
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, PUBLIC OPINION AND JOURNALISM IN WORK OF JOHN STUART MILL

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Abstract: This article reviews the basic elements in John Stuart thought on freedom of expression, public opinion and the role of journalism in a democratic society, ideas bringing together and consolidating a tradition which began in the seventeenth century and continues through to the present day. It also considers Mill's thought in relation with the views of thinkers who came before him, Milton and Jefferson, for example, and his contemporary, Tocqueville. Among the core ideas in Mill's writings are the "harm principle", his approximation to the idea of truth, and his account of how political debate should be carried out. His extensive body of work has given rise to intense debate which is still lively today. As Isaiah Berlin emphasised, "[...] the critics of Mill have, on the whole, exceeded the number of his defenders. Nevertheless, the inner citadel – the central thesis – has stood the test".

Key words: *John Stuart Mill, freedom of expression, public opinion, journalism, liberalism, Tocqueville, Milton, Jefferson.*

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INTRODUCTION

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) is, without a doubt, the author from the classical liberal tradition who, in his own time, offered the soundest account of freedom of expression, public opinion and the press. Even today, his *On Liberty* is an essential reference still vigorously debated and constantly reappraised by scholars and specialists.¹

The most eminent among these scholars coincide in noting that Mill's defence of freedom of expression, in the broad sense of the term, is both the result and finishing touch of a tradition going back to the seventeenth century, although it was basically understood then as a demand for religious freedom.

Hence, what Mill does, especially with *On Liberty*, is to make a decisive contribution towards constructing arguments for a classical defence of freedom of expression and establishing the liberal democratic model of the press and public opinion, a paradigm that would eventually result in the "fourth power" mandate bestowed on the press. It was precisely this model which, besides shaping popular ideas about the nature of journalism, would come to structure and equip the set of professional, deontological and legal norms regulating the relations between the media and the democratic society.

This is so much the case that Alan Haworth has written that "Mill's argument is more than just one amongst other, equally influential arguments. It really is the classic version of the "classic defence" of freedom of expression or, as Mill put it, of *liberty of thought and discussion* (Haworth 1998: 7). For K. C. O'Rourke (2001), Mill's work has come to represent the genesis of modern theory, the threshold between the classical doctrine and liberalism as we know it today, while Stefan Collini points out that

¹ In addition to *On Liberty*, the other major works of Mill include *A System of Logic*; *The Principles of Political Economy with some of their Applications to Social Philosophy*; *Considerations on Representative Government*; *The Subjection of Women*; and *Autobiography*.

Mill's formulation has always been regarded as the most significant and influential defence of the value of human individuality (Collini 1991: 11). Then again, many others see Mill as the most eminent representative of classical liberalism or as the true founder of modern liberalism.

Also numerous are those who have questioned, from different standpoints and with various degrees of vitriol, essential aspects of Mill's opus. In contrast, other scholars have preferred to take a wider view, highlighting the more valuable aspects of his work which, moreover, have best withstood the test of time. Isaiah Berlin is emphatic on this point: "From the days of James Stephen [...] to the conservatives and socialists and authoritarians and totalitarians of our day, the critics of Mill have, on the whole, exceeded the number of his defenders. Nevertheless, the inner citadel – the central thesis – has stood the test. It may need elaboration or qualification, but it is still the clearest, most candid, persuasive, and moving exposition of the point of view of those who desire an open and tolerant society" (Berlin 2013: 246).

Born in London, Mill was not only an intellectual giant but also a brave and honest man. Most strikingly, he embodies a tenacious appetite for learning and understanding whose virtues he believed in with unwavering steadfastness. Mill was unconcerned if he had to change views he had held in the past. Quite apart from his great intellectual rigour, it is easy to see in his approach signs of the marked empiricist Enlightenment legacy which structures his thought. Indeed, his corrections were numerous and his ideas clearly evolved in many other matters as well, for example his position on the utilitarianism developed and promoted by Jeremy Bentham and his own father James Mill, and on socialism, which was fervently professed by his wife Harriet.

