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HOW TO LISTEN

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[1] Τὴν γενομένην μοι σχολὴν περὶ τοῦ ἀκούειν, ὦ Νίκανδρε, ἀπέσταλκά σοι γράψας, ὅπως εἰδῇς τοῦ πείθοντος ὀρθῶς ἀκούειν, ὅτε τῶν προσταττόντων ἀπήλλαξαι τὸ ἀνδρεῖον ἀνειληφῶς ἱμάτιον. ἀναρχία μὲν γάρ, ἦν ἔνιοι τῶν νέων ἐλευθερίαν ἀπαιδευσία νομίζουσι, χαλεπωτέρους ἐκείνων τῶν ἐν παισὶ διδασκάλων καὶ παιδαγωγῶν δεσπότης ἐφίστησι τὰς ἐπιθυμίας ὥσπερ ἐκ δεσμῶν λυθείσας· καὶ καθάπερ Ἡρόδοτός φησιν ἅμα τῷ χιτῶνι συνεκδύεσθαι τὴν αἰδῶ τὰς γυναῖκας, οὕτως ἔνιοι τῶν νέων ἅμα τῷ τὸ παιδικὸν ἱμάτιον ἀποθέσθαι συναποθέμενοι τὸ αἰδεῖσθαι καὶ φοβεῖσθαι καὶ λύσαντες τὴν κατασχηματίζουσαν αὐτοὺς περιβολὴν εὐθὺς ἐμπίπλονται τῆς ἀναγωγίας. σὺ δὲ πολλάκις ἀκηκοὼς ὅτι ταῦτόν ἐστι τὸ ἔπεσθαι θεῷ καὶ τὸ πείθεσθαι λόγῳ, νόμιζε τὴν εἰς ἄνδρας ἐκ παίδων ἀγωγὴν οὐκ ἀρχῆς εἶναι τοῖς εὖ φρονοῦσιν ἀποβολήν, ἀλλὰ μεταβολήν

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[1] I've written up my old lecture on listening, my dear Nicander, and am sending it to you so that you'll know how to listen properly when someone is instructing you. The time is right, since you've come of age and are free of the guardians who used to supervise your learning.¹ But a lack of supervision, which some young people ignorantly believe to be freedom, releases from their chains, so to speak, those desires that become even more difficult masters than the teachers and tutors of one's youth. And just as Herodotus says that a woman sheds her dignity along with her dress,² likewise many young people, when they set aside their childhood clothing, also set aside reverence and respect, and once they've taken off the attire that marked their youth, they become completely undisciplined. You yourself have often heard it said that to follow God and

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ἄρχοντος, ἀντὶ μισθωτοῦ τινος ἢ ἀργυρωνήτου
θεῖον ἡγεμόνα τοῦ βίου λαμβάνουσι τὸν
λόγον, ὧ τοὺς ἐπομένους ἄξιόν ἐστι μόνους
ἐλευθέρους νομίζειν. μόνοι γὰρ ἂ δεῖ
βούλεσθαι μαθόντες, ὥς βούλονται ζῶσι· ταῖς
δ' ἀπαιδεύτοις καὶ παραλόγοις ὀρμαῖς καὶ
πράξεσιν ἀγεννὲς ἔνεστί τι καὶ μικρὸν ἐν
πολλῷ τῷ μετανοοῦντι τὸ ἐκούσιον.

[2] Ἐπεὶ δ' ὥσπερ τῶν ἐγγραφομένων εἰς
τὰς πολιτείας οἱ μὲν ἀλλοδαποὶ καὶ ξένοι
κομιδῇ πολλὰ μέμφονται καὶ δυσκολαίνουσι
τῶν γιγνομένων, οἱ δ' ἐκ μετοίκων σύντροφοι
καὶ συνήθεις τῶν νόμων ὄντες οὐ χαλεπῶς

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to obey Reason are one and the same thing: Believe, therefore, that for those who think rightly, the transition from childhood to adulthood does not entail the rejection of supervision, but it means a change in supervisors. Those who adopt Reason as the divine guide for their life, in place of some hired tutor, are the only people worthy to be called free. For they alone, since they've learned what one ought to wish for, live as they wish. Conversely, there is nothing noble in acting on undisciplined and irrational impulses, and personal choice usually plays little role when a person repents of their actions.

