

# LECTURE 4

## On Liberty - part 3



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# COURSE ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ✓ First Assignment due on  
November 15th

## **About the assignment:**

- **Section = the section of the book that is assigned each week, in your case it's either WEEK 2, WEEK 3, or WEEK 4. The first week was only introductory.**
  
- **Section Review:**
  - **1000 words (ca. 2 pages, use word-count)**
  - **a summary of the main points that Mill makes (ca. 500 words)**
  - **a personal critical assessment of the points made (ca. 500 words)**
  
- **Typical questions for a critical assessment: ➤ Are the points the author makes clear? ➤ Is the argument a logical argument? ➤ Does the argument contain mistakes? ➤ Is the author leaving important objections unanswered? ➤ Does the argument apply in all or only in special cases? ➤ Are there counterexamples to the statements that the author makes? Etc. (Challenge the text as if it was written by your classmate! Get creative!)**

## About submission:

- **November 15th mandatory. From November 16th on I need a valid justification (e.g. medical).**
- **Send your assignment by email to [uni.c.martini@gmail.com](mailto:uni.c.martini@gmail.com) or [carlo.martini@uni-bayreuth.de](mailto:carlo.martini@uni-bayreuth.de)**
- **SUBJECT EMAIL: [MILL.AS01](#) (This is important! Your email will not go through my filters if you don't use that subject and only that subject.)**

# Recap from the previous lectures

- On Liberty (part I):
  - Introduction
  - No-Harm principle
- On Liberty (part II): on the liberty of thought and opinion.
  - Why thought and opinion, of any sort, should not be controlled and/or persecuted, regardless of whether the opinion is: a) true b) false or c) a mix of the two.

# TODAY'S TOPICS

- Personal freedom of conduct and claims of insanity in the XIX and XX centuries.
- Freedom and personal development in Europe and the East: Mill's take on the subject.
- Questions and discussion.

# Mill on personal freedom

“But the man, and still more the woman, who can be accused either of doing "what nobody does," or of not doing "what everybody does," is the subject of as much depreciatory remark as if he or she had committed some grave moral delinquency. [...] whoever allow themselves much of that indulgence, incur the risk of something worse than disparaging speeches—they are in peril of a commission de lunatico, and of having their property taken from them and given to their relations.

FOOTNOTE: There is something both contemptible and frightful in the sort of evidence on which, of late years, any person can be judicially declared unfit for the management of his affairs; [...]" *On Liberty*, p. 76.

# Allegations of insanity (XIX-XX centuries)

- Clint Eastwood's "Changeling".
- Case of Elizabeth Packard (1816 - 1897). See Packard v. Packard (1864). Elizabeth Packard was declared insane and taken to a hospital for the mentally ill because she openly challenged her husband's strict religious beliefs and his attitude of domination towards her.
- Other portrayals: "From Hell", based on some semi-historical facts related to *Jack the Ripper*.

# TODAY'S TOPICS

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# Mill on China

“We have a warning example in China—a nation of much talent, and, in some respects, even wisdom, owing to the rare good fortune of having been provided at an early period with a particularly good set of customs, the work, in some measure, of men to whom even the most enlightened European must accord, under certain limitations, the title of sages and philosophers. They are remarkable, too, in the excellence of their apparatus for impressing, as far as possible, the best wisdom they possess upon every mind in the community, and securing that those who have appropriated most of it shall occupy the posts of honor and power. Surely the people who did this have discovered the secret of human progressiveness, and must have kept themselves steadily at the head of the movement of the world. On the contrary, they have become stationary—have remained so for thousands of years; and if they are ever to be farther improved, it must be by foreigners. They have succeeded beyond all hope in what English philanthropists are so industriously working at—in making a people all alike, all governing their thoughts and conduct by the same maxims and rules; and these are the fruits. The modern regime of public opinion is, in an unorganized form, what the Chinese educational and political systems are in an organized; and unless individuality shall be able successfully to assert itself against this yoke, Europe, notwithstanding its noble antecedents and its professed Christianity, will tend to become another China.” *On Liberty*, p. 79-80.