If one really wishes to appreciate the sense of Mill's work, it is essential to delve into his particular biography. Without understanding the man in his context, it is impossible, I believe, to garner and grasp the true meaning of his words.²

TRUTH AS A DRIVING FORCE

Mill's views on public opinion, freedom of expression and the press, which basically – but not only – appear in *On Liberty*, are founded on

² For details of Mill's life see, *inter alia* Bain 1882; Capaldi 2004; Estapé 1955; Hayek, 1951; Mellizo 1995; Mill 1981; Packe 1954; Reeves 2008, and Stephen 1900.

and constructed around the core principle of individual freedom. Hence, the utilitarian origins are evident in his *principle of liberty*, the necessary condition for human progress which is always in tension with the *greatest happiness of the greatest number*, or what is otherwise known as the *greatest happiness principle*. Mill does not conceive one without the other.

For Mill, individual freedom is the key to collective wellbeing, a union in which truth is the main inner driving force. He was openly hostile towards arbitrary government and condemned the remnants of the *ancient regime* which lingered on in his times, but he was also critical of the press and the power of public opinion.

The blind power that public opinion could wield against individuals and minorities appalled him and he was greatly afraid of what his contemporary and friend Alexis de Tocqueville – who, moreover, married an Englishwoman, Mary Motley – had dubbed the *tyranny of the majority*. He was determined to prevent the harassment and crushing of minorities of people who are different, or who think and act differently. Mill also imbibed ideas from classical and other writers such as Locke, Hume, Kant, Milton, Humboldt, Montesquieu, Comte, Jefferson, the Founding Fathers of the United States of America and, of course, Tocqueville.

Convinced that nurturing liberty would inevitably further individual and general advancement, Mill was a fervent supporter of the Enlightenment belief in the progress of man and society and, without doubt, a devoted upholder of what might be called the *civilising paradigm*.

HARM TO OTHERS

In the opening pages of *On Liberty* Mill clearly delineates the framework within which he believes the relations between individual and society should fit. For him, the freedom of the individual should only be restricted when this freedom harms others, which is the basic idea of his *principle of liberty* or the *harm principle*. The only end for which power can rightfully be exercised over the individual against his or her will is to prevent that individual from harming others. Mill also adds that protecting the physical or moral wellbeing of the person in question is not sufficient reason for intervening (Mill 1977b: 223-224). Moreover, warning, instruction, persuasion and isolation, when necessary, are the only meas-

ures which can legitimately be taken to express disapproval of conduct which does not jeopardise the interests of others (Mill 1977b: 292).

Mill offers a summary of four reasons for conceding the widest margin of freedom of expression possible to a person. First, he says, silencing an opinion, given that we cannot know with any certainty whether it is true or false, means asserting one's own infallibility. Second, a silenced erroneous opinion can also, and often does, contain some degree of truth. Since the prevailing or general opinion is never or rarely the whole truth, this whole truth can only be found in clashes of different points of view. Third, he points out that even if the general opinion were totally true, if it is not faithfully and profoundly discussed, most of those accepting it would uphold it as prejudice with little understanding of its basic assumptions. Fourth, in this case, dogma becomes a merely formal position, ineffective for fostering good while also obstructing and preventing any real and felt conviction based on reason and experience (Mill 1977b: 257-258).

Like other philosophers before him, John Stuart Mill was convinced that truth, when permitted to expand and compete with falsity, will sooner or later be victorious. In his article "Law of Libel and Liberty of the Press" he writes, "Under a free system, if error would be promulgated, so would truth: and truth never fails, in the long run, to prevail over error" (Mill 1984: 7-8). In other words, when there is freedom, time will ensure that truth prevails. Meanwhile, in *On Liberty*, he warns that one might feel confident of having approached the truth as closely as possible in one's own time but, "This is the amount of certainty attainable by a fallible being, and this the sole way of attaining it" (Mill 1977b: 232).

Naturally, Mill could not have imagined twentieth-century horrors like the Holocaust or the gulag, which are often cited in order to challenge Mill's faith in the truth. Yet, one cannot be sure whether, if he had lived in the twentieth century, Mill would have lost the confidence he so ardently invested in the power of truth. He might well have continued appealing to the passage of time, the long-term perspective which would eventually see things set aright.

