John Stuart Mill's Essay On Liberty

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Why Mill should merit our attention today

In a world which is increasingly multicultural, it seems interesting to really understand other cultures, attitudes and stereotypes than our own. For instance, the French and the English have long had a tradition of enmity, which stems partly from different frames of mind. We may be separated by a narrow stretch of water called the English Channel ("why should it be 'English'?", the French jingoist will claim), but in the days of Eurostar and the Chunnel (for Channel Tunnel) kilometric distances are almost erased.

What is likely to set us apart from each other today is more our mentalities. It is a commonplace to say that the English are pragmatic and the French idealistic, by which we mean the English usually have a down-to-earth approach to life's problems, whereas the French relish grand, lofty ideas whose practical applications are all too often impracticable. In recent political history, we might argue that Margaret Thatcher, on the one hand, and François Mitterrand, on the other hand, can best make us aware of the mental gulf between our two nations.

My submission is that, to really grasp British politics and diplomacy, or to be able to do business with a Briton in a fruitful way, we need to understand what motivates them, to 'crack the code' of their 'insular' mentality. Great thinkers of the past may be very helpful in that enterprise. Among those, the proponents of utilitarianism have left a significant legacy. They have shaped the English psyche in such a forceful way that few Anglo-Saxon politicians today can claim they are not influenced by their ideas. That is why thinkers like Mill are valuable.

Furthermore, in an age where the individual may feel estranged by the ever-growing development of standardisation (of tastes, of opinions, of values) in the wake of triumphant globalisation, and powerless as a result of the seemingly unstoppable establishment of supra-national bodies (like European institutions) ever more remote from his daily preoccupations but ever more powerful and awesome, it may be profitable to focus our attention on an Essay, the subject of which is the never-ending tensions existing between the individual and society, the delimitation of man's freedom in a social environment.

Bentham, Jeremy (1748-1832)

A philosopher, jurist and social reformer, Bentham was born in London. He entered Oxford at the age of 12 and, at 19, was admitted to Lincoln's Inn, one of the four Inns of Court where English barristers are trained.

He is best known as a proponent of *utilitarianism* in his pioneering works *A Fragmenton Government* (1776) and *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), which argued that the proper objective of all conduct and legislation is 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' and devel-

oped a '*hedonic calculus'* to estimate the effects of different actions.

Extracted, with slight alterations, from **Webster's International Encyclopedia 1999.**

Mill's life

Born in London in 1806, John Stuart Mill was home-schooled by his father James who taught him Greek at the age of three. At 17, John began a career as a clerk under his father's orders at the East India Company, a British company set up in 1600 to compete for the East Indian spice trade.

An empiricist philosopher and a social reformer, Mill is regarded as one of the major intellectual figures of the 19th century. He became the leader of the Benthamite movement and helped form the Utilitarian Society.

He published his major work, *A System of* ***Logic*****,** in 1843. In 1851, he married Harriet Taylor, who helped him to draft the essay *On Liberty* (1859), the most popular of his works, whose other landmarks are *Utilitarianism* (1863) and *Three Essays on Religion* (1874). He was elected to Parliament in 1865, campaigning for women's suffrage and liberalism.

Of empiricism, utilitarianism and hedonism

• **Empiricism** is a philosophical tradition which maintains that almost all knowledge is based on experience and is ultimately derived from the senses. It is usually contrasted with *rationalism*, and with theories which emphasise the importance of innate or *a priori* knowledge. Its main exponents are Locke(1632-1704), Hume(1711-76) and JS Mill(1806-73).

Extracted, with slight alterations, from **Webster's International Encyclopedia 1999.**

• **Utilitarianism** claims that all actions are to be judged by their consequences for the general welfare. 'The greatest happiness of the greatest number', as Jeremy Bentham put it, is the sole criterion of moral choice. The major advocates of the theory are Bentham(1748-1832), and the Mills, James(1773-1836) and his son John Stuart.

Extracted, with slight alterations, from **Webster's International Encyclopedia 1999.**

• **Hedonism** is an ethical doctrine which maintains that the only intrinsic good is pleasure, and the only intrinsic evil is pain. The utilitarians believe in hedonism, even though their interpretation of 'pleasure' and 'happiness' may differ from that of the Cyrenaics and Epicurians, the other two philosophical schools which consider hedonism as a core concept.

