

## Speech, Storytelling, and Care in Hannah Arendt

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(Please do not circulate—this is a work in progress.)

The idea that speech is the feature that sets human life apart from other living things is an old and frequently repeated one. It famously appears in Aristotle's *Politics*, in which Aristotle appeals to *logos* (notoriously both 'reason' and 'speech') to explain why human beings are unique among *zōa politika*. Many animals, Aristotle acknowledges, have a voice [*phōnē*] to express pleasure and pain. But only humans have the kind of reasoned speech that can "mak[e] clear what is beneficial or harmful, and hence also what is just or unjust" (Aristotle 1998, 1253a10–15). What is distinctive about human beings is not that they are political animals (there are others); it is that humans are the political animal capable of reasoned speech by which the *polis* can come into being. Speech makes this distinctively human life realizable.

Predicating the political life on speech (or, in a different reading, correlating the two) begs a question: what would it mean to lack or lose the ability to speak? Put differently, what kind of human belonging-together is possible when one party cannot speak back? This might seem to be a theoretical concern, but I am posing it with a specific context in mind.

Sometimes, speaking persons come to lose the ability to speak over time due to illness. There are many aphasic, apraxic, and aphonic syndromes and associated illnesses that impinge upon one's ability to speak and communicate linguistically. For my part, I am thinking about a family member's experience of illness (a Parkinsonian syndrome, we were told) that led, at first, to inhibited speech by way of secondary dysarthria, and eventually to the near total impairment of my father-in-law Ted's capacity to communicate vocally, linguistically, and gesturally. Unlike many forms of primary progressive aphasia and its varied neuropathologic causes, this experience left Ted's ability to understand language fully intact. Over time, however, inhibited, slurred speech gave way to an absence of voice altogether, and eventually Ted's illness meant that he could no longer reliably communicate linguistically through voice, writing, typing, signaling, gesturing, or manipulating the sophisticated AAC technology that our family was privileged to have access to.

When Ted began to struggle with linguistic communication, we sought out and received guidance about how to employ infrastructures of communication and expression that did not rely upon the voice or complex manipulations of his body. These included ways of asking questions to prompt assent or dissent, agreed upon signs for common or urgent needs, patterns and schedules of care, and heightened attentiveness to movements, sounds, and postures. We also learned to anticipate needs; for example, we kept a close eye on Huckleberry, a golden retriever with the well-intentioned, but unhelpful habit of resting his head on Ted's lap in an uncomfortable way. Some of these strategies partially succeeded, and some proved frustrating. For a time after Ted's loss of reliable vocal and motor control, humor proved to be an enduring means of communication: wry laughs, chuckles from deep in the chest, and a particularly memorable (and dramatic) sigh when Ted was inadvertently brought a cup of decaf coffee.

Alongside nonlinguistic modes of connection and attunement, language remained, albeit nonreciprocally, in the sense that we spoke with and around Ted, and only rarely received a response in kind. We would tell him stories, listen to the news together, watch films, and fill the room with casual conversation in his presence. Ted's home health aide, Cindy, maintained a

steady stream of casual, friendly conversation every time she came to help with physical therapy. She would narrate her movements and activities whenever she stepped out of his line of sight. From our home in Boston, I listened as my wife told Ted about her day over the phone, which was held to his ear in New York. These conversations were emotionally taxing for her, but seemed vitally important in ways that we could not fully understand or articulate at the time. We all did our best as best we knew how to not fall into silence just because Ted could not respond in kind.

The intuition that I aim to develop today is that nonreciprocal speech can, in tandem with other person-centered modes of listening and sharing, affirm and maintain belonging in a shared world, even as it risks a great deal. Nonreciprocal discursive practices tend to lack many hermeneutical handrails (e.g., seeking input, correction, consent) by which one might avoid imposition and harm. They risk what Frances Bottenberg, in the context of caring for persons with dementia, calls “epistemic arrogance” (Bottenberg 2022). Without downplaying these substantial dangers, I will argue that risking nonreciprocal speech can also be an act of care that grants nonspeaking persons purchase in the linguistic sphere(s) of meaning taking place around them.

