

THE DUTY TO SPEAK YOUR MIND

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CAN ANYONE SHUT UP?



MORE WAYS TO COMMUNICATE THAN EVER...

We live in a time of

- political protest
- social media movements
- debates on college campuses
- talk radio
- Reddit communities
- Facebook posts
- tweets and retweets
- YouTube videos
- blogs
- online comment sections



DO WE WANT MORE PEOPLE SPEAKING THEIR MINDS?

In 'Lie Witness News', a segment of the show Jimmy Kimmel Live!, people are asked their opinions about **events that never happened, music bands that don't exist, and conflicts in fictional countries.**

Those interviewed claim that the U.S. has a duty to intervene in 'Zamunda', that President Trump not only won a debate that was still 24 hours away but also rode up to it on a motorcycle, and that it wasn't so bad when 'all the ponies drowned' during water polo at the Tokyo Olympics.

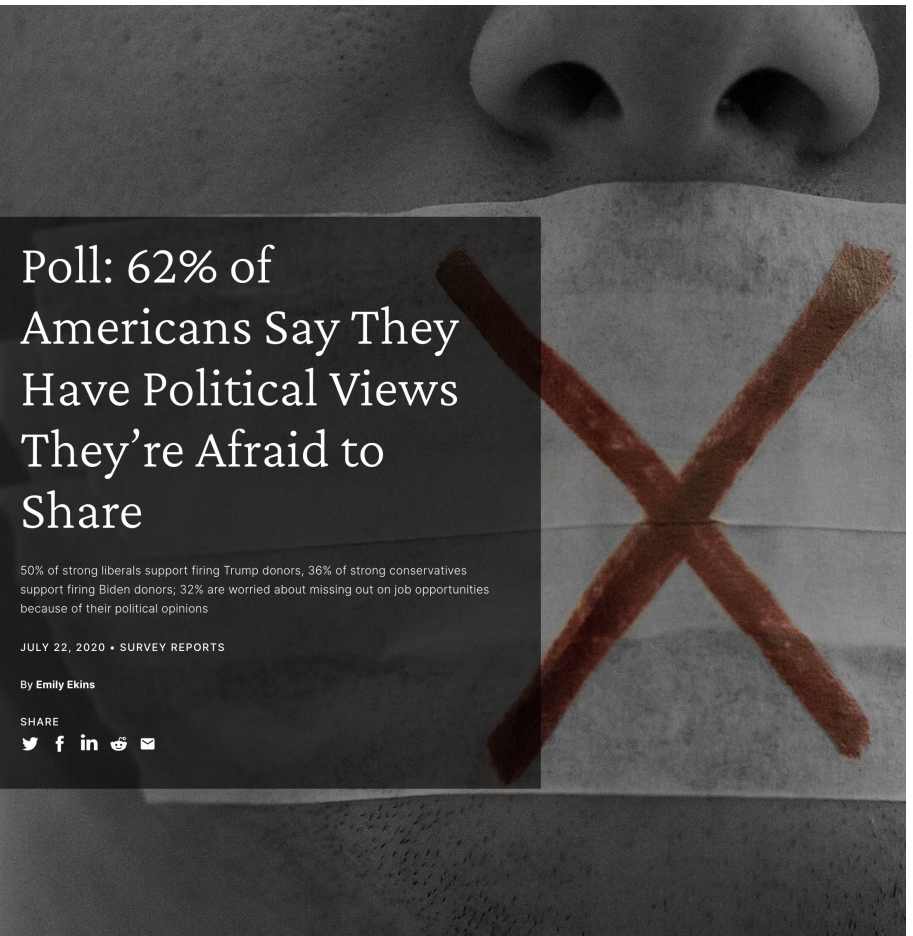


'CANCEL CULTURE'

Yet, an increasing number of **people are afraid to say what they really think.**

The tendency to **self-censor has increased** in recent years.

We risk being 'called out', 'cancelled', and thrust from our social or professional circles into the hands of an angry and capricious internet mob.



