

70 If we have defined man's situation as a free choice, with no excuses and no recourse, every man who takes refuge behind the excuse of his passions, every man who sets up a determinism is a dishonest man.

The objection may be raised, "But why mayn't he choose himself dishonestly?" I reply that I am not obliged to pass moral judgment on him, but that I do define his dishonesty as an error. One cannot help considering the truth of the matter. Dishonesty is obviously a falsehood because it belies the complete freedom of involvement. On the same grounds, I maintain that there is also dishonesty if I choose to state that certain values exist prior to me; it is self-contradictory for me to want them and at the same state that they are imposed on me. Suppose someone says to me, "What if I want to be dishonest?" I'll answer, "There's no reason for you not to be, but I'm saying that that's what you are, and that the strictly coherent attitude is that of honesty."

Besides, I can bring moral judgment to bear. When I declare that freedom in every concrete circumstance can have no other aim than to want itself, if man has once become aware that in his forlornness he imposes values, he can no longer want but one thing, and that is freedom, as the basis of all values. That doesn't mean that he wants it in the abstract. It means simply that the ultimate meaning of the acts of honest men is the

quest for freedom as such. A man who belongs to a Communist or revolutionary union wants concrete goals; these goals imply an abstract desire for freedom; but this freedom is wanted in something concrete. We want freedom for freedom's sake and in every particular circumstance. And in wanting freedom we discover that it depends entirely on the freedom of others, and that the freedom of others depends on ours. Of course, freedom as the definition of man does not depend on others, but as soon as there is involvement, I am obliged to want others to have freedom at the same time that I want my own freedom. I can take freedom as my goal only if I take that of others as a goal as well. Consequently, when, in all honesty, I've recognized that man is a being in whom existence precedes essence, that he is a free being who, in various circumstances, can want only his freedom, I have at the same time recognized that I can want only the freedom of others.

Therefore, in the name of this will for freedom, which freedom itself implies, I may pass judgment on those who seek to hide from themselves the complete arbitrariness and the complete freedom of their existence. Those who hide their complete freedom from themselves out of a spirit of seriousness or by means of deterministic excuses, I shall call cowards.

Sartre, *Existentialism*

13.2 | Freedom of Thought and Expression

CENSORSHIP

Closely akin to freedom of action in society, discussed in Section 13.1, is freedom from interference in the expression of one's opinions, freedom from censorship in the publication of one's thought, and freedom in the production and dissemination of works of art. The basic issue here is, of course, the one about state censorship of works of art and other forms of expression. Is the state ever justified in prohibiting the expression of

opinion, or in condemning and repressing the communication of certain doctrines or views?

The reader will find quotations on both sides of the issue: those that argue for censorship on the grounds that the materials in question would, if allowed publication or dissemination, exert an injurious effect on the community or its members; and those that argue for complete, or almost complete,

toleration of every variety of opinion or doctrine. Questions are raised about the extension of toleration to material that is obscene, libelous, seditious, heretical, and schismatic. The reader will observe that the passages drawn from antiquity and the Middle Ages tend to draw a sharp line between what should and should not be tolerated. Beginning with Milton's *Areopagitica* and coming down through Locke and Voltaire to J. S.

Mill, the argument moves in the opposite direction—toward greater tolerance, based on increasing doubt that injury is ever done by the free expression of thought and opinion.

Related matters are discussed in Chapter 20, especially Section 20.9 on HERESY AND UNBELIEF; and also in Chapter 6, especially Section 6.5 on OPINION, BELIEF, AND FAITH, and Section 6.6 on DOUBT AND SKEPTICISM.

1 *Artabanus*. It is impossible, if no more than one opinion is uttered, to make choice of the best: a man is forced then to follow whatever advice may have been given him; but if opposite speeches are delivered, then choice can be exercised. In like manner pure gold is not recognised by itself; but when we test it along with baser ore, we perceive which is the better.

Herodotus, *History*, VII, 10

2 *Socrates*. If you say to me, Socrates, this time we will not mind Anytus, and you shall be let off, but upon one condition, that you are not to enquire and speculate in this way any more, and that if you are caught doing so again you shall die;—if this was the condition on which you let me go, I should reply: Men of Athens, I honour and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting any one whom I meet and saying to him after my manner: You, my friend,—a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens,—are you not ashamed of heaping up the greatest amount of money and honour and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all? And if the person with whom I am arguing, says: Yes, but I do care; then I do not leave him or let him go at once; but I proceed to interrogate and examine and cross-examine him, and if I think that he has no virtue in him, but only says that he has, I reproach him with undervaluing the greater, and overvaluing the less. And I shall repeat the same words to every one whom I meet, young and old, citizen and alien, but especially to the citizens, inasmuch as they are my brethren. For know that this is the command of God; and I believe that no greater good has ever happened in the state than my service to the God.

