5 Silence and Objecting

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What are we entitled to infer from the silence of others? This is the question that will be at the center of this paper. More precisely, I will explore the connection between silence and the duty we have to object to what we take to be false or unwarranted. I will argue that the central approach to understanding this connection in the literature—what I call the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW—is an instance of an ideal theory and, as such, it excludes the way that things are in the actual world, especially for those who are systematically marginalized. I then show how this exclusion results in a number of significant problems facing the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW, ultimately leading to its rejection. Finally, I argue that when our theoretical starting point is non-ideal theory, and we focus on conversational exchanges in which features of the actual world take center stage—such as power, oppression, and cultural differences—we find ourselves recognizing that objecting is often a luxury, one that not everyone can afford to make. This leads to the conclusion that a constraint on any plausible view of the duty to object is that one's duty can be directly influenced by one's social status.

Ideal Theory

Ideal theory in ethics and political theory, often paradigmatically exemplified by the work of John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*, is frequently critiqued for all that it leaves out of the theoretical picture. Indeed, it is not the appeal to ideals themselves that is regarded as distinctively problematic, since non-ideal theorists will also invoke moral ideals, but the absence of attention paid to the way the world actually is, especially for those who are oppressed and marginalized in various ways.

This is a point that is developed extensively by Charles Mills, who characterizes ideal theory in a recent book primarily in terms of what is absent or ignored rather than by what is present. He writes:

> What distinguishes ideal theory is the reliance on idealization to the exclusion, or at least marginalization, of the actual. . . . [I]deal theory

either tacitly represents the actual as a simple deviation from the ideal, not worth theorizing in its own right, or claims that starting from the ideal is at least the best way of realizing it.

(Mills, 2017, p. 75)

According to Mills, then, the core feature of ideal theory is not the idealization itself but, rather, the disregard of varying degrees of the actual world and the people and institutions in it. He goes on to argue further that ideal theory will use some or all of a list of concepts and assumptions, including (i) idealized capacities, (ii) silence on oppression, and (iii) ideal social institutions. Let's focus briefly on each of these.

With respect to (i), ideal theory often presupposes capacities that are entirely unrealistic for human agents. This is true of those who are privileged, but especially of "those subordinated in different ways, who would not have had an equal opportunity for their natural capacities to develop, and who will in fact be disabled in crucial respects" (Mills, 2017, p. 76). Moreover, when capacities are idealized in this way, norms and expectations, along with the corresponding disapprobation, are likely to become skewed. For instance, if a parent idealizes the cognitive capacities of her 5-year-old child, then she might think it is appropriate to expect him to be able to sit through math tutoring every day for an hour without interruption. When he begins to fidget after 30 minutes and cries on the second day, she might criticize his behavior and regard him as disappointing or deficient when in fact the problem is her idealization of his capacities. This example focuses on cognitive capacities, but similar remarks apply in the moral, political, and epistemic domains.

Regarding (ii), Mills says,

Almost by definition, it follows from the focus of ideal theory that little or nothing will be said about actual historic oppression and its legacy in the present or current ongoing oppression, though these may be gestured at in a vague or promissory way.

(Mills, 2017, p. 76)

This is especially problematic when the issues being explored are normative ones, such as those involving justice, obligations, blameworthiness, and so on. If, for instance, we are assessing when to hold agents blameworthy for being bystanders, completely disregarding the vulnerable positions of members of different oppressed groups would result in holding all of those present equally responsible for their inaction. But this might be misguided insofar as those in positions of power have far less to lose when intervening in morally complex situations than those who are systematically oppressed.

Finally, (iii) focuses on the idealization of social institutions, such as economic structures and legal systems, which are conceptualized as models functioning "with little or no sense of how their actual workings may

systematically disadvantage women, the poor, and racial minorities" (Mills, 2017, p. 76). As we saw with the idealization of capacities, this can result in significant distortions. If, for instance, we're theorizing about punishment in the context of an idealized view of the legal system, we might end up with a radically different conclusion about the moral permissibility of the death penalty than if we factor in the racism pervading criminal justice.

