J.L. Austin [1962: 28] considers a case where someone orders him to pick up wood on a desert island but he rejects the speaker’s claim to authority. This raises the question whether the claimant would have gained authority over Austin in the absence of the block. When considering a similar case, Thomason [1990: 343] suggests so: ‘When no one objected to this arrangement, she became the group leader, and obtained a certain authority. She did this by acting as if she had the authority.’ If I command you to do something and you do it without objection, did I just gain authority over you?

Rae Langton and others have proposed a mechanism for gaining and granting authority in this manner by drawing on the phenomenon of presupposition accommodation [Sbisà 2002; Witek 2013; Langton 2015, 2018a, 2018b]. When an assertion is made that presupposes information that is not part of the conversation’s common ground, the audience quite easily and commonly accommodates by accepting that the presupposed proposition is true in order to make the speaker’s assertion acceptable [Lewis 1979a; von Fintel 2008].1 Analogously, when an illocutionary act is performed that presupposes certain normative conditions are met, the audience may accommodate by changing the context to make it the case that those normative conditions are met and so the act is felicitous. I call this illocutionary accommodation.2 When applied to the speech act of command and the authority required to felicitously issue commands, it looks like it is possible to gain genuine authority by illocutionary accommodation.

The possibility that genuine authority can be gained by accommodation is surprising from the perspective of moral and political philosophy, where authority is taken to be prima facie objectionable and

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1 Following Stalnaker [2014: 4, 45], acceptance is here understood as a general category of positive propositional attitude that includes believing but also weaker states like taking-to-be-true-for-the-sake-of-argument.

2 For Langton and Witek, felicity conditions are a kind of presupposition, so this is one type of presupposition accommodation. For Langton [2015: 4], illocutionary accommodation is when the force of a speech act is directly accommodated. My usage reflects the fact that what this kind of accommodation does is “alter the illocutionary force of an utterance” [Langton 2018b: 144]. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for helping me clarify this.
difficult to attain [Wolff 1970; Raz 1986; Darwall 2010; Adams 2018]. It certainly does not seem to be the case that any time a practical directive is introduced into a conversation and not rejected, the speaker gains authority over the audience. This strongest interpretation of how we gain authority by illocutionary accommodation seems false but it points in an interesting direction. If we expect audiences both to resist the demand for deference implicit in authority claims and to avoid conversational disruption, there should be a mechanism for handling practical directives that doesn’t require ceding authority to someone or even, more radically, admitting that they attempted to claim authority.

I propose such a mechanism, extending Langton’s use of the accommodation framework to what I call social accommodation. In many circumstances, audiences will accommodate a speaker not by granting them authority but by interpreting them as not claiming authority in the first place [Kukla 2014]. Social accommodation is the general practice of the audience changing the context in order to bring the speaker into conformity with norms beyond those strictly concerned with speech acts. Our attention will be on norms related to authority, including issues such as autonomy, equality, hierarchy, and deference. Once we see this extended framework, however, its use beyond questions of authority becomes apparent.

Here’s the plan. In section one, I explain presupposition accommodation and Langton’s extension of the idea. In section two, I consider the norms and values at stake in authority relations. This shapes our understanding of the conditions for conferring authority in particular normative systems and demonstrates how we should think through the possibility of successful illocutionary accommodation beyond the case of command. In section three, I turn to social accommodation, showing how it gives audiences a way to handle practical directives that will often be preferable to illocutionary accommodation. I also argue that further theorizing social accommodation should improve our understanding of how interlocutors negotiate norms.

1. Presupposition Accommodation & Illocutionary Accommodation

Illocutionary accommodation is supposed to work in a manner similar to

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3 I take ‘command’ to pick out a particular kind of illocutionary act; ‘practical directive’ is my term for utterances that have an imperatival locution. Characterizing an utterance as a command is imposing an interpretation on the utterance that is often open to the audience to negotiate, so in many cases it will make sense to focus on practical directives rather than commands, as we will see.

