

### **Freedom of speech should be defended**

Many people's initial impression of freedom of speech comes from this famous quote by Hall (1906): "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." (p. 137) Strictly speaking, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." (United Nations, 1948) This essay will argue for the preservation of free speech through four aspects: it advances scientific innovation and cultural change, facilitates individual self-realization, defends social democracy, and promotes tolerance in society.

Firstly, freedom of expression can drive technological innovation and cultural evolution. In arguing for the importance of freedom, the civil libertarian Mill (1859) emphasized that "it is important to give the freest scope possible to uncouth things, in order that it may in time appear which of these are fit to be converted into customs." (p. 59) When ideas can flow freely, the cultural evolution he describes is most effective. Thinkers, such as scientists and philosophers, can only approach the truth in the context of diversity from different backgrounds, considering all hypotheses and ideas, no matter whether they like or dislike. Cultural change requires the push of diversity and free speech to create variation in communication and choice. According to Molnár (2015), throughout history, members of the creative community have been on the front lines of defending the right to free speech time and time again (p. 7). The result has been the formation of a vibrant and dynamic marketplace of ideas. Thus, the protection of freedom of expression safeguards a valuable "marketplace of ideas" that serves the general interest of humanity (Bychawska-Siniarska, 2017, p. 97).

Secondly, freedom of speech promotes individual self-fulfillment. It provides individuals with the necessary tools to develop their personalities, cultivate agency, form morality, establish social connections, and build resilience. Through these processes, individuals are not only capable of better understanding and defining themselves, but also able to navigate and influence the world around them more effectively. According to Glasser and Adelman (1993), the right to express one's thoughts and to communicate freely with others affirms the dignity and worth of every member of society and allows each individual to realize his or her full potential (p. 168), which is the foundation of self-actualization. "When speech is freely chosen by the speaker to persuade others, it defines and expresses the speaker's 'self' and promotes his liberty and 'self-realization' by enabling him to develop his powers and abilities and to make and influence decisions regarding his destiny." (Baker, 1989, p. 65).

Thirdly, freedom of speech defends social democracy. As one of the representatives linking freedom of expression to social democracy, Meiklejohn argues that free speech is a prerequisite for the realization of democracy and the rule of law. A well-informed electorate is necessary for a democracy to be effective. To be appropriately knowledgeable, there must be no constraints on the free flow of information and ideas (Marlin, 2013, pp. 226-227). Within a democracy, there are usually many divergent and even diametrically opposed views. Free and open debate, then, usually leads to the best options being considered and a greater likelihood of avoiding serious mistakes.

Finally, freedom of speech promotes tolerance in society. It provides a safety valve for the state and society. Before parties take action, they can mitigate potentially radical behaviors through the expression and exchange of opinions. If the external environment allows for a wide range of speech to be expressed, then citizens have a greater opportunity to

think thoroughly before finally acting. Furthermore, because such a society is tolerant of differing theories, it fosters democratic literacy among its citizens. Citizens may not be completely satisfied with certain issues, but they can still maintain their common home. This is also in line with the essence of democratic politics, which is tolerance and compromise (Emerson, 1971, p. 641)

However, <sup>some</sup> people ~~and organizations~~ believe that freedom of expression policies are problematic. For instance, there are concerns that differences between powers mean that speech will never really be completely free because some people will always have more influence than others (Medeiros, 2018, p. 319). <sup>But</sup> these issues cannot be solved by restricting speech, <sup>as</sup> limiting freedom of expression only worsens inequality. In an environment of free speech, powerful voices can indeed shout loudly due to their influence, while whispers representing truth still have a chance to eventually evolve into roars of rage, thus striking a balance. <sup>But</sup> when speech is restricted, those with greater power are able to suppress the expression of opinions they do not want to hear.

... should never be free due to different power relationships among people

It has also been argued that free speech policies may lead to the proliferation of misinformation. As Cole (2017) argued, "In situations of information overload and lack of censorship and regulation, bias and fallacies are likely to flourish." (p. 864) However, first, truth is relative, and it's difficult for opponents of free speech to define what constitutes "error". Therefore, in the field of public opinion, the goal of a rational person is not to win an argument but to approach the truth. Those with differing opinions should not be treated as adversaries but as fellow truth-seekers. No matter how wrong their arguments may appear, they deserve any assistance rational people can offer to develop the best and closest version of the truth. Second, if there is fear of the multiplicity and complexity of information, then granting a small group of people to scrutinize and regulate it falls into the previously shown inequality trap, which can result in even greater error.

In conclusion, although the realization of freedom of expression in the real world is not as smooth as it would ideally be, and often faces numerous controversies and obstacles, freedom of speech remains a cornerstone of a healthy and progressive society. The advancement of technological and cultural innovation, the promotion of individual self-realization, the defense of social democracy, and the promotion of social tolerance are four crucial reasons why freedom of speech must be upheld. Future research should explore innovative ways of balancing freedom of expression with misinformation to ensure that the right to freedom of expression can continue to make a positive contribution to individuals as well as to society.

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