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Thought Imitates Life:  
The Case of John Stuart Mill

By

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## **Declaration**

This essay draws on and occasionally replicates work carried out in preparation of the main work, *Victorian Firebrand*. None of the material presented in the main work or in this essay has been submitted previously for examination.

## Abstract

In this essay, I relate material in the original published work – *John Stuart Mill – Victorian Firebrand* (Atlantic Books, 2007) to the claim that the central features of Mill's thought can be seen more clearly through a biographical lens. The original contribution of the main work lies in the excavation and application of biographical material to the development of Mill's philosophy.

The poor development of Mill's utilitarianism results in part from a lack of personal investment and aspiration. Mill's motivation was to atone for earlier, premature assaults on Jeremy Bentham's philosophy - rather than to develop it further. As a consequence, his mature utilitarianism is hard to integrate with his liberalism, which was where his primary interest lay.

Elements of Mill's liberalism also bear a biographical imprint. The central emphasis on self-creation in Mill's liberal ethic results, in part, from his own 'crisis' and subsequent departure from the rationalist utilitarianism of his father and Bentham. Similarly, Mill's focus on individuality stemmed in part from a concern to demonstrate he was not, himself, a 'made man'. Open-mindedness became a central liberal virtue, for Mill, following his criticism of Bentham's (and his father's) narrowness of thought. Character was also

essential to liberty, since only those of strong character could create themselves and express their individuality, rather than succumbing to custom.

Mill's partner and later wife, Harriet Taylor Mill, had an influence on Mill's thought. The experience of gossip and ostracism, in the years before their marriage, strengthened Mill's opposition to the 'despotism of custom'. More substantively, Harriet's views on socialism, the ballot and feminism clearly influenced Mill's own treatment. Without Harriet, he would have been a less committed socialist and feminist – and would have remained a supporter of the right to vote in secret.

## 1. Introduction: the biographical approach

Mill's ideas bear a strong imprint of the personal and political circumstances of his life. To understand Mill, and his contribution, his life and work must be viewed together. Mill was an intensely autobiographical thinker: for him, the political and personal were inseparable.<sup>1</sup>

In this essay, I set out to defend this claim, with particular reference to the development of Mill's utilitarianism and liberalism.<sup>2</sup> That there is a considerable degree of tension between the two is hardly news. To this day, the degree to which the Mill of *On Liberty* and the Mill of *Utilitarianism* can be reconciled is hotly debated.<sup>3</sup>

My own view is that the subtleties of Mill's argument bring the two strands closer together than they appear at first glance, but in the end, not close enough for reconciliation. Mill's liberalism crowds out his utilitarianism, or at least forces it into a space outside mainstream utilitarian thinking. Mill was a weak utilitarian, because he was a good liberal.

In addition, I provide evidence for the influence of Harriet Taylor Mill on his work, in particular in the development of his socialism and feminism and certain aspects of his political theory. In the main work, I supply fresh materials in the form of biographical connections.

One argument in favour of this approach is that Mill himself frequently saw a strong link between his life and his work. Despite his austere reputation, Mill was an unusually self-reflexive thinker, conscious that his ideas were being motivated and moulded by his own life, and by his developing perception of his own biography.

It is no accident that Mill wrote an *Autobiography*, or that this has become one of his most celebrated works. Part of his motivation for this work was to manage his own posthumous reputation, not least with regard to the delicate matter of his relationship with Mrs Harriet Taylor. But Mill also fleshed out the links between his own development, and the development of his ideas. Most vividly, in the chapter titled 'The Crisis in My Mental History' Mill described how the depression that afflicted him in 1826 and 1827 altered his thinking, in ways that would have profound and lasting implications for his attempts to reframe utilitarianism, and the moral content of his liberalism.

First, from this point onwards, Mill would see happiness as a by-product of a well-lived life, rather than its object:

"I never, indeed, wavered in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life. But I now thought that this end was only to be attained by not making it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end...Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease

to be so. The only chance is to treat, not happiness, but some end external to it, as the purpose of life. Let your self-consciousness, your scrutiny, your self-interrogation, exhaust themselves on that; and if otherwise fortunately circumstanced you will inhale happiness with the air you breathe, without dwelling on it or thinking about it, without either forestalling it in imagination, or putting it to flight by fatal questioning. This theory now became the basis of my philosophy of life.”<sup>4</sup>

This reformulation would be expressed, with increasing clarity, in successive works by Mill, especially his reviews of Coleridge, Bentham and Whewell – and, finally, *Utilitarianism* itself.

Second, Mill’s liberalism would from this point onwards strongly emphasise the development of the character or ‘self-culture’ of the individual:

“The other important change which my opinions at this time underwent, was that I, for the first time, gave its proper place, among the prime necessities of human well-being, to the *internal culture* of the individual. I ceased to attach almost exclusive importance to the ordering of outward circumstances, and the training of the human being for speculation and for action...The maintenance of a due balance among the faculties now seemed to be of primary importance. The cultivation of the feelings became one of the cardinal points in my ethical and philosophical creed.”<sup>5</sup> [my emphasis]

One reason, then, to believe that biographical context will add to our understanding of the development and expression of Mill's ideas is that Mill himself, having 'learnt by experience', believed it.

This is not to say that Mill's ideas cannot or should not be examined purely on their philosophical merits, detached from biographical context. A bad or poorly-developed idea does not become better through a deeper appreciation of why it turned out that way. But it can help us to see when the strength or weakness of an idea is explicable less by reference to the philosophy, than to the philosopher.

As I argue below, Mill was dismissive of *Utilitarianism*, failing to develop or promote what is now one of his most famous works. His ambivalence about the work does not alter the work as it stands: but it does alter how we think about the place it occupied in Mill's moral universe. It is not a coincidence that *Utilitarianism* is the only work of any significance that Mill fails to treat in any detail in the *Autobiography*. More substantively, Mill failed to take opportunities to clarify and thereby strengthen his treatment – with lasting consequences.

Mill's abandonment of some of the central tenets of the 'creed' of utilitarianism, into which he had been baptised by his father, James Mill, and Jeremy Bentham, took place more quickly than his published works suggested - in part because of his fear of, and respect for, his father. By the time he published *Utilitarianism*, Mill had in fact moved on; his focus by this point was individual liberty, rather than individual happiness.

The character of Mill's liberalism was also shaped by his own perceptions of his early life. He was sensitive to criticism, from those such as Thomas Carlyle, that he was a 'manufactured man'. 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.'<sup>6</sup>

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'.<sup>7</sup>

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.

Both Mill's public rejection of the Benthamite version of utilitarianism and his embrace of a Humboldtian, developmental liberalism reflect his private journey.

Mill's liberalism evolved to accommodate both the importance of education and childhood for the development of character, as well as the need for individual responsibility and self-cultivation. He set great store by individual energy and self-creation, and freedom from 'cramped', pre-ordained opinions and roles. In *On Liberty*, Mill criticised 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'. 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.

