**John Stuart Mill**

Free thought & speech is needed for the fulfillment of the individual and for the good of society.

Why?

1. the Truth is necessary for the good of both...

happiness ---- the Greatest Happiness Principle

2. without truth in morals, politics, science, religion, and everyday maxims (or ‘prudential’ matters) ,

a) we live mistakes and lies ... limits and harms us

b) we live according to rules, customs, etc., which we don’t understand or feel anything for...

c) these can’t turn us into robots and sheep

d) and can lead to disasters in our lives which we are unprepared for ... don’t really understand, etc.

3. Truth ..... entails free thought and speech

a) established opinions are either false, true, or a mixture

b) If false, then we need Free Thought to find out and correct them.

c) If true, then we need FT to test, and

i) challenge these truths or they become dead slogans... barely understood by us.

ii) no one is infallible ... always chance of error ... challenges keep us alert to errors.

iii) truth ... understanding

understanding ...

1) knowing reasons for and contra an opinion

2) knowing the meaning of the opinion

The meaning ... i.e., not just a slogan or formula, but the ‘lived’ and ‘experienced’ content of our beliefs.

E.g., Christianity ... “love they neighbor” ... ?

without thought and discussion, this diminishes to a mere slogan... a bumper sticker!

(d) If established opinion is a mixture of true and false, then thought and discussion are needed to bring out all the more truth ... as found in contrary views.

Why? again ... without thought and discussion, beliefs are not understood... neither their supporting grounds, nor the meaning and implications for life. etc.

Without this understanding, we can’t see the weakness and shortcomings of our views ... nor the strengths of contrary views.

The Dangers to truth’s existence:

**Legal limits and opinion limits ... (social censorship)**

**legal censorship ... e.g., “sensitive issues” in Malaysia**

moral censorship

political censorship

religious censorship

artistic censorship

scientific censorship

**Opinion limits also:**

custom; public opinion; majority opinions; prejudices

Democracy’s big problem: the tyranny of the majority and the tyranny of opinion

denying a person a chance to work and earn a living is just as effective a control as legal censorship.

OF INDIVIDUALITY

Chapter III

“One of the elements of well-being”

The same reasons in support of free thought and speech as necessary for intellectual and moral nature of man are applied to the views that men should be free to act or their opinions.

“The liberty of the individual must be thus far limited; he must not make himself a nuisance to other people.” (53)

Diversity of opinions and actions is good.

 experiments in living

 varieties of character

 varieties of modes of life should be proved practically

Given the still imperfect condition of man ... his character, nature, and society ... his way of life ... ……

Individuality should assert itself ... (in things which don’t injure others)

Free development of individuality ... one of the leading essentials of well-being. (54)

The chief difficulty here is not failure to understand this by people, but their indifference to it! (59)

Individual spontaneity is hardly valued at all.

Wilhelm von Humboldt quoted by Mill:

“freedom and variety of situations” are required for “individual vigor and manifold diversity.”

.... for the “highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole.”

Customs: experiences of the past.......

1) May be too narrow for us

2) may be wrongly interpreted by them (our forebearers)

3) even if true and adequate interpretations, custom does not educate us... we must learn for ourselves. (56)

Perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and moral preference are exercised only in making a choice.

N.B. to do by custom is not making a choice.

cf. Kierkegaard, Socrates, Krishnamurti

Mental and moral faculties are improved by being used!

But if the world chooses for you, you are ape-like in imitation.

Man ... the chief work of mankind (56)

not an automaton, but a free thinking and choosing being, creating himself, according to his own plan!

(57) **Understanding** (intellect) and **Desires and Impulses**, too.... should be our own... not dictated and controlled.

i.e., an attack by Mill on moral puritanism which seeks to level and destroy our passions, desires, etc. ... to get us to fit in and conform ... like sheep.

“The mind is bowed to the yoke.”

capacities... withered and starved

incapable of strong wishes or native pleasures

“generally without either opinions or feelings ... properly their own.” (59)

Human nature ... corrupt -- therefore must be killed within!

Calvinism’s view: surrender to the Will of God

a narrow theory of life ... pinched and hide-bound type of human character... cramped and dwarfed human beings are the ideal!

(59) Different view found in the Greeks

Greek ideal of self-development ... (within the limits imposed by the rights of others)

fullness of life, rich, diversified ... “making the race infinitely better worth belonging to.” (60)

Social Restraints: ok, on the selfish, harmful acts, but wrong if it does not affect the good of others.

This dulls and blunts the whole nature. (61)

Great Individuals -- -- teach others by example; more enlightened conduct, better taste, etc. New truths are discovered by them, and new practices.

Mill calls these “the salt of the earth” ...

