

At the September meeting of the philosophy group we discussed **free speech**.

We started with a quotation from Voltaire.

'I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it.'

In fact, we talked about free speech in a broad way to cover not just the spoken word but a wide range of expressions including the written word, plays, films, videos, photographs, cartoons, paintings and so on. Free expression may be a better way of referring to these issues than free speech

The main philosopher we discussed was John Stuart Mill and his work **On Liberty** written in 1859. **On liberty** is the classic discussion of the limits of individual freedom in a civilized society. Mill claimed that free speech is a precondition, not just for individual happiness, but for a flourishing society. Without free expression humanity and individuals do not progress.

Preserving free speech maximizes the chance of truth emerging from its collision with error and half-truths. Central to his approach is his Harm Principle.

The idea is that individual adults should be free to do whatever they wish up to the point where they harm another person in the process.

His theory is based on the idea that we are all individuals and develop, flourish and progress in a free society. It is important to note that physical harm in his definition does not include psychological harm. His ultimate justification for freedom of speech is that it best serves the well-being of all of us

As against Mill's views there are a number of issues where freedom of expression can give rise to problems and conflict as we have seen recently. The problem is if we go beyond Mill's definition is to decide who is going to make the decision as to what is and is not acceptable.

Mills view was that on balance society benefits more from freedom of expression than from some third party telling is all what to do and think.

Report by Wallace Anderson

The next Philosophy group meetings will be on **Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> October** (on Panpsychism - the view that mentality is fundamental and ubiquitous in the natural world) and **Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> November** (Confucius) at 10am at Enterprise House. All are welcome. Come and try a session. Contact Ruth 01325 401850 for further details.