Extracted, with slight alterations, from **Webster's International Encyclopepedia 1999.**

The Essay as seen by Professor John Gray

In the introduction to the 1991 Oxford World's Classics edition, Professor Gray, a leading authority on Mill and the utilitarian movement, claims that *On Liberty* may be considered to be an essay on the limits of social control of the individual.

He also argues that the key to understanding it lies in the doctrine of the **Art of Life,** which Mill set out in the closing chapters of *The System of Logic*. The Logic of Practice, or Art of Life, has as its subject-matter the ends of action, or **Theology,** whose ultimate principle is the promotion of happiness.

In Mill's utilitarianism, Professor Gray maintains, deontic maxims, or rules for right and wrong conduct, are justified by reference to a theological principle, that of **Utility**, which assesses all things in terms of their contribution to happiness. **Utility** is not a moral principle, but an axiological one, specifying that happiness alone has intrinsic value, not a practical precept laying down criteria of right and wrong conduct.

Both in *Utilitarianism* and in *On Liberty*, Mill develops a sort of **eudaimonism** – the ethical theory, first developed by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that the good life for human beings is that in which they achieve well-being via the flourishing of their most distinctive qualities.

The thesis of *On Liberty* is that once mankind has left behind its nonage and can be improved by free discussion and experiments in living, the activities of autonomous persons which are not harmful to the interests of others should be protected within a sphere of liberty or non-interference.

The argument of *On Liberty* is that, once a certain level of cultural development has been achieved, and barbarism left behind, **individuality** – i.e. that form of life in which persons realise their peculiar nature in autonomously chosen activities – is the single most important ingredient in human well-being.

The object of *On Liberty* is to state a principle that delimits a sphere of liberty within which people are free to exhibit their individuality. The **Principle of Liberty**, or **Harm Principle**, which lays down that no one's liberty may be constrained save to prevent harm to others, is defended as just that principle in the essay.

According to Professor Gray, and contrary to received opinion, Mill does not, either in *Utilitarianism* or in *On Liberty*, defend private morality against private control. Rather, he assimilates law and morality by specifying enforceability as their common feature.

The three key arguments of *On Liberty* are :

• the primacy of individuality as an ingredient in the well-being of civilised human beings;

• the fallability of the State and society in intervening with individuals' freedom of action;

• and the role of experiments in living in enabling people to discover the most suitable form of life for them.

In addition, there are arguments for freedom of discussion and also arguments, in the last chapter, in which Mill limits, or defines more exactly, the scope and content of the Principle of Liberty, by showing how it may be supplemented, or even constrained in its application, by principles having to do with preventing offences to others, or the exploitation of others' weaknesses.

Professor Gray's conclusion is that, in this essay, Mill exaggerates the importance of individuality and autonomous choice as components and ingredients in human well-being, and

S*ince there is in Mill no systematic body of evidence to support the large empirical claims he makes, we are entitled to endorse the traditional criticism of Mill – that his moral theory is only utilitarian in its intent, but perfectionist in its substance. (p. XXVIII)*

The essay On Liberty : an outline

The essay falls into five chapters :

I. Introductory (p 5-19);
II. Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion (p 20-61);
III. Of Individuality as one of the elements of well-being (p 62-82);
IV. Of the limits of the authority of Society over the Individual (p 83-103);
V. Applications (p 104-28).

Introduction

The subject is Civil, or Social, Liberty, by which Mill means 'the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual'.

Looking back on history, Mill shows us that the definition of liberty has changed over time, moving from a restrictive sense – 'protection against the tyranny of the political rulers', who were felt to be different from and antagonistic to ordinary people, to a democratic meaning, whereby 'what was now wanted was, that the rulers should be identified with the people'.

But even in democratic systems, as Alexis de Tocqueville showed in *Democracy in America* (1835), Liberty could be threatened by the 'tyranny of the majority', to which Mill added the ominous prospect of the individual being oppressed by

a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since ... it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself. (p 9)

That is why there is a need for the individual to be protected 'against the tendency of society to impose ... its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them.' A core question is that of knowing 'how to make the fitting adjustment between individual independence and social control'.

