COLLECTED WORKS OF JOHN STUART MILL

VOLUME X
The Collected Edition of the works of John Stuart Mill was planned and directed by an editorial committee appointed from the Faculty of Arts and Science of the University of Toronto, and from the University of Toronto Press. The primary aim of the edition is to present fully collated texts of those works which exist in a number of versions, both printed and manuscript, and to provide accurate texts of works previously unpublished or which had become relatively inaccessible.

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Liberty Fund
Indianapolis
Contents

INTRODUCTION, by F. E. L. Priestley  vii

MILL’S UTILITARIANISM, by D. P. Dryer  lxiii

TEXTUAL INTRODUCTION, by J. M. Robson  cxv

Remarks on Bentham’s Philosophy (1833)  3

Blakey’s History of Moral Science (1833)  19

Sedgwick’s Discourse (1835)  31

Bentham (1838)  75

Coleridge (1840)  117

Whewell on Moral Philosophy (1852)  165

Utilitarianism (1861)  203
  General Remarks, 205
  What Utilitarianism Is, 209
  Of the Ultimate Sanction of the Principle of Utility, 227
  Of What Sort of Proof the Principle of Utility Is Susceptible, 234
  On the Connexion between Justice and Utility, 240

Auguste Comte and Positivism (1865)  261
  The Cours de Philosophie Positive, 263
  The Later Speculations of M. Comte, 328

Three Essays on Religion (1874)  369
  Introductory Notice, 371
  Nature, 373
  Utility of Religion, 403
  Theism, 429
APPENDICES

Appendix A. Preface to *Dissertations and Discussions* (1859) 493
Appendix B. Obituary of Bentham (1832) 495
Appendix C. Comment on Bentham in Bulwer’s *England and the English* (1833) 499
Appendix D. Quotation from “Coleridge” in Mill’s *System of Logic* (8th ed., 1872), 519–23 (VI, x, 5) 503
Appendix E. Bibliographic Index of persons and works cited in the *Essays*, with variants and notes 509

INDEX 567
Introduction

The essays collected in this volume are the main documents for the illustration and exposition of John Stuart Mill’s thoughts on ethics and religion and their function in society. Since his system of ethics is avowedly Utilitarian, these documents, arranged chronologically, present the development of Mill’s Utilitarianism as given in published utterance. Questions about the precise nature of his doctrine are capable of being approached in various ways, of which we have, in this edition, chosen two. It is possible to take the essay Utilitarianism as Mill’s definitive statement of his doctrine and subject it to a rigorous analysis, seeking precise shades of meaning, testing the logical consistency and coherence of the argument, by means of the techniques and criteria of the modern philosopher. This task and this approach have been undertaken here by Professor D. P. Dryer, whose thorough and careful study follows this general introduction. It is also possible to follow the patterns of thought, and the patterns of exposition, in the successive works included here, and to treat them in terms of the history of ideas—in this case the development of Mill’s ideas—and in terms of rhetoric, or what might be called the strategy or tactics of presentation and argument. This is to remember that Mill is not purely a philosopher, but a man of letters and a controversialist. It is this second task, and this second approach, that I undertake in this general introduction.

MILL, BENTHAM, AND UTILITARIANISM

It is natural for discussions of Mill’s variations from Benthamism to start with evidence of his discontent or restiveness under Bentham’s rule, and the main documents called in to supply that evidence are the Autobiography and the essays on Bentham and on Coleridge. As one reads Mill’s retrospective account of what he himself was like before the mental crisis of 1826, that is, during the period of complete committal to Benthamism, one is struck by how closely the portrait of the young Mill resembles the portrait the more mature Mill draws of Bentham. Bentham’s “principle of utility” was “the keystone” which “gave unity” to his conceptions of things, and formulated for
him “a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy, . . . a religion.” The “description so often given of a Benthamite, as a mere reasoning machine,” he says, “was during two or three years of my life not altogether untrue of me.” Zeal “for what I thought the good of mankind was my strongest sentiment. . . . But my zeal was as yet little else, at that period of my life, than zeal for speculative opinions. It had not its root in genuine benevolence, or sympathy with mankind; though these qualities held their due place in my ethical standard. Nor was it connected with any high enthusiasm for ideal nobleness.” “[My] father’s teachings tended to the undervaluing of feeling”—as also did Bentham’s. (76–7.)

