

The Context of Hate

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Drawing on Austin's speech act theory, many influential scholars view hate speech in terms of speech acts, namely acts of subordination (MacKinnon 1987; Langton 1993, 2012, 2014, 2017; Hornsby and Langton 1998; McGowan 2003, 2004; Kukla and Lance 2009; Langton, Haslanger and Anderson 2012; Maitra 2012; Kukla 2014). Austin's distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts offers a way to set apart speech that constitutes subordination, and speech that merely causes subordination. The aim of my paper is to address the main objection to accounts of hate speech in terms of illocutionary speech acts, that is the Authority Problem. In particular, I will claim that what is missing from previous proposals is attention to the context in which ordinary instances of hate speech are embedded, and in particular, attention to the social status of both the speaker and the audience. While the social position of the speaker has been examined by several approaches, the social position of the audience has too often been neglected. I will show that not only must the speaker have a certain kind of standing or social position in order to perform speech acts of subordination, but also the audience must have a certain kind of standing or social position in order to either license or object to the speaker's authority, and her acts of subordination.