

## GP Term 3 2017 – Comprehension – Topic 2: Censorship – Right to Free Speech

**Passage 1.** *Steven Pinker argues that the right to free speech is fundamental.*

- 1 More than two centuries ago, the First Amendment to the Constitution was adopted in the United States. This amendment enshrined the freedom of speech, as it was henceforth illegal to make any law that impeded on the freedom of religion, press, and the right to peacefully assemble or petition the government. Now, the right to free speech is very much in the news. Incidents like the massacre of French cartoonists working with the Charlie Hebdo magazine, which publishes satirical articles about politics and culture, or the adherence to campus speech codes, which prohibit topics that may instigate hateful feelings within the university populace, have forced the democratic world to examine the roots of its commitment to free speech. Is free speech merely a symbolic talisman, like a national flag or motto? Is it just one of many values that we trade off against each other? Did the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists “cross a line that separates free speech from toxic talk,” as the dean of a school of journalism recently opined? May universities muzzle some students to protect the sensibilities of others? Or is free speech fundamental? 5
- 2 The answer is that free speech is indeed fundamental. The very thing we are doing when we ask whether free speech should be fundamental — exchanging and evaluating ideas — presupposes that we have the right to exchange and evaluate ideas. In talking about free speech, we are *talking*, not fighting. We are not settling our disagreement by arm-wrestling or a pistol duel. As soon as you show up to a debate to argue against free speech, you have lost it. 15
- 3 Free speech is essential to democracy and safeguards against tyranny. How did the monstrous regimes of the 20th century, the century of the Holocaust and two World Wars, gain and hold power? The answer is that groups of armed fanatics silenced their critics and adversaries. Once in power, the totalitarians criminalised any criticism of the regime. The victimised subjects did little to resist the tyrannical regime. The reason that citizens did not resist is that they lacked common knowledge — the awareness that everyone shared their knowledge. People will expose themselves to the risk of reprisal by a repressive regime only if they know that others are exposing themselves to that risk at the same time. 20 25
- 4 The story of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” illustrates the logic. When the little boy shouted that the emperor was naked, he was not telling them anything they did not already know. But he was changing their knowledge nonetheless, because now everyone knew that everyone else knew that the emperor was naked. That emboldened them to challenge the emperor’s authority with their laughter. The story reminds us why humour is no laughing matter — why humour, even when tasteless, is terrifying to dictators and protected by democracies. Humour, especially satire and ridicule, can stealthily challenge assumptions by forcing its audience to see that those assumptions lead to consequences that everyone recognises are absurd. That is why humour so often serves as an accelerant to social progress and should not be suppressed. 30
- 5 There are a number of laws that provide needed protection and regulations that set the standards for how our media operates. There are, however, too many strictures that inhibit free expression. Finding the appropriate balance can only be achieved through open debate, the very right we seek to protect. 35

**Passage 2.** *Garrett Epps argues that the right to free speech must be balanced by other considerations.*

- 1 Millions of Americans support free speech. They firmly believe that America is the only country to have free speech, and that anyone who even questions free speech had better shut up. European countries and Israel outlaw certain kinds of speech — Nazi symbols, anti-Semitic slurs, and speech that incites hatred on the basis of race, religion, and so forth but the American law of free speech assumes that the only function of law is to protect people against physical harm; it tolerates unlimited emotional harm. However, emotional harm can be equal in intensity to that experienced by the body, and is even more long-lasting and traumatic. Thus, victims of hate speech suffer as much as or more than victims of hate crime. Why should speech be exempt from concern when its social costs can be even more injurious than that of physical injury? I think defenders of free speech need to face two facts: First, the American system of free speech is not the only one; most democracies maintain relatively open societies under a different set of rules. Second, the system is not cost-free. Repressing speech has costs, but so does allowing it. The only mature way to judge is to look at both sides of the ledger. 5
- 2 Most defenders of free speech argue that those who pretend to be worried about the harms of free speech are more interested in trampling your right to say whatever you please. Arguments about harm are not even worth answering. Then, there is the more thoughtful response. Hate speech may be incredibly painful for individual members of minorities, but its toleration is to their great benefit: in a climate of free intellectual exchange, hateful and bigoted ideas are refuted and discredited, not merely suppressed. But the argument is not complete without conceding something most free speech advocates do not like to admit: While it may produce social good much of the time, there is no guarantee that ensures that overall it does more good than harm. 10 20
- 3 In fact, freedom of speech as we exercise it verges on becoming corrosive. Exercised by an unconstrained media, voiced by commentators who seek to incite reaction with ever more inflammatory words — or by those tapping away behind screens of anonymity — hideous, hurtful things are said. This can make people fearful, angry and defensive. It does not turn the level of civilisation up. There are issues of security and personal safety, the value of truth and honesty, and the need to treat others with respect. It is not true that only sticks and stones can hurt; ignorant, dishonest, malicious, corrupt words can also do enormous damage. Finding appropriate boundaries to frame freedom of speech is a constant struggle and judgement is essential. The right needs to be balanced against the damage that its unfettered exercise may cause. 25 30
- 4 Europeans also remember a time when free speech did not produce a happy ending. They take free speech seriously, and in fact many of them think their system of free speech is freer than the American system. However, their view of human rights was forged immediately after World War II, and one lesson they learnt was that democratic institutions can be destroyed from within by forces like the Nazis who use mass communication to dehumanise whole races and religions, preparing the population to accept exclusion and even extermination. For that reason, they argue that incitement to racial hatred, and propaganda for war, not only may but must be forbidden. They strongly protect freedom of expression and opinion, but they also set a boundary at what we call “hate speech”. The price that the Europeans were unwilling to pay — which Americans paid and continue to pay every day — was a price in genuine pain and intimidation. In America, where everyone had the right to speak their mind, civil-rights and women’s-rights advocates were subjected to vile abuse in public and private, and gay men and lesbians endured decades of deafening homophobic propaganda before the tide of public opinion turned. 35 40
- 5 I admire people on both sides who admit that we cannot be sure we have drawn the line properly. The reason that we allow free speech cannot be that it is harmless. It must be that we prefer that people harm each other, and society, through speech than through bullets and bombs. Social conflict and change are bruising, ugly things, and in democracies they are carried on with words. That does not mean there are no casualties, and it does not mean the right side will always win. 45

