

**John Stuart Mill's Projected Science of Society: 1827-1848**

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Doctor of Philosophy**

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I, Yuichiro Kawana, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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## Abstract

The purpose of the thesis is to examine John Stuart Mill's political thought from about 1827 to 1848 as an exercise in intellectual history. It focuses, first, on Mill's view, formulated by the late 1830s, that contemporary society was 'civilized', and second, on his project of a science of society, which he aspired to develop in the late 1830s and early 1840s.

By the late 1830s, Mill came to the view that his contemporary society was a 'commercial society or civilization', dominated by the middle, commercial class. The first part of my thesis, constituted by Chapters 2-4, discusses the way in which Mill formed his notion of civilization, and what he meant by the term 'civilization'. Mill paid attention to the implications of the rise of the middle class, and regarded such phenomena of contemporary society as the corruption of the commercial spirit and excessive social conformity as an inevitable consequence of the rise of the middle class.

The second part of the thesis, constituted by Chapters 5-9, examines Mill's projected science of society. In the late 1830s and early 1840s, Mill attempted to develop a new science of society whose subject-matter was the nature and prospects of commercial, civilized society. This aspiration culminated in *A System of Logic*, published in 1843. In examining Mill's projected science, I pay particular attention to the fact that he conceived new sciences of history and of the formation of character, both of which were indispensable in his project, although he failed to give a complete account of these sciences. My thesis shows that the implications of his interest both in history and in the formation of character are more significant than Mill scholars have assumed.

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## List of Abbreviations

- Address*: John Stuart Mill, *Inaugural Address delivered to the University of St. Andrews* (1867), repr. in CW, xxi, 219-57.
- ‘America’: John Stuart Mill, ‘State of Society in America’ (1836), repr. in CW, xviii, 91-115.
- Bowring: *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, 11 vols., published under the superintendence of his executor John Bowring (Edinburgh, 1838-43). [followed by volume and pages.]
- CRG*: John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), repr. in CW, xix, 371-577.
- CW*: *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 33 vols., ed. F. E. L. Priestley and J. M. Robson (Toronto and London, 1963-1991). [followed by volume and pages.]
- ‘Definition’: John Stuart Mill, ‘Definition of Political Economy; and on the Method of Philosophical Investigation in that Science’ (1836), repr. in CW, iv, 309-39.
- ‘Guizot on History’: John Stuart Mill, ‘Guizot’s Essays and Lectures on History’ (1845), repr. in CW, xx, 257-94.
- Hansard*: *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates* (1803-).
- ‘Ireland [1-43]’: John Stuart Mill, ‘The Condition of Ireland [1-43]’ (1846-7), repr. in CW, xxiv, 879-1035.
- JSM*: John Stuart Mill
- Logic*: John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive: Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation* (1843), repr. in CW, vii and viii.
- PPE*: John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy: With Some of their Applications to Social Philosophy* (1848), repr. in CW, ii and iii.
- Ricardo*: *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo*, 11 vols., ed. P. Sraffa, with the collaboration of M. H. Dobb (Cambridge, 1951-73). [followed by volume and pages.]
- Stewart*: *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, 11 vols., ed. W. Hamilton (Edinburgh, 1854-60). [followed by volume and pages.]
- ‘Tocqueville [1-2]’: John Stuart Mill, ‘De Tocqueville on Democracy in America [1-2]’ (1835 and 1840), repr. in CW, xviii, 47-90, 153-204.

## Notes

For reasons of convenience, all anonymous articles and books are referred to with the names of their authors, insofar as they have been identified, without repeatedly noting that these works appeared anonymously.

For the identification of authorship of anonymous articles in the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*, I have relied on the attributions of W. E. Houghton (ed.), *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals 1824–1900*, vol. 1. (Toronto, 1966); W. H. P. Shine and H. C. Shine, *The Quarterly Review under Gifford: Identification of Contributors, 1809-1824* (Chapel Hill, 1949).

For James Mill's anonymous articles, I have relied on the attributions of A. L. Lazenby, 'James Mill: The Formation of a Scottish Emigre Writer' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Sussex, 1972); R. Fenn, *James Mill's Political Thought* (London, 1987).

The terms 'America', 'United States', and 'the United States of America' are used interchangeably, as did J. S. Mill and his contemporaries.