4 This fits within Lewis’ [1979a: 347] initial general rule of accommodation as long as an utterance’s ‘acceptability’ includes conformity with these broader kinds of norms.
presupposition accommodation. We begin with the familiar idea of a conversation’s common ground, the set of propositions accepted by all conversational participants together [Stalnaker 2014]. Meaningful utterances attempt to update the common ground, for example assertions attempt to add a proposition. Imagine we’re having a conversation about lunch plans and I say, ‘My sister left yesterday.’ The main information this tries to add to the common ground is that my sister is gone. But it also includes and presupposes that I have a sister: the assertion will only make sense if you accept that information. One way of putting this is that presuppositions are requirements that sentences make on the common ground [von Fintel 2008: 138]. More broadly, speakers make requirements on the audience with their utterances. The audience is driven to make sense of the utterance because of how they view the speaker.

If the common ground does not already include what is presupposed, then the conversation might veer off track. Perhaps you challenge my presupposition (‘Hey, I thought you said you didn’t have any siblings!’) or perhaps you explicitly confirm the presupposition (‘Oh, you have a sister?’). But conversations understood as cooperative projects are driven by a norm of smooth, on-track progression towards a shared aim [Thomason 1990; Stalnaker 2014]. Our lunch plans don’t hinge on whether I have a sister or whether I misreported whether I have a sister in the past, so we can achieve our aim of coming to a successful plan without going into sibling tangents. If you simply accept what is presupposed, at least contingently, we can achieve our goals. This is presupposition accommodation. You ‘effortlessly’, ‘quietly and without fuss’, and ‘by default’ accommodate requirements my utterance makes on our conversation in order for it to be an acceptable intervention from me as an interlocutor [Thomason 1990: 344; von Fintel 2008: 137; Witek 2013: 154]. Accommodation removes the obstacle of an apparent norm violation from smooth progression forward, in Thomason’s useful characterization.

Accommodation works because the audience’s consideration of the speaker’s utterance happens in stages. As von Fintel [2008: 143] explains when discussing accommodation’s apparent retroactivity, an utterance’s proposed primary update requires that the context include certain elements at the time of the update, not necessarily at the time of the utterance. The audience first notes the speaker’s intervention as a manifest event, going on to interpret it as a meaningful utterance of a certain sort that has certain requirements. If one or some of those requirements are not already met, the audience may then change the context to fit those requirements, as in presupposition accommodation. Only then will the utterance’s proposed primary update be considered
and the context potentially shifted again to include it [Stalnaker 2014: 52]. In our example, you first register my utterance and its requirements, one of which you accommodate by accepting that I have a sister. Then the primary update can be considered, and it might be challenged while accepting the presupposition (‘Oh, that’s who the woman in your office yesterday was; I thought I saw her again this morning.’). As we will see, illocutionary and social accommodation further exploit this space between utterance and update.\(^5\)

Just as some sentences require that certain propositions hold in order to be acceptable, illocutionary acts require that certain conditions hold in order to be felicitous. Illocutionary accommodation (in my sense) is the process of changing the conversational context so that the felicity conditions on an attempted illocutionary act are met. The illocutionary act of command has authority as one of its felicity conditions: commands aim to change another’s normative standing just by expressing the intention to do so, so require the power to change normative standing in that way. The argument from Langton and others, then, is that when audiences accommodate a command, they change the context so that the speaker has the required authority.\(^6\)

There is a crucial difference between accommodating presuppositions and accommodating commands in the sense I just described. When you accommodate my assertion’s presupposition that I have a sister, you do not make it true that I have a sister, you simply accept the proposition that I have a sister. In this case, changing the context to fit the presupposition is a matter of accepting the proposition that I have a sister, not changing the facts about my family.

The parallel argument would then seem to be that accommodating someone’s arrogation of authority is simply a matter of taking an attitude of acceptance towards the proposition that they have authority for the purposes of the conversation. Here illocutionary accommodation is treated as a strict parallel to presupposition accommodation and all that changes is shared acceptances. But accommodating a speaker in this manner does not seem to entail that they thereby gain genuine authority. Actually having authority is different both from someone acting as if you have authority over them (perhaps you successfully deceive them about your authority) and from merely having influence similar to an authority’s.

The idea of gaining authority by illocutionary accommodation is something stronger. Langton [2018b: 144] argues that ‘Authority’s

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\(^5\) This space is not necessarily temporal.

\(^6\) What Langton calls illocutionary accommodation appears to accommodate force directly, without changing whether the intervening felicity condition is met. It’s unclear to me how this works, so I set it aside to focus on other issues.
existence comes into being through accommodation, not only its acceptability.’ And again: ‘A presupposition of authority can become not just acceptable, but true, because its existence, not only its acceptability, depends in part on what hearers do, or fail to do’ [Langton 2018a: 155]. Here illocutionary accommodation involves changing more than whether the audience accepts that some felicity conditions are met; it involves changing the world to make it true that the felicity conditions are met.

