

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Mill's Life and Works.
- B. Mill in the context of other authors covered in this course. (Hobbes, Locke, Adam Smith, Bentham, Kant, Marx and Engels.)
- C. Basic Terms and Concepts
 - i. Entities: Society – State – Government.
 - ii. Attributes (adjectives): Moral – Political – Legal – Economic.
 - iii. Values and Rights: Freedom-Happiness-Equality-Justice; (Peace, security, order, stability)
 - iv. Types of Government and Distribution of Wealth: Democracy-Capitalism-socialism.

II. LIBERALISM

- A. *The priority of liberty.*
- B. *The limits of liberty:* “The subject of this essay is not the so called liberty of the will... but Civil or Social Liberty: the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual.” (p.5)
- C. *The non-harm principle:*
 - Question: Under what conditions, if at all, may individual freedom be limited?
 - Mill's answer: “The sole end for which mankind is warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.” (p.14)
 - Exception to the principle:* (1) Children, (2) “backward states of society” (p.14)
 - Difficulties in applying the principle.*
Almost every action could be shown to have some harmful effects upon others... the non-harm principle may justify excessive limitation of individual freedom.

Mill's distinction between the private sphere and the public sphere.
The state and its laws have no business regulating the private domain. Implications of this distinction for 'sexual morality': What consenting adults do in the privacy of their homes should not be the business of the law.

III. MILL'S SYSTEM OF FREEDOMS

A. Mill's system of freedoms:

- i. The freedom to live your life as you wish (freedom of action)
- ii. The freedom to declare what you believe and to offer reasons in support of what you believe (***freedom of expression and discussion***).

B. Mill argues that freedom of discussion is important because it increases our chances of arriving at the truth. But ***why should we value the truth?*** Do you agree that "no belief which is contrary to truth can be really useful"? (p.27) (The tension between utility-based theories and rights-based theories)

C. ***How does freedom of discussion lead to truth?*** Some of Mill's main arguments in support of the freedom of discussion:

- i. When we suppress a view with which we disagree, we assume that we are infallible.
- ii. If the belief we suppress happens to be true, we would have denied ourselves, and society, the benefit of accessing a truth.
- iii. If the belief we otherwise would have suppressed proves (upon examination and free discussion) to be false, then it becomes clearer to us why this belief is false. Moreover, our confidence in the truth of the opposing belief that we hold would be strengthened.
- iv. If the belief proves (upon free discussion) to be partly true, then possessing this partial truth is better than not possessing it at all.

IV. DEMOCRACY

A. Mill highlighted some of the pitfalls of Democracy as a 'constructive critic'.

B. ***The Tyranny of the Majority:*** Even under a democratic form of government individual liberty may be threatened and unduly limited: "The limitation of the power of government over individuals loses none of its importance when the holders of power are regularly accountable to the community that is, to the strongest part therein." (p.8)

C. ***The Tyranny of Public Opinion:*** "Protection against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough: there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to

impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them;...” (p.9)

V. ***SOCIALISM***

From Mill’s autobiography (Columbia university Press edition, sixth printing, 1969, p.162). In this quotation “we” refers to Mill and his wife Harriet Taylor.

“ While we repudiated with the greatest energy that tyranny of society over the individual which most Socialistic systems are supposed to involve, we yet looked forward to a time when society will no longer be divided into the idle and the industrious; when the rule that they who do not work shall not eat, will be applied not to paupers only, but impartially to all; when the division of the produce of labor, instead of depending, as in so great a degree it now does, on the accident of birth, will be made by concert on an acknowledged principle of justice; ***and when it will no longer either be, or be thought to be impossible for human beings to exert themselves strenuously in procuring benefits which are not to be exclusively their own, but to be shared with the society they belong to.*** The social problem of the future we considered to be, ***how to unite the greatest individual liberty of action, with a common ownership in the raw material of the globe, and an equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labor.***” (Emphasis added)

VI. ***POINTS OF CONTRAST: MILL AND SOME OTHER PHILOSOPHERS.***

A. ***MILL VS PLATO.***

Mill’s liberal society contrasts sharply with Plato’s Republic. The individual determines his or her ends (Mill’s open society). Each individual has a proper place, or slot, in society (Plato’s Republic).

B. ***MILL VS THE TOTALITARIANS.***

The Open society and its enemies. (Karl Popper)

C. ***LIBERALISM VS PATERNALISM.***

The distinction between negative freedom and positive freedom (Isiah Berlin)

D. ***MILL VS KANT.***

Why should we value freedom? If happiness is the ultimate end of life, then ***all other ends have only instrumental not intrinsic value.***

If you have questions or comments on this lecture, you could send them to wmmasr@aub.edu.lb