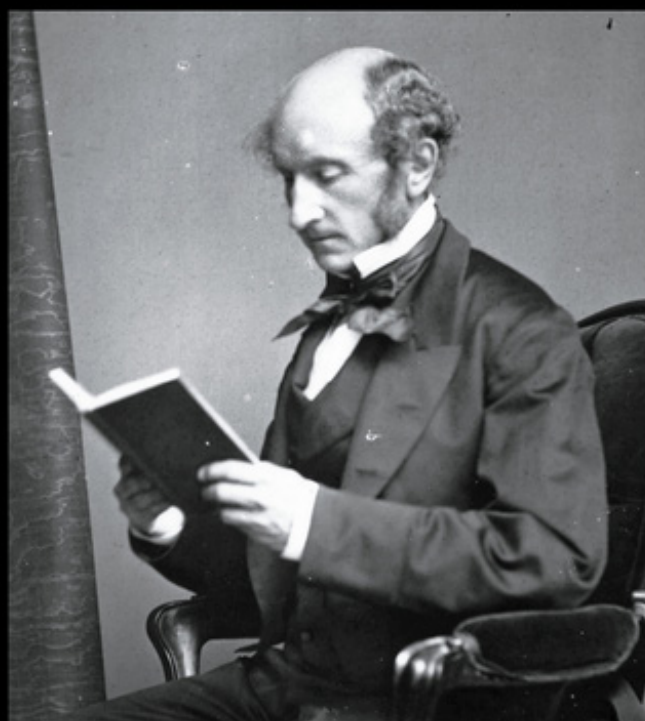


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A Companion to Mill

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This volume is dedicated to the memory of Donald “D.G.” Brown, who sadly passed away just as it was going to press.

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Preface

Why another book on Mill? And, more specifically, why another companion volume, given the existence of the excellent 1998 *Cambridge Companion to Mill*, edited by John Skorupski? The questions are fair, but the answers are not hard to find. Mill has indeed already been the subject of many books of late. In just the last ten years – since 2006, which happens to be the year of his bicentenary – more than a dozen new monographs, at least a half-dozen edited collections of new papers, and a new biography have appeared (in addition, of course, to countless articles in academic journals). While much of the scholarly attention has been focused on Mill's moral, social, and political philosophy, as well as his place in the history of political thought, his theoretical philosophy has not been neglected: witness the publication of a significant work on the Mill–Whewell debate in the philosophy of science and an edited collection on the *System of Logic*, not to mention a number of nuanced articles considering Mill's philosophy of language.

Yet the very fact that so much first-rate work has been and continues to be produced about every aspect of Mill's life and thought indicates that interest in him remains both widespread and intense, and this alone constitutes a rationale for another significant contribution to the literature – at least as long as it is of sufficient quality. Moreover, that the literature has grown so much in just the last decade, let alone since the publication of the last companion to Mill, suggests that this is an appropriate juncture for taking stock in a comprehensive fashion both of everything that we have learned and of the state of the debate over the many interpretative questions that remain unsettled. This is what this volume, whose contributors include most of the biographers and interpreters responsible for moving the conversation about Mill forward in recent years, aims to do.

Despite the advances that have been made in our understanding of Mill, there are still very basic disagreements about the nature of his thought. Writing in Skorupski's *Companion*, Alan Ryan pointed out that despite the apparent simplicity of its prose, the nature of Mill's *On Liberty* remains disputed.

[O]ught we not to know by now whether the essay's main target is the hold of Christianity on the Victorian mind or rather the hold of a monolithic public opinion of whatever kind; whether its intellectual basis lies in utility as Mill claimed or in a covert appeal to natural right; whether the ideal of individual moral and intellectual autonomy is supposed to animate everyone, or only an elite; and so indefinitely on? (Ryan 1998: 497)

Such debate continues between this volume's contributors both here and on the pages of scholarly journals. We still lack consensus on even issues as fundamental as

whether Mill is more profitably seen as a libertarian or a socialist. And if there are still disagreements about the basics of Mill's political philosophy, the same can be said of many other aspects of his works. Whether Mill is better read as advocating a *eudaimonistic* or hedonistic conception of the good is still a live issue, as is how this theory of value relates to his account of morality. Even his orientation towards idealism or naturalism in metaphysics remains contentious.

It is tempting to say that such disputes are inevitable, given Mill's self-declared "many-sidedness" (*Autobiography*, I: 171). His goal to unite the philosophies represented in his own age by Bentham and Coleridge plays out throughout his philosophy as no less than the attempt to reconcile Enlightenment and Romanticism, liberalism and conservatism, scientific explanation and humanistic understanding. This means that Mill's work inevitably pulls in different directions. That is not to say that his philosophy is contradictory, but rather just to point out the obvious – that any satisfactory account of human beings' relationship to the world and to one another must do justice to the complexity of those relationships. Mill's sensitivity to such complexities makes him an invigorating philosophical companion. With the increasing spirit of pluralism within Anglo-American philosophy, Mill's desire to learn from "Germano-Coleridgean" (*Coleridge*, X: 215) insights also provides a useful lesson in how to be open to traditions beyond one's own, while remaining philosophically level-headed.

The chapters in this volume consider many different aspects of Mill's thought. Part I deals with biographical issues, broadly conceived. Mill's life has always been a source of considerable interest. His remarkable education, his breakdown and discovery of poetry, his love-affair with Harriet Taylor and his foray into parliamentary politics all make for absorbing stories – all the more for being set during a period when the British institutions of Church and State were undergoing pivotal change. Behind these episodes, however, lie questions about Mill's relationship to his own intellectual heritage, and the extent to which Mill is a reliable narrator of the meaning and lessons of his own life. Part II of the book offers an account of various important influences on Mill's thought. Providing a complete account is, of course, impossible – Mill's reading was wide, and influence is an amorphous concept. The account here, therefore must be partial, and there are regrettable omissions from the story told here – regrettable all the more because they indicate genuine gaps in our knowledge of Mill's background. We still know little in detail of Mill's debt to the distinctive voices coming from Germany in his own period, the place of the Medievals in his philosophy is not well understood, and (perhaps most surprisingly) his relation to Scottish thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth century has not been fully investigated. Any of these topics, and more besides, could have been usefully included in a companion such as this.

Part III deals with what we have decided to title the "Foundations of Mill's Thought." These include aspects of his theoretical philosophy – though we do not mean to take a stand on the much disputed question of whether Mill's theoretical philosophy is the groundwork, or rather a result of, his moral philosophy. Whatever the case, this aspect of Mill's philosophy is rich and deep, and it is perhaps surprising that it has received so little attention when compared to that of Locke and Hume. Mill's place in the history of philosophy means that he sees clearly the strengths and possibilities of British empiricism – but also its internal tensions. The growth of the physical, biological, and social sciences in his own time made it clear that a new account of humans' knowledge of the

world was necessary – but in the process of attempting to offer such an account, Mill runs into some of the most difficult problems of reconciling the mind seen as a natural object in the world and seen as the condition for our view on that same world. This leads him to struggle with how our minds are formed by our circumstances, the nature of our representations of the world, and the relativity of knowledge – issues which could only start to come clearly into focus in British philosophy after the Kantian turn. This section also deals with Mill’s view on issues – aesthetics, history, and religion – which, although not traditionally thought of as theoretical, are closely related to those issues.

Parts IV and V form the core of this volume, dealing with Mill’s ethics and social philosophy respectively. It is to these areas of Mill’s thought that most scholarly attention has been dedicated in recent years, and much has been learnt. It is now generally accepted that any full understanding of Mill’s ethics must place his account of morality within the broader context of his account of “the art of life.” Mill, to be sure, has much to say about distinctively moral categories of *right*, *obligation*, and *justice* – but it is an open question as to how these relate to his account of the value of utility, which grounds practical reason as a whole. Mill freely avails himself of notions of spontaneity, virtue, and cultivation – these too inform his theory of how it is best for an individual to live. The question of how to Mill’s mind it is best for a community to organize itself and act is equally as complex. It has taken a long time for it to be clearly appreciated how many issues are at stake in Mill’s “text-book of a single truth” (*Autobiography*, I: 259). There are many arguments presented in that work and they must be carefully picked apart if we are to properly understand Mill’s argument for freedom. We must also see these arguments in the context of Mill worries and hopes for a nation’s ability to improve itself and other communities, as given in his lesser known works.

The volume concludes, in Part VI, with a consideration of Mill’s relation to later movements in philosophy: to modern liberalism, to modern utilitarianism, and to the Analytic/Continental divide. Mill’s influence, of course, continues. Many of the philosophic issues he struggled with remain alive today, and chapters on Mill’s relation to various other aspects of twenty-first century philosophy could (and no doubt would) have been chosen for inclusion by other editors. We hope that the perceived gaps in this volume will spur others on to complete the work started here.

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Note on Citations

All citations to Mill in this volume are taken from the *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and Toronto University Press, Toronto, 1963–1991, and edited by John M. Robson.

References are to volume and page and, in order to minimize in-text disruption, we have adopted the following abbreviations throughout the volume:

<i>Auguste Comte</i>	<i>Auguste Comte and Positivism</i>
<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Chapters on Socialism</i>
<i>Considerations</i>	<i>Considerations on Representative Government</i>
<i>Early Draft</i>	<i>Early Draft of the Autobiography</i>
<i>Examination</i>	<i>An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy</i>
<i>Inaugural Address</i>	<i>Inaugural Address to the University of St Andrews</i>
<i>Liberty</i>	<i>On Liberty</i>
<i>Logic</i>	<i>System of Logic</i>
<i>Notes on the Analysis</i>	<i>Notes on the Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind</i>
<i>Principles</i>	<i>Principles of Political Economy</i>
<i>Rejected Leaves</i>	<i>Rejected Leaves of the Autobiography</i>
<i>Subjection</i>	<i>Subjection of Women</i>
<i>Thoughts on Poetry</i>	<i>Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties</i>

Part I

Mill's Autobiography and Biography

Mill's Mind: A Biographical Sketch

RICHARD V. REEVES

Benjamin Franklin exhorted his fellows to “either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.” John Stuart Mill (like Franklin himself) is among that rare breed who managed to do both. It hardly needs stating – especially in a volume such as the one in your hands – that Mill’s writing and thought is influential. Across the field of political philosophy, ethics, gender studies, and economics, his writings still carry a good deal of weight. If the true measure of greatness is posthumous productivity, as Goethe suggested, Mill’s status is assured.

But Mill’s life holds plenty of interest, too, not least for the additional light it shines on the development of his thought. In this brief biographical sketch, I hope to show this relationship between life and work in two areas in particular. First, the way in which Mill’s extraordinary upbringing and education fuelled his journey away from utilitarianism towards liberalism; and second, how his relationship with Harriet Taylor influenced his thinking on gender equality, most obviously, but also on the potentially damaging influence of social custom.

Mill was a quintessential public intellectual before the term was created; an advocate for a humanist, self-reflective life – the “Saint of Rationalism,” as William Gladstone dubbed him – but also a man of political action. John Morley, a Liberal politician and writer and a disciple of Mill’s, described him as “a man of extreme sensibility and vital heat in things worth waxing hot about” (Morley 1921: i.55).

There were many such things, too: parliamentary reform, the US Civil War and slavery, the Irish potato famine, religious freedom, inherited power and wealth, and women’s rights, to name only the most obvious. These were issues to which Mill was intellectually and politically committed. But they became personal, too. It is useful to consider Mill’s personal journey, not simply because it is interesting in itself, but because his ideas bear a strong imprint of the personal and political circumstances of his life. Mill was an intensely autobiographical thinker: for him, the political and personal were intertwined.

Mill's life was out of the ordinary from the beginning. After his birth on May 20, 1806, his father, James Mill, wrote to another new father and proposed "to run a fair race ... in the education of a son. Let us have a well-disputed trial which of us twenty years hence can exhibit the most accomplished and virtuous young man" (Mill 1976: 11).

Mill was home-schooled by his father, a historian and disciple of Jeremy Bentham. The education was, as Isaiah Berlin observed, "an appalling success" (Berlin 2002: 220). By six, Mill had written a history of Rome; by seven he was reading Plato in Greek, at eight soaking up Sophocles, Thucydides and Demosthenes; at nine enjoying the Pope's translation of The *Iliad*, reading it "twenty to thirty times." By the age of 11 he was devouring Aristotle's works on logic, before being moved on at 12 to political economy. Not that the young Mill has to be coerced: as he recalled later, "I never remember being so wrapt up in any book, as I was in Joyce's Scientific Dialogues." In 1819 he undertook "a complete course of political economy" (*Autobiography*, I: 13, 21, 31). (It may have helped that David Ricardo had become a friend of the family, and was fond of Mill junior).

But Mill was lonely, and reserved. "As I had no boy companions, my amusements, which were mostly solitary, were in general of a quiet, if not a bookish turn," he observed. He could talk to his father about cerebral matters, but never emotional ones. Mill's mother does not feature in the final, published version of his *Autobiography* at all: but in earlier, discarded drafts, he ponders how different life might have been if he had been blessed with "that rarity in England, a really warm-hearted mother" (*Rejected Leaves*, I: 610, 612).

After a year in France as an adolescent – turning Mill into a lifelong Francophile – he was baptized into the utilitarian faith, after being presented with Jeremy Bentham's work on the moral foundation of the law. The opening sentences of the work are surely among the clearest in moral philosophy:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters: pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. (Bentham 1962: 1)

Bentham was in fact a very close family friend to the Mills, providing them with financial support in the form of what amounted to a rent subsidy, intellectual engagement and even access to a country home, where the Mill–Bentham routine of reading, writing, editing, and educating was interrupted by bracing walks, even the occasional dance.