Presupposition accommodation can work because adopting an attitude of acceptance towards a particular proposition is under the direct control of the audience. But presupposition accommodation cannot make it true that I have a sister because the audience has no control over the pieces of the world that would constitute my family relations. As Thomason [1990: 342] puts it, people can be accommodating but the world cannot be.

So why think illocutionary accommodation in the interesting, stronger sense can work at all? Although the world is not accommodating on its own, people control some parts of the world. The felicity conditions on commands include authority, but authority is a matter of social norms and so involves a particular audience accepting propositions about who has social standing of various sorts. As Langton [2018b: 144] puts it, ‘actual authority can be constituted by actual acceptability’. (In section 2, we consider how authority is related to acceptance.) Some elements of the social world are under the control of the audience in the same way that their attitudes of acceptance are under their control. Thus it might be the case that an audience’s accommodation of a speaker’s requirements not only changes the common ground but speakers’ normative standing in the world.

When focusing on authority, illocutionary accommodation looks like a relatively small extension of presupposition accommodation: since authority is itself a matter of shared acceptances, all that happens is that the audience’s shared acceptances constitute authority as well as the common ground. The audience still only exercises control over what they accept but in specific cases shared acceptances play more than one role. To my mind, however, illocutionary accommodation is a broader phenomenon.

Here’s an example of illocutionary accommodation that involves the audience exercising control over a part of the world that is not about what propositions they accept. My friend Alisha wants to buy a cappuccino but left her wallet at home, so I agree to loan her five dollars.7

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7 It might be thought that loaning actually only occurs when possession is transferred, but loans can occur without the transfer happening immediately, e.g. a bank loan via a contract. The transfer is simply a future felicity condition, as with marriage and consummation [Langton 2018a: 157].
A felicity condition on loaning is possession of the amount to be loaned. It might be common knowledge among my interlocutors that I don't have five dollars to hand. So my friend Billie rolls their eyes and gives me five dollars, which I then hand over to Alisha. Billie accommodated my attempt to loan by meeting a felicity condition that happened to be under their control. And, as is often the case with accommodation, it is the very act of ostentatiously flouting the felicity condition that calls on the audience to do the work that the speaker hasn't done. This is still illocutionary accommodation because Billie is not just assisting me in a general sense but specifically removing an obstacle from the success of speech act by ensuring that one of the felicity conditions are fulfilled.

Understood in this broader way, a main question for illocutionary accommodation concerns the varieties of audience control. Some illocutionary acts and some felicity conditions will be able to be accommodated but others will not. The illocutionary act of marriage, for example, includes some felicity conditions under the audience's control, such as the absence of attendee objections and the consent of the spouses, but some that are not under the audience’s control, such as whether the spouses are people, not penguins [Austin 1962: 24]. Sometimes audience control is also much more circumstantial: Billie had five dollars so controlled whether or not the condition that I possess five dollars would be met, but had Billie just spent all their cash, my attempted loan could not have been accommodated in the moment, relative to the goal of getting Alisha cash for her cappuccino. The question for gaining authority by illocutionary accommodation is whether the normative standing of authority is under the right kind of control of the relevant audience.

2. Authority and Accommodation

Presented in this way, it becomes clear that the phenomenon of gaining authority by illocutionary accommodation will resist easy classification because whether an audience has the right kind of control over the conferral of authority depends on the normative system in question. Authority is a particular kind of normative standing that will be defined in different ways, including the conditions on its attainment and conferral, in different normative systems. We can see this clearly by comparing legal systems.

In a constitutional system, the possession of the authority of a

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8 This raises an interesting set of questions about how conversation burdens participants asymmetrically—and indeed how a speaker can burden his audience—some of which we touch on below. There are clear connections to issues raised in Fricker [2007].

