

Fuck Censorship

First, let's get clear on what kind of censorship we oppose. We oppose any censorship by government because only the government has the "authority" to legally use force against you for expressing your ideas. Your neighbor might kick you off his property if you say something he dislikes, or a privately owned newspaper can refuse to publish your letter to the editor, but neither can legally use force against you to shut you up.

Why we oppose censorship by government:

Censorship lessens one of the main avenues we have to address our concerns. Most commonly, governments want to suppress the expression of ideas that undermine their position of power. To be able to actively speak out and oppose governmental action is essential to keep the government in check. Unfortunately governments throughout history have implemented illegitimate legislation aimed at preventing criticism of their actions. For example, in 1798 in the United States the Federalists (those advocating for a centralized government) passed the [Alien and Sedition Acts](#), which made it a crime to print anything that questioned the actions of a government official.

Censorship is futile. Using the force of government—which is to say, pointing a gun—doesn't change people's mind. Forcing you successfully into believe something is impossible. No one can check if you believe what they want you to believe; even if you claim you do, because they cannot read your mind. Physical force only stops persons from acting on the ideas in their minds but it doesn't eradicate those ideas from their minds. Also, censorship is ineffective because language evolves. If specific words are banned people will come up with new words to express their sentiments in a different way.

Censorship is an instrument of totalitarian regimes. Since censorship is ineffective at stopping people from holding certain ideas, to kill ideas one has to kill those who express and propagate them. So, while censorship advocates often claim that censorship protects people from violence (emotional or physical), history shows that censorship goes hand in hand with violence: The Chinese government violently broke up the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, the Catholic Church tortured and killed people as heretics during the Renaissance, the Nazis first burned books and then burned people.

Censorship prevents bad ideas from being exposed. Censoring an idea, no matter how atrocious it may be, does not prevent people from adopting it. In fact, many people who hold such an idea would use the fact that it's censored as further evidence that they are right and that their belief is being subverted by the government. Today, there is legislation against holocaust denial in over a dozen European countries. Not only does violate an individuals right to speech (though they don't have a right to force you to listen), it prevents an open discussion of the issue, preventing their claims from being exposed to the light of reason. False ideas have to be allowed to be out in the open, and you have to be free to discuss them, without fearing that the government will fine, imprison, or point a gun at you to try to shut you up.

Censorship allows a group of people (the government) to promote their morality. By granting the government the authority to deem certain content "obscene" or "dangerous" it means the government will be lobbied by countless groups to trying to impose their views on others. For instance, certain moralists want the government to ban pornography or the use of profanity because in their view these expressions have no redeeming value and often only offend people. But what is offensive or of no value to one person is in direct contrast to that of another person. We as individuals have the right to decide for ourselves what we are and are not exposed to, but not to limit that decision for others.

Censorship prevents the proliferation of truth and reason. People make mistakes. Since the government is made up of people, it too makes mistakes and therefore it cannot be given the power to censor something. Ideas, even if universally considered true, need to continually be challenged so that individuals do not get in the habit of accepting things based on faith, authority or prejudice—they need to know and internalize the reasons why their ideas are true and how to defend them properly.

