

artworks that retain their full value only in and through the artwork, therefore embracing an attributelessness through abandoning the given as its object. The main argument of *The Black Circle* remains at the abstract level (i.e. biology), without stepping into the concrete (i.e. discourse). As a result, the contradictions that Love explores in Kojève's work miss their target. To focus on the actual contradictions in Kojève's texts would require, not Love's abstractions, but a concrete presentation of Kojève's ideas.

Unlike Kojève's own book reviews, I will not finish

this one by arguing that Love's book should not be read. Instead, I will conclude by cautioning the reader not to expect to find in Love a dialogue with either Kojève or the history of Russian or twentieth-century thought, but rather a contentious use of Kojève to construct a contemporary argument against individualism. To properly engage the latter would require a much more refined reading than I have provided here, showing how it is current political debates that ultimately inform *The Black Circle's* account of Kojève.

Jorge Varela

How can a word be bad?

David Sosa (ed.) *Bad Words: Philosophical Perspectives on Slurs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). 256pp., \$60 hb., 978 01 98758 655.

'Slurs' - understood here to be particular words designed by convention to derogate targeted individuals or groups - are a puzzling category of speech, which raise a variety of philosophical questions pertaining to their mechanics, meaning, use and moral/political effects. They constitute a particular sort of speech act - slurring words *do something*, namely, harm individuals or groups in particular ways. David Sosa's collection, *Bad Words*, brings together leading voices in the philosophy of language in an effort to begin to solve some important puzzles: in particular, the question 'How can a word be *bad*?' (and consequently, 'How can slurs be *bad words*?').

The first chapter by Luvell Anderson, 'Calling, Addressing, and Appropriation', offers an account of the difference between Black and non-Black uses of 'the N-word', and specifically, how it can be the case that Black uses of the word can be non-derogatory in some instances. Dominant understandings of slurs, Anderson contends, are unable to account for the non-derogatory use, and why it is restricted to certain linguistic users (i.e., why it can only be non-derogatory when uttered by certain people). With the important caveat that acceptance of in-group uses of 'the N-word' is far from universal amongst Black people, it is nevertheless the case that there are members of the Black community who see the term as, in some contexts, an empowering expression of camaraderie, relatively autonomous from White misuse.

After surveying three possible answers to this puzzle, and identifying shortcomings of each, Anderson draws on the concepts of *speech communities* and *communities of practice* to develop a distinction between *calling* and *addressing*, which he contends has the explanatory power to make sense of the specific illocutionary act undertaken by in-group members, and which allows for neutral or even endearing uses of the term.

Though Anderson restricts his analysis to an explanation of only one slur (and the appropriate contexts for its non-derogatory use), his argument has the potential for broader application than this one particular case. For example, his theory might be adaptable to cover in-group uses of other slurs, including, perhaps, non-derogatory uses of 'queer', 'butch', 'faggot' or 'dyke' among members of the LGBTQ+ community. To *address* a fellow in-group member as a 'dyke' might carry the exact opposite valence as when an out-group member *calls* that same person a 'dyke', where the former has a potentially positive (but at least neutral) connotation and the latter likely has a negative one. Overall, Anderson makes a compelling case that one must have the proper standing to perform certain illocutionary acts (i.e., must be part of the relevant *community of practice*), which has additional potential applications not taken up here.

Elisabeth Camp, in her 'Dual Act Analysis of Slurs', contends that the use of a slur effectively performs two

separate speech acts, which serve two distinct but coordinated communicative roles: a truth-conditional *predication* of group membership and an *endorsement* of a derogating perspective of that group. Against the assumption that the predication of group membership is the primary function of slurs, and the endorsement of the derogating perspective is merely supplementary or secondary, Camp argues that the degree of centrality of either is contextually variable. In other words, slurs involve two distinct speech acts, and the prevalence of either depends heavily on contextual facts – we should not assume that one (i.e., predication of group membership) is always primary.

Kent Bach similarly proposes that slurs have two separate functions, though he argues against the commonly held notion that one aspect is descriptive and the other expressive (as ‘hybrid expressivism’ would have it). Rather, Bach defends a view which he calls ‘loaded descriptivism’, for which both components of the meaning of a slur can be properly understood as descriptive. Slurs, Bach argues, do indeed express contempt (or some such attitude), but that attitude is only expressed derivatively. Bach’s account holds that what makes slurs unique from their neutral counterpart terms is not the attitude expressed, but rather, that slurs have *additional* descriptive content. More clearly, slurs do more than simply categorize people into a group (i.e., what the neutral counterpart term does), but also attribute some negative evaluation to the target in virtue of their membership in a particular group, and this attribution is inherently descriptive, not expressive.