When Mill read Bentham, in Dumont's French translation, as he recounted,

the vista of improvement which he [Bentham] did open was sufficiently large and brilliant to light up my life, as well as to give a definite shape to my aspirations ... I now had opinions; a creed; a doctrine; a philosophy; in one among the best sense of the word, a religion; the inculcation and diffusion of which could be made the principal outward purpose of a life. (*Autobiography*, I: 71)

But during a self-described "mental crisis" in 1826 and 1827, Mill began his long and difficult journey away from a narrow, Benthamite utilitarianism vision towards a

profound belief in the inalienable value of individuality and the humanist liberalism that would illuminate his most famous work, *On Liberty*. Mill was helped out of his depression by poetry – famously dismissed by Bentham as no better than push-pin – including the verse of Wordsworth and Coleridge, very far from being required reading for the philosophical radicals clustered under the Benthamite banner. (When Mill visited Wordsworth in the Lake District in 1831, his more orthodox radical friend and travelling companion, Henry Cole, pointedly stayed away.) Mill's much-tested friendship with Carlyle survived the accidental burning by Mill's maid of the only copy of the first volume of Carlyle's monumental history of the French revolution.

Mill's "crisis," and his increasingly negative reflections on his own upbringing, had a clear impact on the development of his philosophy. I do not intend, here, to adjudicate the various attempts to reconcile Mill's utilitarianism and liberalism; that is better left to others in this volume. I will restrict myself to suggesting that Mill was a weak utilitarian, because he was a good liberal.

Biography matters in understanding the development of Mill's thought here. He became highly sensitive to criticism, from those such as Thomas Carlyle, that he was a "manufactured man." And not least because he agreed with it:

I conceive that the description so often given of a Benthamite, as a mere reasoning machine was, during two or three years of my life not altogether untrue of me. (*Autobiography*, I: 111)

Mill felt trapped by one element of his youthful creed, the "associationist" psychology of Hartley, which implied that everyone is shaped by their circumstances into the person they are destined to remain. We are what we are raised to be:

[During] the later returns of my dejection, the doctrine of what is called Philosophical Necessity weighed on my existence like an incubus. I felt as if I was scientifically proved to be the helpless slave of antecedent circumstances; as if my character and that of all others had been formed by agencies beyond our control, and was wholly out of our own power. (*Autobiography*, I: 175–176)

Mill's departure from this brand of psychological determinism was painful, both personally and intellectually. But following his crisis, and during subsequent bouts of depression, it became vitally important to Mill to feel that he was the master of his destiny, living under his own intellectual propulsion. Mill's rejection of the Benthamite version of utilitarianism – at first *sotto voce*, but increasingly loudly – and his embrace and advocacy of a Humboldtian, developmental liberalism are reflections of his own private journey.

In *On Liberty*, Mill criticized those who conform to any of "the small number of moulds which society provides in order to save its members the trouble of forming their own character" (*Liberty*, XVIII: 267–8). It is hard to read this description without thinking of how Mill himself saw himself as breaking free from a mould provided not by "society," but by his father. We are only truly free when our "desires and impulses" are our own, in Mill's view: when we have our own character, rather than the character prescribed for us by others (*Liberty*, XVIII: 264).

Although one of Mill's best-known works is his *Utilitarianism*, he was ambivalent, even dismissive, about the work himself. In a letter to Alexander Bain, on October 15, 1859,

he described the work as “a little treatise” (Letter to Alexander Bain, Oct 15, 1859, XV: 640). A few weeks later, also to Bain, he wrote: “I do not think of publishing my Utilitarianism till next winter at the earliest, though it is now finished ... It will be but a small book...” (Letter to Alexander Bain, Nov 14, 1859, XV: 645). To W.G. Ward, Mill described the work as a “little manuscript treatise” (Letter to William Ward, Nov 28, 1859, XV: 640). *Utilitarianism* ran to four editions during his lifetime, but Mill – generally a diligent reviser of his work – barely touched it. Of the changes that he made, just eight are of any substance. This treatment contrasts strongly with the editorial investments he made in the many editions of the *Principles of Political Economy*, the *System of Logic* and – perhaps most comparable – *Representative Government*, to which Mill made 105 substantive changes for the second edition alone.

It is the only work of any significance that Mill fails to treat in any detail in the *Autobiography*. An important question is: why did he write it? The motives appear to a mixture of defensiveness and guilt. Having become an increasingly outspoken critic of Bentham himself, Mill worried that following the death of his father and Bentham, utilitarianism had been left without serious defenders. Explaining his motives in 1858 to Theodor Gomperz, his German translator, he wrote, “there are not many defences [sic] extant of the ethics of utility” (Letter to Theodor Gomperz, Aug 30, 1858: 570). To Charles Dupont-White in 1861 he explained that “l'idée de l'Utile été...très impopulaire” (Letter to Charles Dupont-White, Oct 10 1861, XV: 745).

Since the work was, for Mill, backward-looking, an attempt to compensate for earlier assaults, he failed to take opportunities to clarify and thereby strengthen his treatment. One example of editorial neglect stands out particularly starkly, given the intellectual history of the work. The weakness of Mill's “proof” of utility was immediately apparent, even to Mill's allies. Theodor Gomperz pointed it out to him in 1863, just after first publication of the first edition of the book in February.¹ But Mill made no alterations, in either the second edition (1864) or the third (1867). In some frustration, Gomperz tried again in 1868 as he was preparing a German translation:

Let me conclude by expressing my regret that you did not in the later editions of the Utilitarianism remove the stumbling block ... pp. 51–52 1st ed. (audible, visible – desirable) which when pointed out to you by me, you said you would remove. (Gomperz 1868)

In his reply a few days later, Mill admits the problem, professes to have forgotten about it, claims he has been too busy in the preceding five years to address it, and then asks Gomperz to do it for him, in the German edition:

With regard to the passage you mention in the Utilitarianism *I have not had time regularly to rewrite the book* & it had escaped my memory that you thought that argument apparently though not really fallacious which proves to me the necessity of, at least, some further explanation & development. I beg that in the translation you will kindly reserve the passage to yourself, & please remove the stumbling block, by expressing the real argument in such terms as you think will express it best. (Letter to Theodor Gomperz, Feb 18, 1866, CW XXXII: 163, my emphasis)

Gomperz, reasonably enough, leaves the flawed passage: it was not his job or place to fix a problem of this kind. The resulting weakness in Mill's argument has provided sport for

undergraduate philosophers ever since, and as Alan Ryan points out, the essay has “become a classic through the efforts of its opponents rather than those of its friends” (Ryan 1982: 12).

This rather shocking neglect was however of a piece with Mill's distance from the work: between the first publication of the essay and his death twelve years later, *Utilitarianism* is mentioned by Mill just eleven times in his correspondence, compared to thirty-three references to *On Liberty*. While he published many of his works – *On Liberty* and *Principles of Political Economy* for example – as cheap “people's editions” (for which he received no royalties), he appears never to have considered doing so for *Utilitarianism*. In 1866, he asked Longman to send some free copies of his most important works to the Durham Cooperative Institute: *Utilitarianism* was not on the list (Letter to William Longman, Feb 18, 1866, XXXII: 163).

A number of scholars, not least Alan Ryan and Wendy Donner, and various authors in this volume, have worked hard to make a better job of presenting Mill's mature utilitarianism than he managed himself in this essay (Donner 1998; Ryan 1974). My only point here is that a biographical examination of the question shows that by the time Mill wrote and published *Utilitarianism*, his heart wasn't in it – and that's at least one reason why it is, by his standards, a poor-quality piece of work (Reeves 2008: 333).

Of course, Mill was not an academic publishing in peer review journals. Like most of his contemporaries, he was an amateur intellectual. He did not attend school or university. His day job was at the East India Company, following in his father's footsteps, where he rose gradually to the heights of First Examiner. He walked to work each morning and began each day with a cup of tea and a boiled egg. (Mill wrote precious little about India, however, and unlike Macaulay, never troubled to visit the county he spent his mornings administering.)

In addition to his civil service duties, Mill was a debater, journalist, editor, and politician. In his twenties, he was an enthusiastic participant in the burgeoning debating club culture. He was not a charismatic speaker by any means, but was sharp in argument, and had the writer's ability to coin a resonant phrase. Mill also ended up running the *London and Westminster Quarterly*, a platform from which he could bring Alexis de Tocqueville's work to a British audience. In fact, Tocqueville bound Mill's review of his landmark book *Democracy in America* into his own working copy, on the grounds that the two had to be read together for his own work to be fully appreciated.

Mill's reputation was made by his *System of Logic*, published in 1843, and burnished by his 1848 *Principles of Political Economy*. William Gladstone was heavily influenced by Mill's economics, and the success of the *Principles* gave him, according to the Victorian writer Walter Bagehot, a “monarchical” status in political economy for decades (Bagehot 1915: 120).

But it was *On Liberty*, published in 1859, the year after the death of his wife Harriet, and dedicated to her memory, that secured Mill his lasting place in intellectual history. The essay synthesized Mill's mature philosophy, centered on the idea of individual growth, progress and cultivation. A liberal society, for Mill, was one in which each person was free to progress “nearer to the best thing they can be” (*Liberty*, XVIII: 267). Mill prefixed his essay with what he called a “motto” from Wilhelm von Humboldt's *Sphere and Duties of Government*, published in 1854: “The grand, leading principle, towards which every argument unfolded in these pages directly converges, is the

absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity" (*Autobiography*, I: 191; *Liberty*, XVIII: 215). Mill endorsed Humboldt's claim that "the end of man ... is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole" (*Liberty*, XVIII: 261; Reeves 2008: 278).

Mill's liberalism was founded on a conviction that the range of opportunities for self-creation and autonomy were the standard against which cultures, political systems, economic institutions, and philosophical ideas should be judged. When Mill argued against repression, he did not use spatial terms like "invade" or "interfere." For him, repression inhibited natural growth, with people turned into "pollards," or being "compressed," "cramped," "pinched," "dwarfed," "starved," or "withered" (VF: 278).

Here, Mill was clearly able to draw a connection to his own life. For him, self-development was a personal issue. He saw his own upbringing as constricted, especially emotionally. But he also believed his education had given him the resources to escape from the path on which he had been set. Mill described his journey to Carlyle:

None however of them all has become so unlike what he once was as myself, who originally was the narrowest of them all...fortunately however I was not *crammed*; my own thinking faculties were called into strong though partial play; & by their means I have been able to *remake* all my opinions. (Letter to Thomas Carlyle, Oct 22, 1832, XII: 128)

Mill worked for his entire career for the East India Company, the same organization that had employed his father. In fact, he owed the job to his father:

In May 1823, my professional occupation and status for the next thirty-five years of my life, were *decided by my father's obtaining for me* an appointment from the East India Company, in the office of the Examiner of India Correspondence, immediately under himself. (*Autobiography*, I: 82, my emphasis)

Mill, as noted earlier, was justifiably afraid of being – and of being seen as – a "made man." For Mill, it was vitally important that individuals not only be authors of their opinions, but also architects of their lives:

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself employs all his faculties. (*Liberty*, XVIII: 262)

One of the chief obstacles to self-expression and self-development identified by Mill is the "despotism of custom." This was a theme of much of his writing; again, biographical factors are important here, specifically the influence of Harriet Taylor, who Mill met in the summer of 1830. Harriet was married with children and the status of her relationship with Mill during the years up until her husband's death in 1849 has been the subject of gossip and speculation ever since. More importantly, the scope of Harriet's intellectual influence has also been hotly contested all along. Godefroy Cavaignac, a French refugee and leading light in the *Société des Droits de l'Homme* dubbed her "the Armida of the London and Westminster."²

Harriet's role has occupied the attention of scholars since. Nicholas Capaldi suggests Harriet was a "great influence" on Mill's life and thought (Capaldi 2004: xiv); for Jo

Ellen Jacobs, her work, "beginning with the *Principles of Political Economy*, tended more and more towards co-authorship" (Jacobs 2002: 196). Hayek devoted a book to the subject. Helen McCabe's chapter in this volume argues that Mill "would not have been half the man he was without her."

According to Michael Packe, Harriet wielded an "astounding, almost hypnotic control of Mill's mind" (Packe 1954: 315). Packe also claimed for Harriet a good deal of the credit for Mill's subsequent essays – especially *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women*: "In so far as Mill's influence, theoretic or applied, has been of advantage to the progress of the western world, or indeed of humanity at large," he wrote, "the credit should rest upon his wife *at least as much as himself*" (Packe 1954: 371, my emphasis).

In private and in public, Mill was at pains to emphasize Harriet's unique brilliance, eclipsing his own merely workmanlike abilities. Sometimes he did in fact position himself as a mere translator of her thoughts, as her amanuensis, likening her at one point to Bentham, "the originating mind," and himself to Dumont, the French translator of Bentham's *Traite de Legislation* (Letter to Harriet Taylor Mill, Aug 30, 1853, XIV: 112). "Unfortunately for both," recounted his friend Alexander Bain, "he outraged all reasonable credibility in describing her matchless genius, without being able to supply corroborating evidence" (Bain 1882: 171).

There is no question that Harriet was an important influence on Mill's thinking and that they worked together in close intellectual partnership. Here again, Mill's biography is interwoven with his thought. His relationship with Harriet, for example, both directly and indirectly shaped his views about the dangers of social custom. Mill and Harriet suffered from gossip and social exclusion during the years of their unusual relationship while Harriet's husband was still alive. Unsurprisingly, they shared a strong fear and dislike of the power of custom.

It is in fact quite difficult in the early years of their relationship to disentangle the effects of Harriet on Mill, from those of Mill on Harriet, on this particular subject. A review by Harriet of Sarrans' *Louise Phillipe and the Revolution of 1830* has clear Millian markings. Or put differently, the quotes from Harriet's essay lamenting the "phantom power" of the "opinion of society," and the centrality of "self-dependence" could be dropped unnoticed into almost any paragraph in *On Genius* – or indeed *On Liberty* (*Enfranchisement of Women*, XXI: 399–400).