[2] Consider the people who are enrolled as new citizens in a city: Those who come from abroad and are entirely foreign complain about and struggle with much of what occurs in their new home, while those who

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προσδέχονται τὰ ἐπιβάλλοντα καὶ στέργουσιν,
οὕτω σε δεῖ πολὺν χρόνον ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ
παρατρεφόμενον καὶ πᾶν μάθημα καὶ ἄκουσμα
παιδικὸν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἐθισθέντα προσφέρεσθαι
λόγῳ φιλοσόφῳ μεμιγμένον, εὐμενῇ καὶ
οἰκεῖον ἥκειν εἰς φιλοσοφίαν, ἥ μόνη τὸν
ἀνδρεῖον καὶ τέλειον ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐκ λόγου
τοῖς νέοις περιτίθησι κόσμον.

[3] Οὐκ ἂν ἀηδῶς δ' οἶμαί σε προακοῦσαι
περὶ τῆς ἀκουστικῆς αἰσθήσεως, ἣν ὁ
Θεόφραστος παθητικωτάτην εἶναί φησι
πασῶν. οὔτε γὰρ ὁρατὸν οὐδὲν οὔτε γευστὸν
οὔθ' ἀπτὸν ἐκστάσεις ἐπιφέρει καὶ ταραχὰς
καὶ πτοίας τηλικαύτας ἡλίκαι καταλαμβάνουσι
τὴν ψυχὴν κτύπων τινῶν καὶ πατάγων καὶ

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were raised in the city as resident aliens and are accustomed to the local laws accept their lot quite easily and are content. And so it is with you, who for a long time have been exposed to philosophy in your upbringing and from the beginning have been accustomed to hearing all your lessons and childhood sayings expressed in philosophical language. You must approach philosophy with familiarity and an open mind, since philosophy alone bestows on young people the perfect, adult polish that is truly based on Reason.

[3] I think you'll be pleased to read an introductory discussion about the sense of hearing, which Theophrastus claims is the most impressionable of all the senses.³ For nothing seen or tasted or touched delivers the same excitement or tumult or fright to the soul as when a person hears certain

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ἤχων τῇ ἀκοῇ προσπεσόντων. ἔστι δὲ λογικώτερα μᾶλλον ἢ παθητικώτερα. τῇ μὲν γὰρ κακία πολλὰ χωρία καὶ μέρη τοῦ σώματος παρέχει δι' αὐτῶν ἐνδύσαν ἄψασθαι τῆς ψυχῆς, τῇ δ' ἀρετῇ μία λαβὴ τὰ ὅλα τῶν νέων ἐστίν, ἂν καθαρὰ καὶ ἄθρυπτα κολακεία καὶ λόγοις ἄθικτα φαύλοις ἀπ' ἀρχῆς φυλάττηται. διὸ καὶ Ξενοκράτης τοῖς παισὶ μᾶλλον ἢ τοῖς ἀθληταῖς ἐκέλευε περιάπτειν ἀμφοτίδας, ὥς ἐκείνων μὲν τὰ ὅλα ταῖς πληγαῖς, τούτων δὲ τοῖς λόγοις τὰ ἥθη διαστρεφομένων, οὐκ ἀνηκοῖαν οὐδὲ κωφότητα προμνόμενος, ἀλλὰ τῶν λόγων τοὺς φαύλους φυλάττεσθαι παραινῶν, πρὶν ἑτέρους χρηστοὺς ὥσπερ φύλακας ἐντραφέντας ὑπὸ φιλοσοφίας τῷ ἥθει τὴν μάλιστα κινουμένην αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναπειθομένην χώραν κατασχεῖν. καὶ Βίας ὁ παλαιὸς Ἀμάσιδι, κελευσθεὶς τὸ χρηστότατον ὁμοῦ καὶ φαυλότατον ἐκπέμψαι κρέας τοῦ ἱερείου, τὴν γλῶτταν ἐξελὼν ἀπέπεμψεν, ὥς

