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Commandment #11: Thou Shalt not infringe upon thy right to Freedom of Speech

The results of the “Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey” conducted by the PewResearchCenter, stated that 40% of millenials are in favour of censoring speech that is offensive towards minorities (1). While the beliefs that millennials are potentially predicated on might come from an emotional state of compassion, the impulse to silence is always authoritarian. Freedom of Speech is defined as “the power or right to express one’s opinions without censorship, restraint or legal penalty” (Oxforddictionaries). Without Freedom of Speech, many countries that orient themselves on this idea/right would collapse sociologically and politically, while also becoming seriously unstable. Freedom of Speech is a social issue because whether one resides in a country with or without free speech, the subject and issue of free speech plays a significant role in the individual’s life and the quality of it; since free speech is a gatekeeper to many other fundamental freedoms (qtd. in Kenyon et. al 31). Combine that with the influx of political correctness’ influence on Western societies, the situation is only exacerbated. Freedom of Speech is an ancient discovery that aligns the human race towards the highest form of self-actualization and a fundamentally more prosperous society. Freedom of Speech is an incredibly old subject and to get a better understanding of how it could possibly emerge in our society, the history of language and how it evolved over time must be understood. Psychological factors of language must be taken into account to as well, since free speech more

than a simple piece of legislation. Sociological and legislative perspectives will be taken into account as the way to have Freedom of Speech in a given society is through legislation. These perspectives will provide a further understanding of the consequences that lack of Freedom of Speech will create once taken away. These arguments will be supported by primary sources, secondary sources such as scholarly journals, books and articles, as well as statistics.

The genesis of the Western notion of free speech came about through “Jewish prophets exposing iniquity and Athenian Sophists training students to debate provide[d] for two millennia” (Pool 13). Those ancient roots were very secluded and private, yet through their passages allowed such ideas to survive through the millennia. The first instance of legislative Freedom of Speech emerged in the Athenian world in “the later sixth or early fifth century [BCE]” (Raaflub et al. 65). Consequently, Athens and its citizens became much stronger as a result of their disposal of a tyrannical system (Raaflub et al. 97). Despite its ancient recognition and understanding, Freedom of Speech did not come about in the Western World with ease. Once the printing press was invented, heresies started to emerge publicly due to unregulated printing of scripture. As a result, mass censorship was instilled in Western Europe over the course of the 1500s and Western society furthered its self-induced societal regression (Pool 14). A couple of centuries later, the Declaration of Independence was approved the 4th of July 1776 (National Archives, Declaration), and along with that, eleven years later came the writing and signing of the Constitution (National Archives, Constitution). The first amendment of this constitution stated that “congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances” (Cornell Law). This law was and still is to this day, one of the most rigid pieces of

legislation providing near totality in individual rights to Freedom of Speech (Meiklejohn 247).

Centuries after the Declaration of Independence, many countries would follow suit and instill their edition of a constitution that would include Freedom of Speech. In the latter half of the 20th century, colonial empires were dying, and Communism began to collapse. In response to these events there was a massive surge in democratization of countries (Ourworldindata). Between 1988 and 1993 there were 30 new democracies that arose in this short time frame and at the present moment, there are 116 democracies (Freedomhouse).

To understand the sheer significance of free speech, one must understand the history of language and civilization to acknowledge how Freedom of Speech could have been incarnated in our society in the first place. The very beginning of humanity is landmarked with the ability to articulate oneself (Durant, Civilization Vol. 1, 11). This is because human beings were genetically pre-disposed to speak due to their ancestor's evolutionary path. Dunbar argues that this may "suggest that the evolution of the capacity for language was the result of the gradual coming-together of several originally unrelated anatomical and neurological components over a long period of time. No one of them was in itself the trigger for the evolution of language, but each was essential. Had any of them failed to evolve, humans would not be speaking to each other today" (142). This is a ground-breaking discovery because it reveals that language is not an abstract idea or concept that emerged out of a mere genetic mutation. It states that language is biologically and evolutionarily rooted in the human genome. With the emergence of language, humans became conquerors, intellectuals, lovers, leaders, writers, etc. Language expands one's understanding of the world into a near *ad-infinitum*. Because without language, thought is essentially limited to "individual objects or experiences sensorily [...] [without the ability to recognize] classes as distinct from individual things, nor of qualities as distinct from objects, nor

of objects as distinct from their qualities” (Durant, 72). While language expands our understanding and thoughts exponentially, it also simplifies the world a great deal. In “The Story of Civilization Vol. 1”, Durant stated that language was the greatest invention that is known to mankind:

