

Mills' harm principle articulated in *On Liberty* argues: the use of coercion, force, or any other means of social or political power to interfere with the manifestation of one's will is unjust, if their actions don't harm any other person. This principle allows harm to be either physical or mental. He supports this principle not on the grounds of unalienable individual rights against one's society, but on the grounds that it will bring about the maximal social utility.

Mills strongly believed that the individual is the great discoverer of truth and the driver of social progress, particularly the great minds of history. He argues that social pressures and majority opinions would too often and wrongly intervene with the individual, leading to less creativity and fewer discoveries of truth, and hence less total good. Thus, a firm set of individual rights against the government and society, and a culture of individualism creates the most good.

A Marxian critique of this view: although the harm principle creates liberal rights, a "great step forward", the freedom gained represents "merely political emancipation". It positions men against the state and society at large. These rights, held against one's fellow men, prevent 'human emancipation', when all prioritize the general welfare, leaving life as a species-being unattainable. In this pursuit of social progress via individuality, man is placed diametrically opposed to the rest of his fellow men and to his society. His place as a species-being is greatly diminished, as his obligation to consider the wellbeing of his fellow men is weakened. This catalyzes collective conflict, where man stands alienated from society, where social consideration is reduced to merely restraint when one's actions stand to harm another, where the notion of a cooperative society is greatly diminished.

Marx would likely argue that Mills' harm principle and culture of individualism don't create the most utility, but rather economic and cultural conditions that encourage competition with and isolation from one's fellow man. However, more fundamentally, he believes Mills' harm principle positions man in opposition with his fellow men—which cannot lead to human emancipation. Even if the actors in Mills' society try to be moral, try to hold the social wellbeing as a high priority, the fundamental structure of the harm principle, of liberal rights, and of individualism, may crush the effort towards human emancipation.

Mills may counter that he doesn't believe a conception of the harm principle, liberal rights, or individualism necessarily puts one in conflict with their fellow men. The harm principle doesn't imply man has no moral obligation to his fellow man. Within Mills' own writing he clearly believes there is a moral obligation to will the good of the other. He may argue that, allowing individuals the freedom to pursue their own aims, within the constraints of the harm principle, while willing the good of the other, will yield more total utility than forcing submission to any community would. For example, imagine the tremendous loss incurred by restraining any great mind of history.

Mills may note that although the two philosophers have fundamentally different goals, one pursuing maximal utility and the other pursuing human emancipation, it isn't necessarily the case that the harm principle can't coexist with a deep social connection between fellow men. Mills may argue that if one wished to pursue human emancipation, the harm principle isn't strictly a barrier to that. For instance, a family is a community where the harm principle could be the law of the land, but a strong connection between members of the community may still exist. In this environment, individuals may remain individualistic, not be coerced unless they have caused harm, and still hold a deep regard for the wellbeing of their community; they may remain 'species-beings'. Moral actors that highly regard the good of those around them, species-beings, can pursue human emancipation while operating under the harm principle.

The Marxian critique is not very successful of Mills' harm principle and individualistic culture. This partly results from the fundamentally different goals Marx and Mills hope to pursue—Marx isn't a utilitarian. Marx's critique may be accurate in stating that Mills' harm principle and strong defense of intellectual freedom distract from the goals of human emancipation and the creation of species-beings; this principle instead may create alienation and a neglect of others.

The Millian view still holds in another aspect—Marx's critique doesn't indicate that the harm principle, individualism, or intellectual freedom by moral actors would bring about less total utility than a direct pursuit of human emancipation. Leaving minds unfettered, particularly great minds, allows the freedom to contribute and discover, developing the economic structures of society and bettering the lives of the worst off. Mills indicates, individualistic men, living under the harm principle, and holding a deep regard for social wellbeing, will maximize the total utility.