

# LECTURE 2

On Liberty - parts 1 and 2



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# Recap from the previous lecture

- According to Grey, there are three points of departure of Mill's moral and political philosophy from the principles of Utilitarianism expressed by Bentham, James Mill and other classical utilitarians.
- Happiness/Utility is found in activities, not in mental states.
- Humans, their natures and pleasures are different from individual to individual and often incommensurable.
- There is a ranking of utilities/pleasures and those that are favored above all other are those we enjoy as free agents.

# *On Liberty*

- Focus on the problem of freedom and the sphere of autonomy / sphere of non-interference that every human being ought to be guaranteed.

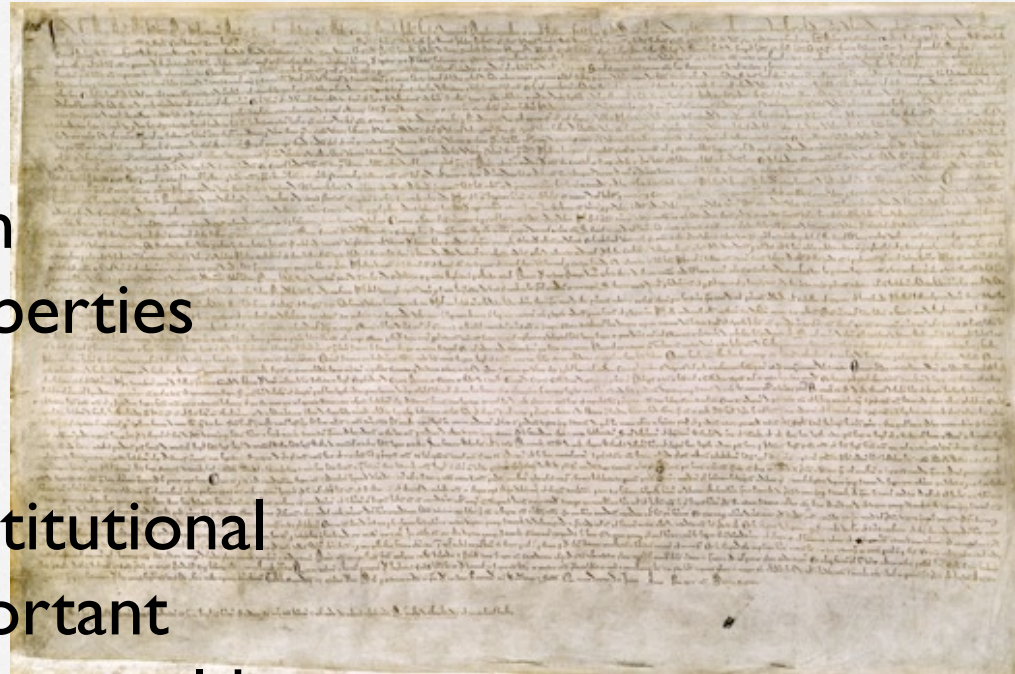
# Preliminary remarks:

- Liberty as “Civil, or Social Liberty” is not the same as the “doctrine of Philosophical Necessity”.
- Sources of threats to civil liberty:
  - Tyrants, Dictators, Oligopolies



# Protections against the rulers:

- Recognition of certain immunities: political liberties or rights
- Establishment of constitutional checks: the most important acts of the government would have to be approved by a body representing the community.



