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The speech acts account of derogatory epithets: some critical notes

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Pascal's research interests are extremely comprehensive, venturing into many fields and touching many interdisciplinary themes, often with an uncommon attention to the civil and public relevance of philosophical issues. I hope, then, that he won't dislike the – in many ways so unlikeable – topic of this paper.

1. Introduction

Derogatory epithets are terms such as 'nigger', 'bitch' and 'faggot' targeting individuals and groups of individuals on the basis of race, nationality, religion, gender or sexual orientation. In recent years they have become an inspiring object of analysis in research fields as diverse as philosophy of language, linguistics, ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of law, feminist philosophy and critical race theory.¹ There is no consensus on the best treatment of derogatory epithets: each theory accounts for certain intuitions, but none seems completely satisfactory. The aim of my paper is to evaluate a proposal recently put forward by Rae Langton, the speech acts account (SAA). Assessing SAA is far from an easy task, since the proposal is little more than an outline, deeply intertwined with Langton's general view on hate speech and pornography. My goal is first of all to disentangle a coherent account from Langton's observations, mostly in Langton 2012 and Langton, Haslanger & Anderson 2012; second, I will raise and partially address some key objections against it. I will argue that, although SAA gives us significant insights into a number of phenomena, it is in need of a clearer formulation and further investigation.

2. Strategies of treatment of derogatory epithets

Derogatory epithets (from now on I will use the term 'epithets' for short) target individuals and groups of individuals on the basis of race, nationality, religion, gender or sexual orientation. They generally have a neutral counterpart, i.e. a non-derogatory term possessing at least the same extension of the derogatory one: 'nigger' and 'African-American' or 'black', 'bitch' and 'woman', 'faggot' and 'male homosexual'.

There are several alternative taxonomies of treatments of epithets. I will adopt here a classification in three perspectives: semantic, pragmatic and deflationary.

a) From a semantic perspective the derogatory content of an epithet is part of its conventional meaning (i.e. part of the truth-conditions of the sentence containing the term); therefore it is expressed in every (nonfigurative or ironic) context of utterance. In a simplified version, the meaning of 'nigger' may be expressed as 'African-American and despicable because of it' (Hom 2008:

¹ Dummett 1973: 454; Kaplan 1999, Hornsby 2001, Hom 2008, Potts 2008, Richard 2008, Williamson 2009, Predelli 2010, Anderson and Lepore 2011.

416). This strategy accounts for the largely shared intuition that epithets *say* offensive and derogatory things. In other words, the sentence

(1) Tom is a nigger

(having as a neutral counterpart

(2) Tom is an African-American)

says something we may paraphrase with

(3) Tom is an African-American and despicable because of it.

b) According to the pragmatic perspective,² the derogatory content of an epithet doesn't contribute to the truth-conditions of the sentence containing it, but is merely conveyed in context. The pragmatic perspective is usually spelled out in terms of presuppositions, tone or conventional implicatures. According to the strategy in terms of presuppositions, the offensive content of (1) isn't expressed or said but merely presupposed. According to the strategy in terms of Fregean tone, 'nigger' and 'African-American' are synonymous, and differ only in coloring or connotation. Finally, according to the strategy in terms of implicatures, (1) and (2) have the same truth-conditions, and the offensive content of an epithet may be assimilated to a conventional implicature.

c) The deflationary perspective opposes both strategies working in terms of content (a) and b)). There is no difference in content (expressed or implicitly conveyed) between 'nigger' and 'African-American': (1) and (2) have the same meaning. In a deflationary perspective, derogatory epithets are prohibited words not in virtue of any content they express or communicate, but rather because of edicts surrounding their prohibition – issued by relevant entities (targeted members, groups, or institutions).³ Deflationists like Anderson and Lepore take a *silentist* stance: they suggest removing epithets from language until their offensive potential fades away, and avoiding any use or mention of them in any context, including so-called pedagogical contexts, where the speaker makes explicit the derogatory import of epithets or objects to discriminatory discourse.⁴

² I adopt here Hom's label 'pragmatic' to indicate strategies claiming that the derogatory content does not contribute to the truth-conditions of the sentence containing them (Hom 2008: 416). More particularly, I dub the strategies in terms of conventional implicatures and presuppositions 'pragmatic', although their (semantic or pragmatic) status is far from settled.