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crashes, clangs, and voices. Now, the sense of hearing is more rational than emotional, for many parts of the body allow vice to slip through and lay hold of the soul, but for young people, virtue's only means of access is through the ears, provided that, from a child's earliest days, the ears are kept unpoluted, uncontaminated by flattery, and unsullied by corrupting words. That's why Xenocrates proposed that children rather than boxers should wear ear protection, reasoning that it was only a boxer's ears that were disfigured by punches, while a child's character was disfigured by words.⁴ He wasn't proposing, of course, that children should stop listening or become deaf. Rather, he was advising that we should protect children from corrupting types of speech, until the beneficial type, nurtured by philosophy and embedded in their character,

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καὶ βλάβας καὶ ὠφελείας τοῦ λέγειν ἔχοντος
μεγίστας. οἱ τε πολλοὶ τὰ μικρὰ παιδία
καταφιλοῦντες αὐτοὶ τε τῶν ὥτων ἄπτονται
κάκεῖνα τοῦτο ποιεῖν κελεύουσιν, αἰνιττόμενοι
μετὰ παιδιᾶς ὅτι δεῖ φιλεῖν μάλιστα τοὺς διὰ
τῶν ὥτων ὠφελοῦντας.

[4] Ἐπεὶ ὅτι γε πάσης ἀκροάσεως
ἀπειργόμενος ὁ νέος καὶ λόγου μηδενὸς
γευόμενος οὐ μόνον ἄκαρπος ὅλως καὶ
ἀβλαστῆς διαμένει πρὸς ἀρετὴν, ἀλλὰ καὶ

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has taken command like a guardian over those aspects of character that are especially malleable and easily seduced. Bias long ago had a similar idea: When Amasis ordered him to send over both the best and the worst cut of meat from a sacrificed animal, he cut out the tongue and sent that alone, on the ground that speech produces both the greatest harm and the greatest benefit.⁵ And many people, when they give affectionate kisses to small children, hold them by the ears, and they urge the children to grab their ears, too. Thus, they hint in a playful way that the children should have special affection for those who are good to them in a way that involves the ears.

[4] It's obvious that a young person who's been completely deprived of instruction and has heard no lessons not only remains entirely fruitless and barren with respect to

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διαστρέφοιτ' ἂν πρὸς κακίαν, ὥσπερ ἐκ
χώρας ἀκινήτου καὶ ἀργῆς ἄγρια πολλὰ τῆς
ψυχῆς ἀναδιδούς, δῆλόν ἐστι. τὰς γὰρ ἐφ'
ἡδονὴν ὁρμὰς καὶ πρὸς πόνον ὑποψίας (οὐ
θυραίους οὐδ' ὑπὸ λόγων ἐπεισάκτους, ἀλλ'
ὥσπερ αὐτόχθονας οὔσας μυρίων παθῶν καὶ
νοσημάτων πηγάς) ἂν ἔῃ τις ἀφέτους ἢ
πεφύκασι χωρεῖν καὶ μὴ λόγοις χρηστοῖς
ἀφαιρῶν ἢ παρατρέπων καταρτύῃ τὴν φύσιν,
οὐκ ἔστιν ὃ τῶν θηρίων οὐκ ἂν ἡμερώτερον
ἀνθρώπου φανείη.