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Any sins of omission and commission in the research and writing of this thesis are mine alone.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1. Purpose of the Study

### i

This thesis aims to examine John Stuart Mill's intellectual activity from about 1827 to 1848, namely between his recovery from his so-called 'Mental Crisis' and the publication of *Principles of Political Economy*. In his *Autobiography*, Mill said that there were three main periods in his mental progress; first, from his earliest memories (about 1809 when he began to learn Greek) to what he called 'A Crisis in My Mental History' in 1826-7;<sup>1</sup> second, from his Mental Crisis to about 1840; and third, from 1840 to early in 1870 when he last worked on the *Autobiography*. Each of these periods has importance in its own right. However, as the literature on Mill has tended to emphasize his place in the history of ideas and the significance of his insights for the present time, the main interest of scholars has been in Mill's later works, such as *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), *Utilitarianism* (1861), *The Subjection of Women* (1869), and of course *On Liberty* (1859), written in the third phase. Recent so-called 'revisionist' interpretations of Mill – the works of Alan Ryan, C. L. Ten, John Gray, and Fred Berger, to name but a few – have insisted that Mill's writings contained a body of doctrine which was, though subtle and complex, not internally inconsistent, criticizing the 'traditional' view of Mill as an incoherent thinker.<sup>2</sup> They aim to reconstruct Mill's thought in its most satisfactory form. In spite of their achievements as exercises in philosophy, their reconstructions have been achieved at the expense of giving consideration to what Mill really intended in the particular historical context in which his ideas were developed. Subsequently, these studies have often attributed to Mill views that he did not hold.

As an exercise in intellectual history, this thesis focuses, first, on Mill's idea of contemporary society as civilized, which had been formulated by the late 1830s, and

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase is the title of Chapter V of his *Autobiography*. As John Robson points out, Mill himself never used the phrase 'Mental Crisis' to refer to his depression in 1826-7. (Robson (1968) 21-49.)

<sup>2</sup> Ryan (1970); Ten (1980); Gray (1983); Berger (1984). For the traditional approach, see Cook (1998) 36-64. For a comparison between traditional and revisionist interpretations of Mill, see Gray (1979), in which the interpretation of John Plamenatz is seen as a typical example of the traditional view. (ibid., 8.)

second, on his project of a science of society, which he aspired to develop in the late 1830s and 1840s. Besides its significance in its own right, his intellectual activity at this period is of huge importance for the further understanding of Mill's later works, for these works were the projects to which he deployed all the ideas he had developed by the mid-1840s.

## ii

Throughout his life, Mill was a utilitarian reformer who aimed to better the condition of man and society and regarded the greatest happiness of the greatest number as the only true end of morality and politics. Having said that, I do not imply that the political theory on which his activism was grounded remained unchanged. Rather, his theoretical view on man and society altered drastically. Before his 'Mental Crisis', Benthamite politics provided Mill's activism with its theoretical foundation. In this period, as he recalled in his *Autobiography*, 'The Benthamic standard of "the greatest happiness" was that which I had always been taught to apply.'<sup>3</sup> Concerning the time when he first read Bentham's *Traité de Législation*, he wrote:

When I laid down the last volume of the *Traité* [sic] I had become a different being. The "principle of utility," understood as Bentham understood it, and applied in the manner in which he applied it through these three volumes, fell exactly into its place as the keystone which held together the detached and fragmentary component parts of my knowledge and beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

From the Benthamite point of view, Mill thought that the rulers did not have any interest in promoting the happiness of people, but had a sinister interest in promoting their own happiness. They were willing to harm the people's interest in order to advance their own. Therefore, it was impossible to secure the interest of the people under any form of government but representative democracy, where there could exist an identification of interests between the rulers and the ruled. In this period, as a committed advocate of representative democracy, Mill regarded James Mill's essay on 'Government' as 'a

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<sup>3</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 67.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

masterpiece of political wisdom'.<sup>5</sup> Political doctrines that were laid down in the works of James Mill, as well as in those of Bentham, dominated his journalism before his Mental Crisis; to use John Robson's expression, his early writings were 'made of Bentham's opinions in James Mill's tones'.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, after his Mental Crisis, Mill attempted to ground his activism on an alternative view of man and society to what he viewed as a Benthamite one. At this time, he ceased to accept the doctrine of James Mill's 'Government' as 'a scientific theory', and no longer thought that representative democracy was 'an absolute principle'.<sup>7</sup> In pursuing an alternative, he came to hold what I call 'political relativism', a view that every question concerning political and social institutions was relative to time and place. In his *Autobiography* he wrote that, around 1829, he came to hold the following ideas:

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: That government is always either in the hands, or passing into the hands, of whatever is the strongest power in society, and that what this power is, does not depend on institutions, but institutions on it: That any general theory or philosophy of politics supposes a previous theory of human progress, and that this is the same thing with a philosophy of history.<sup>8</sup>

Although his view of representative democracy changed, Mill never abandoned the radical cause. He stated: 'this change in the premises of my political philosophy did not alter my practical political creed as to the requirements of my own time and country. I was as much as ever a radical and democrat, for Europe, and especially for England.'<sup>9</sup> He found no difficulty in grounding his claim for political reform on recently acquired ideas that society changed according to inevitable laws and that the suitability of the form of government depended on the condition of society.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>6</sup> Robson (1968) 7.

<sup>7</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 177.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. JSM, 'Civilization', CW, xviii, 126-7. For this argument, see Burrow (1988) 23-4.