I will pursue this argument through engagement with Hannah Arendt. This is an admittedly unusual choice, since few political or philosophical thinkers are as forceful as Arendt in her insistence that speech, as the medium “in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men,” is a prerequisite for a fully human life (1998, 176). I will show that Arendt appears to openly deem nonspeaking persons incapable of sharing in a world with others – they are, she says, “literally dead to the world” (1998, 176).

I will also argue, however, that there are resources in Arendt’s corpus for conceiving of nonreciprocal speech relations as fundamental to world-sharing. Despite initial appearances that Arendt restricts the political world to those capable of reciprocal speech, I will end by foregrounding the centrality of storytelling in Arendt’s concept of world-sharing. And I will ultimately suggest that nonreciprocal forms of speech, though hermeneutically fraught, can also contribute to others’ flourishing by extending a kind of linguistic hospitality by which one invites others to visit, inhabit, observe, and take solace in a shared world. Reading Arendt in this this critical, but redemptive way illuminates the stakes of risking nonreciprocal speech in the context of caring for and living with persons with severe dysarthria.

A brief note about the term ‘speechlessness’: across political, philosophical, theological, and medical discussions of speechlessness, the term very rarely implies a sheer absence of linguistic or vocal faculties. When Gündoğdu discusses the speechlessness of stateless persons, for example, she emphasizes that it “does not indicate the loss of a faculty of speech altogether; instead, it suggests that one’s speech is rendered meaningless or not taken into account” (Gündoğdu 2015, 21). Even restricting our scope to embodied incapacities for linguistic expression, it emerges that many forms of speechlessness do not entail a sheer inability to express oneself vocally, linguistically, gesturally, or otherwise. Examples abound, but for reasons of time let me just assert that the word ‘speechless’ is often misleading if it is taken to mark a wholesale inability to elicit communicative uptake.

Now, the point of this caveat is *not* to now offer, by contrast, Ted’s situation as some sort of ‘extreme’ case in which *ex hypothesi* no possibility of communication obtains. Living with Ted involved training our attention towards inhibited linguistic expressions, non-linguistic cues, and subtle gestures, however unreliable they might have been. We briefly played correspondence chess over the computer, and for several years Ted worked diligently and painstakingly to finish

a book manuscript, though most linguistic expression was not feasible in casual, everyday interactions.

My focus is not on the severity of Ted's speechlessness, but on those nonreciprocal, linguistic encounters that played a substantial role in sharing a world with him. We had little to no assurances that the stories and idle chatter that we shared with Ted were appropriate, or even wanted. Though we lacked the means to calibrate our words through reciprocal dialogue, my view now is that nonreciprocal speech maintained and affirmed a shared world between us, even as it risked a great deal. In short, the idea that I hope to motivate through critical engagement with Arendt is that risking speech in a situation like this might be an act of care.

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Let's now turn to Arendt's concept of 'world,' and specifically her description of the "web of human relationships" in *The Human Condition*:

[T]he physical, worldly in-between along with its interests is overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men's acting and speaking directly to one another. ... [F]or all its intangibility, this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common. We call this reality the "web" of human relationships.... (1998, 182–3)

For Arendt, the "second, subjective in-between" (183) opens a "space of appearance [that] comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action" (199). This intersubjective achievement of speech and action provides the conditions for the possibility for mutual appearance *qua* human beings, 'whos' instead of 'whats.' Going forward, by 'world' and 'world-sharing' I mean this enacted, linguistic sphere of co-appearance, meaning, and belonging. (A question that I would like to open here, but only return to later, is whether this 'world' is an inherently *political* achievement, and if so, what we mean by that distinction.)

The question now is whether and in what way Arendt would admit speechless persons into this world—that is, whether and in what way one can be said to share in the 'web of relationships' without a capacity for linguistic expression. Part of the reason that there is a question of 'whether' is Arendt's open insistence that mutual appearance in the world requires the active exercise of speech.

