SLURRING PERSPECTIVES

ELISABETH CAMP
Rutgers University

§1. Introduction

Slurs are among the most rhetorically powerful and insidious expressions in a language. One key reason for this, I will argue, is that they present contents from a certain *perspective*, which is difficult to dislodge despite the fact that it is precisely what a nonbigoted hearer most wants to resist.

To get a feel for the phenomenon, observe that on the most natural readings of the following sentences:

(1) Isaiah is a kike.
(2) Isaiah is not a kike.

(2) denies that Isaiah belongs to the group picked out by the slur 'kike'—that is, the group of Jewish people. But the denial offered in (2) does not undermine, and if anything compounds, the slur's offensiveness against Jews: it exempts Isaiah from a derogatory way of thinking that is implicitly taken to be warranted for Jews in general. So we cannot use (2) to reject (1) unless we want to buy in to that perspective ourselves. Further, even if we avoid repeating the offensive term by responding to (1) with something like

(3) That's not true./That's false.

then normally, we still manage to deny only that Isaiah is Jewish: we have again allowed the categorical offense to remain standing (McCready 2010). Thus, with an utterance like (1) the speaker seems to have foisted on us, not just a claim, which we can deny, but something more amorphous, which escapes direct challenge. As a result, it seems that any standard form of engagement with the slurring utterance threatens to make us complicit in the bigot's way of thinking, despite our finding it abhorrent.

At the same time, slurs clearly differ from pure expressives like 'damn' or 'fuck', which plausibly contribute no truth-conditional content, serving only to indicate the speaker's emotional state (Potts 2005): unlike expressives, slurs ascribe substantive, truth-conditionally robust properties. More specifically, many philosophers have pointed to the fact that negative sentences like (2), in their most natural usages, deny only the predication of group membership, leaving the objectionable group-directed attitude standing, as evidence for the claim that slurs have an isolable meaning-element that is purely truth-conditional, such that 'kike' applies to all and only Jewish people; 'dyke' to all and only lesbians; and so on (e.g., Hornsby 2001, Williamson 2009). At the very least, we find a fairly marked contrast here between slurs, which all seem

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to have obvious 'neutral counterparts', and thick terms like 'wanton' or 'brave', which also undertake both a truth-conditional predication and a perspectival or attitudinal component, but intertwined in a way that makes it difficult or impossible to assign the appropriate extension except by employing the relevant perspective (Sibley 1959, McDowell 1981, Williams 1985, Altham 1986).

Several theorists have claimed not just that a slur's offensive component is preserved through denial, but that it 'projects out' of all complex constructions, including questions, orders, modals, conditionals, and even quotation (Kaplan 1999, Potts 2005, Anderson and Lepore 2013). Although I agree that this 'wide-scope' projective behavior is typical, I don't think the data are as clearcut as recent discussants have maintained. First, many people have a strong intuition that the offensive component is not so easily separable from the predication of group membership. Second, and more importantly, there are a range of uses where complex constructions do 'bind' the offensive use. I won't go into these complexities much here, although I think they are essential to a full account of slurs. For our purposes, it suffices to note that slurs clearly have some 'other' aspect, which goes beyond the predication of an extensional property like 'Jewish', and which typically remains in force even in complex constructions like (2). Theorists have also recently debated the theoretical status that should be assigned to this 'other' component, arguing that it belongs, inter alia, to the categories of at-issue content (Hom 2008), presupposition (Schlenker 2007), conventional implicature (Potts 2005, Williamson 2009), and pure 'taboo' (Anderson and Lepore 2013). Again, I won't address this question here; I myself think utterances containing slurs advance two distinct speech acts. Instead, I focus exclusively on the question of what the 'other' component of slurs *is*. Briefly, I will argue that slurs conventionally signal a speaker's allegiance to a *derogating perspective* on the group identified by the slur's extension-determining core.

Before we begin, two warnings. First, I am going to mention (though not use) a variety of slurs in contemporary use. This will offend some readers, for which I apologize. But I believe we can understand slurs' actual force only by considering examples where we ourselves experience their viscerally palpable effects. I hope the offense is offset by a commensurate gain in understanding. Second, we should acknowledge that many of 'us'—philosophers; academics more generally—have only limited experience with slurs. In developing a theory of slurs, we need to cover their full range of uses: in particular, not only as weapons of verbal abuse (Richard 2008), but also in relaxed conversation among bigots. We should not let the outrage that slurs produce in many hearers, including ourselves, blind us either to what bigots take themselves to be doing in using them, or to how their fellow bigots receive them.

§2. Possible Positions

What, beyond predicating group membership, might a speaker accomplish in virtue of employing a slur? We can arrange candidate answers along a continuum. At one extreme lies subjectivist expressivism: the view that slurs serve

to express a raw, ineffable feeling (Kaplan 1999, Potts 2005, Schlenker 2007); at the other lies full truth-conditionalism: the view that users of slurs claim that their targets possess substantive properties in addition to mere group membership (Hom 2008). Each extreme displays a distinct package of advantages and weaknesses.

Expressivism offers a straightforward explanation of the intuitively crucial fact that most uses of slurs are affectively loaded, and that one of their prime uses is as verbal weapons. Thus, one might think that (1) means something like

(1$_{Ex}$) Isaiah is Jewish. And by the way: boo to Jews!

Alternatively, one might replace the second sentence with an obscene gesture lobbed at Jews (Hornsby 2001, Richard 2008). Crucially, the Frege-Geach problem, which bedevils moral expressivism, poses no difficulty here.[1] Thus, contrast (4) and (5):

(4) If wearing orange is wrong, then getting your little brother to wear orange is wrong.
(5) If John is a kike, then there are at least two kikes working in your office.

