

Critical analysis: js mill's defense of free speech



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Reading J. S. Mill's Defense of free Speech was a great deal of interest, education and increment of knowledge to me. I was so thrilled by his choice of words and his mechanism of analyses. It is of a great pleasure and of a great honor to me to have this opportunity to analyze and asses critically this very write up.

According to J. S. Mill we see that freedom means: a) the freedom of thought, religion, speech, b) the freedom of tastes, and the freedom to plan the life in own way, and c) the freedom of assembly. Thus, Mill's ideal is a possible freedom of every person for the purpose of the whole society prosperity. Mill even stated that the state should take care of own people and don't try to increase the value of own citizens with the purpose of making them obedient instruments of own projects implementation. Mill defends the right of individuals to live as he pleases. According to Mill we see that each of us is self-sufficient with respect to own health, as bodily, mental and spiritual. Social growth is the result of all the various individual initiatives. Clearly, everyone's freedom finds its limits in the freedom of another. Individual shall not infringe upon the interests of others or a certain group interests, which by law or acquiescence should read as legal. He was forced to accept their responsibilities and the necessary sacrifices for the protection of society and its members from any sabotage and unrest.

Freedom in Mill's mind is the public good. Because a free person is more productive than not free person and has a better chance of " happiness", advocated by the time Mill in his work. Now we have a reason to suspect that the freedom is the condition for further evolution of the individual and, more importantly, the collectivity development, i. e. culture-and sociogenesis.

<https://assignbuster.com/critical-analysis-js-mills-defense-of-free-speech/>

Survival of the human species depends on how human can think, and on his ability to modify the form of collective existence. It is possible to say without exaggeration that Mill first felt in what direction the further process of universal evolution goes or even where it should be directed for the purpose of its future continuation.

It cannot be overemphasized the importance and necessity of freedom in life. It is our right to exercise our freedom. The freedom of speech in consideration here most especially is definitely needful, useful and should be unutilized or underutilized by individuals in recent times. This is one of the bases of civilization. Thinking about the liberty of thought and discussion on the governmental level we see that Mill was worried by the state censorship of individual's behavior more as a danger rather than the topic of the day. In old Europe the state interference in individual's life and the freedom of expression has not been true until Mill's times. It had a place not because of big government's sympathy to personal freedom, but because of the so-called "technical" problems; it means that the government was still focused on other prerogatives. No one was aware of how widely it may be areas of potential individual freedom, because life was a meager content, and finally the prerogative of the regulation of morals then belonged to the church and community in those times.

First of all, I would like to have a short look at the prehistory of the book "On Liberty", because it will help me to be more professional in further analysis of Mill's thoughts. The book "On Liberty" Mill co-wrote with his wife in 1859. The author has predicted a long life to this his work by himself and thought that exactly "On Liberty" will survive the rest of his creations. Mill does not

<https://assignbuster.com/critical-analysis-js-mills-defense-of-free-speech/>

get tired to stress the importance for man and society as a whole in maximum diversity of characters and full freedom of human nature in a myriad of contrasting directions. Freedom does not only protect from the tyranny of power, it insures also against such kind of tyranny as the tyranny of prevailing opinion and feeling of general social trends, ideas and habits ... It seems to me that the freedom limits the penetration of legitimate collective wisdom of individual independence.

On my opinion, treatise " On Liberty" is one of the fundamental works of liberal thought, as it provides the rationale unit of society, where the freedom of speech, the freedom of thought, the freedom of private life (including economic freedom) and the freedom of social and political associations were discussed. According to Mill the above numerated freedoms would become a reality in democratic governance. However, in a representative board (it is assumed in a democracy) are possible the tyranny of fashion and the tyranny of the majority.

