Conversational Disgust and Social Oppression

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Abstract

In recent years, philosophers have begun to uncover the role played by verbal conduct in generating oppressive social structures. I examine the oppressive illocutionary uses, and perlocutionary effects, of expressives: speech acts that are not truth-apt, merely expressing attitudes, such as desires, preferences, and emotions. Focusing on expressions of disgust in conversation, I argue for two claims: (1) that expressions of disgust can activate in the local, conversational context the oppressive power of the underlying structures of oppression; (2) that conversational expressions of disgust can, via the pragmatic process of presupposition accommodation, contribute to morally problematic cases of disgust contagion.

Keywords

In recent years, critical race theorists and feminist philosophers have drawn our attention to the relation between speech and social hierarchy. They have drawn our attention to the role played by verbal conduct in generating *identity-based structural oppression*: oppression of persons or groups on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. They have argued that a range of speech acts – including the use of slurs and epithets, racist hate speech and propaganda, and even the production and distribution of pornography – have the capacity to create oppressive social structures.[1] For example, certain forms of illocution can unjustly rank members of certain social groups as having inferior civil status, unfairly deprive people of certain rights and powers, and legitimate (make legally and socially permissible) discriminatory behavior.

If we accept the general thesis that certain classes of speech acts have the power to create oppressive social structures, we might be interested in knowing just which ones do. While compelling arguments have been offered in recent years that *assertions*, *imperatives* (*or commands*), and *declarations* (what J.L. Austin called *performatives*) have this power, philosophers and theorists have been surprisingly silent on the question whether *expressives* can also have that power. By *expressives*, I mean speech that is not truth-apt, but merely

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1 Here is a representative sampling: on pornography, see Rae Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 22, no. 4 (1993): 293–330; on racist hate speech, see Mari Matsuda, "Public Response to Racist Speech: Considering the Victim's Story," *Michigan Law Review* 87, no. 8 (1989): 2320–81; Richard Delgado, "Words That Wound: A Tort Action for Racial Insults, Epithets, and Name Calling," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Review* 17 (1982): 133–81; Ishani Maitra and Mary Kate McGowan, "On Racist Hate Speech and the Scope of a Free Speech Principle," *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 23, no. 2 (2009): 343–72; on derogatory speech, see Lynne Tirrell, "Genocidal Language Game," in *Speech and Harm: Controversies Over Free Speech*, eds. Ishani Maitra and Mary Kate McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); on slurs, see Robin Jeshion, "Expressivism and the Offensiveness of Slurs," *Philosophical Perspectives* 27, no. 1 (2013): 231–59; Robin Jeshion, "Slurs and Stereotypes," *Analytic Philosophy* 54, no. 3 (2013): 314–29.

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expresses attitudes like desires, preferences, feelings, and emotions. Of course, philosophers have recently been interested in the semantics and pragmatics of *slurring expressions* (the use of the N word, for example); and these are widely understood as having an expressive component.[2] If the use of slurring terms can subordinate members of the groups they designate, and, moreover, the use of slurring terms counts as expressives, then, it is fairly straightforward that certain expressives (namely slurs) can subordinate. But for many, including myself, the claim that using racial or ethnic or gender slurs constitutes a kind of subordination is not all that controversial. If the use of slurs works as a kind of assault – functioning like "fighting words," speech that assaults someone like a move in a physical fight – then the fact that it is morally objectionable is clear. It is harmful and hurtful and produced with the intent of harming and hurting.

What I want to argue in what follows is perhaps more controversial: that even some *non*-slurring expressives (expressives that do not involve the use of slurring terms) that do not on their surface (or in their semantic content) derogate members of certain groups may nonetheless function in a way that is similar to slurs, constituting acts of subordination. That is, my aim here is not to examine the nature of slurs, but rather to develop the idea that more mundane, commonplace expressive utterances (that may not on their surface seem obviously morally problematic) may nonetheless play a role in creating and maintaining oppressive social structures. To do so, I shall concentrate on the linguistic expression of the attitude of disgust in the context of a conversation.

For the purposes of my argument, I shall also focus on *economic* oppression: oppression of the economically impoverished, least-advantaged members of society. I do so in part because poverty as a form of social inequality has been relatively under-discussed, but my account is meant to be in principle generalizable, applicable to other kinds of identity-based structural oppression, given suitable adjustments to the account.[3]

I shall also restrict my focus to the expression or communication of disgust in conversation. Philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, and epidemiologists have in recent years provided rich and fascinating treatments of disgust, bringing to light its role in shaping society's practices and institutions, sometimes in oppressive and unjust ways.[4] In particular, philosophers working in moral psychology have shown that disgust attitudes have historically played, and continue to play, a crucial role in demarcating and maintaining group boundaries by vilifying and dehumanizing a given out-group (for example, women, Jews, Blacks, disabled persons, and homosexuals). However, they have not directly focused on the moral and political significance of the *communication* (that is, the literal verbal expression) of disgust in ordinary conversational contexts. Nor have they concentrated on identifying and explaining the linguistic-mechanisms that partly underlie the phenomenon that I'll call *disgust*

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2   Luvall Anderson and Ernie Lepore, "Slurring Words," *Noûs* 47, no. 1 (2013): 25–48; Elizabeth Camp, "Slurring Perspectives," *Analytic Philosophy* 54, no. 3 (2013): 330–349; Jeshion, "Expressivism and the Offensiveness of Slurs;" Jeshion, "Slurs and Stereotypes;" Chris Hom, "The Semantics of Racial Epithets," *Journal of Philosophy* 105, no. 8 (2008): 416–40. On the view of slurs that I find most attractive, the use of slurs involves (among other things) the expression of the attitude of contempt (Jeshion, "Expressivism and the Offensiveness of Slurs").

3   An exception is Jonathan Wolff, "Social Equality, Relative Poverty and Marginalized Groups," in *The Equal Society: Essays on Equality in Theory and Practice*, ed. George Hull (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

4   See Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Daniel Kelly, *Yuck!: The Nature and Moral Significance of Disgust* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011); Paul Rozin and April E. Fallon, "A Perspective on Disgust," *Psychological Review* 94, no. 1 (1987): 23–41; Paul Rozin, Jonathan Haidt and Clark R. McCauley, "Disgust," in *Handbook of Emotions*, eds. Lisa Feldman Barrett, Michael Lewis and Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones (New York: The Guilford Press, 2016); Valerie Curtis, "Disgust as Adaptive System for Disease Avoidance Behavior," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 366 (2011): 389–401; Valerie Curtis, *Don't Look, Don't Touch: The Science Behind Revulsion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

contagion: the spreading of disgust attitudes in a society or population towards certain objects, including toward oppressed persons and groups. I aim to address both of these topics – economic oppression and linguistic expressions of disgust in conversation – bringing them together.

