



CONCOURS CENTRALE-SUPÉLEC

# Anglais

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Rédiger en anglais et en 500 mots une synthèse des documents proposés, qui devra obligatoirement comporter un titre. Indiquer avec précision, à la fin du travail, le nombre de mots utilisés (titre inclus), un écart de 10% en plus ou en moins sera accepté.

Ce sujet comporte les 4 documents suivants :

- un extrait d'un article d'Elena BUNBURY publié sur le site de *The Adam Smith Institute* le 11 avril 2019 ;
- un extrait d'un article de Dannagal G. YOUNG publié par le *Center for Media & Social Impact*, le 22 février 2018 ;
- un extrait d'un article de Kliph NESTEROFF paru dans le *Los Angeles Times* le 15 octobre 2021 ;
- un dessin humoristique de Dave WHAMOND provenant de *Cagle Cartoons*, réalisé en 2019.

*L'ordre dans lequel se présentent les documents est arbitraire et ne revêt aucune signification particulière.*



ADAM SMITH  
INSTITUTE

## Free speech is more than just a laughing matter

By Elena BUNBURY, 11 April 2019

Free speech is under attack in Britain. The police are knocking on doors to tell people off for 'offensive' tweets. The Government is proposing a new regulator of online speech. Universities are no-platforming speakers that don't chime with student unions' narratives. Places of work are forcing employees to sign contracts that ban certain phrases and words.

This culture of censorship has even reached the industry designed to push the limits of acceptability: comedy. At a comedy night you may be picked out of the crowd and receive a joke at your expense, or you might be offended by one that touches a personal weak spot. But in the end, it's all in the name of having a good laugh. Comedy is supposed to be judged based on whether it is funny, not based on who it is offending.

This principle, however, is under dire threat from a new movement of 'woke' comedy. Woke comedians want to purge all potentially offensive material from comedians' content. Boundaries cannot be pushed. And why would they? What comedian would risk the collapse of their entire career as a result of one offensive joke?

In February, the ASI<sup>1</sup> hosted comedian and social commentator Andrew Doyle, who spoke out against this new culture. As a comedian, you learn quickly if a joke has gone too far. You will deliver the joke you have been practising and rehearsing in your set and if it doesn't go down well, no one will laugh, people

will look uncomfortable and you will learn not to say it again. Comedians are there to make people laugh. If that isn't happening, they're going to change their material. As such, material is designed to please the audience.

Andrew spoke about *Comedy Unleashed — London's Free-thinking Standup Comedy Club*, explaining the ethos that:

"If something is funny, it's funny. We shouldn't be afraid of exploring prejudices, contrarian views and hidden thoughts. If someone is gratuitous or nasty, people won't be amused. The audience is the ultimate judge."

This resonated with me and the other young politicians in the room. Comedy is becoming predictable and stale. The same jokes are made over and over [...]. Andrew spoke of something new, something fresh. Something that was so compelling, I left and immediately purchased a ticket for the next show.

I did not know what to expect when I travelled to the Backyard Comedy Club in Bethnal Green. I had been so brainwashed at university into thinking free speech was dangerous and something you needed to be protected from, that I was anxious at the thought of sitting there for hours of being offended. I went to the bar, bought a pint, took my seat in the second row, and waited for the show to start.

All of my worries disappeared within a few minutes of the host taking the stage. I have never laughed so much in my life.

Was some of the material controversial? Yes. Was it funny? Absolutely.

Afterwards I talked to Andy Shaw, a founder of *Comedy Unleashed* to find out more about what drove them to create a 'safe space' for comedians. Andy grew up with rebellious free-thinking comedians like Spike Milligan, Monty Python, Dawn French, and now he's watching comedy start to die.

[...]

Comedy had started to be seen as a negative experience, which is why Andy Shaw and Andrew Doyle decided to set up a club based on free thinking, expression and free speech. There is no need for self-censorship at *Comedy Unleashed*.

I asked Andy if he had one take home message to give to people who've never been to one of the events,

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<sup>1</sup> ASI : Adam Smith Institute, a neoliberal think tank based in London.

