



## On Liberty

*John Stuart Mill*

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# On Liberty

*John Stuart Mill*

## On Liberty John Stuart Mill

Discussed and debated from time immemorial, the concept of personal liberty went without codification until the 1859 publication of *On Liberty*. John Stuart Mill's complete and resolute dedication to the cause of freedom inspired this treatise, an enduring work through which the concept remains well known and studied. The British economist, philosopher, and ethical theorist's argument does not focus on "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." Mill asks and answers provocative questions relating to the boundaries of social authority and individual sovereignty. In powerful and persuasive prose, he declares that there is "one very simple principle" regarding the use of coercion in society — one may only coerce others either to defend oneself or to defend others from harm.

The new edition offers students of political science and philosophy, in an inexpensive volume, one of the most influential studies on the nature of individual liberty and its role in a democratic society.

## On Liberty Details

Date : Published June 19th 2002 by Dover Publications (first published April 1859)

ISBN : 9780486421308

Author : John Stuart Mill

Format : Paperback 112 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Politics, Nonfiction, Classics, History

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### **Luís C. says**

In the mid-nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill wrote this book defending liberty, with wise words, presenting all the pros and cons devoted to the woman of his country, of which she was a well-known British feminist. He, in turn, was the son of an Anglican pastor. Mill is best known for his work as an economist in which he mixes principles of liberalism with principles of socialism. In the background, today's world all over the West. All the western world studies his work but many people do not read it in Portugal even though in the university could be found these writings, in English, of oxford university press.

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### **Mayar Hassan says**

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### **Rebecca McNutt says**

I've been meaning to read this old classic for a long time now, and I'm really glad I finally got around to it. Regardless of whether or not you agree with its ideas, *On Liberty* is certainly worth a look at. In its short but complex look at society and individuality, it manages to reach law, philosophy and politics all at once and really leave you thinking. Unfortunately my mom took the copy of it we have to Belize before I could finish the last two pages so technically I didn't complete it, but it's a strangely engaging read. You'd expect it to be a bit dry from its description, but it's actually very interesting and a book that everybody can enjoy and learn from no matter their background or knowledge. I especially liked how down-to-earth and concise Mill is in his writing. Short, sweet and to-the-point, he never throws in pointless filler and always has something enlightening to say.

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### **Jonfaith says**

**Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigor, and moral courage which it contained.**

It would be pretentious to suggest I dedicated my reading to Ahmed Merabet, yet it would be untrue to exclaim otherwise. We've drowned in debate about liberty this last week. Somehow I regard that as most encouraging. I found Mill's treatise riveting and incisive along a number of axes which inform our means of government and private life. Mill was a shrewd historian and a brilliant writer. I gasped audibly at his conclusions and deft references. Too often Utilitarianism is wedged into confined spaces for politically conservative purposes. I have no problem with that. I suspect J.S. Mill wouldn't either. His moral remains, we should all disagree, question custom and exercise our faculties at every turn.

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### **notgettingenough says**

Anybody interested in free speech must surely be concerned with the situation of Bret Weinstein in the US. See for instance his hour interview here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fEAP...>

One can only be deeply ashamed that non-conservative media has (I understand) all but ignored this story. Curious to have a statement of why this is so, I've written to NPR to find out why they have not reported one word on it. I am waiting for a response.

Meanwhile, John Stuart Mill's words to remind us of what is at stake. The students who are behaving so disgracefully, who have no interest in truth and most certainly no interest in free speech (except theirs, of course) would do well to heed his words, so timely in a period in which groups of thugs rule and noises on social media make do as replacements for truth, for philosophical contemplation and the like.

What could be more apt than the following words on social tyranny? I note in particular from what Weinstein has said of his situation, that is isn't even the lack of coverage by the left, craven as that is which is most disappointing. What is really disturbing is the number of people who support him in private but will not stand up in public. This is a terrible world we live in where thuggery has won and free speech is a thing of the past. To think that it is the left of centre that is creating this situation, too scared to stand up for this elementary principle, and that it is conservatives who are filling the vacuum is a truly depressing state of affairs.

