

Determining Truth: The Clash of Christianity and Free Speech after *Areopagitica*

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“Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties” -- John Milton, Areopagitica.

Freedom to express thought has been perceived as a challenge to religious and political powers for much of Western history (Newth para. 3). After the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, which made it possible to publish and distribute written materials efficiently, censorship became more commonly practiced by religious and political figures to retain power and reverence. The Catholic Church in particular viewed the ability to spread a written message rapidly as a dangerous threat. (Newth para. 5). In response, the Catholic Church published a list of prohibited books, the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* in 1559, updating it periodically through the centuries. Books were added to this list if they did not comply with specific Canon Laws, by which publications were regulated based on the nature of the author’s ideas. Published materials were censored by one of two methods: either by the censorship of books in regard to matters of faith and morals prior to their publication, or by the condemnation of already published materials by their being listed in the *Index* (Beacon para. 6). Later, European governments similarly recognized the threat and adopted strict prior censorship laws.

Censorship laws became controversial because of increased tensions between European governments and the Catholic Church. Catholicism was not only unpopular but intolerable in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. After the Anglican Reformation,

membership to the Church of England was obligatory, and it was strictly enforced during the "Eleven Years Tyranny" of King Charles I, in spite of his controversial, seemingly hypocritical marriage to Catholic Queen Henrietta Maria (The Papal Visit para. 4). During his rule, King Charles I refused to convene Parliament, instead consulting exclusively with the Court of Star Chamber, whose mission was to advise the king and serve as a royal judicial body (Snell para.14). To control judiciary processes, court sessions were held in secret and offered no chance for appeal. These judiciary sessions were used to suppress sedition, or anti-royalist sentiments as a form of censorship. Despite the king's efforts to curtail its power, Parliament abolished the Court of Star Chamber and its practices in 1641 (Snell para. 16).

Soon after England's Civil War began in 1642, which marked the shift of English political power back to Parliament, Parliament passed the 1643 Ordinance for the Regulating of Printing to combat the spread of libel, piracy, royalist sentiments, and to suppress radical ideas (Park para. 4). The Ordinance for the Regulation of Printing required all books and other publications to be licensed and censored before publication. It also mandated the destruction of any publications which violated this ordinance, as well as the imprisonment of the writers and publishers who wrote, published, or distributed unlicensed materials (Park para. 5). In 1644, John Milton published and distributed his pamphlet *Areopagitica* amid political, religious, and martial tensions. His arguments against prior censorship in *Areopagitica* contribute to early ideas of freedom of speech as expressed through the writings of influential European philosophers, which ultimately manifest in the early American concept of freedom of speech. In tracing the history of the idea of free speech, it appears that the scope of censorship and freedom of speech has long been affected by the role of Judeo-Christianity in European and American governments.

Milton titled his pamphlet *Areopagitica* as an allusion to Isocrates' *Logos arepagitikos*, a written speech that was never meant to be spoken (Park para. 1). Like Isocrates, Milton followed classical rhetorical strategies closely, yet he distributed the tract as a printed pamphlet.

Areopagitica's purpose was to negotiate with, advise, and praise Parliament for its wisdom rather than blame it for its actions. Milton uses components of classical and deliberative rhetoric to outline his arguments against prior censorship and capitalizes on the power of emotional and religious appeal. Using figurative language, Milton tacitly criticizes Parliament's repressive actions, specifically by use of extended and emphatic metaphors (Park para. 13). Milton wrote *Areopagitica* with the same poetic method he uses in his poetry: universalizing "the particular, evoking vividly and accurately the individual state, and at the same time transfiguring it, so that the wider, enduring significance shines through" (Price para. 21). Books, in Milton's view, were the ultimatum of truth, and he drew upon religious imagery to assert that Parliament's judgement of them was unacceptable. Milton suggests that the practice of prior censorship is comparable to judgement of the soul before birth rather than of the body after death. Particularly in this personification of books, Milton uses figurative language to illustrate the forces of good and evil present between books and actions of Parliament, using images of struggles between good and evil in daily life, Greek and Roman life, the writings of Virgil and Ovid, Christian history, and the Bible (Price para. 1). Furthermore, Milton personifies Truth, strengthening his argument and giving it more imaginative qualities (Price para. 5). These personifications are particularly significant to Milton's argument because, "in this connection Milton cleverly exploits the large fund of sentiment in his readers' antagonistic attitudes toward 'the Pope and his appurtenances the prelates.'" Thus the reader's mind is colored against licensing more by vivid imaginative