Thus, in general, Mills objects to ideal theory because of its disconnection from the actual world—especially the experiences of the marginalized—, the way this distorts our understanding of phenomena of critical importance, and the overall impact this has on our ability to achieve the desired results of the very theories in question:

> In modeling humans, human capacities, human interactions, human institutions, and human society on ideal-as-idealized-models, in never exploring how profoundly different these are from ideal-as-descriptive-models, we are abstracting away from realities that are crucial to our comprehension of the actual workings of injustice in human interactions and social institutions, and we are thereby guaranteeing that the ideal-as-idealized-model will never be achieved.
>
> (Mills, 2017, p. 77)

According to Mills, non-ideal theory not only avoids these problems, but is also far better suited to accounting for the perspectives of members of subordinated groups, which is essential to any normative theory.

The Cooperative Conversation View

I now want to turn to what I will argue is a non-ideal theory of the duty[1] to object[2] and show that some of its most serious shortcomings are the result of its disconnection from the actual world.

In a recent paper,[3] Sanford C. Goldberg argues on behalf of the following claim, which he calls the Default Entitlement to Assume that Silence Indicates Acceptance:

DEASIA Competent language users enjoy a default (albeit defeasible) entitlement to assume that in speech exchanges which are conversations, a hearer's silence in the face of an observed assertion indicates acceptance of the assertion. (Goldberg unpublished, p. 3)

The kind of entitlement Goldberg has in mind is a *practice-generated entitlement*,

> wherein a social practice is sufficiently widespread and recognized that those who participate in the practice are entitled to expect that the standards of the practice are being followed by the other participants, and

where the expectation itself is normative (the sort through which we hold one another accountable).

<div align="right">(Goldberg unpublished, p. 2)[4]</div>

Goldberg's defense of this claim is twofold. The first is empirical: he argues that, as a matter of fact, people often *will* assume that a hearer's silence reveals acceptance. To support this, he cites quotes from Plato to Mark Twain, Martin Luther King Jr. to Rabbi Bradley Artson, all purportedly showing that we standardly take silence as assent. King, for instance, says that "There comes a time when silence is betrayal,"[5] and Artson, commenting on the Jewish response to injustice, remarks that "our silence and inaction in the face of contemporary injustice and oppression is akin to assenting to it."[6]

The second source of support that Goldberg invokes on behalf of the DEASIA is normative: he maintains that observers enjoy a presumptive (albeit defeasible) *entitlement* to regard silence as indicative of assent. Goldberg's arguments here are rich and detailed, but they rest primarily on the view, stemming from the work of Grice, that conversations are cooperative, rational activities and, thus, that silent rejection is uncooperative. Given this,

> insofar as linguistically competent subjects are entitled to suppose that they are participants in a conversation, they have a reason, deriving from the practice of assertion itself, to suppose that other participants' silence in the face of a mutually observed assertion indicates acceptance.
>
> <div align="right">(Goldberg unpublished, pp. 7–8)</div>

That Goldberg's thesis is relevant to the duty to object should be clear. If we are entitled to regard silence as assent or agreement, then there has to be some reason to believe that conversational participants will object when they disagree with what is said. Goldberg himself characterizes this in terms of there being *normative pressure* to signal rejection of a proffered assertion, but this can easily be understood in the sense of having a *duty* to object to what is said. According to Goldberg, this pressure or duty is

> a special case of a more general, and more familiar, phenomenon: we are under normative pressure not to engage in behaviors that *recklessly or negligently risk harming others*. In the case of silence, the paradigmatic sort of harm is an *epistemic* harm: the hearer who fails to indicate publicly his rejection of the mutually observed assertion recklessly or negligently risks misleading other participants into forming false beliefs—in particular, as to his own reaction to the assertion, but also, as a possible consequence, as to the truth-value of the asserted proposition itself.
>
> <div align="right">(Goldberg unpublished, p. 2)</div>

Let's call this the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW of the duty to object.

What I would like to emphasize now is the extent to which this view is an example of an ideal theory of the sort discussed earlier. Recall that Mills argues that the distinguishing feature of ideal theory is its reliance on idealization to the exclusion or marginalization of the actual world. This is precisely what Goldberg does in his defense of the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW. His theoretical starting point is what can be inferred from conversations in which there is full cooperation of participants. Moreover, just as Mills argues that ideal theory represents the actual as a simple deviation from the ideal, Goldberg relegates to "defeating conditions" the multitude of ways in which conversations can be radically uncooperative because of the different situations of those involved.