They [language] made not only for clearer thinking, but for better social organization; they cemented the generations mentally, by providing a better medium for education and the transmission of knowledge and the arts; they created a new organ of communication, by which one doctrine or belief could mold a people into homogenous unity. They opened new roads for the transport and traffic of ideas, and immensely accelerated the tempo, and the enlarged the range and content, of life. (74)

Through the use of language, humans became equipped with the means necessary to increase group sizes, and in consequence, gave rise to a collective conscious. The moment a noun was spoken, the world was forever changed since “from that moment the mental development of the race opened upon a new and endless road. For words are to thought what tools are to work; the product depends largely on the growth of the tools” (Durant 72). An example of this mental development emerged 10,000 years ago when humans permanently modified their means of living through the appropriation of agricultural methods, (Dunbar 69-70). Humans went from living in tribes with a population no smaller than 150 to ~175 (113) to being able to accidentally create civilization through the mere domestication of plants (Durant 11). The creation of civilization was revolutionary not only for increasing the longevity and simplicity for one’s life, but also for the development of one’s cognition (Dunbar 689). One factor of a functional civilization is having a vast array of effective communication amongst all citizens. This communication can include matters such as education, that can be transmitted in

one form or another (parents, neighbours, etc). Evidently, this requires language and massive amounts of it. To go from having a tribe that encompassed no more than 175 people to a part of the world where one practices agriculture that can now host over 10,000 people – language is the basis of civilization’s inception. Communication increased exponentially, and for a civilization to function, one would need to communicate in a manner that is beneficial to the whole. This refinement in speech allowed secluded cultures to supersede their basic agricultural status and transform into empires and superpowers. The sharpening of the ability to use one’s tools (language) sped up the process of our societal evolution and Aristotle stated that “through speech man evolved society; through society, intelligence; through intelligence, order; and through order, civilization” (qtd. in Durant, *Story of Philosophy* 86).

This collective conscious that was now at the roots of cultures across the globe lead to massive philosophical revolutions that further heightened humanity’s intelligence. Across cultures and continents, the use of proper and precise speech is glorified upon. The oldest known piece of philosophy comes from Ancient Egypt. This work is known as “the ‘Instructions of Ptah-hotep,’ which [...] goes back to 2880 B.C. – 2300 years before Confucius, Socrates and Buddha” (Durant, *Civilization* Vol. 1, 193). In this work it states that “Silence is more profitable to thee than abundance of speech. Consider how thou mayest be opposed by an expert that speaketh in council. It is a foolish thing to speak on every kind of work” (qtd. in Brown 65). This philosophical stand is not mutually exclusive to Ancient Egypt, but is also very present in the works from Buddha with “right speech” being the fourth rule to be a monk (Durant 430), Confucius with the “qualities of a higher man [...] In regard to his speech he is anxious that it should be sincere” (671). Furthermore, the understanding about the power of speech manifested itself into the Logos which is “a vast impersonal wisdom, a Logos or Reason or Word [...] this

law of the universe, this wisdom or orderly energy which is God” (Durant, Civilization Vol. 2, 147). The Logos became the fundamental presupposition to Christian Theology (612) and is clearly expressed in Biblical verses such as Hebrews 11:3: “we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (James 2567). The catch with this is that in Genesis 1:27, “God Created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him” (6). If humans are products of God in his own image – then they as mortal beings can create their own worlds with *their word*. This is a fact that encapsulates one’s society, as mere laws are codifications of words onto papers, that dictate how one’s world ought to be. Whether those laws are for good or evil, those writings change the fate of any given society. To further the use of the Aristotelian argument that intelligence is formed through society, and language is formed through society, then *it is no accident* that ancient philosophers and writers (across cultures and continents) all stated that speech is a powerful tool which must be used wisely because if that is done, then the world can be formed merely through the use of proper speech and the Logos. This understanding of language is essential because the mere tool of language is what engendered the idea of “Freedom of Speech”.

