

An Intensive Dissertation on Intellectual Freedom and Censorship

The concept of intellectual freedom is difficult to define, as its abstract philosophical nature plays on the semantics of human language. However, such an enigmatic principle remains one of the most important in human history. In the United States Constitution, it is defined as the freedom of speech, in which the United States Congress is forbidden from infringing upon such a right. In more all-encompassing terms, intellectual freedom is defined as “the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction” (American Library Association). In any sense, the right to intellectual freedom is one that, if infringed, removes an individual of their humanity.

Censorship, for instance, is one of the most common crimes against intellectual freedom. Although censorship is often employed simply to prevent children from accessing vulgar or mature material, unabashed, blanket censorship and banning of books from libraries are contentious topics in the information industry. Advocacy for book banning has expanded to the point where it warrants a week of admonishment by libraries. “Banned Books Week” is publicly promoted by libraries nationwide, wherein libraries acknowledge and exhibit attempts made by individuals or interest groups to have certain books “banned” from libraries (“Censorship”). Books like *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the *Harry Potter* series, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* are often challenged either for their mature themes or for their controversial topics.

In Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange*, themes reprimanding censorship are espoused. The plot of the novel explores these themes through an attempt made to prevent further misconduct from a juvenile delinquent. The youth is subjected to aversion therapy which, although it ceases his criminal behavior, it strips the young boy of his humanity. He can no longer think his own thoughts nor make his own choices without forced psychological disgust

(Burgess). Although conveyed in a roundabout fashion, Burgess accurately depicts the conundrum of censorship. For an idea to be censored, it is inherently labeled a “bad idea,” one that ought not to be had. This thinly-veiled mind control resembles the nightmarish concept of thought-policing depicted often in the genre of dystopian literature.

To combat the potential horror of such an Orwellian future, numerous advocacy groups have arisen. Groups like the American Civil Liberties Union, which focus not only on intellectual freedom, but on social inequities and the goal of equilibrium and the National Coalition Against Censorship, which is comprised of several smaller non-profit organizations advocating against censorship, are fully engaged in the struggle against censorship. The American Library Association also contributes by compiling information on why and how books are challenged to raise awareness of the sociocultural issues behind banning books (Cooperative Children’s Book Center). Such advocacy is especially necessary in our modern era of technological advancement.

In addition, the recent repeal of a series of internet privacy laws by President Donald Trump demonstrates a more modern concern with intellectual freedom. As per the executive decision, internet service providers may now sell the browsing history of those their customers, effectively intruding on what was once private ground. While this is a far cry from a tortuous dystopia, this breach of intimacy has effectively diminished whatever efficacy the American public held in their internet safety measures. Although such a political decision is not necessarily as drastic or horrific as publicly perceived, the response it has elicited from the public is demonstrative of the natural human response to a potential infringement of the right to intellectual freedom.

Ultimately, the question of censorship and intellectual freedom depends not on the values of policy one might hold. Rather, it should be agreed, in a non-partisan, apolitical fashion that, as humans, a breach of intellectual freedom is universally unacceptable. Not only does it violate the human rights enumerated in the constitutions of nations worldwide, it is among the most inhuman of crimes, as free will is the basest of all human rights. To halt one's intellectual freedom by subliminal mind control and mental aversion, be it in the form of legislature or the simple banning of a book, is a sickening disturbance of the one aspect of life all people share: thought.

Works Cited

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