An unpublished essay of Harriet's from the early 1830s (it is not dated but is on paper watermarked "1832") describes the "spirit of conformity" as:

[T]he root of all intolerance ... what is called the opinion of society is a phantom power, yet as is often the case with phantoms, of more force over the minds of the unthinking than all the flesh and blood arguments which can be brought to bear against it. It is a combination of the many weak, against the few strong. (Taylor 1832: 264–5)

Harriet also strengthened Mill's support on women's rights, a subject on which he became increasingly outspoken as the years passed. (He was even able to persuade Florence Nightingale of the cause.) Mill was the first MP to put down legislation to give women the vote, winning seventy-four votes to his side, and was the moving spirit in the National Society for Women's Suffrage. Millicent Fawcett described him as the "principal originator of the women's movement" (Fawcett 1873: 85).

During his short tenure as a Member of Parliament, Mill dueled Benjamin Disraeli over the right to protest in public parks, and won. A corner of Hyde Park stands to this day as a testament to his victory. The Tories, he declared, were “the stupid party,” or, as he later clarified his view in Parliament: “I never meant to say that the Conservatives are generally stupid. I meant to say that stupid people are generally Conservative” (*Speech on Representation of the People*, XXVIII: 61). He was also, in addition to his work on women’s rights, a passionate advocate for the north in the US Civil War in the 1860s, for more support to Ireland during the famine of the 1840s, for opening up the British civil service through competitive examination, and for women’s and girls’ education in England and India.

Following his retirement from the East India Company in 1858 and ejection from Parliament a decade later in 1868, Mill spent most of his time in Avignon in southern France, where Harriet had died.

In the Spring of 1873, Mill picked up erysipelas, the result of a bacterial infection following a botanising expedition near his French home. He told his stepdaughter: “you know that I have done my work” (Packe 1954: 705). Indeed, he had. Mill was buried next to his wife, in a funeral with just five attendees, proof, if any were needed, of Dickens’ claim that “the more truly great the man, the more truly little the ceremony” (Ackroyd 1990: xiii).

Notes

- 1 See Weinberg (1963) for an account of the interaction between Gomperz and Mill.
- 2 Armida is an enchantress in Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata* who lured crusading knights away from their duty, popularized through operas by Gluck and Rossini. Cavaignac may have been suffering from sour grapes: there is some evidence that Mill rejected his literary offerings, see VF, p. 139.

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Mill's Epiphanies

ELIJAH MILLGRAM

John Stuart Mill was raised to be the Lenin of the revolutionary movement that we remember as utilitarianism, and whose members at the time were called the “Philosophic Radicals.” And as many philosophers know, Mill’s youth was brought to a close by a bout of depression – what he called his “Mental Crisis” – that amounted to a crisis of commitment. Sandwiched between his training and his first not-exactly-breakdown (of three) we find two epiphanies that get little or no attention, and I want to go some distance towards rectifying that omission. I think they will explain Mill’s Crisis, and why he never became the Lenin of utilitarianism – but also why utilitarianism turned out not to be the sort of movement that needed a Lenin.

1. First Epiphany

In his *Autobiography*, Mill describes “an epoch in my life; one of the turning points in my mental history” (*Autobiography*, I: 67). First, a bit of background. Mill had spent time in France, and by his mid-teens, he spoke and read French fluently. A good deal earlier than that, Jeremy Bentham, the father of utilitarianism and his mentor, had shipped off a very large pile of manuscripts to Étienne Dumont, who translated, edited, abridged, and rewrote them into the *Traité de législation civile et pénale*, since retranslated into English under the title *Theory of Legislation*.¹ Mill is about to describe what it was like to read Dumont’s French rendering of Bentham.

My previous education had been, in a certain sense, already a course of Benthamism. The Benthamic standard of “the greatest happiness” was that which I had always been taught to apply ... Yet in the first pages of Bentham it burst upon me with all the force of novelty. What thus impressed me was the chapter in which Bentham passed judgment on the common modes of reasoning in morals and legislation ... and characterized them as dogmatism in disguise imposing its sentiments upon others under cover of sounding expressions which convey no

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reason for the sentiment, but set up the sentiment as its own reason. It had not struck me before, that Bentham's principle put an end to all this. The feeling rushed upon me, that all previous moralists were superseded, and that here indeed was the commencement of a new era in thought. ... But what struck me at the time most of all, was the Classification of Offences... my previous training, had given me a strong relish for accurate classification. ... when I found scientific classification applied to the great and complex subject of Punishable Acts, under the guidance of the ethical principle of Pleasurable and Painful Consequences ... I felt taken up to an eminence from which I could survey a vast mental domain, and see stretching out into the distance intellectual results beyond all computation. As I proceeded farther, there seemed to be added to this intellectual clearness, the most inspiring prospects of practical improvement in human affairs. ... at every page he seemed to open a clearer and broader conception of what human opinions and institutions ought to be, how they might be made what they ought to be, and how far removed from it they now are. When I laid down the last volume of the *Traité* I had become a different being. The "principle of utility," understood as Bentham understood it, and applied in the manner in which he applied it through these three volumes, fell exactly into its place as the keystone which held together the detached and fragmentary component parts of my knowledge and beliefs. It gave unity to my conceptions of things. I now had opinions; a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; in one among the best senses of the word, a religion; the inculcation and diffusion of which could be made the principal outward purpose of a life. And I had a grand conception laid before me of changes to be effected in the condition of mankind through that doctrine. ... the vista of improvement which he did open was sufficiently large and brilliant to light up my life, as well as to give a definite shape to my aspirations. (*Autobiography*, I: 67–71)

This is Mill's first epiphany, the moment when he realizes what the meaning of his life is, and unlike most such "realizations," Mill lived up to this one. Just for instance, the passage emphasizes the importance of displacing disguised appeals to what people already think or feel with transparent Benthamite cost-benefit analysis; Mill went on to write his *System of Logic*, the book that made him famous in his own lifetime, partly in order to delegitimize appeals to self-evident (that is, *a priori*) knowledge, and to moral intuitions. And of course Mill stayed a utilitarian until the day of his death.

Mill was sixteen, give or take a bit. About two years later, Bentham had a favor to ask, and it must have gone something like this: "John, you know, there's this book I've tried to write three times, and wasn't ever able to finish." (Sorry, I'm too American to even try for an in-period, British rendering!) "Why don't you take these three enormous piles of handwritten manuscript, fold them together, clean it all up, and we'll publish it. It'll be great for your career."² Mill couldn't very well say no to the great man, and it was in any case a genuine opportunity: he had had the home-school equivalent of a very good PhD or two, and this would have been his postdoc: no longer merely a homework exercise, but a contribution to a substantial publication. His father, James Mill, must have encouraged him; Mill senior had put together a lengthy abstract of this very book, and probably he had originally intended himself to do the task his son was taking on.³ Mill then produced the five-volume *Rationale of Judicial Evidence*, totaling some 3300 pages, which he describes as having "occupied nearly all my leisure for about a year" (*Autobiography*, I: 117). Having myself tried the exercise of transcribing Bentham's nearly illegible handwriting into fair copy that you might plausibly send off to a publisher, I can advise you not to take the word "leisure" to suggest a part-time hobby or relaxed pastime; that Mill was able to finish it off in this time frame is nothing short of remarkable.⁴

The year Mill turned twenty brought the onset of his Mental Crisis, and as you no doubt expect, I'm going to suggest that the timing wasn't a coincidence. Here is Mill's own much-quoted description of it:

From the winter of 1821, when I first read Bentham ... I had what might truly be called an object in life; to be a reformer of the world. My conception of my own happiness was entirely identified with this object ... This did very well for several years, during which the general improvement going on in the world and the idea of myself as engaged with others in struggling to promote it, seemed enough to fill up an interesting and animated existence. But the time came when I awakened from this as from a dream. It was in the autumn of 1826. ... it occurred to me to put the question directly to myself, "Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, "No!" At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for. (*Autobiography*, I: 137-9)

Mill's friend, protégé and biographer, Alexander Bain, put the lengthy "dejection" down to "over-working the brain," and, looking at the *Rationale*, it's not an unreasonable initial hypothesis (Bain 1882: 38). But I don't in fact think that's all, or even nearly all, of the explanation.⁵

Notice this very terse remark in the *Autobiography*:

My name as editor was put to the book [that is, the *Rationale*] after it was printed, at Mr. Bentham's positive desire, which I in vain attempted to persuade him to forego. (*Autobiography*, I: 119)

First, let me render that into my crude American, and in due course I'll argue that what I'm about to give you is the right rendering. At one of the final prepublication stages, Bentham becomes aware that Mill has left his name off the title page of the finished book, and sends him a note telling him that he's done a lot of work and should have his name on it. Mill modestly replies: "Oh, no – this is *your* book! I just did copyediting; I really don't deserve that sort of credit... and I also wouldn't want to look like I'm trying to take credit." Bentham says: "No, I insist." Mill tells him that really he doesn't deserve it, *really*; Bentham absolutely insists; in the end, Mill's name appears, but not actually on the title page; you will find it at the end of the editor's Preface.⁶

Mill is polite, but we academics recognize what's just happened. This is the moment when you tell your collaborator that it's really *his* work, because you've realized that you don't want to be associated with it, and the reason you don't want to be associated with it is that it's embarrassingly *bad*. I'm going to defend that reconstruction of the course of events in a moment, but first, and to anticipate, here's the cause (although likely only a partial cause) that I'm about to propose for Mill's Mental Crisis: his teenage emotional commitment to the utilitarian political enterprise was threatened by the low intellectual quality of Bentham's thought and writing.

2. Second Epiphany

How could Bentham have produced two so very different reactions on occasions just two years apart? The materials used by Dumont and the manuscripts on which Mill worked were not nearly all the same, but there was nonetheless a good deal of overlap. Bentham's views hadn't changed much; and while Mill was a couple of years older, at a time of life when people mature rapidly, he was evidently still very much the same person as his slightly younger self. And anyway, where do I get off making dismissive judgments about the quality of the work by someone acknowledged to be an important figure in the history of philosophy and the political and legal history of Great Britain?

If you take time out to read Dumont's *Traité* and Mill's rendition of Bentham side by side, here's what you'll find. Dumont took a great many liberties with his original; he attempted to convey Bentham's ideas, but (evidently partly because Bentham himself wouldn't supply complete manuscripts, or answer Dumont's many questions about what he thought and meant) the resulting work speaks in the voice of a worldly Frenchman, it emphasizes the systematic structure of Bentham's views (especially the organizing idea that all that really matters, when you're designing laws and the institutions that go with them, is the balance of pleasure over pain), and, perhaps most importantly, it is relatively short.⁷ Now Mill, as we'll see in a moment, seems to have taken few liberties with the manuscript in front of him: he made choices about which version to use, but the very length of the *Rationale* suggests that, whenever possible, he used *all* of them.⁸ He took his job to include rewriting Bentham's sentences, and occasionally he added supporting materials, but on the rare occasions when he felt he needed to correct Bentham, the correction appears as an editor's footnote; so he was unwilling to tamper with the content himself.⁹ Perhaps this was because he felt himself to be a great man's underlaborer; perhaps because Bentham was discussing aspects of courtroom procedure that were simply undocumented – in order to know about them, you would have had to have spent a great deal of time in court, or talking with lawyers – and so Mill would likely not have felt confident making more than very minor changes to the text in front of him.¹⁰ We no longer have the manuscripts from which Mill worked (and Bentham had the practice of destroying manuscripts once the material had actually been published). But when we look at the *Rationale*, what we see must be very close to what Mill saw, and this is confirmed by the large amount of quite similar manuscript material that we do still possess.

What we see in the *Rationale* is startlingly different from Dumont's rendering of Bentham; I'll mention just a handful of the more striking contrasts. First, there is almost no properly utilitarian argument. Bentham has many ideas about how things ought to be done, but he does not appeal to anything on the order of a hedonic calculation to justify his proposals (and on most of the occasions, not all that frequent overall, that the term "utility" comes up, it clearly means "usefulness," and not the feeling of pleasure).¹¹ Second, Bentham's proposals often sound reasonable to us: for example, he argues that when taking testimony, you should ask the witness questions in person (as opposed, say, to sending him a letter to answer), you should be allowed to ask followup questions, and when he answers, someone should write it all down. But where Dumont makes this sort of point in a paragraph, the *Rationale* devotes 434 pages to it.¹² Finally for right now, Bentham is much given to pointless taxonomizing.¹³ The overall impression produced

by the writing – anyway, this is how it struck me, and I would expect it to strike you this way also – is of philosophically uninteresting, intellectually flat, endlessly repetitive *crankiness*.¹⁴

The impression the materials made was probably worse than the finished product which Mill has left us indicates. If you sit down today with the many boxes of Bentham's carefully preserved handwriting, you will find, for instance, one after another almost-identical table of contents, meant for the same book, and one after another almost-identical preface, also for that same book... for folder after folder after folder. These are not drafts, as we normally understand the notion: stages in which previous material is being reworked and improved.¹⁵ Rather, Bentham seems to have commenced writing, morning after morning (he worked until his three o'clock breakfast), by starting in, yet once again, on whichever book it was, beginning, as usual, at the beginning. (He apparently did the same thing in the evening as well: while being shaved, presumably with a straight razor, he would dictate to a secretary; see Wheatley 1855?: 9, 34–6.) And, each morning (or evening), the words came out pretty much the same way. Looking at the manuscripts, I had something like the reaction – and I expect that Mill's was similar – of the character in Kubrick's *Shining* who discovers that her husband's novel-in-progress consists entirely in repetitions of the sentence, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" (Kubrick 1980).

What really matters, of course, is not how it strikes you or me, but how the young Mill responded to it. And here we have his subsequent testimony to go on as well.