[5] Διὸ δὴ μεγάλην μὲν ὠφέλειαν οὐκ
ἐλάττω δὲ κίνδυνον τοῖς νέοις τοῦ ἀκούειν
ἔχοντος, οἶμαι καλῶς ἔχειν καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀεὶ
καὶ πρὸς ἕτερον διαλέγεσθαι περὶ τοῦ ἀκούειν.
ἐπεὶ καὶ τούτῳ κακῶς τοὺς πλείστους
χρωμένους ὁρῶμεν, οἱ λέγειν ἀσκοῦσι πρὶν

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virtue but might even be perverted into vice and so experience lots of wild growth in the soul, like a plot of land that's left unworked and fallow. Consider our human tendencies to seek pleasure and to avoid strenuous effort, which are not something imported or learned from others, but are homegrown, so to speak, and the source of countless misfortunes and diseases. If you allow these tendencies to progress naturally and range freely, and if you don't tend to yourself by weeding them out or redirecting them under the influence of good teaching, you'll become wilder than any feral beast.

[5] And so, since listening entails great benefit but no less danger for young people, I think it's important always to be in dialogue, both with oneself and with others, about listening. This is especially true because I see most people approaching the

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ἀκούειν ἐθισθῆναι· καὶ λόγων μὲν οἴονται μάθησιν εἶναι καὶ μελέτην, ἀκροάσει δὲ καὶ τοὺς ὁπωσοῦν χρωμένους ὠφελεῖσθαι. καίτοι τοῖς μὲν σφαιρίζουσιν ἅμα τοῦ βαλεῖν καὶ τοῦ λαβεῖν τὴν σφαῖραν ἢ μάθησις· ἐν δὲ τῇ τοῦ λόγου χρεία τὸ δέξασθαι καλῶς τοῦ προέσθαι πρότερόν ἐστιν, ὥσπερ τοῦ τεκεῖν τὸ συλλαβεῖν καὶ κατασχεῖν τι τῶν γονίμων.

[6] Ταῖς μὲν οὖν ὄρνισι τὰς ὑπηνεμίους λοχείας καὶ ὠδῖνας ἀτελῶν τινων καὶ ἀψύχων ὑπολειμμάτων ὀχείας λέγουσιν εἶναι· τῶν δ' ἀκούειν μὴ δυναμένων νέων μηδ' ὠφελεῖσθαι δι' ἀκοῆς ἐθισθέντων ὑπηνέμιος ὄντως ὁ λόγος ἐκπίπτων “ἀκλειῆς αἰδήλος ὑπαὶ νεφέεσσι κεδάσθη.” τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἀγγεῖα πρὸς τὴν ὑποδοχὴν τῶν ἐγχεομένων ἐπικλίνουσι καὶ συνεπιστρέφουσιν, ἵν' ἔγχυσις ἀληθῶς, μὴ ἔκχυσις γένηται, αὐτοὺς δὲ τῷ λέγοντι

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matter incorrectly: They practice speaking before they have been trained to listen. They believe that the art of speaking requires serious study but think they can listen however they like and still derive benefit. But learning to play ball means learning to catch as well as to throw, and so when it comes to dialogue, listening properly must come before speaking, just as conceiving and being pregnant must precede giving birth.

[6] They say that “wind eggs” produced by birds come from the incomplete and lifeless remnants of fertilization.⁶ When young people are unable to listen or are not accustomed to deriving benefit from listening, the “wind words” that they produce are truly “unrenowned and unknown, and scattered across the sky.”⁷ For they will carefully tilt and turn their jugs under running water so that the liquid enters cleanly rather than