9 As Langton [2018b: 140] articulates, authority is in this sense relative.
particular type, say the authority of the chief executive, can only be had by going through explicit, well-defined, public procedures that the constitution sets out. In a democratic system, this will involve an election. No amount of accommodation can grant someone the legal authority of the chief executive in that particular system of positive law. In a monarchy, by contrast, it could be the case that the monarch’s accommodation is sufficient to confer genuine legal authority on someone who (riskily) implicitly claims it by acting as if they have it. The difference lies in the higher-order norms about the possession of standing within the system; the constitutional system is set up so possession of political authority is institutionalised and explicit, while in the monarchical system control over legal standing is personal and whimsical, and so could be implicit in the manner of accommodation. The question of whether authority of a certain sort can be had by accommodation within a certain normative system depends, then, on the nature of the system. This is mostly a sociological inquiry.

Our philosophical inquiry into authority by illocutionary accommodation proceeds along two distinct lines. First, a philosophical characterization of authority can help us understand what sorts of norms and values practices of authority are instantiating and responding to. As an example: authority presumes a justified hierarchy, so authority should be easier to attain in systems that already accept pervasive hierarchies. All else equal, we should expect authority by illocutionary to be more common in such systems. Second, precisely because practices of authority instantiate and are shaped by questions of value, we can articulate what practices of authority should look like according to our best understanding of those values and how they interact. This stance provides a standard by which sociological practices of authority can be evaluated and critiqued.

The different rules for conferring authority in different normative systems depend in part on how the system in question is trying to balance the various value questions involved in practices of authority. To understand these values, it is first important to narrow the scope of our inquiry. Not all cases of introducing a practical directive into a conversation are cases of attempting the illocutionary act of command [Lewis 1979b: 24]. Langton sometimes expresses interest in the broader phenomenon but there are clearly distinct speech acts at play, which especially matters for what illocutionary accommodation can accomplish. Consider the differences, for example, between telling

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10 This is distinct from the fact that the legal system as a whole depends on at least legal officials accepting the higher-order norms [Hart 1961]. At some level, all legal authority is constituted by shared acceptance of a particular community.

11 One way of seeing this is that actually successfully granting someone authority
someone not to steal because the law or the Ten Commandments forbid it and telling them not to steal because you told them not to. Both introduce practical directives into a conversation but they ground the force of those directives in different sources. Precisely because of this fact, these speech acts have distinct felicity conditions and so accommodating them by making it the case that the felicity conditions are met will be quite different.

The command based in my say-so requires that I have the normative power to change your normative standing just by expressing my say-so. This is (practical) authority as strictly conceived of in moral and political philosophy [Raz 1986, Green 1988, Darwall 2010]. Introducing a directive with its source elsewhere does not claim to change the audience’s standing but to inform them of how their standing already is, according to some external set of norms. It does not require the same normative power to bind just by say-so because it does not claim to bind at all. It only requires the conversational standing to introduce new facts, including facts about what other, supposedly binding authorities have to say. This is still a kind of standing that can be accommodated—suppose a stranger walks by and attempts to insert their views into a conversation and the interlocutors consider whether to grant the passer-by conversational standing or not—but it is not authority. (It is not even epistemic authority: I need only be a credible informant, not an expert, to successfully introduce information about the existence of other norms.)

Authority in the sense I am concerned with is a Hohfeldian power to change the deontic standing of another simply by expressing an intention to do so [Hohfeld 1919]. This is the kind of authority that, for example, the law claims over citizens, parents claim over children, and employers claim over employees. It is an essentially relational and agential notion [Adams 2018]; it cannot be possessed by objects. This is importantly distinct from the broader idea that we take ourselves to be bound by reasons and norms of various sorts and that we introduce reasons and norms into conversation with others, shaping how we act individually and in concert. This broader idea is of course worthy of consideration and study, but it is not surprising that we can accommodate requires connecting to a settled conventional practice or normative system and the mere introduction of norms into conversation need not connect to a conventional practice in this way.

12 I restrict my usage of ‘command’ to the speech act that claims authority.
13 It’s not clear whether the Hohfeldian analysis fits well with various theories of illocutionary acts or with the case of epistemic authority. But practical authority is at issue here and there are weighty reasons for preferring this approach, especially absent alternatives that account for the social aspects of issuing and obeying commands. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pushing me to clarify this.
the introduction of norms in this manner, nor controversial. Someone with authority has control over our shared normative space in an especially distinctive way.

