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“Be Quick to Hear and Slow to Speak”: Exploring the Act of Listening as a Christ- Shaped Philosophical Virtue

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Abstract: Engaging Paul Moser’s Christ-Shaped Philosophy (CSP), this paper argues that listening is a philosophical virtue that is an essential characteristic of the Christ-shaped philosopher by meeting the Divine Love Commands (DLC). The paper first highlights the pertinent parts of Moser’s project that relate to the thesis of the paper – specifically that a defining feature of CSP is characterized by one’s Gethsemane union with Christ. The paper then follows with a discussion on the central role that listening plays in Scripture regarding the life of a child of God, providing a basis upon which to understand listening as meeting the first DLC. Drawing upon the works of thinkers such as Paul Moser, Dru Johnson, and Carol Harrison, among other, the paper engages the role of listening in one’s engagement with others, thus meeting the second DLC. The paper concludes by engaging the art of listening as a philosophical virtue, employing Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung’s definition of ‘virtue’ and Suzanne Rice’s exploration of listening as a Christ-shaped philosophical virtue.

Introduction

Despite its relative silence the past several years, Moser’s Christ-Shaped Philosophy Project (CSP) remains today an important contribution to Christian philosophy (and philosophy at large) regarding the very nature of the work of Christian philosophers.¹ While more pressing issues exist

¹ In Moser’s CSP, a philosopher can be a Christian philosopher because they confess Jesus as Lord, but not be a Christ-shaped philosopher, for their Gethsemane union with Christ is not manifested in their obedience to the Divine Love Commands (DLC) in their work (more on this will be addressed below). A Christ-shaped philosopher, therefore, is distinct from a Christian philosopher (see Paul Moser, “Christ-Shaped Philosophy: Wisdom and Spirit United,” 10). Whether this is a necessary distinction or not (I read Oppy [“Moser,

that demand the Christian philosopher's attention - and though metaphilosophical questions are not the primary concern of most philosophers - one's view of the nature of philosophy ought not be assumed nor taken for granted but serve to guide one's very work.

Entailed in Moser's CSP is the (right) emphasis on the "why" and the "what" of a Christ-shaped philosophy. That is, what the Christian philosopher speaks and writes as a philosopher is under the authority of and guided by the Lord Jesus Christ. Speaking, however, does not happen in a vacuum; as will be shown below, what one does (speaks, writes, etc.) is an outflow of the object of their listening. As such, "how" one goes about doing their philosophy is just as important a metaphilosophical question. The purpose of this paper, then, is to explore one aspect of metaphilosophy – the attitude and disposition of the Christian philosopher in their work toward God and others.

In a day defined by invective speech toward perceived ideological enemies, the need to visit the "how" of CSP stands in sharp relief. Galen Barry observes a parallel between today's culture and professional philosophy: the distinctive feature of demonizing one's opponent.² Though likely referencing secular philosophy, Barry's observation is not lost on Christian philosophy. For instance, Richard Davis, in his affirmation of Moser's CSP, recounts instances when he witnessed Christian philosophers "verbally destroy" other philosophers for the suspected purpose of demonstrating their philosophical prowess. He thus warns against the dangers inherent in a Christian philosophy unmarked by obedience to the DLC: 1) the Christian philosopher—enamored by the "trappings of philosophy"—reduces Christian philosophy to "nothing but an impersonal, academic exercise"; and 2) the Christian philosopher empties their life and work of the power of the cross, which is manifested in their attitudes, speech, and interactions.³ It behooves the Christian philosophy, then, to explore not only how Christ shapes their philosophical work, but also

Ambiguity, and Christ-Shaped Philosophy"] and Hasker ["Paul Moser's Christian Philosophy"] as implying it is not) goes beyond the purpose of this paper. For the sake of argument, this paper assumes the Christian philosopher is marked by obedience to the DLC, and therefore is a Christ-shaped philosopher. As such, the terms "Christian philosopher" and "Christ-shaped philosopher" are used interchangeably. (Note: All articles from the CSP Project referenced in this paper will be cited only using the author's name, article title, and page numbers. The Project can be found at <http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=131&mode=detail>)

² Galen Barry, "Morally Respectful Listening and Its Epistemic Consequences," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 58:1 (March 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjp.12355>.

³ Richard Davis, "Christian Philosophy: For Whose Sake?" 2–3.

how He shapes their disposition toward other philosophers and, ultimately, toward God.

In this paper, I argue that listening is a philosophical virtue that is an essential characteristic of the Christ-shaped philosopher by meeting the DLC. I first highlight the pertinent parts of Moser’s project that relate to the thesis of the paper—specifically that a defining feature of CSP is characterized by one’s Gethsemane union with Christ and their obedience to the DLC.

I then follow with a discussion on the central role listening plays in Scripture regarding the life of a child of God, providing a basis upon which to understand listening as meeting the first DLC. Drawing upon the works of thinkers such as Dru Johnson, Carol Harrison, and Paul Moser—among others—I engage the role of listening in one’s interactions with others, thus meeting the second DLC. I conclude the paper by engaging the art of listening as a philosophical virtue, employing Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung’s definition of ‘virtue’ and Suzanne Rice’s exploration of listening as a Christ-shaped philosophical virtue.

