

## ARTICLE

# MILL, BENTHAM AND ‘INTERNAL CULTURE’

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In well-known lines from his *Autobiography*, Mill identifies two ‘very marked effects’ on his ‘opinions and character’ brought about by the period of his mental crisis.<sup>1</sup> The first involved no longer making happiness ‘the direct end’ of conduct and life. The second effect, which will consume our attention here, was that Mill ‘gave its proper place, among the prime necessities of human well-being, to the internal culture of the individual’, i.e. the cultivation of the feelings.<sup>2</sup> He had, he says, ceased to attach ‘almost exclusive importance to the ordering of outward circumstances, and the training of the human being for speculation and for action’.<sup>3</sup>

The contrast of internal culture with speculation, action, and ‘the ordering of outward circumstances’, draws on a vigorous literature of protest against the tenets of utilitarianism and political economy. Again and again in critics of utilitarianism such as Carlyle, Coleridge, Dickens and Mackintosh, one finds defences of the ‘inner’, ‘internal’, ‘interior’, ‘inward’ and ‘inmost’ against the ‘external’, ‘outward’, ‘outer’ and the closely related ‘mechanical’. We can see a formidable example of this genre in Carlyle’s *Signs of the Times*, in which he identifies his era as a ‘mechanical’ one and makes the following lament:

The Philosopher of this age is not a Socrates, a Plato, a Hooker, or Taylor, who inculcates on men the necessity and infinite worth of moral goodness, the great truth that our happiness depends on the mind which is within us, and not on the circumstances which are without us; but a Smith, a De Lolme, a Bentham, who chiefly inculcates the reverse of this – that our happiness depends entirely on external circumstances; nay, that the strength and dignity of the mind within us is itself the creature and consequence of these. Were the laws, the government, in good order, all were well with us; the rest would care for itself!<sup>4</sup>

This passage, though polemical and perhaps unfair, nevertheless hints at three basic and widespread complaints about the ‘Philosophic Radicals’ or Benthamites: (a) they simplify and flatten out our inner life by reducing

<sup>1</sup>John Stuart Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, edited by John M. Robson, 33 vols, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963–91), Vol., p. 145.

<sup>2</sup>Mill, *Collected Works I*, 147.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas Carlyle, ‘Signs of the Times’ [1829] in *A Carlyle Reader*, edited by G. B. Tennyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 40–1.

human motivation to self-interest (often in service to developing a moral science of which the new political economy was a part); (b) they locate the sources of happiness primarily in ‘external circumstances’, like the services rendered by others, rather than in something less contingently related to the self; and (c) in morality, they prioritize action and ‘underrate the importance of feeling and disposition’.<sup>5</sup> Thus, critics oppose the Philosophic Radicals in politics, which the radicals attempt to rationalize and turn into a science on the basis of controversial psychological premises, and in ethics, which, as Mackintosh put it, they treat ‘too juridically’.<sup>6</sup>

These criticisms resonated strongly with Mill. Though he never fully abandons the tradition of his teachers, he worries about the lack of attention in Bentham’s and his father’s work to the quality of psychic life. The emphasis on internal culture in the passage from his *Autobiography* reflects Mill’s reconsideration of philosophical radicalism in the face of intelligent, aggressive and hostile analysis.<sup>7</sup> This reconsideration focuses on character (or, more broadly, the self) and its education. Mill outlines a place for character in utilitarian theory and provides new goals for the development of various dispositions, especially those of feeling.

Studying these topics in Mill is of interest for a number of reasons. First, and most importantly, though what Mill has to say about character ideals is frequently mentioned in the secondary literature, explanations of what these ideals entail are much harder to come by. Taking ‘internal culture’ (or, for that matter, any of Mill’s most popular phrases concerning character and human development) out of the realm of mere metaphor and into the realm of genuine philosophical concept is difficult. A phrase such as ‘internal culture’ might sound suggestive, but what does it mean, and who would be against it? Until we can answer this kind of question, our understanding of Mill as ethicist – especially as advocate of norms for character education – will remain impoverished. One obstacle preventing an easy answer to this question is that internal culture, though an important idea in Mill’s thought, remains more of a place-holder than a well-developed technical notion. He depends on his audience to understand what he means by it. For us to have access to it requires that we delve into the historical context within which he employs the idea. An examination of the debates in which Mill participated

<sup>5</sup>James Mackintosh, *Dissertation Second; Exhibiting a General View of the Progress of Ethical Philosophy, Chiefly During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, prefixed to the seventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* [1830] 384.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Mill was not alone among the friends of utilitarianism on this score. In this *Autobiography* (I: 185), he talks about his affinities with the elder Austin who had spent time in Germany: ‘He attached much less importance than formerly to outward changes; unless accompanied by a better cultivation of the inward nature. He had a strong distaste for the general meanness of English life, the absence of enlarged thoughts and unselfish desires, the low objects on which the faculties of all classes of the English are intent’.

should allow us to make more sense of the philosophical point behind his appeal to internal culture.<sup>8</sup>

Second, this investigation provides us with an additional way of thinking about the meaning of Mill's famous confrontation with Coleridge and with associated currents in early to mid-nineteenth century thought. This confrontation made him reconceptualize utilitarian ethical theory and it drew his attention to anxieties concerning modern life that Bentham ignored.<sup>9</sup> Third, it offers a more articulate understanding of Mill as a reformer of political and social life, since much of his reforming work can be grasped only in relation to his commitments concerning character and its development.<sup>10</sup> His justifications for the reform of institutions such as the family and the workplace frequently centred on the impact of these institutions on the character of the people in them. Lastly, attention to the theme of internal culture makes Mill's ethical commitments more concrete, allowing us to evaluate him as a practising ethicist, not merely as the defender of a version of the principle of utility.

I will begin by presenting Bentham's views on internal culture, giving particular attention to the hopes (or lack thereof) Bentham had for affecting character, the ways in which he was most interested in doing so (largely tied to institutional reform), and the reasons that should prevent us from

<sup>8</sup>The few previous attempts to deal with the topic of internal culture in the philosophical literature tend to be cursory or to suffer from too much dependence on what Mill has to say without situating it sufficiently in its historical context. Prominent examples of the latter include the otherwise helpful book by Wendy Donner (*The Liberal Self* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), see especially ch. 5), John Robson's 'J. S. Mill's Theory of Poetry' in *Mill: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by J. B. Schneewind (London: MacMillan, 1968), and his *The Improvement of Mankind* (London: University of Toronto Press, 1968) 25–30. Other treatments, though suggestive, are brief. See Alan Ryan, *J. S. Mill* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974) 33 and 55, and Maurice Mandelbaum's excellent *History, Man, & Reason* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971) 194–7, 213–4.

<sup>9</sup>Skorupski nicely states the centrality of this confrontation of Enlightenment (Bentham) and Romanticism (Coleridge) for understanding Mill's thought:

Mill's project, in most general terms, was to present the enlightenment perspective in a way which would claim the allegiance and enthusiasm of thinking men and women, and, through them, exercise a social authority for good. He wanted to rethink it in detail and to show how it could incorporate and transcend the criticisms which had been made of it in the age of early nineteenth-century romanticism, the age in which he grew to maturity. Accordingly, the deepest criticisms of Mill are those which argue that he failed in just this respect; that the enlightenment perspective as such is incoherent – in its metaphysics, or its politics, or both. A full appreciation of Mill requires that one recognise what issues are at stake here and why they are significant.

(John Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill* (London: Routledge, 1989) 2)

<sup>10</sup>One of the stronger claims made on the general importance of moral development for Mill's philosophy is Alan Ryan's: 'And however much at odds it sometimes is with his determinist universe, Mill's concern with self-development and moral progress is a strand in his philosophy to which almost everything else is subordinate.' (Alan Ryan, *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill* (London: Macmillan, 1970) 255.)

endorsing ambitious ideals of character development. The three criticisms of Bentham mentioned above turn out to be reasonably fair statements of the most important points of difference between Bentham and his opponents.