The answer is **self-protection** , by which he means :

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. (p 14)

The individual may be subjected to external control only if he performs an act that is hurtful to others or only if he refuses to perform 'positive acts for the benefit of others', like giving evidence in court or protecting the defenceless against abuse, for 'a person may cause evil to others not only by his actions but by his inaction.' (p 15)

However, there is a 'sphere of action' which society should not infringe on, 'the appropriate region of human liberty', according to Mill, which consists of three main ingredients :

• the 'inward domain of consciousness', demanding 'liberty of conscience';

• the 'liberty of tastes and pursuits', by which he means the liberty 'of doing as we like so long as what we do does not harm others';

• the 'liberty of combination among individuals', i.e. the freedom to unite.

To Mill, these are the pillars on which a free society rests.

Such liberties are nevertheless jeopardised because 'there is in the world at large an increasing inclination to stretch unduly the powers of society over the individual, both by the force of opinion and even by that of legislation' (p 18). This leads Mill to focus his attention on the Liberty of Thought, the first of the aforementioned pillars, in the second chapter of his essay.

Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion

Any opinion, even if it is held by 'only one person' against 'all mankind', should be freely expressed for 'silencing the expression of an opinion is ... robbing the human race'. (p 21)

What then is the duty of governments and of individuals? It is 'to form the truest opinions they can ... and never impose them upon others unless they are quite sure of being right'. For Mill, truth will always prevail in the long term, by incrementally winning over new supporters. Meanwhile, men keep being persecuted for not sharing in prevailing ideas. For instance, the English legal system is still biassed against those who have 'no theological belief', as a few cases arising in London courts in 1857 bear witness : two people were rejected as jurymen at the Old Bailey for being atheists, and a foreigner was

denied justice against a thief for the same reason by the Marlborough-street Police Court. To Mill, this is proof that the 'leaven of intolerance' has not disappeared yet and that England is 'not a place of mental freedom'. (p 37)

Society being what it is, there is a need for 'great thinkers', people whose 'first duty is to follow their intellect to whatever conclusions it may lead.' But even if those thinkers can thrive in an environment of 'mental slavery', 'there has never been, nor ever will be, in that atmosphere, an intellectually active people'. (p 39) Thus there is a need for Englishmen to 'assert [their] mental freedom' again.

Whereupon Mill ventures into a discussion of religious doctrines, and of the influence of 'great thinkers' of the past, from Cicero to Socrates, and their continuing quest for truth and the liberty of man.

The final part of Chapter Two is devoted to an in-depth study of the reasons that 'diversity of opinions' is crucial. In short, truth is very often shared between two conflicting doctrines, and a healthy political life requires bipartisanism.

Truth is a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites. (p 54)

To round up this second chapter, Mill recaps the key findings it contains, namely :

• silencing of opinion is a presumption of infallibility;

• 'it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the [whole] truth has any chance of being supplied';

• vigorous contestation of the received opinion, be it the whole truth, is required if men are to avoid holding that opinion 'in the manner of a prejudice';

• 'the meaning of the doctrine itself will be in danger of being lost, or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct', if it is held as a prejudice.

Of individuality, as one of the elements of well-being

Just as diversity of opinions is a must, so diversity of living experiments should be. 'Variety of character, short of injury to others' ought to be given free rein :

If it were felt that the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being ... there would be no danger that liberty should be under-valued (...) (p 63).

Traditions and customs are anathema to individuality because

To conform to custom, merely as custom, does not educate or develop in [man] any of the qualities which are the distinctive endowment of a human being. The human faculties of perception, judgement, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice. He who does anything because it is the custom, makes no choice. (p 65)

The same rationale should guide the individual's choice of a 'plan of life' since

He who lets the world ... choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. (p 65)

The reason for that being that 'Among the works of man ... the first in importance surely is man himself'.

By stressing individual worth, Mill sets himself in flagrant opposition to Calvinism for which 'man needs no capacity, but that of surrendering himself to the will of God'. (p 69). Man's blind obedience to customs, traditions and religious rules puts him on the slippery slope to loss of originality, that sterling quality which makes man remarkable.

Originality, however, is foreign to the vast majority of men :

Originality is the one thing which unoriginal minds cannot feel the use of. (p 73)

To the latter, originality can only serve as an eye-opener that may urge them to become original themselves.

