

Listening — in a Democratic Society¹

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THE PROBLEM OF EQUITY

The problem addressed in this essay is not a new one. Yet, it is a stubborn one that at moments threatens to elude all of our savvy and effort. It is the problem of equity in our society. To pose the problem, let us begin with — who else? — John Dewey. In 1916, he argued that if American society purports to guide itself by democratic ideals, its schools need to perpetuate and help to fit people for life in a democratic community. Dewey writes in *Democracy and Education*:

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity.²

When Dewey says, “A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint, communicated experience,” he may mean that democracy is not only a way of governing but also a way of living with one another. Education, then, must teach people to live democratically. What does Dewey mean by such a claim? Well, for one thing, he says that those who live in the democracy do not merely exist side by side, but rather communicate so as to link their experiences to one another’s — to “conjoin,” as he puts it. He speaks of “individuals who participate in an interest.” Here, he may mean that those who are “conjoined” work with one another to achieve shared goals. “Participating” requires that they communicate their experiences and goals to one another. And yet, “conjoined” seems to involve more than sharing goals and communicating with one another about them. Dewey says that a member of a democracy “refer[s] his own action to that of others, and...consider[s] the action of others to give point and direction to his own.” Here, he may mean that people living together democratically not only share and communicate with one another about their goals but they use the actions of one another to define their next steps, if not their long-term courses of action.

Dewey also tells us that those who are conjointly related to one another “break down of barriers of class, race, and national territory which [keep] men from perceiving the full import of their activity.” Perhaps he means that those who share a purpose (such as Martin Luther King and his supporters) may have differences between them — may be of different races, economic classes, or nationalities — but their actions are regulated with respect to the common purpose. Hence, their differences are “broken down,” as the differences no longer separate the people who are conjoined and acting with reference to one another and the shared goal.

Now, if the proposed interpretation of Dewey is at all correct, then education is important in a democracy because it teaches people to become “conjoined” to one

another — to form shared purposes that unite them in courses of action. Experience in school, then, should be helping people to understand democracy as a form of government and as a way of life — one in which people are connected to one another through shared objectives that direct their activities despite their differences.

In my book, *Preparing to Turn the Soul; Teacher Education for a New Century*, I argue, among other things, that if schools are to be places in which *all* students are expected to learn and acquire the skills and values needed to take advantage of the rich opportunities that American life offers, then we need schools in which racial, ethnic, economic, social, and cultural differences between people are treated as resources for the learning, and hence, are used in positive ways. Or, as Dewey might say: in schools, differences between people should be a basis for conjoining, not a basis for separating from one another. Others have argued as much,³ but the goal has been difficult to achieve. Indeed,

To be an American is to live an ambivalent relationship to difference: it is to be a neighbor to difference and at the same time harbor suspicions that difference may be our national undoing, that differences can never be bridged, and that without assimilation, disorder lurks just below the surface of our national life. Yet...difference is an integral part of American culture; America is a hybrid nation. Difference...has been a part of the cultural life of Americans since the nation's founding.⁴

When Sarat says that to be an American “is to be a neighbor to difference and at the same time, harbor suspicions that difference may be our national undoing,” he may mean that Americans are both surrounded by yet fearful of those who come from different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. When he says that Americans fear that “differences can never be bridged,” he may mean that Americans fear that the interests of other groups outside their own will diminish their power to get what they want. Hence, unless the other groups become “assimilated,” meaning perhaps, unless their goals become consistent with the national goals, the other groups may work to advance their particular goals and disorder may break out. Here, Sarat seems to point to the basic tension that agitates our diverse society — the desire to pursue our own interests while at the same time, maintaining control over the freedom of others so that our own interests are not jeopardized.

Now, in my view, schools could be places where Americans learn to navigate the tension between the desire to pursue one's own interests and the fear that others doing likewise will limit one's success. Schools could be such places if individual interests were, first of all, clear, and second, shared by others so that together, the members of the community pursued common goals. Such sharing requires what Shweder calls “tolerance”:

Tolerance means setting aside readily aroused and powerfully negative feelings about the practices of immigrant minority [or other] groups long enough to get the facts straight and engage the “other” in a serious moral dialogue.⁵

When Shweder defines tolerance as setting aside our feelings long enough to get the facts straight and engage the “other” in serious moral dialogue, he may mean that tolerance involves learning about the practices of those from another group — those who are different from us in some ways — so as to grasp their perspectives on their practices. It may involve coming to understand the point of view of the other so that

the practice is seen in that context rather than from one's own vantage point — a difficult goal to achieve, at times.⁶ When one begins to grasp the perspective of another, one is able to think about one's own interests entirely differently than is possible if the other's perspective remains unknown. For one may begin to ask: are my beliefs fair? Are they legitimate? Should they be modified? Are they ones to which the other might contribute, given his or her talents, skills, and resources? Such questioning permits a moral dialogue, that is, a dialogue about what those in the conversation believe to be good and bad, desirable and undesirable. If schools were places where tolerance, as defined here, was learned and practiced, they might help the members of our diverse society to value differences between themselves with less ambivalence. The school might, then, help to make the goal of equality — of equal opportunity, equal access to resources, equal rights — a reality.

EDUCATING FOR TOLERANCE

QUESTIONING — AN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

How does one educate for tolerance? Gadamer is helpful on the matter. He writes, in his classic work, *Truth and Method*: “All suspension...of prejudices...has the structure of a question.”⁷ To suspend a prejudice, it appears, is to question it, that is, to be “open”⁸ about whether it is worthy of acceptance or not. To be is “open” seems to mean that one believes the question may be resolved this way or that, or even, in a third way.

Socrates might agree with Gadamer that questioning is a route into the suspension of prejudice. Indeed, the conversations that Socrates held with his interlocutors — conversations about the definitions of virtue, knowledge, friendship, death, and learning, for example — seem to draw out their beliefs and prejudices.⁹ As a belief is identified through dialogue, one may begin to question its acceptability and examine the justification for the belief. If the justification is found to be insufficient, the belief may be modified or rejected, and change in perspective may result.