I will then look at the condemnation of ‘mechanical’ thought that spurred Mill’s discussion of internal culture. This will lead to an examination of how Mill’s conception of internal culture acts to address the three basic criticisms of Bentham’s theory.

## I. BENTHAM AND INTERNAL CULTURE

In his *Principles of Penal Law*, Bentham employs a metaphor that sheds light on his general orientation towards the feelings (in this case, the passions) and towards their organization in character. After suggesting that the ‘seeds of good and evil are inseparably mixed’ in the structure of human motivation, that there are no passions that are ‘absolutely bad’, and that context or situation will most often determine the actions to which the motives lead, he compares finding a ‘useful balance’ among the passions to the successful use of dykes to irrigate land. He concludes by contending that ‘the art of constructing dykes consists in not directly opposing the violence of the current, which would carry away every obstacle placed directly in its front’.<sup>11</sup>

The ‘dykes’ that legislation establishes are not primarily intended to modify the nature of the ‘current’, i.e. the character of the passions themselves. As Bentham puts it earlier in the same section:

The object of direct legislation is to combat pernicious desires, by prohibitions and punishments directed against the hurtful acts to which those desires may give birth. The object of indirect legislation is to countermine their influence, by augmenting the force of the less dangerous desires which may enter into competition with them.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, direct legislation (e.g. laws forbidding certain conduct) operates on the basis of negative sanctions against the acts to which ‘pernicious desires’

<sup>11</sup>Jeremy Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, edited by John Bowring, 10 vols (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), Vol. I, p. 539. Beccaria, whose writings exerted a very strong influence on Bentham, uses strikingly similar language:

The force, like the force of gravity, which compels us to our own well-being, can be checked only by measure of the obstacles opposed to it. Its effects are the confused series of human actions. If these clash and impede one another, then punishments, which I would call political obstacles, prevent their bad effects without doing away with their compelling cause, which is the sensibility inseparable from man; and the lawmaker acts the part of the skillful architect, whose business it is to counteract the ruining course of gravity and cause the interaction of all that contributes to the strength of his building.

(Cesare Beccaria, *Of Crimes and Punishments*, translated by Jane Grigson (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1996) 75)

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

lead. These sanctions do not attempt to change the desires – they combat them. Indirect legislation tries to lessen the likelihood that these desires will be expressed in behaviour by promoting other, less harmful desires (e.g. love of entertainment and the arts). The passions are, therefore, not candidates for fundamental alteration according to this theory of legislation.<sup>13</sup> Bentham spurns efforts to change the affective make-up of a people because (a) any motive may lead to good or bad actions, depending on circumstance, so to identify specific passions as having consistent negative utility is very difficult; (b) the steps required to lessen significantly the prevalence of a motive usually create more harm than good; and (c) the expectation that one might be able to change humans in this way is naive – better just to accept their eternally mixed nature and reject any utopian impulses we might harbour.

The 'dykes', then, have their effects on action, not on the passions directly. Productively, they channel passions through the mechanisms of self-interest and sanction. This emphasis on 'institutional machinery' reflects a set of fundamental premises in thinking about political and social life. There is scarcely any discussion of inculcating virtue in the citizenry. There is little interest shown in interiority at all – external expression of interiority in action is what matters. The provision of healthy contexts for action, i.e. ones that direct predominately self-interested actors under the sway of the great multiplicity of human passions towards publicly useful ends, is the primary desideratum for the legislator. A smoothly functioning municipal law leads to prosperity and to ever-increasing civilization.<sup>14</sup>

This embrace of institutional organization and rationalization derives much of its energy from the early utilitarian acceptance of self-interest as sufficiently dominating human psychology so that all analysis of group interactions should be elucidated in terms of it. Explaining moral life scientifically required this approach, as Bentham had learned from Helvetius

<sup>13</sup>Bentham does make an exception here, however. He identifies three passions that a legislator should have interest in expunging: (a) the malevolent passions (e.g. ill-will, antipathy, malevolent or dissocial affections); (b) the fondness for inebriating liquors; and (c) the love of idleness, namely, indolence. Of these three, the second has the unique distinction of being the only passion which may be extirpated 'without producing any evil', that is, it is the only passion Bentham recognizes as having no positive utility. As for the other two, indolence 'favourites the ascendancy of evil passions', while the vindictive passions are disruptive of civilized social life. See Bentham, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 539.

<sup>14</sup>For a very helpful discussion of 'mechanical' political and social theories in British thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Stefan Collini, Donald Winch and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). In a treatment of Hume's and Smith's assumption (employed by James Mill in his dispute with Macaulay and Mackintosh) that in politics one ought to consider every man a knave who has no other end in mind but his own self-interest, the authors suggest:

The assumption that, by and large, self-interest rules collective behaviour in political as well as economic settings entailed giving greater emphasis to impersonal institutional machinery as a means of checking, balancing, and harnessing self-interest and containing its more destructive results.

and other radical French philosophers.<sup>15</sup> The accusation that utilitarianism embodied cold, calculating economic thinking has its source, in good measure, from the promotion of this thesis.

However, the commitment to self-interest and institutional machinery was not the only driving force behind the 'externalism' of the secular utilitarians. Another is the belief, attacked by Carlyle in the passage above, that our happiness depends much more on the actions of others and on our material conditions than it does on our character. James Mill puts forward an externalist view on the sources of happiness with which Bentham would have been in substantial agreement:

One remarkable thing is first of all to be noticed: the three, above named [Wealth, Power, Dignity], grand causes of our pleasures agree in this, that they all are the means of procuring for us the Services of our fellow-creatures, and themselves contribute to our pleasures in hardly any other way. It is obvious from this remark, that the grand cause of all our pleasures are the services of our fellow-creatures; since Wealth, Power, and Dignity, which appear to most people to sum up the means of human happiness, are nothing more than means of procuring these services. This is a fact of the highest possible importance, both in Morals, and in Philosophy.<sup>16</sup>

Here, James Mill moves away from the tradition that happiness depends primarily on our internal organization or character.<sup>17</sup> For the elder Mill, except in so far as internal organization impacts the likelihood of our receiving services from others or of our being able to look after our own interests (i.e. the cases of prudence and temperance), it remains a less important source of happiness than does external circumstance. As Halevy puts the point,

The only pleasures which the Utilitarian moralist wished in the last analysis to take into account, were the pleasures which had their source not in the exercise of our mental habits, but in external causes, such as gifts, wages or rewards, those pleasures, in a word, which are included under jurisprudence and political economy.<sup>18</sup>

Such a position naturally leads the utilitarian theorist to attend to institutional settings in order to facilitate a mutuality of service-giving,

<sup>15</sup>See, for example, Claude-Adrien Helvetius, *De L'Esprit* (Tours: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1988) 59: 'Si l'Univers physique est soumis aux lois du mouvement, l'Univers moral ne l'est pas moins a celles de l'interet'.

<sup>16</sup>James Mill, *An Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, edited by John Stuart Mill, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green and Dyer, 1869), Vol. II, p. 208.

<sup>17</sup>Perhaps because of his Scottish training for the ministry, James Mill seems to waver on these points occasionally, in a way that Bentham never does.