Without them, human life would become a stagnant pool. (61)

cf. Krishnamurti

To prevent us from becoming human cattle or mechanical men, the influence and example of the genius and originality of some is needed, and it in turn needs the **atmosphere of freedom.**

Mill speaks of these people who don’t “fit it” ………

who are “less capable” of fitting into small molds made by society.

Again, cf. Krishnamurti.

Importance of genius: and of allowing it to unfold freely in thought and practice.

In reality, in practice, “almost everyone is totally indifferent to it.” (62)

They think, at heart, they can do without it.

(eg., who needs a Shakespeare, or Henry Miller, or Thoreau, or Whitman, or Van Gogh, Rembrandt, or Picasso, or Coltrane or Miles Davis?)

What good is it? this genius....

It can “open their eyes”

“All good things which exist are the fruits of originality.” (63)

Mediocrity ... the ascendant power among mankind.

Individuals are lost in the crowd.

“public opinion rules the world” …… in politics. (63)

The mass may differ in contempt of opinion from country to country, but it is always a “collective mediocrity.” (63)

Their thinking is done for them by other mediocrities ... journalism ... newspapers ... etc.

Government is therefore mediocre.

Democracy ... gov’t by public opinion ... can never rise above mediocrity unless the “many” let themselves by guided by the “gifted” ... the “one or few.” (63)

(69) the genius -- -- “freedom to point the way” ... not to subdue others to their will and ideas.

The exceptionals should be encouraged in acting differently from the masses. eg., Thoreau, Miller, etc.

“refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service” to the rest of us! (64)

Eccentricity is needed to break through the tyranny of opinion. (64)

Few now dare to be eccentric -- the chief danger of the time we live in.

“There is no reason that all human existence should be constructed on some one or some small number of patterns.” (64)

(65) Different persons require different conditions for their spiritual development. Different capacities for pain and suffering, etc., ---- different modes of life... or else they stagnate.

If you are too original, you can be put away! (65)

The average for mankind is moderate in intellect and moderate in inclinations. (66)

No strong tastes or wishes to incline them to do anything unusual. Therefore they don’t understand those who do.

Increased regularity of conduct

general rules of conduct

make everyone conform to the approved standard

desire nothing strongly -- maim human nature “like a Chinese lady’s foot.”

Weak feelings and weak energy -- easily kept in conformity

“Scarcely any enery now except in business.” (67)

hobbies .. of small dimension -- if a guy has any energy at all left!

“Men of another stamp will be needed to prevent its decline.” (England’s decline... ) (67)

Despotism of custom:

standing hindrance to human advancement

“The unfailing and permanent source of improvement is liberty.”

In China (the East, he says) custom predominates and civilization stagnates.

In Europe: custom accepts change : eg., fashion and styles of clothing.

But it is “change for change’s sake” **[or for money’s sake?]**

not for any ideas of beauty or convenience

We aren’t against progress ... we like new inventions, machines, etc.

It is **individuality** we are against. (68)

We woud make ourselves all alike if we could.

A warning example in China: submerging of the individual.

In Europe: a plurality of paths and diversity of character (though not a matter of superiority of people) has allowed for its progress.

But, it is striving for the ideal of making all people alike.

... freedom and variety of situations is needed.. as von Humboldt said. We are losing it.

People read, listen to, see, go to, strive for, the same things.

The assimilation is still proceeding. Political changes promote it, and education brings people under common influences.

Politics, Education, Communication, Commerce and Manufacture: all promote assimilation.

The most powerful agency of promotion is public opinion. (70)

The very idea of resisting the will of the public disappears.

No social support for non-conformity. (e.g., art forms, plays, etc.)

(71) a mass of influences hostile to Individuality. “The time is now.” ... early stages ... resistance is still possible... or life will be reduced to nearly one uniform type... and mankind becomes unable to conceive of diversity.

Chapter IV ... of the limits to the authority of Society over the Individual.

Social Contract: a fiction

But we do require rules of conduct to guide us. This consists first “in not injuring the interests of one another.” (73)

“ought to be considered as rights”

Second:

sharing in labors and sacrifices to defend society and its members from injury and molestation.

Law and public opinion can be used to enforce this.

“But there is no room” ... to apply utilitarian, general welfare standards and questions “when a person’s conduct affects the interest of no persons besides himself...” (73)

The main principle of Mill’s:

“In conduct of human beings toward one another it is necessary that general rules should for the most part be observed in order that people may know what they have to expect; but in each person’s own concerns his individual spontaneity is entitled to free exercise.” “...he himself is the final judge.” (75)

Call a guy a fool, warn him... **but don’t interfere....** better than politeness and keeping quiet.

We can avoid the jerks and warn others of the existence of jerks. All that is fine!

These are natural, spontaneous reactions to the jerk... not purposely inflicted punishments... such as boycotts, or refusing to hire a person, etc.