

Structural Injustice and the Responsibilities of the Oppressed: The Case of Denialism

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ABSTRACT

Leading accounts of responsibility for structural injustice endorse the idea that all members of an unjust social structure—including those who are oppressed—bear a forward-looking responsibility to help combat structural injustice. Importantly, this idea assumes that all oppressed agents are capable of consciously combating structural injustice. But there exist oppressed agents, which I term ‘denialists’, who deny the existence of the wrongs that they and other members of their social group(s) experience in virtue of being subject to structural injustice. Initially, it seems doubtful that a denialist can consciously combat structural injustice—what could they possibly do to consciously combat wrongs whose existence they reject? This may lead one to think that a denialist cannot be held responsible for helping combat structural injustice, so that the aforementioned accounts must be revised. In this paper, I show that such revision is not needed. Despite initial appearances, a denialist can be held responsible for helping combat structural injustice. To establish this claim, I first argue that two criteria—*feasibleness* and *plausible effectiveness*—jointly generate pro tanto responsibilities to help fix structural injustice for oppressed agents. Then, I argue that these criteria entail that a denialist has a pro tanto responsibility to listen to others’ claims of wrongdoing.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Some oppressed people deny the existence of the wrongs that they and others like them experience in virtue of being oppressed. For instance, a woman might think it is ok for men to objectify women, and thus deny that a woman is wronged when she is sexually harassed. Call such oppressed people 'denialists'. Many philosophers hold that the oppressed are responsible for combating their oppression. One might think that a denialist cannot bear this responsibility. After all, how can a denialist combat wrongs whose existence they deny? I argue, however, that a denialist can be held responsible for combating their oppression. Specifically, I argue that a denialist is responsible for listening to other people when they talk about the wrongs they perceive.

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Introduction

In the early twentieth century, American women could not vote and had virtually no political representation. Oppressive gender norms outlined their “proper place” in society. Because American women experienced these persistent disadvantages in virtue of belonging to a particular social group—namely, ‘women’—they were subject to *structural injustice*. Some women of the time responded to this injustice by organizing and participating in efforts to undermine it. For example, female suffragists founded and joined the National Women’s Party, which pushed for the passage of a national suffrage amendment. At the same time, however, some women opposed these efforts. In her 1912 treatise *Anti-Suffrage: Ten Good Reasons*, Grace Duffield Goodwin argued that differences between the sexes justify the ballot being reserved exclusively for men, and that the purview of women should be restricted to “the duties toward home and family which they [perform] for the benefit of the state.”¹ She rejected the suffragists’ view that American women were being wronged by patriarchal social rules: “American women, judged not by the individual ... but as a *whole*, are suffering under no wrongs.”² Goodwin’s claims illustrate that some people subject to structural injustice (hereafter ‘structurally oppressed agents’) deny the existence of the wrongs that they and other members of their social group(s) experience in virtue of being subject to structural injustice. Call such structurally oppressed agents ‘denialists’, and call the epistemic state they occupy a state of ‘denialism’ regarding the structural injustice they are subject to.

The existence of denialists such as Goodwin appears to challenge leading accounts of responsibility for structural injustice. These accounts endorse the idea that all members of an unjust social structure—including those who are oppressed—have a forward-looking

¹ Goodwin, *Anti-Suffrage: Ten Good Reasons*, 18.

² *Ibid*, 6.

responsibility to help fix it.³ Importantly, this idea assumes that every oppressed member of an unjust social structure is capable of consciously doing something to combat structural injustice—it would make little sense to speak of an agent having a responsibility to do something that they could not in principle do (“ought implies can”), or that they could in principle do, but only unconsciously. However, it seems doubtful that a denialist is capable of consciously combating the structural injustice they are subject to. After all, the denialist denies the existence of the wrongs that they and other members of their social group(s) experience due to structural injustice. What could they possibly do to consciously combat wrongs whose existence they reject? If there is nothing a denialist can do in this capacity, then accounts of responsibility of structural injustice must be revised to excuse denialists from the responsibility to combat structural injustice.

Excusing denialists from this responsibility would be undesirable for at least two reasons. First, in some cases, a denialist is at least partially culpable for their ignorance. Perhaps a denialist exhibited particular epistemic vices in forming the (untrue) belief that they and other members of their social group(s) are not being wronged in the relevant ways.⁴ For example, they may have failed to examine the evidence available to them in an unbiased manner, or they may have treated their belief as immune to others’ criticisms while forming it. Because some denialists are in their present state of ignorance in virtue of failing to abide by reasonable epistemic norms, it seems unfair to categorically excuse denialists from the responsibility to combat structural injustice.

³ See, for instance, Young (2011); Aragon and Jaggar (2018); Zheng (2018); Gädeke (2021). I will speak interchangeably of an agent’s responsibility “to help fix structural injustice,” their responsibility “to help combat structural injustice,” and their responsibility “to fix/combat structural injustice.” For my purposes, I will treat each of these infinitive phrases as equivalent.

⁴ When I say that a denialist denies that they and other members of their social group(s) are being wronged “in the relevant ways,” I mean that they deny the existence of those wrongs they and other members of their social group(s) experience in virtue of being subject to structural injustice.

Second, if the members of emancipatory movements view denialists as not bearing a responsibility to combat structural injustice (and hence as unable to consciously do anything that would combat structural injustice), then they will be liable to treat denialists in various negative ways.⁵ For instance, a member who adopts this view may become less attuned to certain moral duties they have toward denialists. As with most other forms of ignorance, denialism can be challenging to overcome on one's own. Insofar as we think it is beneficial for an oppressed agent to understand the oppression they are subject to, then, we might also think that the members of an emancipatory movement have an imperfect duty to help denialists (at least those who are non-culpably ignorant) overcome their denialism. But a member who adopts the above view, and sees denialists as unable to consciously combat structural injustice, may believe that the aims of their movement are unlikely to be advanced by engaging denialists. They might then conclude that engaging denialists is an imprudent use of time and energy, leading them to overlook situations in which they ought to help a denialist overcome their ignorance.

My aim in this paper is to show that, despite initial appearances, denialists can be held responsible for combating structural injustice. Specifically, I will argue that in the context of combating structural injustice, the denialist has a pro tanto responsibility to *listen to others' claims of wrongdoing*. This finding builds on recent work by Jugov and Ypi (2019), who have argued that an oppressed agent's responsibility for helping fix structural injustice should be sensitive to how much they know about the injustice. I accept this claim, and extend the authors' analysis in two important respects. First, while they propose responsibilities for oppressed agents in particular epistemic states, I will formulate two general criteria that can help guide the identification of responsibilities in other cases as well. Second, with these criteria in mind, I

⁵ By an 'emancipatory movement', I mean a social movement that aims to undermine institutions and social practices that generate and sustain oppression.

propose a pro tanto responsibility for oppressed agents in a state of denialism, a case Jugov and Ypi have overlooked. In so doing, I provide a way of avoiding the problems associated with excusing the denialist's responsibility to combat structural injustice.