Consider again Aristotle's position. What kind of speech does Aristotle have in mind as the precondition for a distinctively human way of life? His answer is revealing: one must "possess [*ékhein*]" *logos*, and not merely share in or apprehend it as so-called 'natural slaves' do (Aristotle 1998, 1254b20). As Ober observes, where the citizen wields *logos* actively and authoritatively, "[w]omen, slaves, and those who labor for others... are subsequently removed by Aristotle from the category of 'complete' political animals [because they are not] active citizens who would expect to employ reason and speech, in accord with virtue, in deliberations concerning the common interest" (Ober 2013, 209). On this picture, only an authoritative deployment of reasoned speech, and not mere comprehension, grants entry into a 'full' political life.

Few 20<sup>th</sup>-century political thinkers uphold Aristotle's valorization of speech to the extent that Arendt does. This is nowhere more explicit than in *The Human Condition*, in which Arendt approvingly reconstructs the pre-Socratic view that "action and speech... these two human

capacities belonged together and are the highest of all” (Arendt 1998, 25). When Homer’s Phoenix implores Achilles not to sail home, he reminds Achilles of his youth when he “knew nothing yet of the joining of battle / nor of debate where young men are made pre-eminent,” which is why Phoenix was sent “to teach you of all these matters, / to make you a speaker of words and one who accomplished in action” (Homer 1961, 2010 [ix.440–3]).

Arendt reads the repeated conjunction of speech and action in Homer and Sophocles to suggest that in the pre-Socratic imaginary the two are “coeval and coequal” (1998, 26). But by Aristotle’s time, she argues, “[t]o be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence” (26). Those excluded from this “most talkative of all bodies politic” were *aneu logou* (without speech, speechless) in the sense that they did not share in “a way of life in which speech and only speech made sense and where the central concern of all citizens was to talk with each other” (27).

Arendt takes pains to emphasize that to be *aneu logou* is a political status, and not a matter of incapacity: the speechless barbarians are “deprived, of course, not of the faculty of speech, but of a way of life” (27). But in Chapter V, devoted to “the revelatory quality of speech and action,” Arendt openly asserts that speech is an essential human faculty (180):

*A life without speech and without action... and this is the only way of life that in earnest has renounced all appearance... is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men. [Emphasis added] (176)*

Through [speech and action], men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, *not indeed as physical objects, but qua men*. This appearance, as distinguished from *mere bodily existence*, rests on initiative, but it is an initiative *from which no human being can refrain and still be human*. [Emphasis added] (176)

One might wonder whether the ‘and’ of ‘speech and action’ is really an inclusive ‘or,’ such that speechless action is still sufficient for membership in the polity. But Arendt explicitly rules out this reading.

Speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor, and the actor, the doer of deed, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words. (178–9)

These passages appear to commit Arendt to a harsh position: to be *aneu logou* is to be other than human, other than subject, and other than actor. The speechless person in *The Human Condition* is a ‘what’ instead of a ‘who,’ and fails to “make [an] appearance in the human world” as anything other than a physical body (179). Just as Arendt famously describes entry into the world of speech and action as a “second birth” (176–7), her comments indicate the inverse view that the loss of speech brings about a ‘first death’ by which one loses one’s place in a shared web of relations, relegated to a merely biological existence. It is already difficult to see how Arendt could possibly accommodate nonspeaking persons as world-sharers.

Let’s now look at *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, published seven years before *The Human Condition*. There, Arendt describes the predicament of stateless, rightless persons as

“manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world” (1979, 296). Crucially, wordlessness cooccurs with speechlessness: the loss of place “entails the loss of the relevance of speech... and the loss of all human relationship... the loss, in other words, of some of the most essential characteristics of human life” (297). Stateless persons become *aneu logou* when they are expelled from the world of speech and action and reduced to “the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human” (297). Though this expulsion does not prevent stateless persons from communicating “in the sphere of private life” (297), it precludes a wider, human (or perhaps ‘political’—again, I use the word hesitantly) world. Where the conditions for speaking and acting in concert are absent, neither is there a common world. Thrown back into a “peculiar state of nature,” stateless persons have “lost all those parts of the world and all those aspects of human existence which are the result of our common labor. ... [T]hey live and die without leaving any trace, without having contributed anything to a common world” (300). Even from this brief reconstruction, these comments dovetail neatly with her analysis of speech as the medium of human appearance *par excellence* in *The Human Condition*.