As he looks back on what he was, Mill recognizes of course in himself the suppressed potentialities that differentiate him from Bentham: “no youth of the age I then was, can be expected to be more than one thing, and this was the thing I happened to be,” but of the absent “high enthusiasm for ideal nobleness,” he comments: “Yet of this feeling I was imaginatively very susceptible; but there was at that time an intermission of its natural aliment, poetical culture, while there was a superabundance of the discipline antagonistic to it, that of mere logic and analysis” (76–7). He also recognizes from this later perspective the power of his father’s feelings, but the fact remains that the feelings are given little place in James Mill’s system. The whole Benthamite system of the regeneration of mankind, to which the young Mill fully subscribed, was to be the “effect of educated intellect, enlightening the selfish feelings” (78). The inevitable egoism of man was to be modified into an enlightened egoism.

The first movement of emancipation from the narrow mould of Benthamism was a very slight one: the rejection of Bentham’s contempt for poetry. This came first through “looking into” Pope’s Essay on Man, and realizing how powerfully it acted on his imagination, despite the repugnance to him of its opinions. It is significant that in retrospect Mill connects this momentary stirring of the imagination by poetry, quite apart from the appeal of its opinions, with the “inspiring effect,” “the best sort of enthusiasm,” roused by biographies of wise and noble men. These stirrings are, as he points out, of greater meaning from the vantage-point of maturity than they were at the time. They did not affect the “real inward sectarianism” of his youth; they were evidence merely of a suppressed potentiality (79–80). It is, nevertheless, this suppressed potentiality which distinguishes the young Mill from Bentham himself.

The actual process of cracking the shell of his “inward sectarianism” begins with his mental crisis in the autumn of 1826. The great end of Ben-

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1The preceding quotations are from Mill’s Autobiography (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), 47. Subsequent references to this edition are given in parentheses.
thamism was the production of pleasure (or, to accept Bentham’s extension, happiness). Now Mill found his life devoid of happiness. To the vital question, “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?” his “irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, ‘No!’ ” And, as he puts it, “the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down.” (94.)

What is strongly suggested by Mill’s account, and by the criticism of the doctrine of association taught him by his father and Bentham which immediately follows in the *Autobiography*, is that the crisis of apathy, of loss of incentive, had brought home to him with full force the objection commonly made to Utilitarianism as a system of ethics, that it provided no source of obligation. “I was,” he says, “. . . left stranded . . . with a well-equipped ship and a rudder, but no sail; without any real desire for the ends which I had been so carefully fitted out to work for: no delight in virtue, or the general good. . . . [N]either selfish nor unselfish pleasures were pleasures to me.” To “know that a feeling would make me happy if I had it, did not give me the feeling.” “. . . I became persuaded, that my love of mankind, and of excellence for its own sake, had worn itself out. . . .” (97–8, 95.) The cause of his state he finds in the education to which he had been subjected, which was, as he recognizes, the kind of education through which Bentham and James Mill looked for the progressive improvement of mankind. His teachers, he says, “seemed to have trusted altogether to the old familiar instruments, praise and blame, reward and punishment,” linked to behaviour in the educational pattern of association derived from Helvetius (96). These associations Mill now saw as artificial and mechanical, not natural. They are, in fact, deliberately created or cultivated prejudices (or, to use a more modern terminology, states of conditioning). There is thus a conflict between this whole area of Bentham’s thought and that area which concerns itself with critical analysis. Bentham’s constructive thought, his plan for progress through enlightenment, reveals a fatal dichotomy. In so far as it is conceived in terms of rewards and punishments to induce the desired behaviour by mechanical association, that is, in so far as it derives from Helvetius and Beccaria, it is at odds with the kind of enlightenment represented by Bentham’s critical attacks on received notions and stereotyped habits of thought, conducted through rational analysis. As Mill points out, “we owe to analysis our clearest knowledge of the permanent sequences in nature; the real connexions between Things, not dependent on our will and feelings; natural laws. . . .” “The very excellence of analysis . . . is that it tends to weaken and undermine whatever is the result of prejudice. . . .” (97, 96.)