Once Freedom of Speech was first implemented ~2500 years ago, it did not become an idea/right that died with the passing of time, instead it became an idea that was waiting to be practiced. Ever since the Ancient Greeks first put Freedom of Speech into legislative use, that very same right has been fought for intensely throughout the millennia. free speech did not become an idea that died with time for many reasons, one of them is that it is a gateway to many other fundamental freedoms that benefit everyone whom resides in a country that allows Freedom of Speech. Petäjä states that these fundamental freedoms are: “[the] aid in discovering truth or developing knowledge, to serve people’s interest in self-development or autonomy, and

to be necessary for democratic forms of self-government (qtd. in Kenyon et. al 31). These consequences occurred in Ancient Athens as once they established Freedom of Speech, they became the “intellectual center of the Mediterranean world” (Durant, Civilization Vol. 1, 677). Similarly, the United States declared their independence because of suspicions that the British Parliament was preparing to take away their freedom and further oppress those living on American territory (National Archives, Declaration). What followed shortly after was the writing of the Constitution in which the writers made sure that no form of government can become too powerful and protecting its citizens as much as possible (National Archives, Constitution). In essence, the countries that are based on democratic values are more prosperous in quality of life, education, and human rights than those who are not based on said values. (Ourworldindata). In hindsight, this is not a surprise as these legislative pieces are allowing biological substrates to flourish and at the same time, allowing individuals to better themselves and their society. The alternative to a society that does not allow freedom of speech is a tyrannical one. These countries are ensconced at the very minimum, as states that can recognize its people as sovereign individuals at the highest level of political authority, instead of the government holding that power (Diamond). This is crucial because with this type of system, the citizens can at least propel themselves into power using their own Logos (everyone carries it) and/or their vote (Kim and Markus 438). A democratic system is almost always better than an autocratic one, in which the government is holding power over its citizens. In a democracy, the fundamental freedoms are set in order to set one's society up to become as utopic as it can possibly be. Such societies are best suited to progress, as each individual is given respect that they are intrinsically sovereign and that their vote and opinions are crucial to the betterment of their society. While this process is tedious, long and sometimes counterproductive as false narratives can take over, at least the

citizens *have a choice* in their actions and are not constricted to the fate of their government. The fact that with a vote and use of freedom of expression can re-structure tyrannical governments is what our Logos is *supposed to do* – set up habitable order so one’s society is functional and beneficial for everyone.

Language (and the ability to freely think) allows the human race to reach higher forms of self-actualization, as language is an executive function of the brain. Research has indicated that in the very late stages of human neurological evolution, two major developments were taking place. One was the emergence of language, and the other was the near exponential growth of the executive functions (Goldberg 32-33). Goldberg further argues that “without the great development of the frontal lobes in the human brain (couple with the development of the language areas), civilization could never have arisen” (IX). This implies that everyone is *born* with the ability to freely think and to freely express one’s self (unless there are biological conditions that do not allow an individual to do so). Ergo, the ability to use the Logos is ingrained with each human being and if this is not recognized as a divine trait in each individual, then that is taking a stand against humanity. Kim states that speech is one of the most effective ways to express one’s thoughts (qtd. in Kim and Markus 433) and with Freedom of Speech, comes the ultimate showcasing one’s freedom to be their true-self (Kim and Ko 12). The freedom to be oneself is an important right to have in a society. When that is allowed by the state on a legislative level, individuals will not be afraid to speak one’s mind in fear of being persecuted.

What this leads to is to ability to self-actualize oneself through the use of speech and communication (Novosad-Maehlum 116-117). Self-actualization is “the achievement of one’s full potential through creativity, independence, spontaneity, and a grasp of the real world”