Somewhat later in life, Mill penned a biographical essay titled *Bentham* (X: 77–115). The tone manages to be laudatory, but inspection confirms the substance of the assessment I've just given. Describing his mentor's prose, Mill tells us that

he fell into a Latin or German structure of sentence, foreign to the genius of the English language. He could not bear, for the sake of clearness and the reader's ease, to say ... a little more than the truth in one sentence, and correct it in the next. The whole of the qualifying remarks which he intended to make he insisted on embedding as parentheses in the very middle of the sentence itself. (X: 114)

Bentham, Mill more than allows, is not much good at careful argument: "We must not look for subtlety, or the power of recondite analysis, among [Bentham's] intellectual characteristics. In the former quality, few great thinkers have ever been so deficient" (X: 80). Reiterating that "we often must [reject] his practical conclusions," Mill goes out of his way to praise "Bentham's method ... as the method of detail, of treating wholes by separating them into their parts ... Hence his interminable classifications" (X: 82f). Mill seems to identify Bentham's procedure with Plato's Method of Collection and Division; he says that "Bentham was probably not aware that Plato had anticipated him in the process to which he too declared that he owed everything" (X: 88). For the moment, the relevant observations are two: This is a part of Plato's work that nonspecialists tend to ignore, for the simple reason that we don't think much of the Method. And although Mill seems to praise it, this is not how he argues himself.

Mill is in retrospect also disappointed on matters of substance, although it is hard to know how much of that response to attribute to his younger self. Bentham overlooked the importance of character formation in ethics (X: 98), and his philosophy is capable

“of organizing and regulating the merely *business* part of the social arrangements” (X: 99). Even these arrangements are unacceptable, because he never noticed that entirely empowered majorities would be likely to oppress minorities (X: 106–8). His moral philosophizing was bound to be defective, because he both ignored the work of previous philosophers, and was insufficiently imaginative to compensate without their help for “the incompleteness of his own mind as a representative of human nature” (X: 91f). And while Mill insists that any one person would be an incomplete such representative, Bentham was an extreme case, someone who had never grown up: “a boy to the last,” his understanding of other human beings was “the empiricism of one who has had little experience” (X: 92). “It is,” Mill remarks in a final note,

indispensable to a correct estimate of any of Bentham’s dealings with the world, to bear in mind that in everything except abstract speculation he was to the last, what we have called him, essentially a boy. (X: 115)

We can still hear the echo of those “intellectual results beyond all computation” which the young Mill saw “stretching out into the distance,” now almost entirely stripped of the sense of the sublime: his older self tells us that “the field of Bentham’s labours was like the space between two parallel lines; narrow to excess in one direction, in another it reached to infinity” (X: 100).

Looking back, the more mature Mill did find something he could wholeheartedly praise, and that real praise is reserved almost entirely for Bentham’s willingness to stand on his own convictions when faced with institutionalized abuses:¹⁶

he alone was found with sufficient moral sensibility and self-reliance to say to himself that these things ... were frauds, and that between them and himself there should be a gulf fixed. To this rare union of self-reliance and moral sensibility we are indebted for all that Bentham has done. (X: 81)

To borrow a phrase from the *Rationale*, Bentham’s role was to be someone who “speaks out and calls things by their names” (Bentham 1827: vol. i, 388n); he was the child who proclaimed that the emperor had no clothes. His example taught others to do likewise:

It is by the influence of the modes of thought with which his writings inoculated a considerable number of thinking men, that the yoke of authority has been broken, and innumerable opinions, formerly received on tradition as incontestable, are put on their defense, and required to give an account of themselves. (X: 78)

Mill’s father, James Mill, was a friend and political ally of Bentham’s, and the young Mill had been prepared to be a utilitarian political activist. On encountering Bentham’s ideas in Dumont’s rendering of them, John Stuart Mill had embraced that mission. But faced with the actual written manuscripts of the Marx of utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill had, I am suggesting, a horrifying realization, and I’ll put it in today’s idiom: that he had been raised by – and into – the Flat Earth Society. This was Mill’s second teenage epiphany.

3. Bentham's Two Faces

In 200 years, no one is likely to remember the founder of the Flat Earth Society, much less devote a life of scholarship to editing his writings. Benthamites, then and now, think much better of Bentham than I am suggesting the young Mill did. How are we to reconcile the conflicting assessments?

Bentham was in fact capable of graceful, powerful writing, and a good deal of Bentham's influence was due to it. The material on evidence was crabbed, obsessive, and tedious; so part of the problem was that Mill's sample of the raw materials was unfortunate.¹⁷ The problem was no doubt compounded by a further cause of the uptake Bentham received. Much of Bentham's output made its way to the public by way of other intellectuals, such as Dumont and James Mill, who rewrote what they were given, and in doing so, imposed on the final product a much more attractive authorial persona; it would be a mistake to think of Dumont as having translated Bentham from an already existing English original: rather, Dumont *composed* a work "by Bentham."¹⁸ However, Mill was aware of the provenance of Dumont's *Traité*, and in his struggle to make passable prose out of the source materials for the *Rationale* was only too likely to have decided that he was seeing the *real* Bentham behind the facade supplied by another author.

Much of the subsequent enthusiasm for Bentham has to do with the obvious merits of many of his practical proposals. An anonymous contributor to the *Times Literary Supplement* provides an enthusiastic overview which conveys what sort of improvements fall under this heading:

He stood for the reform of the representative system in Parliament; he demanded municipal reform; he prayed for the mitigation of the terrible criminal law, for the abolition of transportation, and for the improvement of prisons ... He clamoured for the removal of defects in the jury system, pleaded for the abolition of grand juries ... demanded the abolition of imprisonment for debt, the sweeping away of the usury laws, the reform of the law of evidence, the repeal of religious tests ... the reform of the Poor Law, ... the training of pauper children, ... the establishment of a national system of education. He demanded an extension of the idea of savings banks and friendly societies, cheap postage without the object of national profit coupled with post office money orders. He insisted on a complete and uniform Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths, a Code for Merchant Shipping, full Census returns, the circulation of Parliamentary papers, the protection of inventors. He demanded local Courts, uniform and scientific methods of drafting Acts of Parliament, a general register of real property, of deeds and all transactions, and last, but certainly not least, the passing of public health legislation.

[I]n addition ... [h]e demanded the creation of public prosecutors and of advocates for the poor.

To us to-day [this is 1925] practically the whole of it in principle, if not in effect, is admitted. It makes quite dull reading. ... But ... when Bentham set forth his polity all these things were impossible, absurd, ridiculous. Great intellects waved them away. (Anonymous 1925: 902)¹⁹

These proposals stand on their own; one doesn't need to read hundreds of pages of Bentham, or connect them to the remainder of Bentham's intellectual system, in order to appreciate their force.

Finally, Bentham's followers are impressed by him because they think he was *right*. But whether utilitarianism was right was not Mill's problem; rather, it was that although he continued to think that Bentham was right on that score, he was dismayed both by the way Bentham's ideas were developed and by the quality of the presentation.

4. From Revolution to Reform

When teenagers become disenchanted with their parents' and elders' ideals, they generally walk away. After emerging from his depression, however, Mill devoted the remainder of his life to improving the quality of utilitarian moral theory, of utilitarian political philosophy, and of all the rest of it. In his hands, the intellectual heritage of utilitarianism became subtle, mature, refined, richly argued, thoughtful – in short, everything it had not been in Bentham's development of it. We remember utilitarianism, and still take it seriously, only because John Stuart Mill took it upon himself to *make it worthy* of the emotional commitment that he had come to have as a 16-year-old.

We tend to forget that the utilitarianism of Bentham and James Mill was not called "radical" for nothing; many of the then-shocking implications – representative government and universal enfranchisement, most notably – have long since been assimilated, and now seem tame. But a succession of popular authors have been clear enough about what sort of steps the position entails.²⁰ And while Bentham seems to have trusted that once his ideas were given a hearing, policymakers would enact the laws and institute the procedures that he advocated, if you actually tried to implement the policies entailed by a principled Benthamite utilitarianism, you would quickly enough find yourself faced with resistance, and just the sort of resistance that could only be overcome by expedients that the French and Russian Revolutions have made familiar. How is it that we do not think of Benthamite utilitarianism together with guillotines and gulags?

In part, the unsullied history is a fortunate accident; in their early days the Benthamites had neither the opportunity nor the personal ruthlessness required to seize the reins of power. Although the reforms that Bentham and James Mill had their hearts set on were not nearly all of the consequences that could be derived from the Principle of Utility, they happened to line up nicely with the interests of the middle class, and so it turned out that they could be gradually accommodated without simply overturning the political system.²¹ And the key players were coopted in various ways: James Mill became a colonial administrator; while Bentham never managed to put up his notorious model prison, the government compensated him for having terminated the project. In part, however, it is a matter of how John Stuart Mill resolved his personal crisis of confidence: once he had reworked the theoretical foundations of utilitarianism, it was no longer that sort of movement. I'll conclude by explaining how that happened.

To connect this point to the preceding discussion, I want to draw my illustration of the way Mill attempted to improve the intellectual underpinnings of the utilitarian platform from his discussion of scientific method. To do that, I'll provide only the briefest sketch of his lengthy and rich treatment of the topic.

Some sciences are systematized, in such a way that lengthy inferences can be assembled from shorter ones; these are the "Deductive or Ratiocinative Sciences" (*Logic*, VII: 209),

with Euclidean geometry serving as Mill's paradigm case. To effect this sort of systematization, we

construct the science from the fewest and simplest possible inductions [the axioms], and ... make these, by any combinations however complicated, suffice for proving ... truths, relating to complex cases ... (*Logic*, VII: 218)²²

Now, of the Deductive Sciences, some exhibit composition of causes and others do not. The model for composition of causes is, "in dynamics, the ... Composition of Forces" (that is, summing vectors to get resultants); formally, causes compose when

the law which expresses the effect of each cause acting by itself ... also correctly express[es] the part due to that cause, of the effect which follows from the [causes] together (*Logic*, VII: 370f)

Sciences which exhibit composition of causes treat causes that can cancel each other out:

A stream running into a reservoir at one end tends to fill it higher and higher, while a drain at the other extremity tends to empty it. ... in cases such as these ... the two causes which are in joint action [may] exactly annul one another... (*Logic*, VII: 372)

This means that your calculations may be mistaken if you have overlooked a contrary cause; whereas if you add 5 and 7 to get 12, you do not have to worry that perhaps a countervailing cause is draining off some of the cardinality unnoticed, and that in *this* case, $5 + 7 = 9$. This latter sort of science

affords no room for what so constantly occurs in mechanics and its applications, the case of conflicting forces ... In mechanics we continually find two or more moving forces producing, not motion, but rest ... There is no similar state of things in geometry ... What is proved true from one geometrical theorem ... cannot be altered and made no longer true by reason of some other geometrical principle. (*Logic*, VIII: 887f)

Mill calls the mode of treatment appropriate to a science like mechanics the Physical Method and that appropriate to sciences like arithmetic or geometry the Geometrical Method.

For domains in which a great many different kinds of cause interact, Mill recommends the Deductive Method.²³ A core of initial principles – he seems to think of Newton's Laws of Motion as a model – is to be established inductively.²⁴ Alternatively, they may be handed down as results established by a methodologically simpler science, as when associationist psychology supplies the initial principles for Mill's projected science of character, which he called "ethology." Further results are derived from these initial principles, in the manner of any Deductive Science, and here we can think of the ways in which, from Newton's laws, we work up treatments of planetary orbits or automobile collisions. But because the causes represented in the treatment might be overridden, we treat them as "tendencies" (*Logic*, VIII: 898), and the conclusions

are therefore, in the strictest sense of the word, hypothetical. They are grounded on some suppositious set of circumstances, and declare how some given cause would operate in those circumstances, supposing that no others were combined with them. (*Logic*, VIII: 900)

The reality check is “Verification,” that is, comparison of the results of the science to “Empirical Laws” – what we call phenomenological laws, rough and ready generalizations “which observation or experiment has shown to exist, but on which [one] hesitate[s] to rely in cases varying much from those which have been actually observed ...” (*Logic*, VII: 516f).

In very complex domains, in particular and especially, that of social science, merely calculating a composition of causes in the manner of mechanics does not in practice suffice. Instead, an entire science is peeled out of the domain and systematized, on the understanding that the treatment exhibits only one aspect of the highly interconnected phenomena; the conclusions drawn within such a treatment will have to be checked against the phenomena and the results of complementary sciences to see whether in one case or another they are overridden by other tendencies. For example, economics helps itself to a simplifying assumption, that people are motivated by solely “economic” considerations (they want to make as much money as possible for as little work as possible). But the conclusions drawn in particular cases may be overridden by phenomena assigned to ethology; in many countries (Mill seems to have France especially in mind), “in conducting the business of selling their goods over a counter ... [men] care more about their ease or their vanity than about their pecuniary gain” (*Logic*, VIII: 900–6).²⁵

In the *System of Logic*, Mill takes time out to criticize “the interest-philosophy of the Bentham school.” Bentham’s “mistake was not so much one of substance as of form”: he applied the Geometrical Method in domains whose sciences require the Deductive Method. That is, when he derived a conclusion from idealized or oversimplified initial principles, he forgot to allow that the conclusion might, in simpler or more complicated ways, have to be modified or overruled. In the example Mill gives, Bentham treats human beings as governed by self-interest, and draws conclusions about how the behavior of rulers can be yoked to the interests of the ruled. These conclusions are right as far as they go, but they have to be corrected to take account of further causes that Bentham overlooked: that human beings in general, and rulers in particular, are also governed by habit and local custom.²⁶

Let’s turn from Mill’s philosophy of science to its political applications. It is plausibly what Mill thinks of as the Geometrical Method that gives rise to revolutionary excesses. When you draw a policy conclusion from the premises supplied by a political ideology, it often wears an extreme form: the monarchy and the church must be deprived of their powers and assets; the implementation of socialism requires shifting agricultural production from small farmers to collectives; China must increase its steel production. When these are not counterbalanced or overridden by other considerations, we have *assignats*, dekulakization, the Great Leap Forward and so on: the repeated spectacle provided by the late eighteenth and twentieth centuries, of revolutionary movements perversely inflicting widespread suffering and mass murder on the populations in their power in the name of humanitarian ideals. However, the formal characterization of the Geometrical Method was precisely that, once you have drawn a conclusion, you do not need to worry that it might need counterbalancing, or even be overridden.