1 Preliminaries

A few preliminaries are in order. I've mentioned that certain kinds of speech have been thought to have the power to create oppressive social structures. Let me clarify what I mean by the term *oppression*. I shall understand *oppression* as a social arrangement that systematically and unjustly subordinates people in virtue of their membership in a socially marked group.[5] To *subordinate* is to put someone or some group in a position of disadvantage, inferiority, or loss of power. It is to treat their needs and interests as not as important or worthy as those of the others. (Examples of the oppressed in our social world include: blacks, women, gays, immigrants, the elderly, the poor, the disabled, and so on).[6]

My interest is in the role played by words in enacting and effecting (in constituting and causing) identity-based oppression. I am interested in how certain bits of language used in ordinary conversational contexts help to construct the oppressive features of our social world. What do I mean by *ordinary*? An ordinary conversational context is one in which the conversational participants are *ordinary* speakers. By *ordinary* speaker, I mean a speaker who does *not* occupy a generally recognized position of authority.[7]

Consider the legislator in apartheid-era South Africa enacting a law by saying in the appropriate circumstances, "Blacks are no longer permitted to vote." The legislator is a *non*-ordinary speaker because he occupies a position of authority: his speech act enacts a law that deprives black South Africans of rights and powers, and legitimates discrimination against them. The legislator in a democratic society has the political authority to enact legislation – to grant or take away from members of society certain rights and powers. The linguistic context in which the South African legislator makes his utterance – "Blacks are no longer permitted to vote" – is thus not an ordinary one.[8]

To be clear, the relevant notion of authority here is not strictly *political authority*. A proprietor of a restaurant in the Deep South in the mid 20th century who puts up a "Whites Only!" sign, announcing a policy of serving only white customers, would also have the relevant sense of authority (over the sphere that is his restaurant), though his authority is not political authority.

Contrast the cases of the legislator and the restaurant proprietor with the following one: An Arab woman is on a subway car crowded with people. An older white man walks up to her and says to her, "F***in' terrorist, go home. We don't need your kind here." The older white man is an ordinary speaker because he does not – as the example is meant to be understood – occupy a generally recognized position of authority. Thus, the context in which he says what he says is an ordinary

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5 On structural oppression, see Marilyn Frye, "Oppression," in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (New York: Crossing Press, 1983); Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," in *Geographic Thought: A Praxis Perspective*, eds. George L. Henderson and Marvin Waterstone (New York: Routledge, 2009); Ann E. Cudd, *Analyzing Oppression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Amy Allen, "Power and the Politics of Difference: Oppression, Empowerment, and Transnational Justice," *Hypatia* 23, no. 3 (2009): 156–72.

6 Compare with Rae Langton, who understands "subordination" as involving "putting [others] in a position of inferiority or loss of power, to demean or denigrate." See Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts," 303.

7 Here I follow Ishani Maitra's use of the notion of ordinary speaker and speech. See Ishani Maitra, "Subordinating Speech," in *Speech and Harm: Controversies over Free Speech*, eds. Ishani Maitra and Mary Kate McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 101.

8 Other paradigmatic examples of a *non*-ordinary speaker commonly given in the literature include the ordained minister at a wedding and the individual authorized to christen a ship.

conversational context. It is ordinary conversational contexts such as these – where the speaker does not have the relevant authority – that I shall be concerned with.

I shall call the broad category of speech acts that is my focus *communicative expressives*: *expressive* because the kind of utterance I have in mind is not truth-apt – that is, does not express a proposition that can be true or false, but merely expresses non-cognitive attitudes, like desires, preferences, feelings, and emotions; and *communicative* because I refer to the communication of such non-cognitive attitudes that are not simply privately held (strictly speaking, these attitudes do not even have to be *actually* held). But there must be some public display of the attitude, and moreover, an intention (however tacit) on the part of the speaker to indicate, signal, or convey to a hearer or audience the presence of the attitude (whether or not the attitude is actually present).

Expressives are speech acts that have as their illocutionary point to express the speaker's psychological state – typically an emotion or desire or preference. Unlike assertions, expressives can neither be true or false. They are ventings of emotion, or emotional verbal reactions, rather than attempts to describe how things are in the world, in a way that might succeed in matching or failing to match reality. For example, a speaker who utters "Yuck!" at the prospect of eating raw fish is expressing disgust and not reporting that she has that feeling. If the speaker were to say, "I feel disgust towards sushi," then she would be making an assertion, saying something that could be true or false. (Other examples of expressive terms: *intensifiers* like using the term "totally" in "That is *totally* rad;" *exclamatives*, such as "holy crap!" "wow!" "ouch" "right on!"). Speakers' use of such terms communicates their emotional or attitudinal state, which is expressed not asserted. The terms function to express speakers' emotions, but do not contribute meaning by predicating a descriptive content.

The further subclass of communicative expressives that is my specific focus I shall call *conversational disgust*. These are not mere feelings of disgust toward something, nor mere feelings of disgust expressed with the intention of being conveyed in just any kind of communicative context; but the communication of the feelings *in a conversational context*. Contrast, on the one hand, someone, who, alone in the private seclusion of her home and in the presence of no one else, takes a bite out of a soggy sandwich, and utters "yuck"; and, on the other, someone who utters "yuck!" after taking a bite out of a soggy sandwich in the presence of a friend with whom she's having lunch, doing so with the intent of conveying her disgust. The former is not a communicative expressive. The latter is a communicative expressive. It is also a *conversational expressive*, and even more specifically, *conversational disgust*.

To be clear, *conversational disgust* (the verbal expression of disgust in a conversational context), though it *does* have as a mental state requirement that the speaker have *communicative intent* (the intent-to-communicate disgust), it does *not* have as a mental state requirement, the actual experience of disgust. In other words, there is not a *sincerity condition* on the part of the speaker. So strictly speaking, one can token conversational disgust simply by uttering certain words that convey disgust ("yuck," "eugh") without any *raw, in-the-moment* subjective feeling of disgust. But, typically, the speaker will satisfy the sincerity condition when tokening conversational disgust.