<sup>18</sup>Elie Halevy, *The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism*, translated by Mary Morris (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955) 469.

thus bolstering overall happiness. The marketplace is a paradigm, since an efficient market does the best possible job of satisfying the desires of the people participating in it. It has the additional advantage of leading to services while not depending upon any more lofty motives than self-interest. Exchange thereby becomes the fundamental social relationship.<sup>19</sup>

Bentham's lack of interest in internal culture, then, derives partly from his commitment to self-interest, to institutional 'dykes,' and to some form of this 'externalist' view on the sources of happiness. In addition, it also stems from distaste for defending grand ideals of character development. Perhaps one of the most useful and rhetorically effective renderings of this scepticism concerning character ideals is found in Macaulay, the poet, historian, *Edinburgh Reviewer*, and part-time critic of utilitarians. In an essay on Bacon (1837), Macaulay contrasts the Baconian approach with that of the ancient moralists, in a way that captures the practical, anti-perfectionist and technical spirit that many of the Whig authors in the *Edinburgh Review*, for all their differences with the Philosophic Radicals, shared with Bentham and others like him:

To sum up the whole, we should say that the aim of the Platonic philosophy was to exalt man into a god. The aim of the Baconian philosophy was to provide man with what he requires while he continues to be man. The aim of the Platonic philosophy was to raise us far above vulgar wants. The aim of the Baconian philosophy was to supply our vulgar wants. The former aim was noble; but the latter was attainable. . . . The philosophy of Plato began in words and ended in words, noble words indeed, words such as were to be expected from the finest of human intellects exercising boundless dominion over the finest of human languages. The philosophy of Bacon began in observations and ended in arts.

The boast of the ancient philosophers was that their doctrine formed the minds of men to a high degree of wisdom and virtue. This was indeed the only practical good that the most celebrated of those teachers even pretended to effect; and undoubtedly, if they had effected this, they would have deserved far higher praise than if they had discovered the most salutary medicines or constructed the most powerful machines. But the truth is that, in those very matters in which alone they professed to do any good to mankind, in those very matters for the sake of which they neglected all the vulgar interests of mankind, they did nothing, or worse than nothing. They promised what was impracticable; they despised what was practicable; they filled the world with long words and long beads; and they left it as wicked and as ignorant as they found it.

An acre in Middlesex is better than a principality in Utopia.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 470.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, 2 vols (London: Everyman's Library, 1937), Vol. II, p. 373. Earlier, Bentham makes a similar point more directly: 'While Xenophon was writing History, and Euclid teaching Geometry, Socrates and Plato were talking nonsense, on pretence of teaching morality and wisdom. This morality of theirs consisted in words'. (Jeremy Bentham, *Deontology together with A Table of the Springs of Action and The Article on Utilitarianism*, edited by Amnon Goldworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 135.)

We should note a few points in relation to this passage. First, Macaulay's emphasis, like that of the utilitarians, is eminently practical and allergic to metaphysical extravagance. Suffering and satisfaction are incontrovertible realities, ones that can be affected through policy and human intervention. Our happiness is largely dependent upon our interactions with nature (i.e. diseases, etc.), with others, and with the institutions that make up our social and political existence. It does not seem dependent on whether or not we achieve 'enlightenment', on whether or not we read philosophy, or on whether or not we are lovers of poetry and the arts. Bacon's greatness lay in his capacity to recognize those 'parts of human nature which lie low, but which are not liable to change'.<sup>21</sup> Such a view combats temptations towards perfectionism or utopianism.

We can, of course, direct people's actions through the mechanism of institutions and incentives (thus the use of Bentham's dyke imagery and his advocacy for the Panopticon). We can aid their action by enabling them better to realize their interests through education, and by increasing our control over the physical world. However, we should not expect or desire to produce a Stoic sage. Moreover, merely holding that kind of ideal is counterproductive; first, because, as Macaulay contends, the ideal is false:

We know indeed that the philosophers were no better than other men. From the testimony of friends as well as foes, from the confessions of Epictetus and Seneca, as well as from the sneers of Lucian and the fierce invectives of Juvenal, it is plain that these teachers of virtue had all the vices of their neighbors, with the additional vice of hypocrisy.<sup>22</sup>

For an additional example of Bentham's basic agreement with this view, see his claim in 'Of the Influence of Time and Place in Matters of Legislation':

Let us seek only for what is attainable: it presents a career sufficiently vast for genius; sufficiently difficult for the exercise of the greatest virtues. We shall never make this world the abode of perfect happiness: when we shall have accomplished all that can be done, this paradise will be, according to the Asiatic idea, only a garden; but this garden will be a most delightful abode, compared with the savage forest in which men have so long wandered.

(Bentham, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 194)

<sup>21</sup>Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, Vol. II, p. 376.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 374. See also the following note from Bentham, included in 'Bentham's Conversation':

Fanny Wright told me Socrates was pure as an icicle. I answered that it was my misfortune to read Greek, and to know better. What I read of Socrates was insipid. I could find in him nothing that distinguished him from other people except his manner of putting questions.

(Bentham, *Works*, Vol. X, p. 583)

One of the most interesting contrasts between Bentham and both Mills comes from their differing evaluation of Socrates.



Second, the ideal's prejudices undervalue certain types of pleasure.<sup>23</sup> Third, it serves to distract us from those things that we can actually accomplish to make our lives here a little easier.

What this means is not that Bentham dismissed the value of character education. It means that we need to be specific about what kind of development is called for and can be justified. For Bentham, the primary desiderata of character development are prudence (the ability to discern well the consequences of action) and self-control or temperance (the capacity to choose a greater future pleasure over the lesser, but more immediate, one). Bentham's expectations for education are thus very modest, and he harbours a thorough-going scepticism about claims that people ought to be compared and evaluated on the basis of some vision of human perfection (such as that of the Stoic sage, the Christian saint or the Romantic poet).<sup>24</sup>

A second point to be gleaned from this passage is that the pragmatism and anti-perfectionism emphasized by Bentham and Macaulay dovetails with Bentham's jurisprudential orientation. With little hope of and interest in reforming the inner world of human beings, external behaviour absorbs Bentham's attention and leads him to take action as the proper object of morality (this is why Mackintosh accuses him of treating ethics 'too juridically').

Finally, the utilitarian and Whig pragmatism expressed in Macaulay's writing represents a possible reply to Carlyle's complaint that Bentham and others look to 'external circumstances' to explain the presence or absence of happiness, rather than to 'the mind which is within us'. This, as we have seen, is basically true; but why do they emphasize external circumstances? First of all, the radicals wanted reform. Emphasizing the importance of happiness's external conditions dovetails with this political agenda. Second, this emphasis implies sensitivity to human dependence on circumstance and environment – those who think that individuals as individuals primarily determine their own well-being locate responsibility incorrectly. The blame rests neither in our stars nor in ourselves, but in the institutions that serve to regulate our interactions. Addressing the flaws in these institutions focuses us on the concrete and available ways in which we can alleviate suffering and promote pleasure.

<sup>23</sup>On this point, see Bentham's critique of taste in the 'Rationale of Reward', *Works*, Vol. II, p. 254, where he claims that it is 'only from custom and prejudice that, in matters of taste, we speak of false and true', and where he goes on to attack the presumption of critics who attempt to establish a hierarchy of pleasures.

<sup>24</sup>The proper role of the moralist, as one can see in Bentham's *Deontology*, is the correction of mistakes concerning what constitutes one's real interest. For a good treatment of Bentham's moral theory, such as it is, see Ross Harrison, *Bentham* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), ch. X.

## II. CRITICS

As we have seen, Carlyle argued that his age was a 'mechanical' one in which thinkers such as Bentham treated humans as components to be fitted into a smoothly working machine. They are thereby seen only from the outside, from an external point of view. The criticisms of Bentham's and others' 'mechanical' thought play an important role in the period's discussion of internal culture.

In using this disparaging term, intellectuals such as Carlyle were influenced by, among other things, German Romanticism, Idealism, *Naturphilosophie*, and more home-grown intellectual movements.<sup>25</sup> A number of oppositions were built into this accusation, all of which depended on characterizing the mechanical as an imposition on something more authentic. First, there were basic contrasts of the mechanical with the organic and living. In epistemology and philosophy of mind/psychology these contrasts manifest in the distinction between the analytic understanding and synthetic reason, with only the latter supplying the genuine knowledge of the whole needed fully to comprehend the parts grasped by understanding. Coleridge, who brought this distinction into prominence in Britain, consistently speaks of the 'dead' or 'abstract' understanding in contrast to 'living' reason. The methodological criticisms of associationism and of the Lockean tradition in psychology relate to this, as does the rejection of self-interest as the key to interpreting action and institutions.