By the time when his two massive works, *A System of Logic* (1843) and *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) were published, Mill had developed a theory of man and society, characterized by the relativism noted above. John Robson states that, ‘Mill’s mature and autonomous attitude towards moral and social phenomena was developed finally in the *Logic*, and from the time of its publication in 1843 no significant change of opinion affecting the total structure of his thoughts is to be found in his works.’<sup>11</sup> Even though the style and content of his arguments in the 1850s onwards often differed in significant ways from those in the 1830s and 1840s, the view of man and society which he had developed by the mid-1840s formed the theoretical foundation for the works written in the 1850s and 1860s, including *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government*.

Mill thought that intellectual improvement should always precede change in society. In particular, he placed emphasis on the refinement of the method of scientific reasoning. In the early 1830s, he stated:

in whatever science there are systematic differences of opinion – which is as much as to say, in all the moral or mental sciences, and in Political Economy among the rest; in whatever science there exist, among those who have attended to the subject, what are commonly called *differences of principle*, as distinguished from differences of matter-of-fact or detail, – the cause will be found to be, a difference in their conceptions of the *philosophic method* of the science.<sup>12</sup>

Mill’s view of methodology as the arena where all intellectual issues could be settled is a clue to understanding why he devoted a great deal of time and effort to his work on logic, and therefore why the *Logic* – the most important product of his longstanding interest in methodology – had a crucial place in his thought. Some scholars, John Robson and Alan Ryan among others, have thought it necessary to take the *Logic* seriously in order to understand Mill’s political thought.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, no scholar has

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<sup>11</sup> Robson (1968) 117.

<sup>12</sup> JSM, ‘Definition’, CW, iv, 324. See also JSM to John Sterling, 20-22 October 1831, CW, xii, 78-9, in which he stated: ‘If there is any science which I am capable of promoting, I think it is the science of science itself, the science of investigation – of method.’

<sup>13</sup> Robson (1968); Ryan (1974).

attempted fully to examine the *Logic* in light of his projected science of society. The aim of this thesis is, therefore, to interpret Mill in light of his project.

Alan Ryan states that Mill's *Logic* was 'a reformer's book'.<sup>14</sup> The *Logic* had a practical bias in that Mill intended it to rebut intuitionist philosophy, which, in his view, claimed that there were certain truths known by the mind whose source was not experience, and which he attributed to Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Whewell among others.<sup>15</sup> He saw that this philosophy led inevitably to conservatism in the political, social, and moral spheres, for it assumed that whatever existed must be true. Rebutting intuitionist philosophy was, therefore, to undermine the philosophical ground for anti-reform arguments. He was convinced that, in the *Logic*, he had achieved his intended aims, both theoretical and practical. In other words, he thought that he had resolved certain methodological problems, and then had rebutted intuitionism as the philosophical foundation of political conservatism.

Prior to the *Logic*, in 'Coleridge' (1840), Mill contrasted the methods of the Benthamites and Coleridgians. He saw the Benthamites as the followers of the rationalist and deductive method of eighteenth-century empiricism, while Coleridgian arguments constituted 'the reaction of the nineteenth century' against it.<sup>16</sup> He identified the common error of the eighteenth-century empiricists as 'mistaking the state of things with which they had always been familiar, for the universal and natural condition of mankind'.<sup>17</sup> In his view, as a follower of eighteenth-century thinkers, Bentham too was guilty of this error. According to Mill, Bentham neglected to gaze beyond his own mind to see how men actually were, and had knowledge only of his own mind which was too narrow to be relied on for generalization. Consequently, though 'the great reformer of the moral and political branch of [philosophy]',<sup>18</sup> Bentham developed an insufficient

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<sup>14</sup> Ryan (1974) 85.

<sup>15</sup> See JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 231-3. For the practical bias which Mill's argument always had, see Robson (1968) ix.

<sup>16</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 169.

<sup>17</sup> JSM, 'Coleridge', CW, x, 132. Mill saw James Mill as 'the last of the eighteenth century'. (JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 213.)

<sup>18</sup> JSM, 'Bentham', CW, x, 86.

‘philosophy of universal human nature’,<sup>19</sup> and thereby his moral, political, and social theory, which was based on this philosophy, was characterized by ‘one-sidedness’.<sup>20</sup> Mill concluded that the deductive approach which Bentham employed could accomplish nothing in politics and morals, as it did not take into account diversities in national character.

Mill thought that an alternative to the eighteenth-century empiricist approach was provided by Coleridge and his followers, a group that Mill called ‘the Germano-Coleridgian school’.<sup>21</sup> In Mill’s view, the nineteenth-century approach to the study of man and society was inductive, while the eighteenth-century approach was deductive. To Mill’s mind, Coleridgians were the first to inquire into the inductive laws governing human society. They examined human behaviour in the varying contexts of time and place, and did not see the condition of society they knew as universal. Subsequently, they succeeded in developing a theory of man and society richer than that provided by eighteenth-century thinkers. Mill thought that, though the purely inductive approach was inappropriate, inductive insights should be incorporated into the deductive study of man and society. In other words, he aspired to combine Benthamite deductive and Coleridgian inductive approaches, which resulted in the complex and subtle formulation of the methodology of moral sciences in the *Logic*. His aspiration to combine the Benthamite and Coleridgian standpoints explains his desire to create sciences of history and of the formation of character as integral parts of his system of social science.

