The Many Sides of John Stuart Mill’s Political and Ethical Thought

by

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to account for the presence of discordant themes within the political and ethical writings of John Stuart Mill. It is argued that no existing account has adequately addressed the question of what possible function can be ascribed to conflict and contradiction within Mill's system of thought. It is argued that conflict and contradiction, are built into the structure of Mill's thought and reflect the author's 'manysidedness of mind,' a concept which Mill derives from his reading of Goethe.

Mill's versatility, his 'manysidedness,' to some readers appears to evidence a lack of centre, equivocality, or a lack of enthusiasm for any cause; it is viewed as being reflective of a theoretical weakness within Mill's system of thought. On the contrary, it is argued, it is precisely Mill's willingness to permit the coexistence of multiple, conflicting perspectives in his writings which is the source of the full, grand richness of his thought.

Manysidedness is a recurring theme within Mill's system of thought, which is of great value not only to Mill himself, but for understanding his thought as a whole. In the absence of a clear statement of purpose in respect to manysidedness from Mill, however, it is necessary to reconstruct the thought which appears in his writing. On the basis of such a reading, it is argued that Mill should be considered important for having discovered ideas that later thinkers have explored. Thus, I have shown that Mill may be seen as anticipating the recent debate on value pluralism; that Mill shows a pluralist-like appreciation for conflict that is at the same time critical of the value pluralist approach. This is not to suggest, however, that Mill's thought directly anticipates current debates within liberal theory. Rather, it suggests that Mill's thought remains relevant over time because it may be combined with a plurality of other thinkers and ideas.
For my grandparents, Chaja Sura and Smul Mordecai, who taught me about survival...

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Introduction

Various of Mill's interpreters have observed that there are inconsistencies within his thought which result from his presenting from multiple, competing perspectives - in effect, speaking in multiple "voices". Yet no account of Mill's thought to date has delved deeply enough into his texts to find the source of the problem. In this study I will argue that Mill's inconsistencies are not the result of confusion, nor are they the result of simple ambivalence, as some have argued. Rather, their presence may be seen as reflecting the irreconcilability of the "manysidedness" of his thought.

For Mill, manysidedness is the attempt "to go all round every object which [he] surveyed, and to place [him]self at all points of view, so to have the best chance of seeing all sides [Mill's emphasis]."¹ Mill perceives that each perspective, though inadequate, contains some part of the truth. Mill attempts to combine these points of view within an harmonious and comprehensive whole. This attempt fails, however, resulting in a body of work resembling a conglomerate of irreconcilable voices.

¹Mill to Thomas Carlyle, 12th January 1834, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, XII, 205. All references to Mill's works are from the Collected Works, which shall henceforth be referred to as CW.
Extrication of Mill's voices from his most significant works on ethics and politics, *On Liberty*, *Considerations on Representative Government*, and *Utilitarianism*, reveals a Mill oscillating between identification and detachment, never giving his full support to any single perspective contained within his writings. Mill envisions that escape is possible only through compromise, or by appeal to an underlying deeper doctrine. His claims in this regard are belied, however, by his failure both to find compromise between differing positions, as well as to provide an effective underlying deeper doctrine. Yet Mill's failure does not issue from an insufficiency of his approach. Throughout his political writings Mill may be observed always to consider more than one side of a problem. Rather, his failure is the result of his taking for himself an impossible task, as the goal of manysidedness, "extreme comprehensiveness," is practically speaking unattainable.

Mill's manysidedness has not yet been given an adequate account - despite his claiming that he had taken manysidedness for his own. Though noted in several (mostly) biographical works, Mill's manysidedness has not been considered important for understanding Mill's political thought. It is recognized in the literature as a characteristic of his political writings, but its presence has been relegated to a mere byproduct of the utility principle. This study represents the

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first attempt to account for the importance of manysidedness
to a systematic understanding of Mill's political thought.

This study is done in five chapters. The first two of
these deal largely with the secondary literature, setting the
stage for the speculations on which the remaining chapters are
developed. Using a novel system of classification, I group
systematic accounts of Mill's political thought in terms of
their ability and willingness to represent Mill's multiple
voices. The first class of interpretations I term
'reductive,' for their tendency to seek to refine Mill's
multiple voices to a single voice, on the assumption that one
of these alone actually belongs to Mill. While it is true
that each of these may find support within Mill's writing, I
contend that none of them can lay exclusive claim to his
thought. The second class of interpretations I term 'non-
reductive'. These interpretations all share a belief that
neglect of Mill's voices is an inadequate interpretive
practice which leads to an inaccurate depiction of Mill's
political thought. Despite being a credible approach, however,
the non-reductivist approach remains insufficiently developed
to deal adequately with the key issue of multiple voices.
For, I will argue, it is not sufficient to merely acknowledge
the presence of multiple voices, one must also account for
their function within Mill's thought. I declare the need for
an alternative approach. I term this approach 'authentic', as
it relates to a material reality which contains a multiplicity
of aspects, bearings and capacities, the perception of which depends on comparison of multiple versions of the world. Before such an account may be given, however, it is necessary first to inquire into Mill's thought to find a theoretical basis.

In chapter three, I will argue that "manysidedness" can provide the basis for the authentic account. I trace the development of Mill's manysidedness, from its adoption, in the period following his break with Benthamism, to its subsequent application in his call for a single, comprehensive system of truth. Mill perceives that each perspective, though inadequate, contains some part of the truth. He therefore argues that there needs to be a unifying Treatise of politics that would unite all half-truths.

Chapter four addresses itself to reconstructing Mill's attempts to provide a unified Treatise of politics, as is envisioned in his early writings. I will argue that Mill's later political writings represent a recapitulation of manysidedness. Focusing on the central problem of the improvement of humanity, I will argue that Mill's attempt is an irretrievable failure; instead of uniting the perspectives, Mill's thought lapses into incoherence. The incoherence of Mill's thought is engendered by endless struggles of resistance. In chapter five I will argue that Mill's failure is instructive, in that it reveals the ineradicability of
conflict, as such. In this, I will argue further, it may be seen as anticipating current debates within pluralism.
Chapter 1

Introduction:

The current state of Mill scholarship is fractious. While it is widely agreed that Mill's political thought contains numerous inconsistencies, there is little agreement over what significance can be ascribed to them. Currently Mill scholars are almost exclusively concerned with giving piecemeal accounts of Mill's political thought; in effect, depicting a multiplicity of Mills. These interpreters have found in Mill a Reform Liberal,\(^1\) a Conservative,\(^2\) and a Democratic Socialist.\(^3\) The possibility of giving such widely divergent accounts - often, citing the very same works as evidence - suggests that the source of the disunity must reside somehow in Mill's thought; that is to say, something in Mill's thought itself permits this wide number of disparate accounts. Yet there appears to be an implicit belief, among current Mill scholars, that there is no problem - or, at least, it is a problem which can be avoided. This may be evinced by the fact that hardly anyone is troubling themselves with the question of what meaning can be ascribed to the

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presence of so many conflicting perspectives. In failing to do so, however, all of these accounts are in some sense begging the question: they are presuming that nothing is to be gained from the attempt to render Mill's thought coherent.

This has not always been the case. In fact, until very recently a number of scholars were concerned with the apparent inconsistencies in Mill's thought, and were seeking to find an underlying doctrine which would resolve the tensions in his writing. The majority of these interpretations may be termed 'reductive' in that they seek to refine Mill's multiple voices to a single voice, on the assumption that one of these alone actually belongs to Mill. Yet, while it is true that each of these may find support within Mill's writing, none of them can lay exclusive claim to his thought.

The temptation to dismiss the tensions in Mill's thought readily insinuates itself into the reductive mode of interpretation. Each reductive interpretation seeks to refine Mill's thought in order to establish its intended meaning. Each proclaims itself to be the representation of the 'true' Mill. However, when Mill's texts are brought against the reductionist interpretations, it is clear that the

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4One noteworthy exception to this rule is the account given by Joseph Hamburger in the posthumously published, John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1999). Hamburger depicts Mill as a moral elitist and rhetorician par excellence, who hides his message within the language of liberty. This account is discussed in detail below.
reductionist assumption is ungrounded, as none of the voices ever receives Mill’s full endorsement. Moreover, I contend that the reductionist approach is an inadequate interpretive practice, as it cannot account for the multiple voices. Instead, the reductionist assumption actually belies the voices and the irreducibility of Mill’s thought.
John Stuart Mill’s Ethics and Political Thought

Though Mill wrote widely on politics throughout his long career, it is generally held that his most significant writings, including the work for which he is best known, the essay On Liberty (1859), were executed within a brief period, spanning nearly a decade, towards the later part of his life. Other significant works from this period include: Mill’s Autobiography (published posthumously in 1873, but originally drafted between 1853-54), Considerations on Representative Government (1861) and Utilitarianism (1861).

There is good evidence within Mill’s writing to support the treatment of these texts as constituting a distinct body of works within Mill’s oeuvre. All of them are marked with a particular urgency, the result of Mill’s failing health. It was during a bout of poor health, starting in 1853 and lasting for more than one year, that Mill originally conceived a new body of political writings. The blueprint for this body of works is contained in the diary Mill kept from January 8-April 15, 1853. Mill’s stated purpose in keeping a diary was to do an “experiment,” exemplifying “what effect is produced on the mind by the obligation of having at least one thought

6 To this list, The Subjection of Women (1865, published posthumously) might also be added.
7 Mill was diagnosed with tuberculosis sometime in the spring of 1854, while travelling abroad [Mill to Harriet Mill, dated April 8. (1854), CW, XIV, 197-201].
per day which is worth writing down." Mill's overly-modest introduction gives a false notion of his true purpose: having succumbed to a series of attacks of pulmonary congestion, and believing himself to be near death, Mill regarded his diary as a final testimony of sorts:

I feel bitterly how I have procrastinated in the sacred duty of fixing in writing, so that it may not die with me, everything that I have in my mind which is capable of assisting the destruction of error and prejudice and the growth of just feelings and true opinions . . . If I ever recover my health, this shall be amended; and even if I do not, something may, I hope, be done towards it, provided a sufficient respite is allowed me.

Most significantly, for the purposes of this study, the diary discloses the fact that the works of this period constitute a body of political writings, which is distinct from Mill's prior works. Evidence for this is given by the very subject matter of the works themselves, for the writings of this period constitute a major refocusing of Mill's political goals, and a general change in his understanding of politics. Mill had formerly been primarily concerned with conventional politics. In commenting on the political and economic achievements of the prior twenty years, Mill communicates his disappointment:

I have seen, in the last twenty years, many of the opinions of my youth obtain general recognition, and many of the reforms in institutions, for which I had through life contended, either effected or in course of being so. But these changes have been attended with much less benefit to human well being

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8Mill, Diary, January 8, (1854), CW, XXVII, 641.
9Mill, Diary, January 19, (1854), CW, XXVII, 664.
than I should formerly have anticipated, because they have produced very little improvement in that on which depends all real amelioration in the lot of causes of deterioration which have been at work in the meanwhile. I have learned from experience that many false opinions may be exchanged for true ones, without in the least altering the habits of mind of which false opinions are the result.\textsuperscript{10}

Having turned away from conventional politics, Mill sought through this new body of works to propose a political programme aimed at moral and cultural regeneration: "I am now convinced that no great improvements in the lot of mankind are possible until a change takes place in the fundamental constitution of their modes of thought."\textsuperscript{11}

Within this constellation of writings, which constitute Mill's most significant body of work on political theory, it may be argued that some works are more illuminating than others, as is the case with the essay \textit{On Liberty}. This work was unique among all of Mill's other writings in the care that was given to its writing. Mill himself attests to this fact, noting that "[n]one of my writings have been either so carefully composed, or so sedulously corrected as this."\textsuperscript{12} None of the other works gives as full an account of Mill's political thought as \textit{On Liberty}, in which his ideas are writ large; the ideas put forward in each of the other works are present in one form or another in \textit{On Liberty}, and not vice versa. This is not to say that the other works are

\textsuperscript{10} Mill, \textit{Autobiography}, \textit{CW}, I, 245.
\textsuperscript{11} Mill, \textit{Autobiography}, \textit{CW}, I, 245.
\textsuperscript{12} Mill, \textit{Autobiography}, \textit{CW}, I, 249.
unimportant to understanding Mill's political thought. Rather, each of these works may be viewed as being a companion to On Liberty, complementing, and, at times, elaborating on themes which are introduced in it. Thus, for example, Considerations on Representative Government may be viewed as providing a political solution to enact Mill's general proposal for producing "an intellectually active people" which is elaborated in On Liberty. In any account of Mill's political thought primary attention ought be given to the essay On Liberty.

The essay On Liberty begins with Mill seeking to define "the nature and the limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual." To this end he asserts "one very simple principle," by which he holds:

That the only purpose for which any power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right.

\[14^3\] Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 217.
This is the heart of Mill's case for liberty: his rejection of paternalism and moralism — the view that one may impose one's opinion of right conduct on another.

In seeking to define a sphere of individual liberty, Mill is concerned with limiting the powers which can be exercised over the individual — not only in the powers of the legislator, but also in the force of public opinion. Mill contends that what he terms, "the tyranny of the majority", is to be "generally included among the evils against which society requires to be on its guard."  

This "tyranny," Mill argues, is the result of "[t]he disposition of mankind, whether as rulers or as fellow-citizens, to impose their own opinions and inclinations as a rule of conduct on others. . ." It denotes a condition in which "society itself is the tyrant — society collectively over the separate individuals who compose it," implying that society itself can execute its own mandate; "and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself."  

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In stating the case for the freedom of the individual against "the tyranny of the majority", Mill presents strong arguments in favour of complete freedom of thought and discussion, arguing that no state or society has the right to prevent the free development of human individuality. He avers that "neither one person, nor any other persons, is warranted in saying to another human creature of ripe years, that he shall not do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it." 20 For the individual is deemed by Mill to be the best defender of her or his own best interest; "the interest which any other person ... can have in it, is trifling, compared with that which he himself has; the interest which society has in him individually (except as to his conduct to others) is fractional, and altogether indirect; while with respect to his own feelings and circumstances, the most ordinary man or woman has means of knowledge immeasurably surpassing those that can be possessed by any one else." 21 The only "freedom" which deserves the name, according to Mill, "is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it. Mankind are greater gainers suffering others to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good by the rest." 22

Mill invokes the language of a rights-based doctrine in his statement of the liberty principle, referring to it as being "entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual." However, according to Mill, liberty, as a principle "has no application . . . anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion." Thus, Mill explicitly rejects the notion of an absolute right to liberty. "I forgo any advantage," he states, "which may be derived by my argument from the idea of abstract right, as a thing independent of utility. I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being."

It is perhaps not surprising that Mill would make utility the highest appeal, given his position as heir to the doctrine of utilitarianism espoused by his father, James Mill, and Jeremy Bentham. Mill boasted that his early education was "in a great measure, a course in Benthamism." Mill's own particular brand of utilitarianism, however, differs greatly from that with which he was raised. That doctrine held that the *sumnum bonum*, the greatest good for society, consisted in the production of the greatest quantity of pleasure for its

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members. It makes no qualitative distinction among pleasures. Under this scheme, the difference between one pleasure and another is considered to be merely a quantitative one. Hence Bentham's claim, made famous by Mill, that "pushpin is as good as poetry."\(^{27}\) Mill, by contrast, believed that a qualitative distinction must be made between pleasures. "It is quite compatible," he argues, "with the principle of utility to recognise the fact, that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone [Mill's emphasis]."\(^{28}\)

Mill's statement of the utilitarian precept in *On Liberty* makes explicit a further difference between Mill's utilitarianism and his father's and Bentham's earlier doctrine. While following his father's and Bentham's formulations, Mill gives their crude doctrine a humanistic slant, by insisting that utility be "grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being." It is also evident from this statement that Mill's primary focus is on the

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\(^{28}\)Mill, *Utilitarianism*, CW, X, 211.
individual - not the collective. This is consistent with the referential slides Mill uses within his writings: while Mill claims to have his mind fixed on "the improvement of mankind," he tends always to give ontological priority to the individual. Thus, in defending freedom, Mill asserts that, where it is lacking, "there is wanting one of the principle ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress [emphasis mine]." All of his prescriptions are aimed specifically at the improvement of individuals. Mill proclaims "free-development of individuality [to be] one of the leading essentials of well-being." According to him, the benefits accrued from being part of the collective, "civilization, instruction, education, culture . . ." issue from this condition having been met. In considering "mankind," it is evident that Mill presumes that the interest of the collective is identical to, or, at least, does not exist over and above that of the aggregate of the interests of the individuals who compose it.

The moral and intellectual improvement of the individual, thus, is the ultimate value in Mill's ethics. In Utilitarianism Mill is anxious to make it clear that he includes in "utility" the pleasures of the imagination and the gratification of the higher emotions. In refusing to

\[29\] Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 145.
\[30\] Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 261.
\[31\] Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 261.
\[32\] Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 261.
distinguish between pleasures, the earlier doctrine of utilitarianism is indifferent to the promotion of improvement. Though his father and Bentham professed that each individual is the best judge of her or his own happiness, it may be argued that individuality is for them only a psychological datum, a presumed starting-point. Bentham proclaims the community to be "a fictitious body," composed solely of the individual persons who may be considered as constituting its members. To say that a person possesses individuality for Bentham, thus, is to say merely that she or he is a person—nothing more, or less. For Mill, however, individuality denotes an ideal, the ultimate end of human existence. Individuality, the love of liberty and personal independence, is for Mill the mark of "a cultivated mind," the attainment of which represents his ideal of individuality. A cultivated mind, "finds sources of inexhaustible interest in all that surrounds it... the ways of mankind, past and present, and their prospects in the future." This propels the individual from the pursuit of a selfish, narrow interest to contemplation of the general good. Mill argues that it is for want of mental cultivation that life is so unsatisfactory. Yet, he does not believe that the world must remain in such a condition of imperfection. He claims there is no reason why a

35Mill, Utilitarianism, CW, X, 216.
person of even moderate intellect should not have sufficient mental culture to be given an intelligent interest in the general good: "Genuine private affections and a sincere interest in the public good, are possible, though in unequal degrees, to every rightly brought up human being."36 Thus, he proclaims that "most of the great positive evils of the world are in themselves removable, and will, if human affairs continue to improve, be in the end reduced within narrow limits."37

Free-development of individuality is for Mill the surest means towards that stage of improvement. He avers that "the only unfailing and permanent source of improvement is liberty . . ."38 Liberty allows for diversity of opinion, which produces "different experiments of living," without which, Mill argues, "human life would become a stagnant pool."39 Accordingly, what he terms "the free-development of individuality," he regards as being the chief ingredient of individual and social progress. For, he argues, individuality of desires and impulses builds strong natures, and out of strong natures comes originality.40

Mill insists emphatically on the importance of originality: "all good things are the fruits of

originality."\(^{41}\) It is only through experimentation that the species can advance, bringing "human beings nearer to the best thing that they can be."\(^{42}\) For he argues, the world has not yet attained perfection in all its ways and practices. Mill appeals to the enlightened One or Few in society, the rare persons of genius, "whose experiments, if adopted by others, would be likely to be any improvement on established practices."\(^{43}\) In order to cultivate genius, however, it is important to first cultivate the soil in which it grows, as genius can only breathe in an atmosphere of freedom. Persons of genius, being more individual than any other people, are on Mill's account, "less capable, consequently, of fitting themselves, without hurtful compression, into any of the small number of moulds which society offers to save its members the trouble of forming their own character."\(^{44}\) Mill thus endeavours to ensure the liberty of cultivated minds.

As for the remainder, the majority in society, Mill complains that "[t]he general average of mankind are not only moderate in intellect, but also moderate in inclination: they have no tastes or wishes strong enough to incline them to do anything unusual, and they consequently do not understand those who have, and class all such with the wild and intemperate whom they are accustomed to look down upon."\(^{45}\) He

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argues that, left in their current state, they will continue to exist as the "collective mediocrity." 46 They must be led to their improvement by the wise One or Few. Thus, Mill contends that "the spirit of improvement is not always the spirit of liberty, for it may aim at forcing improvements on an unwilling people." 47 In his view this may include interference in areas as intimate as the sexual activities of the uninstructed. Mill declares that "The laws which, in many countries on the Continent, forbid marriage unless the parties can show that they have the means of supporting a family, do not exceed the legitimate powers of the State: and whether such laws be expedient or not (a question mainly dependent on local circumstances and feelings), they are not objectionable as violations liberty." 48 However, he does not countenance the use of restraint, arguing that the use of such expedients is "suited only to a state of society in which the labouring classes are avowedly treated as children or savages, and placed under an education of restraint, to fit them for future admission to the privileges of freedom." 49 For, he claims, "[t]his is not the principle on which the labouring classes are professedly governed in any free country; and no person who sets due value on freedom will give his adhesion to their being so governed." 50 Instead, Mill seeks a mechanism that

48 Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 163.
50 Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 299.
would work to induce the less-instructed to attain the mental stature of which they are capable.

In *Considerations on Representative Government* Mill finds in the franchise "a potent instrument of mental improvement." This is consistent with the criterion for improvement given in *On Liberty*, which states: "the human mental faculties of perception, judgement, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice." It will not do for her or him to be guided "in some good path, and kept out of harm's way." She or he must be allowed to choose her or his plan for her or himself. Choice, being conclusive to her or his reason, thus, works to strengthen it. Mill likens the process to physical exercise; in the same manner as the physical powers are improved through exercise, the intellectual and moral powers are improved though the act of choosing. Conformity to custom, as custom, does not in Mill's view serve to educate or develop the individual; a person's actions and beliefs must be "consentaneous to his own feelings and character." "Customs," Mill claims, "are made for customary circumstances and customary characters." Not all actions involving choice are of equal value, however, in the development of an

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51 Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, CW, XIX, 468.
individual's human faculties; the act of choosing must be applied to the perfecting of the individual's inward nature - not her or his immediate outward circumstances as, for example, in the expansion of energy directed towards "tending to physical comfort," or "in the show of riches." For Mill, the choices which have the greatest effect are ones which are most conclusive to the development of the intellect. Thus, the act of voting, Mill argues, provides "the strongest stimulus" to the growth of the intelligence of individuals, as "they are called upon to take part in act which directly affect the great interests of their country." Mill believes that similar development could be achieved through other forms of political participation. The vote is a necessary precondition, however, in order for these to have their effect:

it is from political discussion, and collective political action, that one whose daily occupations concentrate his interests in a small circle round himself, learns to feel for and with his fellow-citizens, and becomes consciously a member of a great community. But political discussions fly over the heads of those who have no votes, and are not endeavouring to acquire them . . . . It is not their suffrages that are asked, it is not their opinion that is sought to be influenced; the appeals are made, the arguments addressed, to others than them; nothing depends on the decision they may arrive at, and there is no necessity and very little inducement to them to come to any [Mill's emphasis].

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56 Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 410.
58 Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 469.
Yet, Mill is compelled, largely by reason of his fear of the danger of class legislation, to seek to limit the political expression of the majority. "The opinions and wishes of the poorest and rudest class of labourers," he argues, "may be very useful as one influence among others on the minds of the voters, as well as on those of the Legislature; and yet it might be highly mischievous to give them, in their present state of morals and intelligence, to the full exercise of the suffrage."\(^{59}\) The magnitude of the importance of these choices leads him to consider the possibility of enacting a plural voting system, as entitled to give a greater weight to the opinions of the cultivated minds. In *On Liberty*, Mill contends that it would be best if the un instructed deferred to the authority of the instructed:

"[n]o government by a democracy or a numerous aristocracy, either in its political act or in the opinions, qualities, and time of mind which it fosters, ever did or could rise above the mediocrity, except in so far as the sovereign Many have let themselves be guided (which in their best times they have always done) by the counsels and influence of a more highly gifted and instructed One or Few."\(^{60}\)

Plural voting is advanced in *Considerations on Representative Government* as a salutary, and necessary, stage in the progress of society towards the time when the complete extension of the franchise may be granted.\(^{61}\) Fitness to vote implies the loss of danger of class legislation,\(^{62}\) the majority having come to

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\(^{60}\)Mill, *On Liberty*, *CW*, XVIII, 469.  
the realization that the opinion of the One or Few is consentaneous to their own long-term interests:

Individuals, and peoples, who are acutely sensible of the value of superior wisdom, are likely to recognise it, where it exists, by other signs than by thinking exactly as they do, and even in spite of considerable differences of opinion: and when they have recognised it they will be far too desirous to secure it, at any admissible cost, to be prone to impose their own opinion as a law upon persons whom they look up to as wiser than themselves. 63

Yet Mill is not simply content to thus impede the proper functioning of democracy; his position is the result of a deep conflict within his own theory of democracy.

In fact Mill supports two principles of representation. In addition to plural voting, Mill also advocates Hare's Plan for Proportional Representation. Hare's Plan, which is set forth in his Treatise on the Election of Representatives, 64 employs a ballot that allows voters to rank competing candidates in order of preference. When the ballots are counted, candidates receiving the requisite number of first preference votes are awarded a seat. Any votes received in excess of the quota are returned to the candidates of second preference. Any of these candidates who have met the quota are then awarded seats. The process continues until all of the remaining seats have been awarded. Mill supports Hare's Plan on the grounds that it allows for greater equality of

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63 Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 508.
64 Thomas Hare, Treatise on the Election of Representatives, (London: Longman, et. al., 1859).
representation, by entitling like-minded voters to return a representative. According to Mill, those electors, therefore who do not wish to be represented by any of the local candidates, might aid by their vote in the return of the person they like best among those throughout the country who have expressed a willingness to be chosen.\textsuperscript{65} "This," argues Mill, "would . . . give reality to the electoral rights of the otherwise virtually disenfranchised minority."\textsuperscript{66} On the basis of this benefit alone, Mill proclaims that he would endorse equal and universal suffrage, "if made real by the proportional representation of all minorities on Mr. Hare's principle."\textsuperscript{67}

In examining Mill's statement we are immediately faced with a puzzle: Mill's support of Hare's Plan appears to directly contradict his case for plural voting. The two systems work at cross-purposes: proportionality, as advanced by Hare's Plan leads toward a working-class majority; plural voting upsets this proportionality.\textsuperscript{68} Yet, upon further examination, Mill's case for Hare's Plan can be shown to be in line with his ideas about democracy. Mill is conflicted in his beliefs about democracy, but is generally fearful of working-class power. His support for Hare's plan reflects his conflicted position, but it does not ultimately prevent him

\textsuperscript{65}Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 453.  
\textsuperscript{66}Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 453.  
\textsuperscript{67}Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 477.  
from impeding its proper functioning, as Mill's support of a universal and equal franchise through the adoption of Hare's Plan needs to be highly qualified. On the one hand, Mill acknowledges that "a constitution which give equal influence, man for man, to the least instructed, is . . . conducive to progress, because the appeals constantly made to the less instructed classes, the exercise given to their mental powers, and the exertions which the more instructed are obliged to make for enlightening their judgement and ridding them of errors and prejudices, are powerful stimulants to their advance in intelligence."\(^6^9\) Yet, on the other hand, Mill warns of the potential for abuse. For, while he admits that the desirability of this effect should entitle the less educated classes to "some, and even to a large share of power," Mill apprehends that when possessed of "all power," the Many - no less than the Few - "have no longer need of the arms of reason."\(^7^0\) Hare himself sees this potential for abuse and is, therefore, wary of popular franchise. Hare sees the chief benefit of his scheme as limiting the powers of the majority, not enhancing its expression. The promised positive effects of the vote on the majority provide no inducement to Hare for supporting the enlargement of the franchise: "The suffrage should be regarded as a right of value, and one not thrown needlessly to every man."\(^7^1\) In fact, despite appearances to the contrary, Mill is similarly wary. Though in public life


\(^{70}\)Hare, *Treatise*, 313.