impressions than by the underlying rational argument” (Price para. 7). Milton coins the term *War on Truth* to describe Parliament’s actions; even though Parliament has made moral, educational, religious, and hypocritical transgressions, he is confident that truth will prevail (Milton 415). In Milton’s view, the liberty to share written scholarship, ideas, and discoveries is integral to the search for and ultimate triumph of truth. Through Biblical allusions and Christian rhetoric, Milton aptly constructs a strong theological argument. Essentially, he is asserting that Parliament is making moral, academic, and blasphemous transgressions through their reposition of prior censorship policies. Because of its skillful composition, *Areopagitica* is an exemplary model of an early argument for free speech.

While Milton’s tract may have influenced liberal thought, his intentions were less democratic than they were aristocratic; Milton advocated for freedom from licensing rather than free press because he did not believe that these freedoms should be extended to Catholic writing. Given the negative view of Catholicism in 17th century England, Milton uses anti-popish, or anti-Catholic, rhetoric to establish a Rogerian argument while appealing to his audience’s pathos: the supremacy of the Anglican Church. Milton argues that through their ordinance, Parliament is mirroring Catholic censorship models “whose canons and precepts’ made men mentally subservient” (Fatovic para. 19). Milton thought that Catholicism and Parliament’s Catholic-like rules would endanger truth and liberty (Fatovic para. 20). In the following section of *Areopagitica*, Milton explains the Catholic model of censorship, drawing obvious parallels with the actions of Parliament:

Milton’s tract is often used as a foundational point of liberal argument for freedom of press. The ways that *Areopagitica* is interpreted by modern scholars can be organized into two

classifications: those who consider Milton's work to be a "paradigm of individualism" that evolved with and alongside liberal discourse (Kolbrener para. 7), and those who think that Milton presents "only a totalitarian argument" that does not operate at all within this liberal paradigm (Kolbrener para. 11). Both the "arguments that *Areopagitica* either promotes an unrestrained and individualistic liberty or an authoritarian and transumptive intolerance and are both projections of the liberal imagination," suggest that Milton never intended to advocate for free press, but rather freedom from licensing (Kolbrener para. 25).

Furthermore, Stanley Fish, a Milton scholar and critic, writes, "Milton is ... in a profound way, not against licensing, and he has almost no interest at all in the 'freedom of press' as an abstract or absolute good and, indeed, does not unambiguously value freedom at all" (Fish 189). Though Milton's argument has long been interpreted as an "argument for books, [it] is actually an argument that renders books beside the point" (Fish 195). Milton does not consider books to be the "preservers of truth, the life-blood of a master spirit, the image of God," as his readers so often argue (Fish 195). Instead, Milton seems to glorify books to emphasize that the physical publication "cannot possibly be the repository of glory, but can only play an instrumental role in its emergence" (Fish 213). Ultimately, while the ideas of freedom in *Areopagitica* are attractive to most readers, Milton's intent in his tract is far from its interpretation (Fish 206).

Regardless of the extent of Milton's intended liberal interpretation, *Areopagitica* may have had significant influence on the evolution of freedom of the press throughout England, France, and, eventually, the United States. While *Areopagitica* received relatively little attention in its day, two obscure allusions contemporary to *Areopagitica* can be found in both John Hall's 1694 *A Humble Motion to The Parliament of England Concerning The Advancement of Learning*

and Reformation of the Universitie and in *The Panegyric and The Storme Two Poetike Libells by Ed. Waller Vassa'll to the Usurper Answered by More Faithful Subjects to His Sacred Maty King Charles Ye Second*, which is believed to have been written by Richard Watson (Haller para. 1).