That discussion of originality stems from Mill's observation that

At present individuals are lost in the crowd. In politics it is almost a triviality to say that public opinion now rules the world. The only power deserving the name is that of masses, and of governments while they make themselves the organs of the tendencies and instincts of masses. (p 73)

This is all the sadder as a mass is 'collective mediocrity'. Massification is an unnatural process since 'human beings are not like sheep', they are not equally susceptible to pleasure or pain, they have different physical and mental make-ups, which calls for ' a corresponding diversity in their modes of life', and therefore tolerance of difference as a principle of social organisation. In a consensual environment, however, standardisation is the norm and the risk is

to maim by compression, like a Chinese lady's foot, every part of human nature which stands out prominently, and tends to make the person markedly dissimilar in outline to common humanity. (p 77)

The 'despotism of custom' hinders 'human advancement', as it constantly hampers 'the spirit of liberty, or that of progress or improvement', liberty being 'the only unfailing and permanent source of improvement'. For Mill, 'the chief interest of the history of mankind' lies in the opposition between the 'progressive principle' and the 'sway of custom'.

Moving on to the plane of nations, Mill claims that a people stops being progressive 'when it ceases to possess individuality'(p 79). A graphic example of a nation where individuality has been stifled is

China, according to Mill, who sees a risk of Europe becoming another China, if it goes on losing its 'remarkable diversity of character and culture'. Political changes contribute to the steamrolling of individuals into the same mould, 'since they all tend to raise the low and to lower the high'. (p 81)

Of the limits to the authority of society over the individual

In the fourth chapter of his essay, John Stuart Mill purports to delineate the respective spheres of sovereignty of the individual on the one hand and of society on the other. Once again, the Harm Principle serves as a useful indicator : society has jurisdiction over someone's conduct if it 'affects the interests of others' in a prejudicial way. Conversely, if

a person's conduct affects the interests of no person beside himself' ... there should be perfect freedom', legal and social, to do the action and stand the consequences. (p 84)

In the conduct of human affairs, general rules need to be observed, so as to make society the predictable environment without which there can be no stability and safety, but the individual should be free to exercise his 'individual spontaneity' when it comes to minding his own business.

Each individual has a duty to himself, that of 'self-respect or self-development'. He should also have a capacity for 'self-government', i.e. the ability not to waste his life by mismanagement, for someone who 'injures his property does harm to those who directly or indirectly derived support from it', which urges Mill to ask whether such people as are incapable of 'self-government' should not be placed under society's tutelage, since society has a responsibility not to let

any considerable number of its members grow up mere children, incapable of being acted on by rational consideration of distant motives. (p 91)

Nevertheless, the main argument 'against the interference of the public with purely personal conduct, is that when it does interfere, the odds are that it interferes wrongly, and in the wrong place.' (p 92) Interference, all too often, is motivated by bias, if not intolerance, most often of the religious sort, Mill claims, to which he adds the egalitarian strain emerging in democratic societies, like the American one, which leads

bad workmen who form the majority of the operatives in many branches of industry [to] employ a moral police, which occasionally becomes a physical one, to deter skillful workmen from receiving, and employers from giving, a large remuneration for a more useful service. (p 97-8)

Furthermore, Mill finds fault with the various prohibitions of drinking, such as the Maine Liquor Law of 1815, a forerunner to the federal Prohibition Act of 1919, as grounded in a theory of 'social rights' which contends that

it is the absolute social right of every individual, that every other individual shall act in every respect exactly as he ought; that whosoever fails thereof in the smallest particular, violates my social right, and entitles me to demand from the legislature the removal of the grievance. (p 99)

Mill's submission is that such a principle would be monstrous and 'far more dangerous than any single interference with liberty', since 'there is no violation of liberty which it would not justify'.

Applications

The point of the last chapter is 'to offer, not so much applications, as specimens of application' of the principles enunciated previously. Such specimens should help clarify the two maxims that encapsulate the doctrine of the essay :

• 'the individual is not accountable to society for his actions, in so far as these concern the interests of no person but himself', and

• concerning actions that 'are prejudicial to the interests of others, the individual is accountable, and may be subjected either to social or to legal punishment', if society deems it necessary. (p 104)

Applying these maxims to trade, seen as 'a social act', Mill contends the seller's conduct falls within the ambit of social control since

whoever undertakes to sell any description of goods to the public, does what affects the interests of other persons, and of society in general (p 105),

whereby Mill dissociates himself from the doctrine of free trade, which he had previously upheld in his *Principles of Political Economy*.