The victory of truth over error and falsity, which invariably comes about if there is freedom, depends on the human ability to choose and discern. Censorship is nothing other than preventing a person from making a choice, from exercising his or her capacity for reasoning in favour of truth and, in brief, in his or her own benefit and that of the community.

In his defence of both truth and the ability to choose, Mill takes up the main arguments outlined by John Milton in his *Areopagitica* (Milton 1918).

MILTON AND JEFFERSON

John Milton (1608-1674) was probably the best English writer in the seventeenth century. As in Mill's case, his talents appeared at a very early age. Nevertheless, the historical contexts in which they lived were very different. In Milton's day, freedom of expression and the press barely existed in Great Britain. Not only was it necessary to have a licence in order to print – and this was subject to highly restrictive criteria – but arbitrary prosecution and punishment of alleged infractions created an atmosphere of great insecurity. In *Areopagitica*,³ which first appeared in 1644 and contains the speech Milton made to the “Parliament of England” in 1643 in defence of freedom of expression, one finds references to God and the sacred texts, which he uses as a basis for legitimating the arguments he presents.

Although Mill only cites *Areopagitica* once in all his writings, the similarities and coincidences between the arguments in this work and *On Liberty* are, in some important questions, undeniable. For example, Milton writes, “And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?” (Milton 1918: 58).

As with Mill, one finds in this work an appeal to the exercise of reason by means of the freedom to choose, which is defended by referring to

³ For all *Areopagitica*'s importance for the history of ideas, its origins are notably profane. In the spring of 1642, John Milton married Mary Powell, when she was seventeen years old and he was thirty-three. After just a few weeks of conjugal existence, Mary fled and took refuge in her parents' house. Milton responded by publishing four pamphlets – which became known as the “divorce tracts” – in which he called for the right to divorce on grounds of incompatibility. A more serious problem appeared when the booksellers' association reported him for not having applied for the prepublication licences. It was this complaint which led to his speech in parliament in defence of freedom of expression. Mary returned to Milton at the end of summer 1645 and domestic life returned to normal.

God, who would have endowed the individual with reason, and thus bestowed freedom of choice: “Many there be that complain of divine Providence for suffering Adam to transgress. Foolish tongues! when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions” (Milton 1918: 28). Milton, moreover, refers to freedom of expression in more general terms when he ponders the harm inflicted not only on the silenced individual but also on other people, the community and humanity (Milton 1918: 6-7).

One also comes across the question of truth and fallibility in yet another of the giants of the liberal tradition, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826). He discusses the question of truth in a way that is very much in tune with the approach adopted by Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill, both of whom were born during Jefferson’s second mandate as president of the United States. In *An Act for Establishing Religious Freedom*⁴, Jefferson declared that truth “is great and will prevail if left to herself”, and that when not denied free argument and debate, she “has nothing to fear” from the conflict with error (Jefferson 2004: 290).

Jefferson⁵ defends the individual in all his or her diversity and passes censure on attempts to bring about uniformity. “But is uniformity of opinion desirable? No more than of face and stature. Introduce the bed of Procrustes then, and as there is danger that the large men may beat the small, make us all of a size, by lopping the former and stretching the latter” (Jefferson 2004: 255).

As I have noted, in Mill, the question of the *right to hear* – which should be linked with the present-day right to information – is expressed more clearly: “But the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it” (Mill 1977b: 229).

In Mill’s opinion, “[...] the great check to abuses of all sorts, is a free press. It is of the utmost importance, therefore, to observe, that all rulers have the strongest possible interest in destroying the freedom of the press” (Mill 1984: 19). He immediately grasped the role of the press as an essential instrument for forming public opinion which, through elec-

⁴ Dated 1779.

⁵ In his *Notes on Virginia*, which were first published in 1784 in Paris but dated 1782.

tions, becomes political will and notes that newspapers, together with the railroads “are solving the problem of bringing the democracy of England to vote, like that of Athens, simultaneously in one *agora*” (Mill 1977a: 165).

FRIENDSHIP WITH TOCQUEVILLE

Mill knew and admired his contemporary Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1854), who was one year his senior and with whom he engaged in a longstanding correspondence. In a letter dated 3 October 1835, Tocqueville confessed to him that he was the only person who had fully understood him, who had been able to look at his ideas in general and grasp them all (Tocqueville and Mill, 1985: 50-53), while, years later, Mill acknowledged to his friend that there was no man alive in all of Europe whose friendship made him feel prouder (Tocqueville and Mill, 1985: 96-98).

