

PREFACE

“We are not content with negative obedience, nor even with the most abject submission. When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will. We do not destroy the heretic....We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him....You must love Big Brother. It is not enough to obey him; you must love him.”—O’Brien to Winston, in George Orwell, *1984*

“Struggles to coerce uniformity of sentiment in support of some end thought essential to their time and country have been waged by many good, as well as by evil, men. Nationalism is a relatively recent phenomenon, but, at other times and places, the ends have been racial or territorial security, support of a dynasty or regime, and particular plans for saving souls. As first and moderate methods to attain unity have failed, those bent on its

accomplishment must resort to an ever-increasing severity. As governmental pressure toward unity becomes greater, so strife becomes more bitter as to whose unity it shall be. Probably no deeper division of our people could proceed from any provocation than from finding it necessary to choose what doctrine and whose program public educational officials shall compel youth to unite in embracing. Ultimate futility of such attempts to compel coherence is the lesson of every such effort from the Roman drive to stamp out Christianity as a disturber of its pagan unity, the Inquisition, as a means to religious and dynastic unity, the Siberian exiles as a means to Russian unity, down to the fast failing efforts of our present totalitarian enemies. Those who begin coercive elimination of dissent soon find themselves exterminating dissenters. Compulsory unification of opinion achieves only the unanimity of the graveyard.”—*The Supreme Court of the United States, in West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (1943)

INTRODUCTION: THE INDISPENSABLE RIGHT TO PRIVATE CONSCIENCE

Support for freewheeling debate and the freedom to challenge reigning assumptions are the cornerstones of our American culture of rights, our constitutional order, designed to defend that culture, and our system of higher education. The freedom to disagree, to state one's beliefs and values, and to discuss and argue peacefully makes democratic deliberation possible and allows us to pursue truth unfettered by the demands of any one ideology or orthodox point of view. As John Stuart Mill wrote in *On Liberty*, "[T]he peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation, those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer percep-

tion and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.”

This right to free expression is enshrined in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which bars the government (including administrators at state colleges and universities) from enacting any law that serves to prevent a citizen, including a student, from speaking his or her mind, with very limited exceptions (for example, obscenity, libel or slander, incitement to imminent violence, or threats). Thus, for example, a citizen who wishes to express his or her support for or opposition to the nation's foreign policy may not be stopped from doing so. (For a more detailed discussion of this topic of free speech, see *FIRE's Guide to Free Speech on Campus*.)

Before one can have the freedom to express ideas in open debate, however, one must have freedom of conscience: the right to arrive at one's private beliefs, without being coerced into an artificial unity by those who wield power over us. After all, the freedom to speak is a dead letter if one lacks the freedom to think, to believe, or to disbelieve. At the heart of American liberty lies a recognition of individual rights, individual responsibility, and individual dignity. Over one's inner mind, conscience, and self, no one has coercive power.

There is, of course, an interaction between freedom of conscience and belief, on the one hand, and freedom of speech, on the other. Usually when one speaks, one is

expressing what one believes. Although belief and speech are, in one sense, two sides of the same coin, there is, nonetheless, an important distinction between them. When the government seeks to *prevent* someone from speaking his or her mind, that is what we traditionally call *ensorship*. Censorship is generally a dreadful thing, but coercing belief and conscience is yet more pernicious and evil, because it invades the inner being of an individual's life. Sometimes tyrannical power seeks to *force* individuals under its sway to *speak or utter* things that the speaker does *not* believe. In our moral tradition, that is a frightful assault upon the innermost sanctum of human privacy and dignity. In our legal tradition, it is a worse violation of the First Amendment to force someone to say that which he does not believe (which we might describe as an *affirmative* form of censorship) than to prevent him from saying that which he does believe (which we might describe as a *negative* form of censorship).

The form of censorship with which this *Guide* is concerned is the affirmative form of censorship that goes beyond prohibiting “bad” speech and ideas. It instead seeks to impose on a student, and coerce the student to adopt, and to believe in, the “approved” point of view advanced by the authorities. Official acts that invade this private sphere of thought and conscience—what we call, in its starkest form, “thought reform”—are related to the more familiar concept of censorship of public speech, but reach far deeper. Instead of preventing students from

expressing their views and beliefs, thought reform seeks to coerce students into *contradicting* those views and beliefs by saying things that they do not believe and that may, in fact, violate their most deeply held beliefs, with the ultimate goal of forcing change in those beliefs themselves. This act reaches deep into the mind and heart of a human being and seeks to force him not only to abandon his own beliefs, but also to mouth and indeed adopt the beliefs of those in positions of power and authority over him.

Censoring speech is bad enough, but requiring people to adhere to, and even to believe (or at least to proclaim belief) in an official, orthodox ideology is completely incompatible with a free society and is the hallmark of totalitarian social control. Of course, those who endeavor to force others to believe in an official ideology and who punish the expression of dissent frequently do so under the guise of enforcing “good,” “moral,” and “ethical” values and social goals. When a government or administration seeks to force those under its authority to believe and to mouth certain views, that authority claims to be implementing positive values—“politically correct,” as the phrase goes—leading to the good society. For those who would coerce thought, belief, and conscience, dissent from their own point of view is evil or immoral or antisocial, and not simply the expression of a different point of view.

Introduction: The Indispensable Right to Private Conscience

History should have taught us to hold in horror the violation of conscience and private belief. The “peat bog soldiers,” Nazi prisoners sent to work in the fields until they died, sang the song, “*Die Gedanken sind frei*,” “Thoughts Are Free.” Inward thoughts and convictions truly are the final atoms of human liberty. No decent institution, civilization, or person pursues an unwilling fellow creature there. Our colleges and universities do so routinely.

The fundamental rights of conscience and belief, the thought-reform programs that threaten those rights at today’s universities, and the means by which a decent and free people can challenge such programs are the topics of this *Guide*.