#### iv

The concept of civilization had a crucial place in Mill’s thought, especially in the 1830s and 1840s. In his article ‘State of Society in America’ (1836), Mill regarded England (not Britain), France, Germany, and America as civilized. Each of these four nations showed, ‘either in its social condition, in its national character, or in both, some points of indisputable and pre-eminent superiority over all the others’, as well as ‘some

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 109

<sup>20</sup> JSM, ‘Coleridge’, CW, x, 112.

<sup>21</sup> JSM, ‘Coleridge’, CW, x, 138.

deep-seated and grievous defects'.<sup>22</sup> Hence, these nations occupied a great deal of his interest. Among them, his enthusiasm for France and French thought is well known, and his attitude towards France has been given serious attention by previous scholars.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, his view of America as a civilized society remains relatively unexplored, despite the growing interest in Mill's concept of civilization. Even where scholars show an interest in Mill's views on the American experience, they discuss them in light of his attitude towards Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which he highly praised. In so doing, their focus tends to be on such abstract political ideas as the tyranny of the majority and political participation, rather than on Mill's views on America itself. Mill's views on America are worth examining in relation to his concept of civilization. As D. P. Crook points out, the American experience was frequently referred to in Britain in the Age of Reform.<sup>24</sup> Hence, it seems appropriate to look at Mill's interest in America in the context of the contemporary English political and social climate, as well as at Mill's attitude towards Tocqueville.<sup>25</sup>

In examining Mill's notion of civilization, I pay attention to the fact that he often referred with disapproval to the social condition and national character of England and the United States (particularly their commercial spirit).<sup>26</sup> Having said that, this does not mean that Mill thought that England and America were less civilized than such nations as France and Germany. Rather, he found more of the characteristics of civilization in England and America. This is a crucial point as it clarifies that he thought that the

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<sup>22</sup> JSM, 'America', CW, xviii, 94.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Mueller (1956); Pappé (1964); Filipiuk (1991); Varouxakis (2002b).

<sup>24</sup> Crook (1965).

<sup>25</sup> My attention to Mill's view of America does not imply that the French experience did not have any impact on the development of his political thought. My argument is interested to complement the interpretations that have emphasized Mill's connection with France.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, JSM to Gustav d'Eichthal, 15 May 1829, CW, xii, 31-2; JSM, 'The Spirit of the Age [1-6]' (1831), CW, xxii, 227-34, 246-7, 258-9, 289-95, 312-16; JMS and Joseph Blanco White, 'Guizot's Lectures on European Civilization' (1836), CW, xx, 367-93; JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 906. Moreover, Mill even expressed the view that Britain was in rapid decline in comparison with France. For this, see JSM to Alexis de Tocqueville, 30 December 1840, CW, xiii, 457-9; JSM to Auguste Comte, 26 March 1846, CW, xiii, 696-7. [Haac (1995) 364-5.]; JSM, 'Prospects of France [1-7]' (1830-1), CW, xxii, 128-40, 142-6, 149-63, 184-9, 295-301.

process of civilization entailed vices. Therefore, what he pursued was ‘strengthening the weak side of Civilization by the support of a higher Cultivation’.<sup>27</sup> He was convinced that his projected science of society would make it possible to improve the condition of civilized society.

v

Some Victorian social theorists conceived the science of society as aiming to discover the ‘natural laws’ which governed the historical development of society, and on which all political activities more or less depended. They emphasized not the political, but the social, and this priority of the social over the political came to be closely bound up with two features: first, historicism, in other words, a belief in the existence of a pattern of historical development which could be understood in terms of ‘law’; second, a commitment to the methods of natural science as the model for the study of human behaviour.<sup>28</sup> ‘On this view’, according to Stefan Collini, ‘the relevant primary category was not moral philosophy but something increasingly referred to as “sociology”’.<sup>29</sup> Mill’s projected science of society had characteristics of this Victorian social theory in important ways. In the *Logic*, Mill outlined a system of social science, which consisted of a ‘General Science of Society’ (Social Statics and Social Dynamics) and ‘Special Sociological Enquiries’ (political economy and political ethology). The systematic character of his project of a science of society becomes clear when examined in the context of his framework for social theorizing put forward in the *Logic*.

My analysis of Mill’s projected science of society pays special attention to his interest in the science of history and that of the formation of character. His interest in, and aspiration to develop, both these sciences have been paid relatively little attention by scholars, particularly by political theorists, who put much weight on such works as *On Liberty*, *Considerations on Representative Government*, and *Utilitarianism*. Mill’s hope for fully developing the science of history, whose objective was to discover the laws of social change, culminated in the mid-1840s. Even though Mill never published

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<sup>27</sup> JSM, ‘Civilization’ (1836), CW, xviii, 143.

