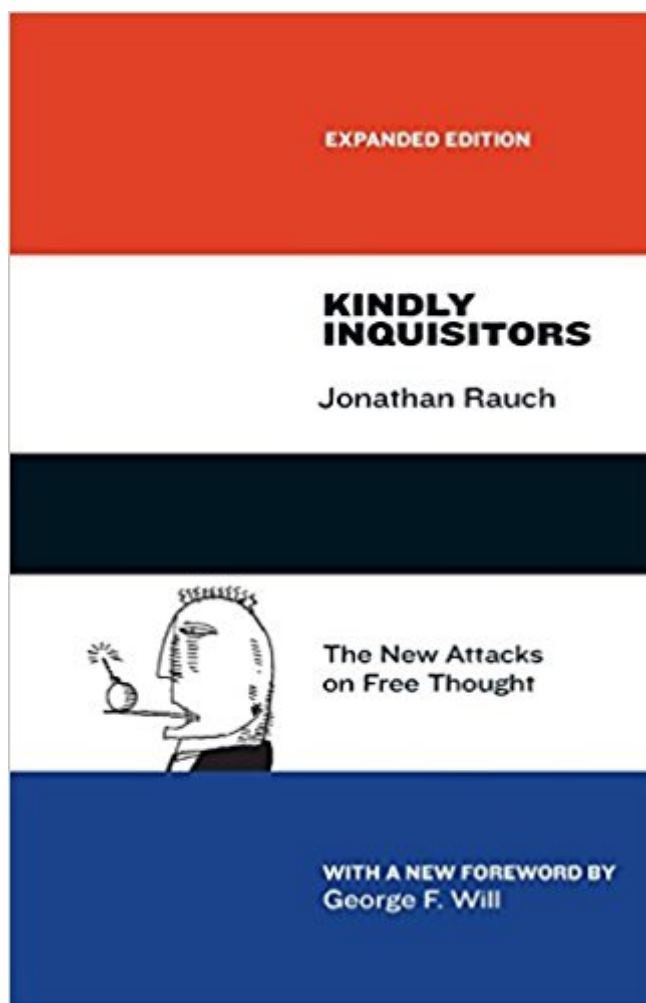


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Kindly Inquisitors: The New Attacks On Free Thought, Expanded Edition



Synopsis

A liberal society stands on the proposition that we should all take seriously the idea that we might be wrong. This means we must place no one, including ourselves, beyond the reach of criticism; it means that we must allow people to err, even where the error offends and upsets, as it often will. So writes Jonathan Rauch in *Kindly Inquisitors*, which has challenged readers for more than twenty years with its bracing and provocative exploration of the issues surrounding attempts to limit free speech. In it, Rauch makes a persuasive argument for the value of liberal science and the idea that conflicting views produce knowledge within society. In this expanded edition of *Kindly Inquisitors*, a new foreword by George F. Will strikingly shows the book's continued relevance, while a substantial new afterword by Rauch elaborates upon his original argument and brings it fully up to date. Two decades after the book's initial publication, while some progress has been made, the regulation of hate speech has grown domestically—especially in American universities—and has spread even more internationally, where there is no First Amendment to serve as a meaningful check. But the answer to bias and prejudice, Rauch argues, is pluralism—not purism. Rather than attempting to legislate bias and prejudice out of existence or to drive them underground, we must pit them against one another to foster a more vigorous and fruitful discussion. It is this process that has been responsible for the growing acceptance of the moral acceptability of homosexuality over the last twenty years. And it is this process, Rauch argues, that will enable us as a society to replace hate with knowledge, both ethical and empirical. It is a melancholy fact that this elegant book, which is slender and sharp as a stiletto, is needed, now even more than two decades ago. Armed with it, readers can slice through the pernicious ideas that are producing the still-thickening thicket of rules, codes, and regulations restricting freedom of thought and expression. —George F. Will, from the foreword

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Customer Reviews

Praise for the previous edition “Fiercely argued. . . . What sets his study apart is his attempt to situate recent developments in a long-range historical perspective and to defend the system of free intellectual inquiry as a socially productive method of channeling prejudice.” (Michiko Kakutani, New York Times) “Like no other, this book restates the core of our freedom and demonstrates how great, and disregarded, the peril to that freedom has become.” (Chicago Tribune) “Stands out as a thoughtful, provocative defense of civil liberties and liberal inquiry. Jonathan Rauch’s unique perspective, derived from personal experience, lends to the poignancy of his thesis.” (William F. Weld, former governor of Massachusetts) “To observe that American political and intellectual discourse has become polarized, intolerant of all but the most predictable ideological nostrums, censorial of anything deemed to be remotely politically incorrect, and generally lacking in subtlety, a free spirit of inquiry, or honest quest for truth, has perhaps become trite. Twenty years ago it was less so, and it was then that Rauch wrote a book called *Kindly Inquisitors*. In retrospect, Rauch was extraordinarily prophetic in his assessment of the evolving state of free speech and thought. [This] newly updated version of *Kindly Inquisitors* provides an opportune moment to reflect on this extraordinarily deep and provocative essay, a true tour de force of logic, integrity and moral passion.” (Forbes 2013-11-08) “A modern classic explaining the importance of free speech in society.” (Greg Lukianoff, Huffington Post 2013-11-08) “An eloquent attack on the advocates of political correctness.” (Economist) “It has been twenty years since the first edition of *Kindly Inquisitors*, yet conflicts persist. This book is worth a second look twenty years later. It will no doubt lead the reader to reflect upon the nature of social and political change within a technologically networked society.” (ID: International Dialogue 2015-01-26)

Jonathan Rauch is a senior fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution, a contributing editor to the Atlantic and National Journal, and the author of six books, including *Government’s End and Gay Marriage: Why It Is Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and*

Good for America.

