

Abraham H. Foxman and Christopher Wolf (2013) *Viral Hate: Containing its Spread on the Internet*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 242 pp., \$31.00 USD, ISBN 978-0-230-34217-0-52700.

In this accessible work, Abraham Foxman, National Director of the Anti-Defamation League, and Christopher Wolf, an internet/privacy lawyer, set out to convince readers to take a more proactive approach to hate on the internet. The authors outline the difficulties of controlling online speech in an American context, with comparative references to several other countries. Foxman and Wolf illustrate that there is no obvious cure for online hate, but offer several different ideas of how it can be combated.

The authors open with an example illustrating how the internet has changed in the past twenty years; emphasising how quickly information can be accessed today. Straightaway the reader can begin to understand the potential dangers of the internet. For example, the book's first chapter demonstrates the dangers of online hate which, according to the authors, really can cause more than just psychological trauma: it can even kill. Foxman and Wolf also point out that the internet makes it incredibly effortless for anyone to spread hateful messages, and people are now exposed to communication they never would have experienced in the past. This is particularly dangerous, as anyone can be a publisher on the internet, and are afforded a "shield of online anonymity" not present in an offline world (p.10). Additionally, any variety of merchandise can be sold and purchased on the internet. This makes it exceptionally easy for anyone to find a copy of *Mein Kampf* or *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, for example, or any sort of hate music. The authors end with the question of whether anything can be done about online hatred and hate speech, setting the theme for the rest of the book.

But what, exactly, is "hate speech"? In the second chapter the authors outline the difficulties of defining exactly what could be considered hate speech. Where is the line between hate speech and critique, and who draws that line? Is hate speech any content that is gross, disrespectful, and insulting? Or is it simply anything that people find offensive? While Foxman and Wolf pay much attention to discussing the difficulties of defining hate speech, a working definition would have been most helpful, especially for later chapters. Additionally, the authors explore the United States' stance on hate speech. In the United States all types of speech, including hate speech, are protected under the First Amendment of the US Constitution. As the authors point out, however, online companies aren't bound by the First Amendment and should exercise their right to interdict instances of hate speech.

At this point the reader begins to ponder the question of why there isn't already a law banning hate speech in the US context; a question which the author's promptly seek to answer in the proceeding chapter. Chapter three aims to show why a law would be the least effective way to deal with the problem of hate speech. The First Amendment protects almost all kinds of speech in the United States, and it is nearly impossible for speech to meet the criteria of being a 'true' threat. Several countries have 'anti-hate speech' and Holocaust denial laws, but there is no 'universal standard' for prosecuting hate speech. The issue is that if one country outlaws hate speech, it will still be widely available for anyone to find on the internet. So, what can be done?

The longest chapter in the book, Chapter Four, deals with the idea of corporate entities regulating online hate speech as they "have a much more direct and intimate connection to Internet users and content than governments do" (p.87). Private entities do not have to abide by the First Amendment, and are not responsible for what is published on their websites.

Hate speech could potentially be regulated through user contracts, and through stricter enforcement of terms and conditions. However, the internet has a vast scope and an internet domain supporting hate speech could easily be found in order to propagate illicit material elsewhere. Additionally, this chapter also discusses the issue of anonymity on the internet. While remaining anonymous can at times be important, it also gives people a mask to hide behind. After a detailed development of the issues surrounding the regulation of hate speech on the internet the book continues, in its final chapters, to give ways in which readers can join in the effort against online hate speech.

Chapter Five, the suitably-titled *When Good Men Do Nothing*, encourages readers to engage in counter-speech, which is “the dissemination of messages that challenge, rebut, and disavow messages of bigotry and hatred” (p.129). Perhaps the most important purpose of counter-speech, according to the authors, is to remind everyone that there are 'still good people in the world'. For those readers who are not comfortable with this level of online activism, the authors also suggest simpler, more effective ways to react. The authors warn that while counter-speech should be encouraged, there is a fine line between posting counter viewpoints and engaging extremists in debate. The primary purpose of counter-speech is not necessarily to engage in online debate, but to create a climate of tolerance and openness on the internet. Lastly, readers are not only encouraged to engage in counter-speech online, but also offline as well; whether this is at work or in the readers day-to-day encounters with people of different faiths, races, or sexual orientations.

Chapter Six of the book discusses the importance of education in combatting hate speech. Schools,

Elementary through High School, should teach children about the appropriate use of the internet. Children should be educated on how to filter content they may see online, and on the rules of etiquette, ethics, and morality that are unique to the internet. The authors also provide a discussion of what parents and guardians can do, and reminds readers that teaching young people notions of 'respect' is 'everybody's business'. This idea of respect is expanded upon in the final chapter, as the authors discuss a basic set of principles that everyone should follow. For example, everyone who shares concern about online hate speech should “accept responsibility for defining and defending norms of civil behaviour – not just on the Internet, but throughout society” (p.175). The book finishes with 47 pages of Appendices, covering articles, excerpts from hate crime laws, and a more in-depth discussion of case studies mentioned earlier in the book.

To conclude, *Viral Hate* is an important book, which many should be encouraged to read. This short book outlines the dangers of the internet, especially for impressionable youth. It shows the complexity of the issues of online hate speech, while concurrently suggesting ways to combat it. While not every question can be answered in the scope of one book, the authors have created a solid groundwork to address these issues in the future. As Foxman and Wolf suggest, the internet is vast and cannot be controlled, so we all have a responsibility to combat hatred and negativity online.

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