Now, it goes without saying that Arendt is not explicitly concerned with dysarthric illness. But even granting that Arendt often uses the term ‘speechless’ to describe a political status, and not an embodied incapacity, it is hardly unreasonable to ask what her dire warnings about the loss of speech *qua* ejection from the world imply about persons who lose the ability to speak due to illness. Given the evidence so far, it is natural to ascribe to Arendt something like the following view: to lose the capacity for speech (whether through political exclusion or dysarthric illness) is to lose the human medium of co-appearance, and with it to “los[e] the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat [a person] as a fellow-man” (300).

Would Arendt accept this extrapolation? Before troubling a straightforward attribution of this view to her, let me speak a little harshly for a moment: I think that Arendt’s valorization of speech invites the marginalization of nonspeaking persons. Her consistent and unabashed assertions that the loss of speech is a loss of humanity tempt abhorrent conclusions about the personhood of someone like Ted towards the end of his life, as well as other nonspeaking persons. To say that “a life without speech... is literally dead to the world [and] has ceased to be a human life” is, at best, a callous and reckless thing to say in a world in which many human beings do not communicate verbally or linguistically (1998, 176). Admittedly, I hope to convince you that Arendt does not entirely foreclose the possibility of sharing a world through nonreciprocal speech; but she unequivocally states that speechless persons are inhuman without clear caveats. This is not, to my knowledge, a widely acknowledged shortcoming of Arendt’s 1950’s monographs, and it should be, if only because it diminishes (without extinguishing) the potential for her thought to contribute to a politics of belonging that extends to nonspeaking persons.

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Without walking back this criticism, it is worth pausing to reconsider whether the passages above paint a fair picture. Here are three possible objections to a strong, exclusionary reading.

First, Arendt’s treatment of speechlessness is largely descriptive, not normative. Though we might wish that it were otherwise, she could be taken to say, the other side of the coin of the indispensability of speech to the polity is that *in practice* speechless persons suffer “the loss of a polity itself [that] expels [them] from humanity” (1979, 297). Arendt does not directly take up the question of whether speechless persons are capable of sharing a human world. Instead, her remarks drive home what she takes to be “an ironical, bitter, and belated confirmation” of

Edmund Burke's skepticism about rights grounded in natural law (1979, 299). In seeking to raise awareness of "[t]he great danger arising from the existence of people forced to live outside the common world," it is perhaps understandable that Arendt depicts the foreclosure of speech as a dire, even mortal injury (1979, 302). A defender of Arendt might read her comments on the non-humanity of the *aneu logou* as a call to reinstate stateless persons in communities of speakers and listeners, and as a condemnation of the material and political conditions by which those persons are *rendered* inhuman.

This objection accurately captures some of Arendt's practical orientation, but it does not fully address the specific concern that Arendt denies the possibility of world-belonging to speechless persons. Even if there are good reasons to rhetorically inflate the degree to which speech is important for world-sharing, all the more reason to underscore that such inflation carries pointed implications for speechlessness associated with embodied pathologies.

A second reason to nuance the exclusionary reading is that a good portion of Arendt's comments on speech and speechlessness are reconstructions of "the ancient estimation of politics" (1998, 207). Taking these glosses as representative of Arendt's own position, it could be argued, misses the larger, historical argument that Arendt develops over the course of *The Human Condition*, in which she charts the evolution of the character of action since antiquity (and hence, the changing status of the public realm as it comes to be displaced by the social realm). Perhaps it is reductive to interpret Arendt's pastiche of Greek politics as indications of a nostalgia for the *polis*, as if, in Margaret Canovan's words, "she intended to present... a kind of New Athens" (Canovan 1998, viii).

This objection may hold for portions of Chapter II, but it is in Chapter V that Arendt offers her most pointed comments on speech and humanity, and this discussion is hardly historical. Consider also the following excerpt of the Prologue, which comes well before any talk of Athens:

*[S]peech is what makes man a political being. ... Men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves. [Emphasis added] (1998, 4)*

(And again, I am troubled by Arendt's use of the term 'political' to denote 'meaningfulness,' that scale of the web of relations that *matters*.) The point is that I think it is hard to deny that Arendt endorses, herself, the necessity of speech for world-sharing.