\(^{71}\)Hare, *Treatise*, 314.
Mill was dedicated to the cause of extending the franchise, in his writings he makes it clear that he does not regard universal and equal suffrage as being among the things which are good in themselves. Rather, he regards it as being only relatively good;\(^72\) it is, in his view, less objectionable than the existing system which he claims is based on inequality of privilege. Therefore, Mill's endorsement of Hare's plan neither eliminates, nor seriously weakens, his case for plural voting. In arguing that he would endorse a system of equal and universal franchise, Mill clearly indicates that the basis of his support is the perceived unpopularity with which plural voting would be received by the public. But he remains steadfastly supportive of plural voting: "But if the best hopes which can be formed on this subject were certainties, I should still contend for the principle of plural voting [emphasis mine]."\(^73\) Plural voting for Mill represents "what is best in principle"; and Hare's scheme represents an "indirect means . . . which may promote in a less perfect manner the same end."\(^74\) At best, one can describe Mill as being conflicted in his values:\(^75\) in presenting conflicting

\(^72\)Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 478.
\(^73\)Mill, Representative Government, CW, XVIII, 478.
\(^74\)Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 477.
\(^75\)This further is evinced in his correspondence, in which Mill goes so far as to countenance a system of proportional representation in which the majority of seats would be returned to the majority of electors - of which he cites Hare's Plan as the "best that has been proposed." However, he immediately reverses this by declaring that "I do not think that one class, even though the most numerous, should be able to return a
perspectives on representative government, it appears that, despite his root attachment to democracy, Mill remains conflicted over its implications. In the end, however, he maintains his willingness to prevent its proper functioning by remaining supportive of plural voting.\textsuperscript{76}

Thus, there is a tension in Mill's thought: Mill feels compelled largely by his fear of "the tyranny of the majority" to consider the use of paternalistic measures, while at the same time advocating that the majority should be governed as free. Having pronounced the use of "an education of restraint" as being inconsistent with the aims of a free society, Mill advocates the use of measures which would have exactly the same effect. This is clearly evident in his plural voting scheme. It has been pointed out that under such a scheme lower-class individuals would not feel a positive influence on their minds as a result of being given the franchise.\textsuperscript{77} The less-developed, knowing that their wills could not prevail, would feel little inducement to vote. According to Mill's own standards for improvement, instead of being strengthened, their characters would be thus "rendered

decided majority to the whole Legislature" [Mill to Thomas Bailey Potter, March 16 (1865), \textit{CW}, XVI, 1013-1014].

\textsuperscript{76}This is not to say, however, that a consistent case cannot be made for the advancement of an equal and universal franchise on the basis of Mill's arguments. Dennis Thompson gives an imaginative reconstruction of a Millsian case for greater democratic participation in \textit{John Stuart Mill and Representative Government} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

inert and torpid." 78 Interpreters seeking to give an account of Mill's political thought are thus confronted with a puzzle as Mill never explicitly admits that he is dealing with irreconcilables. Interpreters in the reductive tradition have made the resolution of this tension the highest goal of Mill scholarship.

**Liberal Reductivism:**

The majority of reductive accounts of Mill's political thought may be classified as "liberal", in that they depict a Mill unambiguously committed to the doctrine of liberty. The major expositors of this view, include: Richard Ashcroft, Isaiah Berlin, Eldon Eisenach and C.L. Ten. All of these accounts share the view that a concern for personal liberty was a preoccupation of Mill's. The accounts given by Berlin and Ten, however, are of greatest interest for this study, as they express most strongly the reductivist view. The former, being the first contemporary reductivist account, is significant as it sets the terms of the debate. Ten's account is significant for the breadth of its analysis: Ten attempts to demonstrate that Mill remains consistently committed to the cause of liberty throughout his writing career. I shall therefore confine my discussion of liberal reductivism to the accounts given by these thinkers.

The liberal reductivist account finds a great deal of support within Mill's oeuvre. It is not a difficult undertaking to construct a consistent case for liberty from Mill's political writings. In general it is argued that despite his fear of the "tyranny of the majority", Mill may be observed to provide arguments consistent with his claim that it is better to govern the majority as free. Mill's fear is tempered by the realization that even the wisest members of society are capable of being corrupted: "the power of compelling others . . . is not only inconsistent with the freedom and development of all the rest, but corrupting to the strong man himself." Thus, it is conceded that Mill's liberalism never led him to deny that some men were wiser and nobler than others. However he did not believe that the wiser and nobler men have the right to compel or coerce others. Ultimately, Mill comes out on the side of individual liberty; the One or Few can only claim "the right to point out the way." It is argued that free development of individuality was held by Mill to be the only desirable means to the advancement of the species. Despite Mill's continued insistence on the importance of the leadership of cultivated minds his chief line of argument is a defense of freedom of discussion on the grounds that it provides an opportunity for the development of "an intellectually active people."
The liberal reductivist case for consistency, however, is not merely concerned to show that Mill’s thought is consistent within his later works. The liberal account attempts to show further that the case Mill makes for liberty in his essay, On Liberty, is consistent, both internally and with respect to his political thought as a whole. This is not to say that Mill’s view of liberty is necessarily viewed as being unchanging over time. In Mill on Liberty Ten argues that there are three different phases in the development of Mill’s ideas on liberty. The first phase spans Mill’s adolescence and early adulthood, when Mill, it is alleged, was quite sanguine about the liberating effects of free discussion on the majority. For example, Ten cites Mill’s speech on “Perfectibility,” delivered to the London Debating Society in 1828, where Mill argued that free discussion serves an important function in society, enabling people to form true opinions and acting as a check on the abuse of power. This occurs, Mill averred, because the force of public opinion takes “men out of the sphere of the opinion of their separate and private coteries and make[s] them amenable to the tribunal of the public at large.”

The emergence of the second phase is marked by a dramatic change in position as Mill, having come under the influence of the St. Simonians, had become chary of the liberating potential of public opinion in favour of “a state in which the

\[82\] Mill, “Perfectibility,” CW, XXVI, 433.
body of the people, i.e. the uninstructed, shall entertain the
same feelings of deference & submission to the authority of
the instructed." 83 Ten argues that in "The Spirit of the Age,"
Mill appears to have swung away from his earlier beliefs,
which Ten characterizes as the movement from a belief in "the
disinterestedness of public opinion" to a belief in "the
disinterestedness of the opinions of cultivated minds." 84
To the extent that Mill believed that ordinary persons were still
capable of holding true opinions, free discussion was still
held to be desirable as it allowed the majority to hold true
ideas. Mill, however, did not think that they were actually
incapable of knowing the truth. He proclaims that only
"[t]hose persons whom the circumstances of society, and their
own position in it, permit to dedicate themselves to the
investigation and study of physical, moral an social truths as
their peculiar calling, can alone be expected to make the
evidences of such truths a subject of profound meditation, and
to make themselves thorough masters of the philosophical
grounds of those opinions of which it is desirable that all
should be firmly persuaded, but which they alone can entirely
and philosophically know [Mill's emphasis]." 85 "The remainder
of mankind must . . . take the far greater part of their
opinions on all extensive subjects upon the authority of those
who have studied them." 86 The "mass of mankind" are thus

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83 Mill to Gustave D'Eichthal, 7th November (1829), CW, XII, 40.
84Ten, Mill, 169.
incapable of knowing the truth. Mill argued that the people should not be forced to accept the unanimous opinions of the cultivated minds; these would be, "with their voluntary acquiescence formed for them, by the most cultivated minds [Mill's emphasis]." However, society is to be organized such that "worldly power" is put into the hands of these cultivated minds so as "to render their power over the minds of their fellow-citizens paramount and irresistible." The Mill represented in this work differs radically from the Mill of On Liberty. Yet, Ten argues that this work need not be seen as the complete representation of Mill's views at this phase. He observes that the most contentious claim, that the feelings and opinions of the people should be "formed for them, by the most cultivated minds," is almost immediately repudiated less than a year later by Mill, in his essay, On Genius. Here Mill reverses his view that the majority cannot know the truth. He implores that "each person be made to feel that in other things he may believe upon trust - if he find a trustworthy authority - but in that of his peculiar duty, and in the line of the duties common to all men it is his business to know [Mill's emphasis]." Mill distinguishes from "the man who knows" from "the man who trusts." The former "can feel and understand the truth," whereas the latter "merely assents.

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Mill contends that genius need not be "a rare gift bestowed on few," but it may be cultivated in society such that "all might posses it, although in unequal degrees." In contrast to his work of a year prior, this text reveals a Mill whose ideas clearly anticipate those which are presented in his later political writings. This is clearly evident in Mill's introduction of the notions of "active" and "passive" minds, by which Mill further characterized those who know the truth and those who merely assent to it. These notions reappear in Considerations on Representative Government. Thus, Ten is justified in arguing that, even in this most pessimistic phase of Mill's moral and intellectual development, there is a clear correspondence between his writings and those of his last phase.

This is not to say that because Mill was consistent in his commitment to liberty, his work was consistent in all of its other aspects. Berlin argues in his essay, "John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life," that while Mill is "officially committed to the exclusive pursuit of happiness," what he actually appears to care most about is individual freedom:

The public policies with which Mill's name was associated as a journalist, a reformer, and a politician, were seldom connected with the typically

utilitarian projects advocated by Bentham and successfully realized by many of his disciples... it is difficult to suppose that it was not liberty and justice (at whatever cost) but utility (which counts the cost) that were uppermost in his mind.\textsuperscript{96}

According to Berlin, one would expect of a utilitarian measures based on "great industrial, financial, educational schemes, reforms of public health or the organization of public health or the organization of labour or leisure."\textsuperscript{97} By contrast, he argues, "the issues to which Mill was dedicated, whether in his published views or his actions, were concerned with something different: the extension of individual freedom, especially freedom of speech: seldom with anything else."\textsuperscript{98} Berlin cites as examples: Mill's declaration that war was better than oppression; that a revolution that would kill all men with an income of more than £500 per annum might improve things greatly. He notes Mill's expression of delight at Palmerston's fall over the Bill that sought to make conspiracy against foreign despots a criminal offence in England, as well as his denouncement of the Southern States in the American Civil War.\textsuperscript{99} By these efforts, Berlin contends that Mill "made himself the most passionate and best-known champion in England of the insulted and the oppressed."\textsuperscript{100}

Following Berlin, Ten argues that Mill's thought may not be viewed as being consistently utilitarian. Ten notes that

\textsuperscript{96}Berlin, "Ends of Life," 179.
\textsuperscript{97}Berlin, "Ends of Life," 179.
\textsuperscript{98}Berlin, "Ends of Life," 179.
\textsuperscript{99}Berlin, "Ends of Life," 179.
\textsuperscript{100}Berlin, "Ends of Life," 179.
whereas a utilitarian is only interested in maximizing happiness, Mill is concerned also with the distribution of harms. Mill is interested in controlling the distribution of harms in an equitable fashion.  

His desire to restrict the extent of the sacrifices involved in harm-prevention is alluded to in his claiming that each person’s share “of the labours and sacrifices incurred for defending the society or its members from injury or molestation” should be fixed “on some equitable principle.”  

Though Mill does not specify what this principle would be, Ten argues that it is evident that it is independent of utilitarianism. For an unrestricted policy of maximizing harm-prevention, as advocated by a consistent utilitarian, is unconcerned with distributive problems; under such a policy it is possible to justify the infliction of indescribable agony on an individual, or some minority group, in order to prevent the majority from suffering.

Ten suggests that Mill’s notion of harm is in fact narrower than that which a consistent utilitarian would accept. He considers the case of racial intolerance. He concedes that at the extreme there is not likely to be any conflict between liberty and utility, as in the example given by R.M. Hare on the improbability of the desire of fanatical Nazis to be rid of the Jews outweighing the desire of all of

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101 Ten, Mill, 6.
103 Ten, Mill, 64.
the Jews not to be rid of.\textsuperscript{104} Although there is nothing in the utilitarian view to prevent the Nazis' wishes from being complied with, should their desire actually outweigh that of the Jews, Hare counts on the fact that in real life it is inconceivable that there would be a utilitarian case to be made for sending the Jews to the gas chamber. Ten notes, however, that it did not escape Mill that "[i]n some real-life situations, the results of a truly neutral utilitarian calculation may be very indecisive as between liberal and illiberal solutions."\textsuperscript{105} Thus, Mill explicitly rejects "a wide, utilitarianly based notion of harm."\textsuperscript{106} He discounts many instances of adverse effects on others as constituting harm done. For example, Ten cites Mill's consideration of a case in which people find themselves negatively affected by the conduct of an individual; they "dislike it", find it "disgusting," or even "immoral."\textsuperscript{107} He argues that Mill would believe that these reasons, taken in themselves, are never good reasons for interfering with her or his conduct, arguing explicitly that we should be left by others to do freely what we like, "so long as what we do does not harm them, even thought they should think our conduct foolish, perverse or wrong."\textsuperscript{108} "In thus ignoring certain effects," Ten contends

\textsuperscript{105} Ten, Mill, 53-4.
\textsuperscript{106} Ten, Mill, 54.
\textsuperscript{107} Ten, Mill, 6.
\textsuperscript{108} Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 227.
that "Mill's defense of liberty is not utilitarian." In fact, he argues, there is no simple and accurate description of Mill's position on the basis of utility alone, as there is no way to determine how he will argue in any particular case. He claims that Mill's argument is in fact a principled defense; in considering harm-prevention in cases where self-regarding conduct has certain adverse effects on others, Mill's case for "individual liberty will lead us to discount these effects on others." Mill states in his liberty principle that "the only purpose for which any power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." The irreconcilability of the strong case for liberty made by Mill with any consistent version of utilitarianism leads Ten to conclude that "it is as a consistent liberal, deeply committed to the cause of individual freedom for everybody, that Mill should be remembered."

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109 Ten, Mill, 6.
110 Note that this argument does not in fact establish Ten's claim. His observation that there is no simple and accurate description of Mill's position on the basis of utility alone, suggests that utility can be used to support contradictory claims. For, in Mill's hands, the notion of utility is rendered so broadly that it can be used to support contradictory claims. Thus, it is not the case, as Ten argues, that Mill's defense of liberty is not utilitarian. Rather, it is utilitarian, but this fact tells us hardly anything substantive about his case for liberty (Ten, Mill, 6). Mill's concept of utilitarianism is dealt with in chapter three, below.  
111 Ten, Mill, 6.
113 Ten, Mill, 9.
Conservative Reductivism

A second strain of reductivist interpretation takes a revisionary stance, focusing on the presence of the very discordant themes which are dismissed by the liberal reductivists as being aberrant. These interpretations point to the possibility that the presence of such themes indicates that the conventional account of Mill as the defender of ample liberty is greatly exaggerated; that Mill also provides for the use of coercion and restraint. Attention is drawn to the elitist strain within Mill's writings, in particular Mill's insistence on the importance of the leadership of cultivated minds, as providing the basis for a more conservative interpretation. The revisionist reading of Mill's thought is a relatively new phenomenon within the literature, and owing to its novelty, such heterodox accounts are in fact few in number. The specifically reductivist revisionary reading of Mill's thought is exemplified in only two accounts: that which is given by Maurice Cowling, and in recent work done by Joseph Hamburger.¹¹⁴ In general, this account argues that the common belief among scholars that Mill provides for ample liberty for the individual needs to be qualified; close scrutiny of his texts will reveal that liberty is a value which is held only instrumentally for Mill. The Mill that

they depict was prepared to contemplate significant restrictions on liberty in the interest of attaining his ultimate goal: the establishment of a future society, in which freedom will ultimately be discarded in favour of rational consensus.

In *Mill And Liberalism*, Cowling argues that liberalism carries with it a proselytizing function within Mill’s thought.\(^{115}\) Like the liberal interpreters described above, he too believes that Mill’s thought should be judged as being coherent. Cowling concedes that Mill’s thought appears at times to be incoherent, but argues that it is incoherent only at lower levels of interpretation; that is to say, this is the view given by a superficial reading. At an important level, Mill’s thought must be regarded as being coherent - not only as a matter of intention, Cowling claims, but “through the more important sap which seeps from the pores of all thinkers, whether they intend it or not.”\(^{116}\)

Thus, the coherence of Mill’s thought does not, in Cowling’s view, depend on Mill’s conscious intentions in providing a defense of liberty.\(^{117}\) Cowling foregrounds his work with the promise that “Mill, the godfather of English liberalism, emerges from these pages considerably less libertarian than is sometimes suggested.”\(^{118}\)

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\(^{117}\)For a liberal treatment of this same theme refer to Eldon Eisenach, “Mill’s Reform Liberalism as Tradition and Culture,” *Political Science Reviewer*, vol. 10, (1995), 71-146.

\(^{118}\)Cowling, *Mill*, xlviii.
Mill’s thought is described by Cowling as having a touch of “moral totalitarianism."\footnote{Cowling, Mill, xlviii} This is not to say that he denies that Mill’s doctrine was liberal. On the contrary, it is held to be liberal - but its liberalism is neither comprehensive, nor libertarian, in the strict sense of individuals being free to act without external interference. Instead, Cowling suggests a more extensive doctrine, encompassing a sort of spiritual, moral and rational liberty. In extending Mill’s doctrine thus, Cowling is not seeking to redefine liberalism, \textit{per se}. He accepts the libertarian definition of liberty. The distinction he seeks to make is between the use of libertarian doctrine as a means and its being used as an end in itself. By his extension of Mill’s doctrine Cowling indicates the instrumental character of its liberalism. “The doctrine,” he argues, “is less practically libertarian in implication than is often supposed, since Mill assumes that, given as wide a freedom as possible to exercise rational choice and taking this freedom as the means, the end will be achieved, not of diversity of opinion, pure and simple, but of diversity of opinion within the limits of a rationally homogenous, agreed social consensus . . .”\footnote{Cowling, Mill, 44.} In defending Mill’s thought against the passages in his writing which suggest that it was a more libertarian doctrine, Cowling seeks to free it from the superficial readings to which it has been subjected.
Cowling argues that Mill's thought - in particular, his essay *On Liberty* - has been misunderstood. "*On Liberty,* contrary to common opinion," he claims, "was not so much a plea for individual freedom, as a means of ensuring that Christianity would be superseded by that form of liberal, rationalistic, utilitarianism which went by the name of the Religion of Humanity."\(^{121}\) The religion of humanity is August Comte's proposal for a secular power which would supply the place of existing religion in the instruction of universal morals and truths.\(^{122}\) According to Cowling, Mill's chief end in advocating the establishment of Comte's religion of humanity was the application of the principle of utility in the widest sense: its ideal is the elevation of humanity, by which, it is alleged, Mill seeks the creation of a commanding authority capable of directing the emotions and desires of individuals towards this goal. For, Cowling argues, Mill would not seek to replace authoritative commitment with a vacuum.\(^{123}\) In so arguing, Cowling dismisses the claim that Mill's liberalism invites "every sort of human experiment [Cowling's emphasis]";\(^{124}\) in freeing humanity from the inadequate and wrong moral postures which Mill held to be present in Christianity, Cowling claims, he does not free it

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\(^{121}\) Cowling, *Mill*, I.  
\(^{122}\) Comte's proposal is contained in his *Système de Politique Positive*.  
altogether of religious postures, *per se*. This is evident in the limitations which Mill sets on the exercise of freedom.

Although Mill advocates that the doctrine of liberty be enacted, Cowling argues that the doctrine serves only as the means by which he seeks to make the majority in society rational. According to Mill, "The prospect of the future depends on the degree in which they can be made rational beings."\(^{125}\) This requires that they be governed as free. However, Cowling argues further, Mill is not advocating an anarchic assertion of individual freedom.\(^{126}\) For, having become rational, the majority in society may be viewed as being obliged to submit their actions and those of society to rational questioning.\(^{127}\) In this way, the pursuit of individual liberty is not by itself the proper end of social action; individuals are to be left free because, in Mill's view, if they are not left free, society may find it more difficult to achieve the ends it seeks. Liberty, as a principle is valuable, because it allows individuals to feel a common sense of participation in the search for the "Kingdom of Truth."\(^{128}\) Thus, Mill's justification of freedom is not based on its intrinsic worth, but "on the belief that a free [person] is more likely than an unfree one to contribute to higher cultivation."\(^{129}\) For Mill "wished the consensus to grow

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\(^{128}\) Cowling, *Mill*, 42.  
by rational persuasion and rational argument based on rational education, not by suppression, violence or force [Cowling's emphases]." Cowling argues that Mill writes under the assumption that "homogeneity emerges amongst rational men," which belies Mill's emphasis on variegated human development. This is what is implied in Mill's assertion:

As mankind improve, the number of doctrines which are no longer disputed or doubted will be constantly on the increase. . . . the well-being of mankind may almost be measured by the number and gravity of the truths which have reached the point of being uncontested. The cessation, on one question after another, of serious controversy, is one of the necessary incident of the consolidation of opinion; a consolidation as salutary in the case of true opinions, as it is dangerous and noxious when the opinions are erroneous.

Thus, according to Cowling, “[t]he function of . . . the pursuit of higher cultivation, of universal education . . . and greater general equality . . . is, then to develop, in the moral and intellectual decay characteristic of an age of unfixed opinions, a body of commanding doctrine which will enable citizens to have a positive basis for their conceptions of political duty, and to restore that sense of solidarity which comes from general rational agreement about the method of determining the character of the good society.” Thus, Cowling continues, “[w]hatever the means Mill advocates in order to achieve solidarity and rational participation, there can be no doubt, and there is no ambiguity about the fact,

130 Cowling, Mill, 23.
131 Cowling, Mill, 34.
133 Cowling, Mill, 25.
that he believes this to be a proper function of human society; and that there is, beyond the libertarian character of the means, an assumption of the fundamental homogeneity of all rational judgement."\textsuperscript{134} The character of the homogeneity which is assumed is one which "replace[s] customary deference to arbitrarily established authority by rational deference to elevated intellect, and reach (in virtue of rational reflection) agreed, superior judgements about the character of the means by which to decide what actions are right."\textsuperscript{135} Thus, on Cowling’s reading, it is the objective to which the principle of free development of individuality is directed that is of importance, not the application of the principle itself. He observes that Mill’s requirement that in seeking happiness, individuals pursue it "under the rule and conditions required by the good of the rest," that "it is incumbent on everyone to restrain the pursuit of his personal objects within the limits consistent with the essential interests of others," effectively proscribes large ranges of conduct. In particular, it precludes the individual from acting in pursuit of selfish interest; "a man’s interest," Cowling avers, "is his interest as a progressive being - a progressive being with an obligation to be concerned for the well-being of society as a whole, and to maximize the greatest amount of happiness altogether."\textsuperscript{136} It follows that it is the duty of society and government to restrict individuality,

\textsuperscript{134} Cowling, \textit{Mill}, 25-6.  
\textsuperscript{135} Cowling, \textit{Mill}, 28.  
\textsuperscript{136} Cowling, \textit{Mill}, 100.
insofar as it is applied to the pursuit of selfish interests, in order to maximize general utility. Thus, "individuality is likely to flourish only so long as it is connected with the higher cultivation."\textsuperscript{137} According to Cowling, "[t]he sort of social or governmental pressure which might, therefore, be admissible on this principle is more searching than superficial attention to the principle suggests."\textsuperscript{138} In this way, he argues that Mill's principle of individuality is "meant to detract from human freedom, not to maximize it."\textsuperscript{139}

Cowling's case, however, suffers from over-identification of Mill's thought with that of Comte. In fact, Mill clearly opposed the political system propounded by Comte - in particular, his proposal for a religion of humanity, referring to it as "the completest system of spiritual and temporal despotism, which ever yet emanated from a human brain . . . ."\textsuperscript{140} Mill held that "the only value it seems to [him] to possess consists in putting an end to the notion that no effectual moral authority can be maintained over society without the aid of religious belief; for Comte's work recognizes no religion except that of Humanity, yet it leaves an irresistible conviction that any moral beliefs, concurred in by the community generally, may be brought to bear upon the whole conduct and lives of its individual members with an energy and

\textsuperscript{137}Cowling, Mill, 98.
\textsuperscript{138}Cowling, Mill, 100.
\textsuperscript{139}Cowling, Mill, 98.
\textsuperscript{140}Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 221.
potency truly alarming to think of. The book stands as a monumental warning to thinkers on society and politics, of what happens when once men lose sight, in their speculations, of the value of Liberty and of Individuality."\textsuperscript{141}

This does not mean that Cowling’s case must, therefore, be completely discarded. In “Individuality and Moral Reform: The Rhetoric of Liberty and the Reality of Mill’s On Liberty,” Joseph Hamburger argues that Mill’s rejection of Comte’s religion of humanity, “did not mean . . . that he did not have one of his own.”\textsuperscript{142} Despite his sharp words of criticism, Hamburger observes that Mill recorded in his diary his conviction that a religion of humanity was in fact desirable:

The best, indeed the only good thing (details excepted) in Comte’s second treatise, is the thoroughness with which he has enforced and illustrated the possibility of making \textit{le culte de l’humanité} perform the functions and supply the place of a religion. If we suppose cultivated to the highest point the sentiments of fraternity with all our fellow beings, past, present, and to come, of veneration for those past and present who have deserved it, and devotion to the good of those to come; universal moral education making the happiness and dignity of this collective body the central point to which all things are to trend and by which all are to be estimated, instead of the pleasure of an unseen and merely imaginary Power; the

