

Blasphemy and Pornography as Speech Acts

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What is a speech act?

Locution conveys meaning;

Perlocution achieves effect;

Illocution does something.

NB: All speech acts are *still* speech, although *also* acts.
Cf. some, especially legal, usage.

Locution He said to me, 'You can't do that'.

Perlocution He pulled me up, checked me.
He stopped me, he brought me to my senses, &c.
He annoyed me.

Illocution He protested against my doing it.

What sort of speech act is blasphemy?

- 1 Perlocution: Offending the Gods?
 - BUT will not convince non-believers.
- 2 Perlocution: Offending the devout?
 - BUT why should they not to be offended?
- 3 Illocution: Profaning the sacred?
 - O.K. where the concept of sacred is prescriptive,
 - BUT will not appear wrong to those who do not share it.

Pornographic speech acts

Catharine Mackinnon:

'the lie that pornography is speech' (*Only Words*).

BUT

As reconstructed by Rae Langton:

- Illocution: Constructs 'social reality of what a woman is';
- Illocution: Subordinates women;
- Illocution: Silences women.

Silencing

- Locutionary suppression;
- Perlocutionary frustration;
- Illocutionary silencing.

Two questions:

- 1 Which (if any) silencing is defensible?
- 2 Does pornography/blasphemy itself silence?

“No one pretends that actions should be as free as opinions. On the contrary, even opinions lose their immunity, when the circumstances in which they are expressed are such as to constitute their expression a positive instigation to some mischievous act. An opinion that corn-dealers are starvers of the poor, or that private property is robbery, ought to be unmolested when simply circulated through the press, but may incur just punishment when delivered. . . to an excited mob assembled before the house of a corn-dealer, or when handed about among the same mob in the form of a placard.”