The necessity of knowing the whole if the part is to make sense also played out in historiography. Coleridge criticizes the 'histories and political economy of the present and preceding century' that 'partake in the general contagion of its mechanic philosophy, and are the product of an unenlivened generalizing understanding'.<sup>26</sup> Carlyle, mining a parallel vein, suggests that, though history can never be fully interpreted by man, one may still distinguish

the Artist in History . . . from the Artisan in History; for here as in all other provinces, there are Artists and Artisans; men who labour mechanically in a department, without eye for the Whole, not feeling that there is a Whole; and men who inform and ennoble the humblest department with an Idea of the

<sup>25</sup>The opposition between inner and outer can be found in the German contrast of '*Kultur*' (and the associated '*Bildung*'), which expresses the value placed on the inner, spiritual sphere and its development, with '*Zivilisation*', which is something of secondary importance, namely, the outward appearance and form of human beings. For the seminal treatment of this distinction, see Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 3-9.

<sup>26</sup>S. T. C. Coleridge, 'Lay Sermons', in *On the Constitution of the Church and State According to the Idea of Each* (3rd edn), and *Lay Sermons* (2nd edn) (London: William Pickering, 1839) 228.

Whole, and habitually know that only in the Whole is the Partial to be truly discerned.<sup>27</sup>

The charge of mechanism reflected not only specific epistemic, psychological, and, especially in the cases when it was motivated by religious criticism, metaphysical concerns, it also gave voice to a general uneasiness about the impact of industrialism on feeling and about Enlightenment attitudes towards humanity (including the attempt to create a 'science of man'). Sussman finds this former concern infusing the Victorian intellectual milieu:

Combined with the use of the machine as metonymy for progress was another perception . . . that the rhythms created by the machine itself had a profound and primarily destructive effect on the psychic life. This idea, that as mechanization expands the affective life declines, shapes the form as well as the content of much Victorian writing.<sup>28</sup>

This latter position, which tended to align the forces of interiority (i.e. art, imagination and religion) against industrial society and the philosophy of mechanism, can be found in numerous places, including Carlyle's essays, 'Signs of the Times' and 'Characteristics', where he discusses the 'mechanical' philosophy of utilitarianism, the caricatured Mr Gradgrind of Dickens's *Hard Times*, and Arnold's later *Culture and Anarchy* where he speaks of 'the believer in machinery' as an enemy of culture and where he situates Bentham in the vanguard of the Philistines (in other words, the vanguard of the bourgeois middle classes).<sup>29</sup>

One of the more interesting examples of a critique of utilitarianism as a mechanical philosophy, however, and one which demonstrates the historical inertia of this association, comes from the 1880s and Lecky's *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*. Lecky argues that utilitarianism is the 'philosophical expression of industrialism'.<sup>30</sup> The perfection of individuals is subordinated in industrialism to the perfection of institutions ('externalism'): 'Among the moderns . . . the law of development has been much more social than individual, and depends, as we have seen, on the growth of the industrial element'.<sup>31</sup> He contrasts the industrial spirit both with asceticism and with the Greek focus on individual perfection

<sup>27</sup>Thomas Carlyle, 'On History', in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (Philadelphia: Casey and Hart, 1845) 222.

<sup>28</sup>Herbert Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968) 4.

<sup>29</sup>Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 13.

<sup>30</sup>William Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1888) 10.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 351.

and the achievement of ‘harmonious sustained manhood, without disproportion, or anomaly, or eccentricity’.

Lecky goes on to contend that utilitarianism had had immense importance in ‘correcting the evils of fanaticism, in calling into action the faculties which asceticism had petrified, and in furnishing a simple, universal principle of life’.<sup>32</sup> Thus, he is in basic agreement with Macaulay’s praises of Baconian philosophy; but he argues that the defects of utilitarianism mirror the defects of rationalism and the associated modern, industrial spirit. Utility, though it is ‘the highest motive to which reason can attain’, cannot account for ‘the noblest thing we possess, the celestial spark that is within us, the impress of the divine image, the principle of every heroism’.<sup>33</sup>

### III. INTERNAL CULTURE

Mill’s advocacy for internal culture and for a re-evaluation of the goals of character education (especially the goals for the cultivation of dispositions of feeling) was conditioned by a sympathetic attention to these criticisms of utilitarianism. As we proceed to outline themes relevant to internal culture, we will come to comprehend how these themes need to be seen in relation to these criticisms.

The following three sections treat the problem of internal culture directly. The first examines Mill’s analysis of Bentham’s ethical theory. In particular, it shows that Mill took Bentham to task for having failed properly to incorporate the notion of character into his ethics. This created a lack of attention to interiority, including to the dispositions of feeling emphasized by the idea of internal culture. The second section discusses Mill’s treatment of aesthetic feeling – a category of feeling to which he assigns great value as a type of higher pleasure. I explain what makes aesthetic feeling or pleasure different from other kinds and show how, for Mill, the capacity to experience these pleasures is dependent upon the nature of one’s character. The third section studies other feelings that Mill found wanting among his fellows, namely, sympathetic feelings. In order to bring out more clearly some of the implications of Mill’s views on internal culture, I go on to elucidate the means by which these feelings are cultivated in opposition to the tendencies of industrialism.

In each section, one finds Mill addressing the criticisms brought against Bentham’s views. In the first, Mill implicitly responds to the claim that Bentham treats ethics ‘too juridically’. The second section characterizes anew the sources of happiness. Mill places more stress on sources of pleasure essentially dependent on the self (the ‘inner’), rather than those sources that have only a contingent relation to the self and that depend more

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 352.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 353.

upon 'external circumstances'. The last section illustrates how Mill places greater emphasis on non-self-directed components of the human psyche (e.g. sympathy) than his early utilitarian companions.

### Interiority and Ethics

In his different surveys of Bentham's ethical views, Mill is particularly keen to demand two revisions. First, he argues that Bentham fails to determine properly the consequences of actions owing to his impoverished understanding of human psychology. For the calculation of consequences to be adequate one requires the science of ethology, i.e. the science of the formation of character.<sup>34</sup> The impact of actions on the human mind and on character must be understood in order to evaluate properly the actions' morality.<sup>35</sup>

A result of this lacuna in Bentham's theory – his 'ignorance of the deeper springs of human character' leading to a miscalculation of the consequences of action – is that it prevented him from appreciating the power of aesthetic activity to shape the moral nature of human beings.<sup>36</sup> To Bentham, the consequences of experiencing art are limited to the pleasures it produces. Thus, there is no reason to favour watching an Ibsen drama over playing solitaire if they produce equal pleasure. He gives short shrift to the possibility that art may have long-term impact on the sensibility of the spectator. This helps to explain Bentham's 'peculiar opinions on poetry', which contrast so sharply with Mill's emphasis on the arts as vital for the development of character, especially for the cultivation of feelings and imagination.

Mill's second revision of Bentham is related to the first and stems from his contention that the kinds of ethical evaluation demanded by Bentham's theory are insufficient. He criticizes Bentham in his essay 'Bentham' and in

<sup>34</sup>See Mill's *A System of Logic* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1874), Vol. VI, p. 5. Ethology is part of a far more complex conception of the moral sciences:

And since it is by these laws [the universal laws of the formation of character] combined with the facts of each particular case, that the whole of the phenomena of human action and feeling are produced, it is on these that every rational attempt to construct the science of human nature in the concrete, and for practical purposes, must proceed.

(VI:5, 2)

<sup>35</sup>Mill attests to this in the following:

Morality consists of two parts. One of these is self-education; the training, by the human being himself, of his affections and will. That department is a blank in Bentham's system. The other and co-equal part, the regulation of outward actions, must be altogether halting and imperfect without the first; for how can we judge in what manner many an action will affect even the worldly interests of ourselves or others, unless we take in, as part of the question, its influence on the regulation of our, or their, affections and desires?

(Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. X, p. 98)

<sup>36</sup>Ibid, p. 113.