Authority as a Hohfeldian power over another centrally implicates a variety of values. First, it involves one person determining how another person can act, so reduces the scope of the subject’s autonomy and self-determination. Second, it constitutes a status hierarchy where one person is superior and the other is inferior. Third, obeying an authority involves deference and a lack of independence. If we value freedom, equality, and independence, authority is prima facie problematic and should be difficult to justify. On the other hand, if we think there are natural status hierarchies or people who deserve to have very little or no autonomy in their lives, then authority that reinforces those hierarchies and controls those kinds of people should be easy to justify. If we think social control is of utmost important and so deference to figures of authority should be people’s default attitude, then authority will also be easy to justify.

The surprising idea at the core of authority by illocutionary accommodation is that genuine authority can be had easily and implicitly—merely by accommodating a speaker. In normative systems that prioritise freedom, equality, and independence, we should expect authority to be difficult to attain and confer on others, and so authority by illocutionary accommodation relatively rare. But in normative systems that prioritise hierarchy, control, and deference, authority by illocutionary accommodation seems to fit quite naturally (at least with respect to conferring authority on those higher in the hierarchy—consider a random man being able to claim authority over an ‘unaccompanied’ woman in a patriarchal context).

Normative systems will structure authority practices according to their commitment to the various values at play. This will include balancing some relevant values that are not about authority per se but, for example, about whether achieving standing within the normative system can be implicit. I might value hierarchy, order, and conformity in a way that leads me to believe all such relations should be explicit. I would then deny that authority can be gained by illocutionary accommodation because, although it can be gained easily, it cannot be gained implicitly.

This is particularly relevant to the question of authority within institutions. Part of the point of institutionalizing a normative system is to make the various roles within the system explicit and well-defined. Although not all systems will make all types of authority resistant to implicit attainment, we should expect this kind of implicit move to be more difficult in institutional settings. It works precisely against the reasons that normative standing of that sort was institutionalised in the
first place.\textsuperscript{14}

This can help us see the transition to the other philosophical consideration, namely how we can evaluate and critique practices of authority given our best understanding of the relevant values and their balance. Authority may be had by accommodation in a monarchy but not a constitutional system. But this is precisely one of the objections to monarchy. Legal systems constitute, structure, and exercise public power. The idea that such power can be conferred by personal whim is objectionable. Instead, the attainment and exercise of such power must be regulated by explicit, public rules, in a process that responds to the will and interests of the persons over whom it is exercised, and so on. So, although the question of whether legal authority of certain types can be had by accommodation in certain positive legal systems is a sociological one, from the normative perspective we can quite straightforwardly say that justified systems of legal authority cannot allow legal authority by accommodation. Legal systems that do so make the possession and exercise of public power objectionably easy and unaccountable.

Given the values at stake, given the sort of authority being exercised and whom it is being exercised over, we can make a claim about how authority practices ought to be. There are of course limits to the level of detail abstract considerations of this sort will give about actual practices. There remains a great deal of space for particulars regarding historical and cultural forms, preferences for value rankings, and similar matters to determine how actual social practices of authority look in particular contexts. But this is within the constraints set by our best understanding of the values at stake: authority practices that render people too eager subjects, or infringe too far into their self-determination, or impose hierarchies of gender or race, are unjustified.

We should expect our best understanding of authority to reject accommodation in most cases. Accommodation looks a lot like tacit consent. The problems with tacit consent theories are well known and these problems are illuminating for our case as well. Tacit consent is only legitimate when the consenter clearly knows what counts as their tacit act and what they are consenting to. If these conditions are not met, then the idea that the subject is reasonably sacrificing their autonomy and the authority can justifiably demand deference from them is objectionable. In most cases, failing to block a command will not fulfil these conditions because it does not demonstrate that the audience knew that they were thereby granting authority, over what jurisdiction, or what that entails. As

\textsuperscript{14} It is also thus that a limited practice of implicitly granting authority might be especially valuable in institutional settings. Precisely because it is so rare, it may be more useful or more status-conferring, or more deniable.
such we have reasons to think that the most reasonable practices of authority would not grant authority simply due to accommodation.

It might be worried that I am idealizing authority too much, a strand of theorizing authority forcefully criticised by Langton [2018b]. Raz, for example, tends to claim that nobody has genuine authority unless they have authority according to the sort of standard I just articulated, that is, in light of our best understanding of the values at stake. But Raz would surely admit that it is coherent to ask about who has authority according to the norms of a particular positive social practice. It is clear that judges have genuine legal authority within an overall illegitimate regime, in contrast to normal citizens of that regime. This fact can be incidentally important for agents trying to balance their reasons and act well. If I want to act efficiently in the context of a particular normative system, it doesn’t matter whether the system is all things considered justified, I just need to know who has what standing and how they exercise it within the system. Raz’s point is that subjects of normative systems that are not all things considered justified do not have their final practical reasons intrinsically shaped by authorities of such systems, as Langton [2015: 28] recognises. Subjects to the oppressive legal regime do not have overriding practical reason to do what the oppressive law says just because it says so, as its claim to authority would have it.

