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## INTRODUCTION: A BATTLE OF IDEAS

*Civilization depends on reason; freedom means the freedom to think, then act accordingly; the rights of free speech and a free press implement the sovereignty of reason over brute force. If civilized existence is to be possible, the right of the individual to exercise his rational faculty must be inviolable.*

—Leonard Peikoff, 1989

Freedom of speech is an essential pillar of Western civilization, yet, tragically, this precious right has come under increasing attack over the last few decades—in the fatwah against Salman Rushdie in 1989, the threats against Danish cartoonists in 2005–06, and, more recently, the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris and on a cartoon contest in Garland, Texas. While the chief perpetrators of the attacks have been Islamic totalitarians, the primary threat to freedom of speech is not existential, but philosophical. Islamists are obviously motivated by ideas that are anathema to freedom of speech, but so, increasingly, are Western leaders and intellectuals, who have repeatedly met these attacks not with a confident defense of Western values, but with apologies, appeasement, and victim-blaming.

For a glimpse of the source of these ideas, we need look no further than the universities, where students are taught a steady diet of irrationalism and emotionalism, self-sacrifice, and multicultural tribalism. The results are predictable—students increasingly seek “trigger warnings” before being taught controversial ideas, they seek refuge in “safe spaces,” and they rail against the ideals on which Western culture is based. In 2015 we saw the logical consequences of these ideas, when students at the University of Missouri physically blocked a photographer from taking pictures of a protest held on public property, and one professor was caught on camera calling for “some muscle” to remove a student who refused to stop filming the protests.

Meanwhile, our politicians increasingly use the “muscle” they possess—the power of physical force, which is the essence of government power—to threaten free speech directly and to choke it off through the use of regulation and litigation. Recent examples include the IRS’s targeting of Tea Party groups for attempting to speak out during the 2012 election cycle, the constant calls by politicians and intellectuals for greater controls on political speech in the form

of campaign finance laws, demands that the United States enact European-style “hate speech” laws, and the investigations by state attorneys general of Exxon and various advocacy groups for challenging climate change orthodoxy.

Ayn Rand spent much of her career writing about events such as these and the philosophical ideas and trends that produce them. In her article “Choose Your Issues,” which appeared in the first issue of the *Objectivist Newsletter*, she wrote: “[T]wo enormously dangerous issues are creeping up on us, undiscussed, unopposed and unfought. . . one to destroy intellectual freedom, the other to destroy economic freedom.” The first was censorship; the second was rampant business regulation, most notably the antitrust laws. Rand urged her readers to educate themselves and speak out about these issues as “they involve the fundamental principles of our culture.” In her 1960 essay “For the New Intellectual,” she elaborated on this point: “*Intellectual* freedom cannot exist without *political* freedom; political freedom cannot exist without *economic* freedom; *a free mind and a free market are corollaries.*”

At the Ayn Rand Institute, we have carried on the defense of both intellectual and economic freedom that Rand began over fifty years ago. The current volume is a collection of our recent writings, published on our website and as op-eds, on the subject of free speech. With one exception, all the pieces have been published since 2003. The exception, which serves as a prologue to the essays in Part 1 of the book, is Leonard Peikoff’s article on our government’s shameful response to the fatwah against Salman Rushdie. In 2009, two decades after the incident, the writer Bruce Bawer would note in his book, *Surrender*, that “there were precious few of us who grasped at the time of the Rushdie fatwah that here was indeed a new form of jihad on the world scene” and that Islamists presented a grave threat to intellectual freedom.

Peikoff grasped it in 1989, shortly after Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini issued the fatwah and Western governments did nothing.

His piece, which ran in the *New York Times* as a full-page advertisement, is a philosophical tour de force, a grave warning of what will happen if we do not act, and a call to action in defense of our rights.

Peikoff identifies the fatwah for what it is—an act of war—a term that even today most commentators are loath to use. Decrying the lame and equivocal response by our government to the Ayatollah’s declaration of war, Peikoff explains just what our government was sacrificing: the values of reason and intellectual freedom that are at the

heart of Western civilization. The consequences of inaction, as Peikoff explained, were dire:

If [the Ayatollah] is not stopped . . . writers and publishers will begin, as a desperate measure of self-defense, to practice self-censorship . . . Is the land of the free and the home of the brave to become the land of the bland and the home of the fearful?

Tragically, the events of the last decade have proved Peikoff correct. Our leaders and intellectuals have continued to appease the enemies of Western civilization and the consequences are now clear: increased attacks, widespread fear and self-censorship, and a growing antipathy to free speech in the West.