Poll: 62% of Americans Say They Have Political Views They're Afraid to Share

50% of strong liberals support firing Trump donors, 36% of strong conservatives support firing Biden donors; 32% are worried about missing out on job opportunities because of their political opinions

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By Emily Ekins

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HOW ONE STUPID TWEET BLEW UP JUSTINE SACCO'S LIFE

- Flying from NY to South Africa in 2013.
- She tweeted: “Going to Africa. Hope I don’t get AIDS. Just kidding. I’m white!”
- By the time she landed 11 hrs later, her Twitter feed had become a horror show.

WHY SPEAK YOUR MIND?

Joshi says the open exchange of ideas is **essential for the flourishing of individuals and society.**

Two arguments:

1. Speaking your mind is essential for the sake of **the common good.**
2. Speaking your mind is essential for **your own sake.**



ANOTHER DEFENSE OF FREE SPEECH?

There is a wealth of scholarship on legal protections and sanctions.

But Joshi focuses on how **social pressures** prevent us from speaking our mind **even when legal protections on free speech are in place.**

Thus, his argument is ultimately about **self-censorship** and the ways it becomes entrenched.



THE UGLY CHRISTMAS SWEATER

Not a duty to say whatever you really think.

When your grandmother gives you an ugly sweater for Christmas, you do not have a duty to tell her that you dislike it.

The duty to 'speak your mind' is not about the wide range of ways in which we might express our opinions, preferences, and prejudices.



THE DUTY TO SPEAK YOUR MIND

“Whenever there is social pressure to refrain from revealing some evidence we have, we should take ourselves to have a duty to reveal that evidence—it is in this sense that we have a duty to speak our minds” (37).

It is a duty to **share evidence** despite social pressure.

THREE ENGINEERS AND A DAM

Pro:

Reason 1 = the dam is constructed with good materials.

Reason 2 = the structural engineering is sound overall.

Con:

Reason 3 = the rainfall has been unusually high this year.

Reason 4 = the spillway design has some defects.

Reason 5 = the pipe maintenance has been suboptimal.

The first engineer knows . . . R1, R2, and **R3**.

The second knows . . . R1, R2, and **R4**.

The third knows . . . R1, R2, and **R5**.



WHAT TYPE OF DUTY IS THIS?

- A **moral duty**, not an epistemic duty.
- A **prima facie duty**, meaning it is not decisive in every context.
- An **imperfect duty**, meaning it allows for discretion.
- A duty that must be performed **in good faith**.
- A duty only when the matter is **of sufficient importance**.



THE EPISTEMIC COMMONS

The stock of evidence, ideas, and perspectives that are alive for a given community.

We must speak our minds to protect the epistemic commons.



THE 'EPISTEMIC COMMONS' ARGUMENT

1. The epistemic commons is a vital public resource that benefits us all.
2. If the epistemic commons is a vital common resource, then we have a duty to protect it.
(If we did not contribute to preserving a healthy epistemic commons, we would be free-riding on the labor of others, which is unfair).
3. If we have a duty to protect the epistemic commons, then we must speak our minds against social pressure to conform.
(If we did not speak our minds against social pressure to conform, then we would not adequately protect the epistemic commons).
4. Thus, we have a duty to speak our minds.

DEVELOPING AS A THINKER

1. To flourish as a human being, you must exercise and develop your rational faculties.
2. To exercise and develop your rational faculties, you must speak your mind.
3. Thus, to flourish as a human being, you must speak your mind.

INTELLECTUAL INDEPENDENCE

1. A good life requires intellectual independence.
2. To cultivate intellectual independence, you must speak your mind.
3. Therefore, a good life requires you to speak your mind.

POINTS OF AGREEMENT



Own epistemic health largely depends on the health of our cultural milieu.

Thus, there is normative pressure to promote a healthy epistemic commons.



Social pressure to conceal evidence may create dangerous blind spots that distort our understanding of the world.

Thus, we collectively benefit from environments that tolerate a diversity of opinions.



We cannot fully exercise our rational capacities or develop intellectual independence by mindlessly conforming to the ideas of others

Thus, we should speak our minds and think for ourselves.