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παρέχειν καὶ συναρμόττειν τῇ προσοχῇ
τὴν ἀκρόασιν, ὥς μηδὲν ἐκφύγῃ τῶν
χρησίμως λεγομένων, οὐ μανθάνουσιν, ἀλλ’
ὃ πάντων καταγελαστότατόν ἐστιν, ἂν μὲν τινι
προστύχωσι διηγούμενῳ δεῖπνον ἢ πομπὴν ἢ
ὄνειρον ἢ λοιδορίαν γεγενημένην αὐτῷ πρὸς
ἄλλον, ἀκροῶνται σιωπῇ καὶ προσλιπαροῦσιν·
ἂν δέ τις αὐτοὺς ἐπισπασάμενος διδάσκη τι
τῶν χρησίμων ἢ παραινῇ τῶν δεόντων ἢ
νουθετῇ πλημμελοῦντας ἢ καταπραῦνη
χαλεπαίνοντας, οὐχ ὑπομένουσιν, ἀλλ’ ἂν μὲν
δύνωνται, περιγενέσθαι φιλοτιμούμενοι
διαμάχονται πρὸς τὸν λόγον· εἰ δὲ μή,
φεύγοντες ἀπίασιν πρὸς ἑτέρους λόγους καὶ
φλυάρους, ὥς ἀγγεῖα φαῦλα καὶ σαθρὰ τὰ ὦτα
πάντων μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἐμπιπλάντες.
τοὺς μὲν οὖν ἵππους οἱ καλῶς τρέφοντες
εὐστόμους τῷ χαλινῷ, τοὺς δὲ παῖδας εὐηκόους
τῷ λόγῳ παρέχουσι, πολλὰ μὲν ἀκούειν μὴ
πολλὰ δὲ λέγειν διδασκομένους. καὶ γὰρ τὸν

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splashing out, but they never learn to open themselves to a person who's speaking or to listen attentively so that they don't miss any useful information. Rather—and this is the most ridiculous thing of all—when they run into someone who begins to tell them about a dinner or a parade or a dream or how they chewed someone out, they listen in silence and want to hear the whole story, but when someone pulls them aside to teach them something useful or give them necessary advice or caution them when they're making a mistake or calm them when they're upset, they won't put up with it. Instead, they fight back against what's being said and do their best to win the argument. And if they can't win, they run off in search of more frivolous stories, treating their ears as though they were cheap and cracked jars by filling them with everything except what's essential.

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Ἐπαμεινώνδαν ὁ Σπίνθαρος ἐπαινῶν ἔφη
μήτε πλείονα γινώσκοντι μήτ' ἐλάττονα
φθεγγομένῳ ῥαδίως ἐντυχεῖν ἑτέρῳ. καὶ τὴν
φύσιν ἡμῶν ἑκάστῳ λέγουσι δύο μὲν ὧτα
δοῦναι, μίαν δὲ γλῶτταν, ὥς ἐλάττονα λέγειν
ἢ ἀκούειν ὀφείλονται.

[7] Πανταχοῦ μὲν οὖν τῷ νέῳ κόσμος
ἀσφαλῆς ἐστὶν ἢ σιωπῇ, μάλιστα δ' ὅταν
ἀκούων ἑτέρου μὴ συνταράττηται μηδ'
ἐξυλακτῇ πρὸς ἕκαστον, ἀλλὰ κἂν ὁ λόγος ἦ
μὴ λίαν ἄρεστός, ἀνέχεται καὶ περιμένη
παύσασθαι τὸν διαλεγόμενον, καὶ παυσαμένου
μὴ εὐθέως ἐπιβάλλῃ τὴν ἀντίρρησην, ἀλλ' ὥς

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Now, those who raise horses properly make them willing to accept the bit, while those who raise children properly make them willing to obey Reason. Properly raised children have been taught to listen much and speak little. Consider this example: When Spintharus was praising Epaminondas, he declared that it would be no easy task to find someone who knew more than Epaminondas but spoke less.⁸ Here's another one: They say that nature gave each of us two ears but only one tongue, since we ought to listen more than we speak.

[7] In every situation, young people demonstrate their best behavior when they hold their tongue. This is especially true when they're listening to someone without getting agitated or growling at every point that's made, and even if the lecture isn't particularly pleasing, they're putting up with it