<sup>2</sup> PC : political correctness

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*Center for Media & Social Impact*<sup>3</sup>

## The Limits of Humor: When Comedians Get Serious

By Dannagal G. YOUNG, 22 February 2018

[...] While it is unsurprising that comedians get serious following tragedies, it is less clear why comedians would choose to drop humor in discussions of political issues.

Late-night comics don't drop their mask often. [...]

In September 2001, a week after the 9/11 terror attacks, late-night hosts returned with emotional opening monologues that sought to acknowledge the tragedy and galvanize the country. *The Daily Show's* Jon Stewart engaged in a tearful monologue about the resilience of New York City and its residents. [...]

Stewart's monologue that day would set the tone for how late-night comedy hosts would respond to tragedy — with increasing frequency — for years to come. Following terror attacks, mass shootings, and hate crimes, late-night hosts use their monologues to mourn and remind Americans "who we are."

[...]

In the aftermath of tragedy, dropping the mask and acknowledging our collective pain seems necessary. It helps situate the comedy as a respite from a cruel

but were considering it, he said: "If it's funny, it's funny. Every night is unpredictable, I don't even know what's going to happen anymore, and I organise it. It's free expression, and that's why we love it."

"The growing culture of censorship is a danger to a free and liberal society. In recent weeks we've seen the cancellation of a free speech society event at Bristol University and Jordan Peterson's fellowship at Cambridge University cancelled," the ASI's Matthew Lesh explains. "Freedom of speech is core to our humanity, to our capacity to think what we want and hear what we want. It's through the process of debate, hearing a wide diversity of ideas, that we are able to separate good ideas from bad ones in the eternal human mission towards progress."

*Comedy Unleashed* offers a new opportunity to spark debate, to question people on the material they say, and in this intense PC<sup>2</sup> climate, it gives people a chance to speak, without the fear of being locked up simply for a retweet.

chaotic world, without pretending that "everything is normal and fine." But what about those moments when comics have adopted this serious pleading tone *outside* of tragic events?

[...]

Why would late-night hosts, whose cultural capital stems from their comedic talents, avoid humor in the treatment of such important issues? After all, as scholars Edward and Lillian Bloom write, satire is intended to "plead with man for a return to his moral senses." So, why not use satire to make these pleas?

First, let it be said that comedians, as a rule, do not acknowledge the influence they may have on public opinion. And while I have found that frustrating over the years, I've come to believe that the reason they don't acknowledge it is because they actually don't believe that their jokes change people's minds. [...]

However, satire *can* create solidarity and mobilize people who are already "on the side of" the comic, moving them from beliefs to actions. Satire can also bring issues and themes to the mind of the public, helping to shape the kinds of things the public is thinking about.

Satire *can* also shape public opinion (and knowledge) on what we call “low salience” issues; issues with which the public is not especially familiar. Think, for example, of Colbert’s influence on public opinion and knowledge about Super PACs and the Citizens United Decision in 2011–12, or John Oliver’s impact on public opinion and familiarity with the net neutrality debate in 2014. Political humor is also good at bringing policies, events or topics to the top of people’s minds. [...]

So why not use humor to bring attention to issues about which these comics are particularly passionate? The obvious answer is that there is a novelty when comedians speak seriously. It violates expectations and gets our attention. But, it might also be a strategic choice stemming from their perceived limits of humor. And if anyone knows the limits of humor, it is the comics. First, comics probably know that the way audiences orient to humor dictates how much they are affected by it. Audience members who consider political satire to be a legitimate source of news/information (rather than just mere entertainment) allocate more cognitive resources to it, and since they’re

thinking harder about it, they learn more from it. Second, at a gut level, comics probably know that humor reduces our scrutiny of the arguments being advanced in a message. Because we dedicate mental energy to “getting the joke,” we have less energy left over to critique whether the argument being made in that joke is fair or accurate. Comics also probably know that when people enter the state of “play” when listening to a joke, they treat that message with different rules, and engage less carefully with its message arguments. This means audiences might be less resistant to an argument made in a joke. It also means they will not process that argument as critically.