\textsuperscript{141}Mill, \textit{Autobiography}, CW, I, 221.
\textsuperscript{142}Joseph Hamburger, “Individuality and Moral Reform: the Rhetoric of Liberty and the Reality of Restraint in Mill’s On Liberty,” in \textit{Political Science Reviewer} (Vol.XXIV, 1995), 19. Hamburger's arguments have recently been published in book form, in \textit{John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control}. As this work was published without the final revisions, due to the author’s untimely death, this prior, published article shall be taken as representing Hamburger’s final, considered thoughts on Mill.
imagination at the same time being fed from youth with representations of all noble things felt and acted heretofore, and with ideal conceptions of still greater things to come: there is no worthy office of a religion which this system of cultivation does not seem adequate to fulfil. It would suffice both to alleviate and to guide human life. Now this is merely supposing that the religion of humanity obtained a firm hold on mankind, and as great a power of shaping their usages, their institutions, and their education, as other religions have in many other cases possessed. 143

Although he does not mention the religion of humanity by name, Mill argues similarly in Utilitarianism that "[i]n an improving state of the human mind, the influences are constantly on the increase, which tend to generate in each individual a feeling of unity with the rest; which if perfect, would make him never think of, or desire, any beneficial condition for himself of which they are not included." 144 "If it is now supposed," Mill continues, "that this feeling of unity could be taught as a religion, and the whole force of education, of institutions, and of opinion, directed, as it once was in the case of religion, to make every person grow up from infancy surrounded on all sides both by the profession and the practice of it, I think that no one, who can realise this conception, will feel any misgivings about the sufficiency of the ultimate sanction for the Happiness morality." 145 Mill cites Comte's Système de Politique Positive as proof that there is a means of realising such a

143 Mill, Diary, 24 January, (1854), CW, XXVII, 646.
144 Mill, Utilitarianism, CW, X, 232.
transformation. He cautions, however, "I entertain the strongest objections to the system of politics and morals set forth in that treatise; but I think it has superabundantly shown the possibility of giving to the service of humanity, even without the aid of belief in a Providence, both the physical power, and the social efficacy of a religion; making it take hold of human life, and colour all thought, feeling, and action, in a manner of which the greatest ascendancy ever exercised by any religion may be but a type and foretaste; and of which the danger is, not that it should be insufficient, but that it should be so excessive as to interfere unduly with human freedom and individuality."\textsuperscript{146}

Thus, Hamburger argues, Mill's approval for Comte's idea of a religion of humanity survives his criticisms. For, despite his criticisms, Mill endorsed Comte's goal, with which he identified: "It is as much a part of our scheme as of M. Comte's that the direct cultivation of altruism, and the subordination of egoism to it, far beyond the point of absolute moral duty, should be one of the chief aims of education, both individual and collective."\textsuperscript{147} Thus, Mill holds that Comte "was justified in the attempt to delevope [sic.] his philosophy into a religion. . ."\textsuperscript{148}; that Mill looked forward to a future state of society which would be "brought to coincide with that which he [Comte] aimed at

\textsuperscript{146} Mill, \textit{Utilitarianism}, \textit{CW, X}, 232.
\textsuperscript{147} Mill, \textit{August Comte and Positivism}, \textit{CW, X}, 339.
constructing." Yet, Mill’s vision of a future apparent society is distinct from that proposed by Comte. The view of progress, which Mill and Comte both adopted from the St. Simonians, identifies two states of society: "transitional" and "organic". Whereas the former state is marked by "criticism and negation," the result of humanity’s losing its old convictions, in the latter state it is said that "mankind accept with firm conviction some positive creed, claiming jurisdiction over all their action, and containing more or less of truth and adaptation to the needs of humanity." The religion of humanity represents for Comte the realisation of the final, organic stage of progress. In arguing for Comte’s proposal for an organic state of society, Mill does not simply adopt it, as suggested by Cowling. Hamburger observes that, in contrast to Comte, Mill’s vision of a future state of society also incorporates individual freedom along with a religion of humanity. Mill wished that the best qualities of the two stages would be united: "unchecked liberty of thought, perfect freedom of individual action in things not hurtful to others; but along with this, firm convictions as to right and wrong, useful and pernicious, deeply engraven on the feelings by early education and general unanimity of sentiment, and so well grounded in reason and in the real exigencies of life, that they shall not, like all former and

\[149\text{Mill, Comte, } CW, X, 334-5.\]
\[150\text{Mill, Autobiography, } CW, I, 171.\]
present creeds, religious, ethical and political, require to be periodically thrown off and replaced by others."\textsuperscript{151}

It is easy to see how Cowling could have been misled. For, in seeking to combine these two elements, Mill provides no explanation of how compatibility would be achieved. Hamburger argues that there is in fact a \textit{prima facie} difficulty in reconciling liberty with social cohesion in Mill's future state of society.\textsuperscript{152} He concludes that it must be the case that "liberty was to serve a transitional era by permitting criticism, undermining, and delegitimating - to hasten its disintegrating ethos, and create conditions that would permit the emergence of an organic state of society . . . ."\textsuperscript{153} There is, in Hamburger's view, no inconsistency between Mill's advocacy of the two positions; liberty would serve the transitional state and eventually be discarded upon reaching the final, organic stage.

Hamburger argues that diversity, which requires liberty as a principle, has no place in Mill's future state of society once stability is achieved. This is implied in Mill's claim that "[i]t is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions";\textsuperscript{154} evidently, once perfection is achieved, diversity is less useful.\textsuperscript{155} The attainment of

\textsuperscript{151}Mill, \textit{Autobiography}, \textit{CW}, I, 173.
\textsuperscript{152}Hamburger, "Individuality," 45.
\textsuperscript{153}Hamburger, "Individuality," 47.
\textsuperscript{155}Hamburger, "Individuality," 48.
general unanimity of sentiment, which is the highest attainment of this society, would replace the need for free discussion; its loss, "though not sufficient to outweigh," in Mill's reckoning, "is no trifling drawback from, the benefit of its [the truth's] universal recognition." In the first instance, Hamburger argues, free discussion would be necessary in order to make possible "revolutions of opinion," by which liberty gained its significance. For without it, Hamburger avers, "new ideas would be denied an opportunity to gain acceptance." Hamburger cautions that one should not exaggerate the amount of liberty that would be generated by the unleashing of individuality, for Mill also provides for restraint and constraint. Mill is seen by Hamburger as advocating for liberty of expression only for a special class of individuals: those who are characterized by Mill as possessing individuality of character. "Only by enlarging the realm of liberty can those with individuality have an opportunity to develop and express their characters. Once they do this, a rich diversity will be revealed and all will benefit." He cites as evidence, Mill's depiction of progress as entailing a struggle between two classes of people: the vast mediocrity and the One or Few with individuality. Hamburger observes that the former are described by Mill as being "depraved" and "inferior", while

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157 *On Liberty*, CW, XVIII, 252
159 Hamburger, "Individuality," 8.
the latter he claims must be, by implication, "wholesome" and "superior." In their struggle with depravity, those with individuality "were to take an active part in discrediting and discouraging the depraved and inferior, as they moved toward a morally regenerated, reconstructed society." To effect this revolution, Mill arms those with individuality with the means necessary to promote fundamental cultural and social change. Principally, this was to take the form of the meting-out of harsh judgements. For Mill reckoned that the "regard to the sentiments of our fellow-creatures is in one shape or another, in all characters, the pervading motive." Thus, on Hamburger's reading, Mill wished to use opinion to control the conduct of the depraved and inferior. Nor is it intended that the freedom of the transitional stage should survive to the organic period. For, Hamburger notes, when Mill addresses the issue of the coexistence of liberty with a stable, cohesive society, "one wonders how experiments in living and an expansive and unpredictable individuality would thrive," given what he says about "firm convictions . . . deeply engraven on the feelings by early education." Mill evidently was prepared to accept less liberty - despite his seeming to argue otherwise.

160 Hamburger, "Individuality," 36.  
161 Hamburger, "Individuality," 36.  
162 Hamburger, "Individuality," 39.  
164 Hamburger, "Individuality," 40.
Hamburger challenges the claim that Mill was a defender of ample freedom.\footnote{Hamburger, "Individuality," 42.} He notes that Mill provides for restraint, in the form of harsh judgements, as a means of rooting out "the endemic selfishness that resisted moral regeneration and social improvement."\footnote{Hamburger, "Individuality," 42.} Mill, he argues, welcomed spontaneity only so long as it encouraged the type of individuality of which he approved. Thus, Mill’s claim that "[i]t is desirable, in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself,"\footnote{Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 261.} needs to be qualified: Mill does not mean by this statement that selfish conduct, which is an impediment to progress, should be allowed to assert itself. Mill, however, was quiet about his advocacy of the use of social pressures and punishment, often only hinting at their use. For example, while explicitly denouncing public opinion as a means of moral coercion, the pressure of opinion emanating from superior natures, being individual in character, is regarded by Mill as being legitimate.\footnote{Hamburger, "Individuality," 51-2.}

In presenting mixed messages about liberty, Hamburger contends, Mill is purposely disguising his real intentions.\footnote{Hamburger, "Individuality," 52.} In support of his claim, Hamburger alleges to have uncovered the rhetorical dimension of Mill’s thought. Mill’s rhetorical strategy consists of a series of discordant themes which are

\begin{footnotes}
\item[165]Hamburger, "Individuality," 42.
\item[166]Hamburger, "Individuality," 42.
\item[168]Hamburger, "Individuality," 51-2.
\item[169]Hamburger, "Individuality," 52.
\end{footnotes}
deliberately included within Mill’s writing.¹⁷⁰ This strategy is evident in his quiet advocacy of the use of penalties for selfish conduct, while conspicuously asserting that thought and actions alike should be free.¹⁷¹ For example, Mill appears to tolerate drunkenness and idleness in chapter five of *On Liberty*, claiming that drunkenness is “not a fit subject for legislative interference”¹⁷² and that idleness “cannot without tyranny be made a subject of legal punishment.”¹⁷³ Yet, Hamburger reminds, “recalling the passages in chapter four in which Mill describes how individuals, acting not on behalf of society but on their own would and should censure those whose conduct was self-regardingly selfish, indulgent and animalistic, it should be clear that drunks and idlers would still suffer penalties.”¹⁷⁴ Hamburger alleges that by separating the elements of his argument by one chapter, Mill is “focusing the reader’s attention away from this use of opinion as a means of penalizing self-regarding conduct”¹⁷⁵ It is also evident, Hamburger claims, in the obscure placement of passages which contradict the view, which Mill actually fostered, that he was a defender of liberty. For example, in the seldom quoted statement in which Mill attributes political functions to persons with individuality of character:

> There is always need of persons not only to discover new truths, and point out when what were once truths are true no longer, but also to commence new

¹⁷⁰Hamburger, “Individuality,” 51.
¹⁷¹Hamburger, “Individuality,” 51.
¹⁷⁴Hamburger, “Individuality,” 44.
¹⁷⁵Hamburger, “Individuality,” 44.
practices, and set the example of more enlightened conduct, and better taste and sense in human life.\textsuperscript{176} Hamburger notes that this passage is surrounded by more commonly cited passages praising individuality for its intrinsic worth. By specifying these tasks for those with individuality, however, Mill indicates that individuality gains its greatest significance by functioning in moving history forward. Hamburger contends that the placement of such passages could not be inadvertent. For Mill was concerned not to reveal his long term goals to an as-yet-unwilling audience. He quotes Mill, cautioning that "[o]pinions contrary to those commonly received can only obtain a hearing by studied moderation of language, and the most cautious avoidance of unnecessary offence."\textsuperscript{177} Hamburger argues that the advocacy of liberty is only a part of Mill's overall position. In couching his argument in the language of liberty, Hamburger contends that Mill was able to hide his advocacy of the use of restraint to all but the well informed, while providing an inherently appealing and immediately useful case for the dismantling of existing society.\textsuperscript{178}

**Conclusion**

Thus interpretations within the reductivist tradition fall in one of two distinct categories which issue, in large part, from the same works - yet from seemingly very different

\textsuperscript{176}Mill, *On Liberty*, CW, XVIII, 267.
\textsuperscript{177}Mill, *On Liberty*, CW, XVIII, 259.
\textsuperscript{178}Hamburger, "Individuality," 53.
premises. It appears that we have two substantively different, but not diametrically opposed, accounts of Mill's thought. Upon reflection, however, it is apparent that the debate between liberal and conservative reductivist interpretations is actually focused on the paternalism/anti-paternalism tension within Mill's political thought. There are other tensions in Mill's thought, as for example, between Utility and Liberty as depicted by Ten. Other examples include: the tension between systematic approaches to political thought and the rejection of systems,\textsuperscript{179} between Logic and analysis and feeling and "poetic" cultivation,\textsuperscript{180} as well as the tension between a purely libertarian theory of democracy and an educative theory of democracy.\textsuperscript{181} These tensions are manifest within specific periods of Mill's moral and intellectual development, and thus may be treated as distinct. However, I argue that they have strong resonances with the paternalism/anti-paternalism tension and thus may be more usefully understood as being manifestations of this problematic, which is, as it were, the deeper problematic. Consider the case of Utility versus Liberty: Ten declares that it is as a consistent liberal, not as a utilitarian, that Mill should be remembered.\textsuperscript{182} Ten's conclusion is somewhat misleading. For no one actually denies that Mill's thought was liberal. Even at the extreme, Cowling, in declaring that

\textsuperscript{179}This tension is dealt with in chapter 3, below.
\textsuperscript{180}This tension is dealt with in chapter 3, below.
\textsuperscript{181}This tension is dealt with in chapter 2, below.
\textsuperscript{182}Ten, \textit{Mill}, 9.
Mill's thought resembles something like a "moral totalitarianism," does not in fact deny that it is liberal.\textsuperscript{183} Rather, he argues that Mill's own particular brand of liberalism, has been generally misunderstood and is inconsistent with conventional liberal doctrine, which favours individualism over authority.\textsuperscript{184}

By the same token, the consistency of Mill's utilitarianism \textit{per se} is also not really at issue. Ten uses the inconsistency of utilitarianism with Mill's case for liberty to argue that it provides the basis for a principled defense, approximating a rights-based doctrine of liberty.\textsuperscript{185} At the heart of this defense is an appeal to Mill's anti-paternalism, by which Ten alleges that Mill, despite his continued insistence on the importance of the leadership of cultivated minds, realizes that it is nevertheless necessary that the majority be governed as free.

\textsuperscript{183}Interestingly, Cowling retracts somewhat his earlier charge of moral authoritarianism in his "Preface to the Second Edition." He contends that if \textit{Mill and Liberalism} were to be written over, he would be slower to impute instrumentality to Mill's liberalism in the short run, implying that he believes that there is some substance to taking seriously Mill's appeals to liberty. Sadly, however, Cowling provides no substantive argument which would clarify the purpose or the extent of his retraction (Cowling, \textit{Mill}, xliii; cf. xlviii).

\textsuperscript{184}Cowling, \textit{Mill}, xliii-xlviv, 87.

\textsuperscript{185}It cannot really be rights-based, as Mill explicitly disavows appeals to abstract right as a thing independent of utility (Mill, \textit{On Liberty, CW}, XVIII, 223-24).
Although Mill’s utilitarianism may seem somewhat irrelevant to the comparison between liberal and conservative reductivists, the issue of its consistency also highlights a key weakness of the reductivist approach. It seems a remarkable thing that the principle which Mill holds to be the “ultimate appeal” on questions of ethics should actually prove to be of so little importance to the understanding of his thought, as the liberal reductivists claim. Neither Berlin nor Ten provides any speculation as to why this might be the case, or what this can possibly tell us about the structure of Mill’s thought. Having found the possibility of constructing a consistent case for liberty from within Mill’s political writings, they are untroubled by the presence of this discordant element in his thought. Although there is a good deal of evidence to support Ten’s claim, for example, that the traditional liberal account may be the most plausible, his approach obscures the fact that Mill’s thought as a whole is inconsistent. Questions of plausibility aside, one may just as easily make a case against the liberal account by privileging the discordant element. One might, for argument’s sake, wish to claim, contrary to Ten, that Mill’s thought may only be regarded as being utilitarian, and on this basis demand that all discrepancies which issue from what one believes to be a falsely held case for liberty must, therefore, be discarded. While the plausibility of this particular claim in fact would be immediately called into question, given the weight of the evidence in support of
Mill's case for liberty,\textsuperscript{186} it does however point to an insufficiency of the liberal reductivist approach: in seeking to refine Mill's thought to a single, authoritative voice, they require that any discordant, illiberal elements be dismissed, discarded, or omitted from discussion. Thus, the paternalism/anti-paternalism tension is avoided within the liberal reductivist tradition. The consequences, not adequately explored by these interpreters, that follow from the possibility of constructing an alternative account of Mill's thought, on the basis of these elements, is borne almost entirely by the conservative accounts.

The conservative reductivist reading surpasses that of the liberal reductivists in its sensitivity to the paternalism/anti-paternalism tension in Mill's thought. However, the tension is too quickly dissipated by the conservative reading's unwillingness to take seriously Mill's anti-paternalism case for liberty. Mill is presented as a rhetorician, \textit{par excellence}, required by demands of the spirit of his age to use the language of liberty to conceal his programme of moral and spiritual regeneration.\textsuperscript{187} Liberty, thus, functions in the short-run to aid in the dismantling of

\textsuperscript{186}That is to say, Mill's thought must be regarded, in some significant sense, as being both Liberal and Utilitarian. The possibility of constructing a consistent account on the basis of either element does not diminish the fact that Mill adheres to both. Rather, it suggests that Mill's thought must be characterized in terms of the disunity of his thought, to the extent that they do in fact conflict.

\textsuperscript{187}Hamburger, "Individuality," 53.
existing society, aiding the construction of a future apparent society in which liberty will not play a significant a role.

Yet, there is no compelling reason to accept this interpretation as authoritative. Without a clear statement by Mill, attesting to his intention to deceive all except his wellinformed readers of his true intentions, there is no way of determining conclusively which of the discordant themes included within Mill's writings are meant in earnest, and which are meant to deceive. It may be argued, conversely, that this fact about the conservative account actually reveals the truth about Mill's thought - albeit in a veiled manner: it is not possible to construct a comprehensive systematic account without disregarding, or omitting, significant aspects of Mill's thought. Every attempt to construe Mill as one-sided runs aground, as a result of Mill's refusal to embrace only one side of an argument.

In arguing against the reductivist accounts, I do not mean to imply that a consistent, one-sided account of Mill's thought cannot be given - just that such readings are necessarily incomplete; Mill, more often than not, provides at least two sides for each argument. Mill's thought has affinities with many - and sometimes conflicting - perspectives. As a result, there is no single Mill, but many. The separate reductionist accounts of Mill's thought are all in a sense accurate representations of his thought; however,
to the extent that each of these interpretations claims Mill exclusively for itself, none is an adequate representation. In opposition to those who would make consistency a special virtue in political thought, I contend that the discovery of multiplicity in Mill's thought reveals its value.

The reluctance of Mill's various interpreters to embrace his multiple voices has produced only caricatures of his thought. The established practice of reductive interpretation hinders our understanding of Mill's political thought. The stress on univocality has led to inadequate interpretation of the texts, as the presence of conflicting voices in Mill's works is not accidental but is given in the structure of Mill's thought. In the next chapter I introduce an alternative interpretive strategy which can, in principle, adequately account for the multiple voices.
Introduction:

If the reductivist tradition is inadequate to direct the interpretation of multiple voices in Mill’s thought, the question still remains, ‘how can one account for these voices, and accommodate them in the interpretation of Mill’s political thought?’ In this chapter I introduce a second interpretive approach, the non-reductivist approach, which, though it is at present insufficiently developed, can in principle deal with the key issue of multiple voices.

The non-reductivist approach is characterized by the belief that neglect of Mill’s voices is an inadequate interpretive practice which leads to an inaccurate depiction of Mill’s political thought. There are two poles of non-reductive interpretation: “serial” and “simultaneous”. This study considers thinkers on the two extremes in order to establish that it is not sufficient to merely accept Mill’s voices; one also needs to account for their function in Mill’s thought. It is my contention that the presence of multiple voices in Mill’s political writings is not accidental, but is given in the structure of his thought.
**Serial Reductionism: Himmelfarb’s Two Mills Thesis**

The serial non-reductive approach is exemplified by Gertrude Himmelfarb’s study of Mill’s political thought, *On Liberty and Liberalism*.\(^1\) In this work Himmelfarb characterizes the two Mills thus: there is the Mill of *On Liberty* who espouses an absolutist doctrine of liberty; and the “other” Mill whose work represents an entirely different mode of liberal thought, resonant with classical thought, which relies also on values of justice, virtue, community, tradition, prudence and moderation.\(^2\) Himmelfarb insists emphatically that the two Mills represent distinct modes of thought, by which she means that they cannot be easily reconciled with each other; she also means that they represent separate periods of his life, and so arise serially within his writings. Leaving open the question of the accuracy of her depictions of the two Mills, suffice it to say that Himmelfarb does discover distinct modes of thought in Mill’s writings. When Mill’s writings are brought against the latter claim, however, it becomes clear that Himmelfarb is not justified in arguing that the modes of thought arise serially. In particular, her claim that Mill’s mode of thought in the essay *On Liberty* is uniformly absolutistic is unfounded.

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\(^2\)Himmelfarb,*Liberty*, xxii.
The basis of Himmelfarb's characterization of the absolutistic Mill is his statement of his doctrine of liberty in *On Liberty*:

The object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsions and control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties, or the moral coercion of public opinion. That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which any power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forebear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of other, to do so would be wise, or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise. To justify that, the conduct from which it is desired to deter him must be calculated to produce evil to some one else. The only part of the conduct of and one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and minds, the individual is sovereign. ³

This passage, she argues, is the heart of Mill's doctrine. Himmelfarb attends to the language Mill employs in this statement. In particular she draws attention to a constellation of words on which, she claims, the entire argument hinges: "one," "sole," "only" and "absolute." ⁴

These words, she contends, betoken the single-mindedness of Mill's doctrine; they are used in virtually every sentence in

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⁴*Himmelfarb, Liberty, 15.*
Mill's statement, thus: 'There is "one" principle, the "sole" end, the "only" purpose, and the "only" part of conduct; the principle governs "absolutely," and the independence of the individual is "absolute."'\textsuperscript{5}

Himmelfarb finds the very presence of a single, simple and absolute principle in Mill's work, quite apart from its content, remarkable.\textsuperscript{6} For Mill had long since rejected any notion that the system of politics was governed by absolute principles: "all questions of political institutions are relative, not absolute . . . different stages of human progress not only will have, but hought to have, different institutions [Mill's emphasis]."\textsuperscript{7}

Himmelfarb next considers the question, 'what made Mill change his mind?' She argues that there can be only one plausible answer: the predominant influence his wife had on his thought during the period in which On Liberty was written. On Mill's own account, her influence was substantial:

The "Liberty" was more directly and literally our joint production than anything else which bears my name . . . The whole mode of thinking of which the book was the expression, was emphatically hers. But I was so thoroughly imbued with it, that the same thoughts naturally occurred to us both.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{5}Himmelfarb, Liberty, 15.\textsuperscript{6}Himmelfarb, Liberty, 4.\textsuperscript{7}Mill, Autobiography, 169.\textsuperscript{8}Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 257-9.
This, according to Himmelfarb, accounts for the peculiarity of the absolute nature of the doctrine of liberty in *On Liberty*: the "whole mode of thinking," which she claims is so difficult to reconcile with his other writings, is literally taken to belong to his wife. For, Himmelfarb argues, it was not Mill's habit to be so absolutistic and simplistic - in effect, to try to "reduce so complex a problem as the relations of the individual and society to a simple, single principle." That it was his wife's distinctive mode of thinking is evinced by an early manuscript on the liberation of sexuality. In this work, she proposes a means for liberating sexuality:

If I could be Providence for the world for a time, for the express purpose of raising the condition of women, I should come to know the means - the purpose would be to remove all interference with affection, or with anything which is or which even might be supposed to be, demonstrative of affection - In the present state of womens minds, perfectly uneducated, and with whatever of timidity and dependence is natural to them increased a thousand fold by their natures at all, it seems to me, that once give women the desire to raise their social condition, and they have a power which in the present state of civilization and of mens characters, might be made of tremendous effect . . . As certain as it is that there is equality in nothing now - all the pleasures such as there are being mens, And all the disagreeables and pains being womens, as that every pleasure would be infinitely heightened both in kind and degree by the perfect equality of the sexes.10

Himmelfarb contends that statements such as this on the part of Harriet Taylor Mill reflect the absolutistic tone of the arguments contained in *On Liberty*. Himmelfarb, however, does

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not mean to imply that Harriet Taylor Mill is the "true" author of *On Liberty*, for if Mill was by his own admission, "so thoroughly imbued with [her mode of thinking]," he should be considered to be no less responsible than his wife for its content.\footnote{Himmelfarb, *Liberty*, 259.} Thus, Himmelfarb justifies her speaking of the absolutist Mill of *On Liberty*.

Yet, it is not at all clear that the doctrine of liberty advanced by the Mill in *On Liberty* is straightforwardly absolutist, as Himmelfarb claims. Examination of the text reveals that her reading of Mill's doctrine is incomplete. Mill, in the beginning of *On Liberty*, does not simply state the absoluteness of his liberty principle; he provides a condition that this principle be held only if it is consistent with "Utility," or the greatest happiness principle. Mill states his utilitarian precept thus:

I forego any advantage which could be derived to my argument from the idea of abstract right, as a thing independent of utility. I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions.\footnote{Mill, *On Liberty*, CW, XVIII, 224.}

If utility is in fact the "ultimate appeal," as Mill claims, Himmelfarb's case for the absolute Mill of *On Liberty* is untenable. For the condition for upholding the liberty principle would be its being in accord with "utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being."\footnote{Mill, *On Liberty*, CW, XVIII, 223-24.} This is inconsistent with absolutist
doctrine, which holds that liberty should be valued as being good in itself. It is clear that Himmelfarb's case is based on an incomplete and opportunistic reading of Mill. He does not in fact mean to "reduce so complex a problem as the relations of the individual and society to a simple, single principle," as Himmelfarb alleges. This does not negate the fact that Mill does give a qualified "absolutist" defence of his liberty principle. So far from presenting a simple, single and absolute principle, however, Mill actually conflates two contradictory claims: liberty is presented as being absolute and conditional. The question is, 'why does Mill present from two opposing points of view within the same work?' This is a question for which Himmelfarb is uniquely unsuited to supply an answer, for she presumes complete separation between modes of thinking within Mill's writing. Her work may be considered to be an advance over reductivism, to the extent that she accommodates two Mills. So far from offering a credible alternative to reductivism, however, she offers a "serial reductivism"; what is in effect a series of disconnected conjectures. Himmelfarb, thus, cannot account for Mill's complexity; she is incapable of accounting for this complexity precisely because she presumes that there is a hard

14Himmelfarb, Liberty, 259.
15Mill's doctrine is only relatively absolutist, as he gives as a condition of its application that "mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion" (Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 224).
16Dr. David Barker, conversation, April 5, 1998.
distinction between the two Mills, and complexity relies on simultaneous presentation.