*Utilitarianism* for ignoring the ‘sympathetic’ and ‘aesthetic’ features of actions in favour of an exclusive focus on the ‘moral’ features of actions, and suggests that this gave ‘to his philosophy that cold, mechanical and ungenial air which characterizes the popular idea of a Benthamite’.<sup>37</sup> The moral aspect, to which Bentham attends, provokes our reason and conscience to judge an action’s rightness or wrongness (through its consequences), and results in moral approval and disapproval. The aesthetic aspect grounds judgements of beauty and ugliness, according to which we admire or despise. Our imagination plays the decisive role here. Lastly, judgements of love, pity or dislike, which are determined by ‘human fellow-feeling’, depend upon the sympathetic aspect of the act.<sup>38</sup>

Bentham, then, not only miscalculates the consequences of actions, he fails to notice that the specific consequences of an act are not sufficient to explain the evaluations that arise, and that ought to arise, in the face of it. What Bentham and other utilitarians ignore are those ethical judgements that have as their objects something other than the consequences of an act.<sup>39</sup> ‘The morality of an action depends on its foreseeable consequences; its beauty, and its loveableness, or the reverse, depend on the qualities which it is evidence of’.<sup>40</sup> Judgements of admiration or dislike or pity cover the dispositional causes of an action rather than the action’s results. They are, in other words, ‘backward-looking’ rather than ‘forward-looking’ evaluations.

In the early essay ‘Remark’s on Bentham’s Philosophy’ (1833), which is a very good source for understanding Mill’s ethical views, he expands on this point:

A certain kind of action, as for example, theft, or lying, would, if commonly practised, occasion certain evil consequences to society: but those evil consequences are far from constituting the entire moral bearings of the vices of theft or lying. We shall have a very imperfect view of the relation of those practices to the general happiness, if we suppose them to exist singly, and insulated. All acts suppose certain dispositions, and habits of mind and heart, which may be in themselves states of enjoyment or of wretchedness, and which must be fruitful in other consequences, besides those particular acts. No person can be a thief or a liar without being much else: and if our moral judgments and feelings with respect to a person convicted of either vice, were grounded solely upon the pernicious tendency of thieving and of lying, they would be partial and incomplete; many considerations would be omitted, which are at least equally ‘germane to the matter’; many which, by leaving

<sup>37</sup>Ibid, p. 112.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid. See also p. 221.

<sup>39</sup>For the legitimacy of this as an interpretation of Bentham’s ethical views, see Harrison’s analysis of Bentham’s ‘deontology’: Ross Harrison, *Bentham* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) 274.

<sup>40</sup>Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. X, p. 112.

them out of our general views, we may indeed teach ourselves a habit of overlooking, but which it is impossible for any of us not to be influenced by, in particular cases, in proportion as they are forced upon our attention.<sup>41</sup>

Beyond noticing from this passage that the Benthamites had developed a 'habit of overlooking' the aesthetic and sympathetic aspects of actions, we can uncover a Millian interest in establishing a sharp division between legislation and ethics. In legislation, the focus on the specific consequences of an action rather than on 'its general bearings upon the entire moral being of the agent' is appropriate.<sup>42</sup>

The legislator enjoins or prohibits an action, with very little regard to the general moral excellence or turpitude which it implies; he looks to the consequences to society of the particular kind of action; his object is not to render people incapable of desiring a crime, but to deter them from actually committing it.<sup>43</sup>

Legislators, in other words, should concern themselves primarily with external behaviour, and, in determining which acts to prohibit, they properly limit their attention to the consequences of the act alone.

In ethics, on the other hand, this kind of attention is insufficient. Mill then, three years after Mackintosh's *Encyclopedia* entry, also interprets Bentham's ethical position as being too juridical. Ethical evaluation demands more than legislative evaluation does; it requires a careful consideration of character, of the interiority of which action is an expression. Exclusive attention on right and wrong means, for a utilitarian, exclusive attention on the consequences of a class of action. When we take into consideration the whole of ethical life, this attention leads us to ignore the importance of the claim that 'no person can be a thief or a liar without being much else'. Mill expresses this in the following account of Bentham's 'great fault . . . as a moral philosopher':

He has largely exemplified, and contributed very widely to diffuse, a tone of thinking, according to which any kind of action or any habit, which in its own specific consequences cannot be proved to be necessarily or probably productive of unhappiness to the agent himself or to others, is supposed to be fully justified; and any disapprobation or aversion entertained towards the individual by reason of it, is set down from that time forward as prejudice and superstition. It is not considered (at least, not habitually considered,) whether the act or habit in question, though not in itself necessarily pernicious, may not

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

form part of a character essentially pernicious, or at least essentially deficient in some quality eminently conducive to the 'greatest happiness'.<sup>44</sup>

Mill wants the reader to recognize the undesirability of atomizing action and habit for the purposes of evaluation and to see how interconnected aspects of character can be. We cannot be habitual liars without being many other things besides (e.g. inconstant). The propensities to lie or to enjoy pushpin to poetry, he suggests, cluster with other character traits, which may also properly influence our judgement of the action and of the dispositions that produce it. So, though Bentham never ignores habits as potential sources of desirable and pernicious action (thus making them appropriate as objects of evaluation), he fails, according to Mill, to appreciate how habits relate to one's character as a whole.

We can now see how Mill's emphasis on internal culture represents, among other things, additional notice being given to the place of character in ethical theory (though Mill's position does not seem to attribute intrinsic value to states of character – he is still a utilitarian). Beyond the theoretical significance of this move, it is also an important precondition to greater interest in character education. One must assign weight to the place of character in ethics at large before turning character education into a significant ethical concern. Bringing character (the 'internal') into prominence is what Mill does in these analyses of Bentham's ethics.

### Sources of Happiness

Carlyle's proclamation of the 'great truth that our happiness depends on the mind which is within us, and not on the circumstances which are without us' resonates in Mill's treatment of aesthetic experience. Throughout his writings, Mill presents aesthetic experience as yielding a particularly valuable pleasure (i.e. a 'higher pleasure'), which is less dependent on 'external' sources than those pleasures emphasized by Bentham. The defence of 'internal' sources of happiness naturally leads to the problem of what internal states or dispositions produce this happiness; and as we shall see, one's capacity to experience aesthetic pleasures has a non-contingent relation to one's character.

In his *Autobiography*, Mill broaches these themes in his account of how the arts yielded a solution to the problem at the heart of his youthful depression. In one well-noted discussion, he tells how he found a solution in Wordsworth's poetry, which presented 'not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling'. It was

the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. In them [Wordsworth's poems] I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 8.



imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings; which had no connexion with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind.<sup>45</sup>

When searching through the text to find what 'state of... thoughts and feelings' made the reading of Wordsworth helpful, we discover the following, which indicates that Mill judged 'external' sources of pleasure to be insufficient for happiness:

I felt that the flaw in my life, must be a flaw in life itself: that the question was, whether, if the reformers of society and government could succeed in their objects, and every person in the community were free and in a state of physical comfort, the pleasures of life, being no longer kept up by struggle and privation, would cease to be pleasures. And I felt that unless I could see my way to some better hope than this for human happiness in general, my dejection must continue.<sup>46</sup>

Before the famous discussion of Wordsworth's healing effects, however, Mill remarks on the impact of another art: music. In a passage, to which less attention has been given, he claims that he felt relief that Weber's *Oberon* showed him to have a continuing susceptibility, even in his depression, to the pleasures of music. Mill goes on to suggest, however, that Weber did not help him as much as Wordsworth. The relief supplied by the music 'was much impaired by the thought, that the pleasure of music (as is quite true of such pleasure as this was, that of mere tune) fades with familiarity, and requires either to be revived by intermittance, or fed by continual novelty'.<sup>47</sup>

The key to comprehending Mill's appeals to art in the *Autobiography* and the implied contrast between the impact of Wordsworth and Weber is to attend carefully to the qualification given for the pleasure of Weber's music, namely, that it is the pleasure of 'mere tune'. This is the fundamental problem. For the pleasure of mere tune, as we find out in the editorial notes for his father's *Analysis*, are pleasures of sensation (i.e. pleasures caused by the sound itself), not pleasures of expression (i.e. the associations connected to the sound).<sup>48</sup> Only the music that excels in expression can be considered

<sup>45</sup>Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. I, p. 151, italics added. This description of aesthetic pleasure also has obvious implications for thinking about class. Aesthetic pleasure is to be that which connects us, that which helps us overcome class conflict, etc. For an interesting Marxist interpretation of the political employment of the notion of the aesthetic, see Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>46</sup>Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. I, p. 149.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>John Stuart Mill in James Mill, *An Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, 2 vols, edited by John Stuart Mill (London: Longmans, Green & Dyer, 1869), Vol. II, pp. 241–2.

truly poetic, that is, artistic. The other music, even if it is highly pleasurable, lacks depth. It is also, importantly, much more likely to be exhausted as a source of pleasure, needing to be ‘revived by intermittance, or fed by continual novelty’.