Like me, many educators, have shared Socrates' passion for questioning and dialogue.¹⁰ With Socrates, we agree that one condition under which change in belief may occur is the presence of a question, or, what Dewey called a “genuine problem,”¹¹ that is, a question that the learner cannot but wish to resolve. I will call such a problem a “genuine question.”¹² Dialogue that seeks to identify, clarify, and resolve a genuine question may permit change in belief and perspective.

It behooves us, then, to study dialogue that works to identify, clarify, and address genuine questions. In so doing, we may gain insight into how, through dialogue, beliefs, including prejudices and assumptions, are identified and the grounds for their acceptance raised for question. One may also see how the truth value of the questioned belief is judged using criteria that the other(s) in the conversation help to make available, and how the dialogue helps participants to grasp a perspective different from the one with which they begin the conversation.

LISTENING: A NEGLECTED YET NECESSARY CONDITION FOR DIALOGUE

I now turn to the topic of dialogue that works to clarify and pursue the resolution of genuine questions, from a vantage point that is not generally assumed. Many of

us, with some notable exceptions, have focused on the speaking aspect of the dialogue.¹³ We have looked at such things as patterns of discourse, the content of classroom conversations in which dialogue takes place, types of dialogue, the place of dialogue in teaching and learning, and in society — all the time thinking about the speaking aspect of the conversation — the talking. But what about the listening? Without listening, the dialogue could not transpire. Group discussions in which participants work together to identify and pursue the resolution of points of doubt, or questions, make little progress if participants do not listen to one another. Yet, important as it is, we have been largely mute before the topic of listening. I take it up now in order to see how dialogue can bring participants to new perspectives.

I will now discuss the nature and functions of listening in dialogue. In doing this, it becomes possible to outline features of the listening necessary for “tolerance,” as Shweder understands the term. That is, it becomes possible to talk about how one can come to take the perspective of the other and in so doing, open prejudices to questioning. It also becomes possible to describe some contributions that philosophers of education can make to realizing the goal of equity in our society — contributions that deserve more consideration than they usually receive.

G.C. Fiumara,¹⁴ who has produced a detailed, systematic, analysis of listening, maintains that the tradition of Western thought is grounded in the Greek word, *logos*, for which Liddell and Scott (Greek-English lexicon) give two categories of meaning: (1) those that relate to the word, or what is said, including: saying, statement, language, assertion, promise, resolution, command, speech, discourse, conversation, right of speech, power to speak, report, story, narrative, history, histories, prose-writing, speech, oration, proposition, principle, “that which is stated;” and (2) those that relate to reason or reasoning, including: ratio, thought, opinion, expectation, a reason, ground, plea, account, consideration, esteem, regard, to give an account of a thing, due relation, proportion, analogy. The definitions, Fiumara argues, do not offer “recognizable references to the notion and capacity of listening.”¹⁵ Hence, the tradition of *logos*, as it has developed in Western thought, is lopsided: the focus has been upon speaking the word, stating the reasoning, while listening to the word and the reasoning have been virtually ignored, despite their indispensability. One might add that perhaps as a consequence, our study of dialogue has been focused upon what is said rather than what is heard.¹⁶

Fiumara’s goal of resurrecting listening seems to me worthwhile. Yet, perhaps she moves too quickly when she says that the various meanings of *logos* do not “offer recognizable references to the notion and capacity of listening.” As she herself seems to agree:¹⁷ what use is a saying, an assertion, a speech, a discourse, an oration and likewise, the activities of reasoning, presenting an opinion, giving an account, drawing an analogy, if there is no listener — no one to whom the using of language is directed? Perhaps the listener is oneself, so that the analogy, for example, is constructed to persuade oneself of a course of action, or the rightness of an interpretation. Frequently, however, the intended listener is another person — the one who hears the speech, the discourse, the account, for example. So it seems to me that the listener — and with it, the notion of listening — is not absent from but, on

the contrary, is central to the various meanings of *logos*. If the speech acts to which *logos* refers — making an assertion, giving a speech, drawing an analogy, and developing an argument, for example — presuppose a listener, then we may ask: how does the listening that takes place bring the hearer to identify and examine beliefs by taking the view of the other?¹⁸

A PARTICULAR CASE

To address the question, and to gain insight into the conditions under which one comes to take the perspective of another and thereby, open beliefs to question, I turn now to a particular case of what I call “questioning.” The case fits into the second category of *logos* terms, for it involves reasoning and argument construction. Here, the young mathematician, Theaetetus, listens to Socrates as the two are questioning together, that is, trying to reach understanding.¹⁹ In what follows first, Socrates presents Theaetetus with a metaphor of an aviary. Together, the two will explore the metaphor in order to determine what knowing involves and how learning occurs:

Socrates: Now consider whether knowledge is a thing you can possess...without having it about you, like a man who has caught some wild birds — pigeons or what not — and keeps them in an aviary he has made for them at home. In a sense, of course, we might say he “has” them all the time inasmuch as he possesses them, mightn’t we?

Theaetetus: Yes.²⁰

Now, the ready and simple reply that Theaetetus gives to Socrates’ question suggests something about the nature of his listening experience. The reader might picture Theaetetus hearing the words describing the metaphor and imagining the aviary keeper with the birds he has captured and engaged.²¹ Judging from Theaetetus’ response to Socrates’ question — and his response is a primary clue to his experience of listening — one is inclined to infer that the listening of Theaetetus has allowed him to grasp the meaning of what Socrates says. Hence, when the youth answers “Yes” to Socrates’ suggestion that the keeper may be said to have the birds that he has engaged in the aviary, Theaetetus seems to indicate that he has followed Socrates’ description of the aviary and concurs with his suggestion.

