

John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," 1859

Mill was a British economist and politician who promoted utilitarianism (actions should benefit the majority) as a central part of ethics.

It has long (perhaps throughout the entire duration of British freedom) been a common form of speech, that if a good despot could be insured, despotic monarchy would be the best form of government. I look upon this as a radical and most pernicious misconception of what good government is... There is no difficulty in showing that the ideally best form of government is that in which the sovereignty, or supreme controlling power, is vested in the entire aggregate of the community, every citizen not only having a voice in the exercise of that ultimate sovereignty, but being, at least occasionally, called on to take an actual part in the government...

A democratic republic came to occupy a large portion of the earth's surface... [But] It was now perceived that such phrases as "self-government," and "the power of the people over themselves," do not express the true state of the case. The "people" who exercise the power are not always the same people with those over whom it is exercised; and the "self-government" spoken of is not the government of each by himself, but of each by all the rest... The will of the people, moreover, practically means the will of the most numerous or the most active part of the people; the majority, or those who succeed in making themselves accepted as the majority... and precautions are as much needed against this as against any other abuse of power... "the tyranny of the majority" is now generally included among the evils against which society requires to be on its guard.

... There needs protection against the tendency of society to impose... its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them...

Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," 1846

Thoreau was a member of what would become known as the Transcendentalist Movement in the US, which promoted simple living in nature. He opposed America's war with Mexico over Texas, during which he wrote Civil Disobedience.

I heartily accept the motto--"That government is best which governs least;" and I should like to see it acted upon more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe,--"That government is best which governs not at all;" and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best an expedient [solution]; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient [disadvantageous]. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it...

A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority... If the choice is to either keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their taxes this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as taxes enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible.

Adam Smith, *On the Wealth of Nations*, 1776
Smith was a Scottish economist and philosopher

"[Without government interference] the obvious and simple system of natural liberty establishes itself of its own accord. Every man...is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest in his own way....As every individual, therefore, endeavors as much as he can both to employ his capital [wealth] in the support of domestic industry [the nation's economy]...every individual labors to provide for the annual revenue of the society as great as he can, led by an invisible hand...Every individual, it is evident, can judge [his self-interest] much better than any statesman or lawgiver can do for him. The statesman who attempts to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their [investments or wealth] assumes an authority which could safely be trusted by no single person nor council or senate whatsoever. . . . To give monopolies in trade to certain industries is...a useless or a hurtful regulation...Were all nations to follow the liberal system of free exportation and free importation [free trade], the different states into which a great continent [Europe] is divided would resemble the different provinces of a great empire...The freedom of the inland trade appears, both from reason and experience, is not only the best cure of dearth [scarcity], but the most effectual preventative of a famine; so would the freedom of the exportation and importation trade be among the different states into which a great continent was divided.

The actual price at which any commodity is commonly sold is called its market price...The market price of every particular commodity is regulated by the quantity which is actually brought to market, and the demand of those who are willing to pay the natural price of the commodity [supply and demand]...When the quantity of any commodity falls short of demand, a competition will immediately begin among them, and the market price will rise...When the quantity brought to market exceeds the demand, the market price will fall...

Olympe de Gouges, "The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen", 1792

Olympe de Gouges was a French playwright who was active in the French Revolution, although she was a moderate (Girondin) who did not support the radicalism of the Jacobins. She wrote "The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen" in response to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen that had laid the groundwork for the French Constitution. She was executed for treason.

Mothers, daughters, sisters and representatives of the nation demand to be constituted into a national assembly...Women have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of women in order that this declaration, constantly exposed before all the members of society will ceaselessly remind them of their rights and duties . . .

Article I: Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights. Social distinctions can be based only on the common utility [what one contributes to society].

Article II: The purpose of any political association [government] is the conservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of woman and man; these rights are liberty, property, security, and especially resistance to oppression.

Article IV: The only limits on the exercise of the natural rights of woman are perpetual male tyranny; these limits are to be reformed by the laws of nature and reason...[Other articles omitted]

Woman, wake up; the toxin of reason is being heard throughout the whole universe; discover your rights...Oh women, women! When will you cease to be blind? What advantage have you received from the Revolution?