Re-visiting Moser’s Christ-Shaped Philosophy

When inaugurated eight years ago, Moser’s CSP Project began a fruitful period of metaphilosophical discussion regarding the nature of Christian philosophy.⁴ Over forty articles have been written in response to Moser’s project, providing helpful corrections or elaborations; exploring various implications of CSP in areas such as spiritual formation and education; and critiquing areas in which Moser’s proposal lacks clarity or development. This paper adds to the discussion by building upon Moser’s CSP, drawing out an element implicit in Moser’s emphasis on one’s obedience resulting from their

⁴ Here I use the publication of Moser’s “Christ-Shaped Philosophy: Wisdom and Spirit United” (2012) published on the Evangelical Philosophical Society’s website as the project’s inauguration. Certainly, Moser had written previously on how one’s union with Christ bears upon their philosophical work (see Paul Moser, “Jesus and Philosophy: On the Questions We Ask,” *Faith and Philosophy* 22:3 [July 2005]: 261–283; Paul Moser, ed., *Jesus and Philosophy: New Essays* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009]; Paul Moser, “Gethsemane Epistemology: Volitional and Evidential,” *Philosophia Christi* 14:2 [2012]: 263–274; and Paul Moser, “Reconceiving Philosophy of Religion,” *Discusiones Filosoficas* 13:20 [Jan–June 2012]: 115–136). Yet, since the project known as the Christ-Shaped Philosophy Project—with which this paper joins in discussion—under the auspices of the Evangelical Philosophical Society, I use 2012 as the inauguration date.

union with God in Christ. While the entire project is in mind, the following characteristics bear directly upon the paper's thesis.⁵

First, the Christ-shaped philosopher must accommodate the Gospel message that Jesus is Lord. Per Moser, one's philosophy can be deistic or theistic without being distinctly Christian by "acknowledging that 'God' is authoritative without affirming that Jesus is Lord."⁶ Second, Christ-shaped philosophers cannot rely upon their intellect alone when doing their philosophical work. CSP has a spiritual component. Referencing Colossians 2:8, Moser claims that philosophy outside of Christ is "dangerous to human freedom in life," whereas philosophy under the authority of Christ "involves a distinctive kind of wisdom."⁷ Wisdom found in Christ is "empowered by the Spirit of Christ"—it is Spirit-empowered and Spirit-guided wisdom.⁸ Thus, the Christ-shaped philosopher is guided by and empowered by the Holy Spirit as they seek to pursue and communicate the wisdom of Christ.⁹

The third component is entailed in the second, and vice versa. Knowledge of God is found only through divine grace, which entails that the one who seeks the knowledge of God is in a "proper volitional stance toward God."¹⁰ Christian philosophy is not merely about having correct beliefs and true propositional statements (though it does include these); rather, by willfully submitting to Jesus Christ as Lord, Jesus Christ guides what and how the Christian philosopher thinks.¹¹ Finally, one's volitional stance toward God in Christ is manifested in their obedience of the DLC as found in Mark 12:29-31. The work of the Christ-shaped philosopher is God- and other-directed. One does not seek after knowledge for its own sake, nor does one pursue philosophical projects out of selfish motives. If Jesus is Lord of the Christian philosopher's life, then He is Lord of the time, energy, and efforts of their intellectual life.¹²

In short, CSP entails the Christian philosopher's volitional union with God in Christ manifested in obedience; their work under the submission to

⁵ The following summary partially follows Michael McFall's helpful summary of Moser's "Christ-Shaped Philosophy" in McFall, "Christian Philosophy and the Confessional Classroom," 1–3.

⁶ Moser, "Christ-Shaped Philosophy," 1.

⁷ Ibid., 2

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Moser, "Christ-Shaped Philosophy," 9.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Moser, "Jesus and Philosophy," 266.

Christ's authority and guidance of the Holy Spirit; and their disposition toward God and others in the context of their work. A key theme, therefore, is that of obedience. Though not explicit in Moser's CSP but entailed throughout, is the essential role of one's listening to the voice of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit—listening that leads to obedience.

If Christ-shaped philosophy is guided by Jesus Christ, then the natural starting point for exploring listening as a philosophical virtue is the Word of God. Once the biblical view of listening is established, it becomes evident how listening obeys the first DLC.

Scripture and Listening

From Genesis and the fall of Adam (who chose to listen to the voice of Satan as opposed to God) to Revelation and the eternal life for those who hear and obey the Word of Jesus Christ,¹³ the theme of listening saturates all of Scripture. Listening is a mark of the true believer: the wise are those who hear the voice of the Lord and the child of God is one who listens to and obeys His commands. Likewise, incorrect listening is the mark of the fool and leads to death.

But, what exactly is meant by “listen” as an act? Today—particularly in Western culture—listening is generally viewed as a necessary (but less important) counterpart to speaking. Listening is merely a means to inform what one speaks, which, to an extent, is true.¹⁴ Yet, Scripture entails much more in regard to the the act of listening, and gives more weight to the role it plays in one's knowing. Two books in particular—Proverbs and James—serve to elaborate on listening and its place in the life of the child of God.