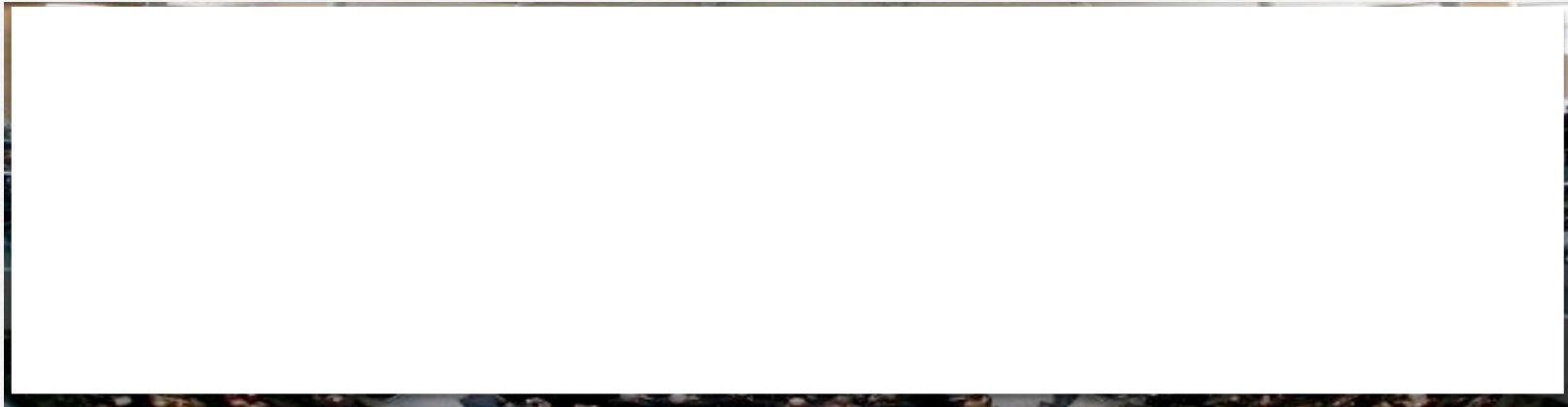
*Magna Carta*, 1215, King John of England was forced to accept that his power was not absolute and arbitrary.

# Preliminary remarks:

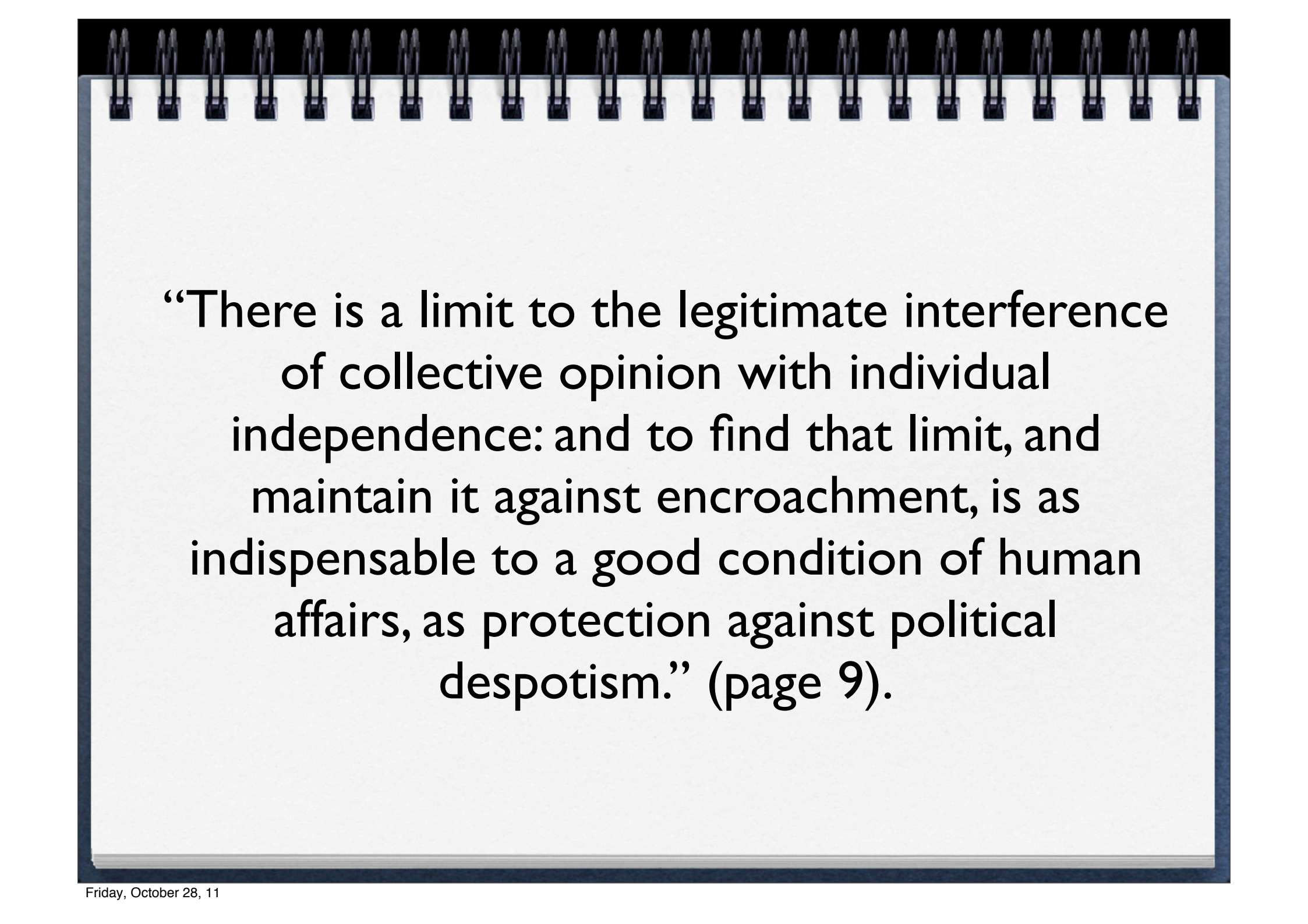
- Liberty as “Civil, or Social Liberty” is not the same as the “doctrine of Philosophical Necessity”.
- Sources of threats to civil liberty:
  - Tyrants, Dictators, Oligopolies
  - Majority