Now I also need to clarify how conversational disgust is different from speech that conveys or communicates disgust in a *non*-conversational context. As I understand it, the conversational context is a subset of the more general communicative context. I am here distinguishing *communicative but non-conversational contexts*, on the one hand, from *communicative and conversational contexts*, on the other. With respect to the former, I have in mind the kind of speech associated with the contents of books, articles, editorials, poems, plays, film, novels, and so on. What makes these forms of speech non-conversational (though communicative) is that they are addressed to their audiences

primarily in a 'one-way' fashion that distinguishes them from conversational speech. So in focusing on *conversational disgust*, I leave to side the kind of disgust that might be expressed in books, articles, editorials, poems, plays, film, novels, and so on. While these count as *communicative* disgust, they do not count as *conversational* disgust.

2   Disgust: Nature and Normative Significance

Let me now turn to the attitude of disgust. What is disgust? Imagine I show you something in a bag – my son's dirty diaper – and you open the bag and inadvertently sniff at it. You're going to feel a particular way. Your gut is probably going to churn, you're going to have a certain expression on your face, which involves pulling back your upper lip, closing your nostrils, averting your eyes, and looking askance. You're very likely to make this "Eugh" sound, which is found common across cultures. But more important than all of those things, you're actually going to stop and think, however tacitly, "I don't want to touch that thing, I don't want to smell it, I want to look at it, and I certainly don't want to eat it." It's that kind of response of revulsion – with its set of physiological, psychological, behavioral aspects – that characterizes disgust.

Social scientists and psychologists have largely agreed that disgust – or our disgust system – biases our behavior to stop our coming into contact with things that could make us sick. The idea is that our capacity to feel disgust drives us to avoid parasites and pathogens. The first sustained and systematic study of disgust was conducted by the psychologist Paul Rozin.[9] Rozin defines disgust narrowly as a "food related" (or orally based) emotion: "the core and origins of the emotion" is revulsion at the prospect of ingesting a contaminating object. Being fundamentally an emotion of food rejection, disgust serves to protect us from eating things whose ingestion we regard as changing our nature for the worse.

More recently, the epidemiologist and anthropologist Valerie Curtis has defended the *Parasite Avoidance Theory of Disgust*.[10] Curtis sees disgust as the human version of the kind of behavioral immune system found in a number of other animals, helping to prevent infection from contagious pathogens by monitoring for, and producing aversion towards, likely sources of disease. Take common objects of disgust: filthy items like old clothing; rotten and regurgitated food; certain insects (like maggots, flies, cockroaches); various slimy animals like slugs and salamanders; human and animal excrement; other products of bodily fluids like phlegm, semen, and pus; decomposing corpses; and unhygienic behavior, such as not flushing the toilet after you or washing your hands. Curtis argues that you can trace an infectious disease origin to nearly all of them. (In developing countries, in places like Africa and in Asia, more than 50 percent of all deaths are due to infections). According to Curtis, there is a very high selection pressure from infectious disease, and that must have been true throughout our evolutionary history. Indeed, microbes pose a far greater danger to us than predators. If, in the Pleistocene, we lived in a world full of carnivorous beasts, it would make sense that we would evolve a sense of fear to keep us away from dangerous animals like lions that are likely to eat us up *from the outside*. Similarly, we have evolved a sense of disgust to keep us away from the little things (the microbes) that when we ingest, or come into contact with, are capable of harming us *from the inside*.

Philosophers have in recent years brought to light the role of disgust responses in shaping society's practices and institutions, sometimes

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9   Rozin and Fallon, "A Perspective on Disgust;" Rozin, Haidt and McCauley, "Disgust."

10   Valerie Curtis and Adam Biran, "Dirt, Disgust, and Disease: Is Hygiene in Our Genes?" *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 44, no. 1 (2001): 17–31; Valerie Curtis, Robert Aunger and Tamer Rabie, "Evidence that Disgust Evolved to Protect from Risk of Disease," *Proceedings of the Royal Society: Biological Science Series B* 271, no. 4 (2004): S131–33.

in oppressive and unjust ways. Perhaps the most prominent example is Martha Nussbaum. Drawing on Rozin's work, Nussbaum identifies disgust with a judgment about contamination: "that the self will become base or contaminated by ingestion of [or coming into contact with] the substance that is viewed as offensive."[11] On her view, to be disgusted by something is to find it offensive and to judge that ingestion of it would contaminate one.

Nussbaum further characterizes disgust as a reaction to the prospect of contamination by something that is *connected with our anxiety about our animal, bodily, and decaying nature.* Disgust is an emotion the susceptibility to which signals a "problematic relationship with our own animality."[12] Objects of disgust remind us of our animal nature – our vulnerability to decay, our having an animal body whose integrity is liable over time to weaken, degenerate, and ultimately collapse. (Note that we can accept that disgust involves a judgment about contamination without accepting that disgust is a reminder of our animal nature and the vulnerability to decay).

According to Nussbaum, disgust is a potentially problematic emotion on which to base society's customs, institutions, and ideals. Disgust becomes morally problematic when people project disgust reaction on to some group of people, as a way of cordoning themselves off from the base parts of their animality to create an oppressed group to whom they impute these properties. She writes: "So powerful is the desire to cordon ourselves off from our animality that we often don't stop at feces, cockroaches, and slimy animals. We need a group of humans to bound ourselves against, who will come to exemplify the boundary line between the truly human and the basely animal."[13] Disgust is "a deeply and ... an inherently self-deceptive emotion" that invites one to deny one's vulnerability as an animal and, in the service of that denial, to target those less privileged than one, especially

the weak and the marginal, as objects of disgust.[14] Disgust can lead us to treat those seen as weak and marginal as undeserving of equal respect and concern.