IMPLICATIONS



SKEPTICISM ABOUT SOME FIELDS

We should be wary of the conclusions of *any* field in which there are social costs for expressing unpopular opinions, such as:

- Do single-parent households lead to more behavioral problems among children?
- Should we tax carbon emissions to reduce global warming?
- Does gun control legislation reduce deaths from gun violence?
- Is abortion morally wrong in most circumstances?
- What are the economic effects of illegal immigration?
- Are intelligence tests biased against minority groups?
- Is there any bias in the hiring and promotion of women in STEM disciplines?
- Are there biological facts about sex differences?

AVOID POLITICS TO LIVE WELL

“political parties have an incentive to create a strong coalition. Thus, parties encourage the adoption of a whole package of views, the connections among which may be simply accidents of history. For instance, a good member of either political tribe today, in the United States, has prescribed and predictable views on immigration, minimum wages, crime and policing, abortion, environmental policy—even if the reasons that would justify particular positions on these issues are quite different from one to the other. Political tribes are not hospitable locations for independent thinkers.”

Joshi (2021, 131)



THE DUTY TO OBJECT?

Jennifer Lackey argues,

we have an obligation to speak out against assertions that are false or unwarranted, especially when they are potentially harmful to others or oneself.

E.g., if I claim that a student plagiarized a crucial passage of their essay, and you know this is an unsubstantiated rumor, then you have an obligation to say that the plagiarism accusation is problematic.

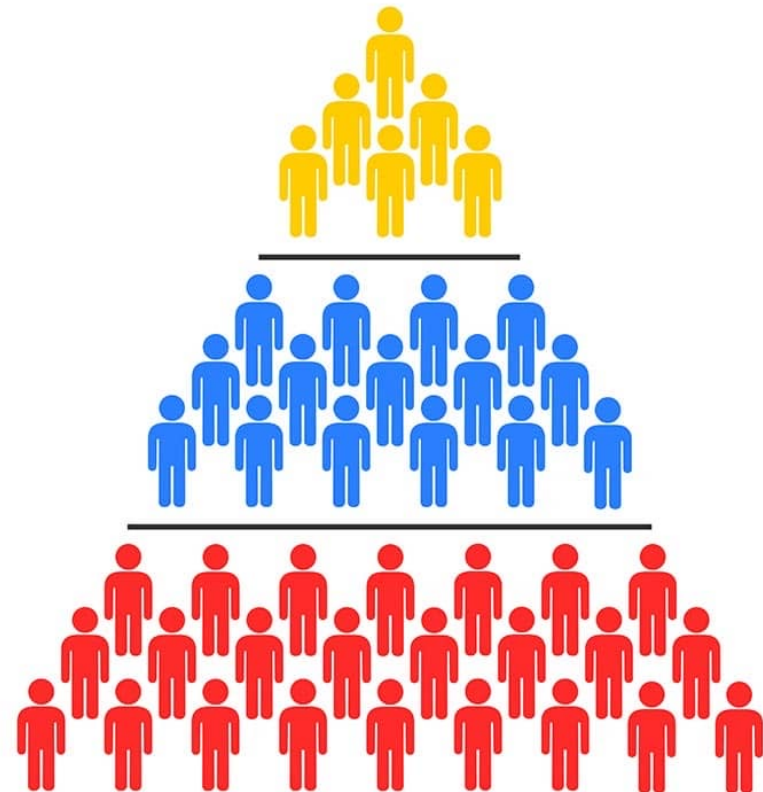


SOCIAL STATUS

One's duty to object can be directly influenced by one's social status.

Lackey writes,

“if a tenured, white, male professor hears a fellow colleague make a clearly sexist remark, his duty to object might be greater than that of his black, female, junior colleague” (2020: 43).



WHY DOES SOCIAL STATUS MATTER?

1. It may increase the likelihood that one's testimony will have a positive effect.
2. It may influence the level of risk or harm to which one is exposed.

HOW OTHERS INFLUENCE OUR DUTIES

One's duty to object can be directly influenced by whether others object, especially those in the conversational context in question.

If you have already objected, then I may not have to.

If nobody has objected, then I may have more of an obligation to do so.

CONCLUSION

There is no such thing as entirely free speech.

Anyone who speaks out pays the price of having others know what they think.

But the open exchange of ideas is essential for the flourishing of society.

By sharing evidence and perspectives, we enhance our collective ability to find truth.