On his return from the United States where he had travelled in 1831 to write a report about the prison system, Tocqueville wrote the two parts of *Democracy in America*, an extraordinary portrait of the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century. Mill, greatly impressed by the work, then produced a more nuanced conception of his radical account of democracy, shifting to a more liberal version and one that was more trusting of representative government.

Tocqueville emphasized in his work the danger that the individual or a minority could be muted by the power of the majority exercising power through government or the law, or otherwise by means of public opinion. He proclaimed, for instance, that the individual is the best and only judge of his particular interests and that “society has the right to direct his actions only when it feels injured by his activities or when it requires his cooperation” (Tocqueville 2004: 72). Here it is impossible not to recall Mills’ aforementioned *harm principle*. As also happens with Mill, in the first volume of *Democracy in America* one finds the outline of what Noelle-Neumann would much later call the *spiral of silence* (2003), or the mechanism by means of which minority and dissenting views tend to be muzzled because of the individual’s fear of isolation (Tocqueville 2004: 283-300).

Throughout *Democracy in America* Tocqueville repeatedly stresses his fears about the silencing of the individual. There are many examples

one might glean in this work but the one cited below, from the beginning of the second volume, is particularly illustrative:

Had democratic peoples merely substituted the absolute power of a majority for all the various powers that formerly hindered or retarded to an unusual degree the flourishing of individual reason, only the character of the evil would have changed. [...] As for me, when I feel the hand of power weigh upon my brow, it scarcely matters who my oppressor is, and I am not more inclined to submit to the yoke because a million arms are prepared to place it around my neck (Tocqueville 2004: 492-493).

THE DANGERS OF THE PRESS

Jefferson, Tocqueville and Mill were all staunch defenders of freedom of expression and of the press which they situated at the heart of the democratic system. Yet none of them was unaware of the dangers associated with newspapers and their power to influence and shape public opinion. All three were highly critical of the *real* behaviour, in practice, of the press of their times, a stance which would seem complementary rather than contradictory in men who could be described as idealist. Furthermore, their criticism and fears also constitute, at the same time, acute, far-sighted, instinctive understanding of the dangers inherent in the future development of the press and, eventually, of its audiovisual and electronic forms.

As a result of his experience as president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson was to speak harshly when referring to the press. His Second Inaugural Address, on 4 March 1805, is probably where his views are most bitterly expressed. Here, he denounced the bellicosity of the press and its artillery levelled against him, “charged with whatsoever its licentiousness could devise or dare” (Jefferson 2004: 316). This was the self-same Jefferson who, a few years earlier, had written in a letter to Colonel Carrington⁶ that if he had to choose between a government without press or a press without government, he would take the latter (Jefferson 2004: 381-382).

⁶ Letter from Paris to Colonel Edward Carrington, dated 16 January 1787.

AN ASSOCIATION

Jefferson had died in Monticello, his Virginia retreat, some years before Alexis de Tocqueville landed in the United States, but the figure of the president and his ideas were still very much in his mind. Hence, in the first volume of *Democracy in America* he did not hesitate to describe Jefferson as “the most powerful apostle democracy has ever had” (Tocqueville 2004: 300). Like Jefferson and Mill, Tocqueville considered that one of the most important missions newspapers had to carry out was to act as a check upon power and as democracy’s “watchdog” (a term coined by Cato): “The press is, par excellence, the democratic instrument of liberty” (Tocqueville 2004: 825).

As Tocqueville himself admitted, he was not of the view that press freedom is a good thing in itself but he supported it more for the evils it prevented than for the benefits it brought (Tocqueville 2004: 205-214). Indeed, he objects to the fact that the press in the United States shows the same destructive tendencies and resorts to the same groundless virulence as in France. Moreover, he describes the American spirit of journalism as “forsaking principles in order to portray individuals, pursue them into their private lives, and lay bare their weaknesses and vices” (Tocqueville 2004: 211). This observation is surprising in its relevance even today given that, all exceptions aside, it identifies one of the distinguishing features of the Anglo-Saxon journalistic tradition in mainland Europe.

