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A liberal defence of freedom of speech and its implications for the Charlie Hebdo cartoons

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Abstract

The cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad on the front cover of various issues of the French satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, leading up to the 2015 terrorist attack have been seen by many to be harmful and offensive. This report argues that, from a liberal perspective, the cartoonists did not do anything morally wrong by publishing these cartoons. In fact, it is argued that the cartoonists were morally justified in publishing these cartoons because they were protecting the liberal value of free speech. I argue that both the *act of publishing* these cartoons, as well as the actual *content* of these cartoons were morally justifiable. Arguments against the cartoons pertaining to both harm and offence are proven to be unsound. Furthermore, when balancing the *seriousness* of the offence with the *reasonableness* of the cartoons, it becomes clear that the offence is not as serious as some may think.