



THE  
JUBILEE CENTRE  
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES



# LESSON 17

## GOOD SPEECH

17



# SESSION 1

● ‘The wise ones fashioned speech with their thought, sifting it as grain is sifted through a sieve.’

The Buddha

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# TYPES OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION





**“It’s a free country, we can say what we want.”**

**Imagine a world where this statement is true. What is it like to live in that world? Do we live there already? Give reasons for your opinions.**

# LIMITING FREEDOM OF SPEECH



For each of the different types of human communication you have identified, decide on any limits that should be placed on them.

# WHAT ABOUT...



Publishing detailed instructions on the internet for making lethal nerve gas from household ingredients.

Posting comments on a blog that are deeply offensive to members of a religion.

A piece of art that shows children naked.

Printing lies about someone in a newspaper.

A political party that is openly racist, sexist and homophobic.

A comedy programme that jokes about how bad and incompetent the government is.

Finding and selling the secrets of your country's biggest company to a company in another country (risking its profits).

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# LIBERTY vs LICENCE



‘When self-governing people demand freedom of speech, they are not saying that every individual has an unalienable right to speak whenever, wherever, however she chooses. They do not declare that any person may talk as she pleases, when she pleases, about what she pleases, about whom she pleases, to whom she pleases.’

Alexander Meiklejohn

# LIBERTY vs LICENCE QUESTIONS



What is the difference between 'liberty' and 'licence'?

What do you think it means to be 'a self-governing person'?

What is a 'self-governing person' like?

Is there a difference between a 'self-governing person' speaking freely and a non-self-governing person speaking freely?



# FREE SPEECH AND THE VIRTUES



## YOUR GROUP'S VIRTUE

Identify an 'icon' of this virtue:  
someone who speaks in this way,  
e.g. Martin Luther King for Justice

Identify what it means to speak according  
to this virtue e.g. courageous speech  
challenges false or harmful ideas

Apply your virtue to a form of  
communication, e.g. what would Twitter be  
like if everyone used it with compassion?



# **SESSION 2**

## **SPEECH AND HARM, A MORAL VIRTUE**

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Individual **adults** should be free to do what they wish up to the point where they harm another person in the process: John Stuart Mill, *the harm principle*. Mill was writing about physical harm, not psychological or economic harm.

Does Mill's harm principle cover internet trolls (people who post abusive comments online for their own pleasure)?

Should internet trolls be forbidden from using the internet or should they be allowed freedom to express their (offensive) opinions?

If we allow internet trolls to express their opinions on the principle of freedom of expression, what measures can we put in place to deal with the harm they do?

# HARMFUL AND OFFENSIVE SPEECH



**‘Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.’**

**Do you agree with this old saying?**

- **What are your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing?**

**Is harm only physical?**

# MISOGYNY



Dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women or girls. The literal meaning of the word is hatred of women.

Misogyny may be expressed through gender discrimination, violence towards women and the sexual objectification of women. It may also be expressed through harmful or offensive speech, including speech intended as humour.

# MISOGYNY CASE STUDY: MARY BEARD



Were the comments misogynistic?

- What are your reasons for thinking this?

Were the comments immoral?

- What are your reasons for thinking this?

What (if anything) should be done about comments such as these?

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- # 'THAT'S SO GAY'



Do you use this expression?

- Is there anything wrong with this expression?



# SESSION 3

## Countering Bad Speech With Good Speech; A Performance Virtue

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# DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS?



Any speech or writing that is false or that causes offence should be suppressed.

- **SHOULD GOVERNMENTS CENSOR DANGEROUS IDEAS AND DANGEROUS INDIVIDUALS?**



“People should not fear their governments; governments should fear their people.”

‘V’ in the film V for Vendetta.

- “When a people fears their government, there is tyranny; when a government fears their people, there is liberty.”

Thomas Jefferson,  
3<sup>rd</sup> President of the USA.