3. Social Accommodation

So far we have focused on the level of normative systems because accommodation requires that the audience have the right sort of control over the conditions on having authority within the system. Ultimately, however, I think the more interesting work to be done in this area focuses on the level of individuals and the audience. Even in normative systems where audiences have the ability to grant authority by accommodation, they often have good reason not to. But explicitly challenging someone’s claim to authority is a costly and disruptive conversational move. If we expect people to resist granting authority by accommodation but also to be relatively cooperative interlocutors, we need to show how there is a conversational mechanism by which practical directives can be accommodated without granting authority. It is in interlocutors’ interests to have such a mechanism available in a wide range of cases. Extending Langton’s use of accommodation even further, I propose the phenomenon of social accommodation.

In social contexts where autonomy, equality, and independence are valued, audiences will often resist granting others authority. But even in contexts where subordination, hierarchy, and deference are preferred, only specific kinds of authority will be appropriate. Social contexts with
prevalent hierarchies don’t grant authority to all over all; they grant authority to specific groups and deny authority to others. In such contexts, then, audiences especially need the ability to resist granting authority when the speaker is in the subordinate class. Imagine a woman issuing a command to a man in a patriarchal setting. Sometimes, perhaps even often, the man may explicitly block the authority. But sometimes it’s easier to just go along and, better yet, to go along without granting authority.

On the strongest reading of authority by illocutionary accommodation, genuine authority would be granted any time there was any kind of directive introduced into a conversation and the subject of the directive happened to conform to it.15 This reading is suggested by the appeal to presupposition accommodation because presupposition accommodation apparently occurs quite passively, perhaps even whenever there isn’t explicit blocking of the presupposed information and the conversation continues apace. Similarly, then, the strongest reading is that whenever the subject doesn’t block the directive and goes on to conform to it, the speaker gains genuine authority. Witek [2013: 152] comes closest to the strongest reading, writing that ‘the hearer’s cooperative response—i.e., his complying with what the speaker has told him to do—involves his tacit acceptance of the speaker’s power to give him binding orders.’

The strongest reading denies the possibility of an intermediate case: a speaker issues a command and the audience conforms to the command but does not grant the speaker authority. This intermediate case is not only possible but preferable and, I think, quite common. There is no authority in such cases because although we are willing to accommodate the speaker, we do so without accommodating their implicit arrogation of authority. The explanation for both the existence and commonality of this intermediate practice is precisely the interaction of two sets of norms: conversational norms that prefer smooth progression and social norms against authority relations.

As I head to my kitchen, my roommate calls out, ‘Grab me a beer.’ On its face, this is a command that my roommate lacks the authority to

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15 In part this rests on the nature of uptake and its relation to illocutionary success. In the literature on practical authority, it is understood that incidental conformity cannot be obedience [Hart 1982: ch. 10; Raz 1986; Lance and Kukla 2013: 463-4]. This formulation of what authority requires plays an especially important role in debates over political legitimacy and political obligation.

16 Sbisà [2002: 431] is also quite explicit. Langton [2018a: 151] states something close: ‘If a hearer treats it as a felicitous binding order, it is a felicitous binding order: the speaker genuinely has authority, and “obtains” it if he lacked it before.’ This only implicitly adopts the strongest reading if to treat ‘as a felicitous binding order’ is identical to mere conformity.
issue. The strongest reading suggests that only two responses are open to me: either I bring my roommate a beer, guided by the norm of smooth conversational progression, and thereby grant him genuine authority over me, or I block the presumption of authority, guided by the norms of autonomy and equality. Neither looks particularly attractive. I don’t want to suggest that I am his subordinate by bringing him a beer but I also don’t want to take the somewhat socially extraordinary step of rebuking him for what might be an offhand remark.