The moral expressivist (e.g. Blackburn 1999, Gibbard 2003) has a hard time explaining the fact that the speaker does not express a negative attitude when 'wrong' is embedded within a complex construction like (4); by contrast, slurs are theoretically interesting in part because their 'other' dimension does typically project out of complex constructions. Further, the expressivist about slurs has a natural explanation for this projection: if expressing a feeling is a fundamentally different kind of act than referring or predicating, perhaps we should predict that it would not get caught up in the machinery of truth-conditional composition (cf. Potts 2005).

That said, however, an expressivist analysis of slurs also inherits important problems from moral expressivism. First, not all uses of slurs do express an occurrent, negatively charged attitude. Thus, consider:

(6) I'm glad we have so many spics at our school: they always bring the best food to our fund-raising functions.
(7) I wonder whether Japs like to cuddle their babies as much as Chinks seem to.

In (6) the speaker is not using the slur to give vent to a feeling of contempt, but in praise; and in (7), she is wondering whether Japanese people possess a positive property, which she takes to be compatible with her label for them. Indeed, many slurs appear to permit the denial of *any* negative feeling, as in utterances of the all-too-familiar form in (8):

1. Indeed, one might say that expressivist analyses of moral terms go wrong precisely by treating them *as* slurs. Boisvert 2008 and Copp 2001 defend forms of hybrid expressivism about moral terms that analogize them to slurs. Schroeder 2009 argues that the most plausible version of moral expressivism analogizes moral terms to slurs, but that this assimilation ultimately fails.

(8) I have nothing but admiration for spics. I mean, they sure do look out for each other, and they know how to work hard and have a good time. You know, some of my best friends are spics.

On a pure expressivist model, such utterances should be palpably incoherent; but at least for many slurs, they are not: frustrating, yes, perhaps often disingenuous, but not incoherent on their face.[2]

A related problem is that if the speaker were merely expressing her own feelings, it would make no sense to challenge her use of the slur: that use would be appropriate just in case it reflected her feelings (Williamson 2009, 17). As a result, a pure expressivist also has a hard time explaining why slurs make recalcitrant hearers feel complicit in the speaker's way of thinking: according to expressivism, the hearer should be able to dismiss the speaker's feelings as just *her* problem, much as with taboo expressives like

(9) You don't have to take that shit from him.

These sorts of considerations militate against the purely subjectivist, 'expulsive' model of emotional expression for slurs advocated by Potts, on which 'we infer from the speaker's use of [an expressive] that he is in a heighted emotional state *right this minute*' (Potts 2007, 171, emphasis in original). At a minimum, the posited connection between tokening slurs and having feelings needs to be weakened, to something more like expressing a disposition to feel negatively toward the targeted group *G*, or a commitment to the appropriateness of feeling a certain way. However, as the expressivist moves away from pure subjectivism, it also becomes less clear in what sense the view is still genuinely expressivist.[3]

At the other end of the continuum, a purely truth-conditional account has the advantage of explaining the widespread intuition that speakers who use slurs inevitably get something *wrong*. Much of the rhetorical difficulty posed to a nonbigoted hearer by an utterance of (1) derives from the separability of the slur's extension-determining predicative content and its 'other' component—not merely insofar as an utterance like (2) typically denies just the predicative content while leaving the 'other' element standing, but also insofar as there is a demonstrable sense in which (1) is *true* just in case Isaiah is Jewish. This separability becomes especially clear if we look at speech acts other than assertion, as in

2. In a related vein, Hom (2008, 429) points to utterances that contain slurs but where the speaker herself lacks any negative attitude toward the targeted group, such as

   (i) Racists believe that Chinese people are chinks.
   (ii) Are you racist if you believe that Chinese people are chinks?

   I don't want to place too much weight on these sorts of cases; they seem to rely on an explicit contrast between the slur and its neutral counterpart, and thus typically have a metalinguistic flavor. Also, as I will discuss in §3, there are specific slurs for which such cancellation is much more strained, if possible at all.
3. Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard have struggled with this criticism in the context of moral terms, as they have revised their views in increasingly representationalist directions.

(10) I bet you they hire a nigger and a dyke before they even consider a white guy.

A nonbigot should obviously refuse to accept such a bet, on the grounds that doing so would make him complicit in the derogation of blacks and lesbians. However, supposing that the bet *has* been accepted, it is clear what the payoff-determining contingency is: just whether the company hires an African-American and a lesbian, and *not* on the 'other' component's appropriateness. In this sense, utterances containing slurs are capable of getting something representationally right. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that many people have a strong intuition that by using a slur, a bigot fundamentally *misrepresents* the targeted group as a whole, and that this misrepresentation 'infects' the entire utterance, rendering *both* (1) and (2) false (e.g., Saka 2007,124, Hom 2008, 437), or at least not true (Dummett 1981, 527). As Richard (2008, 3–4) puts it,

> Imagine standing next to someone who uses S as a slur . . . the racist mutters *that building is full of Ss.* Many of us are going to resist allowing that what the racist said was true. After all, if we admit its truth, we must believe that it is true that the building is full of Ss. And if we think that, we think that the building is full of Ss. We think, that is, what and as the racist thinks.

The sense of misrepresentation here is again markedly distinct from what we find with pure expressives, as in (9). There, if we find the expression problematic, it is because we find either the speaker's feelings or her choice to break the taboo inappropriate. But the fact that there is little temptation in the case of expressives to ascribe *falsity* suggests that by contrast, something representationally ascriptive is at play with slurs, beyond simply extension-determination.

