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Free Speech: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



Synopsis

Voltaire's comment--"I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it"--is frequently quoted by defenders of free speech. Yet it is rare to find someone prepared to defend all freedom of speech, especially if the views expressed are obnoxious or obviously false. So where do we draw the line? How important is our right to freedom of speech? In this accessible and up-to-date Very Short Introduction, Nigel Warburton covers a wide range of controversial free-speech issues, from Holocaust denial and pornography to the status of modern copyright law. The book offers a concise guide to many of the vexing issues concerning our right to speak freely, including: Should a civilized society set limits on freedom of speech? How can we balance free speech with the sensitivities of religious and minority groups? How have digital technology and the Internet changed the debate? About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

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Customer Reviews

"A very careful and efficient inspection of this area by discussing the central arguments as they are related to the idea of free speech while examining the need for limitations... The title will be great for students who have been newly introduced to the idea of free speech and need a to the point look at

free speech without feeling overwhelmed by mounds of legal jargon... very well written and easy to read beginning to the topic of free speech. The organization of the book provided a straightforward discussion that readers could follow effortlessly... I found Free Speech: A Very Short Introduction to provide exactly what the title series set out to accomplish by introducing the free speech in a brief and easy to read format."--AALL Spectrum

Nigel Warburton is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the Open University. He is the author of the bestselling Philosophy: The Basics.

These "Very Short Introduction" books are amazing. They're short, small and give you a substantial overview of the subject with out a lot of tedious dense reading. They're very well written and easy to read (especially when you're bogged down with a LOT of reading in school so thank you professor for choosing this book!!!!) Highly recommend if you want to start learning about Free Speech and aren't really ready to delve into deep philosophical thought on the matter, great jumping off point.

This book is eloquently written and gives one a suitable introduction to free speech with several noteworthy examples.

If you are interested in First Amendment rights and a brief history on how those rights have changed and expanded since the 1700's, this is a great book to read.

Insightful and balanced.

Warburton writes, "John Stuart Mill was explicit that incitement to violence was the point at which intervention to curb free speech was appropriate. Mere offensiveness wasn't sufficient grounds for intervention and should not be prevented by law, by threats, or by social pressure." "A spirit of toleration should not include a prohibition on causing offence." Times columnist Oliver Kamm agreed, "Free speech does indeed cause hurt - but there is nothing wrong in this."As US Justice Brennan said in Texas v. Johnson, which upheld the right of dissenters to burn the US flag as a protest, "If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the Government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable."Virtually anything can be seen as offensive, and something that is both true and important is bound to offend somebody.But in Britain today, it seems that we have the right to have

free speech, as long as we don't use it. So members of the English Defence League are arrested and the group Muslims against Crusades is disbanded for saying things that some find offensive. But it is legitimate, if unjust and idiotic, to call for Sharia law here, and it is also legitimate, and just, to oppose Sharia law. This government is trying to suppress dissent. It is expanding its police powers to control and limit expression, narrowing our rights of democratic participation. The meanings of symbols like the poppy are in the realm of opinion and argument, so the state must not impose a politically correct interpretation on us. The state abused Remembrance Day, when poppy-sellers demanded that we stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with the armed forces serving in the war against Afghanistan. War demands consensus and recruitment of the media. We must resist the warmongering drive for conformity. Some may find it offensive to be told that that their country's armed forces are used not for national self-defence, not for any national interest, but for illegal aggression. But if the truth hurts us, then we must ask why.

Another fine addition to the series, with up-to-date examples put in historical context. Easy to read proof that total freedom of speech does not exist. There are always limits.

For a subject that elicits volumes of discussion in the law and general media, this short overview is a nice summary of some key principles in the area.

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