Two central examples in Nussbaum's treatment of disgust concern anti-Semitism and misogyny. They illustrate the connection between *the communication of disgust* and the oppression of religious and ethnic minorities and those who lack the privileges possessed by the wealthy and more powerful. In the case of anti-Semitism, Nussbaum discusses how Jews were depicted in medieval representations so as to evoke disgust, and how similar but more extreme depictions by notorious nineteenth- and twentieth-century German anti-Semites were used to promote an ideal of Aryan masculinity from which the German people were supposed to draw inspiration and strength:

> The stock image of the Jew, in anti-Semitic propaganda from the Middle Ages on, was that of a being disgustingly soft and porous, receptive of fluid and sticky, oozy and slimy. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such images were widespread and further elaborated, as the Jew came to be seen as a foul parasite inside the clean body of the German male self.[15]

Nussbaum writes of Jews caricatured as having grotesque physical features, which were identified as distinctively Jewish – Jewish noses, Jewish feet, Jewish skin – and which were then used to represent Jews as more animal than human: "[I]t was because there was a need to associate Jews ... with stereotypes of the animal, thus distancing them from the dominant group, that they were represented in such a way that they came to be found disgusting."[16]

In a similar vein, Nussbaum discusses misogynistic depictions of women as aimed at evoking

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11   Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 88.
12   Ibid., 89.
13   Ibid., 107.

14   Ibid., 206.
15   Ibid., 108.
16   Ibid., 111.

disgust. She writes: "One may find variants on these themes in more or less all societies, as women become vehicles for the expression of male loathing of the physical and the potentially decaying."[17] Nussbaum argues that, because women have bodily functions that define them as child bearers, they are seen in these misogynistic depictions to be closer to nature, and so to our animality, than men. Men's need to deny their vulnerability as animals to infirmity, disease, and death has made these functions and women into targets of their disgust.

By focusing on anti-Semitic propaganda and misogynistic depictions of women, Nussbaum has shown that disgust attitudes have historically played, and continue to play, a crucial role in demarcating and maintaining group boundaries by vilifying and dehumanizing certain out-groups (women, Jews, Blacks, disabled persons, and homosexuals). But notice that Nussbaum's central examples are of communicative but not conversational disgust. Her main cases exemplify the kind of one-way speech found in books, articles, editorials, poems, plays, film, and novels, which I distinguished from conversational speech.

I want to explore the idea that expressions of disgust in the conversational context may oppress in ways that are special and distinctive, and this is because conversational speech is typically *cooperative* in ways that distinguish it from one-way speech. Conversational speech is cooperative in the sense that the participants have certain shared aims, such as discussing the same subject matter, sharing information about that subject matter, and coordinating and planning behavior as regards to the subject matter. In virtue of these shared aims, conversational speech (including linguistic expressions of disgust) may generate or sustain oppressive social structures in distinctive

ways. Or so I shall argue in the remainder of my discussion.[18]

3   Conversational Disgust as Exercitive

J.L. Austin famously distinguished between three kinds of acts that may be (simultaneously) performed by an utterance: (i) a *locutionary* act, consisting in the utterance of meaningful words, (ii) an *illocutionary* act, consisting in the act constituted *in* the performance of the utterance, and (iii) a *perlocutionary* act, consisting in the bringing about of certain downstream effects *by* the utterance. In this section, I want to focus on the oppressive illocutionary *uses* of conversational disgust. In the next section, I turn to the oppressive perlocutionary *effects* of conversational disgust.

To make the case for the oppressive illocutionary *uses* of conversational disgust, I shall draw on Mary Kate McGowan's work on *conversational exercitives* as a means of oppression. McGowan argues that certain speech acts, such as casual sexist or racist remarks, are closely linked to the systemic harms and pervasive indignities of an identity-oppressive system of practices, conventions, and expectations. She identifies a particular kind of

17   Ibid., 113.

18   My thanks to the reviewer(s) for their comments and criticism, which have helped me to further clarify key points. The most important concerns the nature and approach of my philosophical concerns in this article. While my philosophical reflections here draw on empirical work by social scientists, the principal focus is on the linguistic mechanisms through which conversational speech is able to alter social facts involving norms, and how, more specifically, the emotion of disgust manifest in such speech is involved in the creation and maintenance of norms bound up with oppressive social hierarchies. It is thus not an exercise in the conceptual analysis of disgust, but rather a reflective examination of the linguistic mechanisms at work that make it the case that disgust in conversational speech can come to enact social norms that prescribe oppressive social relations. Such enactment, I argue, need not always require the backing of, or reduce to, legal or political institutions.

speech act that she calls "the conversational exercitive," which she argues can oppress by "enacting permissibility facts:" they provide cues permitting individuals to say and do oppressive things to members of socially marked groups. Exercitives (in general)[19] are moves or contributions within a norm-governed activity that determine what sorts of actions and behaviors are permissible within that particular domain of conduct.[20] (Consider how a previous move in chess game constrains the moves now available). *Conversational* exercitives (in particular) determine what sorts of actions and behaviors are permissible within a conversational domain.

Suppose you and are I are having a discussion about the popularity of different musical instruments. At one stage in the conversation, I say, "My son has been learning to play the harp." Suppose you reply, "Oh, how wonderful. Usually, young people are taught to play the piano or violin." Given the conversational contributions here, it no longer makes sense for you to subsequently ask me if I have any children. Here's another case.

Suppose you and I are chatting about a mutual acquaintance, John, and I say to you, "Wouldn't you just like to tell John to shut up?!" In saying this, I modify the informal register of our shared presuppositions and respective expectations. Certain suppositions are now in and out of play: certain subsequent utterances are now appropriate or welcome, while others inappropriate or unwelcome. For instance, it would be inapt for you to subsequently reply with, "Yes, I think John is such a sweet person" (said in a non-sarcastic register).

McGowan argues that sexist or racist utterances can count as conversational exercitives, providing cues that permit individuals to say and do sexist or racist things to members of socially marked groups, at least for that conversation. When person A utters a sexist remark or joke in the workplace,

not only does he make it appropriate in what follows to *speak* degradingly of women, he makes it acceptable per se, in what follows in that immediate environment, to degrade women.[21]

McGowan offers the following example:

John and Steve, working together at a factory with few female co-workers, have the following exchange.

> John: So, Steve, how'd it go last night?
> Steve: I banged the bitch.
> John: [smiling] She got a sistuh?

Reflecting on her case, McGowan says:

> Steve's utterance makes it acceptable, in this immediate environment and at this time, to degrade women. His utterance makes women second-class citizens (locally and for the time being). If Steve's utterance does this, then it is akin to a sign reading: "It is hereby permissible, in this local environment and at this time, to treat women as second class citizens." Such a sign would surely be an act of gender oppression. The hypothesis suggested here is that, perhaps, Steve's utterance is too.[22]

Notice that McGowan is not claiming that Steve is responsible, in a single remark, for creating a social system that oppresses women. Rather, Steve's remark enacts the norm (in the conversational context) that women may be treated as inferiors. His remark alters norms – changes facts about what it is permissible in the conversation to say or convey about women – even if Steve does not intend for his remark to do this, and even though he does not have any special authority.