Carlyle described the *Autobiography* (published after Mill's death) as 'the autobiography of a steam engine'<sup>8</sup>. Intentionally or not, Carlyle's attack was even more bitter than it first appears, given what Mill had written in *On Liberty*:

"One whose desires and impulses are not his own, has no character, no more than a steam-engine has a character".<sup>9</sup>

Mill's liberalism is founded on the belief that a good life is one lived 'from the inside', according to the values and beliefs generated through individual reflection, learning and experience. Of course we are all influenced by our surroundings: our parents, our peers, and the culture and institutions of the

society into which we are born. But we are only truly free when our 'desires and impulses' are our own: when we have our own character, rather than the character prescribed for us by others.

For Mill, whose own childhood was a long dose of utilitarianism, these are statements not only of philosophy, but biography, too.

## **2. Utilitarianism**

Mill's relationship with utilitarianism is obscure to this day. Scholars sometimes list Mill as a leading utilitarian, along with Bentham. On other occasions he is cast among the anti-utilitarianism liberals.

The confusion is understandable. Mill was both an ardent defender and devastating critic of utilitarian philosophy. His essay *Utilitarianism* was intended to save utilitarianism from an early intellectual grave, but was so poorly executed that it backfired. As the late Victorian philosopher Jevons succinctly put it: "Mill explains and defends his favourite doctrine with so much affection and so much candour that he finally explains himself into the opposite doctrine".<sup>10</sup> Alan Ryan points out that the essay has "become a classic through the efforts of its opponents rather than those of its friends".<sup>11</sup>

### 2.1 Motivation

To understand Mill's motivation in the writing of *Utilitarianism*, it is necessary to go back to the 1830s. During this period, in the aftermath of his 'mental

crisis', he was being strongly influenced by conservative elements in the thinking of Carlyle, Saint-Simon, Tocqueville and Coleridge. Mill himself knew that he was considered "a lost sheep who has strayed from the flock and been laid hold of by the wolves".<sup>12</sup>

In an 1834 letter to Carlyle, Mill accurately sketched the outlines of his later concern to provide a richer definition of happiness, gained only through autonomous self-development:

"I am still, & am likely to remain, a utilitarian; though not one of "the people called utilitarians"...nor a utilitarian at all, unless in quite another sense from what perhaps any one except myself understands by the word...You will see...with what an immense number & variety of explanations my utilitarianism must be taken...Though I hold the good of the species...to be the ultimate end (which is the alpha and omega of my utilitarianism) I believe with the fullest belief that this end can in no other way be forwarded but by the means you speak of, namely by each taking for his exclusive aim the developement [sic] of what is best in himself."<sup>13</sup>

Mill had in fact already written a fairly stinging critique of Bentham's thinking, for Bulwer's *England and the English*, published in 1833. He took particular aim at Bentham's insistence that private interest was the only 'spring of action', as opposed to public spiritedness:

'By the promulgation of such views of human nature, and by a general tone of thought and expression perfectly in harmony with them, I conceive Mr. Bentham's writings to have done and be doing a very serious evil.'<sup>14</sup>

Bulwer wanted to trumpet the piece, but Mill insisted it be buried as an Appendix, where it was safely ignored. Late in 1834, he flagged the article to John Nichol, shortly to be professor of astronomy at Glasgow University, but added: "It is not, and must not, be known to be mine."<sup>15</sup> He also admitted to Carlyle that the piece was his, but, he added "I do not acknowledge it, nor mean to do so".<sup>16</sup>

After the death of his father in 1836, Mill became much more open in expressing his growing doubts about utilitarianism and his attraction to elements of conservative thought - in particular Coleridge's emphasis on institutions, Carlyle's on the importance of character and Tocqueville's on the danger of a 'tyranny of the majority'.

His essay on Bentham, published in the *London and Westminster Review* in 1838, contained a series of attacks on both the philosophical stance and conclusions of his former mentor. Setting his old mentor alongside Coleridge as one of "the two great seminal minds of England in their age"<sup>17</sup>, Mill praised Bentham's work on legal philosophy and reform. But Bentham had fallen short on four fronts in particular:

- i) He had failed, in his philosophical method, to “derive light from other minds”. Mill wrote: “His contempt of all other schools of thinkers; his determination to create a philosophy wholly out of the materials furnished by his own mind was his first disqualification as a philosopher”.<sup>18</sup>
- ii) Bentham’s utilitarianism was weakened by his emphasis on analyzing human behaviour in terms of self-interest: “Man is never recognized by [Bentham] as being capable of pursuing spiritual perfection as an end; of desiring, for its own sake, the conformity of his own character to his standard of excellence, without hope of good or fear of evil from other source than his own inward consciousness”.<sup>19</sup> For Bentham, complained Mill, “man, that most complex being, is a very simple one.”
- iii) Bentham’s “principle of utility” lacked practical value since “utility, or happiness, is much too complex and indefinite an end to be sought except through the medium of various secondary ends, concerning which there may be, and often is, agreement among persons who differ in their ultimate standard.”<sup>20</sup> Mill was here extending the argument he had first made in his 1833 review of Blakey’s *History of Moral Science*: “The real character of any man’s ethical system depends not on his first and fundamental principle, which is of necessity so general as to be rarely susceptible of an immediate application to practice; but upon the nature of those secondary and intermediate maxims, *vera illa et media axiomata*, I which, as Bacon observes, real wisdom resides.”<sup>21</sup>

iv) Finally, Mill attacked Bentham's insistent neutrality about the ethical value of different activities, encapsulated by his famous claim that poetry was no better than pushpin:

"If he thought at all about any of the deeper feelings of human nature, it was but as idiosyncrasies of taste, with which the moralist no more than the legislator had any concern...To say either that man should, or that he should not, take pleasure in one thing, displeasure in another appeared to him [Bentham] as much an act of despotism in the moralist as in the political ruler."<sup>22</sup>

Given Mill's upbringing and background, 'Bentham' was almost an act of treason. It would never have been published while either Bentham or James Mill were alive, as Mill himself hinted. After his father's death, he wrote to a friend Edward Lytton Bulwer, about the greater freedom he would now enjoy, not least as editor of the *Westminster*:

"As good may be drawn out of evil – the event which has deprived the world of the man of greatest philosophical genius it possessed...that same event has made it far easier to...soften the harder & sterner features of [the review's] radicalism and utilitarianism..."<sup>23</sup>

The Bentham review was the final straw for some of Mill's former comrades-in-arms. William Molesworth, a wealthy Benthamite, withdrew financial support for the review. Francis Place, a political radical and friend of Mill's, lamented: "Mill has made great progress in becoming a German Metaphysical

Mystic”, and added that ‘excentricity (sic) and absurdity must sometimes be the result’.<sup>24</sup>

In retrospect, Mill regretted his heretical attack. In the *Autobiography* (drafted in the mid 1850s) he wrote:

“I have often felt that Bentham’s philosophy, as an instrument of progress, has been to some extent discredited before it had done its work, and that to lend a hand towards lowering its reputation was doing more harm than service to improvement.”<sup>25</sup>

