

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

Defending Freedom of Expression

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations 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 and justify accepting the author's conclusions as opposed to other ones.

Reading

Mill, J. S. (2018). *All Minus One: John Stuart Mill's Ideas on Free Speech Illustrated*. [Chapter 2 of *On Liberty*] (R. V. Reeves & J. Haidt, Eds.; D. Cicirelli, Art & Design). Heterodox Academy. (Original work published 1859.)

Questions

1. In this illustrated selection from chapter 2 of *On Liberty*, John Stuart 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. [p. 6].

What three arguments does Mill give to justify this surprising claim? What reasons does Mill give to support each of them? (Mill defends the first on pages 6–18, the second on pages 20–29, and the third on pages 32–37.)

2. Mill repeatedly claims (especially on pages 6 and 7) that censorship and the silencing of discussion rests on an “assumption of” (p. 7) something that is mistaken.

What is this assumption and why is it a mistake for someone to assume?

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 pp. 8–10, 21–23, 25–28, and 35–37.)
4. Mill suggests (on pages 12–18, 29, and 35–37) that open deliberation and debate are necessary for human development and growth. Why?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses (unless you miss or are late to class, and must then submit a written reading question review).

You do need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting. You may, during the following class, be randomly selected to present answers to these if selected to do so for a verbal reading question review.