Plato, *Apology*, 29B

3 *Socrates*. The beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing; for that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken. . . . And shall we just carelessly allow children to hear any casual tales which may be devised by casual persons, and to receive into their minds ideas for the most part the very opposite of those which we should wish them to have when they are grown up?

Adeimantus. We cannot.

Then the first thing will be to establish a censorship of the writers of fiction, and let the censors receive any tale of fiction which is good, and reject the bad; and we will desire mothers and nurses to tell their children the authorised ones only. Let them fashion the mind with such tales. . . . A young person cannot judge what is allegorical and what is literal; anything that he receives into his mind at that age is likely to become indelible and unalterable; and therefore it is most important that the tales which the young first hear should be models of virtuous thoughts.

Plato, *Republic*, II, 377A

4 *Socrates*. Poets and story-tellers are guilty of making the gravest mis-statements when they tell us that wicked men are often happy, and the good miserable; and that injustice is profitable when undetected, but that justice is a man's own loss and another's gain—these things we shall forbid them to utter, and command them to sing and say the opposite.

Plato, *Republic*, III, 392A

5 *Socrates*. Shall our superintendence go no further, and are the poets only to be required by us to express the image of the good in their works, on pain, if they do anything else, of expulsion from our State? Or is the same control to be extended to other artists, and are they also to be prohibited from exhibiting the opposite forms of vice and intemperance and meanness and indecency in

sculpture and building and the other creative arts; and is he who cannot conform to this rule of ours to be prevented from practising his art in our State, lest the taste of our citizens be corrupted by him? We would not have our guardians grow up amid images of moral deformity, as in some noxious pasture, and there browse and feed upon many a baneful herb and flower day by day, little by little, until they silently gather a festering mass of corruption in their own soul. Let our artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful; then will our youth dwell in a land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear, like a health-giving breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul from earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason.

Plato, *Republic*, III, 401A

- 6 *Socrates*. The imitative poet who aims at being popular is not by nature made, nor is his art intended, to please or to affect the rational principle in the soul; but he will prefer the passionate and fitful temper, which is easily imitated. . . . Therefore we shall be right in refusing to admit him into a well-ordered State, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reason.

Plato, *Republic*, X, 605A

- 7 There is nothing which the legislator should be more careful to drive away than indecency of speech; for the light utterance of shameful words leads soon to shameful actions. The young especially should never be allowed to repeat or hear anything of the sort. . . . And since we do not allow improper language, clearly we should also banish pictures or speeches from the stage which are indecent.

Aristotle, *Politics*, 1336^b3

- 8 Our Twelve Tables of law only carried the death penalty for a few crimes. Among these crimes was singing or composing a song that was derogatory or insulting to someone. This was a good law. Our way of life should be open to judgment by the magistrates and law courts and not left to the commentary of clever playwrights. We should not be subjected to public disgrace unless we can answer and defend ourselves in a court of law. The early Romans did not want any living man to be the object of praise or blame on the stage.

Cicero, *Republic*, IV, 10

- 9 One is . . . inclined to laugh at the stupidity of men who suppose that the despotism of the present can actually efface the remembrances of the next generation. On the contrary, the persecution of genius fosters its influence; foreign tyrants, and

all who have imitated their oppression, have merely procured infamy for themselves and glory for their victims.

Tacitus, *Annals*, IV, 35

- 10 This was the most dreadful feature of the age, that leading members of the Senate, some openly, some secretly employed themselves in the very lowest work of the informer. One could not distinguish between aliens and kinsfolk, between friends and strangers, or say what was quite recent, or what half-forgotten from lapse of time. People were incriminated for some casual remark in the forum or at the dinner-table, for every one was impatient to be the first to mark his victim, some to screen themselves, most from being, as it were, infected with the contagion of the malady.

Tacitus, *Annals*, VI, 7

- 11 The laws of the Romans and the speculations of Plato have this resemblance, that the latter pronounce a wholesale condemnation of poetical fictions, while the former restrain the licence of satire, at least so far as men are the objects of it. Plato will not suffer poets even to dwell in his city: the laws of Rome prohibit actors from being enrolled as citizens; and if they had not feared to offend the gods who had asked the services of the players, they would in all likelihood have banished them altogether. It is obvious, therefore, that the Romans could not receive, nor reasonably expect to receive, laws for the regulation of their conduct from their gods, since the laws they themselves enacted far surpassed and put to shame the morality of the gods. The gods demand stageplays in their own honour; the Romans exclude the players from all civic honours; the former commanded that they should be celebrated by the scenic representation of their own disgrace; the latter commanded that no poet should dare to blemish the reputation of any citizen. But that demigod Plato resisted the lust of such gods as these and showed the Romans what their genius had left incomplete; for he absolutely excluded poets from his ideal state, whether they composed fictions with no regard to truth or set the worst possible examples before wretched men under the guise of divine actions.