Mill appears, then, to have had two primary motives for summarizing his settled view in *Utilitarianism*, first published as a series of essays in 1861, but drafted many years earlier. First, he believed that with his father and Bentham gone, utilitarianism had been left without serious defenders: and that, given the value that he still saw in some elements of the philosophy into which he had been initiated as a youth, he should step up to the ramparts. 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”. To Charles Dupont-White in 1861 he explained that that “l’idée de l’Utile été...très impopulaire”.<sup>26</sup>

Second, Mill was almost certainly moved to offer his defence in part to make amends for his earlier assaults. By the time Mill was writing, in the mid-1850s, Bentham’s philosophy had been dubbed a “pig philosophy” by Carlyle<sup>27</sup> and was in some danger of falling into disrepute. The evidence for this motivation

is indirect, but quite strong: the marked change in tone in his treatment of utilitarianism between, especially, 'Bentham' and Utilitarianism; Mill's public confession that he had prematurely 'lent a hand' in the 'discrediting' of the philosophy; and his personal regret at the state of the Benthamite 'school' (of which he had denied being a member), as reported to Dupont-White: 'l'école de Bentham a toujours été regardée (je suis dis avec regret) comme une insignifiante minorité.'<sup>28</sup>

## 2.2 Aspirations

It is clear, however, that *Utilitarianism* did not loom large in Mill's mind. In a letter to Alexander Bain, on 15th October 1859, he described the work as 'a little treatise'<sup>29</sup>. 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..."<sup>30</sup> To W.G. Ward, on 28th November 1859, Mill described the work as a 'little manuscript treatise'<sup>31</sup>.

Mill rarely refers to the work without applying the epithet 'little', even though it was not much shorter than *On Liberty*. Without descending to psychobiography, this does appear to reveal something of Mill's attitude to the work.

Mill says that he left it to his publisher, John William Parker, to decide whether and when to publish the work as a separate volume, after the three-part series in *Frasers*. He did: but for some reason, as Mill reported to Dupont-White on 10 January 1862, there was a delay of almost two years. There is,

however, no record of Mill attempting to hurry publication, or even to inquire of Parker what was happening. To Dupont-White, he simply reported ‘je présume que cette réimpression est ajournée.’<sup>32</sup>

Nor did Mill promote or engage with the work after publication. His attitude can only be described as ambivalent, bordering on dismissive. Here are five pieces of biographical evidence:

i) 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*.

ii) In his *Autobiography*, in which Mill spends at least two pages each on *The Slave Power* (on the US Civil War), *On Liberty* and the *Logic*, just a few anodyne lines are devoted to *Utilitarianism*:

“Soon after this time I took from their repository a portion of the unpublished papers which I had written during the last years of our married life, and shaped them, with some additional matter, into the *little work* entitled *Utilitarianism*; which was first published in three parts, in successive numbers of *Fraser’s Magazine*, and afterwards reprinted in a volume”.<sup>33</sup> [my emphasis].

iii) Mill 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). But he never even considered doing so for *Utilitarianism*. One

might wonder if this was because he saw the subject matter as too technical or philosophical, but this cannot be the reason, because he did entertain the idea of one for his *Logic*<sup>34</sup>, a much more academic work.

iv) 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.<sup>35</sup>

v) As late as 1863, Mill was still apparently undecided about whether it was worth re-publishing the three pieces into the single volume. On 21 January 1863, a month before the printing took place, he wrote to Samuel Bailey:

‘If I reprint them separately as I am thinking about doing I will beg your acceptance of a copy.’<sup>36</sup> [my emphasis]

### 2.3 Investment

Most importantly for the quality of the work, Mill’s detachment is revealed in his lack of subsequent editorial engagement. Typically, Mill would revise his work in light of criticism or in line with his evolving thinking. The only exception to this working method was *On Liberty*, and that was for an explicit reason: he considered the essay a monument to his wife, Harriet, ‘consecrated to her memory’. As he declared: ““I have made no alteration or addition to it, nor shall I ever.”<sup>37</sup>

But *Utilitarianism* was virtually unaltered, too. It ran to four editions during his lifetime, but Mill barely revised it, despite the considerable criticism it sustained.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup>

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.<sup>40</sup> According to Gomperz, Mill undertook to revise the passage: there is no letter to this effect, but as Mill dined with Gomperz in London on 14th June 1863, it seems likely they discussed it then.<sup>41</sup>

But Mill made no alterations, in either the second edition (1864) or the third (1867). In some frustration, Gomperz tried again in 1868 (18th March), 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.'<sup>42</sup>

Mill's reply (23rd April 1868), is unsatisfactory. He 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.”<sup>43</sup> [my emphasis].

Gomperz did not make any changes (in fact the translation into German was eventually undertaken by Eduard Wessel, under Gomperz's supervision).<sup>44</sup>

This is rather extraordinary. Mill is guilty with some version of philosophical misconduct. He admits that the 'real argument' is not captured by his original phrasing, and it must have been clear to him that this confusion had real implications, given the importance of the claim for his overall argument<sup>45</sup>. Yet he simply leaves it untouched. Gomperz, reasonably enough, leaves it, too: it was not his job or place to fix a problem of this kind.

In a letter to Georg Brandes, in 1872, the penultimate year of his life, Mill showed that he was aware of the criticisms made of the work, but dismissed

them as 'old' and therefore unworthy of reply: 'je n'a jugé à propos de répondre à aucune de ces attaques: aux vieux arguments il suffit des vieilles réponses.'<sup>46</sup>

## 2.4 Implications

A number of scholars, not least Alan Ryan and Wendy Donner, have worked hard to make a better job of presenting Mill's mature utilitarianism than he managed himself in this essay.<sup>47</sup> In the end, though, even the most careful rendering of his utilitarianism is hard to square with his liberalism. Mill wants people to be free, autonomous, self-cultivated and self-propelled. He believes – and hopes - that this will also make them 'happy', that it will provide 'utility in the largest sense, grounded in the interests of man as a progressive being'.<sup>48</sup> But there can be no doubt that Mill places much greater emphasis on liberty than utility: or put slightly differently, that his recast conception of 'utility in the largest sense' is very close to his conception of liberty.

A biographical examination of the question makes it clear that by the time Mill wrote and published *Utilitarianism*, his heart wasn't really in it – and that's why it is, by his standards, a poor-quality piece of work.<sup>49</sup>

Mill was moving on to an intellectual and political campaign for greater liberty. But the liberal emphasis of Mill's last decade or so was, like the utilitarianism he was leaving behind, deeply influenced by his own story.

### 3. Liberalism

In Chapter 11 of the main work, I summarise the key arguments and implications of the most famous expression of Mill's ideas - *On Liberty*.<sup>1</sup> Here, I will attempt to sustain my claim that additional insights can be gained into Mill's liberalism by adopting a biographical viewpoint, in three areas in particular:

#### 3.1 Self-cultivation

For Mill, the idea of individual growth, progress and cultivation was all-important. Personal development was the measure and purpose of individual liberty.