Even a political party with a dramatic slogan – in this case, “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” – that applies its principles using the Deductive rather than the Geometrical Method is no longer this sort of revolutionary vanguard. Bentham and James Mill bought into a quick argument for mechanisms of representative democracy that would tie the interests of the rulers to those of a majority of the population. That argument, Mill allowed, is fine as far as it goes, but there is a counterbalancing consideration, namely, the likely effects of a tyranny of the majority; and so he went on to design institutions intended to restrain the majority in various ways.

If you have drawn policy conclusions from your ideological principles and other political actors object to them, then if you are committed to the Geometrical Method, you will not be able to allow that their objections spring from legitimate counterbalancing considerations. If they do not come around to your point of view after a few rounds of attempted explanation, you are likely to find yourself doubting their good faith: they must be driven by (and here is a phrase that Bentham used in this context) “sinister interests.”²⁷ Such opponents must be silenced and eliminated; it is no accident that the revolutionaries who implicitly adopt the Geometrical Method so frequently avail themselves of the secret police.

But the Deductive Method leads its practitioners to expect their opponents’ conclusions to complement their own, and to think that the correctly adopted policy is likely to be one that reflects and accommodates the apparently conflicting arguments. This puts us in a position to explain the puzzling framing argument of the second chapter of *On Liberty*. You will recall Mill reasoning that any opinion you might have is either true, half-true, or false. He claims that if your opinion is true, it needs to be contested to keep it alive; that if your opinion is half-true, it needs to be contested to have it completed; and that if your opinion is false, it needs to be contested so it can be changed (*On Liberty*, XVIII: 228–59, esp. at 252ff).²⁸ Since any opinion you have needs to be contested, and since you’re probably not going to do the contesting yourself, you have a very strong interest in others having the liberty to disagree with you. The puzzling bit is why Mill felt it necessary to clutter a straightforward dilemma with an extensive discussion of the middling case: of those beliefs that are neither true, nor false, but merely half-true. After all, why isn’t the part-falsity already covered by the final case: false opinions which need to be contested in order to be corrected?

The argument of *On Liberty* is evidently shaped by Mill’s theory of scientific method. In political argumentation, the subject matters are typically those for which the Deductive Method is appropriate. When it is, conclusions established by any one argument quite often turn out to be a part of the truth, and one that is misleading on its own. To complete such a half-truth, it must be supplemented by results often produced by independently developed sciences, and, plausibly, by arguments whose advocates are antecedently disposed to see things in a very different manner.

In the *Autobiography*, Mill tells us that, as a young teen

the subject [of the French Revolution] took an immense hold of my feelings. It allied itself with all my juvenile aspirations to the character of a democratic champion. What had happened so lately, seemed as if it might easily happen again; and the most transcendent glory I was capable of conceiving, was that of figuring, successful or unsuccessful, as a Girondist in an English Convention. (*Autobiography*, I: 65f)

Mill grew up in the aftermath of that Revolution – the Napoleonic Wars lasted until 1815, when he was nine or so – and it would have been a grave oversight if the revolutionary potential of movements directed at radical reform had not eventually received his close attention. A good deal of his writing suggests that it must have: not only did he at one point seriously contemplate composing a history of the French Revolution himself, and not only did Mill review Carlyle's history of the French Revolution very favorably, but an entire volume of his *Collected Works* is devoted to "Essays on French History and Historians." Here we have before us the results of that intellectual engagement: if I am right, Mill's theory of scientific method was an attempt to diagnose and correct the Terror (not that this was by any means its only agenda). Mill's own subsequent political theorizing was shaped by the diagnosis, and if we now think of the views he made famous as "liberal" rather than "radical," and if a great many of them have been taken up into the political common sense of our time, that is in good part because his insistence on sensitivity to the different sides of a question strikes his readers today as intelligent and mature.

I earlier argued that Mill was disheartened when he found Bentham to be, among other things, childish, and that he reformulated the utilitarian theory and political program so as to retrieve his own youthful commitment, by rendering it, among other things, grown up. Let me conclude with one final observation: we are finally in a position to see how Mill managed to rescue rather than reject Bentham.

The Deductive Method allows the result of one treatment to be complemented, adjusted by and even overridden by considerations belonging to a different treatment (or even a different science). Bentham's error, as Mill thought, was that of treating the Geometrical Method as appropriate in social-science subject matter. That allowed Mill to correct Bentham's policy dictates, while granting that the arguments that Bentham constructed for them were right as far as they went. In his essay on Bentham, in one of those attempts to make a criticism sound as nice as possible, he remarked that

there is hardly anything positive in Bentham's philosophy which is not true: ... when his practical conclusions are erroneous, which in our opinion they are very often, it is not because the considerations which he urges are not rational and valid in themselves, but because some more important principle, which he did not perceive, supersedes those considerations, and turns the scale. (*Bentham*, X: 93)

At the age of sixteen, Mill had taken on a lifelong commitment to a cause, one which he was not ready to abandon; his work in philosophy of science, it turns out, met a very personal need. It allowed him to understand himself as *improving* the utilitarianism he had inherited, rather than merely *replacing* it.²⁹

Notes

- 1 (Bentham 1930, originally published in 1802); the 1864 translation by Richard Hildreth can be found in Ogden's edition (Bentham 1931).
- 2 Here is how Mill remembers it:

Mr. Bentham ... bethought himself of me as capable of preparing [his papers on Evidence] for the press ... I gladly undertook this task ... Mr. Bentham had begun this

treatise three times, at considerable intervals, each time in a different manner, and each time without reference to the preceding ... These three masses of manuscript it was my business to condense into a single treatise ... I had also to unroll such of Bentham's involved and parenthetical sentences, as seemed to overpass by their complexity the measure of what readers were likely to take the pains to understand. (*Autobiography*, I: 117)

- 3 At Bentham (1838–43: vol. vi, 1–187). Because the younger Mill is the protagonist of the story I'm telling, a freestanding "Mill" will always refer to him; his father, James Mill, will always be called by his full name.
- 4 Even at the time, his correspondents complained about Bentham's handwriting: "vos billets," Dumont gently chided him, "demandent des heures pour être déchiffrés" (Bentham 2006: 181).
- 5 The Mental Crisis is much discussed, and among the better treatments are Vogler (2001) and Carlisle (1991).
- 6 This must have been an awkward moment, because although the Mills and Bentham lived around the corner from each other, the back and forth was conducted as correspondence, most of which we still have. Here's the long version from which I drew the colloquial summary (Bentham 2006: 347–349):

It is a matter of no small surprise to me [Bentham begins] to see the title page without your name to it. Nothing could be more clearly understood between us than that it should be there ...

I certainly did not understand you [Mill replies] to have expressed any desire that my name should be in the title page. Nevertheless, if you positively require it, I am willing that it should be so rather than that you should imagine I had taken less pains with the work under the idea of its being ... anonymous. But I confess I should greatly prefer that my name should be omitted ... if my name were annexed to it people would think that I wished to make a parade either of your good opinion [of] me, or of the few notes which I have added ... & I should be very sorry to be suspected of wishing to obtain a reputation at a cheap rate by appearing before the public under the shelter of your name.

Bentham replied curtly in two notes:

Your name is of far too great importance to the work to be omitted in the titlepage to it.

P.S. Name at end of the Preface.

- 7 Emphasis on the "relatively": The French totals 1214 pages of text, exclusive of front and back matter, and the English translation runs to some 555 pages. But this is still a great deal shorter than the *Rationale* and it has much greater breadth of coverage.
- 8 Indeed, at one point, Mill apologetically announces that he has included two chapters which are near-duplicates of one another (Bentham 1827: vol. iii, 333n).
- 9 That said, it needs some qualification. Bentham's writing is simultaneously choppy and overloaded – under the latter heading, I mean that copying out, for instance, just the title of one of his tables gives you a half-paragraph – and is occasionally simply illegible. So anyone writing up his prose will have had to interpolate words and phrases, and not infrequently to make up his own mind as to what Bentham was trying to say; likewise, anyone copyediting Bentham will have to make up his mind what can be left out. Moreover, at various points, Mill found the manuscripts to be simply incomplete. He complains in the editor's notes: "This and the following section were left by the author in the state of mere fragments";

The paragraphs ... inserted by the Editor... appeared necessary to complete the section, which is composed of mere fragments ... which the Editor was obliged to connect together as he best could.

The papers from which the above remarks ... have been compiled, were written by Mr. Bentham at different times, and left by him in a very incomplete and fragmentitious state ... The remainder of this chapter ... is the result of a partial attempt to fill up the void which had thus been left in the body of the work. (Bentham 1827: vol. iii, 422, 374, 573f, emphasis deleted; see also vol. v, 570, 597)

10 I'm grateful to Philip Schofield for this observation.

11 Here's the sort of thing I mean: Arguing against "the ceremony of an oath," Bentham remarks that "it places the Almighty in the station of a sheriff's officer" (Bentham 1827: vol. i, 366). Or again, Bentham points out that Christians cannot consistently treat hearsay evidence as inadmissible; after all, their own religious beliefs are based on hearsay (vol. iii, 532n). Those are the sort of point-scoring you might find in Voltaire, but they're not appeals to the Principle of Utility. In many ways, Bentham belongs a great deal more to the Enlightenment than we remember.

There are rare exceptions: for instance, an appeal to cost-benefit calculation (though not one that explicitly invokes utility as Bentham officially wants us to understand it), at vol. ii, 521; or again, in proposing that a register be kept of cases in which "makeshift" evidence is used, he argues that reviewing the register will "exhibit the aggregate quantum of benefit on the one hand, and of mischief on the other," and allow future legislators to revise the judicial code on the basis of the track record (vol. iii, 545f); or again, at vol. iv, 36f, 278, 479–481. (The term is mentioned – but it's not clear in which sense – at vol. iv, 393n., again at 471, and again at vol. v, 416, 457, 735 and 744.)

However, in vol. v, the frequency with which utility is invoked picks up: "the principle of utility" is used in its proper sense on p. 60; Bentham's utility-driven account of justified punishment is rehearsed at 141–3; the Principle of Utility is in play when we are told what "humanity" amounts to on 233; on 298 the point is made that comparative utilities matter, whereas traditional legal categories (such as the classifications "civil" and "criminal") don't; on 303 we are given a definition of immorality in terms of the tendency to lessen the quantity of happiness in society; and there are similar references at 326f, 330–2, 344, 587 and 628n. Mill tells us that over the course of the year-long homework assignment his own writing style improved, to the point where it "became, at times, lively and almost light" (*Autobiography*, I: 119). The change is noticeable only in the final volume (not throughout, however), and the relatively frequent invocations of utility are confined to those more gracefully written stretches of text. I suspect that we owe them to Mill rather than Bentham; at the stage when as editor he became willing impose his voice on the writing, he also found himself able to adjust the content.

If, as John Plamenatz once remarked (Halévy 1972: xvi), the "ends of policy" that Bentham identified "were not happiness but other things which he believed (without troubling to prove it) make for happiness," and if the "principles," which he intended to be

used as guides in making policy ... (though he thought otherwise) have nothing to do with promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number, conceived as a sum of pleasures,

the problem, from the point of view of a sophisticated Benthamite, is not that most of Bentham's arguments are not made out in terms of sums of pleasures and pains. Benthamites were and

are committed to identifying intermediate principles and ends. (I'm grateful to William Twining for pressing me on this point.) The problem is rather that those intermediate principles and ends are supposed to be anchored to the principle of utility, and the young John Stuart Mill working through Bentham's manuscripts would have found no evidence that they were.

- 12 At Bentham (1827: vol. ii, 1–434).
- 13 A shortish sample, picked more or less at random, can be found at vol. iii, 612–8. I should emphasize that the problem was not the presence of taxonomies (recall Mill's "strong relish for accurate classification," from his description of the earlier epiphany), but rather, as Bain (1966: 143) dryly put it, "distinctions without adequate differences."
- 14 Mill's contemporaries balked at the finished product as well. For instance, one reviewer, who as a matter of fact thought well of Bentham's project overall – e.g., he seconds the point about testimony we just touched on, noting that "if there is a point that may be considered indisputable as a general maxim, it is the superiority of *viva voce* examination over prepared and written questions" – complained about "a repulsiveness of style as mysterious as the bricks of Babylon, [which] set[s] lay-readers so completely at defiance," and he went on to reproduce "specimens of the style" that "form as unsuitable ornaments [in a work meant for the edification of posterity] as the grinning faces and burlesque forms with which the monkish builders have studded our magnificent cathedrals"; he pointedly observed that "ignorance of the views of other men is not indispensable for the correctness of one's own; and that it is possible for opinions that are not insolently expressed, to be yet honestly, boldly, and successfully maintained"; and he remarked on Bentham's "eccentricities and impracticableness," which "thrust him out of the rank where [his] genius ought to place him," of "frequent absences of a plain work-a-day sense," and "flaws, which strike across this great work a vein so deep and coarse that there is scarce a page together which we have read with unmixed pleasure" (Empson 1828: 459, 482, 516–20).
- 15 Compare Bentham's own later description of the process of writing the *Rationale*:

all the time of scribbling it the second time I never looked at what I had scribbled the first time: nor while going over the field a third time ... never did I ... take the trouble of bestowing a glance on what I had done at either of the two preceding times ... I suffered the pen to run on in the track upon which it had entered. (Bentham 2006: 336f)

- 16 Mill's example of such an abuse is legal clients having to "pay for three attendances in the office of a Master of Chancery, when only one was given" (X: 81).
- 17 There are exceptions: e.g., the chapter on improbability and impossibility (Bentham 1827: vol. iii, 258–384) is decently written and develops a recognizably philosophical view, which comes with supporting arguments. (For example: by the law of the excluded middle, a proposition is true – and so a fact is the case – or it is not; probability comes in degrees; therefore, probability must be psychological, rather than a feature of the objective world.) But this stretch of text is most striking for the contrast it makes with the remainder of the *Rationale*.
- 18 Acknowledged in his own somewhat awkward explanations at the beginning of the "Discours préliminaire" to (Bentham 1830: at vol. i, iff).

