

Freedom of Speech as Freedom of Responsibility: Beyond Anarchy

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Abstract

Freedom of speech is widely regarded as a cornerstone of modern democracy and human rights. Yet in contemporary society, this concept is frequently misinterpreted as an unlimited right to speak, thereby enabling prejudice, disinformation, and irresponsible discourse under the banner of freedom. This paper redefines freedom of speech as inseparable from responsibility. Drawing on classical philosophy, liberal theory, and Gödel's incompleteness theorems, I argue that freedom without responsibility collapses into anarchy, whereas responsibility restores freedom to its genuine meaning.

1 Introduction

Freedom of speech has historically been celebrated as a guarantee of individual autonomy and a safeguard against tyranny. However, in the present digital environment, the notion of “freedom” is often detached from accountability. This detachment leads to the misuse of speech, the spread of disinformation, and the erosion of trust in democratic institutions. The purpose of this paper is to clarify that freedom of speech is not merely the right to speak, but the responsibility to bear the consequences of speech.

2 The Problem

Understanding freedom of speech as a right alone generates two dangers. First, it fosters social disorder by enabling irresponsible expressions without accountability. Second, it allows actors to exploit the banner of freedom as immunity for prejudice and harmful speech. Both outcomes undermine the very foundation of freedom. Thus, freedom must be redefined not as the absence of restriction, but as the exercise of responsibility.

3 Theoretical Framework

Socrates recognized the dissonance between majority opinion and truth, yet submitted to Athenian democracy and its verdict. His decision, though aesthetic and moral, also exemplifies the entrapment of a system's incompleteness. Gödel's incompleteness theorems demonstrate that no system can be both complete and consistent; every framework carries internal limits. Applying this insight, freedom of speech too is inherently incomplete if understood as an absolute. Responsibility is the necessary complement that prevents collapse into contradiction.

Similarly, J.S. Mill emphasized that liberty is justified only insofar as it does not harm others. Freedom is never absolute; it always carries relational limits and obligations. Therefore, speech must be seen as an act that inevitably produces consequences for which the speaker must be accountable.

4 Argument

The central claim of this paper is simple:

If one cannot take responsibility, one must remain silent.

Speech is not mere utterance; it is an act that shapes social reality. As such, freedom of speech must be exercised only by those willing to take responsibility for its effects. To speak freely is to accept responsibility freely.

5 Conclusion

When freedom of speech is stripped of responsibility, it degenerates into what may be called speech anarchy. However, when redefined as freedom with responsibility, speech regains its constructive role in sustaining democratic life. Thus, the conclusion of this paper can be stated succinctly: **Freedom of speech is freedom of responsibility.**

References

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