Section 1 briefly describes what structural injustice is, what it means to be responsible for it, and why the oppressed bear this responsibility. In Section 2, I appeal to Jugov and Ypi's work in suggesting that the denialist's epistemic state affects their responsibility for helping fix structural injustice. Section 3 demonstrates that Jugov and Ypi do not answer the question of how, specifically, the denialist should be held responsible for helping fix structural injustice: they overlook the existence of denialism among oppressed agents, and the responsibilities they suggest for oppressed agents in other epistemic states cannot appropriately be attributed to the denialist. Section 4 argues that two criteria—*feasibleness* and *plausible effectiveness*—jointly generate pro tanto responsibilities to help fix structural injustice for oppressed agents. In Section 5, I bring these criteria to bear on the case of the denialist, arguing that they entail the denialist has a pro tanto responsibility to listen to others' claims of wrongdoing. Section 6 explains the practical and philosophical significance of this finding.

1 Responsibility for helping fix structural injustice

Certain moral problems affect many people: global poverty, climate change, and gender inequality and violence, to name just a few. Describing these problems as “structural” injustices underscores that they have multiple, complex causes and no simple solutions.⁶ One defining feature of structural injustice is that it is not maintained solely through the actions of agents with ill will and bias. It is also maintained “through the behavior of ordinary decent people whose

⁶ To see how and why these problems have been treated as structural injustices, see Berkey (2021) and Calder (2010) (global poverty); Eckersley (2016) (climate change); Parekh (2011) (gender inequality and violence).

choices are constrained by existing social, political, economic, and cultural institutions.”⁷

Sweatshop labor, for example, is maintained as much through well-meaning consumers who simply cannot afford ethically made textiles as it is by profit-driven factory managers.

To judge that a situation is unjust “implies that we understand it at least partly as humanly caused, and entails the claim that something should be done to rectify it.”⁸ In other words, some party is *responsible* for fixing the injustice. But fixing a structural injustice requires reforming large-scale social processes and institutions, some of which we appear to be inextricably bound up with as we make decisions about what food to eat, what clothes to wear, which neighborhood to live in, which school to send our children to. How can I be responsible for the outcomes of a system that I have little control over, and that I have no choice but to participate in? Iris Marion Young has answered this question by proposing to conceive of responsibility for structural injustice as a forward-looking obligation to help bring about a more just state of affairs. On her “Social Connection Model” (SCM), the most developed and widely accepted account of responsibility for structural injustice, an agent is obligated to participate in collective action aimed at rectifying structural injustice when they “contribute by their actions to the processes that produce unjust outcomes.”⁹

Each member of an unjust social structure contributes to the production of unjust outcomes. Consumers contribute to the exploitation of garment factory workers by creating a demand for cheaply made textiles. Factory managers contribute to the workers’ exploitation by prioritizing their desire for profit over the safety and wellbeing of their employees. One might think that it is possible for the workers themselves to refrain from contributing to their

⁷ Zheng, “What is My Role in Changing the System? A New Model of Responsibility for Structural Injustice,” 869-870.

⁸ Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 95.

⁹ *Ibid*, 105.

exploitation. If a worker did the bare minimum at her job merely to provide for her family, would it not be accurate to say that she carries on “neutrally” with regard to the exploitation she is subject to? While plausible, this view should be rejected. We can easily imagine that, given her low wages, the worker is forced to buy garments produced in sweatshops like her own, thereby contributing to the exploitation of other workers. And even if she does not do so, her decision to labor in the garment factory stabilizes a system of exploitative labor which harms other people. This example demonstrates how, on the SCM, even those who are oppressed by structural injustice are responsible for helping fix it. In what follows, I accept this claim and assume that it extends to structurally oppressed agents in a state of denialism.¹⁰

Although each member of an unjust social structure is responsible for helping fix the relevant structural injustice, this does not mean each person must help in the same way, nor does it mean that each person must help the same amount.¹¹ The responsibility to help fix structural injustice is forward-looking and pragmatic. Our fundamental concern in attributing it is achieving positive, just outcomes: when we say that each person bears this responsibility, we mean they are obligated to do what they can to help fix the injustice. As Young notes, what a person is able to do in this capacity depends on facts about their position within the social structure.¹² She argues that because the actions that can be taken to help bring about a more just state of affairs lie on a spectrum of demandingness, a person’s responsibility for helping fix

¹⁰ The claim that structurally oppressed agents are responsible for helping fix structural injustice is critical to my argument, but my endorsement of the SCM’s justification as to why is not. One could, for instance, think the “Role Ideal Model” formulated in Zheng (2018) provides a better justification for this claim. On Zheng’s view, the oppressed have obligations to combat structural injustice in virtue of their social roles as parents, teachers, citizens, etc., and not because they causally contribute to the processes that produce unjust outcomes.

¹¹ More accurately, the SCM holds that *nearly* every member of an unjust social structure is responsible for helping fix structural injustice. Some members of these structures, such as children and the mentally disabled, do not bear this responsibility even though they contribute to the production of unjust outcomes. But for clarity, Young (after making this stipulation) frames the responsibility for helping fix structural injustice as being borne by everyone in the unjust social structure, and I will do the same.

¹² Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 144-147. Relevant facts include how much power and privilege an agent’s social position affords them.

structural injustice can and should be tailored to their social position. Are there other factors that affect a person's responsibility?

2 The denialist's epistemic state affects their responsibility

Intuitively, a person's responsibility for helping fix structural injustice should (in at least some cases) be sensitive to that person's epistemic state, as what a person is able to do to consciously combat structural injustice *depends on what they know or believe about the injustice*. To see this, consider the following two cases. Sheila, a Black American, reads a news report about recent instances of police violence in her city. She knows these instances of police violence constitute an injustice, and she knows that this injustice results from a long legacy of anti-Black stereotypes and funding disparities between police departments and other social services. Tanya, another Black American living in the same city as Sheila, also reads this news report. She, too, knows the recent instances of police violence constitute an injustice, but she mistakenly believes this injustice consists merely in the unjust actions of a few morally corrupted officers. Sheila, but not Tanya, understands the injustice is structural and affects not just those who have been physically harmed, but all Black Americans.¹³ Whereas Sheila is capable of raising awareness of the unjust social rules that make the injustice distinctively structural, Tanya is not, as she does not know these rules exist. Thus, Sheila's responsibility to help fix structural injustice may encompass raising awareness of these rules, but Tanya's responsibility does not.¹⁴

¹³ Sheila understands the structural injustice can manifest both in terms of physical harm and as an unjust vulnerability to such harm. Because all Black Americans are at least subject to this vulnerability, they are all subject to the structural injustice.