A third, messier objection against the foregoing is that Arendt does not always use 'speech' in a way that is interchangeable with linguistic communication in general, and so we risk overlooking the range of uses to which she puts these terms. It is true that Arendt is a moving target in this regard. At times she disambiguates speech *qua* action from speech as "a means of communication and information" that "could be replaced by a sign language" (1998, 179), or "mere talk... [with] no acting capacity" (1994d, 376), and she argues that speaking persons can be "deprived of the faculty of speech" (1994e, 308) if they rely on clichés or are "incapable of articulating thoughts" (1994a, 253). Consider, however, that in *The Life of the Mind* alone Arendt uses speech to refer to "significant sound" (1978b, 99), "reasoned argument" (1978b, 144), "the interconnection of language and thought" (1978b, 100), "that soundless speech—*tacite secum rationare*, to 'reason silently with oneself'" (Arendt 1978b, 99–100), "actual" and "audibl[e]" speech (1978b, 118), "the sheer naming of things" (1978b, 100), the

“sound[ing] out,” “becom[ing] manifest,” and “activat[ion]” of thought (1978b, 121), Plato’s “living speech, the original” from which writing derives (1978b, 116), “everyday speech,” and Heidegger’s “[s]peech [as] the original dimension in which the human being is able to respond to Being’s claim” (1978c, 180–1). In “Understanding and Politics” Arendt uses ‘speech’ as synonymous with ‘vocabulary’ (1994e, 322), and in “On the Nature of Totalitarianism” she implies that writing is a form of speech that survives death (1994c, 339).

It is not obvious to me that Arendt has something singular or stable in mind by the word ‘speech,’ these varied usages problematize an easy equivalence between ‘speech’ and linguistic communication writ large (though, I must point out, she does sometimes use the term in exactly that way: “communication, i.e., speech” (1978a, 268)). To extract ourselves from the exegetical problem of what ‘speech’ means where, let us pose a more straightforward question: would Arendt understand the absence or severe constraint of linguistic expression due to illness as a form of speechlessness? After all, even if linguistic expression is not a sufficient condition for ‘speech,’ its absence might be sufficient for ‘speechlessness.’

The most obvious answer is ‘yes,’ largely due to a consistent premise across multiple texts that a shared world must be held between speakers *reciprocally*. This premise is explicit in, for example, *The Life of the Mind*, where Arendt writes that “speech is meant to be heard and words are meant to be understood by *others who also have the ability to speak*” (1978b, 32), and characterizes the “gift of speech” as being accompanied by the gifts of “reasoned argument *and reasonable response*” (1978b, 147). In “Concern with Politics,” Arendt defines the *zoon logon echon* as “he [who] has the faculty of speech, the power to understand, *to make himself understood, and to persuade*” (1994b, 442). In “Introduction into Politics,” inhabitants of the public realm are “equals among equals” (2005, 117) who are “capable of seeing and hearing and admiring *one another’s deeds*” (2005, 123).<sup>1</sup> The consistent picture is, like that of Aristotle’s *Politics*, that ‘having’ speech means being capable of actively exercising speech, and sharing a world with others means actively and reciprocally participating in the pluralist achievement of a community.

Of course, Arendt is hardly alone in valuing reciprocity, which is a central value for a wide array of communicative ethical frameworks. What leads Arendt into trouble, I want to suggest, is that she implies that world-sharing requires *linguistic* reciprocity. This makes good sense in dialogical contexts, but it follows that persons unable to reciprocate linguistic expression are excluded from the web of human relations (even if their speechlessness, like Ted’s, is *not* accompanied by an absence of linguistic comprehension). In what remains, I want to argue against the premise of linguistic reciprocity. And despite casting Arendt as the villain thus far, I hope to show that, at times, she endorses the possibility for nonreciprocal linguistic acts to create shared worlds of language and meaning.

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For reasons of time, I will pass over a discussion of Iris Marion Young’s concept of ‘asymmetrical reciprocity,’ which has guided my thinking quite a lot. Let me say only that Young’s redescription of communicative encounters as non-continuous, unidirectional ‘gifts’ instead of ‘exchanges’ is decisive. For Young, “illocutionary gestures of offering and accepting meanings” are what “create and sustain the social bond” (Young 1997, 356). This helps us ask our guiding question anew: What kind of world can be shared through the nonreciprocated gift or

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<sup>1</sup> All italics in these passages are added for emphasis.

offering of language, and what is its relation (if any) to the world that is the “creative product of the dialogue among our multiple perspectives” (1997, 359)?