For McGowan, the structural oppression of women is to be understood as a rule-governed activity. It is a rule-governed activity in the sense

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19   McGowan actually calls these 'covert exercitives'.

20   I use the term *norms* in a descriptive sense to refer to a kind of socially endorsed regularity, which is maintained as a regularity by social endorsement.

21   Mary Kate McGowan, "Oppressive Speech," *Australian Journal of Philosophy* 87, no. 3 (2009): 400.

22   Ibid., 399.

that it is a complex, coordinated system of social interaction. It ranks people and imposes norms, with associated expectations and informal penalties for how people are to be treated in view of their ranking.[23] So understood, the structural oppression of women is not enacted by Steve's remark by itself: Steve's remark alone is not responsible for creating or maintaining the system of social organization governed by norms that prioritize certain of men's interests over women's interests, and which confer certain prerogatives on men. Nevertheless, McGowan argues, Steve's remark activates the oppressive power of the underlying oppressive system of social organization in the local, conversational context.

Just as sexist and racist speech in ordinary conversational contexts enables the underlying structural oppression of women to gain a purchase on particular individuals (men or women) at a particular place and time, so, I want to argue, certain expressions of disgust can activate the oppressive power of the underlying oppressive system of social organization in the local, conversational context. And relevant speakers can do this without intending to alter facts about permissibility or possessing any special authority.

I want to here consider expressions of disgust toward the poor and on economic oppression: oppression of the economically impoverished, least-advantaged members of society. However, my account is meant to be in principle generalizable, applicable to other kinds of identity-based structural oppression given suitable adjustments.

My claim, then, is that an expression of disgust in a conversational context can enact the norm (in the conversational context) that poor people may be treated as inferiors. To be clear, the claim is not that particular expressions of disgust are by themselves responsible for creating or maintaining the system of social organization governed by norms that prioritize the interests of the non-poor over the poor, or which confer certain prerogatives on the non-poor. Rather, the

claim is that conversational disgust can oppress by enacting permissibility facts, providing cues that permit conversational participants to say and do oppressive things to poor people. When someone expresses disgust toward poor people in a conversation, in doing so that speaker makes it appropriate (or more appropriate) in what follows, immediately in the context, to speak degradingly towards the poor and treat them as inferior.

Note that verbal expressions of disgust towards persons differ from verbal expressions of purely subjective feelings like pain in an important respect. When I say "ouch!" after stubbing my toe, I neither represent (nor implicate or presuppose) that my stubbed toe is pain-*worthy*. By contrast, disgust that takes persons as the object implicitly represents or implicates or presupposes (but still does not say or assert) that the object is worthy of disgust.

I am claiming that there is a dimension of normative assessment to disgust toward persons. We may evaluate whether it is *appropriate* for the Brahmin to feel disgust toward the Untouchables; for the 1% to feel disgust towards the homeless; and for Whites to feel disgust at Blacks using the public drinking fountain or swimming in the city pool. Because disgust toward persons has this normative dimension, a speaker who expresses disgust toward a person (or class of persons) not only expresses her disgust at that object but also implicates (without necessarily saying or asserting that) the object ought to be so-responded to. When disgust is expressed toward some person or class of persons, what is signaled to the hearer(s) is that the person or group is inferior – less worthy of equal or full respect and consideration. When the notion that certain persons or groups are second-class is signaled to others, it diminishes their status as persons (or fellow citizens), and is an affront to their dignity. (Importantly, dignity is not simply a matter of their being treated well or poorly, but a matter of how they are treated in light of the attitudes that prevail in their community about their worth, standing, or esteem relative to others – or relative to the community as a whole).

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23   Ibid.

Indeed, I argue even conversational disgust directed not in the first instance, and perhaps not explicitly or consciously, at socially marked groups or members of such groups (such as, women, ethnic minorities, gays, interracial couples, and the homeless) may nonetheless help to create or maintain hierarchical social structures. That is, conversational disgust toward certain *aspects of life* (like choices, options, behaviors, activities, and states of affairs) as opposed to certain *persons* or *groups* may also promote and make permissible attitudes of disgust toward certain persons or groups. Consider expressions of disgust directed in the first instance at certain *aspects of life* that are often associated with certain socially marked groups, but that are at least conceptually distinct from them. For example, in the case of the poor or impoverished: buying clothing at Goodwill; using the public bus system; sending one's child to the underfunded public school; and so on. (It may help to think of the range of things toward which affluent people often take a snobbish attitude). I argue that disgust toward aspects of life intrinsically or contingently linked with being poor and impoverished often ends up as disgust toward poor people. The process may also work in the other direction too – from persons or groups to aspects of life.

Here it might be objected that we can separate out disgust at aspects of life versus disgust at persons or groups. But, even if this is right conceptually (and we can make the distinction in the philosophy seminar), I maintain that as a matter of our everyday psychology the two thoughts are not so hygienically separable. It is, of course, an important and complex task to identify the moral psychological mechanism(s) at play in the slippage between disgust at aspect of life and disgust at persons or groups. Though a complete account here is beyond the scope of this presentation, I suspect it is via *imaginative processes* that disgust towards certain conditions of life gets transferred to the individuals or groups whom we associate with those conditions of life. The imaginative transfer can work in the other direction as well: certain aspects of life associated with the poor

become disgusting because of a kind of generalized disgust towards the poor.

4   Accommodating Disgust

Having considered oppressive illocutionary uses of conversational disgust, I want to turn now to the oppressive perlocutionary effects of conversational disgust. More specifically, I consider the conversational pragmatic mechanisms that may partly underlie the phenomenon of *disgust contagion*. We can think of disgust contagion as a species of the more general phenomenon of *emotion contagion* – the tendency of human beings to "synchronize" their personal emotions with the emotions expressed by those around them. By *disgust contagion*, I mean the social transmission of disgust: the spreading of disgust attitudes in a society or population towards certain objects, including toward oppressed persons and groups. Though disgust is arguably as psychologically and evolutionarily basic an emotion as fear, the case of disgust contagion has received less attention than that of fear contagion.[24] Existing work on disgust contagion has, moreover, tended to focus more on the transmission of disgust attitudes in the developmental context. It has focused on the transmission of disgust attitudes between caregivers and young children (in the general way that young children emotionally respond to items in the same way as caregivers have responded to them) rather than on the transmission of disgust attitudes between autonomous adults.[25]

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24   Consider Hobbes' discussion in *Leviathan* of the infectious character of what he called "panic fear": "fear without apprehension of why or what." In these cases, Hobbes observes, "there is always in him that so feareth first some apprehension of the cause, though the rest run away by example, every one supposing his fellow to know why. And therefore this passion happens to none but in a throng or multitude of people." See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: Revised Edition*, eds. A.P. Martinich and Brian Battiste (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2011), 74.