A consideration of these passages in the *Autobiography* indicates first of
all that Mill is separating the two aspects of Bentham’s system, the constructive and the critical, and showing why he largely rejects the former, while still generally approving of the latter. This whole procedure suggests a detached and rational weighing of Benthamism difficult to reconcile with the obvious agitation of Mill’s mind at this time. But to a large extent the agitation is in fact connected with the detached rational estimate. There can be no doubt that the maturing Mill became intellectually dissatisfied with the narrow and rigorous schematization which both Bentham and his father delighted in. Nor is there much doubt that any wavering or back-sliding, any questioning of its full orthodox doctrine of what was to James Mill, as to John Stuart, a “religion,” smacked to both of heresy and betrayal. It is significant that as late as 1833, Mill is still anxious to keep his heretical views from his father. Some of the anguish, then, is undoubtedly that of a pillar of the faith, beset by intellectual doubts, and in constant communion with the founder of the church.

But much in the Autobiography also suggests a less rational and perhaps even more powerful influence at work. This is an enormous sense of the impoverishment of his own nature, of the denial of a vital part of it, of a suppression of its full potentialities, through the narrowness of the system in which he had been educated. It would be hard to find in any autobiography a passage with more dreadful implications than the one in which Mill records that he read through the whole of Byron, “to try whether a poet, whose peculiar department was supposed to be that of the intenser feelings, could rouse any feeling in me” (103). The nightmarish sense of a paralyzed sensibility, to be tested by the most violent provocation at hand, as if one were applying a powerful current to a nerve one feared to be dead, conveys a profound sense of despair, more profound than that in Arnold’s “buried life.”

As is well known, it was from Wordsworth’s poems that Mill derived “a medicine for [his] state of mind,” “a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings. . . .” “From them,” he says, “I seemed to learn what would be the perennial sources of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. . . . I needed to be made to feel that there was real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation. . . . And the delight which these poems gave me, proved that with culture of this sort, there was nothing to dread from the most confirmed habit of analysis.” (104.) One is again reminded of Arnold, and his tribute to Wordsworth as the poet who, “when the age had bound Our souls in its benumbing round, . . . spoke, and loosed our heart in tears,” and who “shed On spirits that had long been dead, Spirits dried up and closely furl’d, The freshness of the early world.”

In his depression, Mill had been brought to the belief that “the habit of

analysis has a tendency to wear away the feelings . . . ” (96). Since he had been taught by his education not only that the proper exercise of the mind was this habit of analysis, but also that “the pleasure of sympathy with human beings, and the feelings which made the good of others . . . the object of existence, were the greatest and surest source of happiness” (97), he had seemed to be faced with a dilemma. It is from this dilemma that Wordsworth delivered him, as the last sentence quoted above shows.

In his rebellion, emotional and intellectual, against Bentham, Mill sees himself, in retrospect, as if in violent reaction. He notes of a later stage that he had “now completely turned back from what there had been of excess in my reaction against Benthamism” (169). He describes himself, during the reaction, as influenced by the Coleridgeans, and moving towards their position. But he also speaks of the truths “which lay in my early opinions, and in no essential part of which I at any time wavered” (118).

The central question of the nature of Mill’s Utilitarianism clearly involves his attitude towards Bentham and Bentham’s system. But the implications of his reaction against Bentham are neither clear-cut nor simple. An analogy is suggested by his own description of his early enthusiasm for Benthamism as a religion. Heretics are not all of one sort: some reject the old religion totally and subscribe to another set of beliefs, some wish to abandon parts of the orthodox doctrine as excrecences or debasements or perversions, some question the definitions and doctrines and seek a re-definition. Mill had obviously been brought up to accept Benthamism as the full and orthodox doctrine of the utilitarian creed. As a heretic, he could either see himself as rejecting Utilitarianism or as rejecting Bentham’s definition of it. It is clear that he saw himself as doing the latter.

“REMARKS ON BENTHAM’S PHILOSOPHY”

That Mill’s heresy is of the “revisionist” sort is made evident not only by the very obvious fact of his defence of Utilitarianism in the essay on that subject, but by an examination of the essays on Bentham and on Coleridge. The “Remarks on Bentham’s Philosophy” which Mill wrote anonymously in 1833 as an appendix to Lytton Bulwer’s England and the English is notable for its direct challenge of Bentham’s interpretation of the doctrine of Utility: “he has practically, to a very great extent, confounded the principle of Utility with the principle of specific consequences . . . . He has largely exemplified, and contributed very widely to diffuse, a tone of thinking, according to which any kind of action or any habit, which in its own specific consequences cannot be proved to be necessarily or probably productive of unhappiness . . . is supposed to be fully justified. . . .”