³ Anderson and Lepore 2011: 16: '*once relevant individuals declare a word a slur, it becomes one*'.

⁴ Anderson and Lepore 2011: 16: '*A use, mention, or interaction with a slur, ceteris paribus (...), constitutes an infraction*'. On pedagogical contexts see *infra*, §3.

3. Adequacy conditions

Over the last fifteen years scholars working on epithets have identified a number of features characterizing how derogatory terms work in our ordinary conversations: these very features constitute a set of adequacy conditions that any satisfactory strategy of treatment of epithets must meet. For present purposes I will adopt Christopher Hom's list of features.⁵

1. *Derogatory force: Epithets forcefully convey hatred and contempt of their targets.* Epithets are generally perceived as more offensive than pejoratives (terms like 'stupid', targeting individuals and not groups of people).
2. *Derogatory variation: The force of derogatory content varies across different epithets.* Some epithets are perceived as more offensive than others: 'nigger' is considered by many the most insulting racial epithet in the USA.⁶
3. *Derogatory autonomy: The derogatory force for any epithet is independent of the attitudes of any of its particular speakers.* A speaker uttering a derogatory epithet expresses or conveys hatred or contempt towards an individual and a group of individuals independently of her beliefs or intentions.⁷
4. *Taboo: Uses of epithets are subject to strict social constraints, if not outright forbidden.* According to semantic and pragmatic perspectives, uses of epithets are acceptable only within quotations, fictional contexts, appropriation (see *infra*, 7). According to the deflationary perspective, there are no acceptable uses of epithets, and the taboo extends even to expressions that are phonologically similar but semantically unrelated.⁸
5. *Meaningfulness.* According to Hom 'Sentences with epithets normally express complete, felicitous, propositions' (Hom 2008: 427). In what follows, I will return to the alleged felicity of the speech acts performed with sentences containing epithets.
6. *Evolution: The meaning and force of epithets evolve over time to reflect the values and social dynamics of its speakers.* Expressions like 'gay' or 'Tory' were insulting in the past but are no longer perceived as offensive.

⁵ Hom 2008: 426-430. Quotations from Hom are in italics.

⁶ For a more cautious opinion, see Jeshion 2011.

⁷ Cf. Alston 2000: 103-13 and Hornsby 2001: 138.

⁸ Cf. the term "niggardly" (Kennedy 2003: 94-97). *The New Oxford American Dictionary* warns that the terms "niggard" and "niggardly" may cause unintended offense.

7. *Appropriation: Targeted members or groups may appropriate their own slurs for non-derogatory purposes, in order to demarcate the group, and show a sense of intimacy and solidarity – as in the appropriation of ‘nigger’ by the African-American community, or the appropriation of ‘gay’ and ‘queer’ by the homosexual community.*
8. *NDNA uses: Epithets can occur in nonderogatory, nonappropriated (NDNA) contexts. According to Hom there are acceptable uses of epithets in so-called pedagogical contexts, where the speaker is objecting to discriminatory discourse, like:*
 - (4) Institutions that treat Chinese people as chinks are racist,
 - (5) There are no chinks; racists are wrong,
 - (6) Chinese people are not chinks,
 - (7) Yao Ming is Chinese, but he’s not a chink.⁹
9. *Generality: The account of derogatory force for epithets needs to generalize to similar language; for example, sexist, gender-biasing, religious epithets and approbative terms.*

4. The speech acts account (SAA)

I previously stated that there is no consensus on the best account of derogatory epithets. There are indeed well-known problems with all three perspectives: for an overview of the main difficulties of the semantic, pragmatic and deflationary perspectives see respectively Anderson & Lepore 2011, Hom 2008 and Bianchi 2014. Each perspective accounts for certain intuitions, but none seems completely satisfactory; hence, it may be worthwhile to examine an alternative account belonging to the pragmatic perspective, recently put forward by Rae Langton. Drawing on Austin’s speech acts theory, Langton focuses not on what derogatory epithets *say*, but on what they *do*. The derogatory content of an epithet isn’t part of its conventional meaning: epithets are expressions used to do things, to perform certain speech acts.

As is well known, Austin emphasizes the performative dimension present in any use of language: with a famous slogan, ‘to say something is to do something’. Within the same total speech act – the uttering of a sentence like

⁹ Hom, 2008: 429. Predelli 2010 rightly classifies (7) as offensive and suggests adopting the sentence resulting from omission of the contrastive conjunction: (7’) *Yao Ming is Chinese, not a chink.*

(8) Stay here!

