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Preserving American Exceptionalism  
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The vitality and exceptionalism of the American Republic has always hinged upon one thing: the potency of man's free mind and his liberty to seek the truth through inquiry. Humankind is unique in our capacity to reason, to explore future possibilities, to dialogue. It is our capability to communicate, to debate, and to collectively and cooperatively test the veracity of ideas, which empowers us, above all other creatures, to “establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” Unfortunately, there are those nowadays who undervalue the importance of free thought and exchange, who wish to stifle it in pursuit of “peace.” Little do they seem to realize that the day that men cease to grapple with controversy is the day that they cease to be free.

For the purposes of this essay, you need know nothing about me but that I have always been intensely loyal to truth and particularly fond of argument. Ever since I was little, the word “why” has always been at the forefront of my vocabulary. I have always found that the most resilient ideas are those that have been refined by the dual fires of time and skepticism. I am one of those few who regards truth as absolute, exclusive, concrete, and knowable. You can imagine how out of place I feel in our current cultural climate, where truth is about as constant as the temperature, where the tongues of many spirited thinkers are tied by social hyper-sensitivity, and the words “I'm offended” serve to snuff out the flame of dialogue. This grim turn of events concerns me deeply. I agree wholeheartedly with Benjamin Franklin's observation that “Without Freedom of thought, there can be no such Thing as Wisdom; and no such thing as public Liberty, without Freedom of speech.”

This is why I have decided to become a professional philosopher. As I examine history, it seems to be the philosophers, the Lockes, Montesquieus, and Jeffersons, who arouse the people out of destitution by first arousing their minds. I believe that the greatest gift I can give to my countrymen is the gift of argument. Argument is like a pill; it may be hard to swallow, but in the end it eradicates the

source of disease. It expels error and reveals truth. As for those in our culture today who are unwilling to take their medicine, I fear that, in their ambition to promote “diversity” and “tolerance,” they have unknowingly begun to construct a political dogma of the most exclusive, intolerant kind, a dogma that stands alone as the only popular philosophy in American history to declare itself an enemy of truth.

This mindset cannot be besieged by ridicule or denunciation; it has arguably grown out of an abuse of those very tactics. I firmly believe that only the persistent prodding of reason, heavily seasoned with an attitude of grace and civility, is capable of penetrating this intellectual fog. I owe it to my fellow citizens to engage error and champion the light of free thought, and I plan to spend my life doing so. I have been given a mind to think, a mouth to speak, and a pen to write, and I intend to think with all the precision I can manage, speak with all strength that I can muster, and write with all the vigor I can marshal. I wish to teach a new generation of Americans what it is like to think for themselves, what it really is – what it truly means – to be free.