Augustine, *City of God*, II, 14

- 12 Human government is derived from the Divine government, and should imitate it. Now although God is all-powerful and supremely good, nevertheless He allows certain evils to take place in the universe, which He might prevent, lest, without them, greater goods might be forfeited, or greater evils ensue. Accordingly in human government also, those who are in authority, rightly tolerate certain evils, lest certain goods be lost, or certain greater evils be incurred. . . . Hence, though unbelievers sin in their rites, they may be tolerated,

either on account of some good that ensues therefrom, or because of some evil avoided.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 10, 11

- 13 People are right to give the tightest possible barriers to the human mind. In study, as in everything else, its steps must be counted and regulated for it; the limits of the chase must be artificially determined for it. They bridle and bind it with religions, laws, customs, science, precepts, mortal and immortal punishments and rewards; and still we see that by its whirling and its incohesiveness it escapes all these bonds. It is an empty body, with nothing by which it can be seized and directed; a varying and formless body, which can be neither tied nor grasped.

Indeed there are few souls so orderly, so strong and wellborn, that they can be trusted with their own guidance, and that can sail with moderation and without temerity, in the freedom of their judgments, beyond the common opinions. It is more expedient to place them in tutelage.

The mind is a dangerous blade, even to its possessor, for anyone who does not know how to wield it with order and discretion. And there is no animal that must more rightly be given blinkers to hold its gaze, in subjection and constraint, in front of its feet, and to keep it from straying here or there outside the ruts that custom and the laws trace for it.

Wherefore it will become you better to confine yourself to the accustomed routine, whatever it is, than to fly headlong into this unbridled license.

Montaigne, *Essays*, II, 12, Apology
for Raymond Sebond

- 14 It is annexed to the sovereignty to be judge of what opinions and doctrines are averse, and what conducing to peace; and consequently, on what occasions, how far, and what men are to be trusted withal in speaking to multitudes of people; and who shall examine the doctrines of all books before they be published. For the actions of men proceed from their opinions, and in the well governing of opinions consisteth the well governing of men's actions in order to their peace and concord. And though in matter of doctrine nothing ought to be regarded but the truth, yet this is not repugnant to regulating of the same by peace. For doctrine repugnant to peace can no more be true, than peace and concord can be against the law of nature.

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II, 18

- 15 Disobedience may lawfully be punished in them that against the laws teach even true philosophy.

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, IV, 46

- 16 For books are as meats and viands are; some of good, some of evil substance; and yet God, in that unapocryphal vision, said without exception,

Rise, Peter, kill and eat, leaving the choice to each man's discretion. Wholesome meats to a vitiated stomach differ little or nothing from unwholesome; and best books to a naughty mind are not unapplicable to occasions of evil. Bad meats will scarce breed good nourishment in the healthiest concoction; but herein the difference is of bad books, that they to a discreet and judicious reader serve in many respects to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate. . . . I conceive, therefore, that when God did enlarge the universal diet of man's body, saving ever the rules of temperance, He then also, as before, left arbitrary the dieting and repasting of our minds; as wherein every mature man might have to exercise his own leading capacity.

Milton, *Areopagitica*

- 17 If every action, which is good or evil in man at ripe years, were to be under pittance and prescription and compulsion, what were virtue but a name, what praise could be then due to well-doing, what gramercy to be sober, just, or continent? Many there be that complain of Divine Providence for suffering Adam to transgress; foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, He gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions. We ourselves esteem not of that obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force: God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence. Wherefore did He create passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly tempered are the very ingredients of virtue? . . .

This justifies the high providence of God, who, though He commands us temperance, justice, continence, yet pours out before us, even to a profuseness, all desirable things, and gives us minds that can wander beyond all limit and satiety. Why should we then affect a rigour contrary to the manner of God and of nature, by abridging or scanting those means, which books freely permitted are, both to the trial of virtue and the exercise of truth? It would be better done, to learn that the law must needs be frivolous, which goes to restrain things, uncertainly and yet equally working to good and to evil. And were I the chooser, a dram of well-doing should be preferred before many times as much the forcible hindrance of evil-doing. For God sure esteems the growth and completing of one virtuous person more than the restraint of ten vicious.