If we can infer that Theaetetus has been able to hear Socrates’ words and comprehend his meaning, then perhaps we may infer that the youth feels a kind of calm that attends when one hears and is able to understand another. His reply to Socrates, the simple word, “Yes,” may indicate that his listening has enabled him to grasp the aviary metaphor and recognize the feature to which Socrates’ question draws his attention. Hence, it is understandable that Theaetetus seems to experience no tension as he listens — tension that can arise when one listens so as to comprehend yet feels unable to do so.

Now, let us pause here: one might immediately object that although we may speculate about Theaetetus’ experience of listening and his attending emotional response, we cannot know whether our speculations are correct or not. Rather, we can only know what Theaetetus says, and he doesn’t say what he heard, how he felt when hearing the words, or what he took Socrates to mean in uttering the words. Why bother with such speculations if there is no telling whether we are right or not? We hear in the objection a frustration that may play a large role deterring people from studying the experience of listening. Indeed, it may go some way toward helping us

to understand why the focus in the study of dialogue has been upon what is said rather than what is heard.

However, even if we are wrong about what Theaetetus has heard and/or his emotional experience in listening to Socrates, we can still acknowledge that our effort to draw inferences from Theaetetus' utterances is analogous to the effort that we make on a regular basis when we participate in a dialogue with another person. For in order to converse, we often draw inferences about what the other is hearing, based upon what he or she says or does in the presence of our words. Our subsequent contributions to the dialogue may depend upon the inferences that we draw. Although we might infer incorrectly, and say things that thwart rather than advance the conversation, we frequently try to understand what the other has heard and taken us to mean so as to communicate. In fact, the communication that we seek when we participate in a dialogue may occur as we draw reasonably correct inferences about what the other has heard and the attending emotional responses.²²

So saying, I believe we are justified in proceeding to speculate about what Theaetetus and Socrates hear and feel as they converse, given the words that Plato puts in their mouths. And by so doing, we enable ourselves to tell a story about how Theaetetus comes to identify a belief that he did not previously question, and how he examines the evidence for accepting the belief using a criterion that Socrates brings to his attention. As the dialogue continues, the listening of Theaetetus seems to change character. In what follows, Socrates raises a question. He is still thinking about the aviary as a model for knowing and draws an analogy between the keeper who has captured birds and engages them and an arithmetician or literate person:

Socrates: What terms should be used to describe the arithmetician who sets about counting or the literate person who sets about reading — because it seemed as if, in such a case, the man was setting about learning again from himself what he already knew.

Theaetetus: That sounds odd, Socrates.

Socrates: Well, but can we say he is going to read or count something he does *not* know, when we have already granted that he knows all the letters or all the numbers?

Theaetetus: No, that is absurd too.²³

Here, Socrates asks whether an arithmetician who knows all the numbers and counts or a literate person who knows all the letters and reads is learning something new about how to count or how to read when, in particular situations, he or she counts and reads. The question is analogous to one that might be raised about the keeper of aviary: since he has already captured the birds, so that they now fly around in the cage, does he merely acquire something he already has when he retrieves one?

As Theaetetus listens, he may find himself in a quandary, for he says that Socrates' first statement "sounds odd," and that the second statement — that the arithmetician is going to learn something about counting when he counts in a particular case — "is absurd." In so saying, Theaetetus may mean that it makes no sense to say the arithmetician is learning how to count when he recites numbers or sets them up in one to one correspondence with objects since he already knows how to count. Yet, in counting or using knowledge that he/she has already, the arithmetician or literate person seems to do something akin to learning. So can one learn from oneself what one already knows after all?

If it is the case that Theaetetus now hears a question he cannot answer, it may be that his subsequent listening will shift, and become directed in a way that was not true previously. Instead of listening so as to grasp Socrates' meaning and follow his argument, Theaetetus may subsequently listen so as to answer the question. That is, he may begin seeking an answer in what he hears, not simply following and grasping the meaning of the spoken words.

If asked, Theaetetus might describe his present state of understanding by saying, "I do not know the answer to your question, Socrates," suggesting that he is perhaps living the disquiet of puzzlement rather than the calm of comprehending what has been heard. Socrates seems to infer that Theaetetus has reached the state of puzzlement, as the sage's next words further invoke the aviary model, seemingly to assist the youth:

Socrates: Having drawn a distinction between possessing knowledge and having it about one, we agree that it is impossible not to possess what one does possess, and so we avoid the result that a man should not know what he does know, but we say that it is possible for him to get hold of a false judgment about it. For he may not have about him the knowledge of that thing, but a different piece of knowledge instead, if it so happens that, in hunting for some particular piece of knowledge, among those that are fluttering about, he misses it and catches hold of a different one. In that case, you see, he mistakes eleven for twelve, because he has caught hold of the knowledge of eleven that is inside him, instead of his knowledge of twelve, as he might catch a dove in place of a pigeon.

Theaetetus: That seems reasonable.²⁴

When Socrates invokes the aviary model, saying that "It is impossible not to possess what one does possess, and so we avoid the result that a man should not know what he does know," he may mean that on the aviary model, the keeper possesses the birds that are flying around in the cage, even if he does not have them in hand at a given moment. In so saying, Socrates seems to be reminding Theaetetus that by analogy, one would say that the arithmetician knows the numbers, even if he is not using them to count in a given instance. Hence, when he uses them to count, he cannot be said to be learning something new about counting, as he already possesses that knowledge. In the first part of his statement, then, Socrates seems to use the model to argue that one cannot be said to learn that which he already knows.