The primary challenge for a truth-conditional view lies in the implausibility of claiming that by using a slur, a speaker commits herself to a specific, determinate content beyond group membership. Revealingly, in the passage above Richard appeals to 'thinking *what* and *as* the racist does'; he does not attempt to state what this is directly. Similarly, Chris Hom, who comes closest to offering a truth-conditional account, offers the following characterization of the predicative content of 'chink':

> ought to be subject to higher college admissions standards, and ought to be subject to exclusion from advancement to managerial positions, and . . . , because of being slanty-eyed, and devious, and good-at-laundering, and . . . , all because of being Chinese (Hom 2008, 431).

First, one might question whether all users of 'chink' are prepared to accept all the contents Hom attributes here.[4] But further, the characterization is not

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4. Because Hom claims that slurs are *externalist*, he is not committed to the claim that all users are aware of these contents. But he is presumably committed to claiming that they would accept such features if presented.

presented as complete. The felt inadequacy of proferred paraphrases, as reflected in ellipses, hedges, and other markers of approximation, naturally raises the objection of why, if slurs do attribute some special content, it should be so difficult to make explicit (cf. Hornsby 2001, 137; Anderson and Lepore 2013, 17). A natural conclusion is that there is no such content: that what differentiates slurs from their neutral counterparts is (at most) a raw, 'ineffable' feeling (Kaplan 1999, Potts 2005).

In §3, I will argue that a perspectival account of slurs integrates the respective strengths of expressivism and representationalism while avoiding their deficits. Before turning to that task, though, I want to mention a third, apparently attractive 'middle way': the view that slurs predicate a general, affectively defined property, like 'contemptible', of their targeted groups (Blackburn 1999, 148, Saka 2007, 121, Williamson 2009). This view might seem to embody the best of both worlds: first, it explains why slurs intimately involve feeling even though speakers need not be affectively affected at the moment of utterance; and second, it explains the intuition that slurs make *some* representational claim, but one which is difficult to spell out in independent, substantive terms. It might also appear to capture what unites slurs as a class: as McCready (2010 8:8) says, '[I]t seems that pejoratives behave more or less alike in terms of their basic meanings, differing only in the degree of approbation assigned to the individual or group under discussion.' I will argue, however, that this apparently moderate view inherits not just the strengths, but also the weaknesses of the two extremes. To do better, we need perspectivalism.

§3. Perspectivalism

3.1 What Is a Perspective?

The contrast between expressivism and representationalism is most familiar from metaethics. Whatever the best semantics of moral terms might be, I think that part of the problem, at least in the case of slurs, comes from assuming that we can draw such a clear distinction between thinking and feeling. Instead, I want to argue that slurs are so rhetorically powerful because they signal allegiance to a perspective: an integrated, intuitive way of cognizing members of the targeted group. A perspective is representational, insofar as it provides a lens for interpreting and explaining truth-conditional contents, but it need not involve a commitment to any specific content. Likewise, a perspective typically motivates certain feelings as appropriate to feel toward its subject, but it is not itself a feeling. In a general sense, then, my suggestion is that slurs are akin to other expressions part of whose conventional function is not merely to refer or predicate, but to signal the speaker's social, psychological, and/or emotional relation to that semantic value. Other perspectival expressions include formal and informal forms of address (e.g., 'tu'/'vous') (Horn 2007), slang expressions (e.g., for parents, food, or genitals), and ethical and aesthetic 'thick' terms, such as 'wanton', 'cowardly, or 'serene'.

The notion of a perspective is fairly intuitive but rarely spelled out. On my understanding, perspectives are modes of interpretation: open-ended ways of

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thinking, feeling, and more generally engaging with the world and certain parts thereof (Camp 2006, 2008, 2009). Above all, perspectives are ongoing dispositions to structure one's thoughts, along at least two dimensions. First, a perspective involves dispositions to notice and remember certain types of features rather than others, so that those features are more *prominent* or salient in one's intuitive thinking, and have more influence in determining one's classifications (cf. Tversky 1977). Second, a perspective involves dispositions to treat some classes of features as more *central* than others, in the sense of taking those features to cause, motivate, or otherwise explain many others (cf. Murphy and Medin 1985, Thagard 1989, Sloman et al. 1998); a good measure of centrality is how much else about the subject one thinks would change if that feature were removed. Together, these structures of prominence and centrality make certain features and feelings seem especially *fitting*: those that can be assimilated most easily into one's existing cognitive structure.

The effects of perspectives in this open-ended, dispositional sense are pervasive, but are perhaps especially starkly illustrated by differences in political orientation. Such differences may, but need not, eventuate in explicit endorsement or rejection of specific propositions, like *Money belongs to those who earn it* or *Everyone needs a safety net*. Rather, a political orientation is deeper and broader than any particular propositional attitude: it is constituted by certain ways of gathering, remembering, and explaining a range of social phenomena, on an ongoing basis. With respect to any particular situation, a hard-right conservative and a dyed-in-the-wool liberal may eventually come to agree about the basic facts. But they will interpret those facts quite differently, by locating them within distinct nexuses of further facts, possibilities, and values.