Proverbs

More than merely collecting pithy statements, the author of Proverbs sets forth instruction to guide his son (and ultimately all readers) in the true path to wisdom—the fear of the Lord. Yet, fearing the Lord is easier said than done. In a world marred by sin, one's journey to wisdom is often disrupted by the cacophony of voices vying for their attention and allegiance. Continually and persistently drawing his son's attention to his instruction, Solomon implores him to hear his (i.e. Solomon's) voice at least fourteen times in the first eight chapters.¹⁵ Further, Solomon anthropomorphizes wisdom, who calls

¹³ See Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 20–21.

¹⁴ More is said below regarding current research on listening.

¹⁵ Proverbs 1:8; 2:1, 2; 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1, 7; 8:1, 4, 6, 32, 33, 34.

out amidst competing voices to hear and follow her words. Entailed in these supplications is much more than there mere call for the son to pay attention to the parent;¹⁶ it is a call to hear, understand, and submit to the instruction set forth.

Dominick Hernandez picks up this theme of receiving instruction when he notes that hearing in Proverbs connotes a disposition—the posture of the learner toward the teacher. Entailed in this disposition is the learner’s full dedication to humbly and willingly receive and obey instruction.¹⁷ Hernandez notes three ways in which an individual manifests proper listening through: 1) receiving and applying truth, 2) receiving and obeying commands, and 3) accepting and responding to correction.¹⁸ Right listening, notes J. Duncan Derrett, is the hallmark of a genuine pupil.¹⁹

J. Duncan Derrett elaborates further on listening found elsewhere in the Old Testament, pointing out that Deuteronomy 29:4 combines functioning ears and the resolution to obey as a characteristic of the people of God.²⁰ Likewise, Dru Johnson equates the phrase “eyes of faith” as found in Deuteronomy to the act of listening to the proper authority—ultimately, God.²¹ When one listens to the proper voice and acts upon what they have heard, then

¹⁶ Here I am thinking of a child merely hearing their parent’s instruction, only to act in a way contrary to said instruction. In this case, the child hears the parent (through the reception of sound waves in their ears), but fails to really hear the parent as illustrated in their disobedient act.

¹⁷ Dominick Hernandez, *Proverbs: Pathways to Wisdom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), 20.

¹⁸ Hernandez, *Proverbs*, 26. See also Daniel Estes, *Hear My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1–9*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 135–48.

¹⁹ J. Duncan Derrett, “‘He Who Has Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear’ (Mark 4:9 and Parallels),” *The Downside Review* 119, no. 417 (October 2001): 259.

²⁰ Derrett, “‘He Who Has Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear,’” 260–61.

²¹ Dru Johnson, *Epistemology and Biblical Theology: From the Pentateuch to Mark’s Gospel*, *Rutledge Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Biblical Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2018), 99. Here, Johnson derives his use of “authority” from the epistemology of Michael Polanyi and the covenant epistemology of Esther Meek, where an authority is one who “gives grounds for trust, an expertise with regard to the known and a care with regard to the knower that shows respect and attentiveness and skill, an in-tune-ness rather than a high-handedness” (Esther Meek, “Learning to See,” *Tradition & Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 32:2 [2006]: 45). Johnson’s *Epistemology and Biblical Theology* argues that Scripture does present an epistemology, and that is through the act of listening and embodying what one hears. In order to learn rightly, one must listen to the proper authority, which ultimately is God, and to a lesser extent those who rightly teach and model the instruction of the Lord.

they are said to walk in the way of the wise. Hence, Solomon’s repeated call for his son to listen to his voice.

The book of Proverbs references listening more than speaking,²² marking listening as the hallmark of the wise, not what one has to say. The one who is wise is slow to speak—recognizing that ignorant speech is unwise speech and potentially harmful—and thus takes on a posture of humility,²³ modeling careful speech. The one who is wise listens first, and when they do speak, they: 1) restrain their lips, 2) speak wisdom, and 3) use words to reconcile.²⁴

Proverbs’ emphasis on listening over speaking is an oddity for modern ears. Today, American culture prizes one’s ability to use their voice, to be heard, and to stand out, while American academia values consistent publication and engagement—speaking is an individual’s right and duty. An individual who practices listening runs the risk of being passed over, lost in the rat race of being heard. Yet, according to Proverbs, the wise is not the one who is heard, but the one who listens.

On authority—a brief aside. Johnson identifies a general motif found throughout the Old Testament found in the phrase “listen to the voice.” Implied in this phrase is that what one knows depends largely upon the voice to which one listens.²⁵ For instance, in the Garden of Eden Adam comes to know not autonomously, but through God’s guidance (note how Adam, upon naming the animals, came to see that there was no helper suitable for him). Humanity’s finitude, body, and historical situatedness is not a hindrance to one’s knowing; rather, it is at the “center of one’s dependence on God to know.”²⁶

Because of one’s contingency, an authoritative guide is necessary “to account for one’s yielding to the authority of a person in the role of a ‘knower’ who can then guide [them] to know.”²⁷ As one comes to know through listening to an authoritative guide, they embody the instruction through their actions.²⁸ Several questions warrant exploration, such as: Who is an authoritative guide?; How does one account for false or unqualified authorities?; If God is the ultimate, true authoritative guide for how one knows,

²² Hernandez, *Proverbs*, 25.