When the reviewer invoked in note 14 objected to "[t]he slovenly and careless confidence with which [Mill's] office of editor has been performed," part of his dislike had to do with the young Mill's own lack of legal training and experience, but a good part of it was a response to Mill's unwillingness to cut down the manuscripts as ruthlessly as had Dumont: "Not a single unsightliness seems to have been removed" (Empson 1828: 462n, 465n).

- 19 Ogden, whose own somewhat abbreviated quotation of it directed me to the passage, attributes it to an "eminent authority" (Bentham 1931: ix–x) and, writing when and where he did, may well have known enough to do so.

- 20 Huxley (1998) is perhaps the most famous; Gunn (1961) is a more recent and very knowledgeable dystopia. Williams (1973) covers some of the territory in a professional philosopher's register.
- 21 Nonetheless, it's important to remember that what seems to us moderate in retrospect was dangerous politics by the lights of the time; a good example of where the limits were drawn is found in (Bain 1966: 111): in 1810, Sir Francis Burdett published a piece

denying the power of the House of Commons to send to prison, as they had done, John Gale Jones, and John Dean, printer, for discussing in a debating society, the exclusion of strangers from the debates of the House. Burdett was brought up for this article, and sent to the Tower.

And Mill's anything-but-revolutionary tone, later in life, is not representative of how he sounded early on. Mazlish (1975: 237f) reminds us that

if it were not for Roebuck we might never have known that, for example, Mill and his two friends, on the occasion of Louis Philippe's first visit to the opera [this is during a trip to France during the upheavals of 1830], had aroused the audience to shout for "La Marseillaise," and then shouted "Debout, debout!" until the whole audience, including the King himself, actually stood up during the playing of the revolutionary tune.

As far as temperaments went, Bain reports that "while so daring as to be accounted revolutionary, [James Mill] was really the safest politician of his age," and remarks that "in the first French Revolution, no such man was to be found" (421f).

- 22 Many contemporary readers no longer know that Mill's *System of Logic* argues at length for the over-the-top view that all inference, properly understood, is inductive. Thus even geometry simply systematizes inductive generalizations about the empirical world and as a matter of terminology, "the opposition is not between the terms Deductive and Inductive, but between Deductive and Experimental" (*Logic*, VII: 219).
- 23 Bear in mind that not all "Deductive Sciences" are suitable for the "Deductive Method." Because Mill's various uses of "deductive" differ from our own, his commentators tend to lose track of his terminology: for instance, Haraldsson (2011) describes ethics done geometrically as "in a deductive spirit," which is just plain confusing.
- 24 Using his famous methods of agreement, difference, residues and concomitant variations (*Logic*, VII: 388–406); these "four methods" are still taught today in informal logic classes.
- 25 Elsewhere, endorsing a view he attributes to Thomas Carlyle, Mill tells us that:

in the infinite complexities of human affairs, any general theorem which a wise man will form concerning them, must be regarded as a mere approximation to truth; an approximation obtained by striking an average of many cases, and consequently not exactly fitting any one case. No wise man, therefore, will stand upon his theorem only – neglecting to look into the specialties of the case in hand, and see what features *that* may present which may take it out of any theorem, or bring it within the compass of more theorems than one. (*Carlyle's French Revolution*, XX: 161)

And Mill ascribed the success of his *Principles of Political Economy* in part to the way it

treated Political Economy not as a thing by itself, but as a fragment of a greater whole; a branch of Social Philosophy, so interlinked with all the other branches, that

its conclusions, even in its own peculiar province, are only true conditionally, subject to interference and counteraction from causes not directly within its scope. (*Autobiography*, I: 243)

- 26 (*Logic*, VIII: 890–3); compare VIII: 946 on “the error ... of those who would deduce the line of conduct proper to particular cases, from supposed universal practical maxims.” Again, in *Utilitarianism*, Mill replies to a complaint on the part of Herbert Spencer that

Bentham, certainly ... is, least of all writers, chargeable with unwillingness to deduce the effect of actions on happiness from the laws of human nature and the universal conditions of human life. The common charge against him is of relying too exclusively upon such deductions, and declining altogether to be bound by the generalizations from specific experience which Mr. Spencer thinks that utilitarians generally confine themselves to. My own opinion ... is, that in ethics, as in all other branches of scientific study, the consilience of the results of both these processes, each corroborating and verifying the other [that is, successful application of the Deductive Method], is requisite to give to any general proposition the kind and degree of evidence which constitutes scientific proof. (*Utilitarianism*, X: 258n)

- 27 Indeed, Mill observed, in a passage that appeared in early editions of the *System of Logic*:

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that society has usually, both by practitioners in politics and by philosophical speculators on forms of government, from Plato to Bentham, been deemed to be whatever the men who compose it choose to make it ... hardly any notion was entertained that there were limits to the power of human will over the phenomena of society ... the only obstacle was supposed to lie in the private interests or prejudices, which hindered men from being willing to see [the social arrangements] tried. (*Logic*, VIII: 876)

- 28 Millgram (2004: secs. 2–3) reconstructs the supporting argument Mill gives for the first of these three claims.
- 29 I’m grateful to Jerry Ravetz, Henry Richardson, Philip Schofield, William Twining, and an audience at the University of Parma for helpful discussion, to Chrisoula Andreou, Janice Carlisle, Ben Crowe, and Bruce Kinzer for comments on an earlier draft, and to Buket Korkut-Raptis and Candace Vogler for comments on and discussion of related material. Thanks also to the University of Utah for research and travel support, and to Margaret Bowman for research assistance.

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The Afterlife of John Stuart Mill, 1874–1879

DAVID STACK

His death in May 1873 did not end all interest in John Stuart Mill. In the years that followed, the many feet that tramped to the outskirts of Avignon to visit the “gloomy cemetery” that housed his decomposing corpse were testaments to an enduring fascination. Indeed, in 1876 the *Glasgow Herald* somewhat improbably listed Mill’s grave and former house as the third most important feature to be seen in the historic Papal city (*Glasgow Herald*, Jan 22, 1876). Most of the pilgrims were politely curious, but away from Avignon some continued to look to Mill for political guidance. In January 1874, H.R. Fox Bourne used *The Examiner*’s preview of the coming year to lament that the world would “suffer much” from the lack of Mill’s “wise teaching,” but drew comfort from the fact that Mill had bequeathed his books “as monitors” and had “already taught wisdom enough to guide his followers” (*The Examiner*, Jan 2, 1874).

Reading Fox Bourne one might expect to find Mill a significant posthumous presence in the political debates of the mid- and late-1870s. “This kind of afterlife,” however, as Stefan Collini noted, “is naturally short” (Collini 1991: 246), and Mill’s name and books were invoked far less often than his friend predicted. The simplest interpretation of this relative absence is the standard linear narrative that Mill’s reputation “fell rapidly from his death” in 1873 (Skorupski 1998: 2–3). This had its earliest airing in a letter from Henry Sidgwick to C.H. Pearson barely a week after Mill’s passing, (Collini 1991: 178) and was an established trope by 1879 when *The Examiner* blithely asserted “the sudden collapse of Mill’s influence” was an inevitable consequence of the rise of evolutionism, compounded by the “self-inflicted” blows of Mill’s *Autobiography* (1873) and his *Three Essays on Religion* (1874) (*The Examiner*, Apr 26, 1879). It remained the dominant interpretation at the time of the 2006 bicentennial celebrations (Varouxakis and Kelly 2010).

Far from demonstrating Mill’s clear and comprehensive decline, however, a review of the late-1870s newspaper press reveals a more complex and variegated set of attitudes. Fox Bourne was not alone in looking to Mill as a guide (*Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post*,

Nov 21, 1877) and many continued to revere Mill as “the greatest logician since the days of ARISTOTLE” (*Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, Jan 23, 1877). It should also be noted that those keenest on talking Mill down often justified the intemperance of their assaults with the complaint that for “the public at large, Mill’s works still undoubtedly remain as the standard of accurate thinking, and the most esteemed repertory of philosophy” (Jevons 1877: 169). Mill, that is, remained irritatingly influential, and assertions of his rapid fall into irrelevance should be treated, in part at least, as an expression of a desire to render him so, rather than as indisputable evidence of an established fact. Even in death Mill remained a highly politicized figure, and glib proclamations of his decline usually worked to the speaker’s benefit.

In the late-nineteenth century, the rapid decline narrative served not only Mill’s political enemies, keen to eradicate his influence, but also a new breed of liberals like Sidgwick, who wished to emphasize how they had moved on from their mid-Victorian forebears. For historians the tale of Mill’s plunge into irrelevance once accorded with the now increasingly suspect narrative of a “Darwinian revolution,” in which pre-evolutionary thought was rapidly usurped. More recently it has served to honor Mill as a misunderstood modern – a sort of celibate Oscar Wilde – cast aside because of his “untimely moral and social opinions,” which make him more like us precisely because he “cut against the grain of conventional Victorian mores” (Varouxakis and Kelly 2010: 2–3).

A reading of the newspaper press in the years following Mill’s death, however, reveals neither a rapid decline nor the martyrdom of a modern, but a subtler sidelining of Mill. Newspapers, of course, in common with all other primary sources have their limitations: most obviously they are not the best place to find detailed critiques of Mill the moral philosopher. But a study of the newspaper press in the years after his death is revealing. What they show is rather than there being an outright rejection of Mill, based on his supposed anti-evolutionism, a more complex process occurred: there was a decisive narrowing of Mill’s range and breadth of appeal, which is largely traceable to an intensification of Mill’s identification with the cause of religious infidelity. I have discussed elsewhere Mill’s reputation in the period between his death and the appearance of his *Autobiography* (Stack 2011); in this chapter I extend that discussion to the further fracturing of Mill’s reputation that occurred between the publication of his *Three Essays on Religion* (1874) and his final posthumous work, *Chapters on Socialism*, in 1879.

1. Immortalizing Mill

In the summer of 1879 the provincial press noted the forthcoming publication of *The Next World*, a collection of essays and papers from those dwelling in the spirit realm. The clairvoyant, Mrs. Susan Horn had, it was claimed, been in communication with a diverse set of illustrious names on “the other side,” including: Prince Albert, Titian, Thomas de Quincey, Herodotus and, perhaps most surprisingly, John Stuart Mill (*Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 24 Jun 1879). Mill had not been among those originally “invited” to contribute to the book but one evening, during a group sitting in her study, Horn had fallen into a trance and Mill, quite unbidden, “spoke with earnestness”

through the medium. His posthumous peroration dwelt upon the burden of materialism he had carried in his lifetime and “the weight” that was “taken from my heart” by the discovery of immortality in the “World of Spirits.” Mill rounded off this religious recantation with a word of reassurance to “the poor and honest peasantry of England” who, he claimed, “have here better homes and more honorable positions, than those who would oppress and subjugate them” (Horn 1890: 31–3). Mercifully for his admirers this was not Mill’s only activity in his afterlife.

Mill’s spiritual apparition in Horn’s study had been preceded in January 1878 by his physical manifestation on the banks of the Thames. The proposal for a statue had been made in the immediate wake of Mill’s death, but it was almost five years later that a group of devotees, led by Henry Fawcett, gathered on the Embankment to unveil a bronze of Mill rising from a garden-seat, a closed book in one-hand, a newspaper fallen at his feet, in “a striking likeness” of Mill in the House of Commons (*Daily News*, Jan 28, 1878; *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, Jan 28, 1878). The unexpected death of the first commissioned sculptor John Henry Foley in August 1874 (Read 1982: 72–5), and the perfectionism of his Pre-Raphaelite replacement Thomas Woolner – who insisted on starting again from scratch (*The Standard*, Nov 16, 1877) – explain the delay. More time was then lost securing the agreement of the Metropolitan Board of Works for a site – the location, in what is now Temple Gardens, was chosen by Woolner himself, to the dismay of at least one newspaper (*Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, Jan 28, 1878) – and then in finalizing the details of the unveiling (*Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, Nov 7, 1877).

One consequence was that by the time Fawcett led the tributes it was impossible to ignore the fact that Mill was “under a cloud of unpopularity.” It was, Fawcett noted, “the fashion at the present time” for lesser men to boost their own reputation with “a series of carping and petty criticisms” of Mill’s work. “I have heard it said by one of these men,” Fawcett continued, “that one of the greatest services which the political economists of the present day can render is to do all they can destroy the influence of John Stuart Mill” (*Pall Mall Gazette*, Jan 26, 1878). The target of these remarks was William Stanley Jevons, who had joined the gaggle of Mill admirers, despite having just published the first installment of a four-part critique of what he called Mill’s “essentially illogical” philosophy in the previous month’s *Contemporary Review* (Jevons 1877: 169). Jevons was unique among critics in braving the cold wind off the Thames that January morning, and an even frostier reception from Mill’s friends. Criticism of Mill, however, was far from unusual, and Jevons’s assault is a particularly good example of how questions about Mill’s character and non-belief were entwined in assessments of his thought and writings.

Despite his declared ambition to “destroy” Mill’s influence in the field, it was not his political economy per se that most troubled Jevons. Critical though Jevons had already been of Mill in his *Theory of Political Economy* (1871), there was nothing in the pages of that book to match the ferocity of Jevons’s assault upon Mill’s logic in the *Contemporary Review* seven years later. Indeed, in his unpublished papers Jevons was relatively forgiving of Mill as a political economist: “his errors are those of previous economists.” It was Mill’s character, especially his “tendency to bad logic,” rather than his conclusions that Jevons found unforgivable. Mill’s maneuverings on the question of the “wages fund,” for example, were evidence of an intellectual capriciousness: “he no sooner feels

a difficulty than he takes up a new position adapted to meet it,” regardless of the fact that he is already “committed to various positions logically inconsistent with his new view.” Thus even though Jevons agreed with Mill’s revised position that “the wages fund is doubtless wrong,” he accused him of being “over-persuaded” by W.T. Thornton’s criticisms, and damned him for lacking “good reasoning.” In Jevons’ judgment this was far more fundamental than whether or not Mill was right or wrong on any individual issue (Jevons Papers, JA6/6/14).