(Dictionary). This is not limited to a select few living in society, but is in fact present in every human being since birth (Maslow, *Peak Experiences*, 58). A democratic state allows one to be idiosyncratic while also allowing one to discover their own potential (Maslow, *Motivation*, 351), which is the sixth necessity for self-actualization (Maslow, *Farther Reaches*, 47). Whereas an autocratic state might view its citizens as a collective utility to their state, instead of sovereign individuals. Using Freedom of Speech as a mechanism to encourage and allow maximal self-actualization on a collective level coincides perfectly with the theory that free speech plays an aspect in self-fulfillment. Freedom of Speech plays a role in self-fulfillment because “restrictions on what we are allowed to say and write, or to hear and read, inhibit our personality and its growth. A right to express beliefs and political attitudes instantiates or reflects what it is to be human” (Barendt 13). As a result, Campbell states that Freedom of Speech becomes “an intrinsic, independent good; alternatively, its exercise might be regarded as leading to the development of more reflective and mature individuals and so benefitting society as a whole” (qtd. in Barendt 13). When combining self-actualization and the self-fulfillment theory, it almost becomes self-evident that Freedom of Speech inevitably leads to the betterment of society.

Another fundamental characteristic of being a self-actualized person is having democratic values. This is because those who have democratic values respect all people, are non-judgmental of race, religion, sex, etc, (superficial matters do not influence one’s opinion), show an understanding that they can be educated by anyone and educated in a manner that benefits the learner and the educator (Novosad-Maehlum 18). Those key values in a self-actualized person are also reflected in the values of a democratic state and/or a state that values freedom of speech on an electoral level. In essence, the democratic state, becomes a mirror image of the self-actualized person in terms of shared values.

Finally, the largest psychological reward from a democratic state is that it holds psychotherapeutic value due to the human relations that it encourages. Democracy encourages a state of free speech, open discourse, tolerance of opinion (no matter how radical), respect and the ability to progress when better ideas arrive (Cincotta et. al 3 & 8). These are characteristics that are fully aligned with the conditions of self-actualization and psychotherapy. Firstly, a therapeutic setting *has* to be democratic (both individuals in the room are equal), welcoming and friendly to suit the client (Maslow, Motivation, 317). Secondly, a part of self-actualization is taking the responsibility to be honest with oneself to be able to understand the mere idea of what their actualized self looks like. This translates in the psychotherapeutic setting as well since most clients are dishonest for the majority of the time, and once the client adopts the responsibility to be honest with oneself (and the therapist), they begin to self-actualize (Maslow, Farther Reaches, 46-47); which consequently is one of the many goals of psychotherapy (51). While directly comparing the therapeutic effects of psychotherapy to democracy is unfair and a fallacy, one can notice that a democratic system is sprinkled with psychotherapeutic methods. For example, voting dishonestly is not an action one would want to do voluntarily as the person voting would deceive themselves, count as wasting a vote and could potentially elect someone they did not want in power. The consequences of said action are counterproductive and counterproductivity is the antithesis to self-actualization and psychotherapy. Freedom of Speech may not be a psychological principal directly, but language most certainly is. Language needs to be free and honest in order for a person to function properly, let alone a society, and the alternative to free speech is censorship and/or limited speech which is something *no one* wants.

Language is the mechanism in which a civilization is based on, and the ability to freely speak in a civilization is essential to reach societal prosperity. Societies that are predicated on

democratic values while also protecting the fundamental right to freely speak provide their citizens with numerous benefits and simultaneously ascribing them sovereignty. Freedom of Speech grants everyone “equal respect and concern, which underlies their [minorities] right to engage in public discourse” (Barendt 20). While self-evident, and perhaps on a surface level deemed not too important, the implications are that despite democracy functioning based on the ideas that the majority voted for, no matter how minor one’s group is, said group’s idea(s) have an opportunity to prevail against the majority. Simply suppressing the minority group would be inimical to the progress of said society (19-20). This can be understood as a war of ideas or a competition of thought and/or ideas. In “The Poverty of Liberalism”, Wolff expands on this idea:

Competition among ideas strengthens the truth and roots out error, the repeated effort to defend one’s convictions serves to keep their justification alive in our minds and guards against the twin dangers of falsehood and fanaticism; to stifle a voice is to deprive mankind of its message [...] The root metaphor in all these arguments [...] the free market of ideas. The good products [ideas] will sell while the bad gather dust on the shelf, so in the intellectual marketplace the several competing ideas will be tested by us, the consumers, and the best of them will be purchased. (11-12)

What this competition of ideas instantiates is that the ideas of the market ought to dictate the way their society functions. As in a democracy, those who want to be elected, must represent the ideas and wants of their citizens (Barendt 19). As such, Freedom of Speech becomes the testament of equality. Since no matter, your socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion or sexuality, all ideas and forms of speech are equal in their value. The promotion of good ideas in a democracy are not based on who states it, but *what* is being stated and is the content of the statement valid? Thus, the decision of the “good idea” is up to the citizens and not the

government. Since the people represent the government and not the government representing its people – the latter is authoritarian in nature.