On this view, perspectives are indeed aspects of cognition, insofar as they generate cognitive structures and play a crucial role in motivating certain explanations and higher-order interpretations. But they are better thought of as tools for thought than as thoughts per se. In particular, one can retain a perspective while adopting or abandoning any particular propositional claim; there need be no proposition whose endorsement or absence is essential. Further, explicitly entertaining, even endorsing, a certain set of propositions— including higher-order structural propositions concerning prominence and centrality—is neither necessary nor sufficient for actually 'getting' a perspective. Instead, getting a perspective, even temporarily, requires *actually* structuring one's thoughts in the relevant structure, so that those thoughts hang together in an intuitive whole, with some properties sticking out and others receding; and so that one has an intuitive ability to 'go on the same way' in assimilating and explaining new information. Finally, just as with the literal phenomenon of seeing-as, these intuitive structures are only partly under conscious control. Thus, on the one hand, one may struggle to apply a perspective without intuitively getting how the constituent elements are supposed to hang together (again, even while explicitly endorsing certain higher-order structural propositions). On the other hand, and more insidiously, a perspective may control one's thinking unbidden. Thus, I may be unable to avoid thinking of my colleague as a scampering rat, and hence interpreting his gestures and voice, even his philosophical arguments in this light, even though

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I explicitly believe him to be an intelligent, reflective, and even courageous person.[5]

Similarly, just as perspectives are cognitive without entailing specific contents, so too are they typically tied to emotion and evaluation without themselves being feelings. Considerable empirical evidence confirms a close interdependence between perspectives and emotions in normal circumstances. Thus, priming for a certain emotion (e.g., sadness vs. anger) affects both which features subjects notice in a presented situation and what causal explanations they assign to those features;[6] and conversely, different ways of framing, construing, or appraising the same situation affects which emotions subjects feel in response.[7] These empirical findings support the many theorists who have held that an essential function of emotions is to 'gestalt' one's understanding of a subject or scene.[8] However, having a perspective does not entail that one actually engages emotions at every moment one attends to a perspective-relevant situation. Some perspectives, such as scientific and theoretical orientations, are largely or entirely devoid of emotion. And even those that do motivate emotions need not cause emotional responses on every occasion. Thus, a political liberal or conservative may be intuitively disposed to respond with certain emotions to political situations; but most can also engage coolly and (at least semi-)rationally with those topics. Indeed, many can apply complex cognitive perspectives while abjuring feeling almost entirely, perhaps because the situations are so familiar, or perhaps because they think emotions only interfere with effective action. Moreover, while perspectives may constrain and influence which emotions one takes to be appropriate toward certain situations, they rarely entail specific feelings; which particular emotion seems appropriate (e.g., sadness vs. anger) depends on the details of the overall perspective's application to that specific case.

3.2 Slurring Perspectives

Given this characterization, what can we say about perspectives' connection with slurs? At the most basic level, by employing a slur a speaker signals a commitment to an overarching perspective on the targeted group as a whole. More specifically, the speaker signals a commitment to taking the property *g* that determines the slur's extension to be a highly *central* feature in thinking about *G*s. The speaker thinks it is relevant to draw attention to *g* because he takes *g* to be highly diagnostic, or classificatorily useful. And typically, he thinks

5. In being intuitive, associative, and only partly voluntary, perspectives are similar to what Tamar Gendler (2008) calls 'alief'. However, there are also significant differences; for one thing, perspectives include many explicit beliefs within their structures.
6. Keltner et al. 1993, Tiedens and Linton 2001, Lerner et al. 2003, Small et al. 2006, Jost et al. 2009.
7. Wallbott and Scherer 1986, Ortony et al. 1988, Smith 1989, Mauro et al. 1992.
8. For instance, Noël Carroll (2001, 224) says that '[t]he emotions focus our attention. They make certain features of situations salient, and they cast those features in a special phenomenological light. The emotions "gestalt", we might say, situations.' Cf. also, for example, A. Rorty 1980, de Sousa 1987, Greenspan 1988, Calhoun 1984, Robinson 2005, and Currie 2010, 98.

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this because he takes being *g* to explain a range of further properties (e.g., laziness, stupidity, greed, cunning, athletic and sexual prowess or debility), which are themselves prominent in his thinking and which he takes to warrant certain affective and evaluative responses.[9] By the bigot's lights, then, possessing *g* explains which properties about individual *G*s matter, and which are fitting for *G*s to possess. In this sense, the perspective treats each individual member of *G* as primarily, and in some sense *only*, a *G*: for the bigot, being *g* determines who these people are.[10]

The mere idea that individual members of a group are substantively characterizable in virtue of group membership need not be offensive. After all, many members of groups—philosophers, say—do tend to share many properties; and we regularly and non-offensively exploit this fact, as when we say 'You are *such* a philosopher.' Slurs are offensive, in part, because we (nonbigots) believe either that the criterial property *g* is not actually a substantively characterizing property at all, or that it does not warrant the kinds of affective and evaluative attitudes the associated perspective presents as fitting. In this sense, the bigot's error is deep; but it is in part factual: if *g* really were explanatorily efficacious in the way the perspective presents it as being, then the associated perspective *could* be an accurate way of thinking about *G*s; and if *g* really did produce a range of properties that deserved to be condemned, then the corresponding emotions could be warranted.[11]

Of course, this is not the whole story about slurs. Slurs do not signal just any perspective on the targeted group; they are offensive because their associated perspectives are negative. Typically, as most theorists note, a speaker expresses *contempt* by using a slur, much as speakers express contempt toward lawyers by referring to them as 'sharks', toward police informers by referring to them as 'snitches', and toward strike-breaking workers by referring to them as 'scabs'. Although it is undeniable, and important, that slurs denigrate, I think an associated feeling of contempt is less important and explanatory than is usually assumed. Rather, I think the association with contempt largely falls out of a more basic one: that the perspective is *distancing* in the sense that the speaker signals that he is not 'of' or aligned with *G*s; and more specifically, that it is *derogating* in the sense that the speaker signals that *G*s are not worthy of respect. Derogation and contempt are closely allied, to be sure; but it seems that one can withhold respect without evincing contempt.

Although it will be controversial to deny that slurs conventionally express contempt, there are several reasons to think this. First, different slurs, and

9. However, as Robin Jeshion (2011) emphasized to me, there are at least some cases where *g* itself is taken to be evaluatively laden in its own right, not in virtue of motivating further properties. See the discussion of stereotypes in fn. 16.