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Αἰσχίνης φησί, διαλείπη χρόνον, εἴτε προσθεῖναι τι βούλοιτο τοῖς λελεγμένοις ὁ εἰρηκῶς, εἴτε μεταθέσθαι καὶ ἀφελεῖν. οἱ δ' εὐθὺς ἀντικόπτοντες, οὐτ' ἀκούοντες οὐτ' ἀκουόμενοι λέγοντες δὲ πρὸς λέγοντας, ἀσχημονοῦσιν· ὁ δ' ἐγκρατῶς καὶ μετ' αἰδοῦς ἀκούειν ἐθισθεὶς τὸν μὲν ὠφέλιμον λόγον ἐδέξατο καὶ κατέσχε, τὸν δ' ἄχρηστον ἢ ψευδῇ μᾶλλον διεῖδε καὶ κατεφώρασε, φιλαλήθης φανείς, οὐ φιλόνηκος οὐδὲ προπετῆς καὶ δύσερις. ὅθεν οὐ κακῶς ἔνιοι λέγουσιν ὅτι δεῖ τῶν νέων μᾶλλον ἐκπνευματοῦν τὸ οἷμα καὶ τὸν τῦφον ἢ τῶν ἀσκῶν τὸν ἀέρα τοὺς ἐγγεῖαι τι βουλομένους χρήσιμον· εἰ δὲ μή, γέμοντες ὄγκου καὶ φυσήματος οὐ προσδέχονται.

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and waiting for the speaker to pause. And when the pause comes, they don't immediately launch a counterattack, but as Aeschines says, they wait a moment, in case the speaker wishes to add something to what's been said, or to revise, or to take something back.⁹ Students who are quick to cut people off, without listening or being heard themselves and speaking on top of others, only disgrace themselves. But students who are self-controlled and accustomed to listening respectfully hear and retain what's beneficial, while conversely, they see right through what's useless and false. They come across as seekers of the truth rather than as contentious, nor do they appear reckless or quarrelsome. For that reason, some rightly say that it's more important to rid young people of their self-importance and delusion than to deflate

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[8] Φθόνος τοίνυν μετὰ βασκανίας καὶ δυσμενείας οὐδενὶ μὲν ἔργῳ παρῶν ἀγαθόν, ἀλλὰ πᾶσιν ἐμπόδιος τοῖς καλοῖς, κάκιστος δ' ἀκροωμένῳ πάρεδρος καὶ σύμβουλος, ἀνιὰρὰ καὶ ἀηδὴ καὶ δυσπρόσδεκτα ποιῶν τὰ ὠφέλιμα διὰ τὸ πᾶσι μᾶλλον ἥδεσθαι τοὺς φθονοῦντας ἢ τοῖς εὖ λεγομένοις. καίτοι πλοῦτος μὲν ὄντινα δάκνει καὶ δόξα καὶ κάλλος, ἑτέροις ὑπάρχοντα, φθονερός ἐστι μόνον· ἄχθεται γὰρ ἄλλων εὐτυχούντων· ὁ δὲ λόγῳ καλῶς λεγομένῳ δυσχεραίνων ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων ἀγαθῶν ἀνιᾶται. ὥς γὰρ τὸ φῶς τῶν βλεπόντων, καὶ ὁ λόγος τῶν ἀκουόντων ἀγαθόν ἐστίν, ἂν βούλωνται δέχεσθαι.

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wineskins, if we wish to fill them with something useful. If we don't empty them first, the young will remain full of pretension and conceit, and thus they'll have no room for anything else.

[8] Envy, moreover, with its jealousy and ill will, is never an asset. Rather, it's an impediment to all good works, and it's the worst companion and advisor for someone who's trying to listen. It makes everything that's beneficial appear annoying, distasteful, and hard to swallow, since the person who's experiencing envy takes absolutely no pleasure in listening to someone who's speaking well. People who are pained by the wealth, reputation, or beauty that others possess are merely jealous, since they're annoyed at another's good fortune, but people who are disturbed by a well-delivered lecture are vexed by something that's actually

