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# Free Speech

by Eugene V. Debs

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The *American Spectator*, referring to an article in the New York Herald, says:

The New York *Herald* has a well considered editorial on the right of free speech, suggested by the action of the Brooklyn authorities in refusing to allow the anarchists to hold a public meeting.

"The position of the authorities," says the editor of the *Herald*, "in this matter, is not well taken. The right of discussion is founded on bed rock. Our citizens, no matter what their peculiarities of belief may be, are guaranteed all possible liberty of speech. They can talk themselves hoarse, or even talk themselves to death, without any infringement of law

"It is only when an overt act is committed that the rigor of the law should be applied. If they commit a breach of the peace or indulge in deeds of violence, they should be arrested, tried, and sentenced for the offense.

"But free speech, even when it gives vent to disgusting nonsense, should be tolerated. A man who is at liberty to keep his mouth open is seldom dangerous, but it is frequently hazardous to compel a man to keep his mouth shut because he doesn't agree with the views which are generally acceptable."

We are pleased to see great metropolitan journals taking this stand. It is time that all persons who value free speech, free thought, and indeed liberty, should boldly stand forth and demand that every citizen of the Republic should be protected in the orderly exercise of his rights.

We do not propose to discuss anarchism nor anarchists — simply "free speech," particularly this proposition announced by the *Herald*. "But free speech, even when it gives vent to disgusting nonsense, should be tolerated." Is that true? It covers the entire field of speech

— all topics — all questions relating to politics, religion, and morals. It imposes no restraints. Speech is not an “overt act” and therefore should be subjected to no restraint whatever. Is that true? Is it right? Is it in consonance with our best notions of civilization?

There are in the country a class of people who advocate what is called “free love.” These people denounce marriage; they advocate indiscriminate sexual intercourse. They go into communities and in the exercise of “free speech,” so-called, transform homes into brothels, pollute every shrine where virtue worships. Is that what the Herald calls “disgusting nonsense” which is to be “tolerated,” which “should be tolerated?”

Again there are those who would exercise *free speech* in the advocacy of polygamy — and for a quarter of a century or more, did advocate polygamy, unmolested, until thousands and tens of thousands were debauched, and a great territory became more loathsome than a charnel house; until the air was foully infectious and every mountain stream poured its floodtide of nastiness into Great Salt Lake. Was this simply “disgusting nonsense” which “should be tolerated?” Mind, we are running no parallels between such filth and anarchism. We are simply surveying the field of *free speech*, to inquire whether or not society has the right to protect itself from unrestrained liberties in that direction?

Let it be understood that free speech is not necessarily a crime, advocating speech. That which the *Herald* styles “disgusting nonsense” is all too often a deadly virus which inoculates the mind with diseases for which there is no remedy, a fact which the *Herald* understands full well.

This Magazine believes in free speech and a free press — but with limitations. It would have no free speech Satans in American Eden homes; no square foot of American soil defiled by the advocates of polygamy; no brothel beasts, advocating free love; no Sodoms, inviting Heaven’s wrath in storms of fire. In a word, certain forms of free speech are crimes against humanity and should be suppressed and will be suppressed.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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