"Society can and does execute its own mandates: and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself. Protection, therefore, 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; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation, of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own."

"The principle itself of dogmatic religion, dogmatic morality, dogmatic philosophy, is what requires to be rooted out; not any particular manifestation of that principle. The very corner-stone of an education intended to form great minds, must be the recognition of the principle, that the object is to call forth the greatest possible quantity of intellectual power, and to inspire the intensest love of truth: and this without a particle of regard to the results to which the exercise of that power may lead, even though it should conduct the pupil to

opinions diametrically opposite to those of his teachers. We say this, not because we think opinions unimportant, but because of the immense importance which we attach to them; for in proportion to the degree of intellectual power and love of truth which we succeed in creating, is the certainty that (whatever may happen in any one particular instance) in the aggregate of instances true opinions will be the result; and intellectual power and practical love of truth are alike impossible where the reasoner is shown his conclusions, and informed beforehand that he is expected to arrive at them."

I'm afraid even this is pertinent:

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things: the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth a war, is much worse. When a people are used as mere human instruments for firing cannon or thrusting bayonets, in the service and for the selfish purposes of a master, such war degrades a people. A war to protect other human beings against tyrannical injustice; a war to give victory to their own ideas of right and good, and which is their own war, carried on for an honest purpose by their free choice, — is often the means of their regeneration. A man who has nothing which he is willing to fight for, nothing which he cares more about than he does about his personal safety, is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free, unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself. As long as justice and injustice have not terminated their ever-renewing fight for ascendancy in the affairs of mankind, human beings must be willing, when need is, to do battle for the one against the other.

"The Contest in America," Fraser's Magazine (February 1862); later published in *Dissertations and Discussions* (1868), vol.1 p. 26

How can great minds be produced in a country where the test of a great mind is agreeing in the opinions of small minds?

It might be plausibly maintained, that in almost every one of the leading controversies, past or present, in social philosophy, both sides were in the right in what they affirmed, though wrong in what they denied.

All lifted from wiki quotes.

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**sigurd says**

mi ha sempre commosso la dedica che Stuart Mill, uno dei miei filosofi preferiti, fa in questo suo famosissimo libro (riletto di recente perché ricordavo una bellissima invettiva contro la tirannide della maggioranza, "dell'opinione e del sentimento prevalenti" da cui ci dobbiamo proteggere non meno che da altre tirannie) alla moglie Harriet scomparsa un anno prima, tanto che non sotterrò il libro a revisione

senza il suo parere e lo pubblicherà così, come è sgorgato, libero e purissimo. "Quando due persone hanno i loro pensieri e le speculazioni del tutto in comune, è di poca importanza per quanto riguarda la questione di originalità, chi di essi detiene la penna", aveva scritto.

*All'amata e compianta memoria di colei che fu l'ispiratrice, e in parte l'autrice, di tutto il meglio della mia opera – all'amica e moglie il cui altissimo senso della verità e della giustizia era il mio stimolo più grande, e la cui approvazione era la massima ricompensa – dedico questo volume. Come tutto ciò che ho scritto per molti anni, appartiene a lei quanto a me; ma il lavoro, così com'è, ha ricevuto in misura molto insufficiente l'onestimabile beneficio della sua revisione; alcune delle parti più importanti avrebbero dovuto essere sottoposte a un riesame più accurato, che ora non riceveranno mai più. Se solamente fossi capace di trasmettere al mondo la metà dei grandi pensieri e dei nobili sentimenti che sono sepolti con lei, sarei il tramite di benefici maggiori di quanti potranno mai derivare da qualunque cosa io scriva, privo dello stimolo e del conforto della sua impareggiabile saggezza.*

<http://youtu.be/JaB1wdm9pTo>

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### **Tam Nguyen says**

M?t cu?n sách ý ngh?a cho nh?ng con ng??i t?m ??n s? t? do cho ch?nh b?n th?n m?nh

T? do, v?i John Stuart Mill, kh?ng ph?i l? mu?n l?m g? th? l?m, nh? m?i ng??i th??ng ngh?, m? l? con ng??i ph?i ???c ph?t tri?n theo ??ng h??ng t? n?i?n c?a m?nh, kh?ng ???c b?t ?p h? tr? th?nh m?t ai ?ó, m? ???c l? ch?nh anh ta, v?i ?i?u ki?n l? kh?ng x?m ph?m ??n t? do c?a ng?oi kh?c.

