

A Few Questions for Mill on Non-Intervention

In *On Liberty* as well as in his lesser known essay *A Few Words on Non-Intervention*, Mill articulates what is often taken to be the classical liberal position on non-intervention, both personal and political: Namely, that short of preventing harm to others, there is no legitimate basis for exercising power over individuals or states without their consent. Indeed, so forceful is Mill's advocacy of non-intervention, several authors have found it radical in the extreme. So how then can Mill allow for so many exceptions; specifically, how can he allow for paternalism both domestically and internationally? Or are these not exceptions? In this paper I argue that while Mill's interventions with respect to children and other child like individuals are compatible with his liberal commitments to non-intervention, precisely because and to the extent that they are not paternalistic, his interventions with respect to competent adults, as well as his interventions with respect to states, are incompatible with his liberal commitments, precisely because and to the extent that they are paternalistic.

David J. **Garren**