3“Remarks on Bentham’s Philosophy,” 8 below. Subsequent references are to the present edition, and are given in parentheses.
the “source of the chief part of the temporary mischief” Bentham as a moral philosopher “must be allowed to have produced” (7–8). He has ignored the question whether acts or habits not in themselves necessarily pernicious, may not form part of a pernicious character. In ignoring states of mind as motive and cause of actions, Bentham is in fact ignoring some of the consequences, for “any act . . . has a tendency to fix and perpetuate the state or character of mind in which itself has originated” (8). And by thus limiting consideration of the morality of an act to “consequences” narrowly conceived, Bentham has, Mill implies, given some sanction to those who see Utilitarianism as merely a doctrine of expediency; “a more enlarged understanding of the ‘greatest-happiness principle,’” which took far more into account than Bentham’s “consequences,” would not be open to this interpretation (7).

Although Bentham entitles his work Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, it is perhaps fortunate, says Mill, that he concerns himself mainly with legislation rather than morals, “for the mode in which he understood and applied the principle of Utility” was more conducive to valuable results in relation to legislation (7). But even here, the narrowness of his definition of the principle leads him to fail in “the consideration of the greater social questions—the theory of organic institutions and general forms of polity; for those . . . must be viewed as the great instruments of forming the national character . . .” (9). The deficiency in Bentham’s understanding of the principle of Utility is further aggravated, in his speculations on politics, by the deficiency of his method of “beginning at the beginning”: he starts with a view of man in society without a government, and then considers sorts of government as alternative constructions to be hypothetically applied and evaluated. This method, says Mill, “assumes that mankind are alike in all times and all places, that they have the same wants and are exposed to the same evils, and that if the same institutions do not suit them, it is only because in the more backward stages of improvement they have not wisdom to see what institutions are most for their good” (16). This is vastly to over-simplify the real problem of politics. It is to ignore the function of political institutions as “the principal means of the social education of a people,” to be fitted specifically to the particular needs of the circumstances and national character at a particular stage of civilization. Since different stages demand the production of different effects, no one social organization can be fitted to all circumstances and characters.

The reductive simplicity of this aspect of Bentham’s thought proceeds ultimately from the similar simplicity of his view of human nature. He “supposes mankind,” writes Mill, “to be swayed by only a part of the inducements which really actuate them; but of that part he imagines them to be much cooler and more thoughtful calculators than they really are” (17).
He ignores the profound effect of habit and imagination in securing political acquiescence, and the effect upon habit and imagination of continuity of political structure and especially its outward forms. He ignores, in short, what Burke calls "prejudice," and which Burke rightly recognizes as to some extent indicating an adaptation of institutions, "associated with all the historical recollections of a people," to their national character (17). It is this historical continuity "which alone renders possible those innumerable compromises between adverse interests and expectation, without which no government could be carried on for a year, and with difficulty even for a week."

If the narrowness of Bentham's view of human nature introduces such serious deficiencies into his political thought, in the area of moral thought Mill sees its effect as positively vicious. In asserting that "men's actions are always obedient to their interests," Bentham by no means intended "to impute universal selfishness to mankind, for he reckoned the motive of sympathy as an interest. . . . He distinguished two kinds of interests, the self-regarding and the social. . . ." But the term interest in vulgar usage gets restricted to the self-regarding, and indeed the "tendency of Mr. Bentham's own opinions" was to consider the self-regarding interest "as exercising, by the very constitution of human nature, a far more exclusive and paramount control over human actions than it really does exercise." As soon as Bentham has shown the direction in which a man's selfish interest would move him, he habitually "lays it down without further parley that the man's interest lies that way" (14). This assertion Mill goes on to support with quotations from Bentham's Book of Fallacies. "By the promulgation of such views of human nature, and by a general tone of thought and expression perfectly in harmony with them," he flatly charges, "I conceive Mr. Bentham's writings to have done and to be doing very serious evil. . . . It is difficult to form the conception of a tendency more inconsistent with all rational hope of good for the human species, than that which must be impressed by such doctrines, upon any mind in which they find acceptance." "I regard any considerable increase of human happiness, through mere changes in outward circumstances, unaccompanied by changes in the state of the desires, as hopeless. . . . No man's individual share of any public good which he can hope to realize by his efforts, is an equivalent for the sacrifice of his ease, and of the personal objects which he might attain by another course of conduct. The balance can be turned in favour of virtuous exertion, only by the interest of feeling or by that of conscience—those 'social interests,' the necessary subordination of which to 'self-regarding' is so lightly assumed." (15.)