From an absolutely modern standpoint, namely in the domain of the requirements of demand or, in other words, seeing the newspaper as a service which must find readers and which can only subsist if it reproduces the views of a large number of people, Tocqueville writes, “A newspaper therefore always represents an association, the members of which are its regular readers” (Tocqueville 2004: 602-603).

AGREEING ON TRUCES

There is one major difference with regard to the pressure the French press was able to apply and the influence wielded by the American press. In France, Tocqueville lamented, the press represented two kinds of concentration of power, which resided both in the cities and in the same few hands, given that there were not many newspapers. “A press consti-

tuted in this way in the midst of a skeptical nation,” concludes Tocqueville, demonstrating yet again his extraordinary historical foresight, “will enjoy almost limitless power. It is an enemy with which a government may enter into a truce for a more or less lengthy period of time but with which it has difficulty living in a permanent state of opposition” (Tocqueville 2004: 209-2010).

Indeed, criticism by liberal writers of the behaviour of the newspapers of their times is a constant. This may appear as a very striking paradox when one considers where the complaint comes from, given that these are people who constantly identify freedom of the press as an essential element which should never be overlooked in any democratic system. In order to understand this inconsistency, one must be aware that, when they are referring to the press, they do so from two different perspectives. First, as the liberals and idealists that they are, they resolutely defend freedom of the press as a democratic institution of extraordinary value. Second, spurred on by their own doctrine and idealism, they cannot but censure the practical conduct of the newspapers which, moreover, sometimes target them as victims inasmuch as they are also political actors.

Mill⁷ was not unaware that the power of the press to influence the public has a clear political dimension: “The knowledge which is power, is not the highest description of knowledge only: any knowledge which gives the habit of forming an opinion, and the capacity of expressing that opinion, constitutes a political power; and if combined with the capacity and habit of acting in concert, a formidable one” (Mill 1977a: 165). He therefore shared Jefferson’s and Tocqueville’s fears about the effects of the press and public opinion, which led him to write some lines in *On Liberty* wherein it is impossible not to discern an echo of the voice of his French friend and contemporary. Mill states that protection is needed against,

⁷ Mill, who was a member of the British parliament for one legislature, wrote a great number of articles for the press throughout his life. He was involved in all kinds of controversies, starting at the age of seventeen when *The Traveller* published two of his letters, simply signed S, in which he crossed swords over Ricardian economic doctrine with Colonel Torrens, owner of the newspaper and friend of his father. Spurred on by his penchant for engaging in public debate, Mill came to be proprietor and editor of the *London and Westminster Review*, mouthpiece of the radical utilitarians.

[...] 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 its own” (Mill 1977b: 219-220).

As for the idea of the *tyranny of the majority*, Jürgen Habermas would later sagely admit that perhaps Tocqueville and Mill were not so mistaken when they criticised the veiled version of majority power in the liberal notion of a discursively achieved formation of opinion and political will (Habermas 2002). Together with Manin, Stein and Mansbridge, (1987: 338-368),⁸ Habermas suggests that the source of political legitimacy is not the predetermined will of individuals but that it resides, rather, in the process of its formation, which is to say in deliberation itself.

COLLECTIVE MEDIOCRITY

Like James Mill – a founder of the University of London, as Jefferson was of the University of Virginia – his son was always interested in and concerned about education and the degree of learning among citizens. In his view, the rapid growth of the press after the 1850s led to greater prominence of the masses, which he associated with mediocrity. Starting out from Locke’s idea of *government by public opinion*, John Stuart Mill expounded a line of thought which, as happened earlier in the case of Tocqueville, is not free of a patina of elitism. After upholding man’s individuality, he complains 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” (Mill 1977b: 268).