Yet, having said as much, Socrates rushes on to address a second issue: "But we say that it is possible for him to get hold of a false judgment about it. For he may not have about him the knowledge of that thing, but a different piece of knowledge instead, if it so happens that, in hunting for some particular piece of knowledge, among those that are fluttering about, he misses it and catches hold of a different one." Here, Socrates may mean that while on the aviary model it is impossible to say that one learns what one already knows, one can nevertheless explain how a knowledgeable person can make an error — "make a false judgment." On the model, Socrates seems to say, such an event can occur when one mistakes one piece of knowledge for another, or analogously, when the arithmetician, who knows how to count and hence, knows the nature of numbers eleven and twelve, mistakenly chooses to use one piece of knowledge in a given situation rather than another.

Now, when Theaetetus says, "That seems reasonable," what, exactly, "seems reasonable" to him? Those words suggest that in listening to Socrates, Theaetetus

has followed or grasped something in Socrates' remarks. If, as I suggested above, the youth has been seeking to answer the question of whether on the model, one can be said to learn that which one already knows, his words, "That seems reasonable," may indicate that he has heard at least the beginning of an answer to the question. However, when Socrates says that the keeper of the aviary, or by analogy, the arithmetician, "May not have about him the knowledge of that thing...[and] in hunting for some particular piece of knowledge...misses it and catches hold of a different one," Theaetetus may begin to hear something different, namely, additional justification for accepting the aviary model. For he may take Socrates to mean that in catching the wrong piece of knowledge, the arithmetician could make a mistake in counting, for he could mistake eleven for twelve, even though he knew both numbers. In saying, "That seems reasonable," Theaetetus may indicate that on his view, the aviary model not only explains whether one can learn from oneself that which one knows but also, how the knowledgeable can err.

If it is the case that what Theaetetus hears enables him to address the question he previously could not answer, it would explain why his experience of listening seems to return him to a state in which he follows the spoken words and comprehends their meaning rather than seeks to resolve a question. Perhaps what Theaetetus heard dissipated the feeling of puzzlement and replaced it with the calm that attends when one is able to listen and follow what is said without the pressure of seeking a solution. Having heard words that seem to resolve his previous quandary, he is able to listen to and follow Socrates' account of how the learned can err, according to the aviary model.

Now, when Theaetetus says, "That sounds reasonable," Socrates may infer that the youth is no longer listening out of puzzlement and seeking, for Socrates proceeds to reintroduce provocation:

Socrates: Now we are rid of the contradiction about people not knowing what they do know....But it strikes me that a still stranger consequence is coming into sight.

Theaetetus: What is that?

Socrates: That the interchange of pieces of knowledge should ever result in a judgment that is false.

Theaetetus: How do you mean?

Socrates: Isn't that very unreasonable, that when a piece of knowledge presents itself, the mind should fail to recognize anything and know nothing? On this showing, the presence of ignorance might just as well make us know something, or the presence of blindness make us see — if knowledge can ever make us fail to know.

Theaetetus: Perhaps, Socrates, we were wrong in making the birds stand for pieces of knowledge only, and we ought to have imagined pieces of ignorance flying about with them in the mind.²⁵

When Socrates says, "But it strikes me that a still stranger consequence is coming into sight," the youth responds, "What is that?" suggesting that he is once again seeking to understand something that is not yet apparent to him. In posing the question, he positions himself to listen for the answer. And what does he hear? When Socrates says, "That the interchange of pieces of knowledge should ever result in false judgement," he seems to perpetuate the youth's puzzlement, for Theaetetus says, "How do you mean?" The perplexity he seems to feel appears to arise from his

inability to comprehend what Socrates is saying. Again, the youth's listening may shift from following to seeking so as to resolve a question — this time, a question about what perplexes Socrates.

Socrates seems to hear his interlocutor's failure to comprehend the issue, for he continues working to make himself understood: "Isn't that very unreasonable, that when a piece of knowledge presents itself, the mind should fail to recognize anything and know nothing?" In so saying, Socrates may mean that although the aviary model allows one to explain how the arithmetician can answer a question about arithmetic incorrectly, it is problematic as a model for knowledge because it implies that a knower, such as the arithmetician, might mistakenly apply what he knows. When Socrates says that, "On this showing, the presence of ignorance might just as well make us know something or the presence of blindness make us see — if knowledge can ever make us fail to know," he may mean that if having knowledge can cause us to err, then it follows that being ignorant can cause us to understand or answer correctly, and being blind can cause us to see — all of which are propositions that he evidently rejects.

Now, at this point in the dialogue, Theaetetus does something quite interesting: he responds not with a question, an objection, or an assent, as he has done thus far, but with a modification of the aviary model itself. For he says: "Perhaps, Socrates, we were wrong in making the birds stand for pieces of knowledge only, and we ought to have imagined pieces of ignorance flying about with them in the mind." Theaetetus offers his revision of the model without prodding. In so doing, he indicates that he has heard in Socrates' statement not only that the aviary model is problematic but how it is problematic. When he says, "we ought to have imagined pieces of ignorance flying about...in the mind," he may mean that in order to explain how the arithmetician can err, we need to imagine that he has false as well as true beliefs, and that in some instances, he may grasp a false one — a "piece of ignorance" — rather than a true one.

Here, the listening of Theaetetus seems to have involved more than following what was heard so as to grasp its meaning. Indeed, it cannot even be fully described by saying that it involved seeking an answer to a question so as to resolve a puzzlement. Here, his listening seems to have caused Theaetetus to question the usefulness of the aviary model as originally proposed and suggest a modification of it. Why is it that he now questions an assumption — the aviary model α and creates a new idea about its features?

Perhaps in listening to Socrates so as to follow his meaning, Theaetetus hears the challenge to the aviary model α the model that was assumed at the start. Perhaps, Theaetetus now finds himself seeking to understand the logical consequences of arguing that one could err by substituting the "wrong" piece of knowledge — Socrates' suggestion. And perhaps what was a worry for Socrates has become a genuine question for Theaetetus — a question which he cannot yet wish to resolve. That question may be: should one assume the aviary as a model for knowing?