Mill reinforces his case by further criticism of Bentham's psychology—the inadequacy of his list of motives, or "springs of action," the inferiority of his doctrine to Hartley's in omitting "the moral sense," the falseness of his notion that "all our acts are determined by pains and pleasures in prospect," as
implied in the calculus of consequences (12). Mill also introduces something like Godwin's distinction between the morality of an act and the virtue of the actor. The virtuous man is deterred, not by a view of consequences, or of future pain, but from the painful "thought of committing the act," a pain which precedes the act. "Not only may this be so," Mill adds, "but unless it be so, the man is not really virtuous." Again, consequences depend on deliberation, but he who deliberates "is in imminent danger of being lost" (12). Mill might seem here to be arguing a doctrine of "moral sense," an immediate, not deliberative apprehension of the moral quality of an act. He is certainly defining virtue in terms of moral disposition, or motive, like the intuitionists. But in view of his rejection in Utilitarianism of any cognitive element in "moral sense," we must conclude that here the deterrent "painful thought" performs only a psychological, not an epistemic function. What Mill is doing, then, is substituting an account of moral sense in terms of his empirical psychology for that offered by the intuitionists. His reference to Hartley serves to remind us that Hartley also attempts to reconcile in this fashion, at least to some degree, the opposed empirical and intuitionist schools of moral philosophy.

Where Bentham is successful, Mill argues, is in those areas which do not involve moral philosophy. Penal law, for example, "enjoins or prohibits an action, with very little regard to the general moral excellence or turpitude which it implies...." The legislator's object "is not to render people incapable of desiring a crime, but to deter them from actually committing it" (9). Again, in his efforts to reduce law to a science, in his deductions of principles, and the separating of historical, technical, and rational elements, in his exploding of "fantastic and illogical maxims on which the various technical systems are founded" (10), in his concepts of codification of the law, Bentham, operating purely critically, is brilliantly successful, and Mill pays him full tribute.

How far Mill's estimate of Bentham, in this essay of 1833, is accurate or just to Bentham need not concern us here. What we are solely concerned with is to determine the exact state of Mill's own thought, and particularly of its relation at this point to Utilitarianism.

What we first note is the sharp separation of Bentham as moral philosopher from Bentham as analyst and proponent of the philosophy of law, the first being attacked as not only inadequate but positively pernicious, the second being praised almost without qualification. We note secondly that Bentham the moral philosopher is described almost totally in terms of what he derives from Helvetius and Beccaria: the egoistic psychology, the reduction of motive to simple, undifferentiated pleasure and pain, the defining of virtue and vice simply by means of consequences, the restriction of consideration to the action and not including the virtue of the actor or his
motives, the mechanical theory of association which, by linking pain or pleasure to certain actions, will "educate" the egoistic individual into socially useful behaviour. The extent to which Bentham in fact modifies the rigorous pattern of Helvétius and Beccaria is minimized. Mill suggests, indeed, that the modifications weigh very lightly in Bentham's own habits of thought.

What we have in this essay is, then, a point-by-point rejection of practically all the main elements in the structure of the system of Utilitarianism as conceived by Helvétius and Beccaria. It is clear that if their system is taken to be the pure and orthodox doctrine, Mill is at this moment an anti-Utilitarian. But it is also clear from the essay that this is not how the matter appeared to Mill. He insists rather that the structure he is attacking is not the true doctrine, but a false one raised entirely upon the foundations of a false psychology, a false view of human nature. He is, in short, not the type of heretic who rejects the whole religion, but the type who sees himself, not as a heretic, but as the exponent of the true faith, warped in its transmission by the narrowness of vision of the prophets before him.

"SEDGWICK"

The essay on Bentham, written in 1838 as a review of Bentham's collected Works,4 and the essay on Coleridge, published in 1840, continue the pattern established by the essay of 1833. But in the meantime Mill had been provoked by Sedgwick's Discourse into a defence of Utilitarianism. This, being a public and avowed performance, and not, like the earlier essay, anonymous, gave Mill a limited opportunity, as he says, to insert into his defence of "Hartleianism and Utilitarianism a number of the opinions which constituted my view of those subjects, as distinguished from that of my old associates."