To make this point clearer, let's look at how we end up in a different place than Goldberg does if we start by paying adequate attention to the way the world actually is. Consider, for instance, some ways in which silence reasonably and regularly fails to indicate acceptance. First, *objections with traction* are a limited epistemic good, and we need to make wise choices about when to use them. Because of this, silence may be the result of a simple cost-benefit analysis due to limited resources. While a full discussion of how to understand objections with traction lies beyond the scope of this paper, here is a start: objections *simpliciter* are assertions that are added to the conversational context with the aim of correcting the record, but ones with traction typically involve more, though what this "more" involves can take on different forms. Sometimes, objections with traction are ones that are accepted by at least some members of the conversational context. Other times, they will have weaker functions, such as sowing seeds of doubt about the targeted proposition, or being factored into the overall evidential basis of the beliefs of the audience members. Still others will be such that they are not immediately rejected or defeated. At a minimum, however, we might say that objections with traction cannot be systematically ignored or silenced by the members of the conversational context.[7] I emphasize "systematically" because we would be reluctant to say that an epistemic agent's objections are effective if they are merely not tuned out in every conversational context she finds herself in, but never even rise to the level of being factored into the evidential basis of the corresponding beliefs. Given that objections with traction are not a limitless good, silence is often the result of using caution or care with our voices so that our objections matter and are heard when we raise them. We all do this frequently—parents are silent with their teenagers for fear of being "tuned out," colleagues are silent at department meetings so that they "pick their battles," and friends are silent on social media so that they do not become "that person" who is always quibbling. In none of these cases does silence mean agreement, and yet the contexts may be utterly indistinguishable from those in which it does.

This brings us to the second way: differences in *status* or *power* might lead conversational participants to not object even when they reject what is being said. Just as those without power often have fewer social and material

resources than those with it do, so, too, they often have fewer epistemic resources. For instance, prisoners lack the social status and power that correctional officers possess, students lack the authority and the epistemic status of their teachers, and victims often lack the credibility that their assailants enjoy. Silence here might not be merely the result of choosing to be careful with one's epistemic goods, as we all do at times, but instead due to social structures that make objecting impossible, difficult, futile, costly, and so on. In a recent article by law professor Patricia A. Broussard, this issue is taken up directly when she writes:

> Black women continue to suffer from trauma they endured as a result of the dynamics of the societal structure of their world during and after slavery. Moreover, that social structure, by its very nature, imposed a code of silence upon Black women, which continues to exist to this day. There are some aspects of life one does not share and there are aspects that silence protects. As a result of this culture of secrecy, Black women, through their silence, have unwittingly enabled and protected those who have abused them for decades.
>
> There are many societies that embrace a culture of silence, but they do not have a history of slavery and Jim Crow. Therefore, there are clearly other factors and dynamics responsible for shaping silent behavior in those societies . . . the veil of silence still worn by Black women is a remnant of survival tactics adopted to survive slavery and Jim Crow.
>
> (Broussard, 2013, p. 375)

According to Broussard, then, silence from a black woman has a unique history, one that is grounded in oppression and in no way indicates genuine acceptance. Audre Lorde makes a similar point when she writes:

> I wrote for those women who do not speak, for those who do not have a voice because they/we were so terrified, because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't.
>
> (Lorde, 1983, p. 105).

While the first and second ways are related in that they both can be understood in terms of the distribution and use of epistemic goods, there is a level of choice involved in the former that is absent in the latter. We all make decisions about when and how to use our voices, but for those without status and power, the ability to object might simply be denied to them or severely restricted in various ways.[8]

The third way silence regularly fails to indicate acceptance is the result of *psychological* or *cultural* differences: some people are shy, reticent, and conflict-averse, while others are at home with loud protests. Some cultures have norms and expectations that are fundamentally at odds with raising

objections, especially for certain members, such as women, while others cultivate frank and explicit debates. With respect to Japanese culture, for instance, Takie Sugiyama Lebra writes:

> It has been shown that silence [in Japanese culture] is not only polysemic but symbolic of logically opposite meanings or emotions. This certainly generates confusion and misunderstanding for a cultural outsider, but for the native as well. The silent speaker, too, is likely to have mixed feelings or rationales. When a woman says she was silent throughout the period of her husband's extra-marital indulgence, she can mean her feminine modesty, compliance, patience, resentment, unforgiveness, or defiance, and may mean all. A man's refusal to express tender feelings toward his wife may be explained not only as embarrassment, but as an expression of male dignity, or as his true, sincere love, which is beyond words. In the scene of collective decision-making, silence can be taken as polite acquiescence or disagreement.
>
> (Lebra, 1987, p. 350)

According to Lebra, then, silence within Japanese culture has wildly different meanings, some of which are even at odds with one another. Particularly noteworthy for our purposes here is that silence can signal either assent or dissent and that even native speakers cannot easily discriminate between them. Thus, silence in the face of disagreement might be the default for some people and cultures, and yet it might be highly unusual for others.

   The fourth way silence regularly acts to indicate acceptance is *semantic* or *functional*: even within cultures, silence has many different roles, many of which are competing. Vernon J. Jensen (1973) is one of the first linguists to discuss the communicative functions of silence, and he highlights five such functions, each of which has a positive and a negative value:

1.   A *linkage* function: Silence may bond two (or more) people or it may separate them.
2.   An *affecting* function: Silence may heal (over time) or wound.
3.   A *revelation* function: Silence may make something known to a person (self-exploration) or it may hide information from others.
4.   A *judgmental* function: Silence may signal assent and favor or it may signal dissent and disfavor.
5.   An *activating* function: Silence may signal deep thoughtfulness (work) or it may signal mental inactivity. (Jensen, 1973, pp. 249–255)[9]

This list identifies not only five different functions of silence, but also two different values within each function. Moreover, which function and value is at work in a particular conversational exchange is far from transparent to the conversational participants. Silence may, for instance, convey deception

or assent, disagreement, or distance, without any clear signal which of these is in fact operative.

Finally, silence might be the result of purely pragmatic factors: we have many obligations and aims, and only so many hours in a day. Thus, silence might be due to distractions, exhaustion, greater priorities, indifference, and so on. I suspect most of us would be unable to count how many times we've been silent in a conversation simply because our minds are elsewhere— perhaps we have an ill relative, or a pressing deadline, or errands to run. Indeed, it is arguable that this explanation is the most problematic for Goldberg's view, as such purely contingent, highly contextualized features are not only widespread, but might be entirely opaque to conversational participants. I hardly know when my own family members are preoccupied, let alone all of the participants in my daily conversational exchanges. Given this, were the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW correct, I would be entitled to infer acceptance from silence all over the place when in fact people are often just tired and busy.

What these considerations highlight are two features of silence, the combination of which render the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW particularly problematic: a *heterogeneity* with respect to the reasons for silence and a *lack of transparency* in what these reasons are. As we have seen, the causes of silence are wildly and importantly diverse. This, by itself, poses a significant challenge to the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW, for Goldberg claims that silence defeasibly indicates assent and yet there is a significant range of explanations for silence, especially ones that are dependent on diverse features, such as social status, race, culture, personality, mood, daily events, and so on. But when this is coupled with the fact that such reasons are often entirely opaque to conversational participants, it becomes highly questionable whether we can—*in general*—reasonably assume anything at all from silence.

Of course, as should be expected, Goldberg is aware that not every instance of silence indicates acceptance, and so this is why he says that the entitlement we enjoy to draw such an inference is *defeasible*. According to Goldberg, the entitlement can be defeated by either: (i) NON-CONVERSATION: The particular speech exchange is not a conversation—it is not a cooperative exchange—in the first place; or (ii) OUTWEIGHING EXPLANATION: The best explanation of the listener's silence appeals to considerations that outweigh the hearer's conversation-generated reason to be helpful. I take it, then, that the five reasons highlighted above for silence would be understood as various kinds of defeating conditions. People without power might not be part of cooperative conversations in the first place, and so a prisoner's silence need not indicate acceptance of what a correctional officer says—it may instead be the result of being or feeling "silenced."[10] Or the best explanation of a person's silence might be shyness or preoccupation, and so the default entitlement to infer assent would be defeated.