So, I am arguing that right here in the conversation (*Theaetetus*, 199a-e), one sees Theaetetus raising for question an assumption that he had been making thus far,

that is, the aviary model is useful for explaining what knowing involves. Heretofore, the youth seems to have been working to grasp the features and implications of the model, whereas now he seems to be questioning the usefulness of the features as they were proposed by Socrates. Theaetetus' subsequent statement, then, may be seen as a creative response — a new idea — which he draws out of himself because he is answering a question that genuinely perplexes him.

As previously indicated, a genuine question is one which the seeker cannot but wishes to answer. It is not merely a question that one cannot answer. Perhaps the listening of Theaetetus helped him to, as Gadamer might put it, “lay open” a genuine question.²⁶ What is involved in “laying open”? I return Gadamer:

We cannot have experiences without asking questions. The recognition that an object is different and not as we first thought, obviously involves the question of whether it was this or that. The openness that is part of experience is, from a logical point of view, precisely the openness of being this or that. It has the structure of a question.²⁷

When Gadamer says, “We cannot have experiences without asking questions,” he may mean that as we live, we have experiences in which, taking some things as given or acceptable, something happens to make us question what we have heretofore accepted. That “something” that happens involves, perhaps, what Gadamer refers to when he speaks of the “Recognition that an object is different and not as we first thought.”²⁸

Let us, then, take the case of Theaetetus, relate it to the query that prompted our analysis, and ask: how does listening bring the youth to examine his beliefs using the perspective of another? To begin with, we have observed Theaetetus in three different modes of listening. The first was listening so as to follow or comprehend what Socrates is saying, as occurred, for example, when Socrates describes the aviary metaphor (197c-d), and when he explains how the learned can err, given the model (199a-c). The second mode was listening so as to resolve a question, as occurred when Theaetetus seemed to question whether one can learn what one already knows (198e-199a) and when he tries to comprehend the problem with the model's account of error ((199a-e). The third mode was listening so as to fashion a solution to a quandary, as when he proposed modification of the model (199e).

Accompanying the first two modes of listening, I have argued, may have been two very different emotional states. First, when Theaetetus listens so as to follow or comprehend, and is able to do so, he may experience a kind of calm that arises because he is able to hear and, in his view, understand what Socrates is saying. Comments like “Yes,” (197c) and “That seems reasonable” (199b), in the context that Plato presents, suggest that Theaetetus is not feeling the tension that may accompany the struggle to comprehend. However, when he seems to be seeking solutions to quandaries, he gives evidence of experiencing agitation and puzzlement, as when he says, “That sounds odd, Socrates,” and “No, that is absurd too” (198e-199a), “What is that?” “How do you mean?” (199c).

Now, as readers of Dewey and Plato, we should not be surprised to see the moments of seeking and puzzlement followed by movement or change in the thinking of Theaetetus. Indeed, after he declares it “odd” and “absurd” to say that one could learn from oneself what one already knows, he makes no further comment

until he says, “That seems reasonable” (199b). The text suggests, then, that for Theaetetus, the issue of whether one could be said to learn from oneself what one already knows has been resolved, or at least, relegated to the less pressing. Likewise, when Theaetetus proposes his modification of the aviary model (199e), he does so after expressions of confusion. Again, movement in thinking seems to follow felt confusion and puzzlement. Dewey is fond of saying that such confusion or doubt or puzzlement is a necessary condition for change in thinking.²⁹ But why is that the case? Our analysis of the listening of Theaetetus suggests a modification of Dewey’s claim. Here it is: I have argued that in listening to Socrates so as to follow his account of how the learned can err, given the aviary model, Theaetetus is in a state of calm until Socrates says, “But it strikes me that a still stranger consequence is coming into sight... That the interchange of pieces of knowledge should ever result in a judgment that is false” (199c). When Theaetetus questions Socrates about his meaning (“How do you mean?” (199c)), he may perceive that Socrates has begun to challenge the usefulness of the aviary model — the very model of explanation that up to now, Theaetetus has been working to grasp and has accepted as useful for explaining how knowing occurs.

At this moment, Theaetetus seems to become like the European delegates who, as Shweder tells us, in 1931 attended a conference on African children and “urged that the time was ripe when this ‘barbarous custom’ [of cosmetic female surgeries] should be abolished... by law.”³⁰ Just as the delegates found the practice of female cosmetic surgeries inconsistent with and a challenge to their beliefs and values, so Theaetetus may find Socrates’ observation about the aviary model a challenge to his beliefs. For Socrates goes on to say, “On this showing, the presence of ignorance might just as well make us know something, or the presence of blindness make us see — if knowledge can ever make us fail to know”(199d). In these words, Theaetetus may hear a challenge to the model of explanation that up to now, he had been working to embrace.

So while Dewey argued that doubt or confusion was a necessary condition for change in belief, the evidence from the *Theaetetus* suggests that these feelings may arise from the perception of an idea or situation that challenges one’s belief. The presence of the perceived challenge may move one to: (1) identify the belief — perhaps a belief that has never before been recognized as such; (2) raise the belief for question: should I accept it or not accept it? and (3) identify and examine one’s justification for the belief. We see, then, that the necessary condition for change in belief is perhaps not the existence of confusion, doubt or puzzlement, but the existence of a challenge to one’s beliefs — a challenge, which, when recognized as such, may bring on the feelings that Dewey points to as necessary.

Furthermore, the focus on listening helps us to understand why, at least in the case of Theaetetus, the challenge to beliefs arose. For the text suggests that after listening to Socrates draw the inference that on the aviary model, one must argue that the presence of ignorance can make one know and the presence of blindness make one see, Theaetetus begins to question whether the model should be accepted. It may be that Theaetetus follows Socrates’ reasoning when he draws the objectionable inferences. Or, it may be that Theaetetus hears the inferences, finds them objection-

able, yet has not understood whether they follow or not. In either case, hearing the inferences seems to move Theaetetus to take a new perspective on the aviary model — to see in it problems he did not see before. Indeed, listening to Socrates seems to challenge his belief — to suspend his prejudice in favor of the model — because he now hears a criterion that a satisfactory model would need to meet. In seeing the model from the perspective that Socrates offers, Theaetetus identifies a heretofore hidden belief in himself — that the aviary is a useful model for knowing — and raises it for question.