In ‘Slurs, Dehumanization, and the Expression of Contempt’, Robin Jeshion moves the focus away from pure semantic analysis and takes up the important moral dimension of slurs – a rare contribution to the overall collection in this regard. In particular, Jeshion focuses on the power of slurs to *dehumanize* targets, and argues that any useful theory of slurs must explain *how* it is that slurs have this dehumanizing effect. Drawing on some powerful first-person testimonies, Jeshion argues that slurs have not two, but three distinct semantic functions, and furthermore, that attention to all three is the only way to have a conception of slurs that can account for their dehumanizing consequences. The three semantic components of slurs are: 1) the group-designating component, by which slurs designate the same group membership

that the neutral counterpart does; 2) the expressivist component, by which the speaker expresses contempt for the target on account of the designated group membership; and 3) the identifying component, by which the speaker classifies the target in a way that aims to encapsulate *what the target is*, thereby defining the target’s social identity. By way of the third semantic component of slurs, speakers regard the slur’s target contemptuously on the basis of the target’s *identity qua person*.



In order to flesh this out fully, Jeshion enters into terrain that the other contributors’ generally try to avoid, namely, a foray into the moral psychology of contempt. She convincingly argues that this third part of the semantics of slurs (that is, the identifying component) semantically encodes one aspect of the nature of contempt, namely, that contempt involves taking those properties that are the basis for the contemptuous regard as fundamental to the target’s identity as a person. Importantly, insofar as contempt is an affective attitude, it need not be consciously or explicitly recognized or endorsed by its possessor: ‘One may regard someone with contempt while being blind to one’s contempt’. For this reason, her analysis of slurs as encoding contempt (where that contemptuous regard might be invisible or unconscious)

goes a long way toward explaining why slurs are so socially powerful and morally insidious – the invisibility of the contempt encoded in them can drive other phenomena, such as implicit bias and microaggressions, which reflect contemptuous regard (that is, ranking another as low in worth, underserving of full respect, and so on). Furthermore, insofar as contempt inspires the ‘reciprocal emotion’ of shame, those who are the subject of contempt are also likely to experience shame; this sense of shame is particularly destructive, as it leads to negative self-evaluation, and ultimately social exclusion and alienation. Thus, Jeshion’s account of slurs helps us to make sense of how slurs can inspire contemptuous feelings about the target by others, but also negative self-evaluations by the targets themselves. On both fronts, the deep moral significance of slurs becomes readily obvious.

Adding an analysis sensitive to social identity and historical context (in ways many of the pure semantic theories are not), Ernie Lepore and Matthew Stone highlight the particular interpretive strategies involved in interpreting slurring terms, arguing (contra common practice in philosophy and linguistics) that there is no possible *general account* of the interpretation of slur terms: their interpretation is open-ended and involves social and historical contexts. One interesting dimension of their chapter is the role of one’s perspective (or, standpoint) in interpreting the tone of slurs. They note that ‘powerful people must be very skeptical about their intuitions about the tone of slurs that target others. Their experience may be far removed from the factors that really matter’. This is important because, on their view, it is the tone of a slur that influences how hearers are made to think about targets. Thus, different hearers, in light of their social and epistemic standing, are likely to interpret the target of slurs differently, insofar as they are likely to interpret the tone of the slur directed at them differently.

The question of how slurs give rise to offense is taken up in Mark Richard’s contribution, which does an interesting job of articulating why slurs can cause offense even when the speaker does not intend to do so (i.e., when the speaker intends to use the slur in some neutral

way). Richard argues that speakers are often responsible for the negative impacts of their speech, even when they mean no harm. Speakers (often speaking publicly) cannot control in what register and as a part of what group they are taken to speak, and as such, they have a responsibility to anticipate how they can be, or likely will be, taken up. If they have reason to believe that they will be interpreted as using a term slurringly, or of being a member of a group that does so, they have reason to avoid the term (especially when there is a more neutral counterpart available to them). To fail to do so amounts to a sort of linguistic negligence. In the final entry of the collection, Laurence R. Horn examines the phenomenon of taboo avoidance, and the process of shifting meanings from taboo to acceptable (or negative to positive), arguing that this is part of the story when slurs are reclaimed to take on new, positive meanings despite histories of being taboo. His analysis offers interesting historical insight into why some words become (and cease to be) regarded as ‘taboo’.

Overall, Sosa has offered an insightful overview of thought-provoking philosophical work on slurs, although it would have been good to see a better balance between more technical analyses of the semantics of slurs and moral/political analyses of the social significance of slurs. Whilst the former is critically important (and indeed, necessary if we want to understand what particular slurring words *mean* – an essential piece of understanding *how* they cause harm), too heavy a focus on semantics in a collection on slurs is limited. In the particular social and political moment in which we find ourselves, one in which ‘speech’ itself is at the core of particularly polarised social and political debates, more engagement is needed with *why* we ought to care about slurs (beyond their being semantically puzzling). Understanding slurs – both their semantic functioning and their social and political force – is a complex philosophical challenge, but an intensely important and worthwhile one. As Elisabeth Camp aptly puts it, ‘slurs are so infuriating in part because they are so viscerally and socially potent while also being so representationally and evaluatively slippery.’

Heather Stewart