Con ng??i, ??i v?i JSM, c?ng l? quan tr?ng nh?t, con ng??i t? do th?t s? ph?i l? m?t ng??i ??c l?p, t? s?ng cu?c s?ng c?a ri?ng m?nh v? kh?ng ???c ?? ai ch?n l?i s?ng cho m?nh; ng??i n?o m? ?? x? h?i ch?n l?i s?ng cho h? th? h? c? nh?ng n?ng l?c kh?ng kh?c g? m?t lo?i kh?, c? ngh?a ch? bi?t b?t ch??c m?nh th?i.

Ông c?ng n?i v? s? nguy hi?m khi m?t ng??i n?o ?ó ch? bi?t ch?ng l?y v? ph?a m?nh. H? lu?n coi m?nh l? ??ng, l? s?c s?o nh?t. V?i, kh?ng ch?u nghe ng??i kh?c y ki?n c?a h? nh? th? n?o. ? ?y, ch??ng sau, ông c?ng n?i r?ng ?a s?, c?i ph?n ??ng con ng??i, th??ng ch?p nh?n m?t ??nh ngh?a ch?t h?p v? x? h?i, v? coi nh?ng con ng??i c? t?nh c?ch kh?c, x? s? kh?c b?nh th??ng l? thi?u ch?ng m?c, th?m ch? ph?n ??i gay g?t v? k?t t?i h?.

Ch? v?i m?t x? h?i ?? cho con ng??i ???c t? do l?a ch?n s?ng theo nh?ng g? m?nh th?y ph?u h?p v? ???c ph?t tri?n theo n?ng l?c c?a c?nh m?nh, x? h?i ?y m?i c? th? ??t ??n nh?ng b??c ti?n xa. Cu?i s?ch c? n?i v? ti?u s? JSM v? m?nh th?y, ông c? ???c m?t n?n gi?o d?c r?t ??c bi?t, v? c? l? ch?nh v?i th?, suy ngh? c?a ông r?t kh?c so v?i nh?ng ng??i c?ng th?i c?a m?nh.

M?nh c?m nh?n ???c r?ng, ??i v?i ông, nh?ng con ng??i b?o th?, ch? bi?t ch?ng l?y v? ph?a m?nh, v? ch? bi?t b?t ch??c s? l? m?t tr? ng?i l?n cho ch?nh s? ph?t tri?n c?a h?, v? c?a c? x? h?i n?a.

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## Ahmed El Wakeel says

## It's A turning point Book

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**No No, not him !**

**yeah, that's him :))**

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## FotisK says

Εκατομμ?ρια σε ?λον τον πλαν?τη ομν?ουν σε κ?ποιο απ? τα λεγ?μενα Ιερ? Κε?μενα. Εφ?σον αυτ? τους προσφ?ρει γαλ?νη και ελπ?δα, ποιος ε?μαι εγ? να τους κρ?νω; Διατηρ? ?μως το δικα?ωμα να πιστε?ω πως, εφ?σον αυτ? το μικρ? σε ?κταση αλλ? τερ?στιο σε σημασ?α βιβλιαρ?κι συν?δενε τουλ?χιστον κ?ποιες στιγμ?ς της καθημεριν?τητας των ανθρ?πων, ο κ?σμος θα ?ταν πολ? ανεκτικ?τερος, ?σως και καλ?τερος κατ? τι .