**Simultaneous Multiple Presentations: C.B. Macpherson**

In positing two opposite, but simultaneously manifested doctrines, C.B. Macpherson leads us further into the question of Mill’s complexity. Macpherson relates the presence of these doctrines, and the inconsistencies and theoretical confusions which they generate, to Mill’s holding irreconcilable maximizing claims. On Macpherson’s account, Mill is torn between the claims of equal human development, or democracy, and those of the existing system of inequalities generated by the claims of maximization of utilities, or capitalist relations of production as such.\(^{17}\)

Macpherson relates the presence of the first maximizing claim to Mill’s “moral vision of the possibility of the improvement of mankind, and of a free and equal society not yet achieved.”\(^{18}\) Mill seeks in democracy a means to that improvement. For Macpherson, Mill’s political theory of “developmental” democracy represents an advance in moral insight over the one-sided, “protective” theory espoused by Mill’s father, James Mill, and his father’s mentor, Jeremy Bentham. The latter theory views democracy as having only a


\(^{18}\)Macpherson, *Life and Times*, 47.
"negative" protective function, by which Macpherson means that the people use the franchise to protect themselves from the encroachment of government on their liberty. Their case for democracy stems from the axiom that the individual desires above all "to render the person and property of another subservient to his pleasures." Accordingly, each individual is viewed as a seeker of maximum utilities, measured in wealth: "Each portion of wealth has a corresponding portion of happiness." They contend that "[e]very body of men is governed altogether by its conception of what is its interest, in the narrowest and most selfish sense of the word interest: never by any regard for the interest of others." The only way to prevent the government from despoiling the rest of the people is to make them removable by decision of the majority: "A democracy, then, has for its object and effect, the securing its members against oppression and depredation at the hands of those functionaries which it employs for its defence."22

Without overlooking the negative protective function of democracy, Macpherson contends that the good society of John Stuart Mill also has a "positive" protective function, in that it also protects the chances of human development - hence, the

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name, "developmental" democracy. Macpherson notes that Mill's moral vision includes a view of the essence of the individual as not simply a consumer of utilities, condemned to a "money-grubbing and starvation-avoiding existence."\(^{23}\) Mill believed that democracy would lead to the "advancement of the community . . . in intellect, in virtue, and in political activity and efficiency."\(^{24}\) Democracy does this by permitting and encouraging each of its members to act, not merely as a maximizer of utility, but also as an "exerter, developer, and enjoyer of the exertion or development of his or her own capacities."\(^{25}\) To this end, Mill advocates, among other measures, a plural voting system by which all citizens are given the vote - but some are given more votes than others, in proportion to their development as individuals. Thus, in one formulation of his plural voting system, an unskilled worker is given one vote; a skilled labourer is given two; farmers and manufacturers, three or four; professionals or literary persons, artists, public functionaries and elected members of learned societies are given five or six.\(^{26}\) In this way, the benefits of political participation are reaped without fear of giving too much power to the numerical majority who, Mill feared, were insufficiently developed to be trusted with the greater share of voting power. Ultimately, the clamant democratic forces would have to undergo a process of

\(^{24}\)Macpherson, Life and Times, 47.
\(^{25}\)Macpherson, Life and Times, 48.
\(^{26}\)Mill, Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform, CW, XIX, 324-5.
improvement before they could be admitted to a more proportional share of the political power.  

The presence of the second maximizing claim Macpherson relates to the fact that Mill, though he saw that market society was debasing the quality of life, had not really moved very far from his father's and Bentham's "possessive individualist" postulates. Macpherson argues that there is a cumulative decline in realism from the "protective" to the "developmental" models of democracy regarding the necessary structure of capitalist society. The former recognized that capitalism entailed gross class inequalities. For, though Bentham's law of diminishing utilities implied that maximum utility would be had through an equal distribution of wealth, Bentham held that this position was untenable, as the incentives to productivity would be lost. Therefore, it follows, "[t]he claims of equality must yield to the claims of security, in order to maximize the aggregate production of utilities." Thus, Bentham shows that the condition for maximization of utilities requires social and economic inequality. Mill, by contrast, thought this condition to be accidental and remediable, thus:

[t]he principle of private property has never yet had a fair trial in any country . . . The social arrangements of modern Europe commenced from a distribution of property which was the result, not of just partition, or acquisition by industry, but of conquest and violence: and

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27 Macpherson, Democratic Theory, 32.
28 Macpherson, JSM 3a, Lecture Notes for Seminar, May 3, 1979, University of Toronto Archives.
29 Macpherson, Democratic Theory, 8.
notwithstanding what industry has been doing for many centuries to modify the work of force, the system still retains many and large traces of its origin."  

Mill contends that an "equitable principle" of property would remedy this situation. His proposed principle of "proportion between renumeration and exertion," he argues, is just because it ensures that individuals receive the produce of their labour. This is in stark contrast to the existing system of distribution of wealth, which Mill characterizes as apportioning property in inverse proportion to labour.  

Mill looks forward to a time: 

when the division of the produce of labour, instead of depending, as in so great a degree it now does, on the accident of birth, will be made by concert, on an acknowledged principle of justice; and when it will no longer either be, nor be thought to be, impossible for human beings to exert themselves strenuously in procuring benefits which are not to be exclusively their own, but to be shared with the society they belong to.  

Yet, even if the inequalities of the existing social arrangements do remain, Mill feels that capitalist relations in production are just. For, he argues, "while it is true that the labourers are at a disadvantage compared with those whose predecessors had saved, it is also true that the labourers are far better off than if those predecessors had not saved." Thus, Macpherson argues, Mill satisfies himself that there exists no inconsistency between the system of private property and the improvement of humanity. 

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31 Macpherson, *Life and Times*, 53.  
Macpherson argues that there is no escaping the fact that the two maximizing principles are in conflict. In the first place, argues Macpherson, participation in the political process, which Mill holds to be so necessary for the improvement of the quality of people, would only produce a low quality of persons.\footnote{Macpherson, \textit{Life and Times}, 60.} Despite such Tocqueville-inspired beliefs as “the good portion of the influence [of the franchise] could be retained without the bad” through adoption of the plural voting system, Macpherson argues, the lower electoral weight given to the less-developed actually gives little incentive to them to participate in the political process, as they would know that their wills could not possibly prevail.\footnote{The preponderance of the vote, in Mill’s thought, as an unparalleled tool for intellectual and moral development gives little scope for arguing that Mill believed that similar development could be achieved through other forms of political participation. Mill sees in the vote, “a potent instrument of mental improvement.” Mill is clear that it is through the exercise of political franchises that mental cultivation may proceed: “unless substantial mental cultivation in the mass of mankind is to be a mere vision, this is the road by which it must come” (Mill, \textit{Representative Government}, \textit{CW}, XIX, 468).} In the second place, even if the lower classes were given a greater share of voting power, it would likely do nothing to improve their condition. For, underlying this contradiction is the more fundamental contradiction between capitalist relations and the democratic ideal of equal opportunity for individual self-development. Macpherson writes, “[a] system which requires men to see themselves, and to act, as consumers and appropriators, gives little scope for
most of them to see themselves and act as exerters and
developers of their capacities." Mill had hoped that co-
operatives might turn each labourer into his or her own
capitalist, thereby:

healing . . . the standing feud between capital and labour;
the transformation of human life, from a conflict of
classes struggling for opposite interests, to a friendly
rivalry in the pursuit of a good common to all; the
elevation of the dignity of labour. Under this scheme, Mill had hoped that capitalist relations
would be left intact, without the undesirable result of the
degradation of the working class. To the extent that Mill’s
hopes would remain unfulfilled, Macpherson argues, class
oppression would continue. Thus, in upholding capitalist
relations as such, Mill preserves the very obstacles to the
end he seeks: the improvement of humankind.

Macpherson argues that Mill never saw this contradiction
fully. He claims that Mill was sufficiently aware of the
dilemma posed by the irreconcilability of the claims of
liberalism with those of democracy to be worried - not merely
in terms of the "abstract possibility of clash between
majority rule and indiv[idual] liberties," but in terms of the
"real clash between clamant democratic forces and the
establishment which upheld the market society of p.p. [private
property], contract and individual rights." But he was
insufficiently aware of the extent to which the claims of

36 Macpherson, Life and Times, 61.
37 Mill, Political Economy, CW, III, 792.
38 Macpherson, JSM 3a.
liberalism were in conflict with those of democracy. For if he had been fully conscious of the dilemma, Macpherson argues, he would have come out in favour of one side or the other as a means of escape.\textsuperscript{39}

Yet Mill insists explicitly on the practical improbability of such an escape, which may be evinced by his early recognition (1832) that a one-sided system of political philosophy was untenable, since "the true system was something much more complex . . . than [he] had previously had any idea of."\textsuperscript{40} For Mill the goal of political philosophy, extreme comprehensiveness, is achievable only by giving expression to the many capacities and possibilities which are the constituent elements of Truth.\textsuperscript{41} In arguing that Mill would be forced to take sides, Macpherson implies that knowing that one's evaluative beliefs are inconsistent with each other must somehow lead to the weakening of at least one of the two, since it is impossible for contradictory beliefs to both be true. In fact, there is no necessary reason why two such contradictory beliefs cannot be held in tandem.\textsuperscript{42} In this, evaluative beliefs are like desires. Regular beliefs are aimed at truth and two contradictory beliefs cannot both be true. Thus, it is impossible, given the facts to claim that

\textsuperscript{39}Macpherson, JSM 3a.
\textsuperscript{40}Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 169.
\textsuperscript{41}Mill, "Guizot's Essays and Lectures on History," Essays on French History and Historians, CW, XX, 259.
some fact, \( p \), is both true and untrue. By contrast, inconsistent desires, although they cannot both be satisfied, do not tend to be diminished by the recognition of the fact of their being inconsistent with one another. It is perfectly acceptable to assert that \( p \) ought to be the case, and that \( p \) ought not be the case. Thus, Mill is fully warranted in advocating for the free-development of the individual as is suggested by his support for liberalism, as well as for the probable need for the use of restraint, as is necessary for the proper functioning of democracy; realisation of the impossibility of satisfying both oughts does not compel him to discard one in favour of the other. The possibility of conflicting obligations means, however, that they cannot be taken to be descriptions of some real, independent, moral state of affairs. Rather, evaluative beliefs are plural and conflicting.\(^{43}\)

**Conclusion:**

This does not mean that Macpherson's account must be rejected. As I conceive it, the conflict outlined by Macpherson operates on two levels: it may be seen as being characterised by "deception" and by "authenticity". It is "authentic" in the sense that it relates to a material reality which contains a multiplicity of aspects, bearings and

\(^{43}\)In chapter five below, I contend that the disparate elements of his thought reflect this state of affairs. On such a reading, the presence of conflicting perspectives is not viewed as being accidental, or undesirable.
capacities, the perception of which depends on comparison of multiple versions of the world; "deceptive" in the thought which Mill entertains that there is no conflict, thereby projecting the impasse reached by combining liberalism with democracy into the future, as a necessary eventuality. Macpherson's interpretation deals amply with the latter, "deceptive" aspect of Mill's political thought. He shows that the necessary continuation of class conflict which is the result of Mill's upholding capitalist relations as such, combined with Mill's fear of class legislation leads to a "vicious circle of unequal participation justifying continued unequal participation." The question at which the next chapter is aimed is whether there is anything in Mill's thought which strives to look behind the impasse to which his work falls, and from there begin determining a more adequate interpretation.

44Macpherson, *Life and Times*, 62.
Chapter 3

Introduction

In the last chapter the potential was discovered for an interpretive approach to Mill's political thought, which I termed 'authentic', which would provide an alternative account of the tensions outlined by C.B. Macpherson. Before it can be given, however, it is necessary first to examine Mill's political writings to find the theoretical basis for such an account.

There are two strains within Mill's system of thought, which issue from Mill's aspiring to a single, comprehensive account of truth, at the same time that he concedes the impossibility of articulating it. The basis for the first may be found in Mill's constant reference to utility as the ultimate appeal in questions of moral and political right. The second, which is often less explicitly formulated - but which is nevertheless present, in one form or another, throughout Mill's adult writings - has its source in Mill's reaction to the narrowness of the Benthamic creed in which he was raised, his subsequent rejection of it, and his adoption of the doctrine he calls "manysidedness."

Mill adopted "manysidedness", a term which he derived from his reading of Goethe, having come to the realization that "the true system [of politics] was something much more complex.
and many sided than [he] had previously had any idea of."\(^1\)

Though Mill’s manysidedness has never been given a proper account in the literature, I argue that Mill’s adoption of this device is of great significance for interpretation of his thought. In particular, it explains the presence of conflicting perspectives in his writings. As I comprehend it, manysidedness is the attempt to represent with complexity the multiplicity of aspects, bearings and capacities contained within the system of politics. It must be complex because it requires multiple, simultaneous and distinct perspectives. It is on the basis of Mill’s manysidedness that the 'authentic' account of his political thought may be based.

\(^1\)Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 129.
Utility: Robson's "Unity of Thought" Thesis

In The Improvement of Mankind: The Social and Political Thought of John Stuart Mill, John A. Robson argues that Mill's political theory can, and should, be viewed as being consistent and one-sided - though, by his own admission, no one before him had been able to reveal the unity of Mill's thought. Robson cites two reasons for this neglect. The first is the fact that Mill "wrote on more subjects than most critics are interested in," and so, interpretation of his work has been done in segregated areas. The second reason is a common misperception, prevalent also in Mill's own lifetime, that he was a mere "prophet manqué [Robson's emphasis]," a failed reformer of the Benthamic philosophy, whose version of utilitarianism is dismissed as being inconsistent. Robson, however, contends that there is in fact a unity underlying Mill's thought, both in purpose and in method, which is seldom explicitly formulated by Mill, and so, is effectively "hidden" in the text. Robson gives himself the task of finding the underlying principle which, once revealed, will make consistent what appears on the surface to be inconsistent, coherent what appears at first glance to be incoherent.

Robson's unifying principle is "utility". He cites Mill's constant reference to the principle of utility, "the greatest

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3 Robson, Improvement, vii.
4 Robson, Improvement, ix.
happiness of the greatest number,"⁵ throughout his political 
 writings. Robson contends that Mill’s reiteration of the 
 utility principle is not rhetorical, but is meant in earnest; 
 "his schemes, his lessons, his example (sic.) all have 
 reference to the greatest happiness of the greatest number."⁶ 
 Although Robson concedes that Mill is extremely insistent on 
 the importance of other notions, such as freedom and 
 individuality, he argues that utility has a special status in 
 Mill’s work; the others “have the status of secondary ends for 
 Mill - utility alone is primary.”⁷ Thus, on Robson’s reading, 
 Mill’s work is informed throughout by the belief that 
 practical measures must be designed for the benefit of 
 individuals, with particular reference to the greatest 
 happiness of the greatest number; that is to say, they are all 
 “conceived with a utilitarian end.”⁸ 

However, Robson’s 'discovery' is of questionable value. It 
 provides little useful insight into the character of Mill’s 

⁵Note that Mill’s version of utility differs from that of 
 Bentham’s and his father’s, who thought it sufficient that 
 utility be based on "the greatest good of the greatest 
 number." The latter believed that all pleasures were 
 equivalent, and thus held that "pushpin is as good as poetry." 
 In Mill’s version, however, quality, in addition to quantity, 
 is included in the felicitous calculus. Mill never wavered in 
 his commitment to the principle of utility, but noted that he 
 probably could not be not be included in the ranks of "the 
 people called utilitarians," having understood the term 
 "utility" in quite a different sense than they (Mill to Thomas 
 Carlyle, 12th January (1834), CW, XII, 207). The implications 
 of this distinction are discussed below. 
 ⁶Robson, Improvement, ix. 
 ⁷Robson, Improvement, ix. 
 ⁸Robson, Improvement, x.
political thought. By distinguishing between the theoretical and practical elements in Mill's writing, Robson insulates Mill's theory from the charge of inconsistency. So far from resolving the issue of the consistency of Mill's thought, however, Robson's 'unity of thought' thesis actually begs the question of the usefulness of Mill's utilitarianism as a central, unifying principle.

It has been argued that all that one may derive from Mill's utility principle is an indirect theory of the good; that is to say, Mill's principle of good, that "happiness is the only thing which is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end," is not reducible to any direct criterion for action. This by itself throws into question the usefulness of utility as a central unifying principle: the good, while strictly speaking an ultimate end for Mill, remains elusive, as it does not directly inform his political prescriptions. However, it has been pointed out that Mill does not altogether abstain from generating principles of right. For example, in considering rules of justice, Mill proclaims, "I dispute the pretensions of any theory which sets up an imaginary standard of justice not grounded on utility to be the chief part, and incomparably the most sacred and binding part, of all morality

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10Mill, Utilitarianism, CW, X, 227.
Yet he also credits the rules of right as being a direct source of goodness: "The moral rules which forbid mankind to hurt one another . . . have . . . the peculiarity, that they are the main element in determining the whole of the social feelings of mankind. It is their observance which alone preserves peace among human beings." Long-run social utility might thus be maximized by simply encouraging individuals to choose the best act open to them on every occasion. This would be presuming, however, that it is always possible to know what is best. This points to a further problem in the extrication of Mill's moral theory: the focus of Mill's moral theory is on a future state of affairs. This future is entirely uncertain, and, practically speaking, indefinitely extensive. He seeks to secure through his theory "utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of a man as a progressive being." Yet, even if it were possible for one to always do what appears to be one's best, it is not possible to calculate the good or bad consequences of one's actions over such an expanse; arguably, each discrete action may not add up in the end to the best long-range outcome. For it is impossible to know what effect one's actions will ultimately have. If one were to try to

12 Mill, Utilitarianism, CW, X, 255.
13 Mill, Utilitarianism, CW, X, 255.
14 Mill himself attests to this fact, referring to the "incalculable distance" which must be traversed before humanity reaches the stage of intellectual advancement envisioned in his future apparent society (Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 252).
16 Sumner, "The Good," 112.
calculate the good and bad consequences of one's actions over such a distance, one would never act. Instead, individuals must develop rules of conduct about what is right and wrong. According to Mill the need to resort to habit in the fulfilment of general intentions is an inevitable and efficient means to the good.\textsuperscript{17} In order that the desire for virtue exist in sufficient force, it must be implanted in the individual, where the experience of pleasure acquires the support of habit, imparting certainty in her or his conduct which, Mill argues, is necessary for social living.\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, Mill's evaluation of the utility of acts also takes into account conventional morality; it is not merely a function of the utility of the particular act, nor is it simply a function of the particular rule governing that particular form of act.

In facing the problem of extrication of Mill's political thought on the basis of utility, one must contend with Mill's use of a developmental schema. By placing the assessment of utility within an historical framework, his reformulation of utilitarianism makes it impossible to calculate the greatest good, either on its own terms, or in terms of specific acts. Mill conceives that social utility cannot be maximized by establishing a set of absolute rules. He avers that "all questions of political institutions are relative, not

\textsuperscript{17}Mill, \textit{Utilitarianism}, \textit{CW}, X, 238-9.

absolute, and that different stages of human progress not only will have, but ought to have different institutions [Mill's emphasis]." Similarly, the utility of acts is determined not merely as a function of the utility of rules for those acts, but is also determined by their place within conventional morality; their utility must be measured with specific reference to the set of customs, codes and controls which make possible stable social life. Evaluation of utility requires that one take into account the habits acquired through socialization practices, on which conventional morality depends. The rootedness of utility within the socialization practices of a society means that, unto itself, the principle of utility does not provide a useful standard for measuring the theoretical consistency of Mill's thought, as it cannot itself be extricated from the practical concerns which demand that one take an open-ended perspective in the consideration of political actions.

One might ask further of Robson, 'what significant meaning can be ascribed to the term "unity," in the case of Mill's political thought'? He himself admits that Mill's work is inconsistent: "I am not here attempting to dismiss charges of internal and verbal inconsistency . . . A man must grow and a man must change." He complains that "it is difficult to understand what people are demanding when they ask for

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20 Sumner, "The Good," 111.
consistency," but does not attempt to further clarify what would, in his opinion, be a reasonable standard; this is especially problematic, as he has already admitted that there is no question that Mill's work contains inconsistencies. He alludes to a "proper context" into which Mill's thought must be placed. Presumably, the "proper context" is Mill's "insistence that utility be the sole test of actions and the proper end of plans." This brings us back to the problem of employing an effectively useless standard for evaluation of political actions. Robson finds himself in the position of making what amounts to a worthless claim as regards the unity of Mill's thought: his study reveals unity without substance.

Manysidedness of Mind

The foregoing shows that Robson's claim regarding the unity of Mill's political thought relies on a concept which is, practically speaking, meaningless and is thus, unto itself, of little interpretive value. It remains to be shown that there is a second strain of thought within Mill's theory that issues from Mill's manysidedness. Robson acknowledges the influence of manysidedness in Mill's thought. However, he argues that Mill's manysidedness reflects the merely practical aspect of his writings. Thus, he contends that, far from positing only a narrow set of options for practical action, Mill's thought is marked by "the constant demand for unceasing

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21Robson, Improvement, ix.
play of thought about ideas and institutions."\textsuperscript{22} But Robson insists that a clear distinction must be made in Mill’s writings between his theory and his recommendations for political practice. "His plans," he argues, "always have a practical bias; while valuing theory highly, he makes a clear distinction . . . between it and practice."\textsuperscript{23} Thus, the influence of manysidedness is limited to Mill’s purely practical prescriptions.

Practical considerations themselves make it impossible for Mill to advocate a one-sided theory of politics. I contend that the demands of "extreme comprehensiveness" require Mill to adopt a many-sided theoretical stance.\textsuperscript{24} There is no reason to expect consistency of Mill. For, as one author observes, "Mill was too devoted to truth not to try to make room for apparently divergent truths."\textsuperscript{25} The same author cautions that "a number of Mill’s difficulties grew out of his attempts to create a balance out of conflicting perspectives."\textsuperscript{26} Yet it is not slovenliness of thought, which Mill attributes to the mass of mankind, which propels him to embrace at one and the same time things which are inconsistent with one another. Rather, inconsistency is given in the structure of Mill’s thought. Thus Mill’s writings must be approached in terms of the

\textsuperscript{22}Robson, Improvement, ix.
\textsuperscript{23}Robson, Improvement, ix.
\textsuperscript{24}Mill to John Sterling, 20th October 1831, Early Letters, CW, XII, 81.
\textsuperscript{26}Semmel, Pursuit, 23.
disunity of his thought, in his assertion that Truth itself is many-sided, and not to be apprehended all at once. Mill writes, “one feels quite sure of scarcely anything respecting Truth, except she is many-sided [Mill’s emphasis].”

Mill’s adoption of the standard of many-sidedness came unexpectedly, as a result of a fit of despondency, which he termed, “the crisis in [his] mental history.” Prior to his crisis, Mill had been a doctrinaire “utilitarian”. On Mill’s own account, his early education had been “in a great measure, a course in Benthamism.” It should be noted, however, that Mill did not actually read any work of Bentham’s until 1821, at the age of 15 — although Mill writes, “[t]he Benthamic standard of “the greatest happiness” was that which I had always been taught to apply.” Yet, despite his familiarity with the Benthamite philosophy, when Mill finally did read Bentham, he reflects, “in the first pages of Bentham it burst upon me with all the force of novelty”:

When I laid down the last volume of the Traité I had become a different being. The “principle of utility,” understood as Bentham understood it and applied in the manner in which he applied it through these three volumes, fell exactly into its place as the keystone which held together the detached and fragmentary

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27 Mill to Thomas Carlyle, 5th October 1833, CW, 181.
28 The term “utilitarian” was never actually used by Bentham, and originates from Mill: “the name I gave to the society I planned was the Utilitarian Society. It was the first time that any one had taken the title of Utilitarian” (Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 81).
component parts of my knowledge and beliefs. It gave unity to my conception of things.\(^{31}\)

Mill had found in Benthamism, "a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; in one among the best senses of the word, a religion; the inculcation and diffusion of which could be made the principal outward purpose of life," by which to achieve his life goal of being a "reformer of the world."\(^{32}\)

Yet, Mill’s enthusiasm would be short-lived. No sooner did he adopt the Benthamic creed, than he began to find it wanting. Mill’s dissatisfaction grew out of the realization that the system of political philosophy laid down in Bentham’s and his father’s writings, "professing to be a theory of government in general," ought to have made room for many things that it did not.\(^{33}\) Mill, nonetheless, maintained for some time that the Benthamic philosophy was defensible – at least, in principle. When Thomas Macaulay published an attack on the senior Mill’s Essay on Government,\(^ {34}\) however, Mill had to concede, "there was truth in several of his strictures on my father’s treatment of the subject, that my father’s premises were really too narrow, and included but a small number of the general truths, on which in politics, the

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\(^{32}\)Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 137.

\(^{33}\)Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 165.

\(^{34}\)Thomas B. Macaulay, “Mr. Mill’s Essay on Government,” Edinburgh Review, XLIX (1829), 159-89.
important consequences depend.\textsuperscript{35} With this realization, Mill made the stride from the stage of adolescence to that of early maturity. He describes the movement to that experienced by an individual:

after having been taught to think (as every one is) by teachers of some particular school, and having for a time exercised the power only in the path shown to it by its first teachers, it begins, without abandoning that, to tread also in other paths; learns to see with its naked eye, not through the eye-glasses of its teachers, and, from being one-sided, becomes many-sided and of no school.\textsuperscript{36}

This experience marked the beginning of the period, noted above, which Mill describes as "the only actual revolution which has ever taken place in [his] modes of thinking."\textsuperscript{37}

In order to understand this transformation, it is necessary to inquire into its origin, which can be traced to changes in Mill's character, which occurred following the period which he termed, "a crisis in [his] mental history."\textsuperscript{38} The crisis began in the autumn of 1826, when Mill, "in a dull state of nerves," started questioning his objects in life:

it occurred to me to put the question directly to myself, "Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" An irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, "No!" At this my heart sank within me; the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down.

\textsuperscript{35}Mill, \textit{Autobiography}, \textit{CW}, I, 165.  
\textsuperscript{37}Mill, \textit{Autobiography}, \textit{CW}, I, 199.  
\textsuperscript{38}Mill, \textit{Autobiography}, \textit{CW}, I, 135.

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All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for.  

