



Two Ways of Walking Away

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“The First Amendment prohibits the government from restricting free speech,” [explained](#) Michael J. Reitz in *The Detroit News*. But what about individuals and non-government groups?

“Free speech doesn’t compel you to listen. You can walk away,” Mr. Reitz goes on to say

In the piece, [reprinted](#) by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, Reitz wonders, however, whether this “agree to disagree” attitude is enough to keep free speech alive. He believes that “as a society, we show our commitment to free speech through our willingness to listen, discuss and debate. It’s not consistent to say I value another person’s right to speak if I refuse to engage.”

A *liberal* attitude—in a social, perhaps non-political sense—is

what Reitz advises: tolerant of differences; not prone to anger at hearing an opposing view; engaging logically and fairly with differing opinions; but free to take it or leave it without fearing recrimination, retribution or retaliation.

This right to walk away may define free speech, but Reitz argues that we mustn’t all walk to our bubbles in anger.

An old saw, recently popularized, insists that “we have freedom of speech, but we don’t have freedom from the consequences of speech.” In a free society, you may say what you like on your property, on your dime, but some people may shun you. Or fire you. And that’s OK.

What’s *not* an acceptable “consequence” of freedom of speech? Being silenced by the government, or the mob, either with petty violence or maximum force. Too many people use the “no freedom from consequences” cliché as an excuse to harass people at their work. Or bank. This is where it gets difficult.

Since one neither has a right to a specific job nor to force a bank to accept one’s money on account, purely social pressure to de-bank, de-platform, or get someone fired, fits in a free society. But is Reitz correct that, legality aside, when such social pressure is common, and one-sided, free speech is doomed?

Perhaps *society* is doomed, in multi-lateral wars of us vs. them.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.