10. Jeshion (2011) similarly argues that slurs involve an 'identifying component', such that being *g* determines '*what* the target *is*'. In a previous iteration of my view I described this aspect of slurs as 'essentialist'; in her comments on that paper, Robin argued convincingly that this description is overly metaphysical and insufficiently psychological.

11. As Robert May (2005, 7) puts it: 'Suppose the Nazis were right: it is a genetic property of Jews that they are despicable—sort of like Tay-Sachs disease, but more genetically ubiquitous . . . [then] to think of Jews this way, to represent them as despicable, would not be to misrepresent them, and so the Nazi's thoughts would be true.'

different uses of the same slur, are associated with different feelings (e.g., contempt, disgust, fear, dismissiveness) and with different degrees of feeling, much as the use of 'tu' versus 'vous' may signal either intimacy or lack of respect, or something different or in between. This fact suggests that the 'middle way' view cited at the end of §2, which assigns a single affectively defined property like 'contemptible' to all slurs, undertakes an overly specific and broad commitment. Second, as I noted in §2, for many slurs, a speaker can consistently deny feeling contempt, or indeed any other negative feeling.[12] Third, in my experience at least some people who freely employ some slurs do not take them to indicate contempt; rather, they think the slur just *is* the appropriate way to refer to *G*s, or even that it is a joking term of affection. It is only by being brought to attend to these terms' negative effects on recalcitrant hearers that these speakers become aware that and why they are offensive. In all these respects, there is a marked contrast between at least some slurs and pejorative terms like 'scab' or 'snitch', for which even purportedly neutral uses are systematically ruled out. We need an account of slurs as a class that explains both why they systematically perpetuate grievous harm and also how some of their core users can be ignorant of this fact; an account which writes strong negative affect directly into their conventional meaning across the board fails to do this.

At the same time, an account that downplays contempt in favor of a more general derogating stance must also explain the obvious fact that slurs are exceptionally well-suited for use as weapons of verbal assault. A derogating account can explain this by pointing out first, that active contempt is a natural next step beyond mere lack of respect. Second, the inference to contempt is especially natural given that many or most users of most slurs do in fact feel contempt toward their targeted groups, and that this is common knowledge among members of the cultural-linguistic community at large. Further, as several theorists have noted (Tirrell 1999, Saka 2007, Hom 2008), a slur's derogatory power appears to be directly proportional to the power of associated social institutions and networks to enforce them, with anything from fists to job quotas. Thus, by employing a slur in a relevant context and with a relevant tone of voice, a speaker not only manifests her own contempt, but also evokes all those other people who feel contempt for *G*s, which feeling they are prepared to enforce in a range of reprehensible ways.[13]

3.3 Why Treat Slurring Perspectives as Semantic?

It should not be controversial that there is *some* association between slurs and perspectives. After all, perspectives are a ubiquitous feature of our cognitive lives in general, driving much of our intuitive thinking. Further, our choice of

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12. Some slurs, such as 'nigger', may well be essentially contemptuous, in which case cancellation as in (8) will be infelicitous. I discuss cancellation, and its limits, further below; see fn. 16 for discussion of variation among slurs.
13. Note that tone and context often suffice to produce similar, though less dramatic, effects for even purportedly neutral expressions like 'black', 'Jewish', or 'woman'.

words often reveals important information about our perspectives; and we frequently choose our words partly in order to reveal such information. But usually, theorists take these associations to be at most pragmatic. What is distinctive about the connection with slurs, which warrants the claim that perspectives are part of their *meaning*?

To answer this question, consider the following minimal pair:

(11) They gave the job I applied for to a spic.
(12) They gave the job I applied for to a Hispanic.

The first thing we can say is that by using a slur, a speaker does not merely signal his allegiance to a certain perspective on *G*s: he signals this in an overt and nondefeasible way, precisely in virtue of employing that expression. In particular, in (11) the speaker chooses to employ a slur in the face of a salient neutral (or comparatively neutral) counterpart, as in (12). A hearer of (12) might be led to suspect that the speaker harbors racist attitudes toward Hispanics just from the fact that the speaker finds the hired candidate's race worth mentioning; further, his choice of a substantive over an adjectival construction is at least mildly suggestive. But in (12), these attitudes are at most *implicated*: if challenged, the speaker can consistently disavow the claim that he thinks about Hispanics in any particular way, and he can supply a justification for the relevance of mentioning the candidate's race. By contrast, none of this is true of (11): here, the speaker has not merely presupposed or implicated a perspective on *G*s, but has willfully and noncancellably inserted a way of thinking about Hispanics as a group into the conversation.

Indeed, a slur's very optionality is part of what makes it so expressively powerful—slurs are arguably constituted *as* slurs in part through their contrast with (comparatively) neutral counterparts. That is, a *G*-referring expression *S* becomes increasingly perspectively marked to the extent that a co-referring expression becomes increasingly salient as an alternative.[14] Eventually, the choice to employ *S* constitutes a robust signal of in-group allegiance, in distinction to those 'others' who refuse to employ it (Croom 2011). If the signal becomes strong enough, and if enough 'others' reject that perspective, then *S* is likely to become taboo.

So, by using a slur *S*, a speaker optionally and nondefeasibly signals his affiliation with a way of thinking and feeling about *G*s as a whole. This way of

14. To show this, Jesse Rappaport (ms.) suggests imagining a perspectively homogenous community, in which everyone shares, and is known to share, a certain perspective toward a group *G*, but in which there is only one expression for identifying *G*s. In that case, he claims, the group-identifying expression would not intuitively be a slur, precisely because it would not have a perspective-signaling function. As Rappaport says, 'In this community, there simply is no *purpose* in marking such a perspective because everybody shares the same one—it is uninformative' (ms., 18). That is, all that is needed is to refer to the group itself; the mutually assumed beliefs and attitudes about *G*s follow directly from the predication of group membership. By contrast, in a more heterogeneous community, few(er) such conclusions can be drawn about what a speaker believes and feels about *G*s simply in virtue of having referred to them.

thinking and feeling is one that a resistant hearer wants to distance herself from. Further, as we saw in §2, there is an important sense in which the resistant hearer thinks the speaker has gotten things *wrong* in his characterization of *G*s. At the same time, as tools for thinking and feeling rather than thoughts or even feelings per se, perspectives resist the usual rhetorical tools of rejection. And this can create the appearance that there is nothing really 'there' to a slur, beyond its extension-determining predicative content.