Mill considered that in a society the law and public opinion should compel people to perform certain behavioral rules. In this case the most important question is about the true essence of these rules. In every era and in every country the dominate rules and laws are perceived as unquestionable and self-evident by people. Meanwhile, this almost universal illusion is one example of the magic influence of habit. In all societies, wrote Mill, there are several principles that play an important role in the formation of behavioral rules that are imposed by the law or public opinion - in the first and the foremost rate it is the interest of the ruling class. The majority of public morality is conditioned to the interests of the ruling class where one class

<https://assignbuster.com/critical-analysis-js-mills-defense-of-free-speech/>

dominates the other. The second principle, which plays an important role in the formation of the behavioral rules, lies in cringing and in desire to please masters or gods. In addition, the moral concepts were also affected by the public interest.

The fact that there are in accordance to our views the presence of good government and bad government might not be one without error. This was critically emphasized in Mill's write up. Mill (1859) stated that " The best government has no more title to it than the worst. It is as noxious, or more noxious, when exerted in accordance with public opinion, than when in opposition to it. If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were". The opinions we bear always make us who we are. When we see the government as a bad one, it makes us a people who are led by a bad government. An opinion held by a majority or by people in power or even any individual could be erroneous. The same very opinion held by a group of people as truth and correct might be total held by the other group as completely false statement and completely incorrect.

The presence of change cannot be overemphasized and does not change as different generation passes by. It is a true saying that as new generation comes, there comes a new way of life, way of thinking and many other improvements or non-improvements in processes. There have been many reformations and changes in the system of governance of any country of the world from the year 1678 to 2010. What does this point to? This means that for a rational critic to rationally criticize any government there should be detailed consideration of the time, setting and location of the criticized government. Nevertheless I still want to stipulate that there still holds some

general view on the basic things expected of a government to offer its citizens and this is the freedom of speech. According to Van Belle (2000) we see that “ For the most part, efforts to defend press freedom have been equal to the task. In fact, if the gradual growth of press freedom around the world is any indicator, the defense and pursuit of press freedom might even be considered to be slightly more robust overall than the effort to censor. If you mark the beginning of the fight for press freedom with the arguments for unlicensed printing put forth in John Milton’s *Areopagitica*, scholars, philosophers, and politicians have been fighting for the freedom to publish free of government control for three and a half centuries”.

To make our points approved is an enviable feature and character worthy of emulation which establishes our opinion as a statement of truth. I will not but also comment on this point as it evokes the feeling and awareness to each of us and most especially the government to allow great room for criticism and evaluation of the views and beliefs held. Mill holds the view that our views and opinions despite the fact that they are value statements should have enough safe grounds of defense to it. We should always weigh our statements, opinions and views in order that they should be worthy enough for anyone to rely on.

In the issue with misunderstand with a great man once lived-Socrates by the law givers in his time, was of course an act of intimidation, non-civilization and inhumanity. There is a great disharmony between the then existent way of things, judgments and opinion which nowadays is considered as a terrible one. According to Mill (1859) we read that “ Mankind can hardly be too often reminded, that there was once a man named Socrates, between whom and

<https://assignbuster.com/critical-analysis-js-mills-defense-of-free-speech/>

the legal authorities and public opinion of his time, there took place a memorable collision." There has been in history the execution of great men who made great differences in life only because of disagreement with what they believe by the then governing authority. It is of course not an act of justice, not an act that depicts the presence of freedom and grants full power to the government without a full rational basis.

Holding of opinion is not just enough but being able to defend it to some degree is the importance of this opinion thereof. Mill (1859) wrote in accordance to previous statement that " There is a class of persons (happily not quite so numerous as formerly) who think it enough if a person assents doubtingly to what they think true, though he has no knowledge whatever of the grounds of the opinion, and could not make a tenable defense of it against the most superficial objections.". In existence are yet individuals who think one should only listen to them and believe all they say. Any argument with them evokes annoyance and possibly some punishments on the arguer in a case when they are the governing body of the very societal setting. There is great truth in this in that for civilized people the weapons of battle are words; well-constructed, that portrays opinion and substantiates it and able to prove and defend it beyond all reasonable thoughts, but not to involve any physical battles. The battle of words is a constructive civilized way of life aimed at confirming how strong a value statement could be and should even not involve any sort of punishment.