The alternative to a society having free speech, is a society valuing limited speech, such society is intrinsically unstable, unequal and authoritarian. Firstly, censorship is an insult to the speaker, group or community whom is proposing an idea (Barendt 30). The insult is not literal, but implicit. It is stating that the idea one is proposing is not good enough for anyone to consider and at the same time, he/she should be punished for thinking in such a manner. Once any form of censorship is instilled (legislative, societal or private), it sends another message that acknowledges certain forms of speech are privileged, hence creating an unnecessary inequality amongst citizens (20). There can no longer be a free market of ideas for the citizens to dictate which idea is best, but merely an arbitrary set of ideas that are sovereign, and going against those ideas may result in consequences; which, depending on where one lives, can be seriously drastic (ReportersWithoutBorders). Censorship on a legislative level is unequivocally authoritarian (Barendt 22). This type of control, no matter how light, can become dangerous at any moments notice.

The authoritarianism that legislative censorship breeds quickly metastasizes to nearly all sectors of society. To start off, once certain ideas are censored, those in authority who impose such censorship are “likely to adopt an unsympathetic attitude to the publications he is required to inspect” (Barendt 122). Furthermore, “the executive is not only determining conclusively whether an individual is free to speak, [...] [but whether or not] that person is guilty of an offence” (122). This is usually done in secret and “officials are unlikely to be limited by rules of evidence” (123). This is complimented by the fact that since only certain forms of speech are discussed and/or accepted in said society, speech then stagnates (35). As time progresses, the

government whom censors might gain a proclivity to abuse their power to increase levels of censorship, while also making its citizens such as writers, refrain from publishing their work in fear of prosecution (32). This result of the aforementioned consequences is a society that regresses in nature. In short, the authoritarian government gains power, while its citizens lose power, since discourse is short-circuited, and the power of speech is transferred to the government. No longer is the individual sovereign, but merely his or her ideas – the individual is either the good citizen or a criminal simply by what they think. The government who aims to control speech becomes a larger threat than the linguistic danger it tried to limit (152). Perhaps the most effective way to counteract this scenario would be to leave speech alone. With the allowance of free speech, other fundamental freedoms *automatically* manifest themselves (31). One can reverse most, if not all of the latter by simply allowing the intellectual market dictated by citizens to establish what is valuable and non-valuable in their society.

To conclude, Freedom of Speech is one of the most ancient discoveries mankind has ever made and this discovery set in stone how an ideal society ought to be. Freedom of Speech is a concept that is as old as language itself. Through the thousands of years that humans have been living together for, they made discoveries and assertions on the importance, significance and power of language. It is for this reason that when a society acknowledges Freedom of Speech as a basic right, said society has a population that is collectively more prosperous than without free speech. Since language is neurologically and biologically ingrained in the human genome, it is natural that humans would want their language and their thoughts to be free. Finally, sociologically, those societies whom which they attribute sovereignty to their citizens are miles ahead of the authoritarian societies whom limit speech. This is in part due to the fact that Freedom of Speech unlocks a whole set of fundamental freedoms/rights that benefit the

individual and the collective at the same time. What can be done with this research is simply passing it around to other people whom are in CEGEP and University. In the current politically correct world in the West, understanding why free speech is so hard to take down in the name of trying not to offend people is essential to further the discourse on this subject. Because if not, there is only a one-sided argument for political correctness with the only defense to free speech being “I know it’s important, I just don’t know why”. To further future research, it might be of particular interest to find out whether or not proper installments of hate-speech laws can work to a society’s benefit. As of right now, hate speech laws are very recent, vague and rather controversial. Freedom of Speech is a seriously important sociological and legislative concept because of the fact that one of the traits that makes humans unique is the fact that they have language. Therefore, in order to properly sort one’s society, language has to be free, and if this was not the case, then the Ancient Greeks would have thrown away their Freedom of Speech voluntarily 2500 years ago.

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