This is an important distinction because political economy is the area where the narrative of Mill’s precipitous fall appears most convincing. It is undeniable that the late 1870s witnessed “a widespread revolt against the ascendancy possessed a few years ago by Ricardo, and Cairnes, and Mill” (*The Examiner*, Apr 20, 1878). What is less clear cut, and has sometimes perplexed historians of economic thought, is why legitimate criticism frequently spilt over into what his friends described as “promiscuous snarling” and a “wearisomely tedious and hypercritical” approach, as Jevons and others accentuated differences that might have been attenuated (*The Leeds Mercury*, May 22, 1878, e.g., Schabas 1990: 106–9). Jevons was not alone in playing the man rather than the ball, and the reason lies beyond anything Mill wrote in political economy.

Mill had been identified with freethinking in life, but in death the association was intensified. There was, said *The Western Mail*, one shared feature uniting those who gathered for the 1878 statue unveiling: Fawcett, Dilke, Goldwin Smith, Heywood, Harrison, Lecky, Spencer, Stanfeld, Tyndall, Huxley, and Cobbe “form a phalanx of various schools of disbelief which it would be hard to parallel at any other gathering.” Mill’s skepticism, the paper suggested, “formed, doubtless, his chief attraction to some of those who gathered around his statue” and it was striking that “not even one Radical Nonconformist was willing to take part in the ceremony” (*Western Mail*, Jan 29, 1878). Even more indicative was an “odd and amusing incident,” reported in a number of newspapers a few days later when “a very serious and zealous looking Christian” was observed approaching the pedestal and launching into an angry tirade, declaiming: “There’s the fool! There’s the fool! The fool hath said in his heart there is no God!” before asking why “a Christian generation did not pull the effigy down” (*Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, Feb 2, 1878; *Ipswich Journal*, Feb 5, 1878).

This is precisely what Jevons and others were attempting to do, intellectually. Here, besides Mill’s statue, played out in microcosm, was Mill’s fate in the half-decade after his death. When “a studious-looking foreigner” attempted to calm the excitable Christian by remarking: “If you go on this way they won’t erect a monument to you,” his efforts were undermined by a “more polemical Englishman” who goaded Mill’s assailant with a sarcastic question: “I suppose this is a specimen of your Christian charity?” (*Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, Feb 2, 1878; *Ipswich Journal*, Feb 5, 1878). This polarization of religious opinion around Mill owed something to the publication of his *Autobiography*, with its unapologetic depiction of his father’s atheism and his own godless childhood (*The Hull Packet*, Feb 13, 1874; *Bradford Observer*, Mar 10, 1874; *York Herald*, Mar 26, 1874). But for Jevons and others the true extent of Mill’s intellectual shortcomings was only fully revealed in the posthumous *Three Essays on Religion*, which “received a far more searching and hostile criticism than any of his other writings” and finally exposed the “inherent defects in [Mill’s] intellectual character” (Jevons Papers, JA6/6/14).

2. Religious Controversy

From our perspective, the significance accorded the *Essays* can be difficult to understand. The book after all was a collection of unfinished manuscripts written over many years and lacking the originality and élan of Mill's best writings. To dismiss the *Essays*, however, would be to underestimate the expectation with which they were anticipated, and the fervid theological context into which they were launched: "Probably no work Mr Mill issued during his lifetime has been looked forward to with such widespread interest," commented the *Manchester Guardian* (reprinted in *The Morning Post*, Oct 20, 1874). Speculation about the existence, and content, of the *Essays* had begun almost immediately after Mill's death and as the countdown to publication began in earnest in the autumn of 1874 rumors about their contents were rife. According to *The Examiner*, the publication was "waited for with the greatest curiosity and impatience" (*The Examiner*, Oct 24, 1874). For *The Times* the announcement that Mill had "left his private, deliberate, and testamentary thoughts on such matters as religion, nature, and revelation" offered "a promise of something only short of a revelation itself, something we are bound to take into account and cannot but listen to" (quoted in *The Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, Oct 22, 1874). Mill's publisher further stoked the anticipation by issuing advanced copies to the press (*York Herald*, Oct 20, 1874), but the *Essays* themselves did nothing to advance Mill's reputation (Sell 1997).

The first extracts led the *Telegraph* to remark "that a sadder book has not been published for many a day," while the *Dundee Courier* was sure it would do:

immense injury to his reputation in the eyes of the public, and even the critical few will deny that the frequent crudeness of its reasonings is worthy of his intellect. (*Dundee Courier and Argus*, Oct 21, 1874)

The *Manchester Guardian* thought it bound to "still further diminish his influence," with both "the public and with his own disciples": "for it exemplifies in a bolder and more pronounced form the tendencies which gave offence in the autobiography" (reprinted in *The Morning Post*, Oct 20, 1874). The flurry of articles on, and summaries of, the *Three Essays*, which glutted the daily press in the latter part of 1874, soon gave way to lengthier treatments in the periodicals and a surprisingly large number of "popular" lectures usually, although not exclusively, by clergymen, which, as with Jevons' approach to Mill's political economy, focused less on Mill's arguments and more on what they "revealed" about his character (see, for example, *The Ipswich Journal*, Dec 9, 1876, and *The York Herald*, Mar 28, 1877). We will return to this point later; for the moment, we need to note that the *Three Essays* achieved the considerable feat of satisfying nobody – friend or foe.

Prior to publication the *Manchester Examiner* was reporting that "several prominent members of the Utilitarian party," who had seen the essays passing through the press, "have been speaking of their contents in a slighting tone" (quoted in *Birmingham Daily Post*, Jun 5, 1874). The accuracy of this rumor was confirmed, months later, by John Morley's critical appraisal in the *Fortnightly Review*. *The Examiner* defended Mill by arguing that Morley had misunderstood his master's point, (*The Examiner*, Jan 9, 1875) but even in this newspaper a thoughtful review by William Minto took Mill gently to

task. Minto complained that the book had a misleading title – they would have been more accurately presented as “Essays on Morality and Religion” – and that Mill’s critique in the essay on “Nature” was “unanswerable” only if one assumed a “rigid” definition, when in fact “nature” is more usually “a word used in a loose popular way” (*The Examiner*, Oct 24, 1874). Where Minto was himself unusual was in wanting to seriously engage with what Mill had written. For most reaction to the *Essays* was determined not by what Mill wrote so much as when they were published and, in particular, the turbulence created by John Tyndall’s Belfast Address of August 1874.

Historians have long recognized Tyndall’s speech at the British Association for the Advancement of Science as a key moment in crystallizing a conservative reaction against religious unbelief. But few have made a connection between this context and the ferocious treatment meted out to Mill’s (in many ways) anodyne essays. According to Bernard Lightman, a series of events – the 1867 Second Reform Act, the 1870 Education Act, publication of *The Descent of Man* (1871), the unification of Germany, and the Paris Commune – led “defenders of the faith” to feel “as though they were under siege and Tyndall offered them an irresistible target which enabled them to go on the offensive” (Lightman 2004: 202). Non-belief was no longer to be accepted as a discrete failing, and the middle ground of rational but moral non-belief, which Mill had sought to map in the *Three Essays*, was rendered a friendless no man’s land. A small band of liberal clergy, usually Unitarians, who attempted to hold the line that Mill was “almost Christian” persisted, but theirs was very much a minority position (*Nottinghamshire Guardian*, Oct 23, 1874; *The Graphic*, Jan 2, 1875; *Pall Mall Gazette*, May 7, 1878). New battle lines had been drawn and the context, rather than the content, of the *Three Essays*, stranded Mill on the side of Tyndall. This had an element of irony, given that in the Belfast Address Tyndall had explicitly sought to distance himself from Mill, comparing him unfavorably to Herbert Spencer (to the chagrin of *The Examiner*, Aug 22, 1874), but the overwhelming interpretation of the *Essays* was that they confirmed what the *Autobiography* had established:

that the universe of this philosopher was a universe without a God, that for him death meant final extinction, that for him the future had no hope and immortality no meaning. (*Freeman’s Journal*, Oct 21, 1874)

Mill, that is, was made an embodiment of infidelity, to be referred to thereafter in the same breadth, as Strauss, Renan, Tyndall, Huxley, and other proponents of “rank atheism” (*Liverpool Mercury*, Jul 7, 1875).

3. The Character Question

Accusations of atheism, infidelity, and freethinking, which came to define Mill in death, ran deeper than a pejorative judgment on his theology; they entailed a wholesale damning of his moral worth. It is here, in assessments of Mill’s character – that quintessential but nebulous Victorian term – that we find the key to his posthumous reputation. Measured considerations were thin on the ground: for Mill’s friends there was a plaintive concern, as Fawcett put it, that memories of his “charm and simplicity of character” would be

lost as Mill's contemporaries passed away (*Pall Mall Gazette*, Jan 26, 1878). For his enemies, as the *Newcastle Courant* noted, it was simpler "to attrach [sic] odium to his name through a fault in his life than to dispute with his philosophy" (*Newcastle Courant*, Jan 2, 1874). This maneuver, of course, had been presaged in Abraham Hayward's impugning *Times* obituary (May 10, 1873), but it is interesting to note that Hayward's two most vicious allegations – the insinuation of adultery and the claims of pro-birth control activities – did not echo through Mill's afterlife.

A polite passing over of an unprovable suspicion of adultery is less surprising than the fact that the birth control allegation, which flared so spectacularly in May 1873, was barely broached thereafter. Mill's name continued to be invoked in discussions of population, and he continued to be regarded as one who favored population restriction. But, as in the *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), the question of *how* Mill intended for this to be achieved was left gloriously undefined. Thus William Farr's 1877 address on population to Section F (Economic Science and Statistics) of the British Association referred rather imprecisely to "the policy which had been advocated by Malthus, John Stuart Mill, Dr Drysdale, and practiced by the French peasant" (*Standard*, Aug 21, 1877). But this "policy" was anything but singular: Malthus was an advocate of "moral restraint"; Drysdale, contraception; while the French peasantry practiced *coitus interruptus*. Which of these Mill favored was not considered, and we should be wary of assuming this was necessarily because it was somehow known that Mill favored the use of contraception. If that was the case, we need to explain why Mill and birth control was "the dog that didn't bark" during the 1877 Bradlaugh–Besant trial.

The trial of the secularists campaigners Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant on a charge of obscenity for publishing a pro-birth control pamphlet might well have provided an occasion for a resurfacing in the press of the unsubstantiated story of a seventeen-year-old Mill's arrest for distributing birth control literature. Not only had Mill's association with Bradlaugh been firmly established, to Mill's detriment, during the 1868 general election campaign, but also both defendants quoted freely from Mill's *Principles*. Yet neither Mill's many enemies in the press nor Bradlaugh and Besant made any direct claim that Mill favored contraception. Mill was cited exclusively in his sober guise as a political economist, rather than as a birth control activist (Chandrasekhar 1981; Peart and Levy 2008).

It was only in the 1878 coda to the trial, in which Besant's daughter Mabel was removed from her mother on the grounds of Besant's unsuitability for conducting Mabel's education (Fix Anderson 1997), that Mill's name was used more controversially. Tellingly, however, this was not as a birth controller or even as a philosopher, but as the fellow child of an atheist. The Master of the Rolls justified Mabel's removal on the grounds that Besant would raise her daughter without religion. This was a judgment that provoked both *The Times* and a correspondent to *Reynolds's Newspaper*, writing under the pseudonym "An Old Workman," to note that Besant was educating her daughter on "similar lines" as James Mill had raised his son, and yet no one would have thought of taking the young Mill from that "serene old pagan" (*The Times*, May 20, 1878; *Reynold's Newspaper*, May 26, 1878).

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of these citations is that they barely touched upon Mill's philosophy and thought. Where the author of *On Liberty* might have been

invoked either as an advocate of individual freedom or as a proponent of the state's role in a child's education he appeared only as his father's son. Even when the discussion touched on questions of parental rights and the duty of the state to guarantee a child's welfare, which echoed in tone, though not in prescription, the frequently neglected interventionist sections in *On Liberty* (see Claey's 2014: 173–210), no mention of Mill's writings was made (*The Examiner*, May 11, 1878, *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, May 22, 1878). Instead the case fed the ongoing fascination with Mill's childhood – or at least a caricatured version of that childhood – that was, in great part, traceable to his own unfortunate depiction of it in his *Autobiography*, and which showed no sign of abating.

If anything the image of Mill as a prodigy became ever more deeply embedded, even among those who had not read the *Autobiography*. The resultant estimate of Mill was rarely favorable. In an article on "Macaulay as a Child" *The Hampshire Advertiser* contrasted the infant historian, "a quaint little piece of precocity," with "a little monster like John Stuart Mill" (*The Hampshire Advertiser*, May 6, 1876). The interesting thing here is not so much the relative estimate as the fact that Mill was gratuitously introduced into a discussion of Macaulay's childhood. *The Examiner* was similarly wanton two years later when describing a market place in which a "beggar child" watched drunken men reel past her:

But does she think of it all, one would like to know? Well, she is four years old, as we have said: only John Stuart Mill had learned to think at that age; and it is probable her education has not received the same attention. (*The Examiner*, Jan 5, 1878)

Of course, as the Macaulay comment makes clear, Mill's infant abilities were not unique, but *The Examiner's* comment is representative of an increasing tendency to cast Mill as *the* child prodigy, rather than one among many. In a broad sense this chimes with the wider phenomenon of the late-Victorian invention of childhood, which accompanied the 1870 introduction of compulsory schooling. More proximately, interest in Mill's childhood received a further boost from Alexander Bain's decision to present his work in progress for his planned biography with an article in *Mind* in 1879, extracts from which found their way into the press. Bain found the youthful Mill to be a "marvelous boy," who possessed "a combination of cerebral activity and constitutional vigor that is as rare as genius" and, when it came to logic, Bain said, he had "never known a similar case of precocity" (*Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, Apr 16, 1879).