A contemporary of Milton, John Hall was a seventeenth century English poet and pamphleteer of the Puritan agenda who is known to have studied Milton and his work very closely (Haller para. 3). In his forty-five-page pamphlet, Hall attacks Parliament on its scholastic methods and educational practices in its universities (Haller para. 2). In the final section of his argument, Hall uses a humanistic appeal which employs figurative language to illustrate the concept of truth and education, much like Milton does in the concluding sections of *Areopagitica* (Haller para. 3). In the conclusion of his tract, Hall mentions *Areopagitica* by name:

‘But since this would amount to a long rabble, and degenerate into some *Satyre* or *Pasquill*, rather than an *Areopagitick*, I will be content, having a publicke business in hand, to lay aside all bitternesse, though it might be advantagious to my purpose, and with due meeknesse and equanimity, draw to my last taske, and then sit downe with silent wishes and expectation.’ (qtd. in Haller para. 2)

Furthermore, Hall “is explicitly attempting to use the form of the classical oration in addressing Parliament, the form very self-consciously adopted by Milton in his *Areopagitica*,” which begins to illustrate the scope of *Areopagitica*’s influence on political writing throughout the rest of the seventeenth century and beyond (Haller para. 3).

The second allusion that Haller mentions is from a series of heroic couplets entitled *The Panegyric and The Storme Two Poetike Libells by Ed. Waller Vassa'll to the Usurper Answered by More Faithful Subjects to His Sacred Maty King Charles Ye Second* which was published

without imprint but dated 1659 and signed “Richard Watson” (Haller para. 4). Watson, like Hall, mentions *Areopagitica* by name:

‘More curious *Satyrists* had seen the light.
 If that poetike *Areopagite*
 Had from your *Senate* gaind the *voting Word*,
 Or *His old Highnesse more authentike Sw-ord*,
 For the *Pens priviledge*, That all might be
 From *Views, & Censures*, or *suppressions*, free;’ (qtd. In Haller para. 4).

Haller does not provide much insight or analysis into Watson’s motives for writing this series, but finds significance in the sheer mention of *Areopagitica* in this series of heroic couples published without imprint or much clue to its origins (Haller para. 4). In both of the allusions presented by Haller, the references to *Areopagitica* were used as precedents for criticizing Parliament with liberal ideas and poetic underpinnings and are evident of the lasting impressions of Milton’s tract. Both of these seemingly obscure references lay the foundation for *Areopagitica*’s impact on future discourse on free expression.

Integral to the evolving concept of freedom of speech are the writings of philosopher and political theorist John Locke, particularly in his 1689 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In Book I of his essay, Locke focuses on the concept of innate ideas, or self-evident truths, particularly in the importance of questioning their legitimacy such that there is nothing inherent about any specific ideology. Locke emphasizes the importance of one’s ability to conjure complex ideas over blind allegiance to innate ideas which, he argues, do not exist. In order for a principle or idea to be innate, it must be inherent in the brain of every human being from birth,

without any reflection, experience, or from any teaching (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 4). Locke argues that this concept is simply impossible; even the most widespread of ‘self-evident truths’ are not present in one’s mind until after another person teaches it or it is derived from human experience. Locke extends this observation onto justice and morality, particularly in its subjectivity (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 9). Locke suggests that morality cannot be inherent; if so, crime, treachery, and other morally obscene acts could not possibly be committed by any person (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 10). Furthermore, he opines that it is often necessary to justify one’s own moral convictions; inherent morality would render this unnecessary. Ultimately, Locke suggests that even the concept of God is not innate (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 12). In nearly every complex society, the supreme religious being is usually seen as the ultimate lawgiver, creator, and the embodiment of morality. Locke argues that while this is the common view, the idea of an inherent notion of God is absurd – one simply has to engage with an intellectual atheist. If faith in God were inherent, atheism could not exist (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 14). The ideas Locke presents are incredibly progressive for the seventeenth century. Like Milton, Locke is instrumental in the evolution of freedom to have and express thought.

John Locke expresses ideas like Milton’s regarding free speech with limited religious toleration and concern for truth in his 1689 *Letter Concerning Toleration*. In his letter, Locke explores morality in regard to political concepts, primarily in the separation of church and state, and “provides a philosophic foundation for free speech and for the freedom of action that follows from free thought” (Braman para. 2). He argues that for people to gain a full understanding of truth is to have to have religious freedom, but in order for people to have religious freedom,

people must also have political freedom. Locke asserts that governmental power “consists only in outward force; but true and saying religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind ... and such is the nature of the understanding, that it cannot be compelled to the belief of anything by outward force” (*Letter Concerning Toleration* 5). This separation of church and state not only protects public morality but also protects people from “covetousness, uncharitableness, idleness, and many other things are sins by the consent of men” among themselves, which may inhibit public morality and political freedom (*Letter Concerning Toleration* 20). Locke seems to draw from Milton’s argument about truth in *Areopagitica* by using similar Biblical allusions and semi-tolerant rhetoric.