The "end" which had ceased to charm Mill was the happiness which was to be attained through making progress in the reformation of the world. Mill claimed that he had become completely reliant on this as his sole source of satisfaction: "My conception of my own happiness was entirely identified with this object." The object, however, remained elusive. Mill commented that circumstances permitted him to maintain the illusion of happiness so long as "the general improvement going on in the world and the idea of [him]self engaged with others in struggling to promote it, seemed enough to fill up an interesting and animated existence." But, in fact, Mill lacked the capacity for genuine feeling. He complained that the fault lay with his teachers. They had assumed that there was a direct association between the Happiness of the great whole and the individual's feeling of happiness, and so sought to form the strongest possible associations of the salutary class, forcibly in Mill, through the instruments of praise and blame. But the associations they formed in their pupil were artificial, unenduring, according to Mill, because they lacked natural ties which would make them capable of "lasting undiminished to the end of life." He charges that "[his]  

39 Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 139.  
40 Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 137.  
41 Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 137.  
42 Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 141.
teachers had occupied themselves but superficially with the means of forming and keeping up these salutary associations." 43 For, Mill explains, "analytic habits . . . tend altogether to weaken those which are to speak familiarly, a mere matter of feeling." 44 Thus Mill, reflecting on his mental state at the time, contends that "the description so often given of a Benthamite, as a mere reasoning machine . . . was . . . not altogether untrue of me." 45 During this interval, Mill's thoughts had been confined merely to a single mode: logic and analysis. Though he was imaginatively susceptible to strong feeling, Mill claims that he was in fact incapable of any sentiment. Mill, however, did not think that there was anything especially remarkable about the fact that he was one-sided: "no youth of the age I then was, can be expected to be more than one thing." 46 This understanding, however, did not bring Mill any closer to a feeling of happiness.

Mill clung to the hope that the cloud would pass; that he would soon be released from the depression with which he had suffered for months without any relief. Just as he began to feel that he could not go on living, Mill reports, a ray of light broke upon his gloom. It happened during an accidental

43 Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 141.
44 Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 143.
45 Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 111.
46 Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 111.
reading of Marmontel’s Memoirs. Mill recounts that while reading:

I came to the passage which relates his father’s death, the distressed position of the family, and the sudden inspiration by which he, then a mere boy, felt and made them feel that he would be everything to them - would supply the place of all that they had lost. A vivid conception of the scene and its feelings came over me, and I was moved to tears.

With this awakening, Mill’s character ceased to be one-sided. The outpouring of emotion indicated that Mill was not “a stock or a stone”; it was not the case, as Mill in the depths of his despair believed, that there was “no power in nature sufficient to begin the formation of [his] character anew, and create in a mind now irretrievably analytic, fresh associations of pleasure with any of the objects of human desire.” This did not, however, entail a rejection of analysis and logic: “I did not for an instant, lose sight of, or undervalue, that part of the truth which I had seen before.” Rather, in addition to the faculty of analysis and logic, Mill now also possessed the capacity for genuine feeling. The joining of feeling with analysis and logic enabled Mill to perceive with greater depth than he had previously been capable. For with emergence of the capacity for genuine feeling, Mill acquired a means for resisting “the

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48Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 111.
50Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 147.
dissolving influence of analysis," which in his former mechanical state had, on his account, left him prone to precocious and premature analysis. There was a serious flaw in Mill's education which followed from its attaching exclusive importance on the ordering of outward circumstances: ironically, the experiment which had as its purpose the training of the individual for speculation and action in service of the Happiness of the whole, had had the effect of rendering its subject incapable of partaking of any happiness whatsoever. Now, in addition to outward circumstances, Mill was able to attend to the internal culture of the individual, which had been previously inaccessible to him. Mill began to find meaning in the claims that had been made about the importance of poetry and arts as instruments of human culture. In nurturing his own pleasurable susceptibilities thus, Mill sought to redress some of the negative consequences which followed from his ingrained analytic habits. The cloud drew off of Mill and he claims to never have been as miserable again as he had been.

In this way, the transformation in Mill's writing may be seen as being prefigured in the changes in his character: the desire to join other forms of cultivation with the faculty of analysis is followed by the inclusion of new dimensions of thought within Mill's writings. In the period following his recovery, blind adherence to utilitarianism is replaced by

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51 Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 143.
“conviction, that the true system [is] something much more complex and many-sided than [he] had previously had any idea of.”\textsuperscript{52} Mill sought to have his work reflect this complexity through the adoption of “manysidedness” which, as I have noted above, is a notion which he derived from his reading of Goethe.\textsuperscript{53}

Yet the change in his writing cannot be explained by giving an account of what this device meant to Goethe. It must be noted that though having claimed to have taken the “Goethian device,” manysidedness, for his own, Mill’s own knowledge of Goethe was scant, limited largely to that which his acquaintances had related to him.\textsuperscript{54} By his own admission, “I do not myself, as yet, know Götche.”\textsuperscript{55} However, Mill’s ignorance was not unusual for the period in which he lived. Mill, deploring this state of ignorance, writes, “[s]o rare in

\textsuperscript{52}Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 129.
\textsuperscript{53}Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 171.
\textsuperscript{54}It is likely that Mill had his first exposure to Goethe from his friend, Sarah Austin, whose translation of Falk’s reflections on the life of Goethe was being prepared for publication around the same time Mill first became interested in German thought. In this work, manysidedness is identified as a key characteristic of Goethe’s thought: “Goethe’s manysidedness*, [footnote omitted] both in art, and in the accurate perception of character, and of external objects generally, has been much celebrated, even by those who hunt after the universal diffusion of knowledge, now so much in vogue, with the voracity of an empty stomach.” [Sarah Austin, Characteristics of Goethe. From the German of Falk, Müller, etc. vol.1, 8 (London, Wilson, 1833)]. Though Mill does not directly acknowledge Austin there can be little doubt, as the editors of the Collected Works of John Stuart Mill note, that all references to Goethe in the Autobiography derive from this work (Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 635).
\textsuperscript{55}Mill to Thomas Carlyle, 17th July 1832, CW, XII, 111.
this country is any, even the most common-place knowledge of Germany." The term "manysidedness" is suggested by the German, vielseitig. The German use of the term is generally less idiomatic than the English, for whom the term is highly specialized, above all denoting the user's sympathy with German Romanticism. It is clear that Goethe's "take" on manysidedness, or versatility, was very positive, as may be evinced by numerous references within his oeuvre. Some of these show a great deal of resonance with Mill's use of the term. Thus, for example, Goethe writes:

Only with versatility, generosity of spirit, can one attain the loftiest ideal of humanity [emphasis mine].

Still, others show a great deal of contrast. Notably, in his Autobiography Goethe declares:

Human nature appears to possess a peculiar sort of toughness and versatility in that it gets the better of whatever confronts it or it embraces and whatever it cannot assimilate it at least neutralizes.

There is nothing tough about Mill's manysidedness. It can best be characterized as an (unsuccessful) attempt to find compromise among competing views; Mill is able, through the strategies of his writing, to keep contradictory themes going throughout his work. As I shall show below in chapter five, though he strives to achieve unity, Mill does not compel conflicting doctrines to agree.

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56 Mill to Thomas Carlyle, 29th May 1832, CW, XII, 105.
58 W. Goethe, Dichtung und Wahrheit, 10, 1383. Translation by Donald Smith.
Thus, despite its origins in Goethe's thought, Mill's manysidedness\(^{59}\) must be understood as he himself understood it, as the attempt "to go all round every object which [he] surveyed, and to place [him]self at all points of view, so to have the best chance of seeing all sides [Mill's emphasis]."\(^{60}\) It is a reaction to the narrowness of the Benthamic creed, of whose expositors Mill proclaimed himself to be, "the narrowest of them all,"\(^{61}\) and which he now regarded as being a "petrified and narrow philosophy."\(^{62}\) This did not entail a rejection of Benthamism, \textit{per se}. Mill, however, saw that "[his utilitarian] premises were mere generalizations of one of the innumerable aspects of Reality, & that far from being the most important one."\(^{63}\) Thus, though Mill found his "old and taught

\(^{59}\)The Oxford English Dictionary lists 1833 as the first date in which "manysidedness" appeared in print ["Manysidedness," Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd edition, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), vol.9, 347]. Yet, the term first appears in Mill's oeuvre in his obituary notice of the Death of Jeremy Bentham, written in June, 1832: "He [Bentham] has often, we think, been surpassed in powers of metaphysical analysis, as well as in comprehensiveness and many-sidedness of mind" ("Death of Jeremy Bentham," Newspaper Writings, \textit{CW}, XXIII, 472). It is clear that Mill should be credited as being the first to actually use manysidedness in print. Mill, however is not even mentioned in connection with the term. [It should also be noted that although this source cites Mill as using the opposite term, "onesidedness," the source cited is not the first ever use by Mill of the term. He in fact employed it in print as early as 1837: ". . . learns to see with its naked eyes, and not through the eye-glasses of its teachers, and, from being one-sided, becomes many-sided and of no school" (Mill, "Armand Carrel," Newspaper Writings, \textit{CW}, XX, 181-2).]

\(^{60}\)Mill to Thomas Carlyle, 12th January 1834, \textit{CW}, XII, 205.

\(^{61}\)Mill to Thomas Carlyle, 22th October 1832, \textit{CW}, XII, 128.

\(^{62}\)Mill to Thomas Carlyle, 5th October 1833 \textit{CW}, XII, 181.

\(^{63}\)Mill to Thomas Carlyle, 12th January 1834, \textit{CW}, XII, 205.
opinions giving way in many places," rather than allowing it to fall to pieces," he "was incessantly occupied in weaving it anew." This necessitated a radical change in Mill's utilitarianism. Mill contended, 'I am still, & am still likely to remain, a utilitarian; though not one of "the people called utilitarians"; indeed, having scarcely one of my secondary premises in common with them; not a utilitarian at all, unless in quite another sense from what perhaps anyone except myself understands by the word.' In extending the language of utilitarianism to include quality as a dimension of pleasure, Mill diminished the immediate programmatic policy appeal it had enjoyed under his father and Bentham. By rooting the measurement of the goodness of an act within the sociological practices of a given society, Mill made it impossible to derive from the principle of utility any direct criterion for action. This is why it is of so little value as an underlying, unifying principle: it tells us little of the actual content of Mill's political thought.

Mill had become transformed into a syncretist, seeking to combine fresh ideas from the different streams of influence he was now under with those originating from his intellectual inheritance. Mill viewed his function in the domain of thought as being that of "interpreter" and "mediator" for the ideas of original thinkers:

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64Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 163.
65Mill to Thomas Carlyle, 12th January, 1834, CW, XII, 207.
I had . . . marked out this as a sphere of usefulness in which I was under a special obligation to make myself active: the more so, as the acquaintance I had formed with the ideas of Coleridgeans, of the German thinkers, and of Carlyle, all of them fiercely opposed to the mode of thought in which I had been brought up, had convinced me that along with much error they possessed much truth, which was veiled from minds otherwise capable of receiving it by the transcendental and mystical phraseology in which they were accustomed to shut it up and from which they neither cared, nor knew how, to disengage it; and I did not despair of separating the truth from error and expressing it in terms which would be intelligible and not repulsive to those on my own side in philosophy. Thus prepared, it will easily be believed that when I came into close intellectual communion with a person of the most eminent faculties, whose genius, as it grew and unfolded itself in thought, continually struck out truths far in advance of me, but in which I could not, as I had done in those others, detect any mixture of error, the greatest part of my mental growth consisted in the assimilation of those truths, and the most valuable part of my intellectual work was in building the bridges and clearing the paths which connected them with my general system of thought.  

'On what basis,' it may be asked, 'could Mill expect to contain the ideas of others within his system of thought, given his belief that Truth is many-sided?' One clue is given above: Mill, in claiming to be able to "separate the truth from error," must somehow believe that there is a point of view that he can take which will allow him to do this. Despite having argued that no single system of thought is sufficiently comprehensive to encompass the truth, Mill must also believe that it is nonetheless necessary that all doctrines be reconciled within a unified system of thought. Thus, in his review of George Cornewall Lewis' Remarks on the

Use and Abuse of Political Terms, Mill posits the need for mutual understanding among political theorists, "who are all at daggers-drawn, because they are speaking different dialects and know it not." He urges the writing of a "Treatise on the Ambiguities of the Moral Sciences," which would contribute to the uniting of "all half-truths . . . and blend them into one harmonious whole." It would be the task of the writer of the Treatise to "unite all exclusive and one-sided systems . . . by placing before each man a more comprehensive view in which the whole of what is affirmative in his own view would be included."

The presence of multiple voices in Mill's political thought thus is not accidental, it is a manifestation of his manysidedness. Nor is knowledge of their presence hidden, and so reserved only for the philosophic few. Thus, Hamburger's claim that Mill is a rhetorician, par excellence - that Mill deliberately includes discordant themes in his works which he makes inconspicuous - is untenable. Mill wrote his Autobiography with the "desire to make acknowledgements of the debts which [his] intellectual and moral development owes to

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67George Cornewall Lewis, Remarks on the Use and Abuse of Some Political Terms (London: Fellowes, 1832).
69Joseph Hamburger, "Individuality and Moral Reform: the Rhetoric of Liberty and the Reality of Restraint in Mill's On Liberty," in Political Science Reviewer (Vol.XXIV, 1995). This work is discussed in depth in Chapter 1.
other persons." It is clear that Mill did not wish to keep his multiple voices a secret, and so deceive his readers about the manysidedness of his thought.

Mill's disclosure of the sources of the arguments contained in his writings makes intelligible the structure of his political thought, which relies on manysidedness. This is not to say that Mill's voices can be extricated from his thought to reveal a clear genealogy; extrication of his voices for this purpose is not only not possible, it is not even desirable. Mill's sources are so altered by the process of assimilation into his general system of thought that they are often unrecognisable. For, as noted above, Mill was concerned to present only what he believed to be affirmative in their ideas which, he claimed, are veiled in "mystical phraseology," and therefore in need of translation into "the language of Argument." Mill justified this on the grounds that this was necessary in order that these ideas be made intelligible, such that others may be "made to believe what to many of them must always be in the upmost extent of the term "things unseen." This is not a passive process: "in building the bridges and clearing the paths which connected them with [his] general system of thought," Mill must subject a given thinker's idea to revision, "expressing it in terms which would be intelligible" by translating it into a common language.

71Mill to Thomas Carlyle, 2d March 1834, CW, XII, 217.
Carlyle remarked of the necessary role taken by translation in Mill’s process of assimilation, “the creed you write down is singularly like my own in most points, with this single difference . . . you have to translate into Logic before you give it place.”

As regards the desirability of extricating the voices in Mill's writings to give a genealogical account of his thought, the methodological strictures that would be required for such an endeavour would strip Mill’s thought of its intertextuality: it would yield only disparate accounts with no connection between them, as in the case of Himmelfarb’s interpretative approach. No purely textual interpretation aimed at recovering the sources of Mill’s voices could uncover Mill’s authorial intentions in combining them in the way that he does. On the contrary, they would obliterate his intentions. For the ideas which Mill incorporates into his thought, having been translated into “the language of Argument,” have no formal markers by which they could be readily identified, and thus are not meant to be separated from his thought as a whole. Therefore, Mill’s voices can only be interpreted within the context of his own framework; otherwise, one is at risk of missing the proverbial “forest” for the “trees.” The “forest” in this case represents the

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73 See my criticism of Himmelfarb above, in chapter 2.
intertextual dialogue in which Mill’s multiple voices, which comprise the "trees", are engaged.

**Conclusion:**

In the preceding chapter, I claimed that Macpherson's account alone can in principle deal with the key issue of multiple voices. I argued that Macpherson, however, does not make the best use of the interpretive approach which he introduces. It is now possible to see why this is so. Having neglected Mill's many-sidedness, Macpherson has no way of accounting for the presence of conflicting voices in Mill's thought, except as reflecting a general theoretical weakness. Further, lacking insight into the proper context in which Mill’s political thought should be read, Macpherson also conflates arguments Mill made in disparate bodies of work. When read in their proper context, Mill’s political arguments are shown to contain a great deal more ambivalence than Macpherson’s interpretation allows.

Macpherson accuses Mill of being inconsistent between various of his own principles. In particular, he accuses Mill of both accepting and rejecting: i) the liberal postulate of the self-contained individual (accepts in *Utilitarianism*; rejects in *On Liberty* and the *Political Economy*) and ii) the principle of straight democratic majority

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74Macpherson, JSM 2, Lecture Notes for Seminar, University of Toronto Archives.
rule (accepts in Representative Government; rejects in Utilitarianism and On Liberty).\textsuperscript{75} He argues that the inconsistencies in Mill's theories are the result of his failing to see "just how far and in what ways his liberal market assumptions were inconsistent with dem[ocratic] values."\textsuperscript{76} Mill, attempting to resolve the problem of irreconcilables, proclaimed what he could not actually prove: that the claims of liberalism could be made to be compatible with those of democracy. In the process, the democratic impulse was overwhelmed by the liberal impulse in his work, as Mill ultimately privileged the system of capitalist relations as such - a fact which Mill nonetheless had to repress, having also recognized that it was market society that was responsible for debasing the quality of life for all. Believing that there was no real alternative to this form of society, Mill sought resolution through democratic reforms; what Mill failed to see, according to Macpherson, was that the class inequalities of power and wealth, which are integral to market society, are impediments to the very reforms he sought to put in place. Thus, Mill's political theory of liberal democracy is characterized by Macpherson as being fundamentally lacking in realism. This is how he accounts for the inconsistency in Mill's thought; for, Macpherson explains, had Mill been fully and clearly conscious of this dilemma, he

\textsuperscript{75}Macpherson, JSM 2-3.  
\textsuperscript{76}Macpherson, JSM 2b.
would have had to give up, and come down on one side or the other.  

By contrast, I argue that the equivocality highlighted by Macpherson need not be seen to reflect the theoretical weakness of Mill's thought. On the contrary, it may be seen to reflect this manysidedness of mind. Having neglected Mill's manysidedness, however, Macpherson cannot appreciate this aspect of Mill's thought, which is not aimed at providing a theoretical solution, but at rendering the problem even more complex. Thus, though I argued above, in chapter 2, that the conflict outlined by Macpherson may be seen as operating at two levels, I did not mean to suggest by this that the two accounts of Mill's thought are equally accurate. In fact, Macpherson's account is prone to distortion.

As Macpherson outlines it, Mill deceived himself into believing that the conflict between liberalism and democracy could be overcome. He claims that all of the confusions, inconsistencies and uncertainties in Mill's political thought are the result of his failing to recognize that he was in fact dealing with irreconcilables; although Mill was in fact aware of the dilemma posed by the incompatibility of the claims of the two doctrines, democracy and liberalism, he was insufficiently aware of the extent to which they were in conflict. This view is based on arguments Mill put forward in

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77Macpherson, JSM 3a.
the essay On Liberty (1858), Considerations on Representative Government (1861), as well as the Political Economy (1848). Particular emphasis is laid on the Political Economy, as it is essential to Macpherson’s argument that Mill be portrayed as an apologist for capitalist relations as such. Macpherson argues that “Mill’s economic assumptions pretty well determined his solution to the central political problem.”

It is alleged that Mill’s defence of the basic institutions of capitalism, (ie. private property and the wage-labour/capital relationship), in the Political Economy greatly limited his ability to promote change. Thus, Macpherson notes, though Mill did at times challenge the classical utilitarian models of market man and society as necessary, “he clung to the competitive market economy, which really meant accepting the market model of man, for that economy relies on [the] incentive of rationally calculated gain.” He argues that the effect this had on Mill’s political solutions was to greatly limit the possibility for the development of democratic potential. Macpherson cites as evidence Mill’s rejection of “one person, one vote” in Considerations on Representative Government on the grounds that it would lead to class legislation. The presumption that the majority of individuals are little more than consumers and appropriators is evident in Mill’s assessment of the masses which, on Macpherson’s

80 Macpherson, Political Econ[omy], 2.
reading, are viewed by Mill as being little more than "short-sighted, immediate selfish maximizers"; according to Macpherson, Mill cannot even imagine the possibility of a different outcome.

Yet, it is not at all clear that Macpherson is justified in claiming that Mill's economic ideas, as elaborated in the *Political Economy*, determined what his solutions to the problems of a liberal democratic regime would be. In light of the compelling evidence that in undertaking to write his most important political works Mill actually wished to distance himself from his earlier statements on economics, Macpherson's argument appears groundless. This is not to say that Mill's prior economic assumptions were unimportant to his subsequent political writings. There is no question that by confining his discussions to market society, Mill limited the range of possible solutions to the political problems he saw. This does not, however, imply an uncritical acceptance of market society, as Macpherson contends. Read in its proper context, there is a great deal more ambivalence in Mill's political theory of liberal democracy than is revealed in Macpherson's account. This ambivalence, the result of Mill's less-than-full identification with any of the perspectives contained in his writings, provides the basis for the "authentic" account

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81 Macpherson, The Political Econ[omy], 2.
82 See my discussion of the new understanding of politics which took shape in Mill's writings in the 1850's in chapter one, above.
envisioned in the preceding chapter. In the next chapter I show how Mill, through the strategies of his writings, which rely on manysidedness, encounters a liberal democratic society which is a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity.
Chapter Four

Introduction

In 1857, Mill related a dream to his wife in a letter.\(^1\) In the dream, Mill is seated at a table with two strangers. One of the strangers remarks: "There are two excellent & rare things to be found in a woman, a sincere friend & a sincere Magdelan." Mill responds: "The best would be to find both in one." Aside from its obvious autobiographical significance,\(^2\) this dream may be usefully seen as being representative of Mill's political thought as a whole: Mill, faced with a choice between two apparently exclusive properties, characteristically wishes for both. This wish may be seen as reflecting his ambition to somehow combine all contrary opinions within a single, harmonious Treatise of politics. It also reflects the failed quality of Mill's project, for the goal of providing his Treatise remains elusive; being unable to achieve unification, the goal exists for Mill only as a dream image, an image which never becomes actual.

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\(^1\) Mill to Harriet Taylor Mill, Monday [Feb. 16, 1857], CW, XV, 523-4.

\(^2\) One might easily infer that the sincere friend/sincere Magdelan statement reflects Mill's opinion of his wife. For a biographical account of this event, see Bruce Mazlish, James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1975).
Manysidedness in Mill's Later Writings

In the course of drafting the blueprint for his later body of political writings, Mill recapitulates his case for manysidedness in a diary entry dated January 18, 1854:

In the last age the writers of reputation and influence were those who took a side, in a very decided manner, on the great questions, religious, moral, metaphysical, and political; who were downright infidels or downright Christians, thorough Tories or thorough democrats, and in that were considered, and were, extreme in their opinions. In the present age the writers of reputation and influence are those who take something from both sides of the great controversies, and make out that neither extreme is right, nor wholly wrong. By some persons, and on some questions, this is done in the way of mere compromise; in some cases, again, by a deeper doctrine underlying both contrary opinions; but done it is, in one or the other way, by all who gain access to the mind of the present age: and none but those who do it, or seem to do it, are now listened to [emphasis mine].

Mill characterizes his age as being "transitional", and therefore, lacking the circumstances which tend toward the keeping of strongly held views. He observes that "[t]hose who should be guides of the rest, see too many sides to every question. They hear so much said, or find that so much can be said, about everything, that they find no assurance of the truth of anything." Having rejected all systems of political philosophy as inadequate, Mill has given himself no recourse to an underlying "deeper doctrine." Therefore he seeks

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3Mill, Diary, January 18, 1854, CW, XXVII, 664.
4Mill, Diary, January 13, 1854, CW, XXVII, 642.
6This disclosure does not rule out the possibility that Mill thought that his Ethical theory was the "deeper doctrine"; whether it could actually serve this purpose is another question.
escape from this condition, "in the way of compromise." He contends that "Truth, in the great practical concerns of life, is . . . a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites." In subjects such as mathematics, Mill observes that there are no objections, the truth being all on one side. By contrast, in questions of "morals, religion, politics, social relations, and the business of life," where difference of opinion is possible, truth depends on a balance being struck between "conflicting sets of reasons." Mill therefore advocates that diversity of opinion have "a chance at play to all sides of the truth." He does not insist that a single perspective prevail against all other opinions. Rather, he seeks a way of compromise such that all sides may be considered in the construction of a comprehensive Truth.

Irreconcilability of Mill's Many-sidedness

Mill contends that in the complex subject of politics, "three-fourths of the arguments for every disputed opinion consist in dispelling the appearances which favour some opinion different from it." Mill anticipates that unity of opinion will ultimately result from the full and free comparison of opposite opinions. Mill attempts to achieve

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10 Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 244.
11 Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 244.
unity by means of manysidedness, which provides him with a structure in which competing viewpoints are brought into open conflict. Thereby the appearance of what, at first glance, is held to be the truth may be disclosed as being a false, or limited truth by virtue of the context in which its meaning unfolds. Having effectively disclosed that he has no assurance of the truth of any perspective, and having renounced all systems of political thought as inadequate, Mill is free to engage himself in such a process, where he adopts one meaning, which he then destroys by revealing and adopting its opposite. So far from producing a unified Treatise of politics, however, the body of thought which results is a conglomeration of irreconcilable voices. Paradox, not unity, is generated as Mill oscillates between identification and detachment, refusing to endorse fully any single perspective.

The irreconcilability of Mill's manysided political theory of liberal democracy manifests two distinct voices: the one, paternalistic, and the other, anti-paternalistic. In his early writings Mill characterized these as pertaining to the good of the people, in the case of the former, and the will of the people, in the case of the latter. Mill perceived that in

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13I am of course presuming that Mill would include himself as being among those, "who should be guides of the rest" (see quotation above).
14In Autobiography, Mill writes: "If I am asked what system of political philosophy I substituted for that which, as a philosophy, I had abandoned, I answer no system . . ." (Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 169).
order to realize the good it is necessary that some restrictions be put on the will of the people.\textsuperscript{15} Yet, in his mature political writings, at least, he is unwilling to compel the people to restrict the exercise of their will, arguing that the use of "an education of restraint" is unsuited to fitting the underdeveloped members of his society for admission to the privileges of freedom.\textsuperscript{16} By combining these two ends within a humanist developmental schema, Mill seeks to find a way to maximize both such that they are in balance with each other. I will argue that, failing to find any legitimate means through persuasion, Mill may be seen as lapsing into paternalism, which signals the failure of his attempt at reconciliation.