[...]

Right now, progressive comics (and citizens) are finding their core beliefs, value systems, and social identities challenged every single day — by executive orders and legislative outcomes and even by the nature of political discourse. In such a climate, we shouldn’t be surprised when our comics, armed with political beliefs and a microphone, stop trying to be funny.

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<sup>3</sup> The *Center for Media & Social Impact* (CMSI), based at American University’s School of Communication in Washington DC, is a creative innovation lab and research center.

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## Los Angeles Times

### Op-Ed: ‘Cancel Culture’ has always been a problem for comedy

by Kliph NESTEROFF, October 15, 2021

Is freedom of speech evaporating from the world of comedy? We hear a familiar mantra whenever someone like Dave Chappelle comes under fire: You can’t joke about anything anymore. PC police. Cancel culture. People are too sensitive. But does this premise hold up to scrutiny? Studying history, it seems clear comedians have more freedom of speech today, not less.

At the start of the 20th century, ethnic minorities objected to the way they were portrayed onstage. Instead of airing grievances on the yet-to-be-invented internet, many delivered their objections in person.

Irish and Italian immigrants were vocal at the turn of the century. Vaudeville comic Walter Kelly received “a letter threatening his life if he did not immediately cut out several Italian stories in his act,” and an Irish betterment organization called the Clan na Gael pelted comedians with eggs for perceived slights against the Irish.

A newspaper editorial in Kansas feared this would inspire other groups to do the same: “If the well-known and almost indispensable Irish policeman is to be abolished from the stage by decree of the Clan na gael,

what is to hinder the ‘Afro-American’ societies from following suit and threatening dire consequences on the heads of players who represent the stage type of negro?”

That’s precisely what happened. African Americans, Native Americans and American Jews all staged protests in the early 20th century. In 1903, the Topeka Capital predicted the death of comedy: “The final upshot [of protest is] to strip comedy of its most engaging and popular features. If the raid should extend to all sorts of people caricatured in the theater and in print, then good-bye to comedy.”

Indeed, jokes concerning politics, religion and sex were taboo for most of the century. Even the most casual carnal reference could result in arrest. [...]

The debate concerning stereotypes was especially fierce when the television became a household appliance in the 1950s. TV executive Bob Wood explained why CBS and NBC were purging stereotypes from programming in 1956: “We deleted any material which we consider derogatory to any minority group — that’s on a common sense and public relations basis.”

The Wilmington Morning News sounded the death knell: “There isn’t much laughter any more — because there’s no way to speak in any light fashion about any group of people anywhere.”

[...]

Comedians resented interference — yet if it meant advancing their career, they went along with it. “The Tonight Show” was created in 1954 and became an important stand-up showcase. For seven decades, comedians have willingly eliminated the F-word without screaming about censorship or accusing hosts such as Johnny Carson of tyranny.

The obscenity laws used to prosecute Mae West and Lenny Bruce were deemed unconstitutional in the late 1960s, chipped away by the courts. Freedom of expression flourished as obscenity laws were overturned at the start of the ’70s.

[...]

In the same decade, Sears pulled its sponsorship of “Three’s Company” due to religious pressure, George Carlin was arrested after cussing and “Welcome Back, Kotter” was banned in Boston over fears it would trigger disorder. In the 1980s, comedy team Bowley and Wilson were arrested for flatulence humor. In the 1990s, Andrew Dice Clay canceled a show fearing he’d be arrested on an obscenity charge in Texas. All of this occurred long before the words and phrases “millennial”, “safe space” or “retweet” came along.

Comedians have far more freedom today. Subject matter involving sex, religion, politics or profanity does not result in jail time. The tug of war between censorship and free speech has been part of comedy for its entire existence. It is likely to continue.



Dave WHAMOND (Canada), *Cagle Cartoons*, 2019.

Printed after the *New York Times* decided to stop publishing cartoons in 2019.

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