Another proponent of freedom of speech, François-Marie Arouet -- commonly known as Voltaire – draws on Milton’s ideas in his 1733 letter to a First Commissioner entitled, *On the Liberty of the Press: And on Theatres*. Here, Voltaire argues against the censorship laws throughout Europe much as Milton does in *Areopagitica*; Voltaire discusses the contributions of various writers, philosophers, and poets, including Milton, asserting that contributions such as these could not be possible under strict censorship laws (Voltaire 32). Voltaire argues that “the man of taste will only read what is good; but the statesman will permit both bad and good,” suggesting that truth will prevail regardless of some authors’ shortcomings – strikingly similar to the argument that Milton uses in *Areopagitica* (Voltaire 33). Voltaire draws societal parallels here, comparing the selection of reading materials to one’s selection of friends: while it is essential to choose some from the many, it is necessary to have a large population from which to choose in the first place in order to enrich both the individual and the culture. Interestingly, he goes on to suggest that nurturing ideas, notably French ideas, is essential to intellectual and

literal commercial progression and innovation, producing “two important things: profit and pleasure” (Voltaire 33). Due to the similarity of the political context and the structure of argument between Voltaire’s letter and Milton’s tract, it is reasonable to gather that Voltaire is drawing on Milton’s ideas.

While much of the practice of censorship is employed most effectively by political powers, its roots remain in religion. Voltaire, however, cites Christian principles and the concept of God-like morality to uphold his argument for freedom of the press. In his letter to Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia, *On God, the Soul, and Innate Morality*, Voltaire holds firmly that, “society would be (especially among philosophers) an interchange of wickedness and hypocrisy if man had not full and absolute liberty” (Voltaire 47). Furthermore, Voltaire suggests that vice and virtue reside in the individual, drawing upon Locke’s theory of innate ideas. Here, he discusses the nature of morality and the nature of God regarding the pacification of ideas:

I agree with him that there is really no such thing as innate thought: whence it obviously follows that there is no principle of morality innate in our souls: but because we are not born ... to have beards at a certain age? ... Thus, no one is born with the idea that he must be just: but God has so made that, at a certain age, we all agree to this truth. It seems clear to me that God designed us to live in society ... He has given us the power to acquire that sense. (Voltaire 49)

Notably, Voltaire’s concept of God in this sense builds his argument for the liberation of publication such that it is by God’s grace that diversity of thought is possible, thus it is God’s will that these ideas be brought to light -- to be published -- without censorship by the state.

American Revolution-era pamphleteer, Thomas Paine, famously criticizes British government and the role of religion in politics in his 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense*. Paine, in an attempt to avoid British repercussions, initially published his work anonymously so that his ideas could stand alone. His anonymity illustrates that English censorship – even overseas -- was present even well into the eighteenth century. Paine took measures to avoid backlash from the British even on the cusp of American independence. In his pamphlet, Paine addresses the colonists, insisting that separation of the American colonies from British rule is imperative for American political, social, religious, and economic growth, as well as establishing a democratic political model for the rest of the world to follow. Paine begins his argument by outlining the differences between society and government and their respective purposes:

Society exists as produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness *positively* by uniting our affections, the latter *negatively* by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first a patron, the last a punisher. Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil.

(Paine para. 2)

This view of government strictly as a means by which to punish is not uncommon among eighteenth century American philosophers; John Locke expresses ideas similar in his 1690 *Two Treatises of Government*. Furthermore, this view of government is inherently anti-British, as it criticizes hereditary monarchy as an efficient administration.

Under Paine's interpretation, kings are not elected to represent the direct desires of their constituents, but are born into power, giving electorate power to God. Paine points out the

contradictions that this notion suggests: if the administration is appointed by God, “how came the king by a power which the people are afraid to trust, and always obliged to check? Such a power could not be the gift of a wise people, neither can any power, which needs checking, be from God; yet the provision, which the constitution makes, supposes such a power to exist” (Paine para. 21). Paine takes this a step further, suggesting that the followers of Judaism, whom he refers to as “Heathens,” are at fault for the detrimental institution on monarchy as a legitimate form of government (Paine para. 30). Paine argues that Jewish people undermine God’s supremacy by creating authoritarian government, and followers of Judaism are guilty of idolizing their king (Paine para. 35). In the next section of his tract, Paine discusses American autonomy, insisting that the colonists should have no reason to remain allegiant to British rule; American colonists came from a multitude of backgrounds and are united by ideology, not by common heritage (Paine para. 60).