²³ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 71–74.

²⁵ Johnson, 18.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21–22.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

then what role do (or can) humans play as authoritative guides? Unfortunately, these questions, among others go beyond the purpose of this paper.²⁹ The point made here is that no one knows autonomously. Solomon, in Proverbs, instructs his son (and us) that it matters to whom one listens, especially when it comes to wisdom and right living.

James

In an oft-cited passage, the apostle James instructs believers to “Be quick to hear, slow to speak” (1:19, NASB). Scot McKnight notes that James’ command is best understood in light of the letter’s context—that believers were facing various and significant trials.³⁰ McKnight suggests that the trials consisted of persecution—particularly socio-economic in nature.³¹ One way in which the believers responded to their trials was through what Moo calls their “uncontrolled, critical speech” toward one another.³² Thus, the call to be “quick to hear” is in regard to the control of one’s desires that lead to conflict and disputes. Likewise, the command to be “slow to speak” refers to the tendency toward “reactive verbal confrontation.”³³

Such reactionary speech does not exemplify the wise person; rather, uncontrolled anger can lead one to speak too quickly and to say too much, resulting in “rash, harmful, and irretrievable words.”³⁴ Rather, the wisdom of God is, in part, peace-loving and gentle.³⁵ James is not referring to a weak-spined wisdom but that which “motivates certain kinds of behavior,” such as

²⁹ For more on the idea of authority as a guide in one’s knowing, see the following: Johnson, *Epistemology and Biblical Theology*; Esther Lightcap Meek, *Loving to Know: Covenant Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011); Esther Lightcap Meek, *Contact with Reality: Michael Polanyi’s Realism and Why it Matters* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017); and Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

³⁰ Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2011), 82.

³¹ McKnight, 56–57. See also Douglas Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, in vol. 16 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, ed. Eckhard Schnabel (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 44, Kindle.

³² Moo, 44.

³³ McKnight, 82.

³⁴ Moo, 106–07. See also Dan McCartney, *James*, in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. Robert Yarbrough and Robert Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 47.

³⁵ James 3:17 (NASB).

being considerate, submissive,³⁶ kind, and willing to yield when necessary,³⁷ and reflects the demeanor of Christ (2 Cor 10:1).³⁸

James' epistle serves as a warning against the dangers of rash speaking, a characteristic of the fool. But, it also serves as a warning against a faith that lacks visible fruit—obedience. Shortly after commanding believers to “be quick to hear, slow to speak,” James instructs them to be “not merely hearers.”³⁹ If one truly hears the instruction of the Lord, then their faith is “proved” by doing what the Lord instructs.⁴⁰ Listening coupled with obedience is a distinguishing characteristic of the Christian from not only the world, but also those who say “Lord, Lord” but lack the fruit born of obedience.

A brief reset. The account given thus far illustrates several characteristics of listening pertinent to the believer. First, listening entails much more than the act of hearing/listening to another, the “counterpart of speaking in a dialogue.”⁴¹ Second, listening is a disposition—a posture—toward another that is characteristic of the Christian. The believer is “fully dedicated to hearing” and willingly receives the instruction of the Lord.⁴² The Christian assumes the role of a pupil, and upon receiving instruction, they apply, obey, and act upon the teaching accordingly. Finally, listening leads to wisdom and is a distinguishing feature of the wise person. This fuller understanding of listening is vertical in direction, describing how one approaches and relates to God. In the following section, the paper addresses Jesus Christ as the authority to whom the believer listens and as the model example of listening for Christians to emulate.

Listening and Jesus Christ

The cacophony of competing voices described in Proverbs 1 still applies today. With the advent of the Internet and social media, more people today have the ability to have their voice heard than at any time in history. Voices that were once silent can now join the marketplace of ideas. While much good can

³⁶ This idea of “submission” is addressed below. Here, Moo defines the behavior of submission as one who is easily persuaded when “unalterable theological or moral principles are not involved” (172).

³⁷ Moo, 171–72.

³⁸ McCartney, 134.

³⁹ James 1:22, NASB.

⁴⁰ James 1:23–24, NASB.

⁴¹ Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, “Plato’s Philosophy of Listening,” *Educational Theory* 61, no. 2 (2011): 125.

⁴² Hernandez, 20.

come from this new normal, dangers exist as well, including the number of voices pedaling their wares—their answer for how to live well, how to have a happy life, and so on. God’s instruction throughout His Word for one to listen to Him is a recognition of the confusion humanity encounters in the face of so many voices claiming authority. In His goodness and grace, God has not only given us His voice through His word in Scripture, He has given us His Word in Jesus Christ to guide our knowing and to serve as the model for right listening.

Jesus as authority. For one to live rightly and to walk in wisdom—to live as God intends—one “must be guided by Jesus’ prophetic voice.”⁴³ Jesus Christ was no mere man, He is the Son of God, God Incarnate. A prevalent theme throughout the Gospels, particularly the Gospel of John, is Jesus’ claim to divine authority.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God Incarnate (John 1:1, 14).⁴⁴ He alone gives one the right to be a child of God (1:12), and He alone has revealed God the Father to humanity (1:18). The words Jesus speaks—his teachings, commands, and rebukes—are not His own. Jesus Christ speaks what He has seen from the Father (3:10–15), and it is only through the Son that one is brought into right relationship with God (3:16–18).