The concept of "remaking" strongly and permanently influenced Mill. His 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".<sup>50</sup>

A liberal society, for Mill, was one in which each person was free to progress "nearer to the best thing they can be"<sup>51</sup>. Mill prefixed his essay with what he

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<sup>1</sup> *VF*, pp, 262-306

called a “motto”<sup>52</sup> 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”.<sup>53</sup> 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”.<sup>54</sup>

Here Mill was clearly able to draw a connection to his own life, and recreation. 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.’ [emphasis in the original]<sup>55</sup>

### 3.2 Individuality

Mill was home-schooled, in an environment where “the habitual frequenters...were limited to a very few persons”, did not go to university (in large part because his father and Jeremy Bentham thought it a waste of time), and worked for his entire career for the East India Company, the same

organisation 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'.<sup>56</sup> [my emphasis]]

Mill as we have seen, was constantly suspected of being a 'made man'. On the surface, his life decisions supported that assessment. Mill went from being home-schooled by his father for seventeen years, to being line-managed by his father for thirteen years, and then succeeding to his job on his death.

It is worth reminding ourselves that 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".<sup>57</sup>

It is hard to say that Mill chose 'his plan for himself'. Nor though did he abandon the path on which he had been set even after his crisis. It is likely that the strong argument for individuality running through Mill's liberalism

reflects, in part at least, his acute awareness of some of the limitations of his own life.

### 3.3 Open-mindedness

In *On Liberty* and elsewhere, Mill made an instrumental argument for free speech and the 'collision of ideas': debate was necessary to collectively generate, and regenerate, more robust truths. But elsewhere it is clear that for Mill, being open-minded, willing to examine one's own beliefs, values and character - and if necessary change them - was a substantive element of what constitutes a full-developed character.

Lack of open-mindedness was one of Mill's central criticisms of both his father and Bentham. In his own escape from the intellectual confinement of narrow utilitarianism, Mill had swung to the other extreme, worshipping 'many-sidedness', to use the term of Goethe's that he adopted, almost to the exclusion of argument.

In 1833 he explained to Carlyle that he was in a state of "*recovery* after the petrification of a narrow philosophy"<sup>58</sup>. Mill went on a few months later to describe how he had become:

'[C]atholic and tolerant in an extreme degree, and thought one-sidedness almost the one great evil in human affairs...I scarcely felt called upon to *deny* anything but denial itself...I never, or rarely, felt myself called upon to come into *collision* with any one....there has been

on my part something like a want of courage in avoiding, or touching only perfunctorily, with you, points on which I thought it likely we should differ”<sup>59</sup> [emphasis in original].

After the narrowness of his own upbringing, Mill’s openness to ideas from any source, and willful desire to see both sides of a dispute, meant he was, as one modern scholar put it, “continually being hit by the boomerang of his own ideas”<sup>60</sup>.

While Mill recovered some of his youthful intellectual confidence, he did not abandon his new-found respect for open-mindedness. He was disdainful of minds that he saw as closed. Mill attacked the Prime Minister George Canning for stating that he would always oppose widening the franchise:

“[T]o hear a man gravely pledge himself to be always of the same opinion – bind himself by a solemn promise that the arguments which convince him now, upon his honour shall convince him to his dying day – that what he thinks advisable now he will think advisable always howsoever circumstances may change...is utterly ludicrous.”<sup>61</sup>

In his diary, in 1854, Mill railed against the ideal of a cultivated individual as “rounded off and made symmetrical like a Greek temple or a Greek drama...Not symmetry, but bold, free expansion in all directions is demanded by the needs of modern life and the instincts of the modern mind.”<sup>62</sup>

It is hard to overstate the importance of this conviction to Mill's philosophy and political theories. His epistemology relies on his liberalism – free speech is necessary for the collision of ideas, and those collisions promote the acquisition of rational knowledge. His political theory is underpinned by the need for public discourse and engagement rather than a 'tyranny of the majority' or dictatorship of the few. In *On Liberty*, Mill spells out his claim clearly:

“[T]he source of everything respectable in man either as an intellectual or as a moral being, namely, [is] that his errors are corrigible. He is capable of rectifying his mistakes, by discussion and experience. Not by experience alone. *There must be discussion, to show how experience is to be interpreted...*In the case of any person whose judgment is really deserving of confidence, how has it become so?...Because he has felt, that *the only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject, is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind. No wise man ever acquired his wisdom in any mode but this;...*”<sup>63</sup> [my emphases].

There is more than a hint of autobiography in this passage. Mill's insistence on seeing all sides of an argument, learning from experience and history, questioning one's own beliefs: all these stand in stark contrast to the approach and views of his father and Bentham. Mill gained independence in this way: and so he believes it is how all must do so. (Whether he is right about this is of course another matter.)

### 3.4 Character

The most important work that Mill did not write was what he called 'An Exact Science of Human Nature'. The work, as outlined in his *System of Logic*, would draw, he said, on the findings of psychology in order to discover the "[U]niversal laws of the Formation of Character"<sup>64</sup>:

"The subject to be studied, is the origin and sources of all those qualities in human beings which are interesting to us, either as facts to be produced, to be avoided...and the object is to determine...what actual or possible combinations of circumstances are capable of promoting or of preventing the production of those qualities."<sup>65</sup>

As we have seen, for Mill, these questions were far from being merely technical or theological ones. Given his own upbringing, and the accusations he faced of being a "made man" - a creature entirely of his father's creation - he had to believe that he had broken free, that the path of his life had not been set by forces outside his control. Indeed, for Mill, "this feeling, of our being able to *modify our character if we wish*, is itself the feeling of moral freedom which we are conscious of."<sup>66</sup>

Mill had wished to modify his character, and had done so: and from this moment on the cultivation of character was the golden thread connecting every major element of his thinking. For him, 'independent and vigorous'

characters were essential for individual liberty, a balanced economy, gender equality and a vibrant democracy.<sup>67</sup>

Mill is clear that he does not think the co-operation of the 'mind in the formation of its own character' will happen automatically. That is why, in his *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, he insisted that we are all under a 'moral obligation to seek the improvement of our own character'. Mill's treatments of economic systems, the role of government, gender inequality, the place of religion, and the influence of culture, all include an strong reliance on the shaping of character:

- i) On communism as an economic and political system, from the *Principles of Political Economy*: "The question is, whether there would be any asylum left for *individuality of character*; whether public opinion would not be a tyrannical yoke; whether the absolute dependence of each on all, and surveillance of each by all, would not grind all down into a tame uniformity of thoughts, feelings and actions".<sup>68</sup> [my emphasis]
- ii) On the role of culture, rather than innate tendencies, in shaping character, as described in the *Autobiography*: "I have long felt that the *prevailing tendency to regard all the marked distinctions of human character as innate* [as]...one of the chief stumbling blocks to human improvement..."<sup>69</sup> [my emphasis]
- iii) On how to evaluate the performance of government, from *Representative Government*: "the degree in which it tends to increase

*the sum of good qualities* in the governed, collectively and individually".<sup>70</sup> [my emphasis]

iv) On the benefits of co-operatives or employee-owned companies, from the *Principles of Political Economy*: "the healing of the standing feud between capital and labour...; and the conversion of each human being's daily occupation into a *school of the social sympathies* and practical intelligence".<sup>71</sup> [my emphasis]

v) On the artificially-generated differences between men and women, from the *Subjection of Women*:

"[N]o one can safely pronounce that if women's nature were left to choose its direction as freely as men's, and if no artificial bent were attempted to be given to it except that required by the conditions of human society, and given to both sexes alike, there would be any material difference, or perhaps any difference at all, *in the character and capacities* which would unfold themselves."<sup>72</sup> [my emphasis]

vi) On the usefulness of religion, from *Three Essays on Religion*. Old-style Christianity bred passivity, fatalism and prejudice, but a reformed version held out the prospect of an "an increased inducement to cultivate the *improvement of character*".<sup>73</sup>

It would be a worthwhile scholarly endeavour to attempt to re-create the work Mill never completed. It will not, of course, be an 'exact science': it could not have been in Mill's time, and certainly not today.

