

Mill. On Liberty, #1

Reid Blackman
3-11, 17-27, 32-56

“Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think” (35).

Tyranny of the government → self-government → tyranny of the majority

Two sorts of tyranny

- i) **Political:** a political minority gets silenced/oppresed, e.g. 51/49 presidential elections
- ii) **Social:** social majorities “enslave the soul itself” (p. 7).

What does it mean to enslave the soul? How is it done?

- i) **Molding:** a) Opinions put there by society that b) strike us as self-evident, and c) our feelings buttress these opinions. But d) our feelings are the result of being molded by society, e.g. slavery, sexual mores (?), theism (?)
- ii) **Threatening:** The “destruction of the moral courage of the human mind” (p. 34): Instill fear of disapproval, condemnation, being ostracized → put up a façade/be a phony *or* conform.

Question: How can we liberate ourselves from tyranny? How do we prevent such enslavement?

Answer: Engage in and allow free Discussion

Thesis 1: We need free discussion because we may believe falsely.

The assumption of infallibility, **p. 19.**

- Other individuals/groups in our own time thought differently and were fallible, and
- Other people/states in other ages
- We shouldn't just look to members of our group for confirmation.

Objection: But aren't we to use our judgment and then act on it?

Response: Reasons for believing A vs. Reasons for being confident in believing A, **p. 21.**

- Development of human intellect *depends* upon this.

Particularly pernicious: not allowing an opinion to be heard b/c you think it's immoral, e.g. Socrates and Jesus, “support the president/troops”, theism (?)

Thesis 2: We need free discussion because even if our beliefs are true, they need to be debated.

“A dead dogma, not a living truth”

- a) Having a belief superficially (“dead dogma”)
 - Sources of the belief: by authority or feelings/inclinations
 - Easy to lose
 - Liable to manipulation
 - Without really understanding its meaning
- b) Having a belief deeply (“living truth”)
 - Truly understand its meaning
 - i. One must understand reasons for *and against* one's opinion if one is to *know* the truth, as opposed to having (mere) true belief. This is being open-minded, but not “accepting” everything. **p. 38**
 - From different sources
 - ii. Penetrate feelings and conduct; example of the opposite: superficial Christians

Danger!: Superficial beliefs block new ideas from coming in, **p. 42.**

Thesis 3: No one has all the truth, we each have parts, so we need discussion so we can acquire these parts.

- Don't be an “ist”
- “Convictions are more dangerous enemies of the truth than lies” - Nietzsche