sky. So if it is true that a given country’s politicians are corrupt, we tend to find that the society is itself lacking in morality and that the individuals who make up the population do not lead ethical lives. . . On the other hand, when people possess healthy values, and where they practice ethical discipline in their own lives out of concern for others, the public officials produced by that society will quite naturally respect those same values. Each of us, therefore, has a role to play in creating a society in which respect and care for others, based on empathy, are given top priority” (1999, p. 196). Implicit here is that listening is not only a behavior engaged at the individual level but also at the social and political levels. Elsewhere the Dalai Lama suggest the possibility of global listening as well.

Based on the writings of the Dalai Lama, it appears that preparation for ethical life and ethical conduct in life are predicated on listening both internally and externally. Study in ethics blends self study with the study of others, and both enterprises require careful listening in the broader sense I’ve tried to develop here.

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Treating Listening Ethically

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From my own reading of these essays, there are three underlying assumptions across each. First, each essay proposes that individuals can set aside prejudices and be “other-wise.” Although some qualify this assumption by asserting that “we can never fully escape our prejudices” (Arneson), the assumption that we can set aside our prejudices to some degree remains. Second, each essay suggests that setting aside prejudices is a necessary (and perhaps sufficient) condition for ethical listening. That is, when one desires “to learn about others and ‘actively [seeks] self-revision’” (Huglen), she has engaged in ethical listening. Finally, each essay implies that laying aside differences is always good, that it is always ethical to be otherwise.

As to the first claim, this essay contends that, contrary to popular belief (see, e.g., DeVito, 2001, p. 75; Orbe & Bruess, 2005, p. 183; Trenholm & Jensen, 2008, p. 173), we cannot actually “listen with an open mind.” Indeed, several lines of scholarship within social and cognitive psychology as well as communication studies have documented the role cognitive constructs (e.g., schema, stereotypes, scripts) play when new information is processed (e.g., Delia & Crockett, 1973; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Markus, 1977; for review see Proctor & Vu, 2006). With implicit recognition of this fact, Arneson states that “While we can never fully escape our prejudices, this does not mean that we cannot encounter them critically.” Quoting Gadamer, she continues, “The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias.”

The idea that we can critically encounter our prejudices is surprising in light of research showing that, when told to set aside prejudice, people overcompensate for that prejudice (e.g., Wegener & Petty, 1995). While overcompensation is not always bad (for instance, in some cases we ought to engage in self-sacrificial behavior), it is problematic to assert that we can and should always critically encounter our prejudices. For instance, overcompensation of some person, event,
or group may have the unintended consequence of judging that person, event, or group more favorably than another person, event, or group thus replacing one prejudice with another (Carver, Glass, & Katz, 1978). Moreover, it is impossible to be always consciously aware of our own biases and prejudices. As Nagel (1994) succinctly stated: “For the most part we are unaware of many assumptions that enter into our analyses and actions, so that despite resolute efforts to make our preconceptions explicit some decisive ones may not even occur to us” (p. 574). Indeed, communication is primarily an automatic activity (Kellermann, 1992). This is not to say that we should instruct the public to be mindless automatons with their communication, but listening with “an open mind” (or at least to the extent that we can) is often a less efficient way to listen than listening in a more top-down fashion. That is, there is a myth that we can and should always listen with unbiased ears. Instead, it is a well-documented fact that humans cannot take in all of the information available to them all the time (Imhof, 2010); instead, we should set out to listen in ways that are most efficient which should be based on our goals and objectives (Operario & Fiske, 1999). Thus, a more ethical recommendation is that individuals should listen in “unbiased” or “biased” ways depending on what we want to accomplish in a particular situation or context.

Ultimately, questions posed by this analysis include: How much can we and should we set aside prejudices given that they cannot be fully or completely set aside? What are the conditions that must be met to advise someone to be otherwise? If and when should self-centered as opposed to other-centered listening techniques be encouraged? What do those techniques look like exactly?

As for the second and third claims found in these essays—that ethical listening is the act of setting aside our self for the other and that this type of listening is always a good idea—though I think they have merit, I am not quite ready to concede. Part of their merit comes from the fact that these claims have been made before (e.g., Myers, 2000; Purdy, 2000; Rehling, 2008; Shoeter, 2009; Stewart, 1983; Thompsons, 2009; Vora & Vora, 2008). Indeed, it is my belief (and one I have spent time documenting) that we spend too much of our time making claims and very little time actually investigating their accuracy (Bodie, Janusik, & Valkokoski, 2008). Such behavior has led to our current situation of listening as a field of myriad claims with a dearth of evidence supporting them (Bodie, in press) and a dearth of theory to help organize the ones for which there is evidence (Bodie, 2009; Bodie, Worthington, Imhof, & Cooper, 2008). We have textbooks filled with advice that is based on old (and perhaps invalid) research (e.g., Bodie & Worthington, 2010). We suggest that people take 10 steps to good listening when these original prescriptions were intended only for individuals in a classroom setting (Nichols, 1948) and not for every person in every listening situation.

Summarizing the critique to the second and third assumptions, the essays in this forum seem to merely pour old wine in new wine skins—the claim that listening ethically means being “otherwise” has been made before, but the crucial work of substantiating this claim is still left undone. The irony here is that we are not being very self-reflexive or ethical. Indeed, unsubstantiated claims regardless of how nice they sound are misleading at best and potentially harmful at worst. The truly ethical practice of a community of listening scholars would be to take the study of listening seriously and provide some evidence that what we espouse actually works.

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"...and they lived happily ever after." This staple concept in folklore which can be found in fairy tales and Hollywood movies alike, is anything but a workable model for leading a life and for building a relationship. We had sensed this even before Theodore Chaffee's book *Couple Conversation* had come out. When everyday reality hits a relationship, when the couple is facing the challenge to achieve a sound work-life balance, skills are needed to make this shared life work in a way that it has a chance to grow and to flourish. The big question is: How do you do this? Some may have been lucky to have had positive role models, but even so, it is hardly spelled out explicitly what the "trick" was which made a marriage or a family successful. The market is flooded with books written from a therapeutic point of view. But they typically look at how ailing and breaking relationships could be supported or "rejuvenated" if you will. The unique contribution of Chaffee’s book is that he looks at the preventive steps and that he clearly explains what it means, on a day-to-day basis, to actually fill a relationship with life and intimacy.

Chaffee’s book is built on two premises. He puts successful communication into the center of his book. It is important to note that couple conversation (the author avoids the term "communication" purposefully) for Chaffee first and foremost means "listening." It would be possible to "communicate" via post-it notes on the fridge. It is, however, obviously impossible to listen. When direct personal conversations are not in place, it will cause a lack of intimacy and deteriorate the sense of bonding. In the introduction, Chaffee maps styles of conversation and identifies patterns of behavior which will lead to building intimacy and he gives a list of indicators to think about if a couple’s intimacy needs work. The second