¹⁴ Let us assume that Tanya is non-culpably ignorant of the structural nature of the injustice. In the case where Tanya is culpably ignorant, I will reserve judgment as to whether she has a responsibility, like Sheila, to raise awareness of the unjust social rules that make the injustice distinctively structural. Later in the paper, I will argue that all denialists, regardless of whether or not they are culpable for their denialism, are responsible for listening to others' claims of wrongdoing. Thus, on my argument, even in the case where Tanya is culpably ignorant of the structural nature of police violence, she has a responsibility to help combat this injustice.

Building on this intuition, Jugov and Ypi (2019) have argued that in the context of the oppressed, “responsibilities to remedy structural injustice come in degrees and ... they differ depending on agents’ degree of epistemic awareness concerning structural injustice.”¹⁵ If a structurally oppressed agent understands that (1) an injustice is present, (2) the injustice is structural, and (3) they are personally subject to a structural injustice, then they are completely epistemically aware of the relevant structural injustice. But if the agent fails to fully understand any one of these three things, they lack full epistemic awareness of the injustice and occupy a state of *epistemic opacity* regarding it.¹⁶ In general, an oppressed agent in a state of epistemic opacity can do less to combat structural injustice than an agent who is completely epistemically aware of the injustice, and their responsibility to help fix it is mitigated. For instance, in the above example, Tanya occupies a state of epistemic opacity regarding the structural injustice of police brutality, as she understands (1) but neither (2) nor (3). As previously noted, her responsibility is less demanding than the one borne by Sheila, who understands each of (1) – (3).

Denialism is a form of epistemic opacity. Structurally oppressed agents in a state of denialism fail to understand each of (1) – (3). They fail to understand (1) because they deny that those subject to structural injustice are being wronged in the relevant ways. From this, it follows that they fail to understand both (2) and (3): they cannot understand that an injustice is structural or that they are personally subject to it if they do not acknowledge its existence. Jugov and Ypi’s account suggests the denialist’s responsibility to help fix structural injustice should be mitigated according to the severity of their epistemic opacity. However, the question remains: what, exactly, is the denialist to do in order to discharge this responsibility?¹⁷

¹⁵ Jugov and Ypi, “Structural Injustice, Epistemic Opacity, and the Responsibilities of the Oppressed,” 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷ It is worth clarifying what it looks like to “discharge” a responsibility to combat structural injustice. In general, to discharge a responsibility is to act as it prescribes. In some cases, once a person discharges a responsibility, they no

3 Jugov and Ypi do not address the responsibility of the denialist

One natural place to begin looking for an answer to this question is Jugov and Ypi's account. The authors identify three different forms of epistemic opacity a structurally oppressed agent can occupy and subsequently outline pro tanto responsibilities for agents in each of these epistemic states.¹⁸ However, they fail to identify denialism as a distinct form of epistemic opacity:

There are different forms and degrees of epistemic opacity. In some cases, agents might know that they suffer some wrong but doubt the fact that what they suffer from can be defined as *injustice* ['total epistemic opacity']. In others, they might be aware that they suffer from an injustice but remain skeptical that the injustice is *structural* ['partial epistemic opacity']. In Section VI, we discuss a different case of epistemic opacity: agents who believe that although structural injustice exists, they are exceptional in not being affected by it individually ['exceptionalism'].¹⁹

Observe that the only form of epistemic opacity Jugov and Ypi identify in which a structurally oppressed agent fails to understand they are wronged is 'exceptionalism'. It is stipulated that these agents nonetheless admit that a structural injustice exists and afflicts the other members of the social group(s) to which they belong. But the case of Grace Duffield Goodwin, discussed at the outset of this paper, shows that some structurally oppressed agents deny that both they *and* the other members of their social group(s) are being wronged in the relevant ways. Jugov and Ypi do not consider this possibility, thus overlooking denialism.

longer have that responsibility. In such cases, the relevant goal is attained by acting as the responsibility prescribed a single time. For example, if I negligently injure you, I may have a (moral) responsibility to pay for any costs you incur from getting your injuries treated. Once I discharge this responsibility, I no longer have it: I am not responsible for compensating you for any further, unrelated medical treatment you receive. But a responsibility to combat structural injustice is not like this. When a person discharges their responsibility to combat structural injustice, they perform an action that aims to undermine the injustice. But a structural injustice will not be remedied by any single action. Hence, a person will retain their responsibility to combat structural injustice after they discharge it—it remains one of their standing responsibilities as long as the injustice is present.

¹⁸ Jugov and Ypi take the responsibilities they outline to be pro tanto in the sense that, in contrast to stringent duties, they can be overridden "by other considerations, such as the likely costs of particular actions, the intersecting group memberships of a particular person, other conflicting responsibilities [the agent] might face, and so on" (23).

¹⁹ Jugov and Ypi, "Structural Injustice, Epistemic Opacity, and the Responsibilities of the Oppressed," 8.

Despite this oversight, might it be the case that we can attribute to the denialist one of the responsibilities that Jugov and Ypi suggest for oppressed agents in the forms of epistemic opacity they do identify? The authors outline two general ways a structurally oppressed agent in a state of epistemic opacity can be held responsible for helping fix structural injustice: they can either respond to a wrong that is experienced in virtue of structural injustice (if they are in a state of partial or total epistemic opacity) or share their reasons for occupying their epistemic state (if they are in a state of exceptionalism).²⁰ I argue that neither of these responsibilities can reasonably be attributed to the denialist.

First, a denialist cannot be held responsible for responding to a wrong that is experienced in virtue of structural injustice because they are not capable of responding to such a wrong. Recall that a denialist denies the existence of the wrongs they and others in their social group(s) experience in virtue of being subject to structural injustice. Hence, they fail to perceive these wrongs and are incapable of responding to them. I follow Jugov and Ypi in assuming that any responsibility attributed to a structurally oppressed agent should be one that they are, in principle, capable of discharging.²¹ As a denialist is not capable of responding to a wrong experienced in virtue of structural injustice, they cannot be responsible for doing so.

Second, it is doubtful that a denialist can be held responsible for sharing their reasons for occupying their epistemic state, as having them share these reasons will not likely help undermine the structural injustice. This can be seen by contrasting their case with the exceptionalist. When the exceptionalist shares why they think they are exceptional, it is plausible

²⁰ I return to the question of *why* Jugov and Ypi suggest these specific responsibilities in Section 4. In the present section, I am merely showing that the denialist cannot reasonably be held responsible for helping fix structural injustice in either of these two general ways. See Sections V and VI in Jugov and Ypi (2019) for a complete explanation of the authors' reasoning as to why structurally oppressed agents in states of partial/total epistemic opacity and exceptionalism can be held responsible in one of these two ways.

