

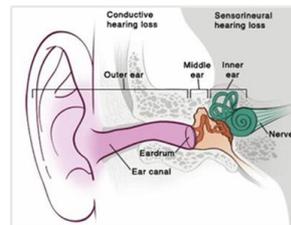
## Philos 3: Technology & Society

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### *Deaf Culture*

## Types of Hearing Loss

- Conductive hearing loss
- Sensorineural hearing loss
- Auditory Neuropathy



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- **Conductive hearing loss** can occur when there is damage or a blockage in the outer and/or middle ear. This can result in sound not being conducted adequately through the ear canal to the eardrum, or from the eardrum via the ossicles of the middle ear to the inner ear. It can be caused by earwax, a perforated eardrum, a build up of fluid in the middle ear from a cold or flu, (often referred to as 'glue ear'), abnormal bone growth involving the ossicles, repeated ear infections and allergies. Medical interventions and technologies are often used to treat conductive hearing loss.

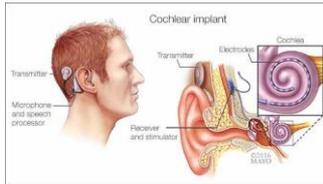
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- **Sensorineural hearing loss** occurs when there is damage or malfunction of the hair cells in the cochlear. It's the most common type of permanent hearing loss. It's treated with cochlear implants.
- **Auditory Neuropathy** occurs when there is a problem with the auditory nerve transmitting the signal from the cochlea to the brain. Understanding speech in background noise can be a particular difficulty. The cause of auditory neuropathy includes lack of oxygen or jaundice at birth, or some neurological conditions.

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## Cochlear Implants

- One part of the device is surgically implanted into the bone surrounding the ear (temporal bone). It is made up of a receiver-stimulator, which accepts, decodes, and then sends an electrical signal to the brain.
- The second part of the cochlear implant is an outside device. This is made up of a microphone/receiver, a speech processor, and an antenna. This part of the implant receives the sound, converts the sound into an electrical signal, and sends it to the inside part of the cochlear implant.



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- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhSpb36\\_1s4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhSpb36_1s4)
- With an implant a child will be able to learn the spoken language of the majority culture in later life.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFlhbBRZPEA>
- Kids with cochlear implants since infancy more likely to speak, not sign.

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## Arguments against Cochlear Implants

- Deaf people objected to the choice being made on behalf of young children to insert the implant.
- Deaf people should not be thought of as disabled but as members of a minority cultural group.
- Instead of the majority culture imposing its language and values on the Deaf we should modify our institutions and take account of the needs of members of another culture.
- The implants in children reduce the size of the Deaf community with whom adult Deaf people can communicate.

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## Is Deafness a Disability?

- People who identify with Deaf culture do not see themselves as disabled.
- They are convinced that it is possible to lead a happy and productive life without hearing or spoken language.
- They do not believe that their children will be harmed by being born deaf.
- The disability view relies on assumptions about prevailing institutional arrangements.

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- **Q:** But are Deaf people not disabled because they cannot respond to aural cues that indicate danger (e.g., a car coming from behind)?
- **A:** (1) Deaf people often have abilities that hearing people lack, e.g., a superior consciousness of subtlety of gesture and of movement of bodies through space. Thus, depending on the environment, a hearing person may be 'disabled.'
- (2) Short people may also have evolutionary disadvantages but we would not want to classify them as disabled.

"Our account of normal bodies is at the very least significantly bifurcated with regard to sex. It admits significant variation in height, weight, skin color and sexual preference. ... Thus, if critics want to insist that deaf people are disabled because they do not have the full range of normal human capacities, it is appropriate to ask whether they think that it is men or women who are disabled? If they insist that both men and women have normal human bodies despite the fact that they have different bodily capacities, then the question arises as to why they are not prepared to admit that this range might include deaf persons as well?" (Sparrow (2005), *Defending Deaf Culture*, p. 139)

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## Deafness as Culture

- Whether a group constitutes a 'culture' seems to depend on the possession of a shared history, a unique language (or perhaps dialect), a distinctive art, music, literature or cuisine.
- Deaf people possess their own distinct languages (each with a unique vocabulary and grammar), a shared set of experiences, a shared history and distinct institutions (schools, clubs, meeting places, sporting events).

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Differences between Deaf culture and other cultural groups.

- Deafness has a social and a biological aspect. One must be unable to hear and use Sign and participate in the cultural institutions of the Deaf.
- Because 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents, cultural transmission of Deaf culture does not occur at home but in cultural institutions of the Deaf.

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## The Liberal Model of Culture

“On this account culture is essentially an *instrumental good*; it is good by virtue of its role in securing other goods, namely self-respect and a context of choice that allows individuals to pursue their own notions of the good. Driving the liberal account is a concern for each individual’s ability to decide for themselves how they wish to live their life. In order for them to be able to do this to the fullest possible extent they must be able to choose between as many different ways of life as possible. This also means that it is possible to rank cultures against one another, according to the extent to which they secure a wide range of possible life options for their members.” (Sparrow (2005), *Defending Deaf Culture*, p. 142)

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## The Communitarian Model of Culture

Same as Liberal model. “But communitarians are likely to hold that part of the value of a culture is that it grounds self-respect in realizing *specific* cultural roles and that it provides a context of choice in which particular choices appear attractive and others are discouraged. ... Each culture therefore makes possible (a) different good(s). This means that it will not be possible to straightforwardly rank cultures against each other according to the extent to which they provide these goods. Instead members of each culture will judge the matter differently, with reference to the standards contained in their own culture.” (Sparrow (2005), *Defending Deaf Culture*, p. 143.)

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## Applying these Models to the Cochlear Implant Controversy

- The danger of the **existing cochlear implants** is that they risk depriving children of full membership of *any* culture because they are unable to function effectively in a hearing context but also lacking the facility with sign language.
- Both models of culture agree that providing a child with an implant is unethical if it poses the risk of leaving the child with fewer opportunities than if they had learned to sign.

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- Suppose scientists create a **bionic ear**.
- On the liberal model of culture, it would be wrong to not give a child a bionic ear because being part of the hearing community gives the child the widest possible range of opportunities.
- On the communitarian model of culture, it depends on the cultural commitment of the person making the decision for the child. “If one is deeply committed to Deaf culture then one may believe that a life lived as a member of Deaf culture offers a wider range of valuable opportunities than membership of hearing culture” (Sparrow, p. 146-7).

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## Sparrow's Conclusion

"It seems sensible to allow that parents should be granted the right to make this decision on behalf of their own children. We should trust that parents are best placed to consider the best interests of their own children. Furthermore there are important practical reasons to think that children will be happier and more likely to grow up with a secure cultural membership if they share the culture of their parents. Hearing parents of deaf children should therefore be allowed to employ the bionic ear to bring their children up as members of their hearing culture. But equally well, the right of Deaf parents to bring deaf children up as members of Deaf culture, without the use of the bionic ear, should also be respected." (Sparrow (2005), *Defending Deaf Culture*, p. 148).