# QUESTIONS

- Are Mill's words the perspective of a Western man who fails to see things from the point of view of a different culture?
- Is Mill's judgment on China's stationary period accurate? Cfr. Joseph Needham's question?
- Is there still an issue about China's alleged lack of creativeness/inventiveness?

# Joseph Needham (1900 - 1995)



# Needham's question

- The Question: Why is it that China was overtaken by the West in science and technology, despite its earlier successes (esp. pre-Renaissance)?
- Needham attributed the stall to the impact of Confucianism and Taoism on the pace of Chinese scientific discovery. He emphasizes two different approaches to scientific inventiveness with a marked independent inventiveness in the western world.
- To some scholars (Nathan Sivin) the question makes no sense, as it is a typical counterfactual historical. It's like asking "why did your name not appear on page 3 of today's newspaper?"

# Today's question

- *The Elements of Creativity and Giftedness in Mathematics* Bharath Sriraman and Kyeong Hwa Lee (Eds.): “In the domain of mathematics, it is widely accepted in China that U.S. students are more creative in mathematics than Chinese students (e.g., National Center for Education Development, 2000; Yang, 2007).”
- McKinsey Global Institute and McKinsey and Company China's office: *Addressing China's Looming Talent Shortage*.
- 2010\_12\_08 (The Wall Street Journal) JIANG XUEQIN: *The Test Chinese Schools Still Fail*.

# OTHER QUESTIONS

\*I will post more questions on chapter 3 on my website together with this week's lecture notes.

## Questions on section 3 of *On Liberty*

- At the very start of section 3, Mill compares the liberty of thought and speech with the liberty of action. Are we free to act just as we are free to think and opine? What is the fundamental difference, between the two acts, which induces Mill to treat them separately?
- Under special circumstances, even thought and opinion lose their status of immunity. What are these special circumstances? Can you provide an example, different from the ones Mill illustrates, where it would be allowed for the society to repress opinion?
- At the beginning of part III of *On Liberty*, Mill repeats several times, in different formulations, the principle of non-interference in one's private sphere of action. The principle is bounded and limited by the *no-harm principle*, enunciated in part I. Provide your own single-sentence formulation of the principle of non-interference and explain it in details.

## Questions on section 3 of *On Liberty*

- What is one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, according to Mill in part III of *On Liberty*? How does Mill justify his claim?
- Why are customs bad for one's intellectual development? Mill provides a *psychological* explanation of the fact that customs are a hindrance to one's capacity to develop independent thought, how does the explanation go? Is that explanation correct and/or justifiable on the basis of some available evidence?
- What does Mill say about strong desires and impulses, and about their role and balance in one's individual development and in society? What is the *social principle* mentioned on page 67? What role does that principle have in Mill's argument?

## Questions on section 3 of *On Liberty*

- Why is the discipline of obedience, as preached by the Calvinists, not in conformity with the religious faith in a “good God” who created humanity?
- Why is it better, or at least: why would Mill rather be a John Knox, than an Alcibiades, but he’d rather be a Pericles than either? [hint: the answer to this question is related to the balance of desires and impulses that are attributed, historically, to the three men.]
- A particularly individualistic account of personal development comes out of Mill’s analysis. Why does Mill focus so much on individuality, when speaking of human development? Is it really “only the cultivation of individuality which produces, or can produce, well-developed human beings”? (see p. 71)

## Questions on section 3 of *On Liberty*

- Mill has so far argued that developed individuals are “good” for themselves, that is for their own development. However, something else needs to be shown according to him: namely, the fact that developed individuals are also useful to those that he calls the “underdeveloped” ones. How does Mill argue for the latter statement?
- Mill notices that society tends towards greater convergence of customs and habits, whereby diversity tends to decrease. What are the factors that affect and determine that phenomenon?
- Mill seems to have bleak prospects for a society in which diversity is eliminated by factors such as common education, commerce, communication, etc. Has the force of those factors increased or decreased in the period between the time Mill was writing to the modern times? How would you judge Mill's comments on the progress of humanity, vis-à-vis the promotion of diversity, in the light of the general history of the world since the writing of *On Liberty*?