Milton, *Areopagitica*

- 18 I know nothing of the licenser, but that I have his own hand here for his arrogance; who shall warrant me his judgment? The State, sir, replies the stationer, but has a quick return: The State shall

be my governors, but not my critics; they may be mistaken in the choice of a licenser, as easily as this licenser may be mistaken in an author; this is some common stuff; and he might add from Sir Francis Bacon, That such authorised books are but the language of the times. For though a licenser should happen to be judicious more than ordinary, which will be a great jeopardy of the next succession, yet his very office and his commission enjoins him to let pass nothing but what is vulgarly received already.

Milton, *Areopagitica*

- 19 Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.

Milton, *Areopagitica*

- 20 Whilst the parties of men cram their tenets down all men's throats whom they can get into their power, without permitting them to examine their truth or falsehood; and will not let truth have fair play in the world, nor men the liberty to search after it: what improvements can be expected of this kind? What greater light can be hoped for in the moral sciences? The subject part of mankind in most places might, instead thereof, with Egyptian bondage, expect Egyptian darkness, were not the candle of the Lord set up by himself in men's minds, which it is impossible for the breath or power of man wholly to extinguish.

Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding*,
Bk. IV, III, 20

- 21 Since . . . it is unavoidable to the greatest part of men, if not all, to have several *opinions*, without certain and indubitable proofs of their truth; and it carries too great an imputation of ignorance, lightness, or folly for men to quit and renounce their former tenets presently upon the offer of an argument which they cannot immediately answer, and show the insufficiency of: it would, methinks, become all men to maintain peace, and the common offices of humanity, and friendship, in the diversity of opinions; since we cannot reasonably expect that any one should readily and obsequiously quit his own opinion, and embrace ours, with a blind resignation to an authority which the understanding of man acknowledges not. For however it may often mistake, it can own no other guide but reason, nor blindly submit to the will and dictates of another.

Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding*,
Bk. IV, XVI, 4

- 22 He knew no reason, why those who entertain opinions prejudicial to the publick, should be obliged to change, or should not be obliged to conceal them. And, as it was tyranny in any Government to require the first, so it was weakness not to enforce the second: for, a man may be allowed

to keep poisons in his closet, but not to vend them about as cordials.

Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, II, 6

- 23 In what kind of government are censors necessary? My answer is, that they are necessary in a republic, where the principle of government is virtue. We must not imagine that criminal actions only are destructive of virtue; it is destroyed also by omissions, by neglects, by a certain coolness in the love of our country, by bad examples, and by the seeds of corruption: whatever does not openly violate but elude the laws, does not subvert but weaken them, ought to fall under the inquiry and correction of the censors. . . .

In monarchies there should be no censors; the former are founded on honour, and the nature of honour is to have the whole world for its censor. Every man who fails in this article is subject to the reproaches even of those who are void of honour.

Montesquieu, *Spirit of Laws*, V, 19

- 24 I think, that the state ought to tolerate every principle of philosophy; nor is there an instance, that any government has suffered in its political interests by such indulgence. There is no enthusiasm among philosophers; their doctrines are not very alluring to the people; and no restraint can be put upon their reasonings, but what must be of dangerous consequence to the sciences, and even to the state, by paving the way for persecution and oppression in points, where the generality of mankind are more deeply interested and concerned.

Hume, *Concerning Human Understanding*, XI, 114

- 25 The spirit of the people must frequently be roused, in order to curb the ambition of the court; and the dread of rousing this spirit must be employed to prevent that ambition. Nothing so effectual to this purpose as the liberty of the press; by which all the learning, wit, and genius of the nation, may be employed on the side of freedom, and every one be animated to its defence. As long, therefore, as the republican part of our government can maintain itself against the monarchical, it will naturally be careful to keep the press open, as of importance to its own preservation.

Hume, *Of the Liberty of the Press*

- 26 The men of letters who have rendered the greatest services to the small number of thinking beings spread over the world, are the isolated writers, the true scholars shut in their studies, who have neither argued on the benches of the universities, nor told half-truths in the academies; and almost all of them have been persecuted. Our wretched species is so made that those who walk on the well-trodden path always throw stones at those who are showing a new road.

Montesquieu says that the Scythians rent their

slaves' eyes, so that they might be less distracted while they were churning their butter; that is just how the inquisition functions, and in the land where this monster reigns almost everybody is blind. In England people have had two eyes for more than two hundred years; the French are starting to open one eye; but sometimes there are men in power who do not want the people to have even this one eye open.