All classes of 'not-at-issue content'—presupposition, conventional implicature, appositive constructions, etc.—are somewhat difficult to challenge, simply in virtue of falling outside the focus of conversational attention. But in those cases, it is still possible to address the 'other' material directly; it merely requires disrupting the conversational flow (von Fintel 2004), as in:

(13) Hey wait a minute! What do you mean, have I stopped beating my wife? I don't have a wife, and if I did, I obviously wouldn't beat her!

Similarly, a revised version of (12) which employs a questionable factual presupposition, such as

(14) They gave the job I applied for to a lazy Hispanic.

can be adequately challenged with

(15) Hey wait a minute! Why do you think the person they hired is lazy?

Pure expressives are more difficult to dispute because they express a speaker's personal feelings, but they too can be fairly straightforwardly challenged. Thus,

(16) They gave the job I applied for to a fucking Hispanic.

invites a response like

(17) Hey wait a minute! Why are you upset that they gave the job to a Hispanic person?

By contrast, as we've seen, many slurs permit cancellation of particular attitudinal attributions.[15] For instance, the speaker of (11), faced with a response like (17), could insist that he was not upset, merely making an observation. Similarly, for most slurs, if a speaker of (11) is faced with a response like (15), or any analogous response containing some other property substituting for 'lazy', the speaker could plausibly deny having claimed that the hired candidate, or the targeted group in general, possess *that* particular

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15. Again, some slurs are more attitudinally committal; see fn. 16. Further, if the slur is being hurled as a weapon, the attribution of a negative feeling will not be cancellable in that context, simply in virtue of the obviousness of the speaker's feelings.

property.[16] Because of this cancellability of any particular feeling or content, the most natural form of challenge to a slur is typically metalinguistic, as in

(18) Hey wait a minute! You shouldn't use that word to talk about Hispanic people—it's offensive and demeaning.

Notably, this is also the form of challenge that is most natural for other perspectival expressions, such as 'tu'/'vous', slang expressions for parents, or thick pejorative terms like 'snitch'.

16. I take it to be an important fact that slurs vary in how substantive the perspectives associated with them are, both attitudinally and cognitively. In particular, various theorists have gestured toward a conventional connection between slurs and stereotypes (e.g. Williamson 2009). On my view, stereotypes are a special instance of perspectives: they are *communally shared* ways of thinking about particular *types*, which specify certain additional features, in additional to the criterial type-identifying property, as especially prominent, central and fitting.

Positing an association between slurs and stereotypes would nicely explain a range of phenomena about slurs. First, the fact that stereotypes are generic, and so represent an entire class while allowing many exceptions, directly explains why statements employing slurs are so difficult to refute (cf. Tirrell 1999, 52). Second, there is ample psychological evidence that stereotypes produce precisely the cognitive effects I have attributed to perspectives: they drive thinkers' intuitive patterns of attention and explanation, constrain which features thinkers notice and recall; influence what explanations they endorse for individual behaviors; and alter the valence and significance they assign to specific features. For instance, Devine (1989) found that nonconscious priming with traits stereotypically associated with blacks led white subjects to interpret ambiguous actions by racially unspecified actors as more hostile, even though no traits directly related to hostility were primed. Likewise, Duncan (1976) found that whites interpreted the same move as hostile when the actor was black, and as jocular when the actor was white. And Ryan et al. (1996) found that subjects who judged members of a group (e.g., sorority members) to display less variability were more likely to assign stereotypical properties to individual group members, and to have high confidence in those assignments. Third, strong implicit reliance on stereotypes appears to be correlated with a past history and future willingness to engage in harm of the targeted group—indeed, stereotypical thinking appears to be more strongly correlated with engaging in past and future harm than implicit negative attitudes are (Rudman and Ashmore 2007).

So an analysis of slurs' 'other' component in terms of stereotypes might seem attractive; indeed, I myself previously endorsed such a view. In particular, some slurs, like 'nigger', 'dyke', and 'shylock', do appear to be associated with fairly robust stereotypes. In these cases, a hearer well may be able to hold a speaker responsible for attributing *some* content and attitudes to *G*s—though even here, the open-ended, indeterminate nature of stereotypes means that a speaker can consistently cancel the attribution of (nearly) any *particular* feature.

However, not all slurs are so stereotypically robust: thus, expressions like 'midget' or 'retard' arguably serve merely to identify *G*s in a denigrating way. (Thanks to Jesse Rappaport and especially Robin Jeshion for convincing me of this.) In these cases, it may be coherent, even if rhetorically quite odd, for a speaker to disavow commitment to *any* further features associated with *G*s, as with

(i) I distain those queers; anyone who would do that is sick. But I do not endorse those as the right ways of thinking about queers. I have no idea who does it, what they are like, and I don't care. I just think those queers should be locked up. (Jeshion 2011)

In such a case, the operative perspective is just that the *only* feature that matters about *G*s is that they possess the criterial property *g*. But this is still a perspective: it makes *g* maximally prominent and central in thinking about *G*s, and 'zeros out' or assigns minimal weight to all other features. Thus, a perspectival account can make sense of these slurs, along with more robust ones like 'dyke', in a unified way that the more committal stereotype view cannot.