²¹ Jugov and Ypi, "Structural Injustice, Epistemic Opacity, and the Responsibilities of the Oppressed," 11.

that they will realize their error. They already acknowledge both that the relevant structural injustice exists and that many people are affected by it—they are merely mistaken in believing they are uniquely unaffected by it. If they articulate this belief, it is reasonable to think they will detect inconsistencies in their reasoning. They may, for instance, realize their belief about why others are subject to the structural injustice contradicts their belief about why they are exceptional. But if the denialist shares why they are a denialist, it is doubtful that a similarly positive outcome will be achieved. The denialist believes that neither they nor any member of their social group(s) is being wronged in the relevant ways. If they articulate this belief, then unlike in the case of the exceptionalist, there will be no relevantly similar beliefs for them to draw on that could help them detect their mistake in reasoning. Responsibilities to help fix structural injustice are attributed with the purpose of achieving positive outcomes; because it is doubtful whether anything positive would come of the denialist sharing why they occupy their particular epistemic state, it is also doubtful that they can be held responsible for doing so.

Section 1 drew on leading accounts of responsibility for structural injustice to motivate the idea that structurally oppressed agents in a state of denialism are responsible for helping fix the injustice they are subject to. If Jugov and Ypi's main thesis is correct, and I think it is, then the denialist's responsibility should be mitigated by the fact that they fail to understand many aspects of their own oppression. I have just given reasons to think that two promising candidate responsibilities—responding to a wrong experienced in virtue of structural injustice and sharing one's reasons for occupying one's epistemic state—cannot reasonably be attributed to the denialist.

Might this be indicative of a more serious problem? Perhaps the issue is not merely that the two responsibilities suggested by Jugov and Ypi cannot reasonably be attributed to the

denialist—perhaps the denialist is in such a severe state of epistemic opacity that *no* responsibility can be attributed to them, as there is simply *nothing* they can consciously do to combat structural injustice. After all, these agents deny the existence of the wrongs that they and others experience in virtue of being subject to structural injustice. How could the denialist possibly combat wrongs whose existence they reject? If the denialist cannot consciously combat structural injustice in their epistemic state, then they must be excused from the responsibility to help fix structural injustice. As discussed in the introduction, excusing denialists from this responsibility would be undesirable. For one thing, in light of the fact that some denialists are culpably ignorant of structural injustice, it seems patently unfair to excuse all denialists from the responsibility to combat this injustice. Additionally, if members of emancipatory movements fail to see denialists as bearing a responsibility to combat structural injustice, then they will be predisposed to treat denialists in various negative ways, such as by overlooking certain moral duties they have toward this class of oppressed agents.

4 Two criteria jointly generate pro tanto responsibilities to help fix structural injustice (for oppressed agents)

It will be the burden of the rest of this paper to argue that in the context of helping fix structural injustice, there *is* a responsibility that can be attributed to the denialist. On my view, this becomes clear upon realizing that two criteria—*feasibleness* and *plausible effectiveness*—jointly generate pro tanto responsibilities to help fix structural injustice for oppressed agents. In this section, I will show that these criteria emerge when we reflect further on why we cannot reasonably attribute either of the responsibilities suggested by Jugov and Ypi to the denialist. After demonstrating that the criteria enjoy support on two separate fronts, I will appeal to them

in Section 5 to formulate one way the denialist can be held responsible for helping fix structural injustice.

Consider again why the denialist cannot be held responsible for responding to a wrong experienced in virtue of structural injustice. Above, I argued this is so because the denialist is not capable of responding to such a wrong: they cannot respond to a wrong they do not perceive. Yet even if it were the case that the denialist was capable in principle of combating structural injustice by performing some action, they still may not be responsible for performing this action. The denialist is a structurally oppressed agent, and they likely face some combination of social, temporal, and financial constraints on top of their epistemic constraints. The action prescribed to them by a responsibility to help fix structural injustice should be able to be performed while they carry out the other obligations they presently have, for we should assume that the fulfillment of many, if not most, of these other obligations is essential to their wellbeing. This suggests the general point that if the responsibility attributed to an oppressed agent for helping fix structural injustice prescribes that they perform some action, then that action should meet the following criterion:

Feasibleness: An action *A* is *feasible* for a structurally oppressed agent *S* to do just in case (a) *S* is capable, in principle, of performing *A*, and (b) *S* can perform *A* while carrying out the other obligations they presently have.

As I noted in Section 3, I follow Jugov and Ypi in thinking that anything we say an oppressed agent ought to do should be something that they are, in principle, capable of doing. Thus the reason for stipulating clause (a) in the feasibility criterion. I have already mentioned one reason clause (b) of this criterion should be accepted: the fulfillment of many obligations an oppressed agent has are essential to their wellbeing, and must be given priority over their responsibility to combat the injustice they are subject to. A second reason for accepting (b) is this: if the responsibility attributed to an oppressed agent prescribes that they perform an action

that takes away from the time and energy they usually allocate to their other, essential obligations, then it is comparatively more likely the responsibility will not be discharged. In fact, this agent may become resentful if they are held responsible for doing something they simply do not have the time or mental bandwidth to do. So as to make participating in resistance efforts sustainable for an oppressed agent, any responsibility attributed to them for helping fix structural injustice should prescribe an action they can perform while they carry out their other obligations.

Now consider once more why it is doubtful that the denialist can be held responsible for sharing their reasons for occupying their epistemic state. I previously argued this is so since it is doubtful that anything positive would come of the denialist sharing why they are a denialist. This suggests the general point that if a responsibility attributed to an oppressed agent for helping fix structural injustice prescribes that they perform some action, then that action should meet the following criterion:

Plausible Effectiveness: A structurally oppressed agent *S*'s action *A* is *plausibly effective* just in case a rough causal story can be given of how *S* performing *A* will help combat structural injustice.

The phrase 'rough causal story' strikes a desirable balance between two extremes. On the one hand, if *S* is to be responsible for helping fix structural injustice by performing *A*, then it must be the case that there is potentially a realistic causal connection between *S* performing *A* and the injustice being undermined. Responsibilities for helping fix structural injustice are attributed just for that reason: to help fix the injustice. It would do little good, then, to attribute to *S* the responsibility to brush their teeth twice a day, as there is no apparent way that brushing one's teeth could causally contribute to structural injustice being undermined.