Austin distinguishes three different acts: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. The *locutionary* act is the act of saying something, the act of uttering certain expressions, well-formed from a syntactic point of view and meaningful. The *illocutionary* act corresponds to the act performed in performing a locutionary act, to the particular force that an utterance like (8) has in a particular context: order, request, entreaty, challenge, and so on. According to Austin, by uttering a sentence we can bring about new facts, "as distinguished from producing consequences in the sense of bringing about states of affairs in the 'normal' way, i.e. changes in the natural course of events" (Austin 1975: 117): by uttering a sentence we may undertake obligations and legitimate attitudes and behaviors, institute new conventions and sometimes even modify the social reality. The *perlocutionary* act corresponds to the effects brought about by performing an illocutionary act, to its consequences (intentional or non-intentional) on the feelings, thoughts or actions of the participants.

Following Catharine MacKinnon 1987, Langton identifies a particular kind of illocutionary act: acts of *subordination*. An utterance of

(9) Blacks are not permitted to vote

in South Africa in order to enact legislation that reinforces apartheid may be conceived as an illocutionary act of subordination: it makes it the case that blacks are not permitted to vote. The same holds for a sign reading

(10) Whites only (MacKinnon 1987: 202).

According to Langton, the sign counts as an illocutionary speech act, ranking blacks as inferior, depriving them of certain important powers, demeaning and denigrating them, and legitimating discriminatory behavior: "it orders blacks away, welcomes whites, permits whites to act in a discriminatory way towards blacks. It subordinates blacks" (Langton 1993/2009: 35).

Moreover, Austin's framework is exploited by Langton in order to offer a defence of MacKinnon's controversial claim that pornography *subordinates* women by violating their civil right to equal civil status, and *silences* them by violating their civil right to freedom of speech.¹⁰ According to Langton works of pornography can be understood as *speech acts* of subordinating women and silencing women.¹¹ More precisely, works of pornography may be conceived as speech acts in two distinct senses:

¹⁰ See MacKinnon 1987.

¹¹ Cf. Langton 1993, Hornsby and Langton 1998, West 2003.

- as *perlocutionary* acts that cause subordination, and produce changes in attitudes and behaviours, including discrimination, oppression and violence;
- as *illocutionary* acts that can in themselves subordinate women, legitimate attitudes and behaviours of discrimination, advocate oppression and violence.

Further extending her view on pornography to racial and hate speech, Langton argues that epithets are expressions used to do things, to perform certain speech acts: “Austin’s distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts offers a way to distinguish speech that *constitutes* racial oppression, and speech that *causes* racial oppression”.¹² As in the case of pornography, speech acts performed with the help of epithets may then be conceived as speech acts in two distinct senses:

- as *perlocutionary* acts that *cause* discrimination, and produce changes in attitudes and behaviours, including oppression and violence;
- as *illocutionary* acts that *constitute* racial or gender discrimination, legitimate beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of discrimination, advocate oppression and violence.

Let us consider the illocutionary thesis in more detail.

5. Three classes of illocutionary acts

According to SAA, derogatory epithets are apt for performing certain illocutionary speech acts. More precisely, Langton outlines a distinction between three classes of illocutions that S can perform by using a derogatory expression.

- a. Assault-like speech acts such as *persecuting* and *degrading*. By using an epithet S may directly attack, persecute or degrade her targets. Epithets are here “weapons of verbal abuse” (Richard 2008): the focus is on the targeted group and individuals. By uttering (1),

¹² Langton, Haslanger & Anderson 2012: 758. They underline that a similar approach is already present in Richard 2008 (a supporter of the expressivist view), p. 1: ‘what makes a word a slur is that it is used to do certain things, that it has... a certain illocutionary potential’.

S isn't merely *asserting* something, but performing an illocutionary speech act of persecuting, degrading or threatening – an act directed towards Tom and all blacks.

b. Propaganda-like speech acts as *inciting* and *promoting* racial discrimination, hate and violence. Shifting the focus from targets to addressees (“prospective haters”¹³) S's utterance of (1) may be regarded as an act of propaganda, an act that incites and promotes racial oppression.¹⁴

c. Authoritative subordinating speech acts as *enacting* a system of racial oppression: derogatory expressions are used to classify people as inferior, to legitimate racial oppression, religious or gender discrimination, to deprive minorities of powers and rights.