Those who do not honor the Son do not honor the Father (5:23). It is only those who hear and believe the words of Christ that receive eternal life, no longer under the judgment of God (5:24; 6:35–40; 7:38; 8:51; 12:47–48; 14:15, 20–21, 23–24; 15:10; 16:27). Jesus’ divine authority derives from His divine nature and equality with God (Phil. 2:6), and His authority is testified to by God the Father (5:31–40; 8:14–18; 17:2). Jesus Christ is sent by the Father (5:43; 8:42; 12:44–46; 16:28). The one who listens to and learns from the Father is the one who believes in, listens to, and obeys the Son (6:45; 8:31–32).

Jesus Christ is the true authoritative voice that guides one in true knowing and living. His words are to be heard and obeyed, for it is only through Him that one knows God the Father.

Jesus as model. Jesus Christ, in His goodness, also serves as a model for us of how to listen rightly. Throughout the fourth Gospel John portrays God the Son submitting to God the Father through listening and obeying. The Father shows the Son what He (the Father) is doing, and the Son does what He is shown (15:29–20). Jesus does nothing of His own will, judging only as He

⁴³ Dru Johnson, *Scripture’s Knowing: A Companion to Biblical Epistemology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2016), 103.

⁴⁴ All Scripture references in this section and the following are from the Gospel of John. Subsequent references will provide chapter and verse only.

hears from the Father (5:30), and His teaching is not his own but is from the Father (8:26; 12:49; 14:10). Jesus Christ came to earth, sent by the Father (7:28–29) to do the will of the Father (6:38–40).

Just as Jesus Christ, the Son of God listened to and obeyed God the Father, those who are children of God through Christ are to be characterized by listening and obeying the Word of God (3:20–21; 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10). In contrast, the one who is not of God does not listen to His words (10:26; 12:46–47). Through the noise of competing voices, the child of God recognizes and listens to the voice of the Shepherd (10:1–18, 27).

Listening and the First DLC

Moser’s CSP demands that the Christian philosopher’s Gethsemane union with Christ shape the what, the how, and the why of their philosophical work. Just as Jesus is “defined by His relationship with God—a relationship expressed by faithful obedience to God’s will...[and by] his hearing and responsiveness to the Father,” so are Christian philosophers to model Christ in what they do.⁴⁵ One does the will of God only if they choose to obey the DLC: to love God and to love others as one’s self.⁴⁶

As illustrated above, however, the Christian philosopher (and the Christian in general) is characterized not only by their obedience to God in Christ, but by their listening to God as well. Listening and obeying are inextricably linked throughout Scripture, so much so that the one who merely hears (see James 1:22–24) and the one who merely does what is commanded without true hearing (note the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18–30) lacks true faith. While one can distinguish between listening and obeying, they cannot be separated, much like the two sides of the same coin. As such, the Christ-shaped philosopher is characterized by listening to *and* obeying the will of God, thus fulfilling the first Divine Love Command.

Listening and CSP

The link between listening and loving the Lord God with all of one’s heart, soul, and mind is readily discerned from reading Scripture. But, what has listening to do in regard to the second DLC—“love your neighbor as yourself”? Listening as developed above makes sense in reference to one’s relationship with God in Christ, but how does it apply to one’s relationship

⁴⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Jesus of the Gospels and Philosophy,” in *Jesus and Philosophy: New Essays*, ed. Paul Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 72.

⁴⁶ Moser, “Jesus and Philosophy,” 271.

toward others, particularly when listening entails obedience, submission, and receiving? The paper now turns to develop the horizontal aspect of listening and its fulfillment of the second DLC.

Listening in Modern Research

In 1990, Gemma Fiumara, whose *The Other Side of Language* remains the definitive work on the philosophy of language, had the following to say regarding Western scholarly work on listening: “there has always been a vast profusion of scholarly works focusing on expressive activity and very few, almost none in comparison, devoted to the study of listening.”⁴⁷ While Fiumara may be overstating the situation a bit, listening has generally been relegated to either scientific research (the psychology and physiology of listening) and to religious research (the contemplative, mystical, and pastoral aspects). Lately, however, there has been a renewed effort to study listening in its own right as a topic of philosophical research.⁴⁸

In light of today’s polarized political and social climate, popular-level works has sought to elevate the status of listening in the context of interpersonal relations. Two works in particular⁴⁹ go beyond the self-help “how to” approach of writing to address what listening is and its implications in one’s daily life. Kate Murphy observes that American culture generally does not value listening, viewing it instead as “the neglected stepchild of communication.”⁵⁰ When listening is used, it is done so as a means of responding—listening so as to decide what to say next.⁵¹ One listens superficially in order to find a fault or

⁴⁷ Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* (1990; rpr.; London: Routledge, 2002), 5–6.