## Suggested Answers

### From Passage 1

1. What does the word “enshrined” (line 2) suggest about how Americans viewed freedom of speech? [1]

#### From the Passage

This amendment enshrined the freedom of speech, as it was henceforth illegal to make any law that impeded on the freedom of religion, press, and the right to peacefully assemble or petition the government.

#### Answer

The Americans viewed freedom as something sacred and the society must uphold this core values of the country. (significance)

2. Why has the author written the word “talking” in italics (line 15)? [1]  
( meaning of word in italics or quotation or parenthesis – intention or purpose)

#### From the Passage

In talking about free speech, we are talking, not fighting. We are not settling our disagreement by arm-wrestling or a pistol duel.

#### Answer

(1) He wants to emphasize the contrast between (2) the use of words to handle disputes and the use of violence to do so, demonstrating how freedom of speech is to be depicted. (content of the purpose)

3. “As soon as you show up to a debate to argue against free speech, you have lost it” (lines 16–17).

Why does the author make this claim? Use your own words as far as possible.  
[3]

#### From the Passage

The very thing we are doing when we ask whether free speech should be fundamental — exchanging and evaluating ideas — presupposes that we have the right to exchange and evaluate ideas... As soon as you show up to a debate to argue against free speech, you have lost it.

#### Inferred Answer

A discussion involving opposing viewpoints is only possible with free speech. Thus, the person participating in such a discussion to oppose free speech, is already conceding defeat as he is actually proving that free speech is essential to prove his point and thus, the other side is right.

**4. What “logic” is the author illustrating with the story of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” (line 26)? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]**

From the Passage

The victimised subjects did little to resist the tyrannical regime. The reason that citizens did not resist is that they lacked common knowledge — the awareness that everyone shared their knowledge. People will expose themselves to the risk of reprisal by a repressive regime only if they know that others are exposing themselves to that risk at the same time.

The story of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” illustrates the logic. When the little boy shouted that the emperor was naked, he was not telling them anything they did not already know. But he was changing their knowledge nonetheless, because now everyone knew that everyone else knew that the emperor was naked. That emboldened them to challenge the emperor’s authority with their laughter.

Answer

The logic he is illustrating is that only when an oppressed people realise that all the rest think alike will they be more likely to face the possibility of retaliation by an oppressive government.

- the masses will only be encouraged if there is freedom of speech to provide them the knowledge of the collective power and the understanding of the issue

**5. “humour is no laughing matter” (line 30).**

**Explain why this is a paradox. Use your own words as far as possible. [3]  
(2 truths that contradict each other)**

From the Passage

...humour is no laughing matter — why humour, even when tasteless, is terrifying to dictators and protected by democracies. Humour, especially satire and ridicule, can stealthily challenge assumptions by forcing its audience to see that those assumptions lead to consequences that everyone recognises are absurd.

Suggested Answer

It seems absurd/contradictory to say that humour, which is the expression of something funny, is serious. In reality, it makes sense because humour can surreptitiously/furtively go against expectations by making its recipients recognise that these basic norms bring ridiculous/illogical outcomes.

Humour is to provoke laughing and funny matters but is also used to show the severity of issue through a satire.

**From Passage 2**

**6. Explain the author’s use of the word “even” in the phrase “anyone who even questions free speech” (line 2). [2]**



the context of the word – reflects the implication – the extent of the issue – freedom of speech cannot be questioned

From the Passage

Millions of Americans support free speech... and that anyone who even questions free speech had better shut up.

Answer

The word 'even' suggests that American uphold the value of free speech to such an extreme that merely having doubts/reservations about the value of free speech is intolerable/unacceptable to them.

**7. How do the victims of hate speech suffer “more than” (lines 7–8) the victims of hate crime? Use your own words as far as possible. [1]**

From the Passage

emotional harm... is even more long-lasting and traumatic

Answer

The victims' suffering can be more sustained and more disturbing emotionally.

**8. Based on lines 14–16, what does the author suggest about how most defenders of free speech view those who argue against it? [2]**

From the Passage

Most defenders of free speech argue that those who pretend to be worried about the harms of free speech are more interested in trampling your right to say whatever you please. Arguments about harm are not even worth answering.  
(what are their views about them and how should they be treated.)

Answer

Those who argue against free speech are viewed by defenders of free speech as insincere in their concerns about the evils of free speech. They show blatant desire to crush others' right to free speech. These illogical people are to be treated with disdain.

**9. What was the price of free speech that the Europeans were “unwilling to pay” (line 39)? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]**

From the Passage

...genuine pain and intimidation. In America, where everyone had the right to speak their mind, civil-rights and women's-rights advocates were subjected to vile abuse in public and private, and gay men and lesbians endured decades of deafening homophobic propaganda before the tide of public opinion turned.

Answer

The price that the Europeans were unwilling to pay was real hurt and inducement of fear in minority groups.