# Majorities and personal liberties



- Any functioning representative system requires a feasible majority. E.g. 50% + 1: always guaranteed if #Pop. is odd.
- Problems: minorities, losing parties, political/social outliers

A spiral-bound notebook with a white page and a dark blue cover. The spiral binding is visible at the top. The text is centered on the page.

“There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence: and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs, as protection against political despotism.” (page 9).





In *On Liberty*, Mill sets out to draw the principles upon **liberties** and **rights** can be given or taken away .

# Foremost principle

## No-Harm Principle:

*[...] the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. [...] the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. (page 14)*



## Three domains of social liberties:

- *Liberty of thought and discussion*
- *Liberty of tastes and pursuits*
- *Liberty of combination among individuals*

# On the Liberty of Thought and Discussion

## QUESTIONS - A

- *What does Mill say about the possibility of depriving even only one individual (whose opinion goes against the one of the others) of his or her opinion?*



# On the Liberty of Thought and Discussion

## QUESTIONS - B

- *What does the practice of contradicting a given opinion allow us to achieve?*
- *Why should even the opinion of the most reliable, holiest, and esteemed man be open to contradiction by others?*
- *What conception of knowledge and "certainty" comes out of Mill's words in this section?*

# On the Liberty of Thought and Discussion

## QUESTIONS - C

- *Possible reply: it is true that we should not deny the right of opinion in the name of infallibility; indeed, we deny it on the grounds that that opinion is useless.*
- *Assumption: some opinions are useful, and, even more, indispensable to the well-being of humanity, such that only bad man would ever want to deny them.*



# On the Liberty of Thought and Discussion

## QUESTIONS - D

- *What does it mean, according to Mill, to assume infallibilism?*
- *Suppose: I am absolutely sure and certain of the truth of my opinion as well as the negative consequences of holding the opposite opinion. Am I therefore an “infallibilist”, in the moral or political sense, according to Mill?*

# On the Liberty of Thought and Discussion

## QUESTIONS - E

- *Mill is a skilled orator. What is the purpose of mentioning Socrates and Jesus?*
- *And what is the purpose of mentioning Marcus Aurelius?*