On the other hand, though, we ought not require that *S*'s performance of *A* *in fact* cause the injustice to be undermined in order to claim that *S* is responsible for performing *A*. There are two reasons for this. First, even if there is good reason to think that *S* performing *A* would

causally contribute to the injustice being undermined, it can never be known *ex ante* that the injustice will actually be undermined when the action is performed. Any number of things may arise in a given circumstance that prevent *S*'s well-informed action from effecting positive change, even if it would ordinarily do so. Second, this requirement would prevent us from identifying and enacting valuable resistance strategies. At any given point, our knowledge of structural injustice is imperfect. As we struggle to remedy it, we will be forced to experiment with novel means of resistance—not all of these will prove effective. Such experimentation should nevertheless be encouraged, so long as it is informed by fact: the ways in which we attempt to subvert structural injustice ought to track what we know about it, and it is beneficial to develop multiple lines of attack against it. So, while there must be some causal story of how *S* performing *A* will help fix structural injustice in order to say that *S* is responsible for performing *A*, that story does not need to be fully fleshed out—it can be 'rough'.

To get a better idea of what a rough causal story looks like, consider the following example. The patriarchal social rules of a given society result in a female professor being sexual harassed by her male colleagues. By reflecting on her treatment and seeing that other women are treated similarly, the professor identifies that she, along with all other women in her society, are subject to a structural injustice. It would be plausibly effective for the professor to conduct a workshop for the other women in her department in which she describes the unjust social rules she has identified. True, there is no guarantee that by conducting this workshop, the professor will in fact help undermine the injustice she is subject to. Perhaps she is distracted or nervous while speaking, and her audience finds the presentation unconvincing. Or maybe the audience had just gotten out of another lengthy meeting, and they fail to internalize what the professor is saying because they are exhausted. Nevertheless, there is a rough causal story of how the

professor could help undermine the injustice by conducting the workshop: if the professor shares her experiences with sexual harassment and explains how this harassment operates, members of her audience may come to realize that they, too, have been subject to similar mistreatment even if they did not realize it at the time. These realizations may motivate women in the department to organize and participate in future resistance efforts.

I have just argued that there are positive reasons to think that the criteria of feasibility and plausible effectiveness should guide the attribution of responsibilities for helping fix structural injustice to oppressed agents.²² The plausibility of these criteria is reinforced by the fact that Jugov and Ypi appear to rely on them in articulating responsibilities for oppressed agents in the three forms of epistemic opacity they identify. To see this, consider the locutions they make in justifying their claim that the exceptionalist is responsible for sharing their reasons for occupying their epistemic state.

One reason Jugov and Ypi claim the exceptionalist is responsible for sharing why they think they are exceptional is because “it does not seem too demanding to require” them to do so, as they can discharge this responsibility in ordinary circumstances.²³ If a person thinks they are exceptional in some way, it is not unusual for that thought to work its way into conversation with others. Hence, an exceptionalist is not only capable of sharing their reasons for occupying their epistemic state, but they can do it while carrying out their other (social) obligations, so this action is feasible for them to do in the way specified in the above criterion.

²² It is worth emphasizing that I am *not* claiming that the criteria of feasibility and plausible effectiveness have a place in a general model of responsibility for helping fix structural injustice. My argument is restricted to the context of oppressed agents—I am arguing that these two criteria should guide how *the oppressed in particular* are to be held responsible for helping fix structural injustice. Presumably, the criterion of plausible effectiveness would carry over into a general model, but I am unsure whether the same could be said for the criterion of feasibility as I have formulated it. Perhaps we should not be concerned with whether the responsibilities we attribute to privileged agents can be discharged while they carry out their other, presently held obligations. For example, perhaps these agents ought to restructure their obligations and prioritize combating structural injustice on the grounds that the fulfillment of some of their presently held obligations is not essential to their wellbeing. I take no stand on this issue.

²³ Jugov and Ypi, “Structural Injustice, Epistemic Opacity, and the Responsibilities of the Oppressed,” 20.

The other reason Jugov and Ypi claim the exceptionalist is responsible for sharing why they think they are exceptional is because in performing this action, they can help “unveil higher-order and more pervasive social rules to which ... their behavioral strategies react.”²⁴ The authors suspect that when an exceptionalist shares their reasons for thinking they are exceptional and compares their own experience with that of others, they may have to confront inconsistencies in their reasoning.²⁵ In turn, the exceptionalist may come to understand why they are personally affected by structural injustice, overcoming their epistemic opacity. Mitigating or eliminating epistemic opacity in any form is effective in combating structural injustice because epistemic opacity obscures structural injustice, thereby helping maintain and replicate it. This shows that a rough causal story can be given of how the exceptionalist can help undermine structural injustice by sharing why they think they are exceptional. For this reason, the responsibility Jugov and Ypi attribute to the exceptionalist is plausibly effective.

Thus, in addition to the positive reasons for their acceptance sketched above, the criteria of feasibility and plausible effectiveness align with the work of Jugov and Ypi. I do not intend feasibility and plausible effectiveness to be exhaustive—there are almost certainly other important criteria that should guide the attribution of responsibilities for helping fix structural injustice to oppressed agents, and I have merely focused on two of them. But even just these two criteria are powerful: we can view the plausibility of the responsibilities outlined by Jugov and Ypi as resulting from the fact that these responsibilities are both feasible and plausibly effective

²⁴ Ibid, 21.

²⁵ For a concrete example of how this might go, see *ibid*. In this example, a female professor believes she is uniquely unaffected by sexism in her department, despite acknowledging that women as a whole are wronged by patriarchal social norms. In explaining her beliefs to a male colleague, she learns that not all professors in the department have to dress a particular way (which she had begun to do unconsciously) to avoid sexual harassment. In this way, the professor realizes that she was mistaken in thinking the structural injustice did not personally affect her.

in each case.²⁶ This suggests that if it is feasible for an oppressed agent to perform some action that would be plausibly effective in combating structural injustice, they are responsible for performing that action barring other overriding considerations. In other words, just these two criteria jointly generate pro tanto responsibilities for helping fix structural injustice for oppressed agents. We can thus appeal to them to generate a pro tanto responsibility for the denialist, a task to which I now turn.

5 A pro tanto responsibility for the denialist

Now, I will use the criteria of feasibility and plausible effectiveness to argue that in the context of helping fix structural injustice, a denialist has a pro tanto responsibility to *listen to others' claims of wrongdoing*. This claim requires clarification in two respects. First, I will clarify the sorts of claims I intend the phrase 'claims of wrongdoing' to pick out. Then I will clarify what, specifically, "listening" to such a claim requires. Once I have clarified these two notions, I will show why it is feasible and plausibly effective for the denialist to listen to others' claims of wrongdoing. Given my argument in Section 4, this entails the denialist has a pro tanto responsibility to listen to these claims.