Both Mill's religious infidelity and depictions of his precocity fed into a broader narrative of his idiosyncrasy, and an overwhelming sense that Mill was "exceptional." This was a judgment accepted, to a certain extent, by his friends as well as his enemies. Mill's assertion of the entirely Platonic nature of his pre-marriage relationship with Harriet Taylor was accepted, in the main, because Mill was deemed not to be like other men. This could be presented as a virtue, as when Fawcett praised Mill's "gentleness and tenderness" (*Pall Mall Gazette*, Jan 26, 1878), but it also left him open to a charge of otherworldliness that even those who were sympathetic could not always deny. Thus Bain thought Mill ill-equipped to comment upon matters of the flesh, while Harriet Martineau complained that Mill "was deplorably weak in judgment, with the weakness, so damning to a man, of being as impressionable as a woman" (Bain 1882: 90;

Martineau 1877: 505). Mill's alleged femininity and otherworldliness, found its fullest expression in the politically damaging form of an accusation of impracticality (*Berrow's Worcester Journal*, Nov 6, 1875).

By 1878 it had become the fashion, Fawcett complained at the statue unveiling, "to speak of Mr. Mill as a theorist, and to say that he was not a practical man" (*Pall Mall Gazette*, Jan 26, 1878). The key justification was Mill's parliamentary career, which was "generally considered to have been a failure" (*Freemans Journal*, Nov 15, 1877). The claim that he had "failed in Parliament" (*The Standard*, Jun 28, 1879), "never made any real mark upon Parliament" (*Leeds Mercury*, Apr 5, 1879) or, even more bluntly, was "'a notorious failure in the House of Commons" (*Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, Dec 9, 1879), was repeated ad nauseum. Mill's defeat by W.H. Smith at Westminster in 1868 was viewed as the triumph of "the practical man taking the place of the ideal and theoretical" (*Dundee Courier and Argus*, May 6, 1878), and Mill himself was seen as "more of a philosopher than a statesman; which is only saying, in other words, that he was better able to propound what is desirable, than to devise what is practicable" (*Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, Oct 16, 1879). So established was this image of impracticality that, as with the child prodigy references, Mill's name was introduced to discussions of impracticality that had no direct connection to him (*Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, Mar 8, 1879). Again Mill's *Autobiography*, with its presentation of reading as the constitutive act in the construction of the self (Plotz 2010) fueled the fire. "It seems to be the fashion in certain quarters," Fawcett noted, "that if a man reads anything at all he is supposed to be a theorist and not a practical man" (*Pall Mall Gazette*, Jan 26, 1878). But there were also other factors at play.

What might have been considered the most "practical" aspects of Mill's politics had dated badly. The administrator of East India House had been lost from view with the demise of the East India Company and the rapid change in Britain's relationship with India that followed the 1857 rebellion. Fawcett's attempt to revive memories of Mill the Company man at the 1878 statue unveiling could barely have been worse timed so soon after Disraeli had made Victoria Empress of India. In the age of the "new imperialism" few were in the mood to reminisce about the good old days of the East India Company. Mill's brief parliamentary career was similarly untimely; he was too late to succeed as an independent MP. This had less to do with his philosophical disposition than the changing nature of parliamentary politics that made it nigh-on impossible for any non-party politician to shine (Taylor 1995).

Mill's critics, of course, were not interested in mitigation or contextual assessment. There was a Burkean subtext to the allegation of impracticality. Just as Mill being a "miserable dry stick" was presented as both a consequence and a condemnation of his life without Christianity (Sir William Worsley quoted in *The York Herald*, Oct 31, 1879; cf. *Liverpool Mercury*, Sep 25, 1877), the charge of "impracticality" was an implicit judgment on Mill's radical politics. He had not been forgiven for his description of the Conservatives as "the stupid party," but the epithet was increasingly worn as a badge of honor in the press of the second half of the 1870s (*Jackson's Oxford Journal*, Nov 22, 1879). For many Tories, what Mill called "stupid" was actually the virtue of expediency and what was truly "stupid" was to try to govern according to a theory (*Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, Sep 4 and 11, 1879). Mill's alleged "impracticality," that is, was only another name for his radicalism.

4. Politics

Far from being *persona non grata*, Mill's name continued to be mentioned in a diverse range of political contexts: from recognition of the Spanish Republic in 1874, to the Brazilian financial crisis, and the treatment of lower animals (*The Examiner*, Feb 21, 1874, Oct 10, 1874). But instances of anything approaching sustained engagement with Mill's thought in straightforwardly political debates were rare. On one occasion when a Gladstone speech introduced Mill's name into a discussion of the future of liberalism (*Leeds Mercury*, Jun 2, 1877) the loudest reaction was a howl of outrage at Mill's "calmly predicated Atheism," which was judged "more dangerous and more unbecoming than the abominable ravings of a profane and unbelieving Radical and Red Republican" (*Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, Jun 13, Oct 31, Nov 21, 1877).

Attempting to find meaningful political debate in the daily press is, perhaps, a category error, and to some extent we must accept that the topics with which Mill was closely associated in life were often too outré for mainstream press. Even with these caveats, however, it is striking how infrequently Mill's name was invoked in relation to, for example, women's suffrage. In March 1874 the Birmingham branch of the Women's Suffrage Society expressed "the deep loss they had sustained in the death of Mr. John Stuart Mill, whose lifelong advocacy of the cause had entitled him to the gratitude of all women" (*Birmingham Daily Post*, Mar 24, 1874). Thereafter, one finds only scattered references. For example, Thomas Hare declaring in 1875 that the London branch of the National Society for Women's Suffrage remained true to Mill's principles; or *the Belfast News-Letter* reporting the claim of a Miss Caroline Biggs that women's suffrage, which had once been "a chimera of [Mill] the philosopher," had become a realistic ambition of the statesman (*Belfast News-Letter*, Mar 19, 1878).

Of more immediate impact were sporadic citations of Mill's support for trade unions, taken from the pages of his *Principles* (*The Wrexham Advertiser*, etc., Jul 11, 1874). These received a further posthumous boost in 1878 when a letter Mill had sent in 1868, discussing the justice and efficacy of trade unions, resurfaced and was published in a number of newspapers (e.g., *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, Mar 22, 1879). There is a degree of uncertainty over how Mill would have regarded his association with trade unionism. What we can be sure of is that he would have been unhappy with his rather unlikely invocation as a posthumous proponent of protectionism.

The year 1879 saw a flurry of support for the principle of reciprocity in trade, which was little more than protectionism by another name. What was particularly galling for free traders, as *The Examiner* noted, was that claims for reciprocity were frequently backed "by an isolated expression of the late Mr. John Stuart Mill" (Jan 25, 1879). From George Bentinck down, the speeches of Conservative protectionists were peppered with references to Mill's argument for protecting infant industries and responding in kind to those who taxed English imports (*Leeds Mercury*, Jul 5, 1879; *Bury and Norwich Post and Suffolk Herald*, ul 8, 1879). As with interpretations of the *Three Essays*, context was all: Mill's mitigations of the principle of free trade, which had seemed moderate in an era when the triumph of unfettered commerce appeared assured, were distinctly less reassuring in the midst of the 1870s Great Depression, when protectionism – in the guise of "reciprocal trade" – was back on the agenda (see Letters to Henry Soden, May 2, 1865,

and Frederick Milnes Edge, Feb 26, 1866, XVI: 1043–4, 1150–1). In other areas too, the changing political terrain was rendering Mill's statements in life outdated.

Despite Mill's rapid radicalization as a land reformer towards the end of his life, it was only in Ireland that Mill's name became central to the land agitation (Martin 1982). Michael Davitt's speech to the monster Land League meeting at Gurteen, for which he was arrested and charged with sedition in November 1879, repeated two pages from Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* verbatim (*The Leeds Mercury*, Dec 1, 1879). In December 1879 his co-accused, James Boyce Killeen, referred to "that eminent Englishman, John Stuart Mill, whose works he hoped every Irishman would read" (*The Standard*, Dec 15, 1879). On the mainland, however, Mill's name carried far less cachet. The fate of his Land Tenure Reform Association is unclear. A move to wind it up in 1874 was "indignantly rejected as a slight to the memory of John Stuart Mill," but this did not prevent P.A. Taylor, MP, resigning as treasurer, and the "new lease of life" the Association's supporters predicted was not realized (*Leicester Chronicle and Leicester Mercury*, Jun 27, 1874). One reason was that the land question developed so quickly in the 1870s and Mill's proposals for free trade in land, which were radical in the early 1870s, appeared parsimoniously passé by the end of the decade. Where Mill had hesitated to go the whole hog toward to land nationalization, his stepdaughter Helen Taylor soon mutated into one of its most outspoken advocates.

5. Helen Taylor and the *Chapters on Socialism*

Taylor is rarely more than a shadow in most accounts of Mill's life, but she played a central role in framing his posthumous reputation. She was his named executor – charged with editing and arranging the publication of his *Autobiography*, *Three Essays*, and *Chapters on Socialism* – and was also taken by many, including Mill's old comrade-in-arms, John Roebuck, as the living embodiment of his political spirit (*Lloyds's Weekly Newspaper*, Jan 21, 1877). Indeed, so closely were the two identified in Roebuck's mind, he declared his readiness "to stand on his head" if she had asked him, "out of respect for the memory of Mr. Mill" (*Daily News*, May 18, 1877). Few went this far but it is interesting to note that admiration of Mill's "clever step-daughter" (*Aberdeen Free Press*) was widespread. In the press she was praised as "a highly intelligent and accomplished lady" (*Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, Jan 23, 1877) who had imbibed Mill's "style and ways of thinking," (*Freeman's Journal*, Aug 22, 1878) and was "his earnest disciple and the inheritor of his large-minded principles" (*Reynolds's Newspaper*, Nov 23, 1879). Ironically, given that Mill was often condemned for his femininity, Taylor was praised for her masculinity (*Newcastle Courant*, Jan 26, 1877). During her candidacy for the London School Board in 1877, one newspaper lauded a Taylor speech as "masculine in both thought and expression," while her proposed "candidacy" for a parliamentary election led another to praise her as "at heart ... only half a woman" (*Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, Jan 23, 1877).

Besides incarnating his political principles, Taylor also inherited Mill's material possessions. Particularly problematic was the private herbarium of over 12,000 specimens that he had gathered over decades of botanizing across Europe. Taylor – who in the 1860s had aided him on some of his trips – determined that Mill would have wanted his

specimens “disposed of in any way that might be most useful,” and thus offered Joseph Hooker, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, the chance to select “such specimens as you would like to have either for your own private or for any public collection” (Helen Taylor to Joseph Hooker, Sep 27, 1873, Herbarium Presentations to 1900, Kew Royal Botanic Gardens Archives). As a result, the herbarium was split: Hooker picked out what he wanted for Kew, and suggested that many of the other specimens be sent to Darwin’s US-ally Asa Gray at Harvard University (Helen Taylor to Joseph Hooker, Mar 20, 1875, English Letters, Kew Royal Botanic Gardens Archives). Taylor happily complied and Gray, in turn, forwarded 2000 of Mill’s specimens to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (The Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences to Asa Gray, Apr 3, 1878, Herbarium Presentations to 1900, Kew Royal Botanic Gardens Archives). Finally, at Taylor’s request, a portion of Mill’s collection was sent to the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne. The Director, Ferdinand von Mueller, was effusive in his thanks, declaring “the unexpected gift of one of the three portions of Mr. J. Mill’s collection, [...] one of the triumphs of my life” (Ferdinand Mueller to Joseph Hooker, Sep 23, 1876, Kew Royal Botanic Gardens Archives).

In the long term, however, splitting the collection probably contributed to the relative neglect of Mill’s botany by historians. Indeed, judging from the late-1870s press, Mill’s reputation as “a great pedestrian and botanist” (*The Examiner*, Mar 9, 1878) faded from public consciousness quite quickly. A humorous indication of this can be seen in the great fun a number of newspapers had with a story concerning the “John Stuart Mill” rose. The story, which had first appeared in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, concerned a “curate in the north” who had read a paragraph on “the Names of Flowers” in a local journal, and reached the erroneous conclusion that the three roses referred to – including the John Stuart Mill rose – were not real plants at all but an elaborate libel upon his fiancée, himself, and his father-in-law (*Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, Nov 14, 1878; *Manchester Times*, Feb 8, 1879). The rose itself divided opinion along familiar lines. For Mill’s admirers it was “a graceful tribute to the great thinker,” (*The Standard*, Apr 19, 1877); for his detractors it was an opportunity to attack his already traduced character. *The York Herald*, for example, took exception to a nurseryman who described the John Stuart Mill as: “Bright clear red, large, full, and beautiful form, of great substance; well adapted for exhibition purposes, being also of strong constitution and free habit. Quite distinct.” Except for the last two words, the paper commented dryly, “nothing could be more inappropriate than this” (*York Herald*, Jun 9, 1875).

For his friends Mill’s botanical passion was proof that “the hard and abstract studies of his life never destroyed the gentler and artistic element in his character” (*The Examiner*, Jun 8, 1878), and thus the fading memory of Mill the botanist contributed to narrowing perceptions. A more direct threat to his reputation, however, came from Mill’s apparent neglect of evolutionary thought. Taylor, in her introduction to the *Three Essays*, was sufficiently sensitive to the problem to apologize for “the absence of any mention of the works of Mr. Darwin” (X: 371). In doing so she deftly claimed an affinity and “coincidence of thought” between Mill and Darwin, especially in their shared Malthusian image of nature. Unfortunately, this common ground related to precisely that part of Darwinian theory – the rejection of providentialism – that was least popular, and which encouraged Mill’s opponents to identify a “common bond of union” between