

April Marratto 3MT Transcript | University of Guelph Campus Final 2020

Student: April Marratto, PhD Candidate, Department of Philosophy, College of Arts

Advisor: Dr. Andrew Bailey

Title: A Time for Hospitable Listening

Transcript: It is June 2020 and vigils, protests, and other demonstrations begging for an end to racial injustice are happening all across the globe.

As a person of racial privilege, it has never felt more apt to be writing a thesis on the philosophy of listening, which develops a concept I call Hospitable Listening.

There are 3 components to hospitable listening:

Humility: which is making the person to whom you are listening as THE priority in the moment.

Learned Ignorance: which is setting aside what you think you know about a subject so that you can learn something new.

And Creating Safe Spaces: which is allowing for people to feel comfortable using their own words and experiences without forcing our interpretations on them.

The best way to explain Hospitable Listening is to tell you a story written by journalist Anthony Breznican.

Alone, angry, and discouraged with his studies, university student Anthony had a chance encounter, in an elevator, with his beloved childhood TV icon, Mr. Fred Rogers. After riding the elevator in silence, Anthony worked up the courage to say hello as they exited the elevator. Mr. Rogers then asked him: "Did you grow up as one of my neighbors?" After Anthony nodded, Mr. Rogers opened his arms up for a hug. As they left the lobby for the front door, sensing Anthony needed to talk, Mr. Rogers undid his winter scarf and jacket and asked Anthony to sit with him. "What is upsetting you?" he asked. Anthony then poured his heart out about his discouraging studies and the sadness of his grandfather's passing, while Mr. Rogers listened intently. After a while, Anthony realized he was making Mr. Rogers late and so he apologized for taking up his time. Mr. Rogers replied to him simply: "Sometimes you're right where you need to be". This humble action demonstrates hospitable listening perfectly. Anthony was impacted deeply for life by this encounter because when we are listened to with hospitality, it strengthens our belief in our own words, experiences, and more generally ourselves as a person.

The second part of my thesis takes the concept of hospitable listening and applies it to contemporary issues.

I presented a paper at the Western Canadian Philosophy conference last year that looked at how hospitable listening can provide positive inroads into the discussions surrounding vaccine hesitancy, specifically at how medical professionals can apply the concepts of hospitable listening. This tends to make those who are vaccine hesitant more confident that they are being listened to with respect and consequently builds more trust between the vaccine hesitant and the community of medical professionals. Today this goal is quite timely as we look to conquer the COVID pandemic.

I will also look at how hospitable listening should play a key role in activism. This is by giving space for oppressed people to speak using their own words and their own voices. Hospitable listening means that I assume a posture of humility to that I can learn from the voices that need to be amplified.

In all, my thesis develops a relatively simple but profound concept and proves how it should be used to help further contemporary cultural discussions.

[End of Transcript]