

Read carefully the excerpt from Walter Lippmann's famous essay "The Indispensable Opposition" published in 1939 by *The Atlantic Monthly*, then follow the instructions given below it.

Were they pressed hard enough, most people would probably confess that political freedom—that is to say, the right to speak freely and to act in opposition—is a noble ideal rather than a practical necessity. As the case for freedom is generally put today, the argument lends itself to this feeling. It is made to appear that, whereas each person claims his freedom as a matter of right, the freedom he accords to other people is a matter of toleration. Thus, the defense of freedom of opinion tends to rest not on substantial, beneficial, and indispensable consequences, but in a somewhat eccentric, a rather vaguely benevolent, attachment to an abstraction.

It is very well to say with Voltaire, I wholly disapprove of what you say, but would defend to the death your right to say it," but as a matter of fact, most people will not defend to the death the rights of others: If they disapprove sufficiently what other people say, they will somehow suppress those people if they can.

So, if this is the best that can be said for the liberty of opinion, that a person must tolerate her opponents because everyone has a "right" to say what he or she pleases, then we shall find that liberty of opinion is a luxury, safe only in pleasant times when people can be tolerant because they are not deeply and vitally concerned.

Yet actually, as a matter of historic fact, there is a much stronger foundation for the great constitutional right of freedom of speech, and as a matter of practical human experience there is a much more compelling reason for cultivating the habits of free people. We take, it seems to me, a naively self-righteous view when we argue as if the right of our opponents to speak were something that we protect because we are magnanimous, noble, and unselfish. The compelling reason why, if liberty of opinion did not exist, we should have to invent it, and why it will eventually have to be restored in all civilized countries where it is now suppressed, is that we must protect the right of our opponents to speak because we must hear what they have to say.

We miss the whole point when we imagine that we tolerate the freedom of our political opponents as we tolerate a howling baby next door, as we put up with the blasts from our neighbor's radio because we are too peaceable to heave a brick through the window. If this were all there was to freedom of opinion, that we are too good-natured or too timid to do anything about our opponents and our critics except let them talk, it would be difficult to say whether we are tolerant because we are magnanimous or because we are lazy, because we have strong principles or because we lack serious convictions, whether we have the hospitality of an inquiring mind or the indifference of an empty mind. And so, if we truly wish to understand why freedom is necessary in a civilized society we must begin by realizing that, because freedom of discussion improves our own opinions, the liberties of other people are our own vital necessity.

We are much closer to the essence of the matter, not when we quote Voltaire, but when we go to the doctor and pay her to ask us the most embarrassing questions and to prescribe the most disagreeable diet. When we pay the doctor to exercise complete freedom of speech about the cause and cure of our stomachache, we do not look upon ourselves as tolerant and magnanimous, and worthy to be admired by ourselves. We have enough common sense to know that if we threaten to put the doctor in jail because we do not like the diagnosis and the prescription, it will be unpleasant for the doctor, to be sure, but equally unpleasant for our own stomachache. That is why even the most ferocious dictator would rather be treated by a doctor who was free to think and speak the truth than by his own Minister of Propaganda. For there is a point, the point at which things really matter, where the freedom of others is no longer a question of their right but of our own need.

The point at which we recognize this need is much higher in some people than in others. The totalitarian rulers think they do not need the freedom of an opposition: They exile, imprison, or shoot their opponents. We have concluded on the basis of practical experience, which goes back to the *Magna Carta* and beyond, that we need the opposition. We pay the opposition salaries out of the public treasury.

In so far as the usual apology for freedom of speech ignores this experience, it becomes abstract and eccentric rather than concrete and human. The emphasis is generally put on the right to speak, as if all that mattered were that the doctor should be free to go out into the park and explain to the vacant air why I have a stomachache. Surely this is a miserable caricature of the great civic right which people have bled and died for. What really matters is that the doctor should tell *me* what ails me, that I should listen to her; that if I do not like what she says I should be free to call in another doctor; and then that the first doctor should have to listen to the second doctor; and that out of all the speaking and listening, the give-and-take of opinions, the truth should be arrived at.

This is the creative principle of freedom of speech, not that it is a system for the tolerating of error, but that it is a system for finding the truth. It may not produce the truth, or the whole truth all the time, or often, or in some cases ever. But if the truth can be found, there is no other system which will normally and habitually find so much truth. Until we have thoroughly understood this principle, we shall not know why we must value our liberty, or how we can protect and develop it

Please choose one of the following essay prompts to write about. You may make marks on this paper. Please use the scrap paper provided for any notes or drafting you wish to do. The blue books are for the final draft of your essay.

1. Lippmann argues that “the freedom of others is no longer a question of their own right but of our own need.” In a well-crafted essay of at least four blue book pages, explain why Lippmann characterizes freedom of speech this way and whether or not you agree with him. Give reasons and concrete supporting examples to illustrate why you agree or disagree.
2. In a well-crafted essay of at least four blue book pages, consider whether you agree or disagree with Lippmann’s claim that, “the creative principle of Freedom of Speech... is a system for finding truth.” Consider the arguments and examples Lippmann uses to support his claim. Do they sufficiently support his contention? If not, why? What kind of evidence would he need to present to make the essay persuasive? If you found his argument persuasive, give a precise account of how he persuaded you. In either case, you will need to present details from the text to support your claim.
3. In a well-crafted essay of at least four blue book pages, consider how Lippmann uses the doctor-patient analogy in his argument. Then, either make the same general argument Lippmann makes (i.e., that Freedom of Speech is a practical necessity for societies based on individual liberty) using a *different* analogy or refute Lippmann’s argument by examining the shortcomings of the doctor-patient analogy.