Mill finds controls relating to workers' protection and consumers' health legitimate, but argues that 'there are questions relating to interference with trade which are essentially questions of liberty [since] the object of the interference is to make it impossible or difficult to obtain a particular commodity.' (p 106) Then, interferences 'are objectionable, not as infringements on the liberty of the producer or seller, but on that of the buyer.' In this respect, the sale of poisons 'opens a new question', that of 'the proper limits of ... the functions of police'. In short : 'How far may liberty legitimately be invaded for the prevention of crime, or of accident?'

It is the government's duty both to prevent and to punish crime, but 'the preventive function of government is far more liable to be abused, to the prejudice of liberty, than the punitory function' (p 106). As for poisons, Mill considers the only mode of regulation which is respectful of the buyer's liberty consists in providing what Bentham called "preappointed evidence", a notion used in contract law.

Contracts are only valid when 'certain formalities are observed, such as signatures, attestation of witnesses, and the like, in order that in case of subsequent dispute, there may be evidence to prove that the contract was really entered into, and that there was nothing in the circumstances to render it legally invalid'. Such precautions 'might be enforced in the sales of articles adapted to be instruments of crime', for they would not prevent buying the article but make it extremely difficult to use it improperly without detection.

For the reader to better grasp what he is driving at, Mill takes up the examples of drunkenness and idleness.

The drunk 'should be liable to a penalty' only if he has previously been proven to be a danger to others under the influence of alcohol since then 'the making himself drunk ... is a crime against others.'

Likewise, idleness is reprehensible only if the idle person proves unable 'to perform his legal duties to others, as for instance to support his children.' Then, 'it is no tyranny to force him to fulfil that obligation, by compulsory labour, if no other means are available.'

What about the responsibility of those who push others in harm's way? For instance, should a person be free to keep a gambling-house? To Mill, the answer is straightforward: public gambling-houses ought to be prohibited, but gambling on a private basis, in one's own house or at a friend's, should be tolerated.

A subsequent question might be that of knowing whether the State ought to 'discourage conduct which it deems contrary to the best interest of the agent'. Should it, say, raise the tax levy on products regarded as dangerous to human health? Once again, Mill's answer is clear : the more harmful the commodity, the heavier its taxation.

Then Mill turns his attention to the Victorian marriage contract, which granted husbands an 'almost despotic power over their wives', and the provision of education to children. The State should compel parents to supply their children with an education and

if the parent does not fulfil this obligation, the State ought to see it fulfilled, at the charge, as far as possible, of the parent. (p 117)

This said, however, Mill is critical of a single State-run education system :

A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another, [which] establishes a despotism over the mind. (p 117-8)

A free State should allow for the diversity of 'teaching experiments' as a means to attain freedom of opinion, thought and choice.

Returning to the subject of parental responsibility, Mill proves himself to be Malthusian, claiming that

to produce children, beyond a very small number, with the effect of reducing the reward of labour by their competition, is a serious offence against all who live by the remuneration of their labour. (p 120)

To conclude, Mill devotes the last ten pages of his essay to 'a large class of questions respecting the limits of government interference', which, strictly speaking, 'do not belong to the Essay' :

There are cases in which the reasons against interference do not turn upon the principle of liberty : the question is not about restraining the actions of individuals, but about helping them: it is asked whether the government should do, or cause to be done, something for their benefit, instead of leaving it to be done by themselves. (p 121)

Mill finds three kinds of objections to government interference in such a case :

• 'when the thing to be done is likely to be better done by individuals than by the government', self-interest being the best guide to conducting any business;

• even though individuals may not be better equipped to do the specified thing than the officers of government, letting them do it may be seen 'as a means to their own mental education – a mode of strengthening their active faculties';

• the last objection may be the most forceful one : 'the great evil of adding unnecessarily to [the government's] power'.