Not all the things that produce pleasures of expression, however, are capable of being an ‘inward source of joy’. Pleasures of expression that are merely pleasures of agreeableness, namely pleasures that result from association of an object to ideas of an everyday sort (e.g. children playing or a hot toddy in winter), remain insufficient. They are not aesthetic pleasures such as those provided by Wordsworth’s poetry. The feelings evoked by truly ‘artistic’ music and poetry have a phenomenological character – a certain kind of heft – that other feelings lack.<sup>49</sup>

Mill’s explanation of this difference between the types of feeling rests on a theory of the imagination (a theory partially influenced by Ruskin). In aesthetic experience, as opposed to the mere experience of the agreeable, we are carried by a work of art into a ‘more majestic world’.<sup>50</sup> This means that we are confronted by or interact with various idealizations (of objects, virtues, etc.) or with the infinite. This confrontation with what Ruskin calls in the second volume of *Modern Painters* ‘ideas of Beauty’, accounts for the felt distinctness of experiences of the beautiful.<sup>51</sup>

If we ask why the pleasures of poetry or expressive music that go beyond mere agreeableness are different from the pleasures of ‘mere tune’, the answer is that art engages us with the ideal or infinite, that is, it brings us through webs of association into some kind of contact (e.g. conceptual, affective) with something apparently limitless or ideal. Music or poetry that depends on the ‘physical’ can do nothing of the kind.

This explains the inexhaustibility of the aesthetic pleasures. Whereas physical pleasures quickly reach a saturation point, at which time we often lose interest in them, imaginative pleasures of the sort we find in art can engage us in more sustainable ways. Contemplation of, or affective reaction to, the ideal or the infinite provides us with a permanent source of profound pleasure, which helped to assuage Mill’s fears about the sources of pleasure

<sup>49</sup>The distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful was a commonplace in the period. Mill accepts Coleridge’s formulation of the issue, though he rejects his explanation of the differences between the feelings in favour of an associationist account. See John Stuart Mill in James Mill, *Analysis*, Vol. II, p. 252.

<sup>50</sup>John Stuart Mill in James Mill, *Analysis*, Vol. II, p. 255.

<sup>51</sup>John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. II (New York: D. D. Merrill Co., 1893). Ruskin’s project in this part of his multi-volume work is to catalogue the ideas of beauty (i.e. those ideas that are expressed by the aesthetic object and that are responsible for our experience of the beautiful), and to elucidate the workings and proper objects of the two central faculties for the creation and appreciation of art, namely, the imagination and what he calls the ‘theoretic faculty’.

available to humans. He had discovered a 'source of inward joy' distinct from those that produce pleasures of agreeableness or of sense.

Mill's crisis led him, or so he claims,<sup>52</sup> to the realization that our pleasures have different sources, and that they can have fundamentally different natures – a contention in relation to which the later higher/lower pleasure distinction in *Utilitarianism* can be fruitfully considered.<sup>53</sup> This realization reconciled him to the view that the success of the reformer's project need not end in malaise, because the joy dependent on the internal state of the mind survives even when the pleasures dependent on political reform are gone.

The limiting condition to aesthetic pleasure is not simply exposure to or opportunity to confront the ideal or infinite. These are readily available. The capacity to enjoy these higher pleasures turns out to depend upon the presence of particular dispositions, upon the 'mind which is within us'. Thus, we see how the debate surrounding the sources of human happiness connects directly to issues of character and internal culture.

Mill gives clues as to how aesthetic pleasure depends upon character in his essay 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties', where he differentiates between the poetic and the narrative.<sup>54</sup> There is a 'radical distinction between the interest felt in a story as such, and the interest excited by poetry; for the one is derived from incident, the other from the representation of feeling'.<sup>55</sup> Stories excite our emotions through showing 'states of mere outward circumstances', while the poetic excites through the 'exhibition of a state or states of human sensibility'.<sup>56</sup> Mill argues that these two sources of affective response – outward circumstance and human sensibility – 'correspond to two distinct, and (as respects their greatest development) mutually exclusive, characters of mind'.<sup>57</sup> Thus, a proneness to interest in stories reflects a lack of attention to interiority. Or, put another way, the person consistently attracted to story over poetry is one for whom 'inward joy' will be absent.

<sup>52</sup>Whether Mill's account of his crisis is true to life is not important for our purposes. What is important is how he explains the events to himself and to his readers. For one well-known revision of the history of Mill's crisis, see Michael Packe, *The Life of John Stuart Mill* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1954) 79–82.

<sup>53</sup>Few people have noticed this way of conceiving of the higher/lower pleasure distinction, and even fewer have tried to treat it in any depth. For one example of the latter, see Susan Feagin, 'Mill and Edwards on the Higher Pleasures', *Philosophy*, 58 (1983) 244–52.

<sup>54</sup>It should be noted that Mill does not mean the narrative form here, as much as the narrative spirit, that is, an emphasis on incident. Thus, a poem can be a narrative, and be completely unpoetic, while a novel can be truly poetic, and be a narrative only secondarily. This is not, then, at least explicitly, an argument for a hierarchy of genres.

<sup>55</sup>Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. I, p. 344.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 344–5. One can see here yet another incarnation of the language of inner/outer in the distinction between the poetic and the narrative. For an interesting use of these texts in a treatment of Mill's associationism, see Candace Vogler, *John Stuart Mill's Deliberative Landscape* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), ch. 4.

<sup>57</sup>Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. I, p. 345, italics added.

Mill presents the ‘truth’ of the story (and the knowledge needed by the novel-writer) as the truth available to the ‘men of the world’.<sup>58</sup> Presumably these truths, having their source in ‘outward experience’, are forms of prudential knowledge concerning how to get things done, how to comport oneself in social life, with special focus on how we present ourselves to the world. This is, among other things, indicative of business savvy and practical success – success in action.

Stories, moreover, characteristically please children. The passion for stories is most intense in childhood, because the feelings depicted in stories and elicited by stories (at least of the sort Mill has in mind) are ‘the simplest our nature has’.<sup>59</sup> The incidents of stories provoke

such joys and griefs as the immediate pressure of some outward event excites in rude minds, which live wholly immersed in outward things, and have never, either from choice or a force they could not resist, turned themselves to the contemplation of the world within.<sup>60</sup>

Ordinary life interests us, provokes us, forces us to respond, but does nothing to connect itself to the ideal or the infinite. It is obvious. It is transparent. Events are interpreted using the ready-made categories of a language community, and these categories condition the response of children to the stories. In fact, storytelling involves one of the first introductions of these social norms and categories to children.

