



The Offensive Internet

Martha Craven Nussbaum

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The Internet has been romanticized as a zone of freedom. The alluring combination of sophisticated technology with low barriers to entry and instantaneous outreach to millions of users has mesmerized libertarians and communitarians alike. Lawmakers have joined the celebration, passing the Communications Decency Act, which enables Internet Service Providers to allow unregulated discourse without danger of liability, all in the name of enhancing freedom of speech. But an unregulated Internet is a breeding ground for offensive conduct.

At last we have a book that begins to focus on abuses made possible by anonymity, freedom from liability, and lack of oversight. The distinguished scholars assembled in this volume, drawn from law and philosophy, connect the absence of legal oversight with harassment and discrimination. Questioning the simplistic notion that abusive speech and mobocracy are the inevitable outcomes of new technology, they argue that current misuse is the outgrowth of social, technological, and legal choices. Seeing this clearly will help us to be better informed about our options.

In a field still dominated by a frontier perspective, this book has the potential to be a real game changer. Armed with example after example of harassment in Internet chat rooms and forums, the authors detail some of the vile and hateful speech that the current combination of law and technology has bred. The facts are then treated to analysis and policy prescriptions. Read this book and you will never again see the Internet through rose-colored glasses.



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