6. Objections to SAA

As mentioned in the Introduction, evaluating SAA is far from an easy task. The proposal is little more than an outline, deeply intertwined with Langton's general view on hate speech and pornography. In this paragraph I will raise and partially address some key objections: my ultimate goal is to disentangle a coherent account from Langton's observations.

1. According to SAA, by uttering sentences containing derogatory epithets, S may perform a variety of acts of subordination: persecuting her targets (a), promoting racial oppression (b) or legitimizing behaviors of discrimination (c). Is Langton saying that the *mere presence* of an epithet makes (1), say, an act of persecution? Is the epithet a sort of illocutionary force indicating device (IFID)? Langton doesn't explicitly make this suggestion, but such a claim would actually fit well within Austin's conventionalist framework. Austin characterizes the illocutionary act as the *conventional* aspect of language (to be contrasted with the perlocutionary act). For any speech act “there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances” (condition A.1, Austin 1975, p. 14): if the conventional procedure is executed according to further conditions, the act is successfully

¹³ Langton, Haslanger & Anderson 2012: 758.

¹⁴ “Promoting” may be understood in a perlocutionary, causal sense, and in an illocutionary, constitutive sense: cf. Langton 2012, p. 130: “‘promote’ is a verb that straddles both sides of Austin's distinction”.

performed. Illocutionary acts are – *inter alia* – performed via conventional devices (like linguistic conventions): in this framework epithets may be regarded as conventional devices apt for performing acts of persecution.¹⁵

2. Langton spells out what kind of speech acts fall under c., but is far less explicit about a. and b.

Using Austin's taxonomy, Langton classifies authoritative subordinating speech acts (c.) as verdictives or exercitives. In the class of verdictives Austin includes acts (formal or informal, and concerning facts or values) of giving a verdict, estimate or appraisal (such as acquitting, reckoning, assessing, diagnosing). In the class of exercitives Austin includes acts of exerting powers, rights or influence (such as appointing, voting, ordering, warning). In Langton's view, derogatory expressions are used

- to classify people as inferior (verdictives: "a judgment that it is so", Austin 1975: 155),¹⁶
- to legitimate racial oppression, religious or gender discrimination, to deprive minorities of powers and rights (exercitives "a decision that something is to be so", Austin 1975: 155).

I suggest classifying a. and b. along the same lines:

Assault-like speech acts (a.) may be seen as verdictives, "a judgment that it is so". In other words, to perform an assault-like speech act amounts to assigning an institutional status (inferior) to a natural fact (being black).

Propaganda-like speech acts (b.) may be seen as exercitives, "a decision that something is to be so". To perform a propaganda-like speech act amounts to creating (or reinforcing) a new institutional fact (the subordination of blacks).¹⁷

3. It is unclear whether a. and b. are two distinct speech acts at all, or the same speech act as perceived by – or directed to – different audiences: its

¹⁵ There is a potential objection: it is widely held that any expression serving as an indicator of illocutionary force must be without semantic content (Stenius 1967, 258–259). Nonetheless, Green 2000, in accounting for the behavior of a range of parenthetical expressions, argues for the idea that a part of speech can simultaneously have semantic content and indicate force.

¹⁶ While Austin distinguishes between *Expositives* (acts that clarify reasons, arguments, or communications) such as describe, class, identify, call and *Verdictives* such as diagnose and describe (where describe appears in two different categories), Searle admits only one class of "assertive illocutionary verbs": Searle 1979, p. 25. Cf. Berdini and Bianchi 2013, Sbisà 2001 and 2013.

¹⁷ Cf. Bach and Harnish 1979.

targets (a.) and so-called prospective haters (b.).¹⁸ Langton is aware of this possibility, but focuses only on propaganda acts used as assault acts: "The distinction here [between assault and propaganda] is a context-sensitive one. Propaganda aimed at turning its hearers into racists could also be used as an attack on an individual" (Langton 2012, p. 131). In my opinion, the reverse case is equally interesting in this context: assault acts may be regarded as propaganda acts. By uttering (1), S is not simply attacking Tom and all blacks, but also promoting racial hatred and discrimination: (1) *constitutes* an incitement to discrimination, directed to addressees and bystanders.