What we find then, is that the two sources of interest – poetry and narrative – depend for the pleasures they produce on two contrasting dispositions of imagination and feeling. Narrative draws on those imaginations and feelings grabbed by action and by ‘outward things’. The narrative mind is the mind of industrial society. It is quickly aroused and absorbed in the excitement of stories, but these stories leave little behind them to engage it. The ‘joys and griefs’ which ‘outward events’ excite satisfy the narrative mind, and it lacks the capacity of the imagination needed to rise to a ‘more majestic world’, which might provide it with other, higher pleasures. The poetic mind, on the other hand, owing to its powers of imagination, finds pleasure in the discovery of the ideal and the infinite. It rejects the speed and exhilaration of industry in order to tarry with the aesthetic (and frequently pastoral) object. The ‘internal’ character of the feelings associated with poetry such as Wordsworth’s derives from its relation to self-reflection and from its connection, through imagination, to ideal and infinite aspects of the world and the self hidden by the ‘external’ goings-on of social existence in industrial society.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 345.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

### The Pleasures of Sympathy

The last revision of Bentham triggered by criticism and embodied in Mill's highlighting of internal culture involves the rejection of a central feature of Bentham's moral psychology – its reduction of almost all motivation to some form of self-interest. This moral psychology reflected an ambition found in the radical French Enlightenment and in the developing field of Political Economy (Bentham was a great admirer of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and was also closely linked to Ricardo through the mediation of James Mill), namely, the ambition to explain human behaviour as a class of natural phenomena subject to laws. In other words, he was attracted to the idea of establishing a 'science of man', and the premise that human action is driven by self-interest seemed justified and useful in creating such a science.<sup>61</sup>

To Bentham's opponents, the emphasis on self-interest showed how impoverished the utilitarian understanding of the 'internal' was. The utilitarian inner life is not a site of deep conflict or wonder, nor is it, because of that, a site of genuine ethical interest for another; it is comprehensible and consistently directed. The form that a utilitarian life takes depends more on dealing with external obstacles to satisfaction and less on struggling with the complexities of one's psyche, including, in the view of the critics, the multiplicity of human motivations.

For Mill, Bentham's account of human motivation was not only incorrect, it also had pernicious effects in the realm of moral education, because it (a) blinded the utilitarians to the importance of sympathy both for social life and for the well-being of the individual, and (b) exacerbated a sharpening decline in sympathetic relations with others by ignoring those features of others (e.g. the complexity of motivations) that might engage us and make us more prone to sympathize. The marginalization of sympathy and the pleasures associated with it was a problem that went beyond the secular utilitarians, however. Mill thought it endemic to English life as a whole. This problem – the absence of warmth and sympathetic feelings – served to fuel the literature on the evils of the mechanical and industrial spirit and on the way in which modern societal relations were founded on cash and contract, rather than on intimacy and emotional connection. Driven by these criticisms, Mill diagnosed the causes of this lack of pleasure in sympathy and suggested some ways to remedy it.

In discussing the negative attitude of one of his earlier intellectual companions, J. A. Roebuck, towards the cultivation of sympathies and feelings through art, Mill says that Roebuck

like most Englishmen who have feelings . . . found his feelings stand very much in his way. He was much more susceptible to the painful sympathies than to

<sup>61</sup>See note 14. Though Bentham mentions sympathy as a possible motivation for action, he rarely emphasizes it or makes the notion do much work.

the pleasurable, and looking for his happiness elsewhere, he wished that his feelings should be deadened rather than quickened.<sup>62</sup>

Roebuck's stance reflected the deeper structure of English life, because

in truth, the English character, and the English social circumstances, make it so seldom possible to derive happiness from the exercise of the sympathies, that it is not wonderful if they count for little in an Englishman's scheme of life.<sup>63</sup>

As opposed to those in other countries, particularly in France, for whom the sympathies are of paramount importance for individual happiness, many Englishmen 'almost seem to regard them as necessary evils, required for keeping men's actions benevolent and compassionate'.<sup>64</sup> That is, the English (and here Mill sees Bentham as the paradigmatic Englishman), might think the sympathies are important in so far as they support the performance of duty. Beyond that, they are often more trouble than they are worth.

The English inability to experience pleasure through sympathetic connection with others depends on three different sources. The first, which comes to light particularly in Mill's discussion of his father's aversion to the expression of feeling, is what might be loosely called English stoicism. James Mill 'resembled most Englishmen in being ashamed of the signs of feeling, and by the absence of demonstration, starving the feelings themselves'.<sup>65</sup> The dominant ethos is a form of self-command. As such, expressions of feeling can be seen as extravagant, and, to gender it, as womanly. To sympathize or feel with others and to express it would be more an occasion of pain than of pleasure, because the feelings are taken by both parties to be embarrassments. They are signs of a lack of seriousness and of an unseemly susceptibility to changes in environment.

In the 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews', Mill identifies the other two sources. While speaking of why the British take art less seriously than those on the Continent (particularly those in France and Germany), he argues that the British failure to count the arts among the 'great social powers' and the 'agents of civilization' 'may be traced to the two influences which have chiefly shaped the British character since the days of the Stuarts; commercial money-getting business, and religious Puritanism'.<sup>66</sup>

Puritanism 'looked coldly, if not disapprovingly, on the cultivation of the sentiments'. This Puritanism, which Mill in other places identifies as a form

<sup>62</sup>Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. I, p. 157.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. I, p. 153.

<sup>66</sup>Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXI, p. 253.

of Calvinism, interprets emotion as generally tied to corporeality and to sin. Matthew Arnold was among those Victorians who joined Mill in accusing Puritanism of stunting human development.<sup>67</sup>

The most important cause, for our purposes, of the English inability to experience pleasure in the sympathies is commercial society. Here, there is not a general attack on the affections, as there is in English stoicism and Puritanism. Rather, money-getting tends to incorporate all other pursuits, making them instrumental to the end of increasing wealth. This commercialism has the dual effect of promoting the English sensitivity to violations of duty (i.e. conscience: 'the kind of advantage which we have had over many other countries in point of morals'),<sup>68</sup> while leaving nothing to oppose self-interested behaviour. We find in the 'Inaugural Address' the negative impact this can have on character:

One of the commonest types of character among us is that of a man all whose ambition is self-regarding; who has no higher purpose in life than to enrich or raise in the world himself and his family; who never dreams of making the good of his fellow-creatures or of his country an habitual object, further than giving away, annually or from time to time, certain sums in charity; but who has a conscience sincerely alive to whatever is generally considered wrong, and would scruple to use any very illegitimate means for attaining his self-interested objects.<sup>69</sup>

This character type emphasizes the Englishman as commercial man, as pursuing self-interested objects (including those of family) but in ways that do not disturb social stability. He is a respecter of rules, and since robust feelings often lead to the transgression of those rules and the disruption of expectation, feelings are devalued.

<sup>67</sup>Arnold makes the point in his own idiom:

all which, in what follows, is said about Hebraism and Hellenism, has for its main result to show how our Puritans, ancient and modern, have not enough added to their care for walking staunchly by the best light they have, a care that that light be not darkness; how they have developed one side of their humanity at the expense of all others, and have become incomplete and mutilated men in consequence.

*(Culture and Anarchy, 11)*

This sense that the Puritan ethos was somehow immoderate and led to one-sided development seems to have been a common theme in nineteenth-century Britain. It was also part and parcel of the effort of a growing few to disentangle ethics from theology through the elaboration of a naturalized ideal of human life and virtue.

The intellectual roots of 'internal culture', however, certainly depend upon the Christian emphasis on the inner life over the inauthentic and often immoral compromises forced upon us by social life. For the eighteenth-century rejection of the outward manners of 'fashionable London' by Christians, see Michael Curtin, 'A Question of Manners: Status and Gender in Etiquette and Courtesy', *Journal of Modern History* 57 (September 1985) 395–423.