These poor persons in power are like Doctor Balouard of the Italian Comedy, who does not want to be served by anyone but the dolt Harlequin, and who is afraid of having too shrewd a valet.

Compose some odes in praise of My Lord Superbus Fadus, some madrigals for his mistress; dedicate a book on geography to his door-keeper, you will be well-received; enlighten mankind, you will be exterminated.

Descartes was forced to leave his country, Gassendi was calumniated, Arnauld dragged out his days in exile; every philosopher is treated as the prophets were among the Jews.

Who would believe that in the eighteenth century a philosopher was dragged before the secular tribunals, and treated as impious by the tribunals of arguments, for having said that men could not practise the arts if they had no hands? I do not despair that soon the first person who is so insolent as to say that men could not think if they had no heads will be immediately condemned to the galleys; "for," some young graduate will say to him, "the soul is a pure spirit, the head is only matter; God can put the soul in the heel, as well as in the brain; therefore I denounce you as impious."

The greatest misfortune of a man of letters is not perhaps being the object of his confrères' jealousy, the victim of the cabal, the despised of the men of power; but of being judged by fools.

Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*:
Men of Letters

- 27 Of all religions, the Christian is without doubt the one which should inspire tolerance most, although up to now the Christians have been the most intolerant of all men. The Christian Church was divided in its cradle, and was divided even in the persecutions which under the first emperors it sometimes endured. Often the martyr was regarded as an apostate by his brethren, and the Carpocratian Christian expired beneath the sword of the Roman executioners, excommunicated by the Ebionite Christian, the which Ebionite was anathema to the Sabellian.

This horrible discord, which has lasted for so many centuries, is a very striking lesson that we should pardon each other's errors; discord is the great ill of mankind; and tolerance is the only remedy for it.

There is nobody who is not in agreement with this truth, whether he meditates soberly in his

study, or peaceably examines the truth with his friends. Why then do the same men who admit in private indulgence, kindness, justice, rise in public with so much fury against these virtues? Why? it is that their own interest is their god, and that they sacrifice everything to this monster that they worship.

I possess a dignity and a power founded on ignorance and credulity; I walk on the heads of the men who lie prostrate at my feet; if they should rise and look me in the face, I am lost; I must bind them to the ground, therefore, with iron chains.

Thus have reasoned the men whom centuries of bigotry have made powerful. They have other powerful men beneath them, and these have still others, who all enrich themselves with the spoils of the poor, grow fat on their blood, and laugh at their stupidity. They all detest tolerance, as partisans grown rich at the public expense fear to render their accounts, and as tyrants dread the word liberty. And then, to crown everything, they hire fanatics to cry at the top of their voices: "Respect my master's absurdities, tremble, pay, and keep your mouths shut."

It is thus that a great part of the world long was treated; but to-day when so many sects make a balance of power, what course to take with them? Every sect, as one knows, is a ground of error; there are no sects of geometers, algebraists, arithmeticians, because all the propositions of geometry, algebra and arithmetic are true. In every other science one may be deceived. What Thomist or Scotist theologian would dare say seriously that he is sure of his case?

If it were permitted to reason consistently in religious matters, it is clear that we all ought to become Jews, because Jesus Christ our Saviour was born a Jew, lived a Jew, died a Jew, and that he said expressly that he was accomplishing, that he was fulfilling the Jewish religion. But it is clearer still that we ought to be tolerant of one another, because we are all weak, inconsistent, liable to fickleness and error. Shall a reed laid low in the mud by the wind say to a fellow reed fallen in the opposite direction: "Crawl as I crawl, wretch, or I shall petition that you be torn up by the roots and burned?"

Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*: Tolerance

- 28 Johnson. "They make a rout about *universal* liberty, without considering that all that is to be valued, or indeed can be enjoyed by individuals, is *private* liberty. Political liberty is good only so far as it produces private liberty. Now, Sir, there is the liberty of the press, which you know is a constant topic. Suppose you and I and two hundred more were restrained from printing our thoughts: what then? What proportion would that restraint upon us bear to the private happiness of the nation?"

This mode of representing the inconveniences

of restraint as light and insignificant, was a kind of sophistry in which he delighted to indulge himself, in opposition to the extreme laxity for which it has been fashionable for too many to argue, when it is evident, upon reflection, that the very essence of government is restraint; and certain it is, that as government produces rational happiness, too much restraint is better than too little. But when restraint is unnecessary, and so close as to gall those who are subject to it, the people may and ought to remonstrate; and, if relief is not granted, to resist. Of this manly and spirited principle, no man was more convinced than Johnson himself.