<sup>28</sup> Mandelbaum (1971) 42. See also Collini (1980) 204.

<sup>29</sup> Collini (1980) 204.

any book whose exclusive subject-matter was history, in the mid-1840s he wrote a number of articles on history in the form of review articles on the works of French historians. When his formulation of a system of moral science, which he presented in Book VI of the *Logic*, is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that his notion of history occupied a more significant place in his thought than scholars assume. As far as Mill's interest in the formation of character is concerned, in contrast to the scholarly consensus that Mill's ethology does not need to be given serious attention because he failed to fully develop it, I give great importance to it in examining his political thought. In Mill scholarship, an underestimation of the significance of his aspiration to develop ethology often produces a misunderstanding of Mill's argument.

## **2. Structure of the Thesis**

In the mid-1830s, Mill came to hold a view that contemporary society was a 'commercial society' or a 'commercial civilization', dominated by the middle, commercial class. The first part of the thesis, comprising Chapters 2-4, discusses, first, the intellectual context in which Mill formed his notion of 'civilization', and second, his notion of civilization itself. The second part, comprising Chapters 5-9, examines Mill's projected science of society. In the late 1830s and early 1840s, he conceived a new system of the science of society for the purpose of inquiring into the nature and prospects of commercial or civilized society. This aspiration culminated in Book VI of the *Logic*, entitled 'On the Logic of the Moral Sciences'.

Chapter 2 deals with two formulations of the science of politics at the turn of the nineteenth century, both of which were similar to Mill's argument in some important respects. The first was that put forward by Dugald Stewart. In the first part of this chapter, I examine Stewart's view of commercial society. He thought that commercial society was distinct from any other society, in that it had achieved the wide diffusion of wealth and knowledge in society. He insisted that the new commercial society should be studied by a new science of society different from traditional politics. Political economy explained the strength of commercial society, and thereby gave scientific grounds to his belief in its superiority. In Stewart's system of politics, therefore, political economy occupied a crucial place.

In the second part of the chapter, I examine Saint Simon's science of social

organization in the form of the philosophy of history, which attracted Mill. Saint Simon downgraded the form of government in the study of politics, claiming that it was necessary to examine the internal function and structure of the social body as a whole. Hence, in Saint Simon's view, the state of society gained recognition as the subject-matter of scientific inquiry. Moreover, he was convinced that the science of social organization had a therapeutic function in promoting social stability.

Chapter 3 deals with Mill's views on America, which have vital significance for the understanding of his notion of civilization. The publication of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* in 1835 led Mill to pay attention to American society. Apart from the immediate circumstances that encouraged Mill to pay attention to America, it should be noted that America was a topic that many intellectuals and politicians at the time frequently referred to while discussing domestic issues, especially parliamentary reform. Hence, Mill's views on America should be interpreted in the context of this intellectual climate, as well as in terms of his relationship with Tocqueville, whose argument was crucial to the formation of his views of America.

Chapter 4 examines Mill's notion of civilization in the late 1830s. He often mentioned that he had been influenced by French thinkers, such as Tocqueville and Guizot; various pieces of evidence support this claim. However, the view that contemporary society was a commercial civilization with a dominant commercial class was shared by most of Mill's predecessors and contemporaries, including James Mill. Therefore, in the first part of this chapter, I point out the similarities between James Mill's notions of the middle class and of civilization and those of J. S. Mill.

In the late 1830s, Mill came to see contemporary society as a commercial civilization led by the commercial middle class, and attained a perspective from which he understood various phenomena in contemporary society. As the second part of the chapter shows, he sought to give a systematic and comprehensive explanation of the tendencies of civilized society, such as the corruption of the commercial spirit and the so-called 'tyranny of the majority', and to propose practicable solutions for them, such as the creation of social antagonism in order to counterbalance the dominant middle class.

In Chapter 5, I inquire into Mill's vision of social science, with reference to *A System of Logic*. The *Logic* has, from its publication, been an important subject of

research from a philosophical perspective. However, it is not my intention to point out whether his argument is philosophically convincing; my purpose is to explain what Mill himself meant and intended. Mill stated that every study of social phenomena should be grounded on psychology as the science of human nature. In other words, all the social sciences had to be deduced from the laws of psychology. In the *Logic*, he gave a detailed explanation of what kinds of deductive methods were to be applied to the study of social phenomena, pointing out why inductive methods of any kind were not feasible in such a study.

In Mill's projected science of society, history had a more crucial role than scholars have assumed. Hence, Chapter 6 is devoted to a discussion of Mill's interest in historical knowledge and his aspiration to form a science of history whose objective was to discover the laws of social change. Even though he never published any works exclusively devoted to history, he wrote several historical essays in the form of review articles, especially in the mid-1840s. Without giving serious consideration to his views on history formed at this period, it is impossible to understand properly his thought, not only in the 1840s, but also from the 1850s onwards when many important works, including *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government*, were written.