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[9] Τὸν μὲν οὖν ἐφ’ ἐτέροις φθόνον ἄλλαι τινὲς ἀπαίδευτοι καὶ κακαὶ διαθέσεις ἐμποιοῦσιν, ὁ δὲ πρὸς τοὺς λέγοντας ἐκ φιλοδοξίας ἀκαίρου καὶ φιλοτιμίας ἀδίκου γεννώμενος οὐδὲ προσέχειν ἔῃ τοῖς λεγομένοις τὸν οὕτω διακείμενον, ἀλλὰ θορυβεῖ καὶ περισπᾷ τὴν διάνοιαν, ἅμα μὲν τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἔξιν ἐπισκοποῦσαν εἰ λείπεται τῆς τοῦ λέγοντος, ἅμα δὲ τοὺς ἄλλους ἐπιβλέπουσαν εἰ ἄγανται καὶ θαυμάζουσιν, ἐκπληττομένην τε ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπαίνων καὶ ἀγριαίνουσιν πρὸς τοὺς παρόντας ἂν ἀποδέχωνται τὸν λέγοντα, τῶν δὲ λόγων τοὺς μὲν εἰρημένους ἔῳσαν καὶ προῖεμένην, ὅτι λυποῦσι μνημονευόμενοι, πρὸς δὲ τοὺς

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good for them. For just as the light is good for people who are seeing, so the well-delivered lecture is good for those who are listening, provided they are receptive to its message.

[9] In most situations, envy arises from an ignorant and ignoble disposition, but the envy that's directed at people who are speaking is engendered by an untimely arrogance and an unjust love of honor, and it prevents the envious person from paying attention to what's being said. This sort of envy disrupts and distracts the mind, which at one moment is busy evaluating its own skills, to see if they fall short of the speaker's talents, and in the next moment is busy observing the other listeners, to see if they're amazed and impressed. The distracted mind is astonished when audience members offer praise and furious when they show approval;

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λείποντας ταραττομένην καὶ τρέμουσαν
μὴ τῶν εἰρημένων βελτίονες γένωνται,
σπεύδουσιν δὲ τάχιστα παύσασθαι τοὺς
λέγοντας ὅταν κάλλιστα λέγωσι, λυθείσης δὲ
τῆς ἀκροάσεως πρὸς οὐδενὶ τῶν εἰρημένων
οὔσαν ἀλλὰ τὰς φωνὰς καὶ διαθέσεις τῶν
παρόντων ἐπιψηφίζουσιν, καὶ τοὺς μὲν
ἐπαινοῦντας ὥσπερ ἐμμανῆ φεύγουσαν καὶ
ἀποπηδῶσαν, προστρέχουσιν δὲ καὶ
συναγελαζομένην τοῖς ψέγουσι τὰ εἰρημένα
καὶ διαστρέφουσιν· ἂν δὲ μηδὲν ἤ διαστρέψαι,
παραβάλλουσιν ἑτέρους τινὰς ὡς ἄμεινον
εἰρηκότας εἰς ταῦτόν καὶ δυνατώτερον, ἕως
διαφθείρασα καὶ λυμνηναμένη τὴν ἀκρόασιν
ἀχρεῖον ἑαυτῇ καὶ ἀνόνητον ἀπεργάσεται.

HOW TO LISTEN

it willingly forgets what's already been said, since to recall the words only causes grief, and it worries about what's coming next, in case the lecture actually improves; it's eager for the speaker to finish quickly when they're speaking especially well, but when the lecture is finished, it disregards the contents and instead assesses the audience's response; it's almost manically repelled by those who offer praise, but it's immediately attracted to those who criticize what's been said and distort the message; and if there's nothing to distort, it compares the speaker to others who—supposedly—have spoken better and more powerfully on the same subject. In the end, the mind that's distracted by envy corrupts and abuses the listening experience so that it becomes entirely useless and unprofitable.