Left to his own devices, it is probable that Mill would in fact have produced such a work. In February 1854, Mill reminded Harriet of the list that they had compiled together of his next writing tasks:

“Differences of character (nation, race, age, sex, temperament). Love. Education of tastes. Religion de l’Avenir. Plato. Slander. Foundation of morals. Utility of religion. Socialism. Liberty. Doctrine that causation is will. To these I have now added from your letter: Family, & Conventional.”<sup>74</sup>

Mill seemed inclined to tackle the first, a treatment of character formation – which he had been saying was essential since the publication of the *Logic* more than a decade earlier:

“It will be a tolerable two years work to finish all that? Perhaps the first of them is the one I could do most to by myself, at least of those equally important”.<sup>75</sup>

But in her reply of Harriet steered him in a different direction:

‘About the Essays dear, would not Religion, the Utility of Religion, be one of the subjects you would have most to say on ...[?]’<sup>76</sup>

Mill did as advised, and on 6<sup>th</sup> March wrote:

'I have fairly set to at another essay, on the subject you suggested. I wrote several hours at it yesterday, after turning it over mentally many days before...'”<sup>77</sup>

It is a pity that Mill was diverted. While his thoughts on religion are interesting in themselves, they add little to the structure of his thought. As we have seen, *Utilitarianism* was a decidedly mixed blessing. The *Chapters on Socialism*, published after Mill's death, added only slightly to his *Principles*, at least as he revised them. A sustained treatment of the formation of character, however – his long-promised 'Ethology' - would have filled a significant hole in the architecture of Mill's thought.

#### **4. Harriet's Influence**

The question of how far Harriet Taylor influenced Mill's thinking was a live one during their lives. Godefroy Cavaignac, a French refugee and leading light in the *Societe[accents] des Droits de 'Homme* dubbed her "the Armida of the London and Westminster"<sup>78</sup>.

Harriet's role has occupied the attention of scholars since. For some, everything from the *Principles* onwards should be read as at the very least a joint production, and quite possibly as Harriet's thoughts flowing through Mill's pen. Nicholas Capaldi suggests Harriet was a 'great influence' on Mill's life and thought; for Jo Ellen Jacobs, their work, 'beginning with the *Principles*

of *Political Economy*, tended more and more towards co-authorship'. Hayek devoted a book to the subject.

According to Michael Packe, Harriet wielded an "astounding, almost hypnotic control of Mill's mind"<sup>79</sup>. 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."<sup>80</sup> [my emphasis]

In private and in public, Mill was at pains to emphasise 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*.<sup>81</sup>

"Unfortunately for both," recounted Bain, "he outraged all reasonable credulity in describing her matchless genius, without being able to supply corroborating evidence".<sup>82</sup>

Bain was right; there is not much corroborating evidence for such grandiose claims. Nonetheless, Harriet did have an influence on Mill in a number of areas. A greater understanding of these helps to illuminate certain aspects of Mill's thought.

#### 4.1 Custom

Mill and Harriet suffered from the gossip and social exclusion during the years of their unusual relationship while Harriet's husband was still alive.<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, they shared a strong fear and dislike of the power of custom.

It is difficult in the early years of their relationship to disentangle the effects of Harriet on Mill, from those of Mill on Harriet. 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*.<sup>83</sup>

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...'

Harriet also stressed the importance of strong individual characters:

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<sup>2</sup> *VF*, pp. 89-91

‘The remedy is, to make all strong enough to stand alone; and whoever has once known the pleasure of self-dependance, [sic] will be in no danger of lapsing into subserviency.’<sup>84</sup>

It seems clear that the couple were reinforcing each other view’s on this subject from the very beginning.

#### 4.2 Socialism

Mill added an informal dedication to the first edition of his *Principles of Political Economy*. (It was pasted into limited numbers of copies, rather than printed, to spare the blushes of her husband):

“To Mrs John Taylor/As the most eminently qualified of all persons known to the author either to originate or to appreciate speculations on social improvement, this attempt to explain and diffuse ideas many of which were first learned from herself, is with the highest respect and regard dedicated.”<sup>85</sup>

This description of Harriet’s influence on the *Principles* is hugely overstated, especially with regard to the first edition. However, by 1851, as a fully-engaged intellectual partner, Harriet was having a more direct impact – especially on the heated issue of socialism.

In the *Autobiography*, Mill reflected that in the first edition of the *Principles*, the “difficulties of Socialism were so strongly stated, that the tone was on the whole that of opposition to it”.<sup>86</sup> With Harriet’s advice, he set about shifting the balance. In 1849 he reassured Harriet that “progress of the right kind seems to me quite safe now that Socialism has become *inextinguishable*.”<sup>87</sup> Mill declared that the substantial changes made for the third edition of the *Principles* had to wait until the couple had enough time together to work on the necessary changes. When they did, the alteration of Mill’s stance towards socialism was marked. Harriet herself suggested the chapter on the “Futurity of the Labouring Classes”, which dealt more directly with socialism, and, according to Mill, heavily influenced its content.

The evidence of their correspondence is that Harriet was consistently more socialist in her thinking than Mill, and that she moved him in that direction. But the movement should not be overstated: it was one of degrees. And there were a number of issues where they disagreed, and where Mill’s position was the one that ended up on the page.<sup>88</sup>

### 4.3 Markets

A specific issue demonstrates the reality and limits of Harriet’s influence – the regulation of working hours. In the *Principles*, Mill used legal limits on working hours as an example of potentially legitimate state interference to solve a collective action problem.

Mill saw this as an issue that served “to exemplify the manner in which classes of persons may need the assistance of law, to give effect to their deliberate collective opinion of their own interest...”<sup>89</sup> It was only an illustration, however, and Mill was uneasy about legislation in this area.

But Harriet was in the interventionist camp. In 1849, she wrote to Mill:

“Among other trash did you observe Hume said – ‘To interfere with the labour of others...is a direct violation of the fundamental laws of society. What a text this would be for an article which however no newspaper would publish. Is not the Ten Hours’ Bill an ‘interference &c &c’?”<sup>90</sup>

Mill did not reply to Harriet on this point – or if he did, the letter has been lost. In fact, he was ambivalent about the Ten Hours Bill, seeing it as part of the wrong-headed philanthropy of the ruling classes.<sup>91</sup>

In revisions to his *Principles*, Mill returned to the passage on working hours. It seems probable that Harriet’s enthusiasm for regulation influenced the slight alteration in his treatment of the point in the third edition, published in 1852, when he replaced “I do not mean to express an opinion in favour of such an enactment’ with the softer “I am not expressing any opinion in favour of such an enactment.”