"My relation to my father would have made it . . . impossible . . . to speak out my whole mind . . . at this time." He was obliged "to omit two or three pages of comment on what I thought the mistakes of utilitarian moralists, which my father considered as an attack on Bentham and on him."5

The modern reader, with the less-guarded essay of 1833 to place beside the defence of 1835, can savour the ironies of the situation. As he reads Mill's scornful rejection of Sedgwick's argument that "waiting for the calculations of utility" is immoral, since "to hesitate is to rebel,"6 he is likely to recall the passage Mill wrote in 1833: "The fear of pain consequent upon

4Though generally taken to be a review of the whole of Bowring's edition of Bentham's Works, the article reviews only Parts I to IV of that edition (all that had appeared to that point); for a description of these parts and their place in the edition, see Bibliographic Appendix, 512 below.

5Autobiography, 140–1. Cf. Professor Robson's comments, cxviii below.

6"Sedgwick," 66 below. Subsequent references are to the present edition, and are given in parentheses.
the act, cannot arise, unless there be deliberation; and the man as well as 'the woman who deliberates,' is in imminent danger of being lost.7 And as he reads the attack on Sedgwick's contention that the principle of utility has a “debasing” and “degrading” effect (66), he remembers, from the text of 1833, that “the effect of such writings as Mr. Bentham's, if they be read and believed and their spirit imbibed, must either be hopeless despondency and gloom, or a reckless giving themselves up to a life of that miserable self-seeking, which they are there taught to regard as inherent in their original and unalterable nature” (16).

Mill's relation to his father has not only made it impossible, as he says, to speak out his whole mind; it has undoubtedly forced him into a degree of disingenuousness. As he begins his defence of the theory of utility against Sedgwick's attack, he lays down a caveat: “No one is entitled to found an argument against a principle, upon the faults or blunders of a particular writer who professed to build his system upon it, without taking notice that the principle may be understood differently, and has in fact been understood differently by other writers. What would be thought of an assailant of Christianity, who should judge of its truth or beneficial tendency from the view taken of it by the Jesuits, or by the Shakers?” (52.) In the context, the implication is that the wrong understanding of the principle of utility is Paley's; in the context of the essay of 1833 the wrong view can also be Bentham's. “A doctrine is not judged at all until it is judged in its best form” (52). This caveat is repeatedly, but often unobtrusively, inserted into the attack on Sedgwick. Mill speaks of the doctrine of utility "when properly understood." He insists that "clear and comprehensive views of education and human culture" must form the basis of a philosophy of morals; that "all our affections . . . towards human beings . . . are held, by the best teachers of the theory of utility" to originate in the natural human constitution; he accuses Sedgwick of "lumping up" the theory of utility with "the theory, if there be such a theory, of the universal selfishness of mankind" (71; italics added).

It is clear to those who know the essay of 1833 that the caveat is directed against Bentham, that Bentham is the counterpart of the Jesuits and Shakers, but no explicit sign of this intention appears. The only mention of Bentham in the whole essay is indeed, when set against the context of 1833, highly misleading: Paley, says Mill, would doubtless admit that men are acted upon by other than selfish motives, "or, in the language of Bentham and Helvetius, that they have other interests, than merely self-regarding ones" (54). This remark does not, it will be noted, actually make any statement about the doctrines of Bentham and Helvetius, but only about their language—specifically the term "interest"—but it permits the reader to interpret it as a statement about doctrine.

7"Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy," 12.
Mill does, however, in spite of these ambiguities, insert some of those ideas that he sees as modifications or correctives of Benthamism. When, for example, he attributes the “lax morality taught by Paley” to Paley’s confusion of utilitarianism with expediency, and objects at length to the narrow definition of “consequences” (56), he directs nominally against Paley the same arguments he directed in 1833 against Bentham. His insistence on the importance of poetry, along with autobiographies and novels, in broadening views of human nature, in supplying knowledge of “true human feeling” (56), and in the formation of character, again parallels passages in the Autobiography and in the essay of 1833. So does his list of feelings—the chivalrous point of honour, envy and jealousy, ambition, covetousness; although his immediate point is to analyze them all into products of association, he is nevertheless suggesting an enlargement of Bentham’s “springs of action.” And his comment upon the effects of the “excessive cultivation” of “habits of analysis and abstraction upon the character” records precisely the same rebellion as that recorded in the Autobiography. The steady emphasis upon character and motive, the inclusion of effects on character among “consequences” of an act, and the tendency to turn attention away from Bentham’s sort of “consequences” to these, insert into the essay, at least by implication, many of the fundamental criticisms of Bentham made in 1833.

