A ONE-PAGE SHEET

On Liberty

John Stuart Mill

AD 1859 · ORIGINAL ENGLISH

> *"That 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."*

CHAPTER I · ORIGINAL ENGLISH, 1859

One simple principle

Mill wants a clear rule for when society may compel a person. The only rightful aim of such force, he says, is to prevent harm to others, not to make a person better for his own sake.

Thought and discussion

He defends free discussion even of claims we think settled. A true opinion, left unchallenged, can become a dead habit; a false one may still contain a fragment we need to hear.

Individuality

A person should be free, in things that mainly concern himself, to try a way of life and to develop his own character, rather than be pressed into a single mold by custom.

Not a rule fo

He says the princ
It is not a claim t
the young.

Advice is not

Society may reas
What Mill refuse
punishment, for

The pressure

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opinion, which c
thought needs ro

What a Christian reader should weigh

The harm principle is a serious limit on civil compulsion, and a free discussion of truth is a real good. It is not the whole moral law. “His own good is not a sufficient w
Church's teaching, or a parent's care. Liberty is a great political good, not the chief end of a human life.