Notably, Paine includes a quote from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* to strengthen the legitimacy of his argument for separation from England rather than reconciliation and compromise. Milton wrote that, “never can true reconcilment grow where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep,” and Paine suggests that there is no alternative to complete separation from England (qtd in Paine para.73). Paine calls for an elected president and politically guaranteed rights to be outlined in a charter—the Constitution—which must protect everything from freedom of speech to freedom of religion, because England has not been receptive to religious or expressive freedom. Like Milton does with Catholicism in his argument, Paine qualifies this call for religious and expressive freedom to exclude Quakerism because its pacifist ideas promote political apathy. In Paine’s view, religion should never interfere with politics.

Contemporaries of Paine, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, hereafter referred to as the Federalists, expressed ideas on the scope of government in their series of *Federalist Papers*. The papers illustrate the Federalists' pseudodemocratic rhetoric, "the relationship between popular sovereignty and democracy in [Federalist] political thought," and how they manipulated the differences in the doctrines of popular sovereignty and democracy to garner support for their ideal form of government (Miller para. 1-4). Because Hamilton, Jay, and Madison seem to use the terms interchangeably in order to gain popular backing for the Constitution, the difference between democracy and popular sovereignty should be emphasized and defined as such: "democracy tries to limit governmental power so that ordinary people can understand and wield it, whereas popular sovereignty creates enormous power for the central government" (Miller para. 2). Unlike the Antifederalists of the time, the Federalists sought to establish a representative democracy with strong, powerful centralized government and defend the right to own private property, which they succeeded in creating. However, Hamilton warned that with the creation of such a large union, "only an 'energetic government' can 'preserve the Union of so large an empire'" (qtd. in Miller para. 21). Ultimately the assertion that, "by attributing sovereignty to a fictitious people, the Federalists reduced the acts of that people to one: the ratification of the Constitution, symbolically interpreted as an act of the people" was arguably not an act of the people at all, but an act of political manipulation by the Federalists for personal gain (Miller para. 34).

Federalist Paper No. 10 discusses the dangers of factions as well as the protection of individual rights by limiting the power of factions. In Madison's view, factions work against public interest and infringe on individual rights. They pose a legitimate threat to democracy, but

are inevitable due to variety of human opinion and status, as well as the human tendency to fraternize with like-minded people. Madison suggests that in order to limit faction control, the American political structure should remove the causes of factions and control its effects by one of two methods: “the one, by destroying the liberty which is essential to its existence; the other, by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests” (Madison para. 4). Of course, Madison does not suggest that the American political system should employ either of these methods, as the former undermines the fundamental concept of American democracy, and the latter is simply impossible. He recognizes that people will always protect their own interests, so it would be more efficient to control the effects that factions have on an individual or private interest’s political power rather than to focus on preventing factions altogether (Madison para. 5 - 6). Because of the potential power a faction could wield in a direct democratic system, Madison advocates for the institution of a representative democracy and the union of the thirteen colonies under a common Constitution. While Madison does not advocate explicitly for freedom from print licensing in *Federalist Paper No. 10*, he notably calls for an American government that limits political power from any individual or interest, securing individual liberties – thus protecting freedom of expression. Likewise, the Federalists’ call for a strictly limited government combined with their aforementioned concept that popular sovereignty inherently protects against prior censorship in the New World.