This latter possibility suggests the intermediate route of social accommodation. I want to interpret my roommate charitably as a speaker and so I must at least interpret his utterance as expressing his desire for a beer. I shouldn’t just presume he is joking or, more radically, simply ignore him as if he is either absent or nonsensical. But I also want to interpret my roommate charitably as a decent human being and good friend. We know in common that we are equals, both because friendship requires equality in some respects and because we are both committed to equality more generally (speaking to what I personally value in friends). A decent person wouldn’t risk their friendship by violating shared norms or by infringing on the autonomy of their friends.

So to interpret my roommate charitably in these other respects, as not violating these underlying moral and social norms, I read his utterance as a request and not a command.17 Requests do not require authority as a felicity condition so I can bring him a beer without granting him any authority and without having to interrupt the cooperative aims in order to rebuke him. I can respect both sets of norms simultaneously. In this case, social accommodation also renders illocutionary accommodation unnecessary: roommates and friends have the standing to make requests of each other.

Of course, there are limits to such accommodation. On one hand, although most practical directives are ambiguous as to the source of their bindingness, sometimes a speaker will explicitly include the claim to authority. Such a speaker can still be accommodated in a variety of ways but it makes reading the directive as a request more difficult and costly; it often requires interpreting the speaker as either incompetent or insincere in some way. If the speaker continues to reassert their authority, then social accommodation that avoids granting authority is ruled out but this is what we should expect. The claim is no longer an implicit one that is tangential to the conversation but has become a central point of contention.

In another case, there are limits to accommodation that are

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17 I leave open whether this actually renders the utterance a request, which it might if we focus on actual uptake [Sbisà 2002; Witek 2013; Lance and Kukla 2013; Kukla 2014].
especially relevant when considering patterns of behaviour. If my roommate is constantly telling me to do things, if he also ignores my requests, if he never requests but always orders, if he never expresses gratitude, and so on, then the defaults should shift because he is not acting like we are equals—he is acting like he has authority and I am his subject. How I interpret him is not only a matter of what norms I as the audience think are valid, but my understanding of what norms he takes to be valid and is trying to conform to. When we are friends, I presume he is not trying to gain dominion over me; but if he has constantly held himself above me, then it extends charity too far to read him as conforming to those egalitarian norms he clearly rejects.

Social accommodation is a natural extension of the general accommodation framework, according to which audiences change the context in order to bring a speaker's utterances into conformity with norms that they would otherwise ostentatiously violate, thereby removing obstacles to the common project. Stalnaker [2014: 85] notes: ‘If a statement made with a syntactically ambiguous sentence would be irrelevant or manifestly false on one of the readings, then that reading will be excluded [because] a conversational maxim would be violated’. Here the audience is at pains to interpret the speaker as in conformity with norms of relevance and truth-telling. Likewise, Thomason [1990: 343] and von Fintel [2008: 153] consider a case where a speaker is in violation of social norms of intimacy and propriety, and both discuss it as obviously a case of accommodation. The speaker uses a more informal greeting than would be appropriate as an attempt to make the relationship more intimate. The audience is accommodating the speaker in relation to norms of propriety; the obstacle is not incoherence or falsity, as with presupposition accommodation, nor is it infelicity, as with illocutionary accommodation, but rude success.

It may appear that this is simply a special case of presupposition accommodation where the audience accepts the proposition that the speaker is not in violation of a social norm. But this isn’t quite right. Presupposition accommodation is generally about accepting that the world is arranged some way. Social accommodation is about how the audience and the speaker relate to social norms that apply to them and, in particular, whether the audience has to treat the speaker as having violated some norm. While the audience could take various stronger or weaker stances towards the idea of relating to the speaker, they cannot do it simply for the sake of argument as in the weakest kind of propositional acceptance. When the audience accepts that they relate to the speaker in a specific way, this immediately structures their ongoing interaction. As they continue the conversation, they will treat the speaker in the new way and thereby actually relate to the speaker in that way.
(and they are responsible for that treatment).\textsuperscript{18}

All accommodation is social in some sense; my notion of social accommodation is simply supposed to highlight that audiences hold speakers to a wide variety of norms beyond conversational norms and will change the context to accommodate in this way as well. Audiences may want to interpret speakers as polite, committed to equality, pious, law-abiding, and much else. Accommodation therefore has to be considered holistically [Roberts 2015: 352; Kukla 2014: 446]. Often the audience is choosing which norms to put the speaker in greater or lesser violation of, not to render the speaker completely free of norm violations. This is simply due to the wide extent of relevant norms.