Chapters 7 and 8 are devoted to political ethology and political economy respectively, both of which constituted what Mill called 'Special Sociological Enquiries'. The subject-matter of Chapter 7 is Mill's aspiration to form a science of the formation of character, a science which he named 'ethology'. In spite of the growing interest in Mill's notion of human cultivation in recent scholarship, the significance of ethology, on which the practice of human cultivation was based, has tended to be ignored. The aim of Chapter 7 is, therefore, to examine his project of ethology.

In the first section of the chapter, I give a brief account of two views about the formation of character – phrenology and Owenite environmentalism – which constituted Mill's main target when he was conceiving his ethology. In the second section, I examine his interest in the formation of character in the 1830s which eventually led him to conceive ethology. Next, I discuss his project of ethology as outlined in the *Logic*. This section is followed by an examination of the practical dimension of ethology.

In Chapter 8, I examine Mill's notions on the nature of political economy and his formulation of its relationship with neighbouring sciences, such as the 'General Science

of Society' and political ethology. In the first part of this chapter, I examine the controversy over the method and scope of political economy in the 1820s and early 1830s. The second part of the chapter discusses Mill's views on the method and province of political economy as a science. Following David Ricardo, he stated that political economy was a deductive science with a narrow scope. In spite of his adoption of the Ricardian definition of the science of political economy, however, he regarded his own political economy as 'a newer & better' version, distinguished in several ways from the old political economy.<sup>30</sup> In the third part of this chapter, I examine what was 'newer & better' about his version of political economy.

The Irish famine in the mid-1840s, caused by the failure of the potato crop, called Mill's attention to the agricultural and economic problems of Ireland. In Chapter 9, I examine Mill's engagement in the so-called Irish land question at this period in light of contemporary discussion on Irish national character and the Irish question. He analyzed the condition of Ireland not only from a political and economic, but also an ethological point of view. This chapter shows that both his diagnosis of the Irish distress and his proposed remedy for it were firmly grounded on the theory of man and society which he had developed by the mid-1840s.

Chapter 10 states the implications of this study for Mill scholarship. I discuss how this study of Mill's projected science of society will lead to a revised understanding of his later works, in particular *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government*.

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<sup>30</sup> JSM to Harriet Mill, 7 February [1854], CW, xiv, 152.

## Chapter 2. The Science of Society in the Early Nineteenth Century

### 1. Introduction

J. S. Mill recognized that the dominance of ‘society’ over political forms was a distinguishing characteristic of nineteenth-century political thought. He believed that his projected science of society was distinct from an earlier political theory which he criticized as insufficient because it concentrated only on the form and machinery of government and omitted the examination of ‘society’. In *A System of Logic*, at the height of his confidence in the novelty of his project, Mill criticized ‘both ... practitioners in politics and ... philosophical speculators on forms of government, from Plato to Bentham’ for their narrowness of vision. ‘Students in politics’, he stated, attempted to study the pathology and therapeutics of the social body, before they laid the necessary foundation in its physiology; to cure disease without understanding the laws of health. And the result was such as it must always be when men even of great ability attempt to deal with the complex questions of a science before its simpler and more elementary propositions have been established.<sup>1</sup>

Despite his confidence in the novelty of his project, there had been a group of thinkers who had been concerned with ‘society’, and of whom Mill was by no means ignorant. These thinkers had been associated with the Scottish Enlightenment, and included David Hume, Adam Smith, and John Millar.

With regard to the affinity between the views of the Scottish Enlightenment and those of J. S. Mill, Stefan Collini states that Mill’s understanding of the laws of social development was ‘slightly more determinist than Smith’s, and considerably more intellectualist than Millar’s’.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Mill’s standpoint was closer to that of Dugald Stewart than to that of Smith or Millar. In the first part of Chapter 1, therefore, I deal with the view of politics and history put forward by Stewart, who greatly inspired some members of the next generation of politicians and thinkers who would flourish in the first decades of the nineteenth century, including the founding members of the *Edinburgh Review* and James Mill. Stewart thought that the commercial society to

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<sup>1</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 876.

<sup>2</sup> Collini et al. (1983) 133.

which he saw himself as belonging was superior both to any preceding societies, such as the feudal and agricultural, and to other contemporary societies, such as those of the Asian nations, which, to his mind, had not yet reached the stage of commercial civilization. Political economy explained the strength of commercial society, and thereby gave scientific grounds to his belief in its superiority. In Stewart's system of politics, therefore, political economy occupied a crucial place.

In Mill's mind, the concern with 'the social' originated with post-Revolutionary French political theorists, such as Saint Simon, Auguste Comte, and François Guizot. In the second part of this chapter, I deal with Saint Simon, whose views were one of the important sources for Mill's projected science of society.<sup>3</sup> Saint Simon downgraded the form of government in the study of politics. He saw it as merely one of several causal factors that constituted the state of a certain society. Government was not the definitive cause in determining the state of society; rather, the most suitable form of government was determined according to the condition of the society in which that government was located. He claimed it was necessary to examine the internal function and structure of the social body as a whole.

