

# Freedom of Speech: What Rights and what Responsibilities?\*

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The review analyses a monograph published by Peter Lang Publishing in 2024 and authored by Tomas Kačerauskas and Algis Mickūnas, the book focuses on the lived experience and structures of awareness that make communication possible. Their approach centres on the difference between *freedom of speech* and *free speech*. *Freedom of speech* is a right, as legally granted by a government. *Free speech*, in one sense, sits at the basis of civilisation.

**Keywords:** freedom, speech, responsibility, free expression, polycentric

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## INTRODUCTION

The authors known from their previous publications on philosophy of communication (Kačerauskas 2019; Kačerauskas, Mickūnas 2020; Kačerauskas 2020; Kačerauskas 2021; Kačerauskas, Baranovskaja 2021; Kačerauskas 2023; Kačerauskas 2025; Mickūnas, Kačerauskas 2025) assume that from a historical perspective, citizens of the USA and the European Union are more or less democratic. Societies assume freedom of speech as a basic right to challenge totalitarianism, and authority of any kind. Freedom of speech cannot be understood without the fundamental principles of democratic society, including the tolerance of others and the right to express unique opinions, which are open to challenge others but with mutual respect. These are the domains of the ethicality of social responsibility concerning the freedom of speech as addressed in practical, ecological and creative modes.

Democratic governments now face the issue of fake news and the press as an enemy of the people. It is important for our authors to look at the media for closer cooperation to engage in a discussion of current events and also to consult historical texts that are engaged in the issues of freedom, responsibility, and the right and obligation to speak. This leads to the fundamental question of the public's rights and duties, and inevitably to the very structure of democratic society in which freedom of speech is intertwined.

Free speech and the limits that can be placed on it, are in jeopardy. Without the tolerance, without the right to express opinions, without mutual respect and the right of others to

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\* Kačerauskas, T.; Mickūnas, A. 2024. *Freedom of Speech: Rights and Responsibilities*. Peter Lang.

challenge our views, democratic society collapses, or, if you will, crumbles from beneath or from within democracy. Freedom of speech is attended to by our social interaction. The ecological landscape is the common home that we cannot destroy without destroying ourselves. Creative speech is a responsibility of individual activity and the understanding of the limits of such speech. Creating freedom of expression makes a society vital and alive, and it is a source of the individual awareness of responsibility for such expressions.

## THE REVIEW OF THE MONOGRAPH

1. First, the authors address the open space of dialogue, in which their argument posits that without freedom of expression – different perspectives – the world shrinks. Free speech creates a public space where things can be seen from multiple sides, preventing any single truth from becoming a dogma.

2. Their second topic treats the area of responsibility and the other. This means that to speak freely is to implicitly recognise the presence of an audience. Freedom of speech carries an inherent responsibility to maintain the conditions that allow others to speak in return. It is not just that *I* can say what I want; I must also act to ensure *we* can *both* speak.

3. The third section treats expression versus information. Information, seen as mere data or propaganda, closes off any kind of questioning. Creativity is involved in expression. It is the unpredictable act of revealing one's unique perspective. Freedom of speech is a preservation of expression over the mere transmission of information. It is a basis for our 'democratic' form of governance. In short, freedom of speech is the oxygen of public discourse. If the flow is stopped, the collective awareness of society will begin to suffocate.

We should move on to provide a brief overview of each of the book's seven chapters:

- *Chapter 1: Speechless Population.* Despite freedom, speech is not an abstract thought. It is part and parcel of embodiment. The argument is that silencing a voice – in a very real sense – is to confine a person's reach and to limit civic agency, creating systematic disenfranchisement and economic inequality.

- *Chapter 2: Can Freedom of Speech Undermine Democracy.* This chapter treats the background of civilisation, examining how ancient cultures viewed truth, as compared to the ways that modern ones do. In this historical section, the authors explain that our modern concept of free speech requires a massive shift from mythological thinking, from seeing truth as sacred. Irrespective of who we are, we must realise that 'my truths' look different from 'yours'. Unrestricted speech can be leveraged by both democratic leaders as well as demagogues; hence, there are boundaries to dissent.

- *Chapter 3: The Controversies of Political Correctness.* The argument here is that speech creates the room we live in. If we only speak in private, we do not actually have a world. This chapter is a stinging critique of modern social media, or echo chambers, that have destroyed shared space. The very tools of political correctness, while they may offer signs of respect, can also become dogmatic and narrow the public domain.

- *Chapter 4: Instrumental Rationality and Progress.* Here, the authors turn to the dangers in speech, distinguishing between speech that seeks truth and speech that seeks power. The warning is that speech is not free if it is designed to manipulate or coerce. We have an exploration of the sophist trap – using the right of free speech so as to dismantle the very logic that allows free speech to exist.

- *Chapter 5: Managing the Tension Between Freedom and Equality.* This chapter shifts the focus from rights to obligations. It is a challenging read that asks the reader to take on a burden.

The argument is that one is responsible for the other's ability to understand one. If one speaks in a way that intentionally confuses or shuts the other person down, one is violating the essence of free speech.

- *Chapter 6: Technocratic Liberation and Political Enlightenment.* This chapter looks at how new technologies and globalism affect our structures of awareness. The authors feel that a globalised language might become too flat and technical, losing the poetic and expressive depth that makes human freedom meaningful.

- *Chapter 7: Society and Political Society.* The authors analyse differing cultural spaces compared to institutional political domains and the politicisation of the public sphere can be toxic to communication.

- *Non-conclusion: Western Universalism and Post-post.* The answer to the dilemma is free speech based in mutual recognition, communicative responsibility, and dialogues transcending geopolitical boundaries; this requires a polycentric awareness.

## CONCLUSIONS

This book's chapters function like a ladder. The reader starts at the bottom, from one's own self and voice, and then looks at the architecture of global civilisation. Free expression cannot exist as an unconditional, absolute right detached from civic responsibility. Also, legal guarantees of free expression are a necessary condition for democracy, but that is not sufficient. Without an equal access to communicative platforms and civic agencies, a large portion of populations remain functionally speechless. Political enlightenment requires critical reflection, sustained dialogue, and civic education. Freedom is not a self-sustaining machine without the truth in social responsibility.

This book is a *tour de force*, and it should be read by anyone who is interested in the problematic of freedom of speech and free speech – how they should not be confused or conflated, which is so easily done today by the media, by our teachers, and by everyday folk. This is a must read. It cannot be ignored. It is more than timely in our world today. I would encourage the reader to also look at some of the other collaborative works that are cited below regarding ethics and communication.

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## Žodžio laisvė: kokios teisės ir kokios atsakomybės?

### *Santrauka*

Recenzijoje analizuojama 2024 m. leidykloje „Peter Lang Publishing“ išleista Tomo Kačerausko ir Algio Mickūno monografija „Žodžio laisvė: teisės ir atsakomybės“. Knygoje daugiausia dėmesio skiriama gyvenimo patirčiai ir sąmonės struktūroms, kurios sudaro prielaidas bendravimui. Autoriai susitelkia į skirtumą tarp žodžio laisvės ir saviraiškos laisvės. Žodžio laisvė yra teisė, kurią teisiškai suteikia vyriausybė. Žodžio laisvė tam tikra prasme yra civilizacijos pagrindas.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** laisvė, žodis, atsakomybė, saviraiškos laisvė, policentriškumas