25   Work on disgust contagion by psychologists and social scientists has tended to focus more on the transmission

Drawing on recent work on cultural evolution to theorize the nature of disgust, Daniel Kelly argues that the psychological mechanisms responsible for the social transmission of disgust involve an instinctive, empathic, non-verbal signaling system: in recognizing that someone nearby is disgusted by something, we ourselves are primed to be disgusted, and so more to come to have the disgust response ourselves.[26] While Kelly (and the psychologists on whom his work draws) might be right that one's recognition of someone else's disgust can lead to sub-conscious facial mimicry (of the facial gape of disgust), it is far from clear that one's such sub-conscious facial mimicry means that one now simply treats the object of that other person's disgust in just the same way oneself. It may be the case that we often "catch" the disgust emotions experienced by those around us instinctively (in the way Kelly suggests). But we should not overstate the extent to which simply registering the disgust response in others triggers the very same kind of reaction in ourselves.[27]

Whatever the role of sub-conscious facial mimicry in the social transmission of disgust attitudes, I want to suggest that verbal signaling also plays an important role in disgust contagion. In particular, I shall appeal to the dynamic communicative process of *presupposition accommodation* to explain how the illocutionary act of expressing disgust can help to create disgust attitudes in people who previously did not feel them, or further entrench them in people who already do to some degree.

Consider the subtle workings of speech acts that implicitly *presuppose* certain facts and norms.[28] What do I mean by "implicitly presuppose?" What are *presuppositions*? Robert Stalnaker characterizes the presupposition as follows:

> The phenomenon is that speakers sometimes treat it as 'already' true that P. A speaker pragmatically presupposes that P ... just in case he is disposed to act, in his linguistic behavior, as if he takes the truth of P for granted, and ... assumes that his audience recognizes that he is doing so. Alternatively, ... he treats it as common ground amongst all parties to the conversation that P.[29]

In other words, presuppositions are propositions taken for granted (at a certain point) in a conversation.

In order for two (or more) people to successfully communicate, they must take certain things for granted as background to their conversation. They must, in other words, presuppose certain things as common ground. Stalnaker says that "to presuppose a proposition in the pragmatic sense is to take its truth for granted, and to assume that others involved in the context do the same....

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of disgust attitudes between caregivers and young children (in the general way that young children emotionally respond to items in the same way as caregivers have responded to them) rather than the transmission of those attitudes between autonomous adults. And it has focused on the interpersonal transmission of disgust attitudes toward *non-social* objects (for example, rotten meat, spoiled food, cockroaches, flies, maggots, fecal matter) rather than on *social* objects (for example, persons, groups, behaviors, practices, living conditions).

26   Daniel Kelly, "Disgust's Sentimental Signaling System: Expression, Recognition, and the Transmission of Cultural Information," in *Yuck!: The Nature and Moral Significance of Disgust* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011).

27   Though psychologists and social scientists have had lots of important things to say about emotion contagion as a general phenomenon – that is, the tendency of human beings to "synchronize" their personal emotions with the emotions expressed by those around them – but comparatively less attention to the specific case of disgust contagion. Another psychologically basic and evolutionarily important emotion that can also be 'contagious' is fear. Fear contagion and its social

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and moral implications have not escaped the notice of philosophers.

28   The following examples are adapted from ones given in Rae Langton and Caroline West, "Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game," *Australian Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 3 (1999): 303–19.

29   Robert Stalnaker, "Presuppositions," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 2, no. 4 (1973): 449.

Presuppositions are propositions implicitly supposed before the relevant linguistic business is transacted."[30] Put in basic terms, the common ground consists of the shared beliefs of the parties to the conversation. The shared beliefs may be wholly tacit. As Stalnaker writes: "presuppositions are probably best viewed as complex dispositions which are manifested in linguistic behavior."[31] So presuppositions often involve something less than full belief: for example, assumption, pretense, and presumption.

Importantly, the common ground is dynamic not static. It changes constantly – on the go – as the conversation unfolds, modifying with each speaker's contribution. For as one party speaks, the other will typically adjust their beliefs (and vice versa), and so the set of shared beliefs on which the conversation relies – the common ground – will also adjust. Kai von Fintel characterizes *presupposition accommodation* as "the process by which the [conversational] context is adjusted quietly and without fuss to accept the utterance of a sentence that imposes certain requirements on the [conversational] context in which it is processed."[32] When an idea or claim is accommodated, a presupposition of the speaker's utterance goes into the "common ground," in order for the hearers to make sense, or best make sense, of what is said.

The basic idea is that in conversations in which we judge each other to be competent and cooperative, we aim to achieve and maintain a kind of shared background – to share presuppositions at least for the purposes of the conversation. For example, if it is clear from my utterance that I am presupposing something, then unless you have reason to suspect my sincerity or credibility, you can legitimately infer the proposition I presuppose, and I can assume that the common ground

has adjusted to include my presupposition, unless you indicate otherwise. To go back to an example I used earlier: if, after hearing me say, "My son plays the violin," you reply, "Oh, I thought you had a daughter," this indicates hesitation to accept the presupposed proposition, "George has a male child." So two points to emphasize here: (1) that what constitutes the common ground in conversation is also always up for constant renegotiation, and (2) conversation conveys information by means other than what is explicitly stated.

A few more examples to clarify the idea of presupposition accommodation: If I say, "The present King of France is bald," what I explicitly say is that the present King of France is bald. But in saying, "The present King of France is bald," I *presuppose* that there is a present King of France, even if I don't explicitly say this. If I say, "Your joke's as bad as Bob's," I presuppose that Bob's jokes are bad, though I never explicitly say so. These presuppositions – that there is a present King of France, that Bob's jokes are bad – are required in order to make sense, or to best make sense, of what I explicitly say.