5.1 Claims of wrongdoing and what it takes to listen to them

For my purposes, a claim of wrongdoing is a claim that communicates either the existence or nature of some presently ongoing wrong. A person will make such a claim when they are trying to raise awareness about some wrong and get people to act to correct it. A claim of wrongdoing may simply alert someone to a wrong that presently exists: "All women are being

²⁶ For reasons of brevity, I have only explicitly demonstrated that the responsibility Jugov and Ypi attribute to the exceptionalist satisfies the criteria of feasibility and plausible effectiveness. I claim without proof that the responsibilities the authors attribute to oppressed agents in states of total/partial epistemic opacity also satisfy the two criteria. See Jugov and Ypi, "Structural Injustice, Epistemic Opacity, and the Responsibilities of the Oppressed," 16 for evidence that the responsibility the authors attribute to the oppressed agent in a state of total epistemic opacity satisfies the two criteria; see *ibid*, 17 for evidence of the same in the case of an oppressed agent in a state of partial epistemic opacity.

wronged by the way that our society is structured.” It may also implicate a person in that wrong: “You may not realize it, but your actions are hurting other people.” One distinguishing feature of all claims of wrongdoing concerns what is required for a person to be said to have listened to them.

Over the course of an ordinary day, we listen to a variety of things in a variety of ways. In some contexts, we can listen without critically engaging with the information being communicated to us. When I am at the airport, I listen to announcements made over the loudspeaker system so I know if my flight has been delayed or if my gate has changed. I typically do so with deference: I attend to the announcements and accept them as true without question. When I listen to my partner tell me about her day, I need not critically engage with what she says; indeed, in some instances it is desirable that I refrain from doing so. If she explains why she is frustrated with a colleague at work, I listen to her insofar as I display attentiveness and concern, empathize with her, and affirm her emotions as valid. It may be unnecessary or even inappropriate for me to ask my partner critical, probing questions about why she is frustrated with her colleague—she may rightly be looking for support, not scrutiny.

But in other contexts, listening *does* require critically engaging with the information being communicated to us. One such context, I contend, is being confronted with a claim of wrongdoing. In asserting that we must critically engage with claims of wrongdoing to truly listen to them, I mean to point out that our response to them must strike a balance between two extremes. On the one hand, if we are to listen to such a claim, we cannot immediately ignore or outrightly reject what we are being told. We have to hear the speaker out in full. On the other hand, listening to a claim of wrongdoing also is not compatible with mere deference. To listen is to attempt to *understand* what is being communicated to us. A claim of wrongdoing

communicates the presence of some wrong; to understand that a wrong is present, one must identify and rationally endorse a rough causal story of how the wrong in question arose and what it consists in. One cannot rationally endorse such a story by accepting what the speaker says without question—one must use reason to see if the speaker’s story stands up to scrutiny. When I am faced with a claim of wrongdoing, I fail to listen if I willfully ignore what is being said, but I also fail to listen if I deferentially accept what I am told without question. To truly listen to the claim, I must understand it, and this requires critically engaging with it through rational analysis.

We can bring this observation to bear on the case of the denialist. In what follows, I will first argue that it would be plausibly effective for the denialist to listen to others’ claims of wrongdoing. Then, I will argue that it is feasible for them to do so. Hence, in the context of helping fix structural injustice, the denialist has a pro tanto responsibility to listen to others’ claims of wrongdoing when they are confronted with them.

5.2 The denialist is responsible for listening to others’ claims of wrongdoing

It is plausibly effective for the denialist to listen to others’ claims of wrongdoing because a rough causal story can be given of how they would combat structural injustice by doing so. There are two parts to this rough casual story. First, in some cases, an interlocuter will confront a denialist with a claim concerning a wrong whose existence the denialist rejects. If the denialist critically engages with this claim, and if the claim offers good reasons for thinking that the relevant wrong really does exist, the denialist may realize their errors in judgment and correct them—they could, after rationally analyzing their interlocuter’s claim, come to acknowledge the wrong that they and others experience in virtue of being subject to structural injustice. In such a case, the denialist would overcome their denialism; and as explained in Section 4, mitigating or eliminating epistemic opacity in any form directly undermines structural injustice.

Second, a nontrivial fraction of the claims of wrongdoing a denialist encounters will concern those wrongs whose existence the denialist rejects. It is likely that there are agents in the denialist's social structure who are epistemically aware of the relevant structural injustice. Indeed, in many cases, a denialist will have arrived at their present state of denialism after being exposed to claims of wrongdoing made by these agents. This is evidenced in the paradigmatic case of Grace Duffield Goodwin, presented in the introduction of this paper: Goodwin became a denialist in response to claims made by suffragists that patriarchal social rules were wronging women as a whole by depriving them of political and personal autonomy. Many of the agents who are epistemically aware of the relevant structural injustice will regularly spread awareness of the wrongs experienced by those it afflicts, recognizing that this is integral to combating the injustice. At times, a denialist will be exposed to the claims of wrongdoing made by these agents. Additionally, although denialists deny the existence of the wrongs they experience in virtue of structural injustice, there will be other structurally oppressed agents who recognize they are subject to these wrongs, even if they do not understand that they constitute an injustice or are structural in nature. In response, these structurally oppressed agents will likely tell others about the wrongs they perceive. This is another way that a denialist may encounter claims which concern the wrongs whose existence they reject.

Putting the two parts of this rough causal story together: a nontrivial fraction of the claims of wrongdoing a denialist encounters will concern those wrongs whose existence they reject, and a denialist can realistically overcome their epistemic opacity by critically engaging with such claims. For these reasons, it would be plausibly effective for a denialist to listen to others' claims of wrongdoing.

Although it would be plausibly effective for the denialist to listen to these claims, is it feasible for them to do so? I argue that it is. To see why, it will be instructive to break the listening process down into three distinct steps. To listen to a claim of wrongdoing, the denialist must first accept, at least temporarily, what their interlocuter says at face value. Second, they must critically engage with their interlocuter's claim by subjecting it to rational scrutiny. Third, they must accept the results of their analysis. I claim that it is feasible for the denialist to do each of these three things, so it is feasible for them to listen to an interlocuter's claim of wrongdoing.

To begin, I will show that the denialist is capable, in principle, of performing each step of the listening process. Suppose that an interlocuter has confronted a denialist with a claim of wrongdoing. If the claim concerns a wrong whose existence the denialist does not reject, then the denialist is clearly capable of temporarily accepting what their interlocuter has said at face value. A claim of this sort will concern a wrong that is not experienced in virtue of structural injustice—the denialist will thus find its content relatively familiar, and perhaps even mundane. For instance, the claim might be, “My coworker stole my lunch from the work fridge,” or “I got mugged on my walk home last night.” Because the denialist possesses the conceptual resources needed to understand this sort of claim, and because they do not suffer from a neurological compulsion to immediately reject what they are told, they are capable of accepting, at least temporarily, what their interlocuter has communicated to them. Even if the claim concerns a wrong whose existence the denialist rejects, the denialist is capable of temporarily accepting what their interlocuter has said at face value. For this merely requires the denialist to entertain the possibility that they are mistaken in thinking that certain wrongs do not exist, and they are capable of doing this. We might concede that someone with an intellectual disability or a neurological disease such as Alzheimer's is not capable of recognizing their fallibility, as their

rational capacities are too impaired. But the denialist's rational capacities are not impaired to this degree.

