

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

READING GUIDE #23

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

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). Of the liberty of thought and discussion [Chapter 2 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. 99–130). Blackwell. (Original work from 1859)

To make it easier for us to discuss this reading, I strongly suggest numbering its paragraphs. There are 44 paragraphs here.

QUESTIONS

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. 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” (paragraph 1, p. 100).

What four reasons does Mill give to justify this surprising claim? (Hint: he summarizes them at the end, in paragraphs 41–43.)

How does Mill defend each of these four reasons? (Hint: Mill defends the first reason in paragraphs 3–20, the second in paragraphs 34–39, the third in paragraphs 20–33, and the fourth reason in paragraphs 26 & 27.)

2. Mill repeatedly claims (especially in 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 (A) open deliberation and debate concerning different opinions, and (B) the truth, meaning, and vitality of opinions? (See especially paragraphs 7–10, 23, 26–30, and 39.)
4. Mill suggests (in paragraphs 19–20, 32, 33, and 39) that open deliberation and debate are necessary for human development and growth.

Why is open deliberation and debate so essential?

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.