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (May 1768)

- 29 *Johnson*. "Every society has a right to preserve public peace and order, and therefore has a good right to prohibit the propagation of opinions which have a dangerous tendency. To say the *magistrate* has this right, is using an inadequate word: it is the *society* for which the magistrate is agent. He may be morally or theologically wrong in restraining the propagation of opinions which he thinks dangerous, but he is politically right." *Mayo*. "I am of opinion, Sir, that every man is entitled to liberty of conscience in religion; and that the magistrate cannot restrain that right." *Johnson*. "Sir, I agree with you. Every man has a right to liberty of conscience, and with that the magistrate cannot interfere. People confound liberty of thinking with liberty of talking; nay, with liberty of preaching. Every man has a physical right to think as he pleases; for it cannot be discovered how he thinks. He has not a moral right, for he ought to inform himself, and think justly. But, Sir, no member of a society has a right to *teach* any doctrine contrary to what the society holds to be true. The magistrate, I say, may be wrong in what he thinks: but while he thinks himself right, he may and ought to enforce what he thinks." *Mayo*. "Then, Sir, we are to remain always in error, and truth never can prevail; and the magistrate was right in persecuting the first Christians." *Johnson*. "Sir, the only method by which religious truth can be established is by martyrdom. The magistrate has a right to enforce what he thinks; and he who is conscious of the truth has a right to suffer. I am afraid there is no other way of ascertaining the truth, but by persecution on the one hand and enduring it on the other." *Goldsmith*. "But how is a man to act, Sir? Though firmly convinced of the truth of his doctrine, may he not think it wrong to expose himself to persecution? Has he a right to do so? Is it not, as it were, committing voluntary suicide?" *Johnson*. "Sir, as to voluntary suicide, as you call it, there are twenty thousand men in an army who will go without scruple to be shot at, and mount a breach for five-pence a day." *Goldsmith*. "But have they a moral right to do this?" *Johnson*. "Nay, Sir, if you

will not take the universal opinion of mankind, I have nothing to say. If mankind cannot defend their own way of thinking, I cannot defend it. Sir, if a man is in doubt whether it would be better for him to expose himself to martyrdom or not, he should not do it. He must be convinced that he has a delegation from heaven."

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (May 7, 1773)

- 30 *The Beggar's Opera*, and the common question, whether it was pernicious in its effects, having been introduced;—*Johnson*. "As to this matter, which has been very much contested, I myself am of opinion, that more influence has been ascribed to *The Beggar's Opera*, than it in reality ever had; for I do not believe that any man was ever made a rogue by being present at its representation. At the same time I do not deny that it may have some influence, by making the character of a rogue familiar, and in some degree pleasing."

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Apr. 18, 1775)

- 31 *Johnson*. Every man has a right to utter what he thinks truth, and every other man has a right to knock him down for it.

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (1780)

- 32 I mentioned Dr. Johnson's excellent distinction between liberty of conscience and liberty of teaching. *Johnson*. "Consider, Sir; if you have children whom you wish to educate in the principles of the Church of England, and there comes a Quaker who tries to pervert them to his principles, you would drive away the Quaker. You would not trust to the predominance of right, which you believe is in your opinions; you would keep wrong out of their heads. Now the vulgar are the children of the State. If any one attempts to teach them doctrines contrary to what the State approves, the magistrate may and ought to restrain him." *Seward*. "Would you restrain private conversation, Sir?" *Johnson*. "Why, Sir, it is difficult to say where private conversation begins, and where it ends. If we three should discuss even the great question concerning the existence of a Supreme Being by ourselves, we should not be restrained; for that would be to put an end to all improvement. But if we should discuss it in the presence of ten boarding-school girls, and as many boys, I think the magistrate would do well to put us in the stocks, to finish the debate there."

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Apr. 29, 1783)

- 33 The people are the only censors of their governors; and even their errors will tend to keep these to the true principles of their institution. To punish these errors too severely would be to suppress the only safeguard of the public liberty. The way to prevent these irregular interpositions of the people is to give them full information of their affairs through the channel of the public papers,

and to contrive that those papers should penetrate the whole mass of the people. The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.

Jefferson, *Letter to Edward Carrington*
(Jan. 16, 1787)

- 34 Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.

Jefferson, *First Inaugural Address*

- 35 Let each thinker pursue his own path; if he shows talent, if he gives evidence of profound thought, in one word, if he shows that he possesses the power of reasoning—reason is always the gainer. If you have recourse to other means, if you attempt to coerce reason, if you raise the cry of treason to humanity, if you excite the feelings of the crowd, which can neither understand nor sympathize with such subtle speculations—you will only make yourselves ridiculous. For the question does not concern the advantage or disadvantage which we are expected to reap from such inquiries; the question is merely how far reason can advance in the field of speculation, apart from all kinds of interest, and whether we may depend upon the exertions of speculative reason, or must renounce all reliance on it.

Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*,
Transcendental Method

- 36 To define freedom of the press as freedom to say and write whatever we please is parallel to the assertion that freedom as such means freedom to do as we please. Talk of this kind is due to wholly uneducated, crude, and superficial ideas. Moreover, it is in the very nature of the thing that abstract thinking should nowhere be so stubborn, so unintelligent, as in this matter of free speech, because what it is considering is the most fleeting, the most contingent, and the most personal side of opinion in its infinite diversity of content and tergiversation. Beyond the direct incitation to theft, murder, rebellion, etc., there lies its artfully constructed expression—an expression which seems in itself quite general and vague, while all the time it conceals a meaning anything but vague or else is compatible with inferences which are not actually expressed, and it is impossible to determine whether they rightly follow from it, or whether

they were meant to be inferred from it. This vagueness of matter and form precludes laws on these topics from attaining the requisite determinacy of law, and since the trespass, wrong, and injury here are so extremely personal and subjective in form, judgement on them is reduced equally to a wholly subjective verdict. Such an injury is directed against the thoughts, opinions, and wills of others, but apart from that, these form the element in which alone it is actually anything. But this element is the sphere of the freedom of others, and it therefore depends on them whether the injurious expression of opinion is or is not actually an effective act.

Laws then [against libel, etc.] may be criticized by exhibiting their indeterminacy as well as by arguing that they leave it open to the speaker or writer to devise turns of phrase or tricks of expression, and so evade the laws or claim that judicial decisions are mere subjective verdicts. Further, however, against the view that the expression of opinion is an act with injurious effects, it may be maintained that it is not an act at all, but only opining and thinking, or only talking. And so we have before us a claim that mere opining and talking is to go unpunished because it is of a purely subjective character both in form and content, because it does not mean anything and is of no importance. And yet in the same breath we have the claim that this same opining and talking should be held in high esteem and respect—the opining because it is personal property and in fact pre-eminently the property of mind; the talking because it is only this same property being expressed and used.

But the substance of the matter is and remains that traducing the honour of anyone, slander, abuse, the contemptuous caricature of government, its ministers, officials, and in particular the person of the monarch, defiance of the laws, incitement to rebellion, etc., etc., are all crimes or misdemeanours in one or other of their numerous gradations. The rather high degree of indeterminability which such actions acquire on account of the element in which they are expressed does not annul this fundamental character of theirs. Its only effect is that the subjective field in which they are committed also determines the nature and form of the reaction to the offence. It is the field in which the offence was committed which itself necessitates subjectivity of view, contingency, etc., in the reaction to the offence, whether the reaction takes the form of punishment proper or of police action to prevent crimes. Here, as always, abstract thinking sets itself to explain away the fundamental and concrete nature of the thing by concentrating on isolated aspects of its external appearance and on abstractions drawn therefrom.

The sciences, however, are not to be found anywhere in the field of opinion and subjective views, provided of course that they be sciences in other

respects. Their exposition is not a matter of clever turns of phrase, allusiveness, half-utterances, and semi-reticences, but consists in the unambiguous, determinate, and open expression of their meaning and purport. It follows that they do not fall under the category of public opinion. Apart from this, however, as I said just now, the element in which views and their expression become actions in the full sense and exist effectively, consists of the intelligence, principles, and opinions of others. Hence this aspect of these actions, that is their effectiveness proper and their danger to individuals, society, and the state depends on the character of the ground on which they fall, just as a spark falling on a heap of gunpowder is more dangerous than if it falls on hard ground where it vanishes without trace. Thus, just as the right of science to express itself depends on and is safeguarded by its subject-matter and content, so an illegitimate expression may also acquire a measure of security, or at least sufferance, in the scorn which it has brought upon itself.

Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 319

37 Every burned book or house enlightens the world.
Emerson, *Compensation*

38 The great writers to whom the world owes what religious liberty it possesses, have mostly asserted freedom of conscience as an indefeasible right, and denied absolutely that a human being is accountable to others for his religious belief. Yet so natural to mankind is intolerance in whatever they really care about, that religious freedom has hardly anywhere been practically realised, except where religious indifference, which dislikes to have its peace disturbed by theological quarrels, has added its weight to the scale.