# IDEAS THAT WERE ONCE FALSE/OFFENSIVE (AND STILL ARE TO SOME)



The earth is  
not flat

Humans  
evolved from  
apes

Women can  
vote

Black people  
have equal  
rights

Gay men and  
women can get  
married

The planets  
revolve around  
the sun  
(not the earth)

Healthcare  
and education  
are free

Slavery is  
wrong

The truth of  
scripture can  
be questioned

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# FALSE AND OFFENSIVE SPEECH



You have just seen examples of false and/or offensive speech. What is your response to it?

Divide your responses up into what you thought and how you felt.

- **HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO SPEECH WE DISAGREE WITH OR THAT IS OFFENSIVE?**



- **‘One reason that false and offensive speech is permitted in most liberal democracies is precisely because the best answer to bad speech is good speech, rather than censorship.’**

**Alan Dershowitz**

# BETTER SPEECH: JOHN STUART MILL



‘Mill’s response is that assuming that we possess the truth having gagged or avoided dissenting voices, is very different from holding a view that has been contested openly and emerged unscathed or even strengthened.

For Mill freedom to contradict an orthodox opinion is also a condition of intellectual development and of progress. In an atmosphere of intimidation and explicit or implicit danger attached to expressing heretical views, only the brave will speak out.’

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# OLIVER KAMM



‘The notion that free speech, while important, needs to be held in balance with the avoidance of offence is question-begging, because it assumes that offence is something to be avoided. Free speech does indeed cause hurt – but there is nothing wrong in this. Knowledge advances through the destruction of bad ideas. Mockery and derision are among the most powerful tools in the process.’

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# RICHARD POSNER



‘People get upset when their way of life is challenged, yet that upset may be the beginning of doubt and lead eventually to change. Think of all the currently conventional ideas and opinions that were deeply offensive when first voiced. Perhaps, therefore, a condition of being allowed to hear and utter ideas that may challenge *other* people’s values and beliefs should be the willingness to extend the same right to others and thus agree that offensiveness will not be a permissible ground for punishing expression.’

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# SESSION 4

## PORNOGRAPHY

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# **PORNOGRAPHY HARMS OUR SOCIETY**



**WHAT DO YOU  
THINK?**

**WHAT ARE YOUR  
REASONS FOR  
THINKING THIS?**

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# **PORNOGRAPHY MIGHT AFFECT...**



**Our ideas of what is normal physically.**

**Our ideas of normal sexual behaviour.**

**Our idea of what to expect from a sexual relationship.**

**Those who take part, or are forced to take part in its production.**

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# WHAT IS NORMAL?



Body hair shaved off

Lots of short sexual relationships

Violence

Casual sex with no emotional involvement.

Foreplay

One man and one woman

Sex with more than one person

Being drunk or on drugs

The 'perfect' body

Dressing up/role play

Sex within 5 minutes of meeting someone

The man being in charge

Anal sex

Oral sex

Animals or children

Cuddling/tenderness/affection

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# PORNOGRAPHY AS A CIVIC ISSUE



HARMLESS  
PERSONAL  
USE

HARMFUL  
TO SOCIETY  
AS A  
WHOLE



IF YOU THINK THAT  
PORNOGRAPHY IS IN ANY  
WAY HARMFUL, WHAT  
SHOULD WE DO ABOUT

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# SESSION 5

## SO WHAT'S CHANGED?

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**“It’s a free country, we can say what we want.”**

What do you think about this statement now?

What are your reasons for thinking this?

What has changed? Anything?

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# HOW DO I WANT TO SIFT MY SPEECH BETTER?



Avoid speech that harms or offends

Challenge speech in others that harms or offends

Be more skilful or virtuous when posting comments online

Challenge false or offensive speech with reasoned argument

Meet false or offensive speech with compassion or empathy

???

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# WHERE TO TURN TO MAKE A CHANGE



Set small,  
specific  
goals

Keep  
practising

Emulate  
icons

Celebrate  
successes

Learn from  
mistakes

Get  
feedback  
from friends