4. Langton claims that hate speech is typically *a more ordinary illocution as well*: "it asserts that there is a Jewish conspiracy... orders blacks to keep away".¹⁹ She seems to extend her claim to utterances containing epithets and argue that S is performing an act of subordination *by asserting* (1). This is common in other cases: we use assertions like 'I will come to your party' in order to perform acts of promising. Someone may object that in this way, subordinating speech acts must be conceived as *indirect* speech acts. However, as in the case of promises, SAA isn't committed to such a conclusion; as Kissine points out, "the fact that an utterance corresponds to the performance of two speech acts does not necessarily imply that one of them is indirect. Arguably, a speech act is indirect only if its content is distinct from that of the corresponding direct speech act".²⁰

5. Another powerful objection concerns "authoritative speech acts"; for the sake of simplicity, let's focus on exercitives.²¹ According to Langton, speech acts performed via epithets are exercitives – illocutions conferring or taking away rights or privileges, i.e. fixing what is permissible in a certain domain. Langton further claims that speech acts performed via epithets enact permissibility conditions that *subordinate* blacks because they i) unfairly rank blacks as having inferior worth; ii) legitimate discriminatory behavior towards blacks; iii) unjustly deprive blacks of certain important powers.

According to Austin, exercitives (and verdictives) are "authoritative speech acts": they presuppose that the speaker has a certain kind of authority or influence. In other words, authority is a crucial *felicity condition* for subordinating

¹⁸ We should, perhaps, investigate whether other speech acts (like *teasing*) exhibit the same pattern.

¹⁹ Langton, Haslanger & Anderson 2012: 758.

²⁰ Kissine 2013: 177.

²¹ McGowan 2003 argues convincingly that verdictives may be reduced to exercitives.

speech acts. Yet, in most cases, speakers using epithets lack formal authority: (1) may be uttered in an ordinary conversation by an ordinary speaker. In order to account for this objection, Langton addresses the question along the same lines as the analysis of pornography – relying on McGowan’s model of conversational exercitives.²² According to McGowan 2003, any conversational contribution invokes rules of accommodation in Lewis’ sense, and therefore changes the bounds of what is permitted in that conversation (in this sense, it is an exercitive). Hence, an utterance of (1) changes what is permissible in that conversation. The question of authority is less critical as far as conversational exercitives are concerned: the authority required of S is limited to the relevant domain, and any conversational participant must have authority over the actual conversation in which she is contributing: "It is clear that a competent contributor to a conversation is an authority over the conversation that he or she is creating".²³

This solution has some unwelcome consequences. First, McGowan holds that all speech is, in some way, exercitive. She denies that this has the result of trivializing exercitive force; nevertheless, her claim seems bound to undermine Langton’s thesis about speech that has the power to subordinate. Second, conversational exercitives seem to enact permissibility facts that are "easily reversible". Third, each conversational participant "seems just as able to change the permissibility facts of the conversation as any other participant".²⁴ These are three features we don’t want to ascribe to subordinating speech acts.

6. One last point. Apparently, no peculiar authority is required in order to successfully perform an act of persecuting (a), promoting racial oppression (b) and legitimizing behaviors of discrimination (c). Langton doesn’t specify when (if ever) acts of persecution, propaganda or subordination are *infelicitous*. What are the felicity conditions of acts of subordination?

7. SAA and conditions of adequacy

In §3 I presented a number of features characterizing the behavior of derogatory terms: these features constitute a set of adequacy conditions that any

²² Cf. MacKinnon: "authoritatively *saying* someone is inferior is largely how structures of status and differential treatment are demarcated and actualized" (MacKinnon 1993 *Only words*, p. 31). Actually, Austinian exercitives have many features that do not fit well with Langton’s claim: see McGowan 2003, pp. 164-169.

²³ McGowan 2003, p. 180.

²⁴ McGowan 2003, p. 187.

satisfactory account of epithets must meet. In this paragraph I will briefly examine whether SAA meets Hom's adequacy conditions.

1. *Derogatory force: Epithets forcefully convey hatred and contempt of their targets.*

According to SSA, using an epithet is far more insulting than using a pejorative like "stupid". As a matter of fact, by uttering sentences containing derogatory epithets, S may perform illocutionary acts of subordination: persecuting her targets (a), promoting racial oppression (b) or legitimizing behaviors of discrimination (c).

