


DS 760

## Week 10: Freedom and Expression

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Locke found freedom of expression extremely important to a healthy society. Some people have suggested that freedom of expression be limited to assure that people are not offended. Weckert takes a position on this view. Summarize his position and then respond to it. Do you agree? Disagree? Explain.

In Computer Ethics and Professional Responsibility, Chapter 16, Weckert said that for censorship, one needs to meet two thresholds: universality of offensiveness and reasonable avoidability. For offensiveness, to be sufficient to warrant censorship, it should be the reaction that could be expected from almost any person chosen at random from the nation as a whole, regardless of sect, faction, race, age or sex. For reasonable avoidability, no one has a right to protection from the state against offensive experiences if he can effectively avoid those experiences without unreasonable effort or inconvenience.

Weckert feels Feinberg's universality principle is unacceptable because it is implausible due to the act of singling out an individual from the group but that the avoidability principle is plausible since most undesirable internet-based situations can be avoided.

My view is that our efforts to protect and enrich society should focus on the bookends of this argument; people should freely read, write, and speak but our systems should protect those that are vulnerable.

I felt that Weckert never connected with the idea that true meaning and purpose in life becomes lost when people are disconnected from real understanding of their beliefs. Social platforms are an excellent opportunity to let ideas clash and people to learn, grow, and develop a greater understanding of the world and each other. But we need to consider that people are dynamic and what they can experience (torturous or otherwise) before breaking varies over the course of life.

The news is filled with examples of people that may be set off by a simple land dispute, a loss spiral, or a perception that they cannot improve their situation. Stories of the vulnerable being swindled financially and people targeted for unwanted sexual behaviors. Google's deep learning technology allows individuals to restrict search results to pornographic or thieving websites. Facebook is allowing users to submit their personal revenge porn for human review so it can be blocked site-wide.

In summary, my view is that people will largely be able to do many things, but system level protection on social platforms will increasingly protect the vulnerable.