Η Ανοχ? ?σως ε?ναι το επιστ?γμα ?σων πρεσβε?ει ο Mill και φυσικ? η Ελευθερ?α – σε κ?θε της μορφ?, σε ?λη της την ?κταση, με τους περιορισμο?ς και τις υποχρε?σεις της. Βασικ? πλεον?κτημα ε?ναι πως το "Περ? ελευθερ?ας" δεν ε?ναι γραμμ?νο συναισθηματικ?, με στ?χο το θυμικ? του αναγ?στη, επικαλο?μενο το α?σθημα δικαιοσ?νης, ευσπλαχν?ας, ανθρωπισμο? κ.ο.κ. Η ακατ?βλητη δ?ναμη και διαχρονικ?τητα αυτο? του κειμ?νου (που γρ?φτηκε το 1859) οφε?λεται εν πολλο?ς στην κλινικ? ματι? του, τη χειρουργικ? ακρ?βεια της επιχειρηματολογ?ας του, τη δ?χως καλλωπισμο?ς κριτικ? του. Διαπρ?σιος κ?ρυκας των ναμ?των του Διαφωτισμο?, ο Mill στρ?φει το Φως της διαλεκτικ?ς στο τ?ναγος των κ?θε λογ?ς μυστικισμ?v, του σκοταδισμο?, της τυρανν?ας των παραδ?σεων και των εθ?μων, αλλ? και των πλειοψηφι?ν και της επιβολ?ς τους.

Δεν χρει?ζεται να επιμε?νω σχετικ? με το π?σο ΔΕΝ ε?ναι ξεπερασμ?νο το κε?μενο αυτ?, τ?σο σε περιοχ?ς του πλαν?τη που ζουν ακ?μα τον Μεσα?ων? τους? σο και στις Δυτικ?ς κοινων?ες που χρωστο?v σε ανθρ?πους σαν τον Mill την ?στω "αποσπασματικ? και ανολοκλ?ρωτη" (για να θυμηθο?με τον Καστορι?δη) Ελευθερ?α τους.

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## Stephen says

**WARNING: Some of my political views are discussed in this VERY LONG review. I don't think there is anything offensive but with politics, you never know. Therefore, in case anything I say upsets anyone, I have included several very CUTE kitten photos by way of apology.**

6.0 stars. *On Liberty* has secured a spot on my list of "All Time Favorite" books. I have gone through a pretty significant political re-examination over the last several years (maybe a lot of us have). A few years ago, if you were to line up everyone on goodreads according to political beliefs, I would guess that I would be found at the more conservative end of the spectrum. However, recently, I have come to see that I disagree with "LARGE CHUNKS" of both political parties and find myself embracing a more "libertarian" philosophy. Without going into a detailed thesis of my political beliefs, I am going to share a few basic beliefs so that you will understand where I am coming from in relation to the theories that Mill argues in

favor of in this book.

The following is a political advertisement on behalf of S-PAC (Stupid Political Asshats of Congress) ...which is sponsored in part by the WTF Association whose motto is, *“When you can see it but just can’t believe it....WTF.”*

#### Social Issues:

On social issues, I think you can generally sum up my feelings as follows:

I believe, with certain exceptions, everyone should be free to do whatever they want so long they are not causing harm to anybody else and this freedom necessarily extends to control over their own body. I know that is pretty simplistic but the nuances would take forever to explain so hopefully I can explain the basic gist. For example, I think people should be able to:

- (a): Eat whatever you want (does not seem to be a problem for people in the U.S.);
- (b): Drink what you want (of course, we run into the whole “cause no harm” thing once you get behind the wheel);
- (c): Smoke cigarettes and cigars if you want...with reasonable restrictions for places where people either have no choice in being (e.g., work, school) or “little” choice (e.g., an airplane or mass transportation).
- (d): Do drugs if you want... I may not like this one but it would be “hypocritical” of me to distinguish this from the whole “free to live as you want and control your own body” philosophy (however, the “cause no harm” requirement still applies).
- (e): **Love who you want...**provided we are talking consenting ADULTS\*\*\*. For me, this is a no-brainer. Two consenting adults caring for one another...let's move on.

