

More Voices, Please

If the social media and other high-tech companies, whether under pressure from the state or not, were to lead people to believe that, starting today, only *accurate* information will get through their gatekeepers, would the public, especially the most gullible, really be better off?

How so? How would it do people any favors to have them think that everything they read or have access to through Google, Facebook, Twitter, Spotify, etc. is good solid information rather than disinformation or misinformation? (Question: when the establishment media “reported” day after day over four years that Vladimir Putin had interfered with the 2016 presidential election to put his puppet in power, was that misinformation or disinformation?)

Of course the gatekeepers couldn’t guarantee any such thing. They’re not omniscient, especially when you remember on whom they will be relying for “the truth”: government agents and their officially approved scientific and other experts — the very source of so much demonstrable misinformation and disinformation on a whole range of subjects. Do you want to hear only from Dr. Fauci on Covid? Or Michael Mann on climate? Etc. Etc. Etc. (For proof of the CDC’s disingenuousness, see [this video](#).)

We absolutely *need* a variety of voices and viewpoints if we — individually and cooperatively — are to make good decisions for ourselves and our families in a world of unfolding yet always imperfect knowledge. Free speech is *not* a luxury that sometimes we can’t afford. It’s a bloody necessity at all times!

Do we need Joe Rogan? I don’t, but I’m only me and I refuse to speak for anyone else. I’ve seen only a few brief segments of his program, but from my impression of him, I’d say Justin Amash had it right on Twitter:

People trust @joerogan not because he’s always right, but because he’s transparent, curious, gracious, humble about knowledge, and willing to consider perspectives that challenge and reshape his own thinking.

Spotify and the other platforms of course should be free to associate with anyone they want. And others have a perfect right to dissociate with those platforms as they see fit. We’re talking here not what anyone has a legal right to do but what anyone *ought* to do or not do. One thing we can say for sure is that the politicians and their spokespeople ought to butt out. If anyone does not have free-speech rights when it comes to these matters, it’s the people who hold and speak for state power. It’s established in case law that government officials may not indirectly censor via winks, nods, and veiled threats directed

at private companies. (See Glenn Greenwald's video commentary.)

By the way, if you're watching Joe Rogan for medical or diet or any kind of specialized advice that you can unblinkingly accept and act on, I've got news for you: you have bigger problems than a free-wheeling internet.

A further-by-the-way: it is absurd that certain words are simply unspeakable under any circumstances, as though we lived when people believed they could cast spells on others. There is a world of difference between directly using a slur word (as the word *using* is usually meant) and discussing how other people have used it. Would it really be impossible for a college English department to have a class on the history of taboo words? Is this society going crazy? If you treat young people, including college students, like babies, they might never grow up. An effective immune system, including the psychological immune system, cannot develop robustness — or antifragility — if it never is stressed.

And that brings up an important related matter. If people are so stupid that we can't have Rogan and others freely doing what they want online, why are those same stupid people urged to vote every two, four, and six years? It was Frédéric Bastiat who wondered how people could be such idiots every day of the year *except election day*. To be consistent, those who would suppress speech should be honest and come out against representative democracy. At least their story would have some coherence — but not entirely. Because we might have to wonder how *they* managed to get out of the Platonic shadowy cave the rest of us are stuck in. But never mind that.

Look at how the enemies of free speech want to have it both ways. If you point out that Fauci has said different things at different times, they will say, "Of course! What's wrong with that? Fauci learned new facts as time went on, changed his positions, and updated the public."

But there's more to the story than that. Imagine that at time t Fauci says that vaccines will keep you from getting Covid. Then at t' he says, "Correction. You can still get it, although not as bad as you would have if you were unvaccinated." What's left out of this account is that at t , other people — credentialed people — had offered reasons to question Fauci's claim. If the would-be censors had had their way, the doubters would have been silenced for trafficking in disinformation. No one would have heard that Fauci's t statement might have been misleading or incomplete. We would have had to wait until t' to learn from Fauci himself that his earlier claims were "inoperative."

That sort of thing would be dangerous anytime, but it's especially so in a pandemic, when new facts come to light daily and even hourly.

Can life in a sea of free and conflicting voices be confusing? Hell, yeah. But you know what's worse? One Official Voice. That's essentially what we had in the golden era of three

boring television networks, ABC, CBS, NBC, and one really boring television network, PBS. Return to those days? No thank you.

Centuries ago the liberal advocates of religious freedom were also admonished that a society could not function with the divisive free exercise of religion, including religious speech. The censors were wrong. The public-health establishment's and legacy media's special pleading in all this is too palpable to need elaboration.