Finally, one might argue that the question of whether the aviary model should be accepted or not becomes a genuine question for Theaetetus — a question which he cannot yet wish to resolve. As argued above, although he may not articulate the question to himself, it seems to be the question that was “opened” to him, as Gadamer might put it. How can one tell? Because it is the question that the youth addresses with the revision of the model that he proposes. The case of Theaetetus suggests that a challenge to one’s beliefs is followed by change in the belief and perspective not because it is accompanied by doubt, confusion, or perplexity — although such feelings may attend — but because the challenge has created a genuine question. So, change in belief may follow not so as to resolve the feeling of puzzlement but because the extant belief, once it is identified and measured against criteria that may have been previously unavailable, is found wanting and is modified or rejected.

CONCLUSION: HYPOTHESES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PHILOSOPHERS OF EDUCATION

The case of Theaetetus is probably less complicated than that of the European delegates at the 1931 conference on African children who urged the abolition of cosmetic genital surgeries. One suspects that the delegates were more attached to their beliefs about child-rearing than Theaetetus was to the aviary model. And one suspects that the task of taking the view of the other was more difficult for them than it was for Theaetetus. However, the simplicity of Plato’s case allows us to identify some conditions under which taking the perspective of the other and possibly changing one’s beliefs in light of so doing may occur. It also allows us to identify ways in which we, as philosophers of education, may help others (and ourselves) to become more tolerant and thereby, advance toward equity in democratic society.

CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH ONE MIGHT TAKE THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE OTHER

So let us look first at the conditions under which one may be encouraged to take the view of another, as suggested by our analysis of Plato’s *Theaetetus*.

First Hypothesis: There is a question. That is, one may be more inclined to listen to the view or perspective of another if one is seeking to resolve a question to which one does not know the answer. Socrates and Theaetetus began with a question to which neither knew the answer it seems, that is, how is one to explain how knowing takes place? I am not at all certain that the question was what I have been calling a “genuine question” for Theaetetus, because I am not certain how much he wished to resolve it. But, it did seem to be a question whose answer interested him.

Second Hypothesis: Listening is interrupted. If there is a question on the floor that participants in the conversation wish to resolve, then they are likely to listen to the words of one another. However, the listening will not bring them to suspend

prejudices, and thereby begin to take the view of the other — until it is interrupted. The interruption may occur because at some point, it is not possible to follow the reasoning of the other (199c). It may also occur because what is heard conflicts with one believes and thus, poses a challenge to that belief (198e-199a; 199d). We saw the listening of Theaetetus interrupted for both reasons.³¹

Third Hypothesis: The nature of the interruption determines the direction of the shift in the subsequent listening. If the interruption occurs because what is heard contradicts the listener's beliefs, as seems to occur when Theaetetus hears a problem with the aviary model that Socrates has identified, then the following events may take place: First, a heretofore unrecognized belief may be identified. Second, the newly recognized belief may be questioned, and grounds for its acceptance may be questioned. Finally, the listening may shift so as to grasp the details of the perspective(s) of the other(s) in the conversation. That perspective, once grasped, may be used to carry out the evaluation of the grounds, or it may be used to provide additional grounds or criteria for judging the acceptability of the belief. So, for example, Theaetetus seems to use the objectionable inferences that Socrates draws about the model (that is, one must argue that ignorance can cause knowledge, that blindness can cause seeing) as criteria for its evaluation and finds the model, as originally proposed, wanting.

Fourth Hypothesis: The new criteria are used to determine features of the new beliefs or modifications of the old ones. So, for example, the modification of the aviary model that Theaetetus proposes at 199e will not require one to infer that the knowledgeable err because they have knowledge, and consequently, that ignorance can make one know, or that blindness can make one see. Perhaps, then, Theaetetus proposes a modification that will avoid such claims because in listening to Socrates, he has acquired some new criteria by which to evaluate and revise the model.

Fifth Hypothesis: The question becomes a genuine question. When the question for the listener becomes a genuine question — one that he or she wishes to resolve — then he/she listens to the other so as to develop criteria for evaluating and modifying beliefs. Socrates and Theaetetus begin by asking: how are we to explain how knowing takes place? In exploring the aviary model, Socrates begins to worry about the adequacy of the model. What begins as a worry for Socrates may become a genuine question for Theaetetus. I make the claim because his proposed modification of the model suggests that he cared about making it more adequate. I am not claiming that Theaetetus becomes passionate about resolving the question, only that he wanted to resolve it enough to seek, in Socrates' words, ideas for resolution. If one comes to care about resolving a question, then there may exist incentive to seek, in what one hears, criteria for evaluating and defining features of a satisfactory resolution.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PHILOSOPHERS OF EDUCATION

If I am at all correct about some conditions under which one may come to take the perspective of another and possibly change one's beliefs in the course of so doing, then there are implications for philosophers of education that follow. I will now briefly describe three of these implications.

First, we need to teach people how to find (“open”) questions, not simply construct and perfect arguments. Traditionally, we philosophers have taken as one of our responsibilities that of helping people to recognize and develop sound arguments for conclusions — ones in which conclusions follow from premises. Now, the foregoing analysis invites us to undertake a no less critical and complicated task — that of helping others to find genuine questions — questions they care about resolving. For as I have argued, in the course of developing a genuine question, one may strive to listen to others whose views are different from, and indeed, challenging to one’s own. The desire to resolve a question to which one does not know the answer may encourage one to seek out such views so as to make progress addressing the question. One may, then, come to value difference in perspective as a resource, and to feel less ambivalence toward those whose views are different.

