

**John Stuart Mill** (20 May 1806 – 8 May 1873), English philosopher, political theorist, political economist, civil servant and Member of Parliament, was an influential British Classical liberal thinker of the 19th century whose works on liberty justified freedom of the individual in opposition to unlimited state control. Perhaps his most famous work was *On Liberty.* Mill was against slavery in his day and is also famous for being one of the earliest and strongest supporters of ever greater rights for women. His book *The Subjection of Women* is one of the earliest written on this subject by a male author. He felt that the 'oppression' of women was one of the few remaining relics from ancient times, a set of prejudices that severely impeded the progress of humanity.

***On Liberty***

John Stuart Mill’s view on liberty is that the individual ought be free to do as he wishes unless he harms others. Individuals are rational enough to make decisions about their good being and choose any religion they want to. Government should interfere when it is for the protection of society. Mill explains,

“The sole end for which mankind are 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 sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinion of others, to do so would be wise, or even right...The only part of the conduct of anyone, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns him, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.”

***Mill's view on social liberty and tyranny of majority (from On Liberty)***

Mill believed that “the struggle between Liberty and Authority is the most conspicuous feature in the portions of history.” For him, liberty in antiquity was a “contest... between subjects, or some classes of subjects, and the government." Mill defined "social liberty" as protection from "the tyranny of political rulers." He introduces a number of different tyrannies, including social tyranny, and also the tyranny of the majority. Social liberty for Mill was to put limits on the ruler’s power so that he would not be able to use his power on his own wishes and make every kind of decision which could harm society; in other words, people should have the right to have a say in the government’s decisions. He said that social liberty was “the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual”. It was attempted in two ways: first, by obtaining recognition of certain immunities, called political liberties or rights; second, by establishment of a system of "constitutional checks".

However, limiting the power of government is not enough. "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 practices 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.”

***Freedom of Speech***

An influential advocate of freedom of speech, Mill objected to censorship. He says: "I choose, by preference the cases which are least favourable to me - In which the argument against freedom of opinion, both on truth and that of utility, is considered the strongest. ...However positive anyone's persuasion may be, not only of the faculty but of the pernicious consequences, but (to adopt expressions which I altogether condemn) the immorality and impiety of opinion. - yet if, in pursuance of that private judgment, though backed by the public judgment of his country or contemporaries, he prevents the opinion from being heard in its defense, he assumes infallibility. And so far from the assumption being less objectionable or less dangerous because the opinion is called immoral or impious, this is the case of all others in which it is most fatal.” Source: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)