In his *De Tocqueville on Democracy in America II* Mill had approached this matter from a perspective that was slightly different, but still consistent, with the one I have just cited. In this case, he points out that the fact that cultural goods or “products of intellect” are destined for mass consumption inevitably leads to an associated reduction in quality and a debasement of good taste. At the same time, in a very incisive fragment in which he once again sees beyond his own time, he indicates an abundant

⁸ Cited by Habermas (1994: 26).

offer and competition as distorting factors to the extent that they make choosing and deeper knowledge more difficult, pushing producers to strive for commercial success, to seek an immediate effect rather than to aim for true quality. It is appropriate to recall that, besides being a thinker and philosopher, Mill was an outstanding economist, a brilliant successor of the classical school of Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

In the burgeoning of quantity he sees a deterioration of quality: “Distracted by so great a multitude, the public can bestow but a moment’s attention on each; they will be adapted, therefore, chiefly for striking at the moment. Deliberate approval, and a duration beyond the hour become more and more difficult of attainment.” (Mill 1977^a: 180-181).

Mill’s position is unquestionably close to what, much later, Umberto Eco, when referring to opponents of mass culture, would describe as “apocalyptic” (Eco 1993).

“SEMINAR GROUP”

An attentive reading of *On Liberty* – especially Chapter II, “Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion” – leads one to conclude with Haworth (1998) that Mill’s way of imagining public debate, the exchange of views in public opinion which, in large part, was possible thanks to the press, was not so comparable with the agora of Athens – although he repeatedly referred to it – as with the discussion taking place in a small group consisting of people with appropriate and comparable degrees of knowledge, willing to seek the truth and, accordingly, to listen and modify their original positions.

In the case of any person whose judgement is really deserving of confidence, how has it become so? Because he has kept his mind open to criticism of his opinions and conduct. Because it has been his practice to listen to all that could be said against him; to profit by as much of it as was just, and expound to himself, and upon occasion to others, the fallacy of what was fallacious (Mill 1977^b: 232).

Another premise in this situation would be knowledge of and respect for the rules by all participants: “The worst offence of this kind which can be committed by a polemic, is to stigmatize those who hold the contrary opinion as bad and immoral men” (Mill 1977^b: 259). Haworth

wonders whether what he calls the *seminar group model* should be understood in Mill as descriptive or normative. In the former case, the model would be erroneous while, in the latter, namely if Mill's idea is taken as a desideratum, an aspiration which society could come closer to attaining in the future, there is little to criticise. It is worth pointing out that this second interpretation is perfectly consistent with Mill's idealism to which I have referred above. In Haworth's opinion, Mill's idea is a source of hope and inspiration in the context of the communications revolution in our own times (Haworth 1998: 81-82).

It should now be noted that, besides the books he wrote and the controversies he engaged in through his articles in the press, Mill was a brilliant, greatly-admired orator and he took part in all kinds of debates. In 1825 he was one of the founders of the London Debating Society, which was inspired by the Edinburgh Speculative Society. He was also a founder of the Utilitarian Society whose members discussed the philosophical doctrine which was most conspicuously represented by his father and Jeremy Bentham and, for a time, he joined a group of friends at the home of the historian George Grote where they discussed a wide range of contentious issues. These clubs, societies and associations are typical of Mill's time and also of the eighteenth century. For example, in his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin describes how he and a group of friends founded a debating club in Philadelphia. Editor of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of Philadelphia, Franklin describes in the following terms the regulations of this group which was known as the Junto:

Our debates were under the direction of a president, and were to be dictated only by a sincere desire of truth; the pleasure of disputing, and the vanity of triumph, having no share in the business; and in order to prevent undue warmth, every expression which implied obstinate adherence to an opinion, and all direct contradiction, were prohibited, under small pecuniary penalties (Franklin 1809: 71).

Throughout his life and also during the legislature in which he was a member of parliament, John Stuart Mill stood out for his defence of often radical and path-breaking positions in the Victorian era in which tradition and moral conservatism prevailed. It is not at all surprising, then, that if one bears all these facts in mind, the institutionalised type of exchange of opinions constituting what I have referred to as the *seminar group model* is deeply entrenched in Mill's thinking. From this point of view,

it is understandable that his idea of democratic debate should be based, more or less consciously, on this paradigm. In this regard, Haworth suggests, and I believe rightly so, that Mill's defence of freedom of thought and discussion, and of freedom of expression, is more convincing to the extent that the situation of reference, the one to which it is applied is similar to the *seminar group model* (Haworth 1998: 81-82).

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