Now, helping people to develop genuine questions is often not easy. Even in the few excerpts from the *Theaetetus* considered above, we see Socrates working to help Theaetetus to understand and pursue the resolution of questions of concern to the youth. There is at least some evidence that he comes to care about whether the aviary model can explain how knowing occurs. How does Socrates help Theaetetus to cultivate that question?

In my new book, *Preparing to Turn the Soul: Teacher Education for a New Century*, I argue that in order to help people come to questions they wish to resolve, one needs to develop such questions for oneself. That is, one needs to focus upon identifying what one does not understand about the meaning of some text (be it a book, data set, musical work, or other item with enough ambiguity to permit interpretation). How does one identify a point of doubt? I, for example, read (or somehow study the text) while writing questions about its meaning. I re-read the text, write more questions, then pick out the questions in which I have interest. I ask myself about the meaning of the questions, and finally, study various passages in the text which if interpreted in at least one way, seem to have implication for resolving the question that concerns me.³²

Having examined various passages in relation to a question of concern gives me a way into the text — a perspective from which to ponder its meaning. It is also a perspective from which to begin to question others about its meaning. It seems to me that Socrates had cultivated a genuine question for himself — How is one to explain how knowing occurs? He was able to initiate conversation with Theaetetus because he could put this question on the floor. Beginning with his own question, Socrates helped Theaetetus to develop what became for him a genuine question. So my first point is that we, as philosophers, need to help people cultivate questions that they wish to address, and we can do so by developing genuine questions for ourselves.

The second point is that we, as philosophers, need to help people to see how, in particular circumstances, listening as well as speaking is necessary for questioning and reasoning. We have done an admirable job of showing whether what people say follows from what has been said previously — much as Socrates does when he shows Theaetetus that on the aviary model, one cannot be said to learn from oneself what one already knows. However, we have virtually ignored the challenge of helping

people to see the value of hearing the other's perspective in order to create the question of concern and its resolution in the first place. I think we can do better here.

Let me give an example. I have studied how to prepare teachers to engage students in the cultivation of genuine questions (*Preparing to Turn the Soul: Teacher Education for a New Century*). As part of the research, I observed two novice teachers engage two fourth grade classes in a series of discussions about texts that came from different cultural traditions. One of the classes was in an urban public school and one of them was in a suburban neighborhood school. Toward the end of the study, the teachers mixed the two groups: they took some of the students from the suburban school into the urban school and likewise, some of the students from the urban school into the suburban school. In these instances, the two mixed groups discussed a short story entitled, "About what Happened to a Man Who Married a Very Unruly Wife" — a kind of taming of the shrew tale from thirteenth century Moorish Spain by Don Juan Manuel. Like Socrates, the leaders had developed a genuine question for themselves before the discussion, that is, does the husband become unruly or does he pretend to be unruly in order to tame his wife?

Now, during the discussion of the story which took place in the urban school, the group came to the following question: did the husband in the story go crazy or did he act crazy as part of a plan? — a question not too different from the question that had puzzled the leaders. Both students and leaders wanted to know whether the husband of the unruly wife, who does such outrageous things as cutting off the heads of his dog, cat, and horse, acted out of design or not. Several students argued that the husband acted crazy as part of a plan. "What was the plan supposed to accomplish?" asked one leader. Answers: frighten the wife into stop being mean; make the wife obedient to the husband; teach the wife what it felt like to be bullied. Students pointed to evidence in the text for their positions, and so the controversy intensified

After about thirty-five minutes of discussion, the three ideas about the husband's motive had been articulated and defended. Then, one child from the urban school said to another from the suburban school, "I want to hear what Alex (he had on a name tag) has to say. He hasn't said anything yet."

Given the context, one might argue that the student from the urban school was being polite to a guest who had not yet spoken when she asked for his view. However, because the question on the floor was one for which there existed three competing resolutions, one might also argue that the inquisitor was seeking — that she had formed a genuine question and that she sought Alex's view in order to make progress resolving it. While I have no time to argue it here, I suspect that the speaker had begun to intuit the importance of hearing the view of another — that she wanted to hear it because she thought it might help her come to a resolution about a problem of concern. I also suspect the questioning of the leaders — first of themselves and then of the students — helped the students clarify the question to the point where it became a genuine question, just as happened between Socrates and Theaetetus. And just as Theaetetus seemed to listen to Socrates in order to get help resolving an issue of concern, so the students may have been seeking help from one another and may have begun to discover the value of listening to the perspective of the other.

And so I come to the final point. In *Democracy and Education* Dewey says:

A democracy is more than a form of government: it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity.

How can philosophers of education help people to become “conjoined” — “to consider the action of others to give point and direction to their own,” as he puts it, and thereby help to break down the barriers of race and class that separate them from one another? Our analysis of the *Theaetetus* and indeed, of the classroom case above, suggests that Gadamer may be right — living, like it or not, brings us to question. If we get clear about our questions, and philosophers can help us do that, then we may come to feel desire to find the answers. If we are seeking resolution of a genuine question, we may find ourselves seeking help from others in order to do so. And so we become “conjoined” — we consider the perspective of the other in order to reflect upon our beliefs and possible courses of action. Perhaps, as occurred in the case of *Theaetetus*, the perspective of the other may challenge our beliefs. Recognizing the indispensability of the other’s perspective for the growth of our own thinking should go some way toward lessening our ambivalence toward difference — much as Sarat and Shweder would seem to welcome.

1. I wish to thank David Hansen and Nel Noddings for their inspiration and support in the preparation and the delivery of this essay.

2. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1916/1944).

3. For example, Jim Garrison, “A Deweyan Theory of Democratic Listening,” *Educational Theory* 46, no. 4 (1996): 435-39.

4. A. Sarat, “The Micropolitics of Identity/Difference: Recognition and Accommodation in Everyday Life,” in *Engaging Cultural Differences: The Multicultural Challenge to Liberal Democracies*, ed. Richard A. Shweder et al, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation: 2002), 397.

