

Quotations from *On Liberty*

The Harm Principle

... the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. (1.9)

The liberty of the individual must be thus far limited; he must not make himself a nuisance to other people. (3.1)

This conduct consists... in not injuring the interests of one another; or rather certain interests which, either by express legal provision or by tacit understanding, ought to be considered as rights. (4.3)

Harm and Offence

An opinion that corn-dealers are starvers of the poor, or that private property is robbery, ought to be unmolested when simply circulated through the press, but may justly incur punishment when delivered orally to an excited mob assembled before the house of a corn-dealer, or when handed about among the same mob in the form of a placard. (3.1)

Whoever succeeds in an overcrowded profession, or in a competitive examination; whoever is preferred to another in any contest for an object which both desire, reaps benefit from the loss of others, from their wasted exertion and their disappointment. But it is, by common admission, better for the general interest of mankind, that persons should pursue their objects undeterred by this sort of consequences. (5.3)

... there is no parity between the feeling of a person for his own opinion, and the feeling of another who is offended at his holding it; no more than between the desire of a thief to take a purse, and the desire of the right owner to keep it. (4.12)

Self- and Other-Regarding Actions

To individuality should belong the part of life in which it is chiefly the individual that is interested; to society, the part which chiefly interests society. (4.2)

Freedom

... the only unfailing and permanent source of improvement is liberty. (3.17)

The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way. (1.13)

Freedom of Expression

But the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. (2.1)

Both teachers and learners go to sleep at their post, as soon as there is no enemy in the field. (2.29)

If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind. (2.1)

Individuality

As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so is it that there should be different experiments of living. (3.1)

... one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress. (3.1)

The initiation of all wise or noble things, comes and must come from individuals; generally at first from some one individual. (3.13)

It really is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are that do it. (3.4)

The Tyranny of the Majority

Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough: there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling... (1.5)

In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, every one lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. (3.6)

... society has now fairly got the better of individuality; and the danger which threatens human nature is not the excess, but the deficiency, of personal impulses and preferences. (3.6)

Utility

I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being. (1.11)

Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest. (1.13)