It is also likely that, even as Mill’s doubts grew, he was reluctant to return to the topic with Harriet at his side. But when it was time for a new edition in

1862 edition - the first to appear after Harriet's death – he added the following caveat:

“...which has never been demanded, and which I certainly should not, in present circumstances, recommend.”<sup>92</sup>

What this example shows is that Harriet certainly influenced Mill, not least through their ongoing intellectual engagement, but certainly did not dictate to him.

#### 4.4 Ballot

One of the most marked changes of opinion by Mill was in his attitude towards the 'ballot' (ie. the secret ballot, or right to vote in privacy). In the 1830s he was faithful to the radical demand for its introduction. Indeed he wrote to Tocqueville in 1837 that with the introduction of the ballot:

“reform will have finally triumphed;: the aristocratical principle will be completely annihilated, & we shall enter into a new era of government”<sup>93</sup>

But in 'Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform', published in 1859, Mill performed a volte-face:

“Thirty years ago, the main evil to be guarded against was that which the ballot would exclude – coercion by landlords, employers, and

customers. At present, I conceive, a much greater source of evil is the selfishness, or the selfish partialities of the voter himself”<sup>94</sup>

The vote should therefore be cast with a degree of public-spiritedness, not based on purely personal calculations. Being “under the eyes of others” and having “to give an account of their conduct”<sup>95</sup> would, Mill now believed, encourage the right spirit in the voter.

Mill’s former radical comrades-in-arms were displeased. “If James Mill could have anticipated that his son John Stuart should preach so abominable a heresy,” fumed Francis Place, “he would have cracked his skull.”<sup>96</sup>

What changed? In a single word: Harriet. She was fiercely opposed to the idea of a secret ballot, which flew in the face of her ideal of strong, independent citizens standing up for their beliefs. The evidence suggests strongly that she was able to convert Mill to her view.

In the *Autobiography*, Mill describes the change of heart revealed in the essay:

‘Its principal features were, hostility to the Ballot (a change of opinion in both of us, in which *she rather preceded me*) and a claim of representation for minorities’.<sup>97</sup> [my emphasis]

It is clear not only that Harriet helped to convince Mill on this question, but that she was much keener to publicise the U-turn. Mill was content to make his argument about the ballot in the course of a longer essay, in a volume to

be published at some date in the future. He was justifiably concerned about giving too much succour to the political enemy, especially at time when some degree of reform seemed possible.

Harriet, by contrast, wanted to devote an article specifically to the question - and sooner rather than later. Two letters from Mill to Harriet show the difference, the first dated 24 June 1854:

“I reckon on leaving our opinion on that question [the ballot] to form part of the volume of essays, but I am more anxious to get on with other things first, since what is already written [the draft of ‘Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform’]...will in case of the worst suffice, being the essentials of what we have to say, & perhaps might serve to float the volume as the *opinion on the ballot would be liked by the powerful classes, and being from a radical would be sure to be quoted by other writers, while they would detest most of the other opinions*’.<sup>98</sup>[my emphasis]

Harriet’s intervening letter is not extant, but she argued for swifter publication, as Mill’s next letter (30 June 1854) makes clear:

I do not feel in the way you do the desirableness of writing an article for the Ed[inburgh Review] on it. There will be plenty of people to say all that is to be said against the ballot – all it wants from us is the authority of an ancient radical & that it will have by what already written and fit to be published as it is...”<sup>99</sup>

Mill got his way: and as far as the extant correspondence shows, they never discussed the timing or form of publication again. This is a good example of the workings of the relationship. Harriet was an intellectual partner, and in this instance a strong enough one to alter his opinion. But Mill resisted strong pressure from Harriet to publish the new arguments sooner, or in a more attention-grabbing fashion.

#### 4.5 Feminism

Stefan Collini suggests that “any complete account of Mill’s thinking on the subject of women would have to come to terms with the role of this very clever, imaginative, passionate, intense, imperious, paranoid, unpleasant woman”.<sup>100</sup> Collini is right about taking into account Harriet’s views when considering Mill’s feminism: but for what it is worth, the evidence on Harriet’s pleasantness is inconclusive. (Even today, it seems, Harriet Taylor Mill can provoke strong reactions.)

Mill was a strong supporter of gender equality before he met Harriet. Indeed, it marked the first real breach with his father’s opinions, at least as Mill recounted it in his *Autobiography*. While considering (at that stage) James Mill’s *Essay on Government* to be a ‘masterpiece’, Mill reports that he ‘most positively dissented [from]...the paragraph, in which he maintains that women may consistently with good government, be excluded from the suffrage, because their interest is the same as men.’ Nor was the disagreement trifling: for the young Mill, the falseness of this claim was “as great an error as any of those against which the *Essay* was directed”.<sup>101</sup>

Of course, Mill could have been projecting his later feminism back on his teenage self: but there is other evidence suggesting a commitment to women's rights, even at this young age.<sup>102</sup>

There is no question, however, that Mill's feminism was amplified and deepened by Harriet. It was her most passionate cause. And in addressing issues such as marriage and divorce, and women's property rights, both of them were also tackling deeply personal matters, given their own painful circumstances.

In the early stages of their relationship, they exchanged notes about their views on marriage – much of which would, in adapted form, find its way into the *Subjection of Women*.<sup>103</sup> The couple also worked directly together on the issue of women's rights, and produced a series of working notes, which seem to date from the late 1850s - the only extant example of work that is clearly jointly produced.

It also seems unlikely that without Harriet at his side, Mill would have spent hours making the language of the third edition of the *Principles* gender-neutral, replacing hundreds of instances of the word "his" with "their"<sup>104</sup>.

While Mill became an important figure in the development of women's rights, leading the charge for women's suffrage in parliament – I label him the 'Father of Feminism' in the main work – he lagged behind Harriet in terms of radicalism.

First, Mill was more cautious than Harriet about expressing the full extent of his views. In 1850, rather than submitting an article on the subject to the *Westminster Review*, he turned in an article of Harriet's, which they titled 'The Emancipation of Women' but was published in 1851 under the less ambitious title "The Enfranchisement of Women".

Harriet drew a parallel between the position of women and black slaves, and criticized the "unjust...prejudice of custom" which permitted one group of society the right to decide for another "what is and is not their 'proper sphere'".<sup>105</sup> Many of the article's themes would in fact be echoed in Mill's own *The Subjection of Women* – but nineteen years later.