5. Richard A. Shweder, “What About Female Genital Mutilation?” in Shweder, *Engaging Cultural Differences*, 247-48.

6. See, for example, Deanne Bogdan, “Musical Listening and Performance as Embodied Dialogism,” *The Philosophy of Music Education Review* (2001): 3-22, who, like Gadamer, argues that the perspective of another is one that may be engaged through experience — in Bogden’s case, through aesthetic experience. But, the experience may be wrenching.

7. Hans G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d ed., trans. Sheed and Ward, Ltd. (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1985), 266.

8. *Ibid.*

9. One thinks, for example, of the opening of *Republic*, Book II (357a), where Socrates, believing he has finished the present conversation about justice, finds that for others, it has only just begun. As the discussion continues, various participants air their beliefs and queries, suggesting much about their values and past experiences in so doing.

10. Nicholas C. Burbules and Bertram C. Bruce, “Theory and Research on Teaching as Dialogue,” in *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, 4th ed., ed. V. Richardson (Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association, 2001), 1102-121; Nicholas C. Burbules, “The Limits of Dialogue as a Critical Pedagogy,” in *Revolutionary Pedagogies: Cultural Politics, Education, and the Discourse of Theory*, ed. Peter Trifonas (Routledge, 2000), 251-73; David Hansen, *Exploring the Moral Heart of Teaching: Toward a Teacher’s Creed* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001); Jane R. Martin,

Reclaiming a Conversation: The Ideal of the Educated Woman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); D.C. Phillips, "Popper and Pragmatism: A Fantasy," *Educational Theory* 25 (Winter 1975): 83-91, reprinted in D.C. Phillips, *The Social Scientist's Bestiary* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1992), chap. 6; Phillips, "Philosophy of Education on Cloud Nine," in *Philosophy of Education 1991*, ed. M. Buchmann and R.E. Floden (Urbana, Ill.: Philosophy of Education Society, 1992), 2-17; Stanton Wortham, "Teachers and Students as Novelists," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 45 (2001): 126-37; Stanton Wortham, "Interactionally Situated Cognition: A Classroom Example," *Cognitive Science* 25 (2001): 37-66; Stanton Wortham, "Denotatively Cued Interactional Events: A Special Case," *Semiotica* 114 (1997): 295-317; and Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, *Turning the Soul: Teaching Through Conversation in the High School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

11. Dewey, *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process* (New York: Henry Regency Company: A Gateway Edition, 1971).

12. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 340, writes: "Reflection on the hermeneutical experience transforms problems back to questions that arise and that derive their sense from their motivation." Here, he may mean that from the point of view of human experience, a "problem" is a question — a point of indeterminacy — that arises from lived experience. The meaning of the problem derives from that point of origin. See also, Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 325.

13. Garrison, "A Deweyan Theory of Democratic Listening," and Bogdan, "Musical Listening and Performance as Embodied Dialogism."

14. G.C. Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* (London: Routledge, 1990).

15. *Ibid.*, 1.

16. *Ibid.*, 5-6.

17. *Ibid.*, 6.

18. John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 22-23, characterizes speech acts as doing things with words. Each of the terms identified with the Greek word *logos* points to a performance with words of a certain type. Searle does not list the word "listening" in the index of his book.

19. The *Theaetetus* is one of the dialogues written by Plato. It is said to be from the late middle period, written between his first and second trips to Syracuse, where he was called as a political consultant. Quotations are made from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. E. Hamilton, H. Cairns, trans. F.M. Cornford (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961).

20. *Theaetetus*, 197c-d.

21. As Wittgenstein would caution, *Theaetetus* might have no such picture in mind and still respond as he does. We cannot be certain what, if anything, goes through his mind. See, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3d ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Basil, Blackwell, and Mott, 1958), sects. 139-41.

22. Wittgenstein might argue that we learn to play language games in which, when we see and hear X, we say and do Y. But, experience teaches that often, we are not sure whether we have heard X or not. So, we learn to look and listen again — consider the evidence more fully. We might say that we then draw an inference or make an interpretation of the evidence and its meaning. Drawing inferences is one of the language games that we learn to play.

23. *Theaetetus*, 198e-199a.

24. *Theaetetus*, 199a-b.

25. *Theaetetus*, 199c-e.

26. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 266.

27. *Ibid.*, 325.

28. Wittgenstein, it seems to me, is also referring to the experience of "laying open" a question when he writes in *Philosophical Investigations*, "Can we not be mistaken in thinking that we understand a question? For many mathematical proofs do lead us to say that we *cannot* imagine something which we believed we could imagine. They lead us to revise what counts as the domain of the imaginable" (Sect. 517). Here, Wittgenstein may mean that we ask, (to use his example in 517): can we draw a picture of a heptagon — a closed figure with seven sides of equal length that do not cross one another? Experience teaches us that we that we cannot draw such a picture, so that the question, we come to recognize, cannot be asked, given the definition of a heptagon.

29. Dewey, *How We Think*, 106-7

30. Shweder, "What About Female Genital Mutilation?" 220-21.

31. The interruption in listening may have powerful consequences. For listening, as Garrison, "A Deweyan Theory of Democratic Listening," 433, and Bogden, "Musical Listening and Performance as Embodied Dialogism," 13, agree can be "dangerous." That is, we may respond to what we hear by trying to understand the other with our own beliefs/understanding α beliefs that make it difficult to hear what the other intends. Or, in listening to the other, we may come to question our beliefs — even very fundamental ones — so that we may be said to question who we are.

32. At the Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society, Miami, 2003, where the present address was delivered, Nel Noddings and I had a most interesting discussion about when one should write down questions. I argued as above. She maintained that one should read the text through once or twice, then write questions. Ann Diller shared my view. The issue is: how should one read to encourage the formation of genuine questions?