Another example: Suppose you and I are having a conversation about the current NCAA Basketball tournament. And I say to you, "*Even* Hawaii could win the tournament." In saying this (in using the word *even*), I *presuppose* that Hawaii is not a favored team. Hawaii is not one of the stronger teams in the field, is not the best team to put one's money behind. (And I may be implicitly relying on a belief shared by the parties to the conversation). Now, it can sometimes happen that the introduction of a presupposition can help to create the shared belief, if it was not shared before. If nobody challenges me straightaway with, say, "What do you mean *even* Hawaii could win," the conversation will proceed with the presupposition that Hawaii is a less than ideal candidate.

I should note that changes in the common ground might occur in ways other than presupposition accommodation. There are ways other than *presupposition accommodation* – such as *suggestion* and *conversational implicature* – for

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30   Robert Stalnaker, "Pragmatics," *Synthese* 22, no. 1–2 (1970): 279.

31   Ibid.

32   Kai von Fintel, "What is Presupposition Accommodation, Again?" *Philosophical Perspectives* 22, no. 1 (2008): 137.

conversations to convey information by inexplicit communication. Suppose I say to you, "I just published my *latest* book." You will likely infer that I have published multiple books. Or take Grice's classic example. If I write a letter of recommendation to graduate school for one of my students and spend most of the letter expressing enthusiasm for his handwriting, you may infer that I do not think well of his or her philosophical abilities. (A general point here: Often, we say more by what we don't say than by what we do).

How to distinguish what enters the common ground through implication and what enters through presupposition is a difficult question that I want to sidestep. For the purposes of running my argument, I shall apply the model of presupposition accommodation, but one might also apply the model of implicature. Which approach one adopts matters little, I think, once we have the idea that the common ground can be updated in ways that are not explicit and that the hearer or speaker need not even be consciously aware of.

Rae Langton and Caroline West have argued that when something is introduced as a presupposition, it may be harder to challenge than something that is asserted outright. They write: "A speaker who introduces a proposition as a presupposition thereby suggests that it can be taken for granted: that it is widely known, a matter of shared belief among the participants in the conversation, which does not need to be asserted outright."[33] When I say, "Even John could pass that class…," I convey not simply the message that John is a less than ideal student, but that everyone knows that. Someone who wants to challenge this presupposition faces the cost of contradicting not simply me, the speaker, but the (perceived) general opinion. This is at least in part why it can be more difficult to challenge a presupposition than an outright assertion, and why a hearer's belief can spring into being after the speaker presupposes that belief.

Recent accounts of oppressive speech that appeal to the idea of accommodation have tended to focus on how the common ground of conversation accommodates the moves speakers make, and how the hearers adjust their *beliefs* accordingly.[34] But beliefs are not the only attitudes that are adjusted in the course of a conversation, and which may make up its "common ground." Desires (or, more generally, attitudes like preferences and pro-attitudes with a *world-to-mind* rather than *mind-to-world* direction-of-fit) have an important role here as well.[35] Just as a hearer's belief can spring into being, after the speaker presupposes that belief, so too a hearer's disgust (and more broadly emotions and desires) can spring into being, after the speaker presupposes the hearer's disgust (emotions and desires). Speakers invite hearers not only to join in a shared belief world, but also a shared desire world, and a shared emotion world. Just as speakers can invite hearers to join a shared *belief* world via accommodation, so they can also invite hearers to join a shared *disgust* world via accommodation.

Earlier, I argued that by expressing disgust toward something that is a common aspect of life for members of lower economic classes, a speaker may in effect express disgust and contempt toward the members themselves. And in so doing – given the *slippage* between disgust at the *aspect of life* to disgust at the *person(s)* – the speaker derogates those members, signaling that they are unworthy of equal respect or standing in society. What I'm arguing now is that sometimes conversational expressions of disgust not only signal the speaker's disgust but also *presuppose* it in the hearer. In expressing disgust toward some object in our

33   Langton and West, "Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game," 309.

34   Langton and West, "Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game;" Maitra, "Subordinating Speech;" Ishani Maitra, "Subordination and Objectification," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (2013): 87–100.

35   Rae Langton, "Beyond Belief: Pragmatics in Hate Speech and Pornography," in *Speech and Harm: Controversies over Free Speech*, eds. Ishani Maitra and Mary Kate McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

presence, I (the speaker) may presuppose that you (the hearer) also feel disgust toward that same object. When this occurs, it can result in you too coming to feel disgust toward the same object of my disgust, even when (prior to my utterance) you did not feel disgust toward it. In this way, expressions of disgust can generate (or further reinforce) attitudes of disgust in their hearers, thus *spreading around* in a population disgust attitudes. This disgust contagion can be morally problematic in the cases where the disgust attitudes are directed toward persons or groups, and incompatible with the ideal of equal respect and standing for all.

For example: Suppose a group of us are deliberating where to go for lunch during an academic conference, and I say "yuck," expressing my disgust at the idea of going to McDonalds. This expression of disgust may very well involve or end up becoming a kind of disgust towards the people who eat McDonalds food (or those we tend to associate with eating at McDonalds; or those for whom going to McDonalds counts as a special occasion or treat). Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that these are people from the lower-economic classes.[36] By taking it for granted that you also feel disgust towards eating at McDonalds, I can subtly (and perhaps even unknowingly) invite you to also feel disgust towards eating at McDonalds, even if eating at McDonalds is not something you antecedently felt disgust towards. The expression of disgust toward the prospect of eating at McDonalds can sometimes shade into a kind of disgust expressed towards the people associated with eating at McDonalds. And furthermore, an individual's sense of disgust, when expressed to a hearer in a conversation, can lead to a jointly or more collectively shared sense of disgust.

Some people, perhaps by virtue of their place in a social hierarchy, will have more power and influence to lead others to feel disgust towards the same objects that they feel disgust towards. This can often be true even if these people do not intend or set out to bring about the shared disgust attitudes in others. Consider the power of "acting as if," as described by Richmond Thomason:

> Acting as if we don't have a flat tire won't repair the flat; acting as if we know the way to our destination won't get us there. Unless we believe in magic, the inanimate world is not accommodating. But people can be accommodating, and in fact there are many social situations in which the best way to get what we want is to act as if we already had it. Leadership in an informal group is a good case. Here is an all-too-typical situation: you are at an academic convention, and the time comes for dinner. You find yourself a member of a group of eight people who, like you, have no special plans. No one wants to eat in the hotel, so the group moves out the door and into the street. At this point a group decision has to be made. There is a moment of indecision and then someone takes charge, asks for suggestions about restaurants, decides on one, and asks someone to get two cabs while she calls to make reservations. When no one objects to this arrangement, she became the group leader, and obtained a certain authority. She did this by acting as if she had the authority; and the presence of a rule saying that those without authority should not assume it is shown by the fact that assuming authority involved a certain risk. Someone could have objected, saying "Who do you think you are, deciding where to go for us?" And the objection would have had a certain force.[37]

Applied to the case of disgust, simply acting-as-if the other parties in the conversation share

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36 If you do not like this example, a different *aspect of life* to your liking may serve.