Mill's anti-paternalism is inherited from his father's and Jeremy Bentham's narrowly-defined "protective" theory of democracy,\textsuperscript{17} which holds that democracy has for its sole object and effect, the securing of its members against oppression at the hands of the state. Thus Mill holds that:

\begin{quote}
The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it. Mankind are greater gainers suffering others to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good by the rest.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17}About which, more is said in chapter 2.
\end{flushleft}
Yet it must be conceded that, in addition to liberty, Mill also provides for the use of restraint and constraint, as Cowling and Hamburger rightly adduce. However, these interpreters are mistaken in attributing its source to Mill's relatively brief flirtation with Comte's *Système de Politique Positive*. For Mill ultimately repudiates Comte's *Système*, referring to it as "the completest system of spiritual and temporal despotism, which ever yet emanated from a human brain . . . ." Rather, the origin of Mill's paternalism may be traced to his sustained appeal to a developmental humanist schema - of which the interest in Comte may be seen as a byproduct. As William Spanos notes, despite its humane rhetoric, Mill's appeal to the emancipatory potential of "poetry," by which Mill means any sort of "culture," or that which tends to the improvement of the individual, actually contains a mechanism for domination, grounded on the image of a "real" or "best" self.

Mill's reading of Wordsworth in the aftermath of his mental crisis, marks the beginning of his new way of thinking. Recognizing for the first time the place of the internal culture of the individual among the necessities of human well-

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19 See chapter one, above.
being, Mill finds within poetry a means for realizing his objective of the improvement of mankind. 24 Mill discovers from his own experience of reading that poetry, by addressing itself to the individual's strongest pleasurable susceptibilities, enables that individual to draw on a source of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure. He conceives that this sort of "culture" carries with it an increased interest in "the common feelings and the common destiny of human beings." 25 Through general poetic cultivation, he imagines that the highest sentiments could be shared by all human beings; all would share a source of inward joy, "made richer by every improvement in the physical and social condition of mankind." 26

The potential for improvement through poetic cultivation thus is in Mill's view not restricted to self-perfection, but also to social relations. "Poetry" becomes for Mill a vehicle for the attainment of social harmony. Mill perceives a link between the capacity for enjoying poetry and social development. He argues that in a "rude, child-like state of society poetry is both least relished and least understood." 27 Passing on to the "mature" state of society, he argues, "the minds of greatest depth and elevation are commonly those which take greatest delight in poetry." 28 The influence of social

feeling may be seen as being strongest among cultivated individuals, for Mill contends that persons who have the most feelings of their own best understand the feelings of others. 

This view of culture has strong resonances within Mill's later political writings, the moral foundation of which is the inherent social feeling of individuals - "the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures." According to Mill, the preponderance of selfishness within his own society obscures this desire. However, he believes that there is no inherent necessity that individuals should care for nothing except "that which centres on their own miserable individuality." Rather, he states that "the principal cause which makes life unsatisfactory is want of mental culture," implying that the opposition of interests both among individuals and among classes of individuals is at bottom a matter of faulty thinking: the individual who behaves selfishly wrongly imagines that her or his fellow-creatures are rivals with her or him for the means of happiness. According to Mill, the "real" aims of individuals do not conflict. Mill's programme

\[29\text{Evidently this would not be limited to philosophers, "but any mind to which the fountains of knowledge have been opened." For Mill argues that "[g]enuine private affections and a sincere interest in the public good, are possible, though in unequal degrees, to every rightly brought up human being (Mill, Utilitarianism, CW, X, 216).} \]

\[30\text{Mill, "Thoughts," CW, I, 349.} \]

\[31\text{Mill, Utilitarianism, CW, X, 228.} \]

\[32\text{Mill, Utilitarianism, CW, X, 216.} \]

\[33\text{Mill, Utilitarianism, CW, X, 216.} \]

\[34\text{Mill, Utilitarianism, CW, X, 233.} \]

\[35\text{Mill, Utilitarianism, CW, X, 233.} \]
for social change thus conjures the notion of a "real" self, a self risen above class and other divisive forms of identification, to which the individual may aspire through the process of general cultivation.

In conjuring the notion of a "real" self, the spectre of paternalism emerges, as Mill puts himself in a position to contemplate the control of the activities of actual individuals, on the grounds that this is done in the name of the freedom of their "real", as of yet submerged, selves. Culture thus discloses itself as a dominating force. The mechanism for this can be made clear through examination of the writings of Mill's conservative counterpart as an advocate of humanism, Matthew Arnold, as what is often only implicit in Mill's thought, is made explicit by Arnold.

In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold responds to what he perceives to be the threat posed to culture by the emerging class-consciousness of the working class. Culture is held by Arnold to be the sole means of combatting the process of social decay and disintegration which is evinced, for example, in the multitude's demands for political and economic equality. To those who would disparage culture as irrelevant to moral and social improvement, Arnold defends it as an indispensable aid in the endeavour to see, learn and make
prevail the perfection of humanity as a whole.\textsuperscript{36} Like Mill, Arnold appeals to poetry for its recuperative function, arguing that it is one with culture in its appeal to the harmonious perfection of the individual's whole being, to a "human nature perfect on all its sides."\textsuperscript{37} Also like Mill, Arnold argues that the site of its recuperative activity is not restricted to individuals, but also has application to the collective:

\begin{quote}
Now if culture, which simply means trying to perfect oneself, and one's mind as part of oneself, brings us light, and if light shows us that there is nothing so very blessed in merely doing as one likes, . . . that the really blessed thing is to do what right reason ordains, and to follow her authority, then we have got a practical benefit out of culture. We have got a much wanted principle, a principle of authority, to counteract the tendency to anarchy which seems to be threatening us.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

For Arnold, the organizing principle of this authority is the State. He argues that culture suggests the idea of the political State by its appeal to the "best" self, the self which is united, at harmony, existing beyond the ideas of class, or any other fictive, particularizing body.\textsuperscript{39} As the organ of right reason, the State provides salvation from the "movement of ideas" in a period of expansion by suggesting the notion of a "harmony of ideas."\textsuperscript{40} Thus the State is for Arnold a state of mind, embodied in the notion of the "best" self,

\textsuperscript{36}Matthew Arnold, \textit{Culture and Anarchy}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 47.
\textsuperscript{37}Arnold, \textit{Culture and Anarchy}, 54.
\textsuperscript{38}Arnold, \textit{Culture and Anarchy}, 82.
\textsuperscript{39}Arnold, \textit{Culture and Anarchy}, 94-5.
\textsuperscript{40}Arnold, \textit{Culture and Anarchy}, 85.
which is analogous to the "real" self conjured by Mill. However, it is simultaneously also a working power. Arnold defends the State as a working power, arguing that there is no peril in granting it authority; "when anarchy is a danger to us, to this authority we may turn with sure trust." The State, as the organ of the collective "best" self, is established on behalf of whatever great changes are needed to secure order; "because without order there can be no society, and without society there can be no human perfection." When this proves unlikely, as when the multitude who disbelieve in right reason and the paramount "best" self subvert progress, the State is also empowered to repress overt disruptive manifestations; the State thus becomes an instrument of repression. Arnold countenances the need to rely on the use of force in order to preserve the public order. Despite its humane pretensions, Arnold's educational project of cultivation shows itself to be a mechanism of supervision, domination and mastery. If the subordinated classes who are demanding more political power cannot be persuaded that culture is more enriching than outward circumstances, the State has the right to use its repressive apparatuses against them. Spanos argues that Arnold's vision precludes awareness of the repressive praxis which is authorized by the imperative to aid the "ordinary" selves of the multitude toward their

41 Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, 95.
42 Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, 203.
43 Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, 201-202.
actualization and fulfilment in their "best" selves.\textsuperscript{44} Arnold appeals to culture as a means "to get men to allow their thought and consciousness to play on their stock notions and habits disinterestedly and freely."\textsuperscript{45} Yet culture, as Arnold constructs it, reveals itself to be quite immune to the free play of ideas. In fact there is no possibility for any fundamentally substantive political difference of opinion, as any unruly challenge to the established order is immediately regarded as either errant or deviant; the State, as the centre of "light and authority,"\textsuperscript{46} discloses itself as "fire and strength"\textsuperscript{47} when challenged, punishing all who fail or resist.

While Mill and Arnold share similar paternalistic impulses, there is a significant difference in their writings in the controlling function of humanism. The difference in approach is illustrated in the accounts given by Mill and Arnold of the workers' rallies of 1866.\textsuperscript{48} In Arnold's account, humanist education appeals directly to the State as a means for repressing anarchy and disorder. In Mill's thought, by contrast, the principle of humanist inquiry itself functions

\textsuperscript{44}Spanos, \textit{Education}, 77.
\textsuperscript{45}Arnold, \textit{Culture and Anarchy}, 205-206.
\textsuperscript{46}Arnold, \textit{Culture and Anarchy}, 94.
\textsuperscript{47}Arnold, \textit{Culture and Anarchy}, 205.
\textsuperscript{48}Within Mill's political writings, his account of the Reform Meeting in Hyde Park is especially significant, as it is the only concrete example that he gives of the influence of abler persons on the less instructed. Mill, in effect, offers himself as the model for the Strong Man of Genius described in \textit{On Liberty}, leading the multitudes by his example, as well as by persuasion (Mill, \textit{On Liberty}, CW, XVIII, 268).
as a power — albeit, a disguised power. Yet this controlling function is no less controlling for its being disguised. For, as Spanos notes, even without a direct appeal to the State as a working power, the so-called "benign" practice of humanist education is in fact complicitous with its objective (i.e. not necessarily conspiratorial), sociopolitical programme of control.  

It effects control by means of its strategy of incorporation, which Spanos argues, "operates to reduce the subversive threat of the emergent differential constituencies . . . by accommodating them to the humanist core or centre."  

Reformation and normalization are achieved by making those on whom it is practised the bearers of their own oppression.  

The humanist education thus provides an effective and efficient means of control, obviating the need to resort to overt measures.

The workers' rallies of 1866 were in response to the defeat of the proposed Electoral Reform Act introduced in Parliament earlier that year. In fact, the measures sought in the act were moderate in scope. Yet it spawned a revolt from within the Government caucus, which led to its eventual defeat. This was soon followed by demonstrations all over the country.

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49 Spanos, Education, xiii.
50 Spanos, Education, xiv.
51 Spanos, Education, xv.
Most notably, on July 23, 1866 the Reform League, a working class movement that sought the advancement of manhood suffrage, organized a demonstration to be held at Hyde Park. The event was prohibited by act of the then Home Secretary, Spencer Walpole and the Conservative government, who ordered the gates sealed. The Reform League leaders, Edmond Beals, Charles Bradlaugh and Lt. Colonel Lothian Sheffield Dickson dispersed without entering the Park, but not before determining to make another attempt at a meeting. Many of the protestors, however, defied the prohibition, broke down the park railings, and entered the park, where they were met by the military. A scuffle ensued, which lasted for several days. The Government made military preparations to resist the second attempt. There was no second attempt, however. The Reform League gave up the Hyde Park project, deciding against the need to resort to insurrection to advance their cause, and instead met peaceably at the Agricultural Hall on July 30, 1866, the following week.

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On July 26, 1866, questions were put to the Home Secretary regarding the Reform League's plan to hold a second meeting in Hyde Park. The Secretary replied that no permission for a meeting in Hyde Park had been given, nor was it likely to be given. Mill, however, reported to the House that having just met with the leading members of the League, he had "full authority to say from them this, that so far as they are concerned there is no intention of renewing the attempt to meet in the Park." Mill claims that the motives of the League's leaders were in the interest of preventing further disturbance, "to prevent what they believed would have otherwise resulted in bloodshed..." (Mill, "The Reform Meeting in Hyde Park [3]," CW, XXVIII, 101-2.)
Arnold's account of the rallies, while brief, and only topically accurate,\textsuperscript{54} is illustrative of his distinctive practice of relying on the use of direct means of force to repress anarchy and disorder. As against those who would shrink from affording the State too much power, Arnold argues that he sees in the State "our best self's powerful, beneficent and sacred expression and organ."\textsuperscript{55} He is thereby resolved to strengthen it against anarchy. For culture is the most resolute enemy of anarchy. Referring specifically to the "Hyde Park riots," Arnold writes:

And this opinion of the intolerableness of anarchy we can never forsake, however our \textit{Liberal} [emphasis mine] friends may think a little rioting, and what they call popular demonstrations, useful to their own interests and to the interests of the valuable practical operations they have in hand, and however they may preach the right of an Englishman to be left to do as far as possible what he likes, and the duty of his government to indulge him and connive as much as possible and abstain from all harshness of repression. And even when they artfully show us operations which are undoubtedly precious, such as the abolition of the slave-trade, and ask us if, for their sake, foolish and obstinate governments may not wholesomely be frightened by a little disturbance, the good design in view of the difficulty of overcoming opposition to it being considered, - still we say no, and that monster-professed support of this good design, ought to be unflinchingly forbidden and repressed [emphasis mine]; and that far more is lost than is gained by permitting

\textsuperscript{54}Arnold's use of "topical allusion" is well documented by his editors. Arnold seldom makes use of factual references, instead offering only oblique references. Apparently, the author's intention in using such allusions was to arrest and persuade his own generation by means of comic musings, for whom the facts of the events described were the small change of London gossip in the time they were written. See, for example John D. Wilson's "Introduction," to \textit{Culture and Anarchy} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955).

\textsuperscript{55}Arnold, \textit{Culture and Anarchy}, 205.
then. Because a State in which law is authoritative and sovereign, a firm and settled course of public order, is requisite if man is to bring to maturity anything precious and lasting now, or to found anything precious and lasting for the future.

On Arnold's account, the advancement of culture necessitates the use of force. For, he argues, the pursuit of human perfection is not conformable to the permitting of free reign to the expression of the wishes and ideas of class. Culture teaches us to nourish the great hopes and designs for the progress of humanity by arming with full authority, the State, which he calls "the appointed frame and vessel of our future best self":56

But as, believing in right reason, and having faith in the progress of humanity towards perfection, and ever labouring for this end, we grow to have clearer sight of the ideas of right reason, and of the elements of helps of perfection, and come gradually to fill the framework of the State with them, to fashion its internal composition and all its laws and institutions conformably to them, and to make the State more and more the expression, as we, say of our best self, which is not manifold, and vulgar, but one, and noble, and secure, and peaceful, and the same for all mankind, — with what aversion shall we not then regard anarchy, with what firmness shall we not check it, when there is so much that is so precious which it will endanger [Arnold's emphasis]!57

The duty of the administrators of the State is, on Arnold's account, sacred and absolute. The persistence of disorders and perplexities is due only to their lack of resolve to use their full authority to repress disorder and anarchy. He warns that the pricked consciences of the "Barbarian

56Spanos, Education, 205.
57Spanos, Education, 204.
Secretaries of State let the Park railings be broken down, "nearly risking the future progress of humanity towards its perfection. The lesson of the workers' rallies shows the need for greater resolve in the use of force.

Mill, by contrast, argues that it was not the threat of violence itself that prevented the workers' insurrection. Rather, it was due to the intercession and influence of abler persons, such as himself that bloodshed was avoided; the workers, being fully willing to march, had to be convinced to change their course of action. Mill puts great weight on his own intervention in this affair:

At this crisis I really believe that I was the means of preventing much mischief . . . I was invited, with several other Radical members, to a conference with the leading members of the Council of the Reform League; and the task fell chiefly upon myself of persuading them to give up the Hyde Park project, and hold their meeting elsewhere. It was not Mr. Beales and Colonel Dickson who needed persuading; on the contrary, it was evident that those gentlemen had already exerted their influence in the same direction, thus far without success. It was the working men who held out: and so bent were they on their original scheme that I was obliged to have recourse to les grand moyens [Mill's emphasis]. I told them that a proceeding which would certainly produce a collision with the military, could only be justifiable on two conditions: if the position of affairs had become such that a revolution was desirable, and if they thought themselves able to accomplish one. To this argument after considerable discussion they at last yielded: and I was able to inform Mr. Walpole that their intention was given up . . . I have entered thus particularly into this matter because my conduct on this occasion gave great displeasure to the Tory and Tory-Liberal press, who have charged me ever since

58Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 205.
with having shewn myself, in the trials of public
life, intemperate and passionate. I do not know what
they expected of me; but they had reason to be
thankful to me if they knew from what I had in all
probability preserved them. And I do not believe that
it could have been done, at that particular juncture,
by anyone else. No other person, I believe, had at
that moment the necessary influence for restraining
the working classes . . .

Attending to the language Mill employs in this statement, it
is clear that it is, in fact, not sufficient for him to appeal
to the good sense, moderation and forbearance of the working
classes, but that there must be the possibility of recourse to
the use of forceful means. Mill states that he had to resort
to "les grand moyens" that is, "to resort to drastic measures,
or means." He claims that the workers only yielded when he
made clear to them that "proceeding would . . . certainly
produce a collision with the military."

What Mill lays bare in the above passage is the forceful
nature of his understanding of persuasion. For Mill does not
actually believe that the workers should be free to do what is
irrational, stupid or wrong. While it behooves Mill to first
appeal to the workers' good sense, etc., if they cannot be
counted upon to act rationally, it then behooves him to try to
undertake to educate them. The majority, being irrational,
however, cannot be relied upon to understand or cooperate with
their educators. Nor may they be relied upon to understand
why they must be educated. They must therefore be coerced, as
in the case described above by Mill, forced by means of

59 Mill, Autobiography, CW, I, 278-9
restraining arguments to obey the system that will make them rational. In this view of education, compulsion itself can be regarded as a form of "education".

This is essentially the view put forward by Mill in his discussion of colonial societies. Mill justifies subjection of an underdeveloped people to a foreign government, by those he calls superior in civilization, on the grounds that it is often of the greatest advantage for them to be so governed. In the case of a colonial society Mill defends the use of force, arguing that it has the benefit of "carrying them rapidly through several stages of progress, and clearing away obstacles to improvement which might have lasted indefinitely if the subject population has been left unassisted to its native tendencies and chances." While Mill is vague on the details of what sorts of means are to be employed to this end, he clearly indicates the use of "despotic power" as being necessary to exert the needed influence. It is not unimaginable that the force used could be considerable. Elsewhere Mill argues that the "use of any expedients is warranted [emphasis mine]" in dealing with this class of

60 Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 410.
61 Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 419.
62 Mill does allow that the need to resort to despotic means is not necessary if the people are graced with a monarch of extraordinary genius. But he cautions that history has afforded few of these chances, and "[i]t would be absurd to construct institutions for the mere purpose of taking advantage of such possibilities" (Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 419).
underdeveloped.\textsuperscript{63} As regards the underdeveloped within his own society, however, Mill argues that compulsion through direct measures is no longer admissible as a means to their own good.\textsuperscript{64} Yet Mill has made it clear that they cannot be trusted to effect their own improvement. Mill has no recourse but to the use of some controlling means. Having no appeal to the constant direct use of force, Mill must have recourse to indirect means of control. Universal Education, which is touted by Mill in response to the crisis precipitated by the emergence of a working-class consciousness thus has the effect of reproducing a colonial political economy. In rejecting the use of direct means of control, Mill does not reject the use of controlling means altogether. While the means that Mill chooses to employ are more subtle – often imperceptible, even to those on whom they are practiced – they are no less controlling than those advocated by Arnold.

Coercion and control reside in the illusion of individual sovereignty, which is grounded in the form of the "real" self as the best or proper self.\textsuperscript{65} For within the notion of the "real" self resides an ideological apparatus which reduces the disruptive potential of difference. Mill seeks to domesticate the newly awakened consciousness of the working class by persuading its members that culture, as an end, is far more

\begin{footnotes}
\item[64] Mill does not actually rule out the use of direct force. But its use is justified "only for the security of others" (Mill, \textit{On Liberty}, CW, XVIII, 224).
\item[65] Spanos, \textit{Education}, 77.
\end{footnotes}
enriching than food, clothing, shelter or enfranchisement which are the trappings of mere "outward circumstances." If the great majority of the human race are not to remain in a "savage or semi-savage state," he argues, attention must be focused on their "inward nature." Mill acknowledges that the majority are afforded little of the means by which the efficacy and the necessity of forming a far better ideal of human society depends. "It is not sufficiently considered," he observes, "how little there is in most men's ordinary life to give any largeness either to their conceptions or to their sentiments." "Their work," he continues, "is a routine, not a labour of love, but of self-interest in the most elementary form, the satisfaction of daily wants; neither the thing done, nor the process of doing it, introduces the mind to thoughts or feelings extending beyond individuals; if instructive books are within their reach, there is no stimulus to read them; and in most cases the individual has no access to any person of cultivation much superior to his own." Mill proposes the remedy to this situation: "Giving him something to do for the public, supplies, in a measure, all those deficiencies. If circumstances allow the amount of public duty assigned to him to be considerable, it makes him an educated man." The moral instruction thus afforded to the individual enables her or him

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66 Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 410; Spanos, Education, 76.
69 Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 411.
70 Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 410.
to "feel one of the public."\textsuperscript{71} For, according to Mill, 
"[w]here this school of public spirit does not exist, scarcely any sense is entertained that private persons, in no eminent social situation, owe any duties to society . . . Every thought or feeling, either of interest or duty, is absorbed in the individual and in the family. The man never thinks of any collective interest, of any objects to be pursued jointly with others, but only in competition with them, and in some measure at their expense [emphasis mine]."\textsuperscript{72}

Ultimately, the humanist education discloses itself as a training in right conduct; it is thus implicated in an imperial political project which orders and domesticates the force and threat of differential knowledge in the name of correctness, in the form of the "real" self as the best or proper self.\textsuperscript{73} Difference is "colonized," put in the service of this humanist core self. The positive productive potential of developmental humanism thus functions to generate a supervising institutional framework that disciplines difference throughout the whole of society, without the need to resort to force.\textsuperscript{74}

Yet Mill is not unaware of the repressive dangers inherent in the humanist developmental schema. Mill shares with Arnold

\textsuperscript{71}Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 411. \textsuperscript{72}Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 411. \textsuperscript{73}Spanos, Education, xviii. \textsuperscript{74}Spanos, Education, xvi.
the notion of the State as a mental model for the ordering of the inner culture of the individual, and simultaneously an active principle for the general cultivation of the multitude. In Mill's view, the educative functions of the institutions of the state are twofold. The first consists in "the degree in which they promote general mental advancement of the community, including under that phrase advancement in intellect, in virtue, and in practical activity and efficiency." 75 The second consists "of the degree of perfection with which they organise the moral, intellectual, and active worth already existing, so as to operate with the greatest effect on public affairs." 76 However, unlike Arnold, Mill is not at all secure in a belief in the positive productive potential of the instrument of the state. Thus, while proclaiming that the "means by which the efficacy and the necessity [of forming a far better ideal of human society] are evident, is universal Education," Mill ponders, "who will educate the educators?" 77 Mill perceives that a working power

75Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 392.
76Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 392.
77Mill, Diary, January 22, 1854 CW, XXVII, 645. Mill's statement invites a comparison with Marx, whose third "Thesis on Feuerbach" states:

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself [emphasis mine]. Hence, this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, one of which is superior to society [in Robert Owen, for example].

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which relies on compulsion and control is corrupting to educators as well as to the underdeveloped: "the power of compelling others is not only inconsistent with the freedom and the development of all the rest, but is corrupting to the strong man himself."\textsuperscript{78} Thus, while he appeals to the state as an instrument of general cultivation, he also seeks to limit the expression of its worldly power. According to Mill the only authority which may be legitimately claimed is "freedom to point out the way";\textsuperscript{79} the power of compelling others he regards as wholly illegitimate. In thus limiting the educators' authority, Mill appears to have found a power which is both sufficient and legitimate to promote his cultural transformation. Yet his own arguments show that, on the contrary, this power is far from adequate. Its inadequacy is expressed both politically, as a failure of representative

In contrast to Mill, however, Marx understands education as entailing the radical overthrowing of society. He therefore declares that:

\begin{quote}
The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionising practice.
\end{quote}

It follows that the better lot of society are not educated for the role of re-educating society, as Mill sometimes insists they are. Nor can they be so educated as to be able to perform this role. This task falls to the working class itself, who will educate themselves through the act of revolution [Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," Marx-Engels Reader, ed. R.C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 143. The note at the end of the paragraph, omitted in Tucker's edition, was added by Engels at the time of publication]. \textsuperscript{78}Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 268. \textsuperscript{79}Mill, On Liberty, CW, XVIII, 268.
government, and ontologically, as a failure of human character.

For Mill, the only form of government that can satisfy the demands of the social state is one in which the whole people are admitted a share in the sovereign power of the state—a condition which, by Mill's own admission, is impracticable for any but the smallest community. It follows then that the best practicable form of polity is representative government. The unfeasability of direct democracy does not daunt Mill. He regards the vote as an unparalleled tool for intellectual and moral development. The preponderance of the vote as an instrument of improvement within Mill's political thought makes it the critical case, by Mill's own standard, for determining the success of his humanist developmental schema; that is to say, while he does envision other political means of moral and intellectual improvement, in Mill's view, failure or success in any of these depends on the success of the vote in promoting the general mental advancement of the community. Mill declares the vote to be the most "potent instrument of mental improvement,"80 on the grounds that the act of voting provides "the strongest stimulus" to the growth of the intelligence of individuals. By voting, he argues, "they are called upon to take part in acts which directly affect the great interests of their country."81 Though Mill believes that

80Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 468.
81Mill, Representative Government, CW, XVIII, 468.
similar development could be achieved through other forms of political participation, the vote is a necessary precondition for these to have their effect:

it is from political discussion, and collective political action, that one whose daily occupations concentrate his interests in a small circle round himself, learns to feel for and with his fellow-citizens, and becomes consciously a member of a great community. But political discussions fly over the heads of those who have no votes, and are not endeavouring to acquire them . . . .It is not their suffrages that are asked, it is not their opinion that is sought to be influenced; the appeals are made, the arguments addressed, to others than them; nothing depends on the decision they may arrive at, and there is no necessity and very little inducement to them to come to any [Mill's emphasis].

In considering the real possibilities for improvement by means of the franchise, the spectre of failure is made immediately apparent. For, while Mill argues that "... unless substantial mental cultivation in the mass of mankind is to be a mere vision, [the vote] is the road by which it must come," he nonetheless recognizes that representative government suffers from some serious defects which stand in the way of progress. Principally, these stem from the fact that the underdeveloped are not as yet able to direct their own improvement. Until they have reached a stage of intellectual advancement in which they no longer arouse any fear of "class legislation," Mill contends that it would be best if the uninstructed deferred to the authority of the instructed:

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82 Mill, Representative Government, CW, XVIII, 468.
83 Mill, Representative Government, CW, XIX, 468.
[n]o government by a democracy or a numerous aristocracy, either in its political act or in the opinions, qualities, and time of mind which it fosters, ever did or could rise above the mediocrity, except in so far as the sovereign Many have let themselves be guided (which in their best times they have always done) by the counsels and influence of a more highly gifted and instructed One or Few.\textsuperscript{84}

Yet, Mill observes that "there is a character of mind which does not look up to any one; which thinks no other person's opinion much better than its own . . . It cannot be denied that a complete democracy has a strong tendency to cast the sentiments of the electors in this mould [my emphasis]."\textsuperscript{85} This would be further exacerbated in an incomplete democracy, such as Mill's proposed plural voting scheme; as Macpherson notes, under this scheme reliance on the vote as a tool of improvement is less likely to produce the desired results, as the underdeveloped would likely see no inducement to vote, for it would be clear to them that their wills could not prevail.\textsuperscript{86}

Moreover, the problem would not be solved even once the electorate is given sufficient inducement to exercise their franchise. For the political problem discloses a deeper problem at an ontological level: in providing the underdeveloped with mixed messages about their responsibilities, plural voting generates a "double bind".