Mill, *On Liberty*, I

39 If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.

Mill, *On Liberty*, II

40 We have now recognised the necessity to the mental well-being of mankind (on which all their other well-being depends) of freedom of opinion, and freedom of the expression of opinion, on four distinct grounds; which we will now briefly recapitulate.

First, if any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility.

Secondly, though the silenced opinion be an error, it may, and very commonly does, contain a portion of truth; and since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the

whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied.

Thirdly, even if the received opinion be not only true, but the whole truth; unless it is suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will, by most of those who receive it, be held in the manner of a prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds. And not only this, but, fourthly, the meaning of the doctrine itself will be in danger of being lost, or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct: the dogma becoming a mere formal profession, inefficacious for good, but cumbering the ground, and preventing the growth of any real and heartfelt conviction, from reason or personal experience.

Mill, *On Liberty*, II

41 Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth—more than ruin, more even than death. Thought is subversive and revolutionary, destructive and terrible; thought is merciless to privilege, established institutions, and comfortable habits; thought is anarchic and lawless, indifferent to authority, careless of the well-tryed wisdom of the ages. Thought looks into the pit of hell and is not afraid. It sees man, a feeble speck, surrounded by unfathomable depths of silence; yet it bears itself proudly, as unmoved as if it were lord of the universe. Thought is great and swift and free, the light of the world, and the chief glory of man.

But if thought is to become the possession of many, not the privilege of the few, we must have done with fear. It is fear that holds men back—fear lest their cherished beliefs should prove delusions, fear lest the institutions by which they live should prove harmful, fear lest they themselves should prove less worthy of respect than they have supposed themselves to be. “Should the working man think freely about property? Then what will become of us, the rich? Should young men and young women think freely about sex? Then what will become of morality? Should soldiers think freely about war? Then what will become of military discipline? Away with thought! Back into the shades of prejudice, lest property, morals, and war should be endangered! Better men should be stupid, slothful, and oppressive than that their thoughts should be free. For if their thoughts were free they might not think as we do. And at all costs this disaster must be averted.” So the opponents of thought argue in the unconscious depths of their souls. And so they act in their churches, their schools, and their universities.

Russell, *Education*

42 The fundamental argument for freedom of opinion is the doubtfulness of all our beliefs. If we certainly knew the truth, there would be something to be said for teaching it. But in that case it could

be taught without invoking authority, by means of its inherent reasonableness. It is not necessary to make a law that no one shall be allowed to teach arithmetic if he holds heretical opinions on the multiplication table, because here the truth is clear, and does not require to be enforced by pen-

alties. When the State intervenes to ensure the teaching of some doctrine, it does so *because* there is no conclusive evidence in favour of that doctrine.

Russell, *Sceptical Essays*, XIV

13.3 | Equality

Two main questions are discussed in the passages assembled here. One is whether persons *are* by nature equal in any sense. The question is not whether individuals are unequal in a wide variety of respects—in their natural endowments and in their personal attainments; no one has ever denied that; but whether there is any truth in the proposition that men *are created equal or are by nature equal* in any sense of the term. The other question is whether men *should be accorded equality of status or of opportunity and should be given an equality of external conditions*. The question that involves the word “should,” as contrasted with the question that involves the word “are,” elicits a range of diverse answers, from the advocacy of a complete equality of conditions to the opposite extreme of contending that the inequalities that exist among men, in their natural endowments and their personal attainments, call for inequality of treatment, status, and opportunity.

Closely related to the issue raised by the second question is the issue concerning the relation of liberty and equality. The reader will find famous passages from John C. Calhoun, Alexis de Tocqueville, and William Graham Sumner arguing that liberty and equality are incompatible: every movement toward equality of treatment or the establishment of an equality of conditions tends to interfere with or diminish individual liberty. On the opposite side, the reader will find Henry George and R. H. Tawney arguing that equality of conditions, especially in economic matters, is indispensable to the operation and preservation of political liberty.

Crucial to both issues, of course, is the position one takes on the question of human equality: whether there is any significant respect in which all men are naturally or personally equal, and whether such equality is more fundamental than the many respects in which individuals are unequal. Relevant to this question is the discussion of natural slavery in Section 10.7 on SLAVERY; also relevant are the arguments for and against democracy that will be found in Section 10.4 on GOVERNMENT OF AND BY THE PEOPLE: REPUBLIC AND DEMOCRACY. Other sections in which equality is a pivotal term are 12.2 on JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE, 12.3 on RIGHTS—NATURAL AND CIVIL, and 10.8 on CLASSES AND CLASS CONFLICT. The reader should observe that the main concern in certain of these contexts is political equality, equality of rights, or equality before the law; in other contexts it is economic equality—equality of wealth, in pos-