As far as methodology was concerned, he held a naturalistic view that all moral and political problems could be solved by methods similar to those employed in the natural sciences, and thereby his science of social organization was expressed in physiological terms, grounded on the analogy between the social body and the human body. Having experienced the French Revolution, he was obsessed with the need to re-establish social order on a new, firm basis which would prevent the recurrence of such catastrophic turmoil. He was convinced that the science of social organization had a therapeutic function in promoting social stability. His science of social organization took the form of the philosophy of history, which Mill found attractive.

## **2. Dugald Stewart on History and Politics**

### **i**

Eighteenth-century Europe witnessed the emergence of the notion of commercial society or civilization. There was a growing awareness that, in the age of commerce, the

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<sup>3</sup> For the impact of the Saint Simonian ideas on Mill around 1830, see Mueller (1956) 48-91.

power of a nation depended more on the arts and productivity of its people than on the valour of its armed forces on the field of battle. It was often remarked that European commercial society was sharply distinguished from any other form society. The Enlightenment philosophers, especially in Scotland, conceived a new science which investigated the nature, history, and prospects of commercial society. A picture of commercial society, and the division of labour as its distinctive element, can be found in the writings of such Scottish thinkers as David Hume, Adam Smith, and John Millar. They stated that commerce was the driving force behind the progress of society, and that the division of labour created complex social relations, thereby bringing about the refinement of manners and passions and general improvement in the arts and science.

The study of society emerged as a discipline within moral philosophy particularly in the work of eighteenth-century Scottish philosophers. It was generally characterized by the following features.<sup>4</sup> First, the study of society was grounded on the study of human nature, in other words all social phenomena were interpreted in terms of the operations of the laws of human nature. Thus, the study of society was a study of man. The Enlightenment philosophers showed a huge interest in the social structure of any given people at any given point in time. For them, to inquire into a state of any remote and primitive society which was in contrast with their own society was nothing but to study human nature. Second, they regarded any social phenomenon as an ‘effect’ which had a ‘cause’ to which it corresponded; the aim then was to clarify the causal relation in question. In other words, they assumed the existence of, and subsequently aimed to discover, the ‘natural laws’ which governed the historical development of society – laws which were applicable to all societies. Third, as far as methodology was concerned, they assumed that the same methods could be used for both the natural and the moral sciences. In particular, the Newtonian method was thought to be applicable to the study of man and society. The Newtonian method, as they understood it, consisted in the formulation of general laws through experimental methods.<sup>5</sup> However, there was a crucial difference between natural science and moral or human science; the latter

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<sup>4</sup> For the following interpretation, see Skinner (1967); Rendall (1982); Berry (1997) 52-73.

<sup>5</sup> Hume insisted that, ‘As the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation.’ (Hume (2000) 4.)

inevitably made experiment difficult. Hence, by ‘experimental’, they meant the inductive method, and not the conducting of actual experiments. Moreover, the inductive method, as they conceived it, did not mean the mere collection of observable facts, but induction from observation so as to discover ‘the constant and universal principles of human nature’.<sup>6</sup>

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Dugald Stewart, who can be taken to be a representative figure of the final generation of the Scottish Enlightenment, was committed to the Enlightenment project of a study of man and society. He attempted to renovate politics by adjusting Smith’s views, his *Wealth of Nations* in particular, to the new circumstances of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period. As professor of moral philosophy, he attracted a number of men who afterwards distinguished themselves, including the founders of the *Edinburgh Review* and James Mill.

## ii

Stewart’s position on the development of society was characterized by his view that intellectual factors were decisive in social change. He stated that the diffusion of knowledge throughout society brought about a drastic change in the condition of society.<sup>7</sup> It encouraged changes of relationship between people, and thereby change in social and political institutions. Among historical events which contributed to the progress of society, such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the discovery of the New Continent, the invention of printing was particularly important.<sup>8</sup> According to Stewart, it contributed to the improvement of the condition of society in two ways: first, ‘in securing and accelerating the progress of knowledge’; and second, ‘in facilitating the diffusion and dissemination of knowledge among the lower orders’.<sup>9</sup> He paid attention to the importance of material factors, but did so from the point of view that these constituted a necessary condition for the diffusion of knowledge. He stated:

Without this auxiliary circumstance [i.e. the broad diffusion of wealth through society], the art of printing must have been a barren invention; for before men read,

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<sup>6</sup> Hume (1999) 150. See Skinner (1967) 34-5.

