

being forced on them. This is not right. People have been given the inalienable right to think for themselves and have their own opinion—*this* is independence, this is freedom, this is democracy.

Protecting society from a corrupt ruler is one thing; protecting them from themselves is an entirely different matter. People individually may think that they are able to think rationally and consider other's opinions, unfortunately, the people who speak the loudest and are most apt to force their point-of-view on someone is the person who cannot think rationally and openly. The result is social tyranny and tyranny of the majority (or whomever speaks the loudest). This is much more dangerous when this happens in a Democracy than in a Monarchy—if a ruler is being oppressive, they people can start a revolution or a rebellion. However, in democracy, the people are the authority and power behind the government. It would be nearly impossible for a small group of people to overthrow their entire society. It can be done, but a sane person would not give it a second thought. Therefore, as Mill states, "it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself." If a person were to go against what is acceptable by the law, they could potentially be put to death; however, if a person goes against what is acceptable by society, they will most likely encounter a punishment worse than death—they will have to endure a life of wretched cowardice, ostracized for not conforming. This punishment is worse than physical death, is a social death that may never be recovered. For this reason, it is imperative that society be protected from tyranny of the majority. Individual liberties must be protected in order to ensure that people are not mentally harmed or made into social slaves.

Specific events that have taken place in history demonstrate the power of the majority-- events such as the abolition of slavery and the abolition of plural marriage. When the early Latter-Day Saints moved to Utah, it was part of their religious belief that they were to engage in plural marriage. Many people in the country were opposed and appalled by the opinions of these “Mormons” that their plural marriages were ordained of God when they viewed it as an abomination. The tyranny of the majority prevailed and plural marriage was out-lawed in the US and its territories.

While most of these examples are good for society as a whole, not much opportunity is left for differed opinion. Society places these restrictions on themselves and do so willing, some because they agree with the common opinion and some because they fear to have a different opinion; a small group of people may differ from the prevailing opinion and do not wish, by any means to accept that opinion.

Mill states in *On Liberty* that one “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 opinions of other, to do so would be wise, or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise. To justify that, the conduct from which it is desired to deter him, must be calculated to produce evil to some one else. The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns other. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.” This states that no one should have opinion forced on him and the only reason why their opinion should be forcibly changed if it is infringing on others rights or it is causing harm to other people or themselves. However, society would lead one to believe that in order to be “popular” or accepted, that they have to give-up their opinion and adopt the one that is

company they keep and suppress their opinions and desires, for fear of not being accepted socially. Mill continues, "No one, indeed, acknowledges to himself that his standard of judgment is his own liking; but an opinion on a point of conduct, not supported by reasons, can only count as one person's preference."

There are many people in the world that would prefer to walk around barefoot for the remainder of their life, but because they are in the minority, they suppress their opinion and their urge to continue life barefoot. Other examples besides public conduct that would fall in the custom category is the fact that society also decides the way people should dress. More and more woman are led to believe, by the majority, that they are supposed to dress in immodest, revealing clothing that is up to the fashion standard found in the latest issue of Vogue magazine because that is what is socially acceptable. The majority also decides the way a person should talk. A person living in an upper-class neighborhood would not want to sound uneducated when they talk, for fear of being rejected as inferior, just as someone living in Harlem, NY would not be accepted if they are not fluent in Ebonics.

Not only social customs held in high regard made the standard an unspoken rule, but Judeo-Christian ethics has been widely adopted and enforced by law: thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness. These are examples of principles that have been taken from others standards and applied to society as a whole. These Judeo-Christian ethics, although enforced by law, have become unspoken rules. The common-sense argument would state that it is understood that sometimes "you just don't do that." Other Judeo-Christian ethic examples would include the golden rule: do unto others as you would have them do to you, which is taught to children at a very early age. Most of these examples are just good virtues that a person should apply because they are widely accepted and are good advice.

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April 11, 2002
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The Importance of Protection Against the Majority

Wars and dissensions due to the tyranny of kings and aristocracy have plagued history. It seemed that the only solution to the problem of countless bad kings and monarchies was to let the people be the rulers—democracy was the key. However, with the resolution of one problem came other problems. Individual liberties are not necessarily taken away or established by the government rulers only; society may strip themselves of their liberties. Mill states in Chapter 1 of *On Liberty* that “Protection...against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough: there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation, of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of it own.”

Mill emphasizes the need of restrictions placed on society to keep them from imposing the same restrictions on themselves as those that were placed on them by previous rulers. Except that democracy was the people’s rule over themselves and people don’t need to be protected from themselves. This is the great irony of democracy. People don’t want to be oppressed, but they insist on oppressing themselves through custom, common belief, and prevailing opinion.

The belief that people should be regulated by custom is applied everywhere in the world. “When in Rome, do as the Romans do!” Mill says on this subject “the practical principle which guides them to their opinions on the regulation of human conduct, is the feeling in each person’s mind that everybody should be required to act as he, and those with whom he sympathizes, would like them to act.” Because of this personal, universal belief, people are very cautious around the