**\*\*\*Point of clarification #1...**I said consenting ADULTS. Pedophiles and NAMBLA spokesmen can go ahead and sit back down...or better yet:

(f): Abortion....uh, I think I just stumbled upon one of the third rails of politics. However, like the drug issue I think it would be hypocritical of me to argue an exception to the whole “control over your own body” philosophy and therefore, regardless of what one personally believes, I don’t believe you should have the right to impose that belief on someone else and thus a person should be “free to choose.”\*\*\*

**\*\*\*Point of Clarification #2...** I can hear the “do no harm” contingent screaming on this one and I understand the argument but (for me at least), the other interests don’t overcome the fundamental freedom over one’s own body.

Okay, this is getting a little heavy, so I would like to take a short break to look at another cute animal photo:

Ahhhhh, that is cute. Okay, I feel better.

#### Economic Issues:

Being consistent and applying the same reasoning as above to economic issues will probably make me sound

very conservative, but it is really just a consistent application of the concept of individual freedom. Basically, I think that people should be free to keep what they earn, except for some reasonably allocated portion needed to DEFEND\*\*\* the Country and to protect the rights of people to live their lives free from oppression by their neighbor.

**\*\*\* Point of Clarification #3...** I said DEFEND the Country. That does NOT mean the equivalent of getting a bunch of your buddies together, grabbing a pile of gold from the money room and storming off next door because you think they MIGHT be the next Mordor.

Now I certainly understand that for a lot of people this is just too limited a governmental role and they feel like there are things the government NEEDS to do. I certainly acknowledge that the government does a lot of things that help a lot of people. For me, the problem arises when I step back and start with the basic premise that every dollar the government has must be TAKEN from someone (e.g., through taxes, tariffs, or borrowing from our kids). Now when those “taxes” go to benefit everyone (e.g., defense, police, courts, etc.) then it is simply a matter of figuring out how to fairly allocate the burden among the people.

However, when money is taken from one group and given it to another group, suddenly you are in the position of necessarily imposing one group’s values on another. Suddenly it is necessary to “lobby” the government so that your group is the one that comes out on top. Thus, you get the rise of the “special interest” group, the name calling, the buying of influence through “campaign contribution” and everyone fighting for control over the public teat. Basically, you get our current political system which just seems broken to me.

Well, I have probably said more about myself than most of you care to know. Hopefully, I haven’t offended anyone even if you don’t agree with anything I have said. Thank you for listening to me ramble and, as a form of appreciation, I offer you another cute kitten picture:

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Well, with that VERY LONG introduction, I now come to the book itself.

On Liberty is in many ways a “bible” for libertarian philosophy and encompasses many of the ideas I mentioned above. In the book, Mill takes the position that, with certain limited exceptions, people should be free to think what they want, believe what they want, worship (or not worship) as they want, speak and write freely and conduct their own personal lives without interference from the government. Mill argues that the government’s role should be to create the environment whereby people can be free from the oppression of their neighbor and should not intrude in or exert control over the day to day lives of its citizens.

In addition to his strong defense in favor of freedom of the press, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly and debate, Mill also passionately argues that all of the very assumptions that we live by should never be held so sacred as to be excluded from debate. Mill argues that only by examining our beliefs and subjecting them to rigorous debate and evaluation can we achieve true wisdom. I thought that was a wonderful way of saying keep an open mind and always be willing to challenge your assumptions.

One final thing I wanted to mention that I found fascinating for a book written in 1859, was Mills position on women’s rights. Mills categorically believed that the right to be free and live your life as you choose applied

equally to both women and men. He spoke of the “oppression” of husbands over their wives as being absolutely contrary to the principle of individual freedom. I found him to seriously ahead of time on that subject and it just made me appreciate his positions even more.

Overall, I have rarely found myself more in agreement with a book on political theory and am sure I will be reading this again in the future. **HIGHEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION!!!**

## Nikos Tsentemeidis says

Σπουδα?ο ?ργο !!!

**Nasser Moh'd says**

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**Night0vvl says**