The contrast between the responses available to slurs and expressive terms like 'fucking', as in (16), also helps to bring out the fact that 'ineffability' or unparaphraseability of slurs is not primarily one of articulating a raw feeling, as Kaplan 1999 and Potts 2005 have it. Rather, the challenge lies more in slurs' amorphousness.[17] Whether sincerely or disingenuously, the speaker of a slur who invokes cancellation exploits the indeterminacy, open-endedness, and abstractness of perspectives to disavow any particular factual or affective commitment.

However, the cancellability of any particular commitment makes pressing the converse question of why we should accept that there really is anything 'there' at all: why not treat slurs as pure taboo expressions (Anderson and Lepore 2013)? The answer is that an appeal to perspectives is needed to explain what slurs actually *do*. In particular, positing a role for perspectives explains the apparently conflicting facts that first, so many theorists have taken slurs to *have* factual and evaluative contents, and second, that for most slurs particular candidate contents are both difficult to identify and cancellable. Further, a perspectival account can explain why slurs become taboo in the first place:[18] because and to the extent that they signal affiliation with a way of thinking that the community at large rejects, or at least is unwilling to acknowledge openly. Finally, a perspectival account can explain the difference between slurs and other taboo expressions while a 'pure' taboo account cannot. Terms like 'shit' and 'fuck' do have appropriate circumstances of utterance: they are useful expressions because tokening them expresses an emphatic attitude on the speaker's part. Indeed, there are occasions on which I myself token them, because I take it that conditions are such as to warrant their use. The situation is quite different with slurs: here, we (nonracists) take it that their use is never warranted.

Finally, an appeal to perspectives explains why slurs are so rhetorically powerful, and specifically why they produce a feeling of *complicity* in their hearers in a way that other taboo expressions do not: why resistant hearers so often feel implicated in a speaker's derogation of *G*s. The phenomenon of complicity has two dimensions, I believe. First, there is *cognitive* complicity. The automatic nature of semantic understanding in general, along with the fact that perspectives are intuitive cognitive structures only partially under conscious control, means that simply hearing a slur activates an associated perspective in the mind of a linguistically and culturally competent hearer. This in turn affects the hearer's own intuitive patterns of thought: she now thinks about *G*s in general, about the specific *G* (if any) being discussed, and indeed about anyone affiliated with *G*s in the slurs' light, however little she wants to do

17. I argue for a similar claim about the purported unparaphrasability of metaphor in my 2006.
18. Anderson and Lepore disavow any such possibility, saying that

> Slurs are offensive *not* because of what they mean or convey, but rather because their uses are prohibited, and so, they offend those for whom these prohibitions matter . . . to infer [that a slur's associations] are responsible for its high offense potential is to put the cart before the horse (2013 39, 46).

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so.[19] This cognitive complicity explains, I think, why so many people find even direct quotation of many slurs offensive: mere mention suffices to affect the hearer's mind in a way that she finds objectionable, and that has demonstrable lingering effects.

Second, there is *social* complicity. The very fact of the slur's existence demonstrates that the speaker's perspective is not hers alone, but sufficiently culturally established for a conventional signal of it to maintain widespread use. Further, as we saw, slurs evoke the 'backing power' of individuals and institutions to ensure that members of the targeted group G are able to possess only those properties deemed fitting by the perspective. Bringing these social facts to conversational salience is already painful for a recalcitrant hearer—especially when they are irrelevant to the topic at hand, as in (11). Compounding this insult is the fact that the hearer's own comprehension constitutes evidence that she herself is aware that the perspective, and its backing social contingent, is out there. Thus, if the hearer allows the slur's use to stand uncontested, she implicitly conspires in perpetuating its associated perspective's public currency.

§4. Conclusion

I believe a perspectival treatment of slurs nicely balances two apparently conflicting facts: that slurs produce substantive, insidious, and systematically predictable rhetorical effects, and that those effects are typically amorphous, open-ended, and indeterminate. I have left the question of what particular semantic status to assign perspectives for another day. However, the very existence of slurs demonstrates that semantics needs to study more than just the compositional determination of asserted truth-conditions. We employ a dangerously distorted model of what language is for if we focus exclusively on the exchange of proffered information while ignoring the multiple and manifest ways in which speakers intentionally manipulate associative and perspectival aspects of cognition in conversation, by inviting, cajoling, or berating their hearers into adopting their perspectives. The role of such rhetorical effects is perhaps most obvious, and most comfortably studied, in the context of pragmatics. But slurs constitute a particularly compelling case for the claim that the expression and manipulation of intuitive aspects of thought can take on a conventional linguistic role as well.

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19. Thus, for instance, Kirkland et al. (1987) found that subjects who overheard slurs evaluated not just the target, but also someone who was positively associated with the target more negatively—even when they found the slur itself disturbing. Stereotype activation even in resistant hearers is a more general phenomenon. For instance, Nelson et al. (1996) found that subjects were unable to repress stereotypical judgments in judging probable career goals of both gender-typical and gender-atypical strangers even after those stereotypes had been discredited. Likewise, in 'stereotype threat' (e.g., Steele and Aronson 1995), individuals' performance is differentially affected by being reminded of their membership in a group that stereotypically performs worse (or better) than 'normals' on the assigned task.

