

**READING QUESTIONS FOR JOHN STUART MILL, *ON LIBERTY*  
AND *THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN***

*On Liberty*

1. What is the subject of Mill's essay? Why does he think that the issue of individual liberty has become more pressing in modern societies?
2. What is the "one very simple principle" that Mill argues should regulate the extent of interference with the individual (13)?
3. Mill states that he will give up any argument based on "abstract right" and argue from "utility" instead (14). How, then, does he argue for the utility of liberty of thought and discussion? In other words, what are they good for?
4. What are the "four distinct grounds" on which he bases his argument for the utility of freedom of opinion and expression of opinion? (Chapter 2, summarized on pp. 53-4) As you read, try to notice some assumptions his argument is based on. Do you find that his arguments add up to a convincing case for intellectual progress?
5. What does he make of the qualification that the expression of dissenting opinions must be "temperate" (54-5)?
6. Among the expressions of opinion, Mill at one point includes "different experiments of living" and "different modes of life" (57). What do you think he is getting at?
5. What does Mill mean by individuality? What does it have to do with diversity? with spontaneity (56ff.)? What is his attitude toward "the Calvinist theory" (62)? What kind of character does Mill seem to favor? What does he mean by pointing to China as a "warning example" (71)?
6. In what ways does Mill see "tyranny of the majority" as particularly dangerous (7-9)?

*The Subjection of Women*

1. As in *On Liberty*, Mill provides "utilitarian" arguments, in the broadest sense, for ending the subjection of women (see question 3, above). What would be the

utility of doing so? What do you think of making this case based on utility? What else might it be based on?

2. Mill notes that in his time, the right of the strongest had been “abandoned as the regulating principle of the world’s affairs” so that “the social subordination of women thus stands out as an isolated fact in modern social institutions” (137). Why, according to Mill, does this anomaly exist? What explanations for the anomaly does he reject? In what ways are women similar to, or different from, other “subject classes?”

3. How are the arguments about moral progress that Mill makes in *On Liberty* applied in the case of women? What would the emancipation of women contribute to general human progress?

4. “The family is a school of despotism” (160). What is Mill getting at, and what are the implications?

5. Try to find passages where Mill uses the marital relationship to describe his ideal of human association (e.g. 160).