Second, on at least one substantive issue, Harriet was much more advanced than Mill: the gendered division of labour, especially in relation to childrearing. In her 1851 essay, Harriet insisted that:

"[I]t is neither necessary nor just to make imperative on women that they shall be either mothers or nothing, or that if they have been mothers once, they shall be nothing else during the whole remainder of their lives."<sup>106</sup>

By contrast, the impact of maternity on the opportunities for public and labour market participation is barely mentioned by Mill. And in *Subjection*, he took a fairly conservative view of women's domestic labour:

“[T]he common arrangement, by which the man earns the income and the wife superintends the domestic expenditure [is]...in general the most suitable division of labour between the two persons.”<sup>107</sup>

Mill’s concern was that women who attempted to do paid work and raise children would end up failing in the latter, vitally important, task. The fact that they were in the labour market, Mill noted, “seldom relieved” women from being expected to perform in full “the ordinary functions of mistress of a family”: but it would probably “prevent her from performing [them] properly”.<sup>108</sup>

Modern feminist scholars, including Susan Okin and Julia Annas, claim that Mill “never questioned or objected to the maintenance of traditional sex roles”.<sup>109</sup> This is a fair criticism. A defence is that he was writing and campaigning in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – and that the endurance of gendered roles to this day shows that they are not to be easily overturned. On the other hand, it cannot be claimed that he was not forced to think about this issue, given Harriet’s strong and clear position. Mill’s feminism is, to this extent, incomplete. This is doubly unfortunate, given that the ‘tyranny of custom’ against which he railed in *On Liberty* was most obviously being exercised to reinforce the inequalities he dramatised in the *Subjection of Women*.

In these five key areas, Harriet had a demonstrable influence on the development of Mill’s ideas. But in a sense, even these discoveries fail to do

her justice. Above all she was an engaged, passionate, supportive intellectual partner: for Mill, nothing could have been more important.

## 5. Conclusions

Turning to biography to illuminate philosophy is a delicate enterprise. There is a real danger of reaching for a biographical explanation of each and every idea: 'Of course, he only thought X because he was doing Y.' But philosophers are flesh and blood like the rest of us, and it is likely that their work is influenced by their own life, in varying ways and to varying degrees. There is more value in biography than can be gleaned, for instance, from Martin Heidegger's 1924 biography of Aristotle: 'The man was born, he worked, and then died'.

The extent to which the life is implicated in the thoughts depends to a very large extent on the thinker. The lives of Socrates, Mill, Rousseau, Berlin and Sen offer us more insight into their philosophy than, say, the lives of Aristotle, Hume, Jevons, Green or Dworkin. And even for the most intensely autobiographical thinker, the life will only ever offer a slighter greater illumination of work that must, regardless, also be judged as it stands alone.

In the main work, and this essay, I have attempted to use biography to throw a little more light – or at least a different light – on the ideas of just one philosopher, John Stuart Mill. As he wrote, in almost the final words of *On Liberty*: 'it really is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are that do it'.<sup>110</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> *John Stuart Mill – Victorian Firebrand* (hereafter *VF* in endnotes) p.8
- <sup>2</sup> See especially *VF*, pp. 329-333
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, Donner (1991), Ryan (1974) and Riley (2006)
- <sup>4</sup> *Collected Works* (hereafter *CW*), I, p.147.
- <sup>5</sup> *CW*, I, p.147
- <sup>6</sup> *CW*, I, p. 111
- <sup>7</sup> *CW*, I, p. 175-6
- <sup>8</sup> Thomas Carlyle, quoted in Basil Willey, *Nineteenth-Century Studies, Coleridge to Matthew Arnold*, London: Chatto & Windus, London, 1964 (first published 1949), p. 152.
- <sup>9</sup> *CW*, XVIII, p. 264
- <sup>10</sup> Jevons, W. Stanley, Professor, 'John Stuart Mill's Philosophy Tested - IV.- Utilitarianism', *Contemporary Review*, 36 (1879: Sept./Dec.) p. 521-538
- <sup>11</sup> Ryan, *JS Mill*, p.12
- <sup>12</sup> Letter to Thomas Carlyle, 12 January 1834, *CW*, XII, p. 205
- <sup>13</sup> Letter to Thomas Carlyle, 12 January 1834, *CW*, XII pp. 207-8
- <sup>14</sup> *CW*, X, p.15
- <sup>15</sup> Letter to John Nichol, 14 October 1834, *CW*, XII, p. 236
- <sup>16</sup> Letter to Thomas Carlyle, 2 August 1833, *CW*, XII p. 172
- <sup>17</sup> 'Bentham', *CW*, X, p.77
- <sup>18</sup> *CW*, X, p. 90-91
- <sup>19</sup> *CW*, X, p. 95
- <sup>20</sup> *CW*, X, p. 110
- <sup>21</sup> 'Blakey' *CW*, X, p.29. Mill's "least utilitarian" work, according to Alan Ryan.
- <sup>22</sup> 'Bentham', *CW*, X, p.96
- <sup>23</sup> Letter to Bulwer, 23 November 1836, *CW*, XII p. 312
- <sup>24</sup> Francis Place to Thomas Falconer, 2 September 1838, quoted in Hamburger *Intellectuals in Politics*, p. 108
- <sup>25</sup> *CW*, I, p. 227
- <sup>26</sup> Letter to Theodor Gomperz , 30 August 1858, *CW*, XV, p. 570; letter to Charles Dupont-White, 10 October 1861, *CW*, XV, p. 745
- <sup>27</sup> Quoted in Ryan, *JS Mill*, p.97
- <sup>28</sup> Letter to Charles Dupont-White, 10 October 1861, *CW*, XV, p. 745
- <sup>29</sup> Letter to Alexander Bain, 15 October 1859, *CW*, XV, p. 640
- <sup>30</sup> Letter to Alexander Bain, 14 November 1859, *CW*, XV, p. 645
- <sup>31</sup> Letter to William Ward, 28 November 1859, *CW*, XV, p. 640
- <sup>32</sup> Letter to Dupont-White, 10 January 1862, *CW*, XV, p.761
- <sup>33</sup> *CW*, I, p.266
- <sup>34</sup> Letter to William Longman, 22 December 1867, *CW*, XVI, p.1336 (but decided against; see p.1351)
- <sup>35</sup> Letter to William Longman, 18 February 1866, *CW*, XXXII, p. 163
- <sup>36</sup> Letter to Samuel Bailey, 21 January 1863. *CW*, XV, p. 825
- <sup>37</sup> *CW*, I, p. 192
- <sup>38</sup> *CW*, X, p. cxxv
- <sup>39</sup> *CW*, XVIII, p. lxxxviii
- <sup>40</sup> See Adelaide Weinberg, *Theodor Gomperz and John Stuart Mill* (Geneva, Droz, 1963)
- <sup>41</sup> Letter to Gomperz, 11 June 1863. *CW*, XV, p.862
- <sup>42</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> March 1868, Gomperz to Mill, a.l.s., Johns Hopkins University Library
- <sup>43</sup> Letter to Theodor Gomperz, 23 April 1868, *CW*, XVI, p. 1391
- <sup>44</sup> *CW*, XVI, p.1392, n. 3
- <sup>45</sup> *CW*, X, p. cxxvi
- <sup>46</sup> Letter to Georg Brandes, 4 March 1872, *CW*, XVII, p. 1875
- <sup>47</sup> Donner, 1998; Ryan, 1974