Alexis de Tocqueville, a self-proclaimed advocate of liberty, travelled from France to North America with the intention of studying the American prison system, but ultimately studied the entire American political system. This trip resulted in his most famous book, *Democracy in America*, throughout which de Tocqueville thoroughly discusses every facet of the phenomenon

of American democracy, including popular sovereignty. In the eleventh chapter of *Democracy in America*, aptly entitled “Liberty Of The Press In The United States,” de Tocqueville explores American popular sovereignty’s specific interaction with freedom of speech as well as the “repression of the abuse of the liberty of the press by judicial prosecutions” (de Tocqueville para. 1). Before discussing American free press, de Tocqueville states that his own opinion on censorship is, “I confess that I do not entertain that firm and complete attachment to the liberty of the press which things that are supremely good in their very nature are wont to excite in the mind; and I approve of it more from a recollection of the evils it prevents than from a consideration of the advantages it ensure” (de Tocqueville para. 3). Considering de Tocqueville’s experience with French censorship, it is evident that he, like Milton, opposes the practice of prior censorship. Unlike Milton, however, de Tocqueville does not explicitly deny the extension of freedom of expression to any particular group of people. Here, de Tocqueville makes an argument for freedom from print licensing much like Milton’s:

If it is your intention to correct the abuses of unlicensed printing and to restore the use of orderly language, you may in the first instance try the offender by a jury; but if the jury acquits him, the opinion which was that of a single individual becomes the opinion of the country at large. [...] But even here the cause must be heard before it can be decided; and the very principles which no book would have ventured to avow are blazoned forth in the pleadings, and what was obscurely hinted at in a single composition is then repeated in a multitude of other publications. The language in which a thought is embodied is the mere carcass of the thought, and not the idea itself; tribunals may condemn the form, but the sense

and spirit of the work is too subtle for their authority. Too much has still been done to recede, too little to attain your end; you must therefore proceed. If you establish a censorship of the press, the tongue of the public speaker will still make itself heard, and you have only increased the mischief (de Tocqueville para. 4).

Under de Tocqueville's interpretation of early American democratic ideology, freedom of the press is a natural byproduct of popular sovereignty; the two institutions are correlative, and one cannot exist without the other (de Tocqueville para. 6). Because colonial America lacked a strong central internal government, each sovereign entity was left to make many of its own decisions—thus, nearly each community exercised freedom of the press to its full extent, publishing their own newspapers and pamphlets and spreading them widely. In his studies, de Tocqueville finds that the combined lack of centralization with widespread dispersion of independent publications uniquely prevents governmental control of opinion in America (de Tocqueville 13). De Tocqueville references various American publications to further exemplify this phenomenon and asserts that American politics and publication practices will become a model for other global governments.

The concept and practice of freedom of speech has evolved tremendously over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with both the help and the hindrance of Judeo-Christian philosophies. Milton's original notion of freedom from print licensing in his *Areopagitica* inspired the work of other European political writers who, in turn, inspired the conventions that founded the American democracy. Since then, ideas on individual liberties and freedom of expression have become increasingly important in an era during which the written word can spread more quickly than ever. While the modern argument surrounding censorship

addresses concerns Milton could never have fathomed, his ideas remain relevant in the twenty-first century.

In his lecture “Milton’s *Areopagitica* and the Modern First Amendment,” Columbia University Professor Vincent Blasi discusses Milton’s religious influence and explores the similarities and differences between the democratic arguments in *Areopagitica* and in the modern politically-liberal view of freedom of speech. Blasi first explains how the modern reader is to read Milton and warns against trying to secularize *Areopagitica*, because “truth in Milton’s cosmos is destined to prevail in due time, for a reason that can have no secular dialogue” (Blasi para. 38). Given the Protestant roots of Milton’s tract, Blasi asserts that “the argument in *Areopagitica* is for a purposive liberty: the Christian Liberty of the Puritan saint searching after God’s partially revealed truth” (Blasi para. 41). As for the use of *Areopagitica* in the modern argument for the first amendment, Blasi notes that Milton’s observation that certain liberties cannot be, “achieved by coercive legislation alone,” is shared by modern people with political interests across political party lines (Blasi para. 52).

Censorship in the twenty-first century exists under the presumption of public protection; freedom of speech is defended and encouraged until it infringes upon the rights of others. At the time of this writing, the attitude is shifting in a country whose foundational values are in sovereignty, individuality, and free expression. In 2018, attacks on the legitimacy of the press, the propagandization of “alternative facts,” the corporate threat to net neutrality, and the anxieties that surround the future of public education can all be charged to Milton’s, “War on Truth.” The cyclical nature of the rise and fall of power throughout history may serve as a warning: from the *Areopagitica* to social media, the ability to exchange, express, and examine

ideas is essential to obtaining the “utmost bound of civil liberty ... that wise men look for” (Milton 395).

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