

Socrates Café

Wednesday, September 20, 2017

*All political, economic and social points of view are welcomed and encouraged.
The only ground rule is that we will be polite to those opinions that differ from our own.*

What limitations should there be on First Amendment free speech?

The text of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States is as follows:

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.

For more than 200 years the interpretation of these words has been subject to discussion, disagreement, and debate.

We might all agree that yelling “Fire” falsely in a crowded theater is a no-no, but what about “hateful speech”? College campuses, for example, seem to be having a large problem with this issue.

Zechariah Chafee, an American professor of law, judicial philosopher and civil rights advocate, said that your right to swing your arm stops where the other fellow’s nose begins.

Exactly what limits should we put on free speech?

- Should someone who hates Jews and Blacks be allowed to scream it from the rooftops so long as violence is not advocated? Or does the rant implicitly advocate violence by its very nature?
- Is it an exercise of free speech at an event to shout down a speaker with whom we disagree?
- Is it acceptable to call someone a racist because I disagree with his position on charter schools?
- Do I have the right to organize a mass boycott of a store because I don’t like their bathroom policy for transgendered individuals?
- Is it free speech to petition a company to dismiss its CEO because he gave money to “No Gay Marriage” state referendum?
- Can a company fire an employee who writes an article disagreeing with the company’s Equal Opportunity policies?

What, if anything, are the appropriate actions to take now, and what would be their impact on us?

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