


John Stuart Mill
1806-1873

Libertarian
Utilitarian

John Stuart Mill



Mill's Background

- ◆ He learned Greek, starting at age three
- ◆ His father hired servants who spoke Latin
- ◆ He learned "utilitarianism from his father, James Mill, and his Godfather, Jeremy Bentham
- ◆ He suffered an emotional crisis as a young man
- ◆ He was devoted to Harriet Taylor and eventually married her
- ◆ He authored works on logic, liberty, and utilitarianism

Contrasting Views on Liberty-I

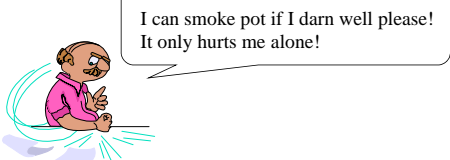
- ◆ Positive Liberty (Paternalism)
 - ◆ This is the view that some people in society, leaders, know better than the general populace what is good, right and true. Those leaders should tell people not only what they must refrain from because it may harm others, but also what they must do in order to live a good life.
 - ◆ Examples: Plato, Hobbes, Marx, Burke

Contrasting Views on Liberty-II


- ◆ Negative Liberty (Libertarianism)
 - ◆ This is the view that government should only restrict individual choice when one's actions could harm another. Otherwise, we should act as autonomous agents, making our own decisions about what is good for us personally.
 - ◆ Examples: Locke, Mill, Thoreau, Jefferson, Kant

Mill's On Liberty


- ◆ Mill is the pre-eminent writer who promotes negative liberty, the view that government should only prevent harm, and other decisions, whether or not they may harm ourselves, must be ours to make.




I can smoke pot if I darn well please!
It only hurts me alone!


 ***Mill's On Liberty***

- ◆ The sole purpose for which humans can rightfully interfere with the liberty of action of another is for self protection.
 - ◆ Society can not rightfully exercise power over others for “their own good,” either moral or physical.
 - ◆ This doctrine does not apply to immature persons or primitive people--those we can force to do what is right for themselves.


 ***Mill's Freedom Principle***




- ◆ “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.”

 ***Mill's On Liberty***


- ◆ Areas of liberty
 - ◆ “the inward domain of consciousness, liberty of conscience”
 - ◆ “liberty of tastes and pursuits, of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character”
 - ◆ “liberty of combination among individuals”
 - ◆ liberty of speech, press, action

 ***Mill's On Liberty***


“[T]he only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it.”




I demand autonomy!


 ***What Can a Government Ask?***

- ◆ First, we can be required to refrain from causing direct harm to others
- ◆ Second, we can be asked to support societal services, e.g., armies, roads, police, & postal services in some equitable way
- ◆ Thomas Jefferson seemed to share Mill's view: “no man has a natural right to commit aggression upon the equal rights of another, and that is from which the law should restrain him.”



 ***The Objection to Mill's On Liberty***

“No man is in island, entire of itself”--Every act we perform has a ripple effect on others. Drug users affect their families, their co-workers; prostitutes spread disease, lower neighborhood standards, property values; alcoholic drivers kill people on the highways; careless industries harm the environment.



Mill's Reply to the Objections

If someone drinks, drives, and harms someone, punish her for the harm, but not for the drinking. If someone takes drugs and beats his wife, punish him for the beating, but not for taking the drugs.

Rules prohibiting people's actions which only indirectly harm others are wrong; they harm society and rob us all of our freedom in major ways, more than do the indirect harms.

Exceptions: Soldiers on guard, policemen, airline pilots, etc, where the possibility of harm is too great.

Mill's Utilitarian Ethics

Three aspects of focus in ethical theory

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graph LR; Motive[Motive] --> Act[Act]; Act --> Results[Results];
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The Hedonistic Masters of Humans

What act would bring the greatest good for the greatest number?

Pleasure

Pain