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- <sup>48</sup> *OL*, *CW*, XVIII, p. 224
- <sup>49</sup> *VF*, p. 333
- <sup>50</sup> *VF*, p. 278
- <sup>51</sup> *CW*, XVIII, p. 267
- <sup>52</sup> *CW*, I, p. 191
- <sup>53</sup> *CW*, XVIII, p. 215
- <sup>54</sup> *CW*, XVIII, p. 261; *VF*, p. 278
- <sup>55</sup> Letter to Thomas Carlyle, 22 October 1832, *CW*, XII, p. 128
- <sup>56</sup> *CW*, I, p. 83
- <sup>57</sup> *CW*, XVIII, p. 262
- <sup>58</sup> Letter to Thomas Carlyle, 5 October 1833, *CW*, XII, p. 181
- <sup>59</sup> Letter to Thomas Carlyle, 12 January 1834, *CW*, XII, p. 205
- <sup>60</sup> Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1949, Chapter VI, quoted in Thomas Woods, *Poetry and Philosophy, A Study in the Thought of John Stuart Mill*, London: Hutchinson, 1961, p. 46
- <sup>61</sup> 'The Coalition Ministry', 29 June 1827, *CW*, XXVI, p. 402
- <sup>62</sup> *CW*, XXVII, 6 February 1854, p.651-2. See also letter to Harriet on 7<sup>th</sup> February, *CW*, XIV, p.152
- <sup>63</sup> *CW*, XVIII, p. 232
- <sup>64</sup> *CW*, VIII, pp. 864-5
- <sup>65</sup> *Logic*, *CW*, VIII, p. 869
- <sup>66</sup> *CW*, VIII, p. 841
- <sup>67</sup> *VF*, p. 268
- <sup>68</sup> *POPE*, *CW* II, p. 208. In an article written in the midst of the revisions to *POPE*, Mill had already set out his basic position in somewhat starker terms. The 'bondage' he feared 'in the cooperative communities' was that "the yoke of conformity would be made heavier rather than lighter; that people would be compelled to live as it pleased others, not as it pleased themselves; that their lives would be placed under rules, the same for all, prescribed by the majority; and that there would be no escape, no independence of action left to any one, since all must be members of one or another community'. 'Constraints of Communism', *Leader*, 27 July 850, *CW* XXV, pp. 1179-80
- <sup>69</sup> *CW*, I, p.270
- <sup>70</sup> *CW*, XIX, p. 392; in 1829, he had argued to Gustave d'Eichthal that 'government exists for all purposes whatever that are for man's good: and the highest & most important of these purposes is the improvement of man himself as a moral and intelligent being', 8 October 1829, *CW*, XII, p. 36
- <sup>71</sup> *POPE*, *CW* III, p. 792
- <sup>72</sup> *Subjection*, *CW*, XXI, p. 305
- <sup>73</sup> *CW*, X, p. 485
- <sup>74</sup> Letter to Harriet Mill, 7 Feb 1854, *CW*, XIV, p. 152
- <sup>75</sup> Letter to Harriet Mill, 7 Feb 1854, *CW*, XIV, p. 152
- <sup>76</sup> Letter from Harriet Mill to JSM, 14-15 February 1854, quoted in Hayek, pp. 195-6
- <sup>77</sup> Letter to Harriet Mill, 6 March 1854, *CW*, XIV, p. 178
- <sup>78</sup> Armida is an enchantress in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* who lured crusading knights away from their duty, popularised 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
- <sup>79</sup> Capaldi, *Mill*, p. xiv; Jacobs, *Voice of HTM*, p. 196; Packe, *Mill*, p. 315
- <sup>80</sup> Packe, *Mill*, p. 371
- <sup>81</sup> Letter to HTM, 30 August 1853, *CW* XIV, p. 112
- <sup>82</sup> Bain, *JSM*, p. 171
- <sup>83</sup> 'The Enfranchisement of Women', *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, July 1851, *CW*, XXI, Appendix C, pp. 399-400
- <sup>84</sup> [Untitled], *Complete Works of HTM*, pp. 137-8

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- <sup>85</sup> Reproduced in Hayek *Mill and Taylor*, p.122 and Capaldi, *Mill*, p. 202
- <sup>86</sup> *AB*, CW I, p. 241
- <sup>87</sup> Letter to Walter Coulson, 22 November 1850, CW XIV, p. 53; letter to HTM, ca. 31 March 1849, CW XIV, p. 21. In 1851 he also inveighed against the ‘nonsense of the *Economist*’ opposing the state public management of the water supply, letter to Edwin Chadwick, [after 22] January 1851, CW XIV, p. 55
- <sup>88</sup> During an exchange on how tough a line to take on the anti-liberal tendencies of socialism, Mill declared to Harriet that while he thought “the objections as now stated to Communism to be valid...if you do not think so, I certainly will not print it, even if there were no other reason than the certainty I feel that I never should long continue of an opinion different from yours on a subject which you have fully considered”.<sup>88</sup> Importantly, the passage stayed in.
- <sup>89</sup> CW, III, p.958
- <sup>90</sup> HTM to Mill, 28 July 1849, *HTM Complete Works*, p. 341
- <sup>91</sup> Letter to John Austin, 13 April 1847, CW XIII, p. 713.
- <sup>92</sup> CW, III, p. 958. Mill thought that the best way to bring about a change was “by a quiet change in the custom of the trade; short hours, becoming, by spontaneous choice, the general practice, but those who chose to deviate from it having the fullest liberty do so”. For the last edition, published in 1871, he added a further caveat: ‘which has never *in this country* been demanded...’ [my emphasis]
- <sup>93</sup> Letter to Tocqueville, 7 January 1837, CW, XII, p. 317
- <sup>94</sup> CW, XIX, p.332
- <sup>95</sup> CW, XIX, pp.335-336
- <sup>96</sup> CW, XVIII, p.xxxii
- <sup>97</sup> CW, I, p.261
- <sup>98</sup> Letter to Harriet, 24 June 1854, CW, XIV, p. 217
- <sup>99</sup> Letter to Harriet, 30 June 1854, CW, XIV, p. 222
- <sup>100</sup> Collini, ‘Introduction’ CW XXI, p. xxx
- <sup>101</sup> CW, I, p. 93
- <sup>102</sup> For example, during one of debates with the Cooperative Society, in the middle of a passage about rhetorical style, he praised speakers who treat the audience ‘like men, and I may add, like women, of judgement and sense’.
- <sup>103</sup> *VF*, pp. 92-3
- <sup>104</sup> See for example *POPE*, CW II, pp. 218-219: in these two pages alone, Mill makes nine changes to neutralise gender.
- <sup>105</sup> ‘The Enfranchisement of Women’ *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, July 1851, CW XXI, Appendix C, pp. 399-400
- <sup>106</sup> ‘Enfranchisement’, CW XXI, p. 402
- <sup>107</sup> *Subjection*, CW, XXI, p. 297
- <sup>108</sup> CW, XXI, p. 319
- <sup>109</sup> Okin, S. *Women in Western Political Philosophy*, 1979. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p. 237
- <sup>110</sup> CW XVIII, p. 263