We have seen that in most of her writing on linguistic world-sharing, Arendt is principally interested in the reciprocal in-between of speakers and actors. But in numerous places, Arendt hints at (or at least leaves open) the possibility of a different kind of shared, linguistic, and disclosive in-between. In *The Human Condition*, she pointedly downplays the importance of a ‘common nature’ to world-sharers, and instead argues that a shared “reality is... guaranteed... by the fact that, differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives notwithstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same object” (1998, 57). The suggestion here is that a world in common, even a ‘public life’ in common, requires a shared object of concern, and is not an achievement of shared features or capacities. Where there is no shared object, the common world dissolves.

This shared in-between is not always the result of plural expression, even if it is a joint achievement in a different sense. In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt marvels at “the power of the spectator” to bestow “potential immortality” to the actors of great deeds (1978b, 131). Arendt sees this power in Homer’s depiction of Odysseus weeping in the Phaeacian court. After being “entertained by the bard, who sings some story of Odysseus’ own life, his quarrel with Achilles: Odysseus, listening, covers his face and weeps, though he has never wept before, and certainly not when what he is now hearing actually happened” (1978b, 132). Note that Odysseus does not speak. His interaction with the bard is linguistic – he is moved by the bard’s words – but not linguistically reciprocal.

Arendt returns to this same scene in “The Concept of History,” published the same year as *The Human Condition*, this time emphasizing how remarkable it is that “listener, actor, and sufferer are the same person” (1961, 45). If the banquet scene is remarkable because Odysseus is at once the listener, actor, and sufferer – that is, if the coincidence of these roles is unusual – then what is the ‘normal’ state of affairs? Well, we know that the doer is “always and at the same time a sufferer,” which indicates that what is remarkable is not that Odysseus is actor and sufferer, but that he is both actor and *listener*, where normally these would be discrete roles. The bard’s song allows Odysseus to access the story of his own deeds from the position of spectator, and to participate in and bear witness to the reception and propagation of his story into a larger community of listeners.

Walter Benjamin famously claims that “[a] man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller; even a man reading one shares this companionship” (Benjamin 2006, 372). The companionship between listener and storyteller, I want to say, can be achieved through nonreciprocal speech. Only the Phaeacian bard speaks (or sings) while the gathered attendees of the banquet listen. The bard sings others into a world of shared meaning by opening a temporal interval in which his story becomes an object of mutual concern.

We can push this point further by insisting that storytelling is far from a niche practice in Arendt’s account of a political world. On the contrary, we can only know “[w]ho somebody is... by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero” (1998, 186). But the political world is not co-constituted by members who all shout their own stories simultaneously in a cacophony of overlapping expressions. The temporal interval opened by stories is the very condition of its durability. This is why Arendt claims that action depends on speech and the power of the spectator to “save human deeds from the futility that comes from oblivion” (1961, 41).

My suggestion is that Arendt’s emphasis on storytelling, which Paul Ricoeur once described as both “very subtle” and also “one of the most striking themes of... *The Human*



*Condition*,” is key to seeing how her thinking might accommodate speechless persons in the world of speech and action (Ricoeur 1983, 67). Speech as storytelling (which, again, is not such an uncommon way to use language) does not require equal capacities for linguistic expression, and does not demand reciprocation; it requires a shared, linguistic object of concern that represents and reifies one’s interconnection with other listeners and the storyteller.

Admittedly, there are many forms of coercive, nonreciprocal speech that involve reference to shared, linguistic objects of concern; e.g. to command or rule over someone, to reprimand, to monologue, to gaslight. By contrast, the form of storytelling that I am after is one that invites (not browbeats) a listener to share in a world. Let me venture that the distinguishing feature of this form of nonreciprocal speech is that it is *for* the good of the listener. Something of this teleological orientation can be found in Aristotle’s comments on storytelling in the *Politics*. In Section VII, Aristotle considers how storytelling might help or hinder in a child’s upbringing. He suggests that child supervisors should only tell young children “stories and fables... [that] pave the way for their later pursuits” (Aristotle 1998, 1336a32). The appropriate stories for children are those that contribute to their eventual flourishing.