The freedom of expressing ones belief is good but more especially there should also be concomitant knowledge of the opposing belief in order to rationally express the basis of this belief. The greatness you have as a

propagator of a certain belief lies in your knowledge of an opposing belief's facts and knowing and expressing a rational assertion of superiority over the opposing belief.

It is political as well as rationally worthy to discuss opinions for the complete exposure of its foundational basis and meaning. Analyzing Mill's position we see that Mill opposed to individual self-restraint, to restriction of individual's freedom from the society's side, and also he opposed to restrictions on freedom of the individual and society from the state's side. It is obvious that Mill was well aware that the joint lives of individuals cannot exist without any restrictions of freedom. Mill said that the freedom of one ends where the freedom of another begins. The boundary of the previous Mill's statement, of course, is mobile and conventional and, incidentally, is supported in the free discussion. Mill in his treatise "On Liberty" provides some clarification, as this border should be determined. But wherever it took place, Mill insists that the freedom - is the norm, and its limitations are rationally justifiable exceptions or pathology. An individual is entitled to any vices and follies, if it will not cause harm to anyone except himself. Moreover, the scope of conduct, harmless to others, in Mill's explanations is much extended. If the individual's behavior provokes a moral outrage and aesthetic revulsion at the neighbors, then shrugs Mill, let them leave their feelings with themselves: the freedom of public interest and public good is more important than their feelings. It could be named Mill's rationalization of tolerance.

One can easily agree with him that many who profess the Christian faith lack the deep knowledge of its foundation. Mill (1859) was interested "To what an extent doctrines intrinsically fitted to make the deepest impression upon
<https://assignbuster.com/critical-analysis-js-mills-defense-of-free-speech/>

the mind may remain in it as dead beliefs, without being ever realized in the imagination, the feelings, or the understanding, is exemplified by the manner in which the majority of believers hold the doctrines of Christianity.” To what end will it then be in general to profess something you have no full understanding concerning. It pertains not only to Christianity but other spheres of life.

The concept of the whole truth is one that is farfetched especially when considering the extent of truth in the opposing doctrines. Man is not an island and his existence knowingly or unknowingly is influenced by the existence of other people, their thoughts, activities and their way of life. It of course also freely given to man, his existence here on earth and much more especially important is also his freedom to influence his surroundings. He influences all components of his surroundings and this includes the people in it, the animals that exists in it and even the climate. If our notions will actually influence others, it will do so only when it is well grounded such that the erroneous nature of it will be near zero.

In the society where the lives of men and women are being led by other men and women, there should be presence of quality and capability in these leaders. It is of course worthy and respectable the fact that leaders act, make decisions, enact laws and even enforce punishments on those they believe defaulted the law, there should also be a justifiable explanation for their actions and steps. Adequacy and competency in leadership and politics therefore not only includes actions which of course should be appropriate ones but also should include their ability to communicate their decisions, intention and even their actions to those they lead.

Conclusion

I agree to a great degree on the write up because of expressive power portrayed concerning the fact that truth is a complex concept that takes almost eternity to completely rationally evaluated. It is worthy of understanding then that since governing powers, humans and group of individuals are bound to be erroneous, there is only a major demand on rationally expressing the reasons of actions, views, decisions and doctrines beyond all reasonable doubts that could arise against it.

Let's remember that Darwin showed the man that he was an animal in some way. Mill explained how this animal is different from all others. Unlike other animals, man is able to manipulate by himself - choose the lifestyle and create own character. But the person needs freedom of thought and action for the purpose of this natural human ability has been realized and it means that this freedom must be provided to the person as soon as possible.

Thus, connecting Darwin's and Mill's works we see that their two fundamental books were published almost at one time and they were two remarkable documents of emancipation of the human person, deeply connected with each other by a common theme, as is clearly seen in our time. Darwin explained individual's retrospection on the evolution stage, and John Stuart Mill's traced prospects of human further development.