Second, the denialist is capable of critically engaging with their interlocuter's claim by subjecting it to rational scrutiny. This is clear in the case where the claim concerns a wrong whose existence the denialist does not reject. Because the denialist will find the content of such a claim relatively familiar, they will possess the conceptual resources needed to rationally scrutinize it. As an example, if their interlocuter alleges "My coworker stole my lunch from the work fridge," the denialist is capable of identifying what the alleged wrong consists in (a stolen lunch) and what must be the case for this claim to be true (the coworker in question must have taken this lunch without permission). By drawing upon what they know to be the case, and by seeking out further relevant information if necessary, the denialist is capable of determining whether their interlocuter's claim is true. Even if the interlocuter's claim concerns a wrong whose existence the denialist does reject, the denialist is capable of rationally scrutinizing it. Because a claim of this sort will concern a wrong that is experienced in virtue of structural injustice, subjecting it to rational scrutiny will require reflecting on facts about oppression (an oppression we are assuming is present in the social structure of which the denialist is a member). The denialist is regularly confronted with such facts just in virtue of participating in social life: they have conversations with other structurally oppressed agents and hear about their experiences; they observe how these agents are treated; they internalize and react to their own treatment. Hence, although the denialist will believe their interlocuter's claim is false, they will be familiar with its content. The denialist is thus capable, at least in principle, of rationally scrutinizing the claim.

Finally, the denialist is capable of accepting what comes of rationally scrutinizing their interlocuter's claim. In order to be a denialist, an oppressed agent must have previously encountered and rejected at least one claim concerning a wrong that the members of some social group experience in virtue of structural injustice. Some denialists will have arrived at their denialism by subjecting such a claim to rational scrutiny and accepting the results of their analysis—these denialists will have considered what would be required for the alleged wrong to exist, identified reasons for thinking that these conditions do not hold, and accepted that these reasons show that the alleged wrong does not exist. Because they previously accepted what came of rationally scrutinizing a claim of wrongdoing, these denialists are capable of doing so presently. Even if a denialist did not arrive at their denialism via a rational process—perhaps they rejected the relevant claim of wrongdoing without critically engaging with it—they can still accept what comes of their present rational analysis. In at least some areas of their life, the denialist behaves rationally by collecting and weighing evidence, deliberating thoughtfully, and making informed inferences in choosing how to act. They might regularly behave this way, for instance, when deciding how to complete tasks at work, or in considering how to resolve interpersonal conflicts in their private life. The fact that the denialist regularly accepts what comes of their rational analyses in other areas of life suggests they are capable of accepting what comes of rationally analyzing their interlocuter's claim in the present case.

Thus establishes why in the case of the denialist, listening to others' claims of wrongdoing satisfies clause (a) of the feasibility criterion. To see why clause (b) is satisfied, consider that prior to reflecting on how the denialist ought to be held responsible for helping fix structural injustice, we might think they already have an obligation to listen to others.²⁷ If this is

²⁷ See, for example, Morgan-Olsen (2013). He argues that in the context of political liberalism, citizens have a duty to listen to others' arguments and attempt to discern public reasons in them "even if [they] appear nonpublic at first

right, then attributing to the denialist the responsibility to listen to others' claims of wrongdoing does not require them to restructure their previously held obligations, and (b) is met. Even if one rejects this move, it is unlikely that listening to an interlocuter's claim of wrongdoing would prevent the denialist from fulfilling their other, essential obligations. For example, it is unlikely that listening to such a claim would threaten the denialist's ability to pay their rent or put food on the table. Only in extreme circumstances would it be the case that, on pain of fulfilling their other obligations, a denialist would not even be able to perform the first step of the listening process. This gives us good reason to think that (b) is satisfied, and it is feasible for the denialist to listen to others' claims of wrongdoing. This, together with the fact that doing so is plausibly effective in combating structural injustice, shows that denialists have a pro tanto responsibility to listen to these claims.

6 Why it matters

We have just seen that in the context of helping fix structural injustice, the denialist is responsible for listening to others' claims of wrongdoing. This finding has both practical and philosophical significance. I will first discuss the practical significance of my finding. I will begin by way of contrast, and explain why articulating the responsibility of the denialist is *not* practically significant in the way that articulating many other responsibilities is practically significant. Then, I will explain why articulating the responsibility of the denialist is nevertheless practically significant. Once I have done this, I will discuss the philosophical significance of my finding, and explain what we learn about the nature of the political agency of the oppressed in articulating the responsibility of the denialist.

blush" (185). It thus seems that Morgan-Olsen would hold that all members of a polity, including the oppressed, have a duty to listen in the way I have schematized it here (hearing one's interlocuter out in full, critically engaging with what is being said, and accepting the results of one's rational scrutiny of the interlocuter's claims).

6.1 The practical significance of my argument

In some cases, arguing that a class of agents has a particular responsibility is practically significant because doing so can potentially spur those agents to act in a desirable way. In such a case, the agents implicated in the argument are capable of recognizing that they are so implicated. If one of these agents finds the argument convincing, they will be compelled to act in the way the responsibility prescribes. For example, Morgan-Olsen has argued that citizens of a liberal polity are responsible for listening to their fellow citizens' arguments and attempting to identify public reasons within them, even if those arguments initially seem to include nonpublic premises.²⁸ Listening in this way prompts citizens to cultivate respect for each other, and makes for more productive public deliberation within the polity.²⁹ Morgan-Olsen's argument is practically significant in part because it can potentially spur the agents it implicates to act to bring about this desirable outcome. In all but a few fringe cases, a citizen of a liberal polity knows that they are a citizen of a liberal polity, and sees themselves as such.³⁰ Hence, if they encounter Morgan-Olsen's argument, a citizen of a liberal polity will recognize that they are implicated in the argument. If they find the argument convincing, the citizen will feel compelled to listen in the way prescribed by Morgan-Olsen, and thereby contribute to healthy and effective public deliberation.

²⁸ Morgan-Olsen, "A Duty to Listen: Epistemic Obligations and Public Deliberation," 186. Morgan-Olsen's use of the terms 'public reason' and 'nonpublic reason' is borrowed from Rawls (1996). By a 'public' reason, Rawls means a reason that "expresses political values that others as free and equal also might reasonably be expected reasonably to endorse" (Introduction, p. 1). And by a 'nonpublic' reason, Rawls means a reason that appeals to "comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines—to what [an individual sees] as the whole truth" (225). Tyndal (2019) helpfully distinguishes these two sorts of reasons in the following way: whereas only certain polity members could agree to nonpublic reasons, public reasons "are the sort of reasons that, ideally, anyone could agree to regardless of one's personal comprehensive doctrines" (1062). Broadly, Rawls's ideal of public reason holds that in a constitutionally democratic polity, political justification must rely solely on the use of public, as opposed to nonpublic, reasons.