As Stalnaker’s example makes clear, audiences accommodate by considering the utterance at a variety of stages prior to the update. They might change their understanding of the speaker’s meaning, purposes, sincerity, or intended illocutionary force. In general, the audience will exploit ambiguities in utterances to give themselves a wider variety of interpretive options so that they can treat the speaker in the way they want.

Social accommodation is not necessarily a good thing. It is simply about how the audience may interpret utterances in order to bring the speaker into conformity with different sets of norms. Consider the following more pernicious case from Rebecca Kukla [2014]. Celia is a floor manager at a factory where most of the workers under her remit are men. Celia has a problem: when she issues orders politely and on the basis of her authority, the workers often fail to comply and consider her overly presumptive. Even when they conform, though, they are resentful. One explanation is that they are just sexist and refuse to obey a woman. But Kukla offers another explanation, namely that the workers are reading the commands as requests. I think this is right: they are accommodating Celia in precisely the sense I articulated above. Celia cannot have authority according to the prevailing patriarchal norms. Further, this explains some of the workers’ hostility to Celia. She thinks she’s giving orders that they are obliged to obey but they think they’re doing her a favour by agreeing to her requests, and for which she should express gratitude.

Kukla argues that the problem is an absence of conventions ascribing authority to women. This doesn’t explain why the workers make the extra effort of reading the orders as requests. As Thomason

\textsuperscript{18}The audience may refuse to accommodate but also not block, resulting in a defective context where the speaker and audience do not share an understanding. Notice, though, that this refusal will be realized in the way the audience treats the speaker. In the polite address case, they will not use the more informal address precisely because they do not believe it is appropriate.
notes, there is a general rule that one shouldn’t claim authority one doesn’t have. But then it seems that we should just ignore and perhaps censure those that claim authority they don’t have; if a woman claims authority and the prevailing norms tell us women can’t have authority over men, then disobedience, not accommodation, seems to be called for.

Characterizing the workers’ response as social accommodation is a friendly addendum that helps us further analyse the case. If this is a case of accommodation, then we should be on the lookout for additional potential norm violations that are removed by the audience’s reading. Using Kate Manne’s [2018: 33] understanding of the relevant terms, Kukla’s case involves both a patriarchal ideology that puts women under men in social hierarchies and a misogynist ideology that makes women liable to punishment for stepping out of their place in the hierarchy. If the workers merely disobey, they are implicitly recognizing the claim to authority in command. But for a woman to claim authority over men is for her to step out of place according to the patriarchal norms, which then would necessitate punishment according to the misogynist norms. But punishing Celia would also be costly since they really are her subordinates. The workers not only want to interpret Celia as not having authority, they want to interpret her as not even claiming authority because of the surrounding norms. So they accommodate Celia by interpreting her commands as requests, thus rendering their work situation consistent with their commitment to patriarchy.

Here social accommodation is being performed because and in support of the prevailing patriarchal and misogynist norms. Celia’s male audience ‘charitably’ refuses to interpret her as a woman stepping out of her place. This fits well with Manne’s analysis of misogyny because the workers may not be motivated by hostility to Celia or women in general and may in fact feel protective of Celia and want to avoid the punitive repercussions. But it is the presence of misogynist norms that the workers apply to Celia that sets the conditions for this seemingly amicable treatment in the first place.

Kukla argues that this as a case of discursive injustice, where Celia is unable to perform a certain kind of illocutionary act due to systematic unfairness in the surrounding context that inhibits her agency and infects her life quite broadly. Social accommodation reveals a way in which injustices in general can be compounded and upheld. Even when speakers intend to challenge various norms, their intent might be stymied and their utterance neutralised precisely because the utterance is presumptively norm violating. The audience is both motivated to avoid norm violations and has social accommodation available as a mechanism to do so. The more important the norm is taken to be, the more motivation the
audience will have to interpret the speaker as not violating the norm. Violations of some norms are so beyond the pale that the audience will accommodate the utterance by rendering it something else entirely, even perhaps nonsensical, rather than entertain the possibility of a good faith challenge to the norm in question. Social accommodation is thus a distinct mechanism by which prevailing norms resist change.

References


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19 Social accommodation would fit well with analyses like Stanley (2015) on how norms work through language in unexpected, subtle ways.

20 My thanks to the editor and two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.
Philosophical Logic 8/1: 339-59.