

ETHICAL THEORY

Defending Freedom of Expression

As you read the material for our 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 reading:

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 about these issues at our next class meeting.

Reading

- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion".

The text does not number the paragraphs in *On Liberty*, so you will need to number them yourself. This section has 44 paragraphs.

Questions

1. Mill says he will defend the following claim:

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. ["Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion", paragraph 1].

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 throughout chapter 2? (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 "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion", paragraphs 3–4 and 11–14) 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 "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion", paragraphs 7–10, 23, 26–30, and 39.)
4. Mill suggests (in "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion", paragraphs 19–20, 32, 33, and 39) that open deliberation and debate are necessary for human development and growth. Why?