To my mind, however, this approach is misguided. Defeating conditions ought to be such that they pick out the non-normal or unusual against a background of what is normal, the latter being the default. Thus, on the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW, silence indicating acceptance should be the norm, and this is precisely what purportedly gives it such powerful explanatory value. But this is simply not the case. The reasons for silence are as deep as they are varied, and they are woven into the very fabric of our interaction with others. No conversation is entirely free of differences in the distribution of epistemic goods, status, power, psychology, cultural expectations, practical constraints, or some combination thereof. Speaking up against others almost always involves a calculation—whether conscious or not—that is based on one's position and the costs and benefits of dissent on this topic at this time with this conversational participant.

There is also a point to be made against the support that Goldberg offers on behalf of the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW. Recall that he provides a number of quotations that purport to show that, as a matter of fact, we take silence to indicate acceptance. However, these quotations don't strike me as compelling evidence on behalf of his claim, as they seem more normative rather than descriptive. That is, rather than describing how silence in fact functions, they seem to aim at motivating people to speak out when they disagree, especially when the stakes are high. Consider, for instance, Martin Luther King Jr. saying that "There comes a time when silence is betrayal." Notice that King is not saying here that silence always means betrayal but, rather, that there comes a times when this is the case. In the context of the speech in which this assertion is offered, he is referring to the Vietnam War, and he goes on to say that he is making "a passionate plea to [his] beloved nation" to speak out against it. Nothing about this suggests that King takes himself to be describing our ordinary conversational practices. In fact, if he were, it is entirely unclear why he would need to make a passionate plea to the nation to do what we all are doing anyway. Instead, King is naturally read as providing a motivational, rather than a merely descriptive, claim here, and he is plausibly interpreted as saying that the reason the time has come for silence to be understood as betrayal is because the stakes have gone up with respect to the Vietnam War. This is at odds with the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW that silence has this same significance in any ordinary conversation.

Similar considerations apply regarding the quotation from Rabbi Bradley Artson when he remarks that "our silence and inaction in the face of contemporary injustice and oppression is akin to assenting to it." Once again, notice that he is singling out high-stakes cases—ones where injustice and oppression are at issue—rather than run-of-the-mill instances of silence. Moreover, like King, Artson is making this claim in the context of trying to encourage people to speak out against wrongs that they might otherwise ignore.[11] Thus, if people need to be motivated to object in the face

of disagreement, then Goldberg's claim that silence, by default, indicates acceptance is implausible.

There is a still further point against the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW that should be emphasized: in order for silence to indicate acceptance, not only does it have to be the case that there is the norm to object that Goldberg describes, but it also needs to be followed with at least some generality and regularity. In particular, most conversations need to be cooperative ones, for it is only the uncooperative nature of silent rejection that enables us to infer assent from silence on this view. But why should we think that this is the case? As indicated above, silence can be the result of wildly heterogenous factors, many of which are the result of asymmetries in power. Are poor black women generally in cooperative conversations with wealthy white men; are untenured faculty members generally in cooperative conversations at department meetings with tenured colleagues; are those who are incarcerated generally in cooperative conversations with those who are not? While these are empirical questions, there is evidence, some of which was offered above, that supports negative answers here. But even if the answers are instead positive, there is still the issue of the lack of transparency—how can I tell which ones are cooperative and which ones aren't? Otherwise put, how could I possibly infer that your silence means that you're assenting when I have no idea whether we are part of a cooperative conversation in the first place? I might, for instance, do everything possible to cultivate an environment in which my students feel comfortable to express themselves in conversation with me, but it obviously doesn't follow from this that they do.

At this point, I have argued in a fair bit of detail that the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW faces significant challenges. My purpose in doing so is twofold: first, I want to show that there are independent reasons to reject Goldberg's account, both of what can be inferred from silence and what this reveals about our duty to object in conversational contexts. Second, and perhaps even more importantly, I want to reveal the extent to which the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW gives rise to an ideal theory of the duty to object, and how such an approach leaves out the way that silence functions in the actual world, especially for those who are systematically marginalized. If our theoretical starting point is not a conversation in which everyone has the privilege of being cooperative, but, rather, one in which features of the actual world take center stage—such as power, oppression, job insecurity, limited resources, cultural differences, and so on—we do not end up at a place where inferring assent from silence seems plausible. Instead, we find ourselves recognizing that objecting is often a luxury, one that not everyone can afford to make.