“BENTHAM”

By 1838 James Mill, as well as Bentham, was dead, and John Stuart Mill was free to write without wounding his father by his heresy or disloyalty. The essay on Bentham is his first public exercise of this freedom. His emancipation is proclaimed in the opening paragraph, where he praises in perfectly equal terms Bentham and Coleridge, “the two great seminal minds of England in their age,” the proponents of the philosophy in which Mill had been reared, and of the philosophy which he in general thinks of as its antithesis. In the context of the relatively long essay on Bentham, this first paragraph and the one following it create a peculiar effect. We are told that both men effected a revolution in the “general modes of thought and investigation” of their time, that both were closet-students, never read by the multitude, that their influences have “but begun to diffuse themselves” over society at large, Bentham’s over the “Progressive class,” Coleridge’s over the “Conservative,” and that to Bentham it was given “to discern more particularly those truths with which existing doctrines and institutions were at variance; to Coleridge, the neglected truths which lay in them”—talents which suggest in broad and relatively conventional terms Progressive and Conservative attitudes. The reader of 1838 might well have wondered why this very general preamble

8“Bentham,” 77 below. Subsequent references are to the present edition, and are given in parentheses.
and this laudatory but unspecific tribute to Coleridge should preface a long and detailed essay concerned exclusively with Bentham. As we are now able to recognize, and as probably the reader of 1840 could recognize with the essay on Coleridge before him, the introductory paragraphs are not an introduction to the essay on Bentham. They are an introduction to Mill's thoughts about Bentham, which is a somewhat different and more complex subject. We can now see, with the Autobiography available to us, why Mill thinks of Coleridge as well as Bentham at this point. The reader of "Coleridge" would understand the force of the final introductory sentence about each philosopher's approach to doctrines and institutions.

Any reader, however, is likely to feel that the treatment of Bentham in the essay contrasts in its severity with the praise in the introduction, and indeed Mill himself at a later date had misgivings. The contrast is perhaps more apparent than real. As in the essay of 1833, Mill does not underestimate what he takes to be Bentham's real achievement: "to refuse an admiring recognition of what he was, on account of what he was not" is an error, he says, "no longer permitted to any cultivated and instructed mind" (82). The praise he now gives Bentham goes a good deal further than Mill was willing to go in 1833. At that time it was difficult for him to value any but the critical side of Bentham's philosophy. Now he discriminates and elaborates. Bentham is still the great "subversive, or, in the language of continental philosophers, the great critical, thinker of his age and country" (79). But his importance is to be estimated fully neither by the quality of his critical analysis—which shows no subtlety or power of recondite analysis—nor by his achievement in the area in which he really excelled, the correction of practical abuses. His importance lies in his widespread and lasting influence. "It was not Bentham by his own writings; it was Bentham through the minds and pens which those writings fed—through the men . . . into whom his spirit passed" (79). And this spirit was not purely negative and critical; it included a positive and constructive element. He "made it a point of conscience" not to assail error "until he thought he could plant instead the corresponding truth" (82). But again, his real value lies not in those conclusions he took for truth, but in the method, combining critical analysis with positive synthesis. He reformed philosophy, but it "was not his doctrines which did this, it was his mode of arriving at them." "It was not his opinions, in short, but his method, that constituted the novelty and the value of what he did; a value beyond all price, even though we should reject the whole, as we unquestionably must a large part, of the opinions themselves." (83.)

Freed of the necessity of accepting and praising Bentham's opinions, and free to make this radical disjunction of his method from its doctrinal product, Mill can praise whole-heartedly. It was the doctrines that had been the stumbling-block. As soon, however, as he begins to examine the method to which he has ascribed a revolutionary novelty, he is seized by fresh doubts. The novelty and originality are perhaps not in the method after all, but in "the subjects he applied it to, and in the rigidity with which he adhered to it" (83). The method, considered as a logical conception, has certain affinities "with the methods of physical science, or with the previous labours of Bacon, Hobbes, or Locke. . ." (83). The novelty now becomes "not an essential consideration" of the method, but of its application. And here the novelty appears in "interminable classifications," "elaborate demonstrations of the most acknowledged truths." "That murder, incendiaryism, robbery, are mischievous actions, he will not take for granted without proof. . . ." (83.)

