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Free to offend

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JASON KUZNICKI at the Cato Institute offers a [valiant defence of free speech](#) against those who insist on a "right" not to be offended by what other people say.

Modern challenges to free speech, he observes,

have lately arisen from the right, from the left, from Muslim perspectives and even in the name of protecting children online. These challenges seem to share an underlying concern, namely that we must balance free expression against the psychic hurt that some expressions will provoke.

[Examples include] flag-desecration laws, hate-speech laws in the United Kingdom and Canada, U.S. college and university speech codes, the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam and the Megan Meier Cyberbullying Prevention Act...

Although seemingly unrelated, these measures rely on a common assumption, namely that governments should provide emotional well-being to their citizens, even at the expense of free expression.

The result is not more happiness, but a race to the bottom, in which aggrieved groups compete endlessly with one another for a slice of government power.

This seems right to me. You may decide, out of politeness, to refrain from mocking my religion. But the government should not punish you if you choose to say what you really think, so long as you do not explicitly urge your friends to burn down my house. Read the whole [essay](#).