Non-Ideal Theory

In this section, I will defend one feature of the duty to object that emerges when we begin, not with the ideal, but with the actual.[12] Otherwise put,

I will argue that a non-ideal theory of the duty to object leads to the acceptance of the following condition:

> SOCIAL STATUS: One's duty to object can be directly influenced by one's social status.

By "social status," I include not only those properties that contribute to differences in power, paradigmatic examples of which are race, sex, gender, and class, but also properties that are more epistemic in nature, such as authority and expertise, which often accompany professional roles. For instance, the social status of the President of Northwestern includes not just that he is a white male, but also that he is an economist and an administrator with years of experience.

If SOCIAL STATUS is correct, then people have different obligations or are under various kinds of normative pressure to express their dissent, depending on who they are and what social position they occupy. Unlike Goldberg's account—according to which, absent defeating conditions, an undergraduate student, an incarcerated man, and a black woman all have the same normative pressure to object as a white, male CEO does—my view holds that such people quite literally do not have the same duties. Given this, the default cannot be that silence conveys acceptance because what silence indicates is normatively linked with the particulars of the individual who is silent. So, for instance, if a tenured, white, male professor hears a fellow colleague make a clearly sexist remark, his duty to object might be greater than that of his black, female, junior colleague.

To see this, I will offer considerations on behalf of this conclusion from both an epistemic and a moral point of view. Let's consider the former first: with great power in a domain often comes greater authority, and thus an increased likelihood that one's testimony will have an effect. So, if we assume that the sexist remark in question is false and that one of our aims as epistemic agents is to promote the truth, then the white professor objecting to it might have more epistemic impact in producing true beliefs, both at the individual and the collective level. That this is the case is supported by a recent study by Kevin Munger (2017), in which he looks at the impact of calling out racist harassment online via Twitter. To this end, he used "bots" to object to harassers, varying their identities not only by in-group (white man) and out-group (black man) membership, but also by the number of Twitter followers each bot has. Munger found that subjects who were sanctioned by high-follower white males significantly reduced the use of racist slurs, leading to the following title of a recent article in *The Atlantic*: "Why Online Allies Matter in Fighting Harassment: A clever experiment with Twitter bots shows that telling people not to be racist can work—but only if it comes from someone influential and white."[13] In this same article, the author writes:

> There's a reason why higher-status members of these communities bear a larger share of the responsibility for speaking out against racist or

bigoted speech," says Betsy Levy Paluck, a psychologist at Princeton University. "This isn't just a moral judgment but an empirical regularity that's been coming out of many research programs: People with higher status are influencing norms, and with that influence comes responsibility. If anyone says, I'm not a role model, that's a wish, not a fact."

Here are other examples of this kind: a pediatrician speaking out about the safety of vaccines, a prosecutor objecting to police misconduct, and a university official condemning ineffective sexual assault policies on campus. In each case, the duty to object might be greater for the person in question than it is for the average citizen in large part because that person's objecting is likely to lead to more true, and fewer false, beliefs.

Notice that one assumption operative in my argument here is that our epistemic duties extend beyond our own beliefs as individuals to include those of others in our broader communities. While traditional epistemology focuses almost entirely on obligations with respect to our own beliefs, I see no reason why we shouldn't also be concerned with the beliefs of others. Indeed, it seems clear that we are subject to criticism for knowingly promoting, or even permitting, at least some false beliefs in those around us. If, for instance, I know that you falsely believe that our colleague cheated on his partner, or that classes are canceled tomorrow, or even that a local restaurant serves vegetarian food, it is objectionable for me to do nothing at all to correct your belief. Moreover, the false beliefs of those around me will very likely beget false beliefs in others, eroding the competence and trust relations of our epistemic communities. Given this, combined with the fact that one of the central epistemic goals is to maximize true beliefs and minimize false ones, it follows straightforwardly that those whose voices will have a greater epistemic impact have a greater duty to use them.

Of course, this argument should not be understood as in any way devaluing the voices of those who already marginalized. Instead, the point is that in many cases it will be supererogatory for members of the community who have lower social status to object to what they take to be false or unwarranted, and thus they will be deserving of praise and admiration for doing so. In contrast, for those who have higher social status, they will often be doing the minimum that is expected of them when they object, and failure to do so will leave them open to disapprobation.