But while some commentators have noted these consequences, none has focused on the fundamental philosophical causes of the attacks and of the weak response among intellectuals and governments in the West.

As this volume attests, at ARI we engage in this sort of analysis every day.

Along with Peikoff's essay, the essays in Part 1 of this book serve as a demonstration of the principle that ideas have consequences, and terrible ideas have terrible consequences. The essays in this part expand on the points raised in Peikoff's essay, discussing the major terrorist attacks on free speech that followed the Rushdie affair, the ideas and attitudes that motivated both the attacks and the appeasing response in the West, and the self-censorship that has taken root in the West as a result. This section also includes my essay on North Korea's threats to Sony over the movie *The Interview*, because the episode closely parallels the blame many unjustly placed on private companies for the inactions of their governments during the Rushdie affair. In addition to essays, Part 1 includes an interview of Flemming Rose, the Danish editor at the center of the Muhammad cartoons controversy in 2005 and author of *The Tyranny of Silence: How One Cartoon Ignited a Global Debate on the Future of Free Speech*. Part 1 ends with a timeline of significant events related to terrorist attacks on free speech since the Rushdie affair, illustrating what the West's appeasement has wrought.

Parts 2 and 3 examine the ideas motivating the attacks on freedom of speech more broadly, their consequences, and what we need to do to defend this precious right.

What are the ideas at the root of the attacks on free speech? In

1962 Ayn Rand summarized them as “mysticism (irrationalism)—altruism—collectivism.” These ideas threaten more than just freedom of speech, as Rand made clear; they are eroding the foundations of Western civilization itself.

Irrationalism, whether secular or religious, represents a rejection of our basic means of survival—our reasoning minds. In her essay “Faith and Force: The Destroyers of the Modern World,” Rand noted the consequences of rejecting reason: “There are only two means by which men can deal with one another: guns or logic. Force or persuasion. Those who know that they cannot win by means of logic, have always resorted to guns.” The entire jihadist attack on free speech serves as a grim reminder that Rand was right. In my essay “At the Heart of the Attacks on Speech, an Attack on Reason,” I examine the role of mysticism and irrationalism in the context of both the Islamist attacks on speech and the ideas motivating the rejection of free speech on America’s campuses.

Altruism is captured in the popular dictum that we are “our brother’s keeper.” It is the doctrine that individuals have no right to exist for their own sakes or to pursue their own happiness as they see fit, but must instead put the interests of others before their own. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand made the point (speaking through John Galt) that “Those who start by saying: ‘It is selfish to pursue your own wishes, you must sacrifice them to the wishes of others’—end up by saying: ‘It is selfish to uphold your own convictions, you must sacrifice them to the convictions of others.’” In “The Twilight of Freedom of Speech,” Onkar Ghate illustrates how this principle is causing the West to sacrifice its convictions—including the conviction that freedom of speech is essential—to the Islamists.

Collectivism follows naturally from mysticism and altruism. It holds that the individual has no real existence or value apart from the group, and that his primary concern should be to devote himself to the “common good.” Collectivism, as Rand put it in “Who Will Protect Us from Our Protectors,” views “man as a congenital incompetent, a helpless, mindless creature who must be fooled and ruled by a special elite with some unspecified claim to superior wisdom and a lust for power.” Thus, Islamists command us to obey the dictates of all-powerful imams, and secular collectivists in America claim that the “collective rights” of the “public” trump the right of the individual to think and say what he wants. I examine one of the most pernicious examples of this latter view in Part 3, which addresses campaign



finance laws and the contemporary attack on political speech.

There are many more essays in this volume than those mentioned here, each dealing with various aspects of the attacks on free speech and, importantly, the principles—reason, egoism, and individual rights—that are necessary to defend it. Those familiar with ARI's work will know that we produce philosophical and cultural commentary in many forms, including not only writings, but courses, talks, and videos as well. For those interested in learning more about how Rand's ideas apply to the issues covered in this volume, we include a list of further resources at the end.

Ayn Rand saw herself as resurrecting in philosophically stronger form the ideas of the Enlightenment and, in particular, defending the ideas and values on which America, her adopted homeland, was founded. While Rand harshly criticized those who attacked these foundations, her ultimate focus was always on the positive—the ideas and values on which a proper human life should be based. This volume is compiled in the same spirit, and we think you will see that the approach we take at ARI is never simply to criticize bad ideas and trends, but to promote better ones in their place.

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