State and government interference can only foster the creation of a 'pedantocracy' – a term apparently coined by Auguste Comte – that is 'government by rule-bound bureaucrats or academics with spurious claims to special expertise', as Professor Gray puts it, a system akin to the one they had in Czarist Russia where, Mill asserts,

The Czar himself is powerless against the bureaucratic body; he can send any one of them to Siberia, but he cannot govern without them, or against their will. (p 124)

In order this to avoid, Mill believes the safest organisation of government, 'the ideal to be kept in view', may be summed up as

the greatest dissemination of power consistent with efficiency, but the greatest centralization of information, and diffusion of it from the centre. (p126)

In the very last lines of his work, Mill states his core creed again:

The worth of a State, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it. (p 128)

This statement is strangely reminiscent of Jean Bodin's "Il n'est de richesses que d'hommes". To which he adds, as a final warning against the disempowerment of the individual by the State:

a State which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes - will find that with small men no great thing can really

be accomplished; and that the perfection of the machinery to which it has sacrificed everything, will in the end avail nothing, for want of the vital power which, in order that the machine might work more smoothly, it has preferred to banish. (p 128)

The topicality of J S Mill's Essay "On Liberty"

The lessons of *On Liberty* still reverberate today and pervade political discourse in Britain on an almost daily basis. The following quotations should make it clear to you:

• 'We are building an enabling state founded on the liberty of individual potential.' Tony Blair, British Prime Minister, in *The Observer*, November 10, 2002.

• 'People want a society that is free from prejudice – racism and intolerance – but not free from rules.' TB again, in the same article.

• On education : 'Our commitment is to take whatever steps are necessary to raise standards, including greater choice ..., all with the goal of transformation.' Still TB, in a November 2003 speech, "Raising standards in London schools", delivered at a secondary school in Southwark, London.

• On freedom : 'Is Britain a free country? Partly yes and partly no. For all sorts of reasons, we restrain ourselves or allow a law to restrain us from doing all sorts of things. But within that framework of law, we are free to do as we please. (...) The great genius of Britain has been to fashion a framework of balanced liberty within which the claims of freedom have been reconciled with security, prosperity, fairness and justice.' The Daily Telegraph, 2nd July, 2002.

• On the threats posed by the use of IT (= information technology) by government : 'The reason the government is computerising all this information is not because it wishes to attack personal freedoms, but because it wants to make its systems work more efficiently. This is something every taxpayer also wants.(...) But there is a danger that efficiency will lead to loss of liberty. An inefficient state can never repress its people as efficiently as an efficient one. The only way of reconciling efficiency with liberty is to balance the government's new powers with new rights. [For example] the right [for citizens] to see any information the state holds about them.' The Economist, 6th July, 2002.

• about 'the increasing inclination to stretch unduly the powers of society over the individual'(JS Mill): '... the Government makes more and more people dependent on the state. Nearly half the population now receive means-tested benefits. So, first people pay their tax, then, ... they are offered a complicated form to fill in and take cap in hand to a government department to claim a benefit. They can never say, as a free man should : "I am the captain of my soul." The Government likes it that way; itself the master, the people as dependent children, the complicated tax system the instrument of its power.' Lord Saatchi, one of the new co-chairmen of the Conservative party, in The Daily Telegraph, 04/11/03.

• on the 'Englishness' of liberty :
- 'In order to practise liberty successfully, a nation needs first to have a critical mass of individuals who truly understand it. Such understanding cannot be gained simply by reading books, only by developing the habits and outlooks which make liberty sustainable. Put differently, a free political, economic and social order *first* requires free men and women.'
- [The citizens of a free country] must be capable of thinking and acting for themselves and taking responsibility. They must, in the fullest sense, be individuals.'
- 'A large part of the explanation of why the English have been so successful in making liberty work is ... that the nation has bred and nurtured more than its share of these rugged, angular individualists.'
-'The sense that it is from the individual not from the group that inspiration and progress should be sought seems to be buried deep in our past.'

The last four quotations are taken from the postscript to Margaret Thatcher's *Statecraft*, published in 2002 by Harper and Collins.

As I see it, all those quotations, put together, convey the same message as that delivered by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*, a sense that individual freedom can never be taken for granted, that the individual should constantly be on the lookout lest society withdraw the rights it has grudgingly let him enjoy, a conviction, too, that

Among the works of man, ... the first in importance surely is man himself. (p 66)

S. B.

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