

Ethical Theory

Defending Freedom of Expression

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Readings

- *On Liberty*, chapter 2 (pp. 99–130 in *Utilitarianism and On Liberty*).

The book does not number the paragraphs in *On Liberty*, so you will need to number them yourself in the page margins. Chapter 2 is 44 paragraphs total in length.

Questions

1. In paragraph 1 of chapter 2, Mill says he will defend the claim that “if all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind”. What four reasons does Mill give to justify this surprising claim? (Hint: he summarizes them at the end of chapter 2, in paragraphs 41–43.) How does Mill defend each of these four reasons? (Hint: Mill defends the first in paragraphs 3–20, the second in paragraphs 34–39, the third in paragraphs 20–33, and the fourth in paragraphs 26 & 27.)
2. Mill repeatedly claims (especially in paragraphs 3–4 & 11–14 in chapter 2) that censorship and the silencing of discussion rests on a faulty assumption. What is this assumption and why is it faulty?
3. What relationship does Mill see between open deliberation and debate concerning different opinions, on the one hand, and the truth, meaning, and vitality of opinions, on the other? (See especially paragraphs 7–10, 23, 26–30 & 39 of chapter 2.)
4. Why does Mill see open deliberation and debate as necessary for human development and growth? (See especially paragraphs 19–20, 32, 33 & 39 of chapter 2.)