Double bind theory is concerned with the experiential component of tangles in the rules of adaptive change. It

\textsuperscript{84}Mill, \textit{On Liberty}, \textit{CW}, XVIII, 269.
\textsuperscript{86}See chapter two above.
holds that the contextual structure of learning is so constructed that in order to adapt and change one must be able to deal with the larger context of contexts in which learning takes place; that is to say, one must be able to learn how to learn. In the first instance, learning may be said to occur whenever information from a particular external event is received in such a way that a later, similar event will convey the same information. The organism learns of the context for learning, as has been observed in the case of operant conditioning used in the training of a porpoise to accept the sound of its trainer's whistle as a secondary reinforcement for the receipt of food. The porpoise learns that its trainer's whistle is expectantly followed by the presentation of food: when it repeats what it was doing the first time the whistle was blown, it expects to receive food. By itself, however, this sort of learning does not provide a mechanism for adaptive change; learning to learn requires a disruption in the contextual structure in which the rules for putting information together are contained. The pattern of learning described above is only fitted to a single episode, which must be broken in order for the porpoise to deal with the class of such episodes, as when the porpoise is conditioned to offer totally new pieces of conspicuous behaviour in expectation of reward. In order to effect this sort of conditioning, the next time the porpoise performs the conditioned action, the

trainer offers no reward. In response, the porpoise displays its displeasure with a new action, which the trainer then rewards. The porpoise, having been conditioned to a particular structural context, again performs the second action in expectation of food. If food is given, then the porpoise does not learn to learn, as the same general rules may be said to apply; only the specific action has changed. If none is given, however, and if the porpoise offers yet another new action for which it is rewarded with food, after many repeated attempts the porpoise may be observed to offer a different piece of conspicuous behaviour in expectation of reward, thus signalling that it has learned of the context of contexts, and has adapted to a new set of logically more abstract rules.

Pathology is induced by a system which puts an individual continually in the wrong concerning the rules of making sense of rewards and punishments.88 In relational terms, the individual caught in the "double bind" is attempting to discriminate accurately what message is being communicated, so as to be able to respond appropriately. Yet it is impossible for her to do so, because the other party in the relationship is expressing two orders of message simultaneously, one of these denying the other. The primary negative injunction states that a certain act will be met with punishment of some kind. In conflict with it is a secondary injunction which

88Bateson, "Double Bind, 1969, 278.
states that the negative consequences warned of in the primary injunction are not punishment, thus negating at a higher level the message of the first injunction. The classic example is given in family therapy, where the parent, expressing withdrawal of love, threatens his child with punishment for a certain action. The parent simultaneously communicates, either by verbal or nonverbal means, that this should not be seen as punishment. The child, being unable to discriminate by herself accurately between different orders of message, cannot comment on the messages being expressed in order to correct her discrimination. This is further frustrated by the parent's unwillingness or incapacity to aid the child in the act of discriminating. Lacking her own means of escape, and being offered none by her parent, the child is thus caught in a maladaptive situation in which she cannot use context as a guide for action. The result is that the child learns unconventional adaptive habits.

Mill's treatment of the underdeveloped majority may be seen as sharing the same abstract relations as the double bind scenario described above. Under Mill's developmental schema, the underdeveloped are given mixed messages about their franchise. On the one hand they are given the message that as responsible members of society, tasked with the important job of participating in the process of determining who will govern. However, the voting process is to be rigged such that it is unlikely that their wills would prevail. Mill,
motivated by his fear of class legislation, seeks to limit the democratic expression of the will of the numeric majority. He justifies this by suggesting that the "real" interests of individuals do not conflict, and are best served by giving the greatest consideration to the wishes of the One or Few; in thus limiting the expression of their franchise, the real interests of the underdeveloped are preserved, while they may still accrue some benefit from the exercise of their will through the act of voting. Yet it is unlikely that they will accrue the desired benefit: the elevation of morals and of intellect. For, when actual individuals have their liberty restricted, or are compelled to act in accordance with the wishes of their "real" selves, they are presented with two conflicting messages: "If your freedom is being restricted, it is because you are incapable of acting on your own initiative," and 'Your liberty is not really being restricted, because your "real" self wishes it.' The result, as shown above, is a breakdown within the learning process, and the capacity for adaptive change; in short, the underdeveloped do not "learn to learn." The benefits of democracy accruing to the less instructed through "the exercise given to their mental powers," thus are likely to never be realised; the lower electoral weight given to the less-developed provides insufficient stimulus to the growth of intelligence, as the act of choosing entailed in their vote does not meet the stringent conditions which Mill outlines in On Liberty as

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89 Mill, Representative Government, CW, XVII, 478.
being necessary for intellectual advancement.\textsuperscript{90} For they must rely overly on the decisions of the One or Few in society as the basis of determining their own best interest. Reliance on the opinion of the One or Few means that the grounds for their holding a given opinion are not conclusive to their own reason. This condition results in "the rendering of feelings and character inert and torpid."\textsuperscript{91} Mill argues that "[i]nactivity, unaspiringness, absence of desire, are a more fatal hinderance to improvement than any misdirection of energy; and that through which alone, when existing in the mass, any very formidable misdirection by an energetic few becomes possible."\textsuperscript{92} Lacking the means of intellectual and moral cultivation, which are the criteria for full participation in the system of politics, the underdeveloped are thus condemned to remain unequal partners within the social compact.

\textbf{Conclusion:}

Evidently, Mill was not at all sanguine about the real prospects for his plans for progress in "the improvement of mankind." Thus, he contends that "hardly anything short of super-human power seems sufficient to turn the tide, and give a fresh commencement to the upward movement."\textsuperscript{93} Nor was he at

\textsuperscript{90}Mill insists that in order for the intellect to be strengthened, a person's actions must be conclusive to her or his reason (Mill, \textit{On Liberty, CW}, XVIII, 262).
\textsuperscript{91}Mill, \textit{On Liberty, CW}, XVIII, 262.
\textsuperscript{92}Mill, \textit{Representative Government, CW}, XIX, 410.
\textsuperscript{93}Mill, \textit{Representative Government, CW}, XIX, 388.
all optimistic about the likelihood of success of his
developmental humanist schema. Speaking of “the incalculable
distance”\textsuperscript{94} that humanity must traverse in order to enter the
wished-for stage of intellectual advancement, Mill himself
might even have comprehended that he had failed to strike a
balance between conflicting perspectives.

\textsuperscript{94}Mill, \textit{On Liberty, CW, XVIII,} 252.
**Chapter 5**

*Introduction*

Within the constellation of works identified earlier as comprising Mill's most significant works on politics, Mill attempts to provide a unified "Treatise" of politics, as is envisioned in his early writings. The purpose of such a Treatise is to unite all half-truths within a comprehensive system of truth. Mill perceives that each perspective, though inadequate, contains some part of the truth. He attempts to combine these points of view within an harmonious and comprehensive whole. This attempt fails, as I showed in the previous chapter. Mill's failure results in the creation of a body of work resembling a conglomerate of irreconcilable voices. Mill's failure is irretrievable. Having renounced onesidedness as "almost the one great evil in human affairs", Mill cannot escape this condition by retreating to any single perspective contained in his works. Ultimately, Mill has no assurance of the truth of any single doctrine.

Yet Mill's failure does not issue from an insufficiency of his approach. Throughout his political writings Mill may be observed always to consider more than one side of a problem. Rather, his failure is the result of his taking for himself an impossible task, as the goal of manysidedness, "extreme comprehensiveness", is practically speaking unattainable. In this way, however, Mill's failure may be seen as being instructive: one learns from Mill's failure of the
impossibility of uniting exclusive doctrines within a comprehensive and harmonious view. By permitting himself the illusion that reconciliation is possible Mill discloses, through the strategies of his writing, the impossibility of arriving at a final manysidedness. He shows that it is impossible to comprehend Truth, as the coalescing of all partial and exclusive one-sided accounts within a single theory of politics, by means of a manysided account. Manysidedness itself makes it impossible to provide a universal account of the competing perspectives, due to the infinite nature of Truth. The Truth which is disclosed is always a false truth, limited by virtue of the context in which its meaning unfolds. For Truth cannot be perceived independent of one's vision; at best all one has is one's own inadequate view.
**Complexity and Function of Multiple Voices**

Mill's political thought has been widely criticized for its inconsistency. Yet, it is precisely Mill's willingness to permit the coexistence of multiple, conflicting perspectives in his writings which is the source of the full, grand richness of his thought. For the irreconcilability of Mill's manysidedness discloses a deeper truth: a new dimension is added to his thought as the product of the immanent difference that exists in the relationship among the conflicting perspectives contained in his political writings. Gregory Bateson illustrates this process in *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* with the example of binocular vision, one of the simplest forms of multiple description. Binocular vision combines the two differently coded images of the same region of surrounding space that are produced in the left and right retinas to generate a single picture in the mind of the seer. A complex synthesis enables the seer to achieve greater resolution and contrast than can be achieved with a single eye. This synthesis is, however, also a source of completely new information: the perception of depth.

The basis of depth perception lies in the dissimilarity of the images presented by three-dimensional objects to each of the two retinas. Binocular vision allows for perception in three dimensions, though the image of the world produced in a

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single retina is only two-dimensional. When the images are combined to a single point in the brain, the differences in the two images provide news of difference: visual cues of depth. Specifically, nearer objects are perceived as being nearer because they require greater convergence for fixation than the more distant objects. Without difference, no perception of depth is possible; identical retinal images give no information regarding depth. In this way, a new class of information is produced; information of a higher logical type which neither source alone was capable of producing. In all cases of multiple description, a bonus of understanding comes from combining differently coded information. This bonus of understanding falls under Bateson’s general principle of complexity: “‘extra depth’ in some metaphoric sense is to be expected whenever information is differently collected or coded.”

At the end of chapter two I posed the question as to whether there is anything in Mill's thought which strives to look behind the impasse to which his work falls as a consequence of the contradiction between capitalist relations and the democratic ideal of equal possibility of individual self-development, and which could from there begin to provide the basis for a richer and more generous reading of Mill's thought? The foregoing discussion of complexity suggests that there is. The simultaneous presentation of two different

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2Bateson, Mind, 70.
perspectives in Mill's political thought carries with it the possibility of creating a transcendentally new perspective, as two eyes allow the viewer to move from two-dimensional to three-dimensional space. What I contend is that Mill's voices constitute different ways of coding, and that their being brought together in complexity, intentionally or otherwise, enables the perception of theoretical "depth"; that is to say, it enables greater insight than would be possible if each perspective were to be considered separately and merely placed side by side with the other.

**Reconciling Irreconcilables**

Having found it possible to conceive of unification of all partial and one-sided systems of thought, Mill undertakes to provide a comprehensive "Treatise" of politics, as envisioned in his commentary on Lewis' *The Use and Abuse of Political Terms*, in the form of a new body of works on politics. As Mill proceeds in his attempt at unification, however, Truth becomes increasingly inaccessible to him, as he is confronted with the irreconcilability of the manysidedness of his thought. Mill, as if sensing the unlikelihood of success declares: "It is only in small things, or at least things uncomplex and composed of few parts, that admit of being brought into that harmonious proportion." Yet faced with the fact of irreconcilability, Mill still remains insistent that

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4 Mill, Diary, February 8, 1854, CW, XXVII, 652; cf. the printed use of this argument in *On Liberty*, CW, I, 104.
unification must be achieved, as may be evinced in his
discussion of Truth in politics in his essay On Liberty.\(^5\)

In proclaiming the need for a unified account, at the same
time as he acknowledges the impossibility of articulating such
a unity, Mill is not necessarily simply contradicting himself,
as a hierarchy exists between these claims such that they are
non-consecutive: the claim of an harmonious whole is more
abstract and at a higher logical level than the claim of
manysidedness. The distinction being made here is like that
between the thing itself and the thing named. Naming at a
higher level permits Mill to transform manysidedness by
raising it to a kind of onesidedness. This process is
demonstrated by Bateson in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. In a
transcribed "metalogue" with his daughter, Bateson records a
youthful Mary Catherine Bateson proclaiming, "I did an
experiment once." In this experiment she attempts to see if
it is possible to think two things at once, in this case the
thoughts: "It's summer" and "It's winter." What she finds is
that she was not having two thoughts simultaneously but "was
only having one thought about having two thoughts."\(^6\)
Similarly, it is possible for Mill to think about the
desirability of harmony among conflicting accounts of
politics. This thinking does nothing to eliminate the fact of
manysidedness. For there is in actuality no harmony; the

\(^5\)Mill, *On Liberty*, CW, XVIII, 244.
unity achieved at a higher level is therefore manysided; Mill’s theory, like his set of practical considerations, is manysided, despite, or rather, in conjunction with, there being a unifying underlying principle, utility. For this principle must be understood itself as being part of a greater whole, and having meaning only in the context of this whole. Thus, while it might appear that Mill is contradicting himself by persisting in the belief in the possibility of reconciliation at the same time as he discloses the improbability of success, the two claims actually complement each other within Mill’s system of thought. They do so, in so far as his striving for the possibility of a harmonious system of political thought provides the minimum of unity necessary for the intertextuality. This, Mill believes, is necessary in order to comprehend the manysidedness of Truth. The belief in the possibility of reconciliation does this by insuring an optimum of mutual understanding. The harmonious account envisioned by Mill actually facilitates this understanding by effectively blurring the multiplicity of his thought; this unfortunately facilitates naive, one-sided accounts, as are given by Mill’s reductivist interpreters. These accounts are conceivable - despite Mill’s claim that onesideness is “almost the one great evil in human affairs” - because of a difference

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7See my discussion of utility in chapter three, above. The particular genius of Mill’s thought is apparent in the way he gives insight into this fact by structuring his utilitarianism so as to include consideration of conventional morality within its notion of the Good.
in logical type between Mill’s two apparently simply contradictory claims.

This is clarified by referring again to the analogy with binocular vision. In binocular vision, the perception of depth is generated by the combination of two different two-dimensional images. The harmony which is produced as a result of their being combined within the mind of the seer enables her to perceive depth, but the harmony produced requires disharmony. The former does not negate the latter, as they are logically distinct. However, the former is entirely dependent on the latter, as the two-eyed way of seeing is itself an act of comparison. Consider the case of viewing a stationary object. When viewing a stationary object, the eye literally draws distinctions by means of a continual tremor, called the micronystagmus, by which the eye produces different images by causing the optical image on the retina to move relative to the sensory receptors within the eye. The production of difference by means of the micronystagmus is necessary, as the mind cannot perceive harmony; without generating distinctions, the object would remain unseen. But this process is autonomic, and thus the individual has no conscious sense of the change of state induced by the eye. Similarly Mill, when finding it possible to conceive of harmony, neglects the disharmony on which his own perception of harmony depends. While Mill can put disharmony out of his mind, the essential fact of disharmony remains. The practical
implication of this is that the process of unification is never completed—whether or not Mill wishes otherwise—as the unifying force of harmonization is constantly being undone by the ongoing, overpowering force of manysidedness. The analog of depth perception thus consists in the understanding that manysidedness brings to the ineradicability of conflict.

Mill's Deep Pluralism

In failing to reconcile the competing views on how to improve the lot of the working class which issue from the opposing principles of paternalism and anti-paternalism, Mill's thought may be seen, in great measure, as exemplifying the condition described by Berlin, as the "pluralism of values." In the essay, "Two Concepts of Liberty," Berlin contends that "monism," the doctrine that there is a single criterion, is a source of deep satisfaction to those who would seek to make life easier than it is. Yet Berlin claims that "Pluralism . . . [is] a truer and more humane ideal than the goals of those who seek in the great, disciplined, authoritarian structures the ideal of 'positive' self-mastery by classes, or peoples, or the whole of mankind." "It is truer," he argues, "because it does, at least, recognize the fact that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and in perpetual rivalry with one another." To assume that

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they can be graded on a single scale, he claims, falsifies the knowledge that individuals are free agents, as it deprives individuals in the name of some "remote, or incoherent, ideal" of what is indispensable to their lives as "self-transforming human beings: to choose on the basis of fundamental categories and concepts that are "a part of their being and thought and sense of their own identity; part of what makes them human."  

Liberty and equality are among the primary goals pursued by humans. It is often supposed that true liberty does not conflict with true equality. Yet, Berlin observes that this cannot be the case:

total liberty for wolves is death to the lambs, total liberty of the powerful, the gifted, is not compatible with the rights to a decent existence of the weak, and the less gifted . . . Equality may demand the restraint of the liberty of those who wish to dominate: liberty without some modicum of which there is no choice and therefore no possibility of remaining human as we understand the word - may have to be curtailed in order to make room for social welfare, to feed the hungry, to leave room for the liberty of others, to allow justice or fairness to be exercised.  

Such collisions of values are, for Berlin, the essence of what it is to be human: "If we are told that these contradictions will be solved in some perfect world in which all good things can be harmonised in principle, then we must answer, to those

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who say this, that the meanings they attach to the names which for us denote the conflicting values are not ours."\textsuperscript{13}

To the extent that life affords a plurality of values, each being, according to Berlin, equally genuine, equally ultimate, and above all equally objective, it is impossible to order these in terms of one absolute standard; the true answers need not necessarily be compatible with one another and so form a single whole.\textsuperscript{14} The notion of a "perfect whole," the belief that all truths must in principle be compatible with one another, he claims, is based on "the philosophia perennis, that there could be no conflict between true ends, true answers to the central problems of life."\textsuperscript{15} This view, which Berlin attributes to the rationalists of the seventeenth century— but which has its origins in Classical Greek thought— holds that:

the rational reorganisation of society would put an end to spiritual and intellectual confusion, the reign of prejudice and superstition, blind obedience to unexamined dogmas, and the stupidities and cruelties of the oppressive regimes which such intellectual darkness bred and promoted. All that was needed was the identification of the principal human needs and discovery of the means of satisfying them . . .\textsuperscript{16}

This view, he argues, lay the basis of all progressive thought in the nineteenth century,\textsuperscript{17} as exemplified in the writings of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Berlin, "Pursuit," 13.
\item Berlin, "Pursuit," 8.
\item Berlin, "Pursuit," 4-5.
\item Berlin, "Pursuit," 5.
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Mill. All such views share the Platonic ideal that "all genuine answers must have one true answer and one only; . . . that there must be a dependable path towards the discovery of these truths; . . . [and] that the true answers, when found, must necessarily be compatible with one another and for a single whole, for one truth cannot be incompatible with another. . ."

While the condition of perfect knowledge may be unattainable, such views hold that even if we cannot reach the final answers, or even if the final system which combines them is practically speaking, unattainable, the answers do exist and must be in principle knowable. Yet, Berlin observes that it is clear that not all of the supreme values pursued in all societies are necessarily compatible with one another. This, he notes, is apparent in the writings of Machiavelli, who shows the incompatibility of Christian virtues — humility, acceptance of suffering, unworldliness, the hope of an afterlife — with those of the Roman Republic — patriotism, the ability to seize opportunities and use them, courage in adversity and pride in the state. On Berlin's reading, Machiavelli sought to restore some of the wisdom and vitality of Rome to his own Christian society but perceived an incompatibility between the two set of virtues. For the beliefs of Christians are sure to be trampled on by the ruthless pursuit of power of those individuals who aim to re-create the Republic. Machiavelli does not condemn Christian

virtues, however, but sets them along side Roman values, and points to the incompatibilities between the two moralities to show that they cannot be combined.

Values can clash; Berlin urges that values make conflicting claims and cannot be reconciled with each other without loss. He perceives that they can be incompatible between cultures, or between groups in the same culture— even, within the "breast of a single individual."20 But it does not follow, he argues, that some must therefore be true and others false. Neither does pluralism of values mean that it is impossible for individuals holding different sets of values to understand each other.21 Berlin argues that they may find these values unacceptable, but surely they can grasp, through use of imaginative insight, how one might live with values widely different from one's own.22 Intercommunication between cultures is possible, Berlin avers, because "what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them." There is a world of objective values. But they are not infinite in number. And, Berlin argues, all of them must exist within the human horizon. In rejecting the values of other cultures, he contends, "we cannot pretend not to understand them at all, or to regard them simply as subjective, the products of creatures in different circumstances with different tastes from our own, which do not

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Thus, "pluralism — the incommensurability, and at times, incompatibility of objective 
ends — is not relativism [Berlin's emphasis] . . ."24 Though 
ends are many, Berlin insists that they cannot be infinitely 
many, and "they must be within the human horizon."25

Yet Berlin recognizes no criterion which would enable one to decide which end is the right end for individuals in society. On the contrary, he posits that no such criterion can be found. An ultimate solution to the problem of the clash of values he holds to be "conceptually incoherent."26 Berlin argues that to believe in such a resolution is "a piece of metaphysical optimism for which there is no evidence in historical experience."27 This is not an analytical proposal. On the contrary, it is defined almost entirely by allusion to actual historical developments. Thus, while there are three aspects to Berlin's claim, political, ethical and philosophical, they are not all equally well developed within his writings. It is argued that politically, attempts to reconcile conflicting values have been disasters; ethically, they are evasive, an attempt to fashion a life free from conflict, by means of an intellectual construction; and philosophically, they are simply mistaken. Berlin however, substantiates his philosophical claim by only allusion to

politics and ethics. By thus neglecting the philosophical claim, Berlin does not appear to be suggesting that it is indistinct from the political and ethical claims. Rather, he appears to be implying that the philosophical claim can only be understood through the other two.²⁸

Berlin contends that insight into the irreducible pluralism of values is a relatively recent development: "It may be that the ideal of freedom to choose ends without claiming eternal validity of them, and the pluralism of values connected with this, is only the late fruit of our declining capitalist civilization . . ."²⁹ This insight he takes to be a sign of moral and political maturity; the demand for absolute values, by contrast, he holds to be the signature of moral and political immaturity. For Berlin, the only protection against such fantastical thinking is reflection on political and ethical experience, in particular, "the Russian Revolution and its aftermath — totalitarian tyrannies of both right and left and the explosions of nationalism, racism, and in places, of religious bigotry . . ."³⁰ These events, he claims, were initially motivated by ideas; visions of some supreme goal in the minds of leaders, "about what relations between men have been, may have been, are, might be, and should be."³¹ Such

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thinking, he argues, ultimately proves fatal: "For if one really believes that such a solution is possible, then surely no cost is too high to obtain it."\(^{32}\) It is the vision of "mankind just and happy and creative and harmonious forever."\(^{33}\) "[T]he millions slaughtered in wars or revolutions – gas chambers, gulag, genocide, all of the monstrosities for which our century will be remembered – are the price men must pay for the felicity of future generations. If your desire to save mankind is serious, you must harden your heart, and not reckon the cost."\(^{34}\) In presuming to know the only true path to the ultimate solution of the problems of society, one is either implicitly or explicitly, demonstrating one's resolution to repress those who would resist the attempt to realize it. For, according to Berlin, it is unlikely that values will coalesce. From the perspective of those proposing a final solution, however, such resistance must surely be based on ignorance or malevolence: "then it must be broken and hundreds of thousands may have to perish to make millions happy for all time."\(^{35}\) Thus, Berlin argues, "The possibility of a final solution . . . turns out to be an illusion; and a very dangerous one. For if one really believes that such a solution is possible then surely no cost would be too high to obtain it . . . what could be too high a price to pay for that?"\(^{36}\)
Berlin concedes that posing a solution to the problem of the clash of values may be, in some sense, "a deep and incurable metaphysical need."³⁷ Yet, he implies that any attempt at a solution must end in disaster:

"The history of thought, like the history of nations, is strewn with examples of inconsistent, or at least disparate, elements artificially yoked together in a despotic system . . ."³⁸

Mill, by proclaiming that a harmonious Treatise is the one thing needed in political theory, is in effect presuming to do exactly this. While, his failure at this task attests to the fact of the irreducible pluralism of values, it is an open question as to whether Mill is actually unwarranted in undertaking to do the improbable, as Berlin seems to suggest.³⁹ By proclaiming a metaphysical need for resolution of this type, Berlin as much as admits that there is some warrant for what Mill is attempting to do. Berlin even goes so far as to suggest that, historically, such attempts are sometimes to the great benefit of humanity.⁴⁰ However, the basis for such a

³⁹Having proclaimed Mill an unqualified liberal, Berlin would not himself have authorized such a comparison with Mill and his theory of value-pluralism. For, though Berlin characterizes Mill's thought as containing many voices - not all of them compatible with liberalism, he avoids the key issue of Mill's attempt at unification by declaring that "Mill's voice is most his own when he describes the glories of individual freedom . . ." [Berlin, "John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life," in Four Essays on Liberty, (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1989), 178].
⁴⁰Further evidence of Berlin's neglect is given by the fact that he does not at all elaborate on what benefit can be accrued from such instances (Berlin, "Two Concepts," ff128).
need, and its potential value, remain obscured by Berlin's exclusive attention to negative examples of actual historical developments. He implies, thus, that any further attempts at resolution of this type is altogether too dangerous to be worthy of consideration. This presents Berlin's political philosophy with a serious problem. For the need for some form of evaluative framework is great: in actual practice decisions must be and are made many times daily; policies are adopted - even ways of life are favoured over others. Choosing entails value loss. Yet Berlin denies that there is one currency in which the gains and losses can be calculated.

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41 Berlin speculates that the conditions which may have predisposed individuals to realize some ultimate, all-reconciling synthesis may no longer obtain: "It may be that the ideal of freedom to choose ends without claiming eternal validity of them, and the pluralism of values connected with this, is only the late fruit of our declining capitalist civilization: an ideal which remote ages and primitive societies have not recognized, and one which posterity will regard with curiosity, even sympathy, but little comprehension" (Berlin, "Two Concepts," 172).