37 Richmond Thomason, "Accommodation, Meaning, and Implicature: Interdisciplinary Foundations for Pragmatics," in *Intentions in Communication*, eds. Philip Cohen, Jerry Morgan and Martha Pollack (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 342–3.

the same disgust attitudes as one can become self-fulfilling. Even if the others do not share the disgust, one's acting as-if the other parties do can help to create the shared disgust.

There are, of course, related difficult questions I cannot fully address here about the moral psychological mechanisms that account for the slippage from disgust at aspects of life associated with certain groups and persons to disgust at the persons or groups themselves. It is worth pointing out that, even if conceptually (or in the philosophy seminar) we can separate out disgust at aspects of life versus disgust at persons, as a matter of psychological practice in everyday life the two thoughts are not so hygienically separable. In other words, disgust towards certain conditions of life gets *transferred* (via the imagination?) to the individuals or groups whom we associate with those conditions of life.[38]

5 Conclusion

I have argued that conversational expressions of disgust toward the poor (or toward certain aspects of life associated with the poor) can activate in the local, conversational context the oppressive power of the underlying economically oppressive system of our society. That is, conversational disgust can oppress by enacting permissibility facts that make it appropriate (or more appropriate) for individuals to say and do oppressive things to poor people. I have also argued that conversational expression of disgust towards the poor or towards relevant aspects of life (e.g., eating at McDonalds) can function to socially transmit disgust attitudes

toward the poor. In particular, the process of accommodating (presupposed) disgust attitudes in conversational contexts plays an important role in the phenomenon of disgust contagion.

If my arguments are successful, there are important ethical implications. We should pay attention to how seemingly morally-neutral attitudes of disgust toward certain aspects of life may naturally slip into disgust toward certain persons and groups; and how those attitudes, when verbally expressed, may spread in a population, thereby generating or maintaining structures of oppression. Of course, we cannot always fully control our disgust responses, just as we cannot control our beliefs (in the sense that belief is not under the will). But we certainly have greater, even if not complete, control over our verbal expressions of disgust in a conversational context. Being mindful of the fact that some of our feelings of disgust may be tainted by biases that are the direct result of being the privileged beneficiaries of the social structures of oppression, and that the outward expression of these feelings may help to perpetuate the structures of oppression, we need to acknowledge that we have a duty to take due care – a duty to be non-negligent – with respect to self-regulating our outward expressions of disgust. And we have this moral duty, even if for reasons of enforcement and feasibility there can be no such legal duty.

I have been focusing on how disgust toward certain persons or groups is socially harmful, how those who feel the disgust cordon themselves off from those toward whom the disgust is felt. In closing, I want to also register the 'flip side' of this phenomenon: the fact that disgust can create and sustain solidarity within a group. John Deigh observes that:

> With regard to disgust, the phenomenon manifests itself in shared revulsion at actions and people who betray the beliefs, norms, and ideals of a group to which its subjects belong and with which they strongly identify. When people who belong to a group thereby

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38 There is also the related worry that the attempt to draw the conceptual separation when confronted with actual case (outside of the philosophy seminar room) of feeling disgust toward something would be self-deceptive, would actually just be to enact (or re-enact) one's oppressive bias. After all, if my feelings of disgust are tainted by those biases I have developed from living a privileged life, then why would my attempts to separate out disgust towards general aspects of life from disgust toward persons and groups not also be so tainted?

share beliefs, norms, and ideals, when they subscribe to the same faith and support the same practices, then members who break faith with them or subvert their practices, have, if only symbolically, weakened the group. They have compromised, as it were, the group's integrity, and such compromises of integrity are seen as corruption and even defilement. Politicians in a representative democracy who abuse the public's trust by trading votes for personal gain subvert the democracy in which they serve. Athletes who cheat to gain an edge on their competition damage the integrity of the sports in which they compete. The corruption, in either case, makes them objects of disgust on the part of the members of the relevant community, fellow citizens in the case of the corrupt politicians, teammates and opponents, their assistants and fans, in the case of the corrupt athletes. For corruption sullies the values and ideals for which the group stands, and the judgment of being tainted in consequence gives rise to disgust at the offending actions and the offenders who did them.[39]

The fact that disgust can help to create and sustain the shared beliefs, norms, and ideals of oppressive social structures is thus linked to the fact that disgust can create and sustain solidarity within a group, solidarity between those sharing in disgust feelings toward the same objects, persons, or groups. That disgust is solidarity- and community-enabling for those who share the emotion is closely connected with why shared disgust attitudes toward certain others can help to form or maintain social hierarchy, or relations of social superiority and inferiority between classes of individuals in a society: the fact that it is structured in a way such that some people are "above" and others "below."

Consider the insightful observations of Simone de Beauvoir regarding our desire to become part of an *Us*, as opposed to a *Them*:

> Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself. If three travellers chance to occupy the same compartment, that is enough to make vaguely hostile 'others' out of all the rest of the passengers on the train ...[40]

I take from this passage the idea that a desire to be in a group is closely tied to a desire that certain others be out of the group. Group membership is established in part by barring certain others from being part of the group, and viewing them with disgust and contempt. As social creatures, we care greatly about being members of an in-group, and that being members of an in-group helps us get a certain sort of esteem and positive-regard we seek. Membership of an in-group brings with it the rewards of approval from other insiders – and that itself is achieved in part through disgust and contempt for outsiders. But this, of course, is deeply morally problematic.

Bringing down existing oppression and social hierarchies requires not just changing our beliefs but also taking due care with respect to what emotions and desires we express in the presence of others, and what emotions and desires we presuppose in those with whom we are in conversation. But of course, in the context of *social oppression*, this is something many of us must already know on some level. However, we would do better to not so easily forget that making the world a morally better place requires both changing our hearts and minds, and changing what and how we express our hearts and minds.

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39   John Deigh, *Emotions, Values, and the Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 119–20.

40   Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 16–17.