²⁹ Morgan-Olsen, "A Duty to Listen: Epistemic Obligations and Public Deliberation," 212.

³⁰ Perhaps a citizen of a liberal polity is engaged in an internal debate about whether the polity they belong to is truly liberal. This is an example of a fringe case in which the citizen may not see themselves as a citizen of a liberal polity, the sort of case I am presently ignoring.

My argument that denialists have a pro tanto responsibility to listen to others' claims of wrongdoing is not practically significant in this way. The responsibility I have articulated does instruct the denialist to act in a desirable way: by listening to others' claims of wrongdoing, the denialist is put in a position where they can overcome their epistemic opacity, thereby helping combat structural injustice. However, my argument cannot spur denialists to act in this desirable way, as a denialist encountering the argument will not recognize themselves as implicated in it. The denialist is, by definition, a structurally oppressed agent who denies the existence of the wrongs they and others experience in virtue of structural injustice. Because they do not acknowledge the existence of the structural injustice they are subject to, the denialist does not see themselves as a denialist. For this reason, encountering my argument would not compel a denialist to begin listening to others' claims of wrongdoing.

My argument is practically significant in a different way. Although it cannot spur denialists to act in a desirable way, it can spur the members of an emancipatory movement to act in a desirable way. Prior to my argument, it was likely that many members of an emancipatory movement would view denialists as being incapable of helping combat structural injustice. It does initially seem, after all, that a structurally oppressed agent cannot help combat a wrong whose existence they deny. The members who adopted this view would be unlikely to pursue resistance efforts that engage denialists, as there would appear to be no way that these agents could help advance the aims of the movement. Left to their own devices, denialists would likely persist in a state of severe epistemic opacity, as it is difficult to overcome denialism on their own. But my argument makes clear that the members of an emancipatory movement should *not* adopt the above view of denialists. The denialist is capable of helping combat structural injustice by listening to others' claims of wrongdoing. Thus, they should be viewed as possessing this

capacity. Members of emancipatory movements who encounter my argument and find it convincing will be compelled to adopt this view of denialists. If they do, they will be more likely to pursue resistance efforts that engage denialists. Moreover, in virtue of my argument, they will know how to effectively engage denialists: these structurally oppressed agents ought to be tactfully confronted with claims of wrongdoing, as this provides them with an opportunity to overcome their epistemic opacity. In short, my argument is practically significant because it can spur members of emancipatory movements to engage denialists, and help put them in positions where they can combat structural injustice by overcoming their denialism.

6.2 The philosophical significance of my argument

Articulating the responsibility of the denialist is philosophically significant because it helps identify a novel sufficient condition for when a structurally oppressed agent possesses the political agency required to combat structural injustice.

In some cases, it is clear that a structurally oppressed agent possesses the agency required to combat structural injustice because they can consciously initiate an act that helps combat the injustice. For example, in light of Jugov and Ypi's argument, it is clear that an exceptionalist possesses the agency required to combat structural injustice because they can choose to begin sharing their reasons for occupying their epistemic state. If they do this, then there is a realistic chance that they detect their mistake in reasoning and overcome their epistemic opacity, thereby helping undermine structural injustice. The same is true for structurally oppressed agents in states of total and partial epistemic opacity. These agents can choose to begin an act that helps undermine structural injustice—specifically, they can respond to a wrong that is experienced in virtue of structural injustice—so they possess the aforementioned form of political agency. In other words, Jugov and Ypi's argument helps identify a sufficient condition for when a

structurally oppressed agent possesses the political agency required to combat structural injustice: the agent can consciously initiate an act that helps undermine the structural injustice.

Perhaps one reason why it initially seemed like the denialist did not have the agency required to combat structural injustice is because this condition is not satisfied in the denialist's case. Unlike oppressed agents in the states of epistemic opacity identified by Jugov and Ypi, an oppressed agent in a state of denialism cannot consciously initiate an act that helps undermine structural injustice. Given that the denialist denies the existence of the wrongs they and others experience in virtue of structural injustice, it is difficult to see what sort of act they could begin of their own volition that would help combat the injustice they are subject to.

But the above condition is a sufficient condition, not a necessary one! The fact that a denialist cannot consciously initiate an act that helps undermine structural injustice does not mean they lack the political agency required to combat it. My argument in Section 5 shows that the denialist does have the agency required to combat the structural injustice they are subject to, as they can help undermine this injustice by listening to claims of wrongdoing that others confront them with. In this way, my argument helps identify another sufficient condition for when a structurally oppressed agent possesses the political agency required to combat structural injustice: the agent can consciously respond to and assist in developing an act (initiated by someone else) that helps undermine structural injustice. Identifying this condition is significant, as it allows for more structurally oppressed agents to be viewed as having the agency required to combat structural injustice.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that oppressed agents in a state of denialism, a form of epistemic opacity, have a pro tanto responsibility to help fix structural injustice by listening to

others' claims of wrongdoing. That is, when they are confronted with information about wrongdoing, the denialist (barring other overriding considerations) ought to hear their interlocuter out in full, engage with the interlocuter's claims in good faith by subjecting them to rational scrutiny, and accept the results of this scrutiny. This pro tanto responsibility is jointly grounded by two criteria: feasibility and plausible effectiveness. There are likely other criteria that should inform an oppressed agent's responsibility for helping fix structural injustice. Perhaps, for instance, a criterion of personal safety should be formulated: performing the act(s) prescribed by such a responsibility should not place an oppressed agent in foreseeable danger. I leave these considerations to be taken up in future work, and simply point out that such work is needed.

Identifying who can be held responsible for helping fix structural injustice is important because it tracks political agency. Initially, it seemed doubtful that a particular class of oppressed agents—denialists—possessed the agency required to combat the injustice they are subject to. But this proved to be wrong. Denialists *do* have the requisite agency to combat structural injustice, as we can appropriately attribute to them a pro tanto responsibility to help fix structural injustice: it is both feasible for them to listen to others' claims of wrongdoing when they are confronted with them, and doing so is plausibly effective in undermining structural injustice. The value of the criteria of feasibility and plausible effectiveness consists in their ability to help discern when an oppressed agent possesses the political agency required to combat structural injustice and when they do not. Presently, the criteria of feasibility and plausible effectiveness helped show that, despite initial doubts, denialists possess this form of political agency. I suspect they can be used to assess the political agency of oppressed agents in other problematic

epistemic states, and thus provide the members of emancipatory movements with guidance as to how they should relate to different kinds of oppressed agents.

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