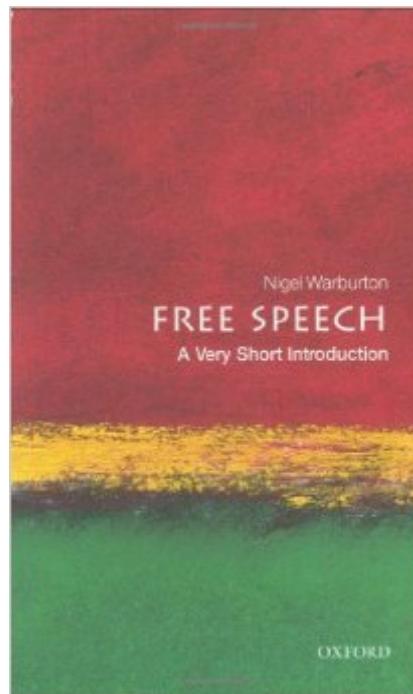


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Free Speech: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



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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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.

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