Appendix

This welcome collection of articles demonstrates the diversity and strength of opinions about slurs: not just about their best theoretical analysis, but also about more basic matters like the truth and falsity of sentences containing them. I take this diversity to show just how complex and fraught the topic is, and to suggest that a crucial task in developing a theory of slurs should be to do justice to the full variety of basic intuitions, rather than just to advocate for one's preferred subset of them. The collection also demonstrates the importance of locating slurs—which I take to be expressions that derogate in virtue of membership in a group like race or sex—in relation to other expressions, including expressives (e.g., 'fucking'), substantival pejoratives (e.g., 'fucker'), stereotype-encoding pejoratives (e.g., 'Uncle Tom'), and thick terms (e.g., 'snitch'). There are many specific points in this collection that I wish I could address; I'll confine myself to two main points, concerning how many speech acts are undertaken by an utterance using a slur, and the role of stereotypes.

§A1. *Truth-Conditions and Speech Acts*

Whiting and Jeshion each nicely summarize the most important objections to a view like Hom's, which includes the 'other' aspect of meaning which conventionally differentiates slurs from their neutral counterparts within the expression's core 'at-issue', truth-conditional content. The most decisive of these objections, I take it, is that slurs' offensive attitudes typically project across standard 'plugs' like conditionals and attitude reports. Given this, the fact that Hom and May raise the Frege-Geach problem—precisely the inverse of projection—as a challenge for alternative analyses of slurs is rather ironic. Their evidence for this challenge derives entirely from pejoratives other than slurs; but as I note at several points in my piece, there are independent reasons to think that slurs behave differently from other expressives and pejoratives. It is also notable in this context that Hom and May's support for their null-extensionality thesis (what they call 'semantic innocence') derives exclusively from intuitions about nonreferential, quantified sentences. Intuitions about truth and falsity are much more varied when slurs are applied to specific individuals; in particular, many speakers have the strong intuition that utterances containing slurs do advance claims about group membership, claims which can be captured in terms of the expressions' neutral counterparts.

At the same time, the null-extensionality thesis does reflect another widespread intuition: that slurs are fundamentally 'off', and in a specifically representational way, which prevents sentences containing them from even the potential for truth. This basic intuition cuts against conventional implicature accounts like Whiting's, as well as pure 'taboo' accounts like Anderson and Lepore's, both of which treat sentences like 'I am Jewish, not a kike' as analytically contradictory and 'Jews are kikes' as analytically true. Whiting does

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address these worries, but I find his responses largely unsatisfying. In particular, his explanations in terms of mere pragmatic, conversational implicatures produced by the choice to employ the slur fail to account for the nondefeasibility of the speaker's commitment to the appropriateness of the 'other' way of thinking, and for the fact that the promulgation of this 'other' element is so often the main point of utterances containing slurs.

Thus, all parties need to acknowledge that the data about truth and falsity are more variable than has usually been acknowledged. As I mentioned (but did not argue) in my paper, I think this variability motivates a dual-speech-acts view. Frege, Grice, and others who have addressed coloring and conventional implicature have long admitted that the line between what does and does not affect 'the truth-conditions of what is asserted' is very hazy; I believe, following Neale (1999) and Bach (1999), that we should abandon the assumption that we can always identify 'the' content or speech act undertaken in virtue of a sentence's conventional, compositional meaning. Granting that slurs contribute to the production of two distinct speech acts—a (typically) primary one predicating group membership, and a (typically) secondary one endorsing a way of thinking about that group—allows us to explain the complex observed patterns of projection and plugging, and in particular the mixed data about indirect quotation. Most importantly, it explains the intuition that the speaker of a slur may get something representationally right (that is, true) even as she gets something fundamentally, representationally, wrong.

§A2. *Slurs and Stereotypes*

A significant part of Jeshion's contribution criticizes a view that I held until she convinced me of its shortcomings, but that I continue to find appealing (see my fn. 16). Thus, I mostly want here to acknowledge her points, while registering my continuing temptation to locate a conventional role for stereotypes within the meaning of many slurs. Here, in this respect, I take it to be revealing that Hom and May's discussion relies so heavily on the intuition that stereotype-like social/mental constructs play a key role in producing the distinctively powerful species of derogation associated with slurs, and they take these constructs to be semantically associated with certain linguistic expressions.

As Jeshion says, however, the crucial challenge for the philosophy of language is how to distinguish a genuinely semantic association (or polysemy) from mere pragmatic coercion; and her examples have convinced me that not all slurs do encode stereotypes. I still think that someone who believes that it is appropriate to apply 'kike' to Jews because they are shiftless and sexually predatory is deeply confused, and confused partly about what 'kike' means. Further, Jeshion's example of an utterance cancelling all knowledge and endorsement of the stereotype associated with 'queer' strikes me as very odd; and the same utterance substituting 'dykes' for 'queers' seems outright incoherent. At the same time, I grant that not all slurs are like this (and certainly, Jeshion is correct that 'much bigotry is rooted simply on finding others

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"different" '). The clearest case of a stereotype-neutral slur I've encountered is 'midget', which is (though I did not previously know this) highly charged, but neither applies nor suggests any properties beyond short physical stature.[20]

Given all of this, my contribution to the present volume attempts to capture the 'other' component in virtue of which slurs derogate their targets, in a way that explains both why this component often but not inevitably takes the form of a stereotype, and also why speakers who employ slurs have gotten something representationally wrong about their targets even as there is typically no specific content for which a recalcitrant hearer can hold the speaker responsible. In some cases, as with 'midget', perspectivalism may border on expressivism; and in others, like 'nigger', it may border on representationalism. But in order to explain the full rhetorical and semantic force of the full range of slurs, we need the richer resources provided by perspectivalism.

Acknowledgments

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20. Thanks again to Jesse Rappaport for the example; see this exchange between Roger Ebert and Daniel Woodburn for enlightening and relevant discussion: http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/dwarfs-little-people-and-the-m-word. Slurs for outsiders like 'goyim' and 'gaijin' constitute interesting intermediate cases, because they suggest or claim that the targeted group lacks those properties associated with the (positive) stereotype for in-group members.

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