<sup>68</sup>Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXI, p. 253.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*

How, then, does one address that impoverishment of the 'internal' indicated by a lack of sympathetic feelings and pleasures? How does one generate enough interest in or concern for the other to promote pleasure in sympathy? In other words, what would this part of internal culture look like? Mill turns primarily to the cultivated imagination as embodied in art and history. We can begin to understand what this might mean by looking at what Mill has to say about how the 'exclusive cultivation' of 'habits of analysis and abstraction',

while it strengthens the associations which connect means with ends, effects with causes, tends to weaken many of those upon which our enjoyments and our social feelings depend; and by accustoming the mind to consider, in objects, chiefly the properties on account of which we refer them to classes and give them general names, leaves our conceptions of them as individuals, lame and meagre: how, therefore, the corrective and antagonist principle to the pursuits which deal with objects only in the abstract, is to be sought in those which deal with them altogether in the concrete, clothed in properties and circumstances: real life in its most varied forms, poetry and art in all their branches.<sup>70</sup>

This passage shows that one of the most important ways in which the social feelings are supported (and in which the 'dissolving force of analysis'<sup>71</sup> that prompted Mill's crisis is combated) is through being able to see objects and people 'in the concrete' rather than as types or as one in a series of causes and effects (a point of view promoted by industrialism). Doing this depends on the imagination.

The pleasures of sympathy require an activity of the imagination that is different from that responsible for aesthetic pleasures, but one which Mill still consistently describes as 'aesthetic' or 'poetic'. It might best be called 'concretization' or the taking up of various aspects of a thing not present and tying them together into an image of a convincing, real unity, which can more thoroughly act upon our feelings and motivations. This is one of the main functions of the imagination, 'which Bentham had not'.<sup>72</sup> The imagination

enables us, by a voluntary effort, to conceive the absent as if it were present, the imaginary as if it were real, and to clothe it in the feelings which, if it were indeed real, it would bring along with it. This is the power by which one human being enters into the mind and circumstances of another.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup>Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. X, p. 39.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>72</sup>Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. X, p. 92.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.



It is what constitutes the poet, dramatist and historian: through successful employment of the force of their imaginations, they are able to make something or someone real or particular enough to engage the sympathies.

We can better understand how one cultivates the 'concretizing' imagination necessary for promoting sympathy in an industrializing world by looking at Mill's discussion of history, drama and poetry. His review 'Carlyle's French Revolution' (1837), begins by proclaiming about Carlyle's work that 'This is not so much a history, as an epic poem; and notwithstanding, or even in consequence of this, the truest of histories. It is the history of the French Revolution, and the poetry of it, both in one'.<sup>74</sup> Mill contrasts the poetry of Carlyle's history with the psychological flatness of some of Britain's greatest eighteenth-century historians (and one must wonder whether his father's *History of British India* might also fall under the scope of this criticism):

If there be a person who, in reading the histories of Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon (works of extraordinary talent, and the works of great writers) has never felt that this, after all, is not history – and that the lives and deeds of his fellow-creatures must be placed before him in quite another manner, if he is to know them, or feel them to be real beings, who once were alive, beings of his own flesh and blood, not mere shadows and dim abstractions; such a person, for whom plausible talk about a thing does as well as an image of the thing itself, feels no need of a book like Mr. Carlyle's.<sup>75</sup>

Mill goes on to note how the want for something beyond 'shadows and dim abstractions' is 'generally felt', and how this can be seen from the popularity of historical plays and romances. One can be responsive to 'authentic facts' while still creating a history with blood coursing through it.

Mill further sharpens his distinction between poetic and non-poetic histories by comparing Carlyle's history with the work of dramatists such as Schiller and Vitet. But he leaves his most illuminating comparison for Shakespeare:

It has been noted as a point which distinguishes Shakespeare from ordinary dramatists, that their characters are logical abstractions, his are human beings: that their kings are nothing but kings, their lovers nothing but lovers, their patriots, courtiers, villains, cowards, bullies, are each of them that, and that alone; while his are real men and women, who have these qualities, but have them in addition to their full share of all other qualities (not incompatible), which are incident to human nature. In Shakespeare, consequently, we feel we are in a world of realities; we are among such beings as really could exist, as do exist, or have existed, and as we can sympathise with; the faces around us are human faces, and not mere rudiments of such, or exaggerations of single

<sup>74</sup>Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. XX, p. 133.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 134.

features. This quality, so often pointed out as distinctive of Shakespeare's plays, distinguishes Mr. Carlyle's history.<sup>76</sup>

The ordinary dramatist (and historian) fails to make his characters more than marginally sympathetic, because the characters are nothing more than one role (e.g. king, villain, courtier), rather than a person with complex motivations and complex conflicts among roles. If the character acts in a way not included within our understanding of that one role, the action loses an intelligible relation to the actor. Shakespeare's Prince Hal, by contrast, is not merely the embodiment of the audience's stereotype of a prince. He is a son, a friend, a ne'er-do-well. As such, his humanity and his interiority, including the exercise of his judgement and the process of his making choices, become more and more apparent to us. We are able to understand his conduct through a lens as more than a simple archetype of a prince. The flatness of a mere prince is replaced by the fullness of a person.

For the historian, then, enabling the reader to 'picture to himself what human life was' in any particular historical period is the most basic requirement for engaging the reader's sympathies. By giving a sense for the joys, sorrows, hopes, fears, ideas and opinions of a people (including not merely the nobility, but the commoners), one comes to understand the reasons why individuals or groups acted as they did. In so doing, we are better situated to sympathize potentially with the actors and 'to erect ourselves into judges' of conduct.<sup>77</sup> A more 'objective,' fact-based historical approach, including political and military histories, becomes, under this view, less fundamental than various forms of cultural history.

Thus, we see that sympathetic pleasures, and the feeling of unity with others that depends upon these pleasures, itself depends on a particular kind of imaginative capability – a capability that turns people from mere types into concrete individuals with whom we may more readily share affective bonds. This is an imaginative disposition that history and art, which are among the 'great social powers' and 'agents of civilization', serve to cultivate. It is also a disposition that industrialism, according to Mill and other thinkers of the period, deadens. People become means for realizing ends, or cogs in institutional machines, rather than beings in themselves worthy of attention. The conflict of the internal versus the external has one of its decisive engagements in the realm of the sympathies. Whether the internal succumbs or emerges victorious depends in part on how the skirmish between the poetic and the industrial turns out. Mill took the deadening of sympathies in England to be a sign of the undesirable dominance of the latter over the former.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., Vol. XX, pp. 134–5, italics added.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

## IV. CONCLUSION

It has often been noticed, especially in discussions concerning *On Liberty*, that Mill places great emphasis on moral education and self-cultivation. It has been rarely made clear in specific terms, however, to what Mill's commitment to education amounts. How should we understand his position?

Too often, commentators have interpreted and evaluated Mill's ethical views without reference to the context in which Mill formulated those views. In such cases, we are left to speculate blindly what Mill means when he celebrates something as potentially amorphous as 'internal culture'. This and other notions such as self-cultivation in his ethical theory are solutions to problems that are no longer visible to us. In order properly to understand Mill as offering a solution, we must make the effort to understand the problems as they presented themselves to him.

The heightened attention to the dichotomy of internal/external in early to mid-nineteenth-century Britain reflected numerous concerns. As I have shown, critics of utilitarians emphasized the importance of representing inner life with a complex palette of motives and of recognizing how human happiness often depends more on factors essential to the self (e.g. dispositions of imagination and feeling) than on those that are contingently related to it (e.g. the quality of the legal system). They also argued for the centrality of character and feelings (e.g. aesthetic and sympathetic) to ethical theory.

Mill's reform of utilitarian ethics indicates his awareness of Bentham's shortcomings as an ethicist and of the legitimacy of the critics' anxieties about the impact of accelerating social, political and economic changes on the psyche. He is engaged in articulating a vision for how human development should go, along with making scientific claims about the conditions for the possibility of this development – claims detailed in his more sociological works, such as *Subjection of Women* and *Principles of Political Economy*.

Mill's views on internal culture reveal some of the most important ways in which he conceptualized human interiority, both as it is and as he thought it should be. My hope is that this paper furthers our appreciation of the specific connections between this conceptualization and the intellectual pressures exerted by critics of the period.

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