⁴⁸ In this paper I focus narrowly on the philosophy of listening. Philosophical accounts of listening exist in a variety of fields, such as aesthetics, consciousness, medical ethics, and so on. While these accounts are of great value, I focus on the works of Haroutunian-Gordon and Rice in particular, and reference others such as Gemma Corradi Fiumara, because they address the meta-level question of “what is listening?” Most works focus on listening as an activity and application without addressing (substantively) the nature of listening. Haroutunian-Gordon, Rice, and Fiumara represent current philosophers who engage listening at the meta-level. Because I seek to identify listening as a philosophical virtue, it is necessary to address listening not at how its employed, but at its very nature.

⁴⁹ Alan Jacobs, *How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2014), and Kate Murphy, *You’re Not Listening: What You’re Missing and Why It Matters* (New York: Celadon Books, 2019).

⁵⁰ Murphy, 37.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 73–74.

to jump in with an opinion.⁵² Alan Jacobs refers to this superficial form of listening as the “Refutation Mode.” The one who operates in this mode generally believes they have done all of the thinking necessary and that “no further information or reflection is desired.”⁵³ The Refutation Mode also “over-emphasizes”⁵⁴ the analytic approach to thinking and dialogue, “constantly separating, dividing, and distinguishing until” the issue at hand “lies in pieces.”⁵⁵ Such an approach in the pursuit of truth plays into the metaphor of warfare, where “people cease to be people because they are, to us, merely representatives or mouthpieces of positions we want to eradicate.”⁵⁶ Such are the dangers of an inadequate view of listening.

In regard to academic research, the journal *Educational Theory* ran an issue in 2011 that addresses the philosophy of listening in its own right (that is, not within the context of speaking).⁵⁷ In this issue, Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon explores Plato’s various works, observing that listening is viewed as the “counterpart of speaking in a dialogue, and it is no less important.”⁵⁸ Haroutunian-Gordon outlines a philosophy of listening that entails: 1) the aim of listening, 2) the nature of listening, 3) the role of the listener, and 4) the relationship between the speaker and the listener, in which the listener’s role is to identify questions to ask and to pursue the answers to the questions.⁵⁹ Suzanne Rice explores listening as an Aristotelian virtue. Being a good listener “entails assessing when and how closely to listen.”⁶⁰ Rice’s account of listening emphasizes the moral aspect of listening—it matters to whom one listens, and it matters why one listens, for the end to listening is *eudaimonia*.⁶¹ Finally,

⁵² Ibid., 53.

⁵³ Jacobs, 18.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁶ Jacobs, 98.

⁵⁷ *Symposium: Philosophical Perspectives on Listening*, eds. Sophi Haroutunian-Gordon and Megan Laverty, *Educational Theory* 61, no.2 (2011): 117–237. The following paragraph summarizing this issue of *Educational Theory* is derived from an unpublished paper (currently under review): Danny McDonald, “‘Draw near to listen,’” Reading Scripture, Listening, and Moral Formation (paper presented at *Theological Interpretation for Moral Formation*, Ecclesia and Ethics IV, Brisbane, Australia [online], August 2019), 10–14.

⁵⁸ Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, “Plato’s Philosophy of Listening,” *Educational Theory* 61, no. 2 (2011): 125.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 125–127.

⁶⁰ Suzanne Rice, “Toward an Aristotelian Conception of Good Listening,” *Educational Theory* 61:2 (2011): 152.

⁶¹ Ibid., 142.

Mordechai Gordon employs the philosophy of Martin Buber, particularly his I-Thou construct, to address the relational aspect of listening. According to Gordon, Buber's philosophy of dialogue implies a philosophy of listening, which includes: 1) being present to the other (i.e. the dialogical partner), and 2) encouraging the other to create their own meaning (i.e. dialogue is not coerced, nor is the other to be manipulated).⁶² Within a dialogue, one being encounters another being,⁶³ and the dialogue is characterized by reciprocity and mutuality,⁶⁴ where listening requires an active attentiveness to the other's words.⁶⁵

Several themes stand out in current research regarding listening, themes that bear upon the horizontal aspect of listening. First, listening goes beyond the idea that it is just a means to respond in a dialogue. Listening is not a mere tool by which one achieves their own ends. Second, listening entails recognizing that one is engaging another person who is more than the sum of their ideas. Engaging with others requires attentiveness, reciprocity, and mutuality.

The Horizontal Aspect of Listening

In *Listening in the Early Church*, Carol Harrison mines, in part, the works of Plutarch and Augustine to extract a rich, robust understanding of the act of listening, particularly in regard to its purpose and practice. For both thinkers, listening is necessarily an active process whereby one receives another's words and is motivated by the love of wisdom (which, for Augustine, is God).⁶⁶ The listener must attend to "the deep meanings of the words and the intention of the speaker."⁶⁷ According to Plutarch, the love of wisdom (philosophy) is a process of character formation,⁶⁸ as such, one must practice right listening so as to "not be swayed or 'swept away' by external appearances" of the speaker.⁶⁹ It is through listening that virtue takes hold of the heart,⁷⁰ so one must hone the art of listening so as to be able to recognize wisdom, "receive it, be informed

⁶² Mordechai Gordon, "Listening as Embracing the Other: Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue," *Educational Theory* 61:1 (2011), 207.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁶⁶ Carol Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 124.