Jonathan Rauch is an excellent writer, and I am definitely part of the choir for his argument that speech restrictions, especially on college campuses, are a perversion not just of the ostensible purposes of our colleges, but of any kind of liberal or scientific thought. Despite my agreement with his arguments, I gave this book only 3 stars because I felt that it provided me with little new information, and would have no effect on those who are urging "speech codes". As I read, I kept thinking of Amadeus, when the Emperor explained to Mozart what was wrong with his latest composition: "Too many notes." In this, too many words. The problem is that those who favor "speech codes" have long since concluded that theirs is the only right view, and that those who feel otherwise are either evil, or stupid, or both. Or, as Rauch says, are latter-day Fundamentalists, with whom it is pointless to argue, Try reading the lonely one-star review for a reasoned rebuttal to Rauch's thesis. So what's the value of a long intellectual argument? Nor is this anything new. As Nat Hentoff noted in "Free Speech for Me, but Not for Thee", written just over 20 years ago, both Left and Right have been trying to censor the other side for years. And universities have long been known for their leftish bias. Many years ago, when I was in college, official censorship was not yet in vogue, but even the least perceptive of students was careful in what he said in class, or wrote as an exam answer. All that has really changed is that the onslaught of "victimization" studies at the universities has provided an excuse for campus-wide censoring of Wrong Speech enforced by administrators who too well remember the fate of Larry Summers at Harvard..I think the reason for the book's length is Rauch's effort to make censorship a denial of the scientific method, under which all views of things are subject to constant criticism and question, out of which further enlightenment comes. I would agree in general, although his reliance on the intellectual community to detect error doesn't, in my view, give enough weight to the non-scientific incentives that seem to be skewing some allegedly dispassionate researchers, and the failures of "peer review." More importantly, anyone who believes a little censorship is a good thing is unlikely to be persuaded by, or even pay attention to, arguments about the scientific method, which use up lot of space in this book..Whether it's good news or bad, the urge to censor speech with which those in power disagree is not new, dating back to Ancient Greece. The fight continues, but it is alarming to have the alleged intellectuals at our Universities join the Inquisition.

As someone who values free speech, limited experience at my college has taught me that not everyone else does, whether or not they admit it. More and more these days it seems like people

are content to take the easy way out and stifle opinions that they don't agree with, and this happens on both sides of the political spectrum. The core message of Rauch's book, which is still relevant today, is liberal scientific inquiry, the methodical pursuit and acquisition of knowledge, is the best way to decide what is true. It's basically evolutionary theory and the scientific method applied to epistemology. All other roads lead to totalitarianism. For the casual reader, the early, philosophy-heavy sections might be a little dense, but it's definitely worth the effort. This is a book that has stood the test of time, and thankfully we've made progress since the early 90's. If you care in the least about liberty, I highly suggest you pick up a copy and start reading it immediately.

This magnificent piece of writing is a potential balm for campuses that seem to be divided along ideological lines, and is a must-read for students and professors interested in making the very most out of the potential of university educational experiences. The book is both compassionate and edgy, delving without apology into the humanitarian and egalitarian principles that support the seemingly humane circumscription of expression of thought on campus. The author then provides an unblinking and foreword-thinking observation of the end to which attempts to maintain the ideals of political correctness in the university lead: creed and culture wars. Throughout the book the author makes a convincing case for a strength-based and affirming solution that serious thinkers from across the ideological spectrum will be able to live with, and with practice and discipline, enact. This is a book about the long game of advocacy that students in a post-Orlando world need to read. This is a book for our times, written by a gay man who is a gay rights activist, and who has lived to witness both intense oppression and inspiring social change. He clearly outlines a set of strength-based and ideologically neutral principles for advocacy and social change, while also providing a well-reasoned and straightforward description of the pitfalls into which those of us who care deeply about people may fall in misguided, and ultimately destructive, endeavors to promote sensitivity in the university. What Rauch has to say is challenging and beautiful. For professors who are considering using this book (I am assigning it for my graduate-level human development class next fall) I suggest having students read the last chapter first, and I also suggest having students watch the utube interviews with Rauch early in the class (his gentleness and genuine care for others is more apparent in the last chapter and the interviews than it is in the initial chapters of the book, and knowing the author better may help cautious students to engage with some challenging material).

Science and politics have always been and should always be an open argument. When one side

stifles the other freedom is lost. Poor logic and bad ideas eventually fade away like the many gods of yore. Shutting down opposition with force is shown to end up badly. Science and politics require democracy of intellect. Autocrats, oligarchs, dictators and religion are enemies of skepticism and free inquiry. Freedom is not free and the battle will be fought as long as mankind exists.

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