42 In fact, Bonnie Honig, a feminist critic of value-pluralism argues, there is no space in life that is untouched by conflict and incommensurability - a fact which value-pluralism tends to gloss over. There is a tacit understanding in Berlin's value-pluralism, made more explicit in the writings of Bernard Williams, that the terrain of moral life is not entirely fraught with conflict. By confining himself solely to considerations of "the most extreme cases of moral conflict, tragic cases," Williams implies that there is a secure place for the unitary moral subject. It suggests that moral dilemmas are discrete events into which the subject periodically stumbles. Thus, Honig argues, Williams resecures moral closure, "not by obviating the dilemma philosophically . . . but by holding them at bay rhetorically, psychologically, and politically" [Bonnie Honig, "Differences, Dilemmas, and the Politics of Home," in Democracy and Difference, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 258-259; Bernard Williams, "Ethical Consistency," Problems of the Self, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 173].
A criticism can be made of Berlin's theory, that without some form of currency in which the gains or losses can be calculated, these choices are simply irrational. Berlin denies that this is the case, claiming that value pluralism is not relativism. He does not actually deny that there needs to exist some basis which would enable the promotion of one value over another; Berlin simply posits that there can be no ultimate resolution. Such criticism of Berlin is justified, however, insofar as he has not adequately considered what form of currency could be established; by neglecting this problem, Berlin opens himself to philosophical challenge on both the status and content of his value pluralism.

In anticipation of both Berlin and his critics, Mill, it appears, has discovered a way in which a currency can be established, while still permitting the irreducibility of contradictory themes within his system of thought. Mill observes a lack of mutual understanding among theories of politics, all of which, he claims, are possessed of only half-truths. Even in the face of immanent failure, Mill still persists in the belief that they must somehow be reconciled, in the way of compromise. He fails, thus, to apprehend that

43 Such a position is put forward by Bernard Williams in The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ...
46 Mill provides two means by which this can be accomplished: by means of compromise, or by appeal to an underlying, deeper doctrine. Yet, as I have argued above, having rejected all systems of political philosophy as being necessarily
his failure is a necessary failure, as Berlin shows it must be. Yet, Mill's approach has a decisive rhetorical advantage over Berlin's in that it enables Mill to address directly the problem of how decisions are made, by expressing irreducibility within a unifying doctrine, at the same time as he demonstrates that choice entails irreparable loss; that the search for harmony is, in fact, an unattainable goal. For, as I note above, by persisting in his belief in the possibility of reconciliation, Mill provides a minimum of unity necessary for intertextuality between competing perspectives, thus enabling all of their truths to be brought together. They are brought together under the rhetoric of utility, which acts as a central, unifying concept — but one which becomes in Mill's hands too open-textured and broad a concept to actually do any analytic work. Utility is rendered such that conflicting values are brought under the same concept without loss. Mill's approach to political thought makes it possible to consider seriously the possibility, and probability, of ineradicable conflict, on the basis of his unifying account.

Utility functions in Mill's thought as a measuring rod on which competing values are made commensurable, and ranked together in order of their contribution to the attainment the Greatest Happiness. This is, in effect, what Mill claims to have possessed when, in the essay On Liberty, he purports to incomplete, Mill only has recourse to the former, and cannot really avail himself to the latter (Mill, Diary, January 18 (1854), CW, XXVII, 644).
have found the "one very simple principle" on which conflicts of liberties may be arbitrated on the basis of utility as the ultimate appeal. However, Mill provides only a semblance of harmony - albeit, a strategically useful semblance; substantive conflict persists among competing values. It is not due to the insufficiency of his utilitarianism, per se, that Mill fails to enforce harmony among competing views. The condition of value pluralism itself makes this an impossible task. For, as Berlin notes, the notion of a perfect whole, in which all good things coexist harmoniously is unattainable: "We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss." In this sense, Mill's concept of utility may be seen as actually reflecting the authentic environment in which evaluative beliefs interact. Utility, as organized in such an environment, if it does not wish to make itself irrelevant, must acknowledge that human interests are varied, and often in conflict. As John Gray notes in a recent essay, "In the real world, vital freedoms are rivals . . . No doubt there is much that is vague or disputable in Mill's Utilitarianism; but it is better to seek a balance, necessarily imprecise and never wholly fixed, between the claims of liberties whose conflicts we admit, than to pretend that they can be reconciled in the spurious harmonies of theories of justice." In contrasting Mill's historical and

49 John Gray "The Light of Other Minds: John Stuart Mill's Neglected Insights: His Understanding of Human Variety and
empirical political theory with theories of rights - in particular, that which is espoused by Rawls' in *A Theory of Justice*, Gray highlights a significant difference in approach between the two: for the latter, all questions of political right are to be answered by consulting the "theory of justice," following a narrowly formed, "intra-academic agenda" which, Gray alleges, contours liberties such that their demands do not conflict, showing a "comprehensive disregard for . . . historical circumstances"; for Mill, it is always a matter of formulating principles that are practically useful, responding to the social and political demands of his time. According to Mill, the office of political philosophy is "to supply, not a set of model institutions, but principles from which the institutions suitable to any given circumstances might be deduced." Thus, Gray argues that Mill's approach enables clearer thinking about conflicts among values.

Mill's concept of utility is able to accommodate contradictory perspectives, but it does so at the cost of becoming itself an empty concept. For, as I have argued above, Mill's realization of the need for complexity and manysidedness in political philosophy makes it an effectively

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51 Gray, "Other Minds," 12.


53 Gray, "Other Minds," 12.
useless standard. To the extent that evaluation of utility requires that one take into account the habits acquired through socialization practices on which conventional morality depends, the rootedness of utility within the socialization practices of a society, means that, unto itself, the principle of utility does not provide a useful standard for measuring the theoretical consistency of Mill's thought, as it cannot itself be extricated from the practical concerns which demand that one take a manysided perspective in the consideration of political actions.

This is not to say that Mill is consciously undermining his own theory. Mill never renounces his goal of unification: while he does appear to comprehend that his attempt at unification fails, there is no compelling evidence to support the claim that Mill himself perceives the impossibility of reconciliation, as such. Yet, there is no denying that alongside Mill's unifying efforts, there is a disunifying force which interrupts the process of unification. This force, once realized through a reconstructive reading, discloses a contradiction-laden, tension-filled unity contained within Mill's account of politics.

In his writings, Mill shows something resembling the pluralist insight that conflicts between viewpoints are neither systematically avoidable, nor directly soluble. His

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openness to conflict, his ability to hold several conflicting truths in his mind simultaneously, implies, at least in principle, the acceptance of the possibility of such an understanding. Gray contends that Mill may be seen as tacitly expressing value pluralism.\textsuperscript{55} Indeed, there is good evidence within Mill's writing to support Gray's contention, for example, in Mill's disclosure:

That all questions of political institutions are relative, not absolute, and that different stages of human progress not only will have, but ought to have, different institutions [Mill's emphasis] . . .\textsuperscript{56}

Gray argues that Mill's insight that humans thrive in many, widely divergent ways of life, qualifies — if it does not actually subvert, the project of conceiving the unified, universal system of ultimate values to which he was steadfastly committed.\textsuperscript{57}

Gray, however, does not speculate on the source of this subversion. I contend that it could be traced to Mill's reaction to the narrowness of the Benthamic creed, the mode of thought in which he had been raised, and his subsequent adoption of manysidedness. Recall that in the Autobiography, Mill proclaims that he substitutes no system of political philosophy for that which he had abandoned, having become convinced that the "true system . . . is much more complex and many sided than [he] had previously had any idea of . . ."\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55}\textit{Gray, "Other Minds,"} 12.  
\textsuperscript{56}\textit{Mill, Autobiography, CW, I,} 169.  
\textsuperscript{57}\textit{Mill, Autobiography, CW, I,} 171.  
\textsuperscript{58}\textit{Mill, Autobiography, CW, I,} 169.
Mill perceives that no existing single account is sufficiently comprehensive to encompass the whole truth, noting that the system of political philosophy espoused by his father and Bentham is sorely deficient in this regard. He seeks to redress its inadequacy by exposing himself to various other doctrines - especially those fiercely opposed to the mode of thought in which he had been brought up. For he had become convinced that, along with much error, these doctrines possessed much truth. Mill embarks on a project to unite all of these disparate accounts within a harmonious Treatise. In so doing, he implies that there is a many-sided Truth, as such. For Mill must believe that the truth is not deeply, or ultimately, many-sided. Otherwise, he could not continue to strive for unity.

Yet Mill's efforts undermine their own adequacy. Ironically, the conflict between the principles on which Mill's practical measures are based is such that they work at cross-purposes; that is to say, the conflict between the two principles underlying Mill's arguments, paternalism and anti-paternalism, is such that the values of one cannot be satisfied without limiting, or substantially inhibiting the expression of the values of the other. Mill does not attempt to hide, or otherwise diminish, this fact. Rather, Mill's thought provides a structure in which the competing viewpoints are brought into open conflict, whereby the appearance of what, at first glance, is held to be the truth is ultimately
disclosed as being a false, or limited truth by virtue of the context in which its meaning unfolds. Thus, it may be argued that Mill shows a tacit pluralist-like appreciation - not merely a syncretic, or additive, appreciation, of conflict. For, while Mill persists in the belief that all perspectives must somehow be combined within a comprehensive system, when faced with the irreducible pluralism of values, he does not engage in a process of forceful revisionism, veiling or otherwise denying the ineradicable incommensurability that exists among ultimate values, as Berlin predicts anyone in his position would do.

Mill's notion of going "all round" the object, and seeing all of its sides, implies that we should bear in mind that there may be another perspective from which to view an object to which we might not have access, and so be open to the possibility of learning about such new perspectives and revising our judgment once we learn of them.\(^5^9\) It holds that there are many perspectives from which reality can be determined, none of which is, by itself, wholly, or exclusively true, but each of which is partially so. To interpret experience from only one point of view, to the exclusion of others thus is, in Mill's view, to commit a serious error. We should actively seek out new perspectives, and try as best we can to see from all of them. It is, in this sense, an additive understanding of the contribution of

\(^{59}\) Mill to Thomas Carlyle, 12th January 1834, \textit{CW}, XII, 205.
different perspectives to our understanding of the truth. Yet, is also distinct from an additive understanding in that it admits that, in attempting to grasp an object in all of its aspects, bearings and capacities, some assertions might have a negative structure, or even express indescribability, to the extent that some assertions are incompatible with others.  

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60 Doctrines of pluralism of this sort, which are unusual in Western thought, are not uncommon within the Eastern traditions. This sort of pluralism is expressed, for example, within Jaina doctrine, in anekantavada, the theory of manifold predication. According to this doctrine, the essence of anekantavada lies in exposing and making explicit the standpoints or presuppositions of the different philosophical schools. Jainism put ethical emphasis on nonviolence - the multidimensional nature of objects should not be violated by single, absolutist predications about them. Respect for life is thus transformed in its philosophical application, anekantavada, into a principle of respect for other views. Each standpoint and predication presents a partial truth and, according to Jainism, only the theory of manifoldness does justice to the complex nature of entities.

The key to the Jaina position is the need to qualify an assertion or to make it conditionally true in order to leave open other possibilities. This represents the Jaina respect for the views of other schools and at the same time implicitly criticizes their absolutist stands, which have the potential for dogmatism and intolerance. The way to overcome one-sided doctrines is to adopt a method of accepting metaphysical theories with a qualified affirmation. It is the philosophic attempt to come as close as possible to capturing the true, multidimensional nature of an entity.

According to the Jaina doctrine of standpoints, saptabhan gi, all statements are judged as either "true," "false," or "indefinite," depending on the point of view. This doctrine posits a seven-valued logic, based on the three principle truth values. Thus, a statement may be regarded as "true," "false," "indefinite," "true and false," "true and indefinite," "false and indefinite," and "true, false and indefinite." Jaina theory does not imply that it is epistemologically difficult to determine the nature of an object, but rather that it can be definitely determined from several particular points of view, even though some assertions
Mill is able to live with the tension between irreconcilables without resorting to looking for a simplified solution. Mill's understanding is, in this sense, more specifically a pluralist understanding.

Yet the understanding that emerges from Mill's manysidedness also demonstrates the insufficiency of pluralism, or, at least, the need for a deeper pluralist understanding than is afforded by value pluralism. In this sense, Mill's thought may be seen as anticipating some of the recent criticisms of value pluralism. Such criticisms hold that while it is a valid response to "monism," the doctrine that values ultimately do not conflict, value pluralism is a regressive doctrine, in that it tends to reconstruct monism in its obverse form.

Addressing a variant form of pluralism, the pluralism of social groups, or what she terms "pluralist multiculturalism," Nancy Fraser argues that:

- it tends to substantialize identities, treating them as given positivities instead of as constructed relations. It tends, consequentially, to balkanize culture, setting groups apart from one another,
- ignoring the ways they cut across one another, and
- have a negative structure or express indescribability.

Complete knowledge of an entity, simultaneously grasping it in all its modes and in all possible ways, occurs only in the case of beings unhindered by karma and is a sign of omniscience. In the case of human knowledge, which is restricted to the functions of the sense organs whose capacities are impeded by karma, only partial knowledge is possible. The doctrine of standpoints thus represents the various kinds of partial knowledge accessible to human beings.
inhibiting cross-group interaction and identification. Losing sight of the fact that differences intersect, it regresses to a simple, additive model of difference.61

The same criticism can be levied on value pluralism.62 For, as Honig observes, value pluralism both affirms dilemmas and keeps them at bay, by providing for "safe places" which are free from conflicts, in the form of universal and objective values. Although it does not eliminate conflict from the moral universe, value pluralism does construct an agency that is not really at risk from ordinary conflict. The presumption is made that there is a clear, central principle to which the individual, or group, subjectivity can be grounded. The pluralist thinker "resecures the kind of moral closure he claims to eschew, not by obviating dilemmas . . . but by holding them at bay rhetorically, psychologically and politically."63 Thus, Berlin, beginning with the premise that human values are plural and conflicting, reassures that such conflict does not threaten to make us ungovernable, by resecuring "safe spaces" of order for his moral subjects.

Berlin insists experience shows that ends must be universal


62Although the form of pluralism with which Fraser is concerned is in fact distinct from value pluralism, the comparison is warranted. For, as Honig notes, "value pluralism . . . treat[s] dilemmas in a way that parallels the approach taken by pluralists and multiculturalists to difference" (Honig, "Culture," 258).

63Honig, "Culture," 258.
and objective. For he claims that, while value pluralism enables us to understand that "our values are ours, and theirs are theirs," there must exist some commonality between people, such that "they can grasp how it is possible to live in the light of values widely different from one's own, but which nevertheless one can see to be values, ends of life, by the realisation of which men could be fulfilled." The intelligibility of past practices makes for the possibility of trans-cultural and trans-historical judgements, which in turn permits moral judgement. On what basis can moral judgements be made valid? Berlin claims that ultimate values are many, but they are not infinite many: "they must be within the human horizon." Thus, regardless of cultural pluralism, there is according to Berlin, a great deal of broad agreement among people in different societies over long stretches of time about what is right and wrong, good and evil. In this way, Berlin defends his theory from the charges of relativism, securing moral choice from the dangers of incoherence and ceaseless conflict. By locating conflict outside of moral agency, it reassures that conflict, though ineradicable, exists as a series of discrete events onto which the unitary agent only occasionally stumbles.

Berlin's value pluralism thus reconstructs monism, but in its obverse form; instead of demanding that the unitary subject conquer conflict and disorder, it permits her or him to withdraw to a safe place. Yet, as Honig notes, withdrawal and conquest are actually two sides of the same coin. "Both," she argues, "signal an unwillingness - on the part of constituted subjects or formed nation - to settle for anything less than a phantasmatic imaginary home."68 Mill's manysidedness, by contrast, goes far beyond value pluralism, disturbing the view that it is necessary to secure safe places, free of conflict, to which the subject may withdraw. By proclaiming that Truth is infinite in nature, it discloses multiple conflictual axes, such that it is impossible to conceive of dilemmas in terms of discrete events in which unitary agents occasionally stumble onto. Thus, while the doctrine of value pluralism proclaims that there is pluralism among values; Mill's manysidedness demonstrates that pluralism also exists within values. The incoherence of Mill's thought is engendered by endless struggle of resistance throughout all human activity. Instead of treating dilemmas as merely symptomatic of value pluralism, thus, it reveals the ineradicability of conflict, as such.

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68 Honig, "Culture," 270.
Conclusion: The Name is not the Thing Named

Mill distinguishes manysidedness from coherence, consistency and comprehensiveness. This does not mean that Mill's manysided thought is completely lacking in these qualities. On the contrary, if Mill's thought may be said to possess them, it is on the basis of his manysidedness; on the basis of the integrity with which he pursues his goal of combining all partial and one-sided systems of thought within a unified Treatise of politics. Yet, as Mill proceeds in his attempt at unification, Truth becomes increasingly inaccessible to him, as he is confronted with the irreconcilability of the manysidedness of his own thought. Mill, sensing the likelihood of failure declares: "It is only in small things, or at least things uncomplex and composed of small parts, that admit of being brought into ... harmonious proportion." Thus Mill's thought may be characterized by substantive incoherence, inconsistency and incomprehensiveness, and formal coherence, consistency and comprehensiveness. It is important to note the difference in logical type between the substantive and formal levels of Mill's thought. For Mill's disclosure of his failure cannot be taken as an outright rejection of his principles. Having subscribed to Carlyle's notion of "infinite nature of Truth,"

70 Mill, Diary, February 8 (1854), CW, XXVII, 652.
Mill knows that each individual "looks at the world from a position in several respects his own particular one."\textsuperscript{72} Yet in the end, he would believe, this view must harmonize with, and complete each other. Carlyle proclaims that "Each man is the supplement of all other men"\textsuperscript{73} - a view to which Mill strongly subscribes.

Having found it possible to conceive of unification, however, Mill cannot actually do away with incoherence, etc. Nothing prevents him from, at times, believing that he has done away with them. Yet Mill cannot identify himself entirely with this position, without being in some sense inconsistent - although, not to the same extent as he may appear to be upon first reading. As I show above Mill deceives himself into believing that he has achieved unity. For, the capacity for thinking about coherence, etc. does nothing to eliminate the fact of incoherence, etc. - even if one were capable of constructing a comprehensive unifying principle, it would have to be qualified as being temporary or limited, as the process of disunification is ongoing.

In this way, the flaws in Mill's thought may be seen as instructive: by permitting himself the illusion that reconciliation is possible Mill discloses, through the strategies of his writing, the impossibility of arriving at a

\textsuperscript{72}Thomas Carlyle to Mill, June 13 (1833), \textit{Letters}, 55.  
\textsuperscript{73}Thomas Carlyle to Mill, June 13 (1833), \textit{Letters}, 55.
final many-sidedness. He shows that it is impossible to comprehend Truth, as the coalescing of all partial and exclusive one-sided accounts within a single theory of politics, by means of a many-sided account. Many-sidedness itself makes it impossible to provide a universal account of the competing perspectives, due to the infinite nature of Truth. The Truth which is disclosed is always a false truth, limited by virtue of the context in which its meaning unfolds. For Truth cannot be perceived independent of one's vision; at best all one has is one's own inadequate view.

Arguably, even Mill himself sometimes realizes that the irreconcilability of many-sidedness is an impediment to his attempt "to go all round every object which [he] surveyed . . . [Mill's emphasis]"74 This is why he is careful to identify it with only an "extreme," and therefore unattainable, form of comprehensiveness.75 This does not lessen the importance of his task. It means, however, that the attempt to represent a multiplicity of its aspects, bearings and capacities with complexity requires that he live with an endless task, uncover only partial truths, and risk his work being simply taken for incoherence, etc.

74 Mill to John Sterling, CW, October 20 to 22 (1831), CW, XII, 81.
75 Mill to John Sterling, CW, October 20 to 22 (1831), CW, XII, 81.
In advancing my argument for a third "truth" emanating from the simultaneous presentation of two conflicting truths, I have employed the analogy of binocular vision. Binocular vision enables the perception of depth, on the basis of the comparison of two different, two-dimensional images. The analog of depth in Mill's thought consists in the insight that his thought gives to the irreducibility of conflict, as such. Mill attempts and fails to provide a unified Treatise of politics. One may learn from Mill's failure of the impossibility of uniting exclusive doctrines within a comprehensive and harmonious view. By permitting himself the illusion that reconciliation is possible Mill discloses, through the strategies of his writing, the impossibility of arriving at a final manysidedness. He shows that it is impossible to comprehend Truth, as the coalescing of all partial and exclusive one-sided accounts within a single theory of politics, by means of a manysided account. It is in a sense, a pluralist understanding, in that Mill permits conflicting values to exist within his system of thought; while Mill would prefer that these values could somehow be combined within a harmonious Treatise, he does not demand that they be reconciled. To the extent that he permits conflict to exist within his system of thought, and does not eliminate it by means of forceful revision, it is a deeper statement on the ineradicability of conflict than that offered by Berlin.
Mill's thought provides an environment in which politics engenders unending, and never-quite mastered struggles of resistance, adjustment and negotiation. The incoherence of his descriptions of political events does not mean, however, that it would have been possible, or even desirable, for him to have done away with categories altogether. Such concepts are crystalizations, nodal points, on a broad infinitely complex continuum. Thus, one may speak of "utility," "liberty" and "equality," "absolute" and "classical" liberty, "protective" and "developmental" democracy, "logic and analysis" and "feeling" to name but a few of the analytical concepts contained in Mill's political writings which have emerged from Mill's texts. But their status and unity - both in relation to themselves and to each other, are the result of partial fixation; they do not actually correspond with any unified or unifying essence. The denial of the existence of an a priori, assured and necessary link between subject positions does not mean, however, that the effort to establish links between them is purposeless. On the contrary, it proclaims the necessity of the unifying account; but, at the same time, it insists on its unattainability. Mill's political thought may be characterized as a constant effort to establish historical, contingent and variable links. However, the discursive structure in which they are constituted is

itself unstable. This is why there is no subject position whose links with others is definitely assured.\footnote{Mouffe, "Feminism," 373.}

On this reading, Mill's stance, \textit{vis à vis} his multiple voices, is ironic. Mill contradicts himself constantly. Having renounced all systems of political thought as inadequate, however, Mill is free to engage himself in a process whereby he adopts one meaning, which he then destroys by revealing and adopting its opposite. Thus, Mill may be observed, variously, to take such contrary positions as: "truth can be separated from error by means of Logic" and "it is impossible to separate truth from error," or "harmony can be achieved among all competing perspectives" and "manysidedness makes it impossible to provide a universal account of the competing perspectives, due to the infinite nature of Truth," or, and this is the rub, "it is possible to comprehend Truth by means of a manysided account" and "Truth cannot be perceived independent of my vision, at best all I have is my own inadequate view." There is no need to decide which of these voices truly belongs to Mill. Rather, Mill's political thought may be more usefully understood as the attempt to articulate, from different standpoints, the diverse ways in which ineradicable political conflict may be visualized.
Conclusion

As I noted at the outset, current Mill scholarship has moved away from giving systematic accounts of his political thought. I feel that this is an unfortunate trend, as the relatively recent completion of the Mill project, The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, has enabled a closer reading of Mill's works than has ever been possible. As Mill himself attests:

Books are a real magic, or rather necromancy - a person speaking from the dead, and speaking in his most earnest feeling and gravest and most recondite thoughts.¹

Never before has there been a better opportunity to inquire into the possibility of discovering the underlying principle in Mill's thought which, once revealed, will make consistent what appears on the surface to be inconsistent, coherent what appears at first glance to be incoherent. In the Collected Works, all of Mill's works are published together for the first time. In addition, the Collected Works also features many works never before published. Of particular interest is the vast number of Mill's correspondences - many published for the first time - and his diary (1853-54). With the evidence provided by the former, I have been able to make connections between many disparate works. This is perhaps most significant for my research, as it gives clear evidence to support my contention that Mill's political works written between 1853-1864 comprise a body of work, distinct from his

¹Mill, Diary, April 6 (1854), CW, XXVII, 666.
earlier writings. Most significantly, for the purposes of my study, it also shows him recapitulating his case for manysidedness.

The reading afforded to me by the Collected Works has enabled me to draw on the widest possible number of Mill's writings, making it possible for me to trace the development of the notion of manysidedness within Mill's system of thought, and its subsequent use in Mill's later political writings. On the basis of this reading, I have been able to show that manysidedness is in fact a recurring theme within Mill's system of thought, which is of great value - not only to Mill himself, but for understanding his thought as a whole.

This study supports the conclusion that Mill's theory, like his practical prescriptions, must be regarded as being manysided; that is to say, whatever is said about Mill in isolation from the multiple voices which constitute his political thought is essentially faulty. The ultimate goal of interpretation thus is to acknowledge the multiplicity of his thought and account for its presence in his writings.

Implications Of The Study:

The implications of this study are highly significant to the kind of methodological approach which may be employed in undertaking to systematically reconstruct Mill's thought. It shows that there is no need to decide which of the conflicting
perspectives which are contained in Mill's writings actually represents Mill's true position. In the absence of a clear statement from Mill as to his intentions in presenting conflicting perspectives, all such attempts are necessarily inconclusive. Ultimately, it is impossible to decide Mill's actual position, as Mill oscillates between identification and detachment. Therefore, it is pointless to ponder, for example, how it is possible for Mill to be both a utilitarian and a liberal? The structure of Mill's thought is such that it permits him to hold conflicting truths in his mind simultaneously.

As a consequence, Mill's thought often lapses into incoherence. It is no wonder, therefore, that previous interpreters have been so eager to reconcile his thought. Indeed, it is perplexing that Mill, who is so discerning in his criticism of others' theories should have missed the inconsistencies contained in his own works. Faced with such a dilemma, and given the ineradicability of inconsistency within Mill's system of thought, one may choose to regard Mill's thought as irretrievably flawed, or one may choose to regard the problems as being there for a reason. The latter, seems to me, to provide a richer insight into Mill's works.

In the absence of a clear statement of purpose from Mill, one must attempt to make an imaginative systematic reconstruction of the significance of Mill's thought. To a
great extent, the limits which are imposed by a strict historical-contextual account of Mill's thought are not appropriate to such an undertaking. That is to say, the aim should not be to determine Mill's conscious intentions, but to reconstruct the thought which appears in his writings. In advocating for a reconstructionist reading of the thought which appears in Mill's writings, I am also claiming that Mill should be considered important for having discovered ideas that other, later thinkers have explored. Thus, I have shown that Mill may be seen as anticipating the recent debate on value pluralism; that Mill shows a pluralist-like appreciation for conflict that is at the same time critical of the value pluralist approach. This is not to suggest, however, that Mill's thought directly anticipates current debates within liberal theory. Rather, it suggests that Mill's thought remains relevant over time because it may be combined with a plurality of other thinkers and ideas. One further implication of a reconstructionist reading of Mill's thought, is that it treats Mill's texts as open-ended; it leaves open the possibility that Mill's texts may yet be found to be illuminating of future traditions of discourse.
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