Up to this point, one gets a sense of deliberate anticlimax, starting with a great seminal mind, dismissing the doctrines and opinions produced by it, praising the method it developed, only to cast suspicion on the originality involved, and ending with a reduction to the phrases above, with the slighting "interminable," "elaborate," "most acknowledged." Having thus invited the reader virtually to dismiss Bentham, doctrines, method, and all, Mill proceeds to a patient and detailed demonstration of the value, despite its and its begetter's shortcomings, of Bentham's method, the "method of detail." In it Mill sees an "application of a real inductive philosophy to the problems of ethics." And so, after an anticlimactic nadir, we come back to praise.

The peculiarity of this pattern is open to more than one explanation. It could be a purely rhetorical device, in which Bentham's opponents are thrown off balance and disarmed by concession after concession, until, just as all seems conceded and their victory complete, Bentham's greatness is re-asserted on grounds they had overlooked. But one gets the sense here rather of following the windings of Mill's own mind, as he sorts out what he himself has acquired from Bentham: not doctrine, for much of that he had rejected in 1833; not method, for he himself had argued for an imitation of the inductive sciences rather than of geometry in moral and political philosophy. It could then only be the way in which Bentham had developed and applied the method, the precise nature of the "habit of analysis" he and James Mill had taught their pupil. From his father Mill had learned, he believed, subtlety of analysis; from Bentham the "exhaustive method."

And this of course brings Mill back again, after giving Bentham due credit, to the limitations of the "habit of analysis" in general, and to Bentham's

10Cf. ibid., 267–8, where Professor Robson suggests that Mill was praising not the detail of Bentham's method, but his very adoption of a method in ethics, politics, and sociology.
limitations in particular. In what seems to be a general anxiety in this work to be fair to his subject, he first explains the sort of breadth Bentham's mind possessed: "he sees every subject in connexion with all the other subjects with which in his view it is related...." (88-9). He thus preserves himself against one kind of narrow and partial views—but "Nobody's synthesis can be more complete than his analysis" (89), and a system based upon an imperfect analysis will be exceedingly limited in its applicability. Bentham's analysis is limited in various ways: first of all by his contemptuous dismissal of all other thinkers and schools of thought, whose speculations he dismissed as "vague generalities." The "nature of his mind," says Mill, "prevented it from occurring to him, that these generalities contained the whole unanalysed experience of the human race" (90). One catches here, particularly in the last phrase, a hint of Mill's own discovery, recorded in the Autobiography, of the vast areas of human experience, and especially of the unanalyzed and unanalyzable experience embodied in imaginative writing, which Bentham so glibly dismissed.

Furthermore, in ignoring thinkers of the past, Bentham is ignoring "the collective mind of the human race." "The collective mind does not penetrate below the surface, but it sees all the surface." And by refusing to consider views opposed to his own, Bentham limits his own vision, for "none are more likely to have seen what he does not see, than those who do not see what he sees" (91).

It is at this point that Mill develops his theory of the half-truth, conceived generally in terms of polarity. "The hardest assertor... of the freedom of private judgment—the keenest detector of the errors of his predecessors, and of the inaccuracies of current modes of thought—is the very person who most needs to fortify the weak side of his own intellect, by study of the opinions of mankind in all ages and nations, and of the speculations of philosophers of the modes of thought most opposite to his own." "A man of clear ideas errs grievously if he imagines that whatever is seen confusedly does not exist...." (91.)

Bentham's most serious limitation, however, was "the incompleteness of his own mind as a representative of universal human nature. In many of the most natural and strongest feelings of human nature he had no sympathy; from many of its graver experiences he was altogether cut off; and the faculty by which one mind understands a mind different from itself, and throws itself into the feelings of that other mind, was denied him by his deficiency of Imagination." (91.) Behind these sentences lie not only the explanation of the incompleteness of Bentham's analysis of human nature, of the reductive simplicity of his "springs of action," but also a strong suggestion of Mill's own experience in the early years recorded in the Autobiography—of the sensitivities of an imaginative child and youth dismissed as nonsense.