⁶⁷ Harrison, 119–20.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

by it, and act upon it.”⁷¹ The character of a good listener is discerned in what they do.⁷² Referencing 1 Corinthians 13, Augustine identifies a mutual interaction between the speaker and hearer—“the necessary reciprocity of giving and receiving.”⁷³ It implies attentiveness, receptivity, and openness.⁷⁴ Listening, then, is primary to speaking, for “right listening or right reception is the beginning of right speaking.”⁷⁵

Parker Palmer picks up the themes found in Plutarch and Augustine in *To Know as We Are Known*. Knowing begins not in a dispassionate, neutral stance; rather, it begins in love.⁷⁶ Contrary to the Western emphasis to divide and conquer through argumentation (i.e., analysis), God has given humanity a mind for another purpose: “to raise awareness of the communal nature of reality, to overcome separateness and alienation by a knowing that is loving, to reach out with intelligence to acknowledge and renew the bonds of life.”⁷⁷ True knowledge (found only through God in Christ) is meant to restore and renew what has been broken by the Fall.

Palmer uses prayer as analogy of how one knows. Prayer to God is a practice of relatedness where one reaches for relationship—they address God as well as listen to God, they know God and are known by God.⁷⁸ Another way in which one practices relatedness with God is through the reading of Scripture and the hearing of God’s word read aloud and preached. It is only through relationship with God, through Christ, that one comes to know God.

Thus, for Christianity, truth is neither an object somewhere “out there” nor a mere collection of true propositions for one to obtain truth; rather, truth is known through personal relationship.⁷⁹ Ultimately, truth is known in Jesus Christ, who is Truth (John 14:6). Yet, truth is also known in community with others, for all are created in the image of God, seek after truth, and endeavor to live according to truth.⁸⁰ To say that truth is personal means “not only that the

⁷¹ Ibid., 121.

⁷² Ibid., 128.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 164.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 131.

⁷⁶ Parker Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 8.

⁷⁷ Palmer, 8–9.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 10–11.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 48.

⁸⁰ Here I distinguish between Truth and truth, where Truth refers to divine revelation, and truth refers to the way things are in reality. Truth (big “T”) is only known by

knower's person becomes a part of the equation [of knowing], but that the personhood of the known enters the relationship as well. The known seeks to know me even as I seek to know" them.⁸¹ Palmer does not mean here that truth is subjective and that everyone's "truth" is valid. Rather, all have been created to seek after truth, which—as has already been said—is found only through the fear of the Lord. Palmer's point is that when we engage with others, we do not engage disembodied ideas, nor are they reducible to their ideas. Rather, one engages fellow human beings, created in the image of God, all seeking to walk in truth. That is what all humans share in common—this search for truth.⁸² (Where the difference lies is: to whom are they listening? To whom do they trust as an authority?) Thus, humanity *en toto* is a community of truth.

The bond of this community of truth is obedience. Pointing the reader to the link between knowing and obedience in Scripture, Palmer defines obedience not as "slavish, uncritical adherence,"⁸³ but as "careful listening and responding in a conversation of free selves."⁸⁴ In fact, the word "obedience" comes from the Latin word *audire*, which means "to listen to."⁸⁵ Obedience, then, is a "personal response that acknowledges that one is in troth with the speak and with the words they speak."⁸⁶ Thus, in a community of truth, the bond of obedience "requires the discerning ear, the ear that listens for the reality of the situation, a listening that allows the hearer to respond to that reality."⁸⁷

God's gracious revelation, and one's faith in Christ Jesus as Lord. Truth (little "t") can be known by employing the rational faculty God has given to all humankind. All truth (whether Truth or truth) is God's truth, as the saying goes. Thus, that which is true in science, math, philosophy, religion, and every other discipline is not known through autonomous reason but is of God revealed through natural revelation. What I seek to communicate here is that all truth is known through relationship, in community, never in isolation nor autonomously, which is what I believe Parker is communicating as well.

I reference the idea that "all truth is God's truth" in John Daniel McDonald, "Philosophical Questions and the Unity of the Trinity: Re-engaging Christ-shaped Philosophy," *Christ-Shaped Philosophy Project*, Evangelical Philosophical Society (2017): <http://epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=332>

⁸¹ Palmer, 58.

⁸² As Aristotle says in the opening of *Metaphysics*, "all men desire to know."

⁸³ Palmer, 43.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 43

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

Listening and the Second DLC

When a scribe asked Jesus to name the most important commandment of all, Jesus responded with not one but two commands. The first of the greatest commandments would not have surprised the scribe nor those who were listening. The second command, however, perhaps may have raised some eyebrows. Two greatest commandments? For those whose life was devoted to the study the Law of God, this should not have been a surprise—consistently throughout Scripture, one’s faith in and obedience to God is necessarily tied to one’s engagement with and actions toward others. Faith in God entails (in part) right relationships with one’s fellow beings.

