Argument for Mills Free Speech Position

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In *On Liberty,* Mill presents the idea that in a society free speech is good for the society as a whole whether it is true or false due to its overreaching positive effects on the society as a whole. According to Mill, the validity of a statement is not important for the society due to the fact that humans have no ability to know what opinions are true and what are not, therefore it is important for people to discuss their opinions to discover which opinions are true to the society while others will be deemed false. In addition he notes that sometime opinions may be true, but it is important they continually be discussed even though they have been considered true, this is important in order to reinforce truths and continually show people that the opinion is true rather than just saying it is true.

Mills presents the following argument in order to justify his viewpoint that all free speech is important for a society’s growth and should not be censored.

1. If an opinion is true that it is the case that it benefits a society more for

to share this opinion than it does to suppress the opinion from being expressed.

2. If an opinion is false, then it is the case that it benefits a society to talk about the opinion and have it be expressed rather than having it oppressed.

3. If it is okay for any opinion to be shared, either true or false, then it must be the case that it benefits a society to discuss the opinions rather than try to suppress the opinions from being expressed within the society.

4. For any opinion it is the case it should be allowed rather than suppressed.

5. Every opinion should be allowed regardless of if it is true or false

6. Our society should tolerate the expression of every opinion.

Mills argument is valid, (3) follows from (1) and (2) according to *modus tollens*. Additionally (4) follows premise (1),(2),(3) and (6) follows from (4) and (5) from *modus tollens* again. However I think this argument is sound, for this argument to be sound, then it has to be the case that the premises (1),(2),(3),(4), and (5) must be true. As a result I will go into detail why I think these premises are true and give evidence that supports these ideas. I think it is obvious that these points are true; however I will explain why it is reasonable to accept that all the premises are true.

Suppose an opinion is shared in a community, let the opinion be in regards to a proven fact in the realm of Mathematics. Let it be the case that this opinion for general argument is accepted as a true statement to the community which is basic. Lets say the statement however was proven centuries ago, that is, the original creator of the idea and his proof has been trivialized and not visited by many and just held as truth. To perhaps a child this opinion is not trivial, everyone in the community states that the Mathematical identity is true, however this child is not convinced in its validity and voices he thinks it is false, he presents his opinions to the teacher and then the teacher does not know how to justify this Mathematical identity due to how long ago it was discovered. Due to the fact the opinion had been seen true and trivial, nobody remembered why it was true. The professor then finds the proof and presents it to the child and he himself also understands why the Mathematical identity is important. This situation is important for both premise one as well as premise two. In premise one; this takes the side of the teacher, a true opinion which is presented. What is the value in this opinion being shared? For those students who took it at face, nothing at all, however to the student it created a discussion in his own mind, that is it made the student question his own thoughts on the subject. Therefore the introduction of this idea was beneficial for the student because for questioning his own mindset and as a result he learned why this fact was true. Therefore it result that (1) follows. Additionally, look at this situation from the teacher’s perspective that is the introduction of a false opinion to the conversation that the student disagreed with the opinion being presented by the teacher. As a result of being challenged, this caused the professor to question the validity of his own opinion on this trivial fact that he just assumed as being true. As a result he had to go learn and reconfirm that the statement was true. As a result of this wrong opinion being shared, he reaffirmed the validity of his opinion by letting the opinion by his student be shared. Therefore it shows that premise two must also be true because it was better for the teacher to allow this opinion and learn from it rather than for the teacher to let the opinion not be expressed at all. This shows that both the student’s false opinion and the teacher’s true opinion were important in order to have a discussion of the ideas of presented. Due to the fact that both opinions were presented, one false, and one true, led to a positive outcome for both. This not only resulted in the teacher questioning the truths that he held, but it is also the case that the student in question also learned that his viewpoint on the Mathematical identity was not correct and learned from that. Due to the fact that both sides were given, resulted in a positive outcome for both parties, therefore it follows that for this situation that all opinions on a subject should be presented either true or false because in the end it benefits everybody. Due to the fact that this idea was presented by the student, a discussion could take place in order to discuss the opinions and come to the conclusion that one was true and the other was false. Therefore it is the case that all opinions should be shared either true or false and as a result it follows premise (4). Now suppose that there were modifications to the situation presented above. That is, the boy’s opinion was not shared, even though it was an incorrect assumption of the Mathematical identity. Then not only would the boy not of understand what caused the Mathematical identity to be true, but the teacher may of not been exposed to figure out why his concept was true rather than just accepted it as a trivial Mathematical identity. Therefore it was important for this opinion to be shared, because if this opinion was suppressed then it would have not been the case that the teacher would have been able to reaffirm why this Mathematical identity was true. As a result it follows that every opinion shouldn't be oppressed either true or false because it benefits a society more for the opinion to be presented then be oppressed. Therefore (5) follows as a result.

Showing that all the following premises are true leads to a conclusion based on *modus tollens*, that, not only the argument is valid but also as a result is also sound. I gave an situational argument why it is important for Free Speech to be shared in society rather it is true or false because of its importance to how it can influence the society positively.

To conclude, Mills has a reasonable conclusion of the role of speech in society and how important it is for the growth and development for that said society. As I argued, the free speech argument is a sound argument based on the examples that I gave in this paper, as well as seeing the benefits of free speech in the growth of our society even today. As a result I think that Mills is correct in his perspective that it is indeed important to allow any form of speech to be shared in a society whether or not the speech is true or not.

**Works Cited**

John Stuart Mill. *On Liberty* in Today's Moral Issues Classic and Contemporary Perspectives. *Daniel Bonevac* New York, New York; McGraw-Hill 2013