

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

READING GUIDE #22

THE NATURE & PURPOSE OF FREEDOM

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 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 position on an issue, rather than another.

READING

Mill, J. S. (2003). Introductory [Chapter 1 from *On liberty*]. In M. Warnock (Ed.), *Utilitarianism and On liberty: Including Mill's 'Essay on Bentham' and selections from the writings of Jeremy Bentham and John Austin* (2nd ed., pp. 88–98). Blackwell. (Original work from 1859)

To make it easier for us to discuss this reading, I strongly suggest numbering its paragraphs. There are 16 paragraphs here.

QUESTIONS

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. What issue does John Stuart Mill say he will address in *On Liberty*?
2. Mill compares the need for liberty in societies governed by monarchies (in paragraph 2) with the need for liberty in more democratic societies (in paragraphs 3–8). In each of these cases, what is Mill's justification for why liberty is necessary? In addition, for each case, what exactly is personal liberty supposed to protect an individual against?
3. Mill says "the object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle" (paragraph 9, p. 94). This principle is typically called the *harm principle*.

What is this principle? What does the harm principle protect against? To whom does this principle apply (see especially paragraph 10)?

4. According to Mill (in paragraphs 9–11), what will be his strategy for justifying the harm principle?
5. Finally, to what three categories of liberties/rights does Mill claim (in paragraphs 12–16) the harm principle protects? What do you think these three categories have in common in order for Mill to suggest that they are the appropriate ones for liberty?

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. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.