The emphasis of most scholarly work on listening as a means to understand is not off the mark, yet it is only the tip of the iceberg. Listening is born out of love—love of God in Christ manifested in obedience to His will. Listening is an act of obedience, not only toward God, but toward one another through patient dialogue, seeking consensus, personal transformation, and bridging existing gaps and divisions.⁸⁸ In other words, the horizontal aspect of listening is the act of serving others in truth in a posture of humility.⁸⁹

How does all of this apply to a Christ-shaped philosopher? Luke Timothy Johnson sums up best the disposition of the Christ-shaped philosopher. First, Christ-shaped philosophy is not about fulfilling one’s desires and selfish aims, but to see others as “in Christ” and “the object of divine self-giving love.”⁹⁰ Second, the Christ-shaped philosopher participates in and demonstrates the mind of Christ in their whole work.⁹¹ Finally, to be a Christ-shaped philosopher

is to embrace and inhabit a way of life, within a set of divine and human relationships characterized by faith, hope, and love. To do philosophy with Christ’s mind is, minimally, to have Christ like attitudes, but it is also to work out the meaning of faithful, hopeful, and loving relationships in one’s present circumstances.⁹²

⁸⁸ Palmer, 89.

⁸⁹ Hernandez, 25.

⁹⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson, 99.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 103.

Listening in the horizontal aspect is the disposition of humility, love, service, and obedience toward others, thus fulfilling the second of the Divine Love Commands.

Listening as a Christ-Shaped Philosophical Virtue

What remains now is to address listening as a Christ-shaped philosophical virtue. Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung defines a virtue as “complex but consistent marks of character that integrates one’s overall vision, one’s deepest commitments and motivations, attitudes, emotions, reasons, patterns of attention, and actions.”⁹³ These “marks of character” are “lasting features” of a person, the tendencies of a person to be a certain way.⁹⁴ Virtues are not inherent characteristics of a person, nor do they compose one’s personality. Rather, virtues are developed—one becomes virtuous which requires habituation and experience. One observes exemplary models, are instructed in what to do, and then act in ways that promote the virtue in their character and disposition.⁹⁵

If the view of listening set forth in this paper is correct (that it is a disposition toward God and others; one is taught how to and to whom one listens; it is a characteristic of a child of God; and it manifested in one’s actions), then listening fits the definition of a virtue. Traditionally, Christian philosophy has identified seven virtues: four derive from Cicero: prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice; and the final three derive from Scripture: faith, hope, and love. Is this paper suggesting, then, that listening be added to the traditional seven virtues? Alisdair MacIntyre rightly highlights the problematic nature of freely adding to the list of virtues.⁹⁶ Yet, if DeYoung’s definition and Annas’ elaboration is any indication, there appears to be no fixed set of virtues, at least a set confined to the seven listed above. Rather, there is room to view other dispositions as virtues.⁹⁷

⁹³ Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, “Virtue,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Daniel Treier and Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 1679.

⁹⁴ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (2011; rpr., London: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8–9.

⁹⁵ Annas, 12.

⁹⁶ That is, is this paper just another example of adding to a culturally and chronologically bound list of virtues (see Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* [1981; rpr., London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011])?

⁹⁷ The definition of and types of virtue is a discussion for another work, well-beyond the scope of this paper. I assume for the sake of argument that DeYoung’s and Annas’ approach to virtues is on the mark.

Jesus Christ identifies listening (coupled with obedience) as a hallmark of a true believer, and He models listening for us. If Christians are modeled listening and are instructed to listen, then listening is not merely something one does. Rather, true listening (as defined in this paper) requires a right disposition toward God and others, is manifested in one's attitude and actions. It follows then, that listening is a virtue. More specifically, because Jesus Christ commanded and modeled listening, listening is a Christ-shaped philosophical virtue.

In order to reconcile the question of whether there are more than seven virtues or not, perhaps the best way to move forward is to understand the seven virtues (traditionally understood) as a closed set that governs all other dispositions identified as virtuous. Here a virtue not one of the seven falls under one (or more) of the original seven. For instance, listening as understood in this paper necessitates (at minimum) the virtues of faith and love: proper listening requires faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and it requires the virtue of love—love of God through Christ manifested in obeying the Word of God. Thus, listening can be viewed as a complex virtue, one that falls under the governance of the virtues of faith and love.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to build upon Paul Moser's Christ-Shaped Philosophy by drawing out an implication of Moser's emphasis on the Christian's obedience to God's will. Obedience does not occur in a vacuum, but results from one listening to the voice of another. Throughout Scripture, listening is coupled with obedience, and is embodied and modeled by Jesus Christ. Christ-shaped philosophers are marked by their obedience and submission to Jesus Christ, which is manifested in their obedience to the Divine Love Commands. By taking on the disposition of listening, the Christ-shaped philosopher fulfills the first DLC by submitting to, hearing, and obeying the Word of God. Further, the Christ-shaped philosopher fulfills the second DLC by shaping and guiding how one engages with others. As a virtue, listening is learned and practiced so as to become a "deep feature" of the Christ-shaped philosopher.⁹⁸

As we go about our work as Christ-shaped philosophers, may we embody right listening in our relationship with God in Jesus Christ and our engagement with others, regardless of whether they are fellow believers or not.

⁹⁸ Annas, 9.

May our philosophical interactions, disagreements, and debates be informed by the virtue of listening such that our speech aids—not hinders—the proclamation of truth for the glory of God.

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