Now, Aristotle would certainly deny that children have the capacity to deploy *logos* authoritatively; though they possess the “deliberative part of the soul... it is incompletely developed” (1998, 1260a13). Children are *aneu logou*, but they share in the world of the *polis* “as observers of the lessons they themselves will eventually have to learn” (1998, 1336b36). Athenian children are thus included in the world of speech and action in the position of *akroaton*, listeners or auditors, without the expectation that they will contribute to its co-constitution—at least “until they have reached the age when it is appropriate for them to recline at the communal table and drink wine” (1998, 1336b20–2). This risky, unidirectional gift of speech for the sake of another’s flourishing is one way in which nonreciprocal speech can be used to offer listeners a foothold in the linguistic sphere of meaning taking place around them.

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By way of conclusion, let me illustrate these points with a few lived examples. I mentioned that my wife sometimes spoke to her father over the phone. The content of those calls was often unremarkable. She sometimes talked about her day, her work, our plans for travel or weekend activities, the food we had cooked the night before, the television shows she thought he might like, and other topics of everyday life. These were hardly bardic tales of heroism, but they had a world-constituting power. Through nonreciprocal conversation, and without the two of them actually seeing one another, my wife and her father were able to share a world of language. Part of what made Ted’s illness so difficult for him and those around him was that language *was* an important part of Ted’s flourishing – he was, among many other things, a writer and teacher. Perhaps receiving language in the form of stories and idle chatter attuned to his person and adjusted for the sake of his inclusion allowed Ted to, if not co-appear, co-inhabit linguistically with his daughter. I hope (but of course cannot know) that Ted saw himself and his own story reflected and reified in the details of his daughter’s daily life, and that he could share in the concerns of the world of speech and action through her efforts to include him in it.

Is this a political world? Perhaps not in the sense that would interest Arendt. But I am reluctant to cede that caring, nonreciprocal speech is restricted to the confines of the private realm (notoriously restricted, in Arendt’s analysis). The kind of world-sharing I’ve sketched is, I think, irreducibly political in a broader sense, in line with Aristotle’s original usage of *politikos* as the highest form of *koinōnia*: not merely living together, but living *well* with and for one

another. Ted's home was not a political body, but the shared way of life that emerged was akin to *koinōnia politike* in important ways. When we visited, Ted would be helped to the living room at 8:30 AM every morning. His chair was positioned in the center of the house and angled so that he could see across the living room and into the kitchen. It was impossible to move through the home without passing him. The living room was a center of activity for the family to have meals, talk, watch television, and play with Huckleberry, and every day invariably started and ended there. When Ted was removed to the privacy of his bedroom for rest or care, he exited this 'public' arena. At other times, he participated in the flow of household life in the position of auditor and listener. His presence in the room changed the tenor of our activities in it, since when Ted was there our conversations swelled in order to include him in them. We spoke to *one another* differently knowing that Ted was there. In these ways, there was a shared, linguistic, public life within the household that Ted entered, exited, and held in common with his family.

This is not an ideal or scalable model of political coexistence, but I would insist that a linguistic world shot through with appearance, speech, recognition, memory, and belonging was maintained, however imperfectly, between Ted and his family. Ultimately, reading Arendt helps me understand both the stakes of losing linguistic expression, and also how nonreciprocal speech might be wielded to provide a kind of hospitality to persons who would otherwise find it difficult to retain their place in shared worlds of linguistic meaning. This form of world-sharing surely invites dangers, misunderstandings, and frustrations. Still, refusing to speak with nonspeaking persons as a way of steering clear of the hazards of hermeneutical imposition is not a neutral act; it carries its own risks. Prominent among them is that of foreclosing surviving possibilities for linguistic connection. In certain circumstances, nonreciprocal speech is practically all that remains of a shared linguistic world. Surely the coincidence of speaker and listener is enough to affirm the latter's belonging, and to say with Arendt and Scotus, "*Amo – volo ut sis*" – I love you, I want you to be (1978c, 144).

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