Similar considerations apply at the moral level. Surely there is more moral pressure for the tenured, white, male professor to object to the sexist remark than there is for his junior colleague, both because he has the social standing to bring about greater positive change and because there is less risk of harm for him. For instance, drawing on the Munger research again, if those with higher social status are more likely to reduce racist slurs, then their objecting will have a greater chance of eliminating both false beliefs and wrong or harmful actions by successfully cultivating moral communities in which there is less racism overall. Moreover, the stakes are typically far lower for those with higher social status, rendering them less vulnerable

for speaking out, especially about contentious matters. The tenured white professor, for example, has political, professional, and economic advantages that make him far less exposed to retaliation or other adverse effects for raising objections. He doesn't have to worry about being regarded as stereotypically angry or whiny, and he doesn't risk losing his job and financial stability.

Still further, a common concern expressed by some members of marginalized groups, particularly by Black Americans, is the overwhelming burden that comes with having to constantly explain their experience to others and challenge the racism pervasive around them, both at the systemic and individual levels.[14] Their daily lives are described as "exhausting," often depriving them of time and energy crucial for making progress in other areas of value. Given that those with lower social status are typically already shouldering a greater epistemic and moral burden in simply trying to navigate a system designed to exclude or oppress them, those who do not face these barriers should step in and take on more when possible. Objecting to what one takes to be false or unwarranted is precisely an area where this can and should be done.

A related, though more general, argument on behalf of SOCIAL STATUS can be given by focusing on some of the objections raised against the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW. In particular, recall my claim that objections with traction are a limited epistemic good and, as with all other goods, some have far more of them than others. Now, notice that we often have different normative expectations of people, given the amount of goods they possess. For instance, we clearly have different views about the level of charitable giving Bill Gates ought to engage in compared with someone who is living on minimum wage. Indeed, if Bill Gates did not make any monetary contributions to charities, we would be critical of him, perhaps even strongly, but we have no similar expectations of those with far fewer resources. Similar considerations apply when the goods are epistemic. Suppose, for instance, that I have platforms with audiences; I'm listened to and respected; I have the competence to develop compelling objections; and I have power and authority. In such a case, I would have a lot more objections with traction than someone without these privileges, and so just as we expect Bill Gates to engage in significant charitable giving because of his tremendous wealth, we should expect me to use my voice more than others who have far fewer social and epistemic goods.

Conclusion

In this paper, I've argued against an ideal theory approach to understanding the duty to object, which is exemplified with the COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION VIEW, and I've taken a first step toward showing how to theorize about this duty within a non-ideal framework. One conclusion that quickly emerges is that one's social status plays a significant role in whether one has such a

duty in the first place, and relegating the differences between us in social status to "defeating conditions" masks the critical role they play in our normative lives. Once we see this, it becomes clear that we cannot determine when we ought to voice dissent without first looking carefully at our positions of power and privilege, or lack thereof.

Notes

1 While I will talk about there being the "duty" to object, for those who don't like talk of duties, this can be substituted with "obligations," "demands," "normative force," or "normative pressure," which I will often use interchangeably with duties.
2 See Lackey (forthcoming).
3 Goldberg (unpublished).
4 For a detailed discussion of this sort of entitlement, see Goldberg (forthcoming).
5 Source: www.informationclearinghouse.info/article2564.htm, accessed 4 July 2016.
6 Source: www.myjewishlearning.com/article/no-neutrality-silence-is-assent/, accessed 4 July 2016.
7 For a helpful discussion of the distinction between rejecting and ignoring testimony, see Wanderer (2012). For work on "silencing," see Hornsby (1995) and Langton (1993
8 See also Tuerkheimer (unpublished) for a detailed discussion of some of these issues in relation to reports of sexual assault.
9 See also Jaworski (1993).
10 For work on "silencing" in this sense, see Hornsby (1995) and Langton (1993).
11 Unlike King, however, Artson grounds his specific view in the *Talmud*.
12 I develop my positive view of the duty to object in Lackey (forthcoming).
13 Source: www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/11/why-online-allies-matter-in-fighting-harassment/507722/, accessed 7 December 2016.
14 See, for instance, www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/education/what-its-like-to-be-black-on-campus-isolating-exhausting-calling-for-change/ and www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2014/12/04/the-exhausting-task-of-being-black-in-america/19894223/.

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