2. *Derogatory variation: The force of derogatory content varies across different epithets.*

Some epithets are perceived as more offensive than others: the derogatory force varies with the strength of the discriminatory system that acts of subordination contribute to enact and reinforce. It is crucial to SAA that uses of derogatory epithets are but an ingredient of a more comprehensive subordinating system.

3. *Derogatory autonomy: The derogatory force for any epithet is independent of the attitudes of any of its particular speakers.* According to SAA, by uttering a derogatory epithet, S performs an act of subordination towards an individual and a group of individuals independently of her beliefs or intentions. We have said that in an Austinian framework illocutionary acts are performed – *inter alia* – via conventional devices or linguistic conventions. More particularly, epithets may be regarded as conventional devices apt for performing acts of persecution, autonomous from the beliefs, attitudes and intentions of individual speakers.

4. *Taboo: Uses of epithets are subject to strict social constraints, if not outright forbidden.* Because epithets are conventional devices apt for performing acts of persecution, there are rigid social limitations ruling their use. Their use is appropriate only in quotations, fictional contexts and appropriation.

5. *Meaningfulness: Sentences with epithets normally express complete, felicitous, propositions.* The felicity of the *speech acts* (and not of the *propositions*, as Hom erroneously holds) performed with sentences containing epithets cannot be presupposed but must be argued for. Langton herself doesn't specify

the felicity conditions of acts of subordination, and seems to hold that acts performed with sentences containing epithets are always felicitous.

6. *Evolution: The meaning and force of epithets evolve over time to reflect the values and social dynamics of its speakers.*

We have said that epithets are devices used to enact and reinforce more comprehensive systems of oppression: those very systems may evolve over time, leading to changes in the derogatory force of the acts of subordination associated with them.

7. *Appropriation.* Targeted members or groups may appropriate their own slurs for non-derogatory purposes, in order to demarcate the group, and show a sense of intimacy and solidarity. I have argued elsewhere that appropriated uses may be conceived as echoic uses, in Relevance Theory terms: in-groups echo derogatory uses in ways and contexts that make manifest the dissociation from the offensive contents.²⁵ A second approach that SAA could adopt treats appropriation as a type of *pretense*. On this approach, a targeted member uttering (1) in an appropriated context is not performing an act of subordination but merely pretending to perform an act of subordination, while expecting her audience to see through the pretense and recognize the critical or derisive attitude behind it.²⁶

8. *NDNA uses: Epithets can occur in nonderogatory, nonappropriated (NDNA) contexts.* SAA focuses not on what derogatory epithets *say*, but on what they *do*. In NDNA contexts the speaker isn't performing acts of subordination, but completely different speech acts: *objecting* to discriminatory discourse, *pointing out* the racist contents carried by epithets, *denouncing* the racist, misogynist, homophobic presuppositions that come with ordinary uses of epithets. Of course Langton owes us a detailed explanation of how a conventional device for subordination may be put to a new, non-derogatory, use.

9. *Generality: The account of derogatory force for epithets needs to generalize to similar language; for example, sexist, gender-biasing, religious epithets and approbative terms.*

²⁵ See Bianchi 2014. My echoic account suggests a solution compatible with the semantic and the pragmatic perspectives, that is with strategies of treatment of epithets in terms of content (expressed or conveyed).

²⁶ See Walton 1990.

More than alternative views, SAA provides us with a general framework for hate speech: derogatory expressions are used to classify people as inferior, to legitimate racial oppression, religious or gender discrimination, to deprive minorities of powers and rights. Furthermore, SAA offers a straightforward explanation for *approbative terms* as “angel”, “blessed”, “stud”, “goddess” (Hom, 2008: 439): approbative terms are terms apt for performing acts of approval, praise and commendation.

8. Conclusion

The aim of my paper was to evaluate the speech acts account, recently put forward by Rae Langton. Assessing SAA is a challenging task for at least two reasons. First of all, the account is little more than a draft, not fully developed in its consequences and assumptions. Second, the model is deeply intertwined with Langton’s arguments against pornography: it inevitably inherits some of the weaknesses of her general view on hate speech. I have argued that SAA needs a clearer formulation and further investigation. Nonetheless I hope to have shown that the proposal has interesting advantages over alternative views, gives us significant insights into a number of phenomena and certainly deserves careful consideration and further development.

9. References

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