HOW TO LISTEN

[10] Διὸ δεῖ τῇ φιληκοῖα πρὸς τὴν φιλοδοξίαν σπείσασμενον ἀκροᾶσθαι τοῦ λέγοντος ἴλεων καὶ πρᾶον, ὥσπερ ἐφ' ἐστίασιν ἱερὰν καὶ θυσίας ἀπαρχὴν παρειλημμένον, ἐπαινοῦντα μὲν ἐν οἷς ἐπιτυγχάνει τὴν δύναμιν, ἀγαπῶντα δὲ τὴν προθυμίαν αὐτὴν τοῦ φέροντος εἰς μέσον ἃ γινώσκει καὶ πείθοντος ἑτέρους δι' ὧν αὐτὸς πέπεισται. τοῖς μὲν οὖν κατορθουμένοις ἐπιλογιστέον ὥς οὐκ ἀπὸ τύχης οὐδ' αὐτομάτως ἀλλ' ἐπιμελεία καὶ πόνῳ καὶ μαθήσει κατορθοῦνται, καὶ μιμητέον γε ταῦτα θαυμάζοντάς γε δὴ καὶ ζηλοῦντας· τοῖς δ' ἁμαρτανόμενοις ἐφιστάναι χρὴ τὴν διάνοιαν, ὅφ' ὧν αἰτιῶν καὶ ὅθεν ἡ παρατροπὴ γέγονεν. ὥς γὰρ ὁ Ξενοφῶν φησι τοὺς οἰκονομικοὺς καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν φίλων ὀνίνασθαι καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐχθρῶν, οὕτω τοὺς ἐγρηγορότας καὶ προσέχοντας οὐ μόνον κατορθοῦντες ἀλλὰ καὶ διαμαρτάνοντες ὠφελοῦσιν οἱ λέγοντες·

HOW TO LISTEN

[10] We must, therefore, make a truce between the love of listening and the love of glory, so we can attend a lecture with grace and mildness, as we would attend a holy banquet held after a sacrifice. We must praise the speaker's ability when the arguments are convincing, and when they're not, we must nonetheless appreciate the good intentions of someone who's shared their knowledge and attempted to teach us what they've learned. When a speaker does well, we must not assume that it was by luck or accident, but thanks to study and toil and learning, and we should admire and emulate their technique. And when a speaker doesn't do well, we should analyze their thought processes, to understand how and where their arguments went awry. For Xenophon says about the managers of estates that they benefit from both their friends and their

HOW TO LISTEN

καὶ γὰρ διανοήματος εὐτέλεια καὶ ῥήματος
κενότης καὶ σχῆμα φορτικὸν καὶ πτόησις μετὰ
χαρᾶς ἀπειροκάλου πρὸς ἔπαινον καὶ ὅσα
τοιαῦτα μᾶλλον ἀκροωμένοις ἐφ’ ἐτέρων ἢ
λέγουσιν ἐφ’ ἑαυτῶν καταφαίνεται. διὸ δεῖ
μεταφέρειν τὴν εὐθυαν ἐφ’ ἑαυτοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ
λέγοντος, ἀνασκοποῦντας εἴ τι τοιοῦτο
λανθάνομεν ἀμαρτάνοντες. ῥᾶστον γὰρ ἐστι
τῶν ὄντων τὸ μέμψασθαι τὸν πλησίον,
ἀχρήστως τε καὶ κενῶς γιγνόμενον, ἂν μὴ πρὸς
τινα διόρθωσιν ἢ φυλακὴν ἀναφέρηται τῶν
ὁμοίων. καὶ τὸ τοῦ Πλάτωνος οὐκ ὀκνητέον
αἰεὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῶν ἀμαρτανόντων
ἀναφθέγγεσθαι, “μή που ἄρ’ ἐγὼ τοιοῦτος;”
ὥς γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ὅμμασι τῶν πλησίον ἐλλάμποντα
τὰ ἑαυτῶν ὁρῶμεν, οὕτως ἐπὶ τῶν λόγων δεῖ
τοὺς ἑαυτῶν ἐνεικονίζεσθαι τοῖς ἐτέρων, ἵνα
μήτ’ ἄγαν θρασέως καταφρονῶμεν ἄλλων,
αὐτοῖς τε προσέχωμεν ἐν τῷ λέγειν
ἐπιμελέστερον.