<sup>7</sup> Stewart, i, 487ff. See also Haakonssen (1996) 233; Collini et al. (1983) Chap. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Stewart, i, 489-91.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 503.

they must have felt the desire of knowledge, and this desire is never strong, till a certain degree of independence and of affluence is obtained.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, the improvement of society by the broad diffusion of knowledge could be achieved only in commercial society where material needs were met to a certain degree. Commercial society was distinguished from preceding societies by this fact.<sup>11</sup>

Stewart was distinguished from such Scottish thinkers as Hume, Smith, and Millar by his optimistic view of the possibility of the intellectual and moral progress of mankind, from which his strong belief in the rightness of public opinion and education as a means of forming that opinion arose.<sup>12</sup> Stewart stated, for example, that the division of labour in intellectual activities had had a huge significance in the progress and spread of knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Understanding history in terms of the progress and diffusion of knowledge, Stewart tended to depict history as the unilinear development of the intellectual ability of mankind. In addition, he expressed a strong belief in the use of legislation, grounded on acquired knowledge, to achieve desirable development, and therefore left little room for the operation of unintended consequences in the future development of society. Hence, his argument showed teleological and determinist tendencies, and gave an important role to the legislator in encouraging the progress of society.<sup>14</sup>

### iii

Stewart insisted that the new commercial society should be studied by a new science of society different from the traditional politics which focused almost exclusively on the advantages and disadvantages of forms of government. He stated that ‘little assistance is

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 509.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., ii, 242, 510-5. See also Haakonssen (1996) 232ff.

<sup>12</sup> Collini et al. (1983) 35ff. Significantly, Stewart was much inspired by French philosophers. The idea of the indefinite progress of the human mind, put forward by Condorcet, particularly attracted him. Stewart was fond of Condorcet’s *Life of Turgot* (1786), where Condorcet’s commitment to this idea was illustrated. This book came to be James Mill’s favourite book and he let his son read it. In his *Autobiography*, J. S. Mill wrote that *Life of Turgot* was ‘a book well calculated to rouse the best sort of enthusiasm’. (JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 115.) See Collini et al. (1983) 32, 39, 48, 53.

<sup>13</sup> Stewart, ix, 339.

<sup>14</sup> Collini et al. (1983) 38.

to be derived from the speculations of ancient philosophers' in analysing commercial society. This was because

the greater part of [them], in their political inquiries, confined their attention to a comparison of the different forms of government, and to an examination of the provisions they made for perpetuating their own existence, and for extending the glory of the state. It was reserved for modern times to investigate those universal principles of justice and of expediency, which ought, under every form of government, to regulate the social order; and of which the object is, to make as equitable a distribution as possible, among all the different members of a community, of the advantages arising from the political union.<sup>15</sup>

As part of moral philosophy, a new science of society had been developed by Scottish philosophers, such as Hume and Smith, in the eighteenth century. Stewart attempted to adjust Smith's argument to the new circumstances at the turn of the nineteenth century. The new science of society, as they conceived it, did not only aim to give a concrete account for each historical event, but also aimed to discover abstract principles which were not only applicable to the past, but also useful in predicting the future. Stewart wrote:

The ultimate object of philosophical inquiry is the same which every man of plain understanding proposes to himself, when he remarks the events which fall under his observation, with a view to the future regulation of his conduct. The more knowledge of this kind we acquire, the better can we accommodate our plans to the established order of things.<sup>16</sup>

Stewart's formulation of a science of society revealed his interest in the potential of political economy as the basis for the new science. In his view, theories of government and of legislation constituted political science. While the theory of government dealt with the advantages and disadvantages of each form of government, the theory of legislation was designed to inquire into 'those universal principles of justice and expediency, which ought, under every form of government, to regulate the social

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<sup>15</sup> Stewart, ix, 309-10.

<sup>16</sup> Stewart, ii, 6.

order'.<sup>17</sup> In Stewart's terminology, this theory of legislation was identified with political economy whose subject-matter was 'the happiness and improvement of Political Society'.<sup>18</sup> The theory of legislation, as conceived by Stewart, embraced jurisprudence but excluded a comparative study of the forms of government.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, Stewart wrote on the relation between theories of government and legislation. Stewart claimed that the promotion of the happiness of people in a society depended immediately on social and economic arrangements, and not political arrangements. In other words, civil liberty was more important than political liberty for the happiness of the people. Nevertheless, it seemed reasonable on the surface to deal with the theory of government prior to political economy, since the existence of government was an indispensable prerequisite for the stability of society. However, it was not theoretically appropriate. On the one hand, the study of political economy did not necessarily presuppose knowledge of forms of government, because the general principles of political economy could be applied to many nations under different forms of government. On the other hand, the theory and comparative study of forms of government presupposed a knowledge of political economy.<sup>20</sup> The fact that different European nations had reached the stage of commercial civilization under a diversity of forms of government suggested that commercial society could flourish under different political arrangements.

Stewart's prioritization of political economy over the theory of government had practical as well as theoretical dimensions. He claimed that political economy did not have a radical, but a moderate practical implication, and was not, therefore, dangerous to the existing social order. Political economy, as he conceived it, whose main objective was to achieve the expediency and rightness of laws – the improvement of legislation – was not primarily concerned with questions of the form of government and the rights and liberties of the people. Thus, political economy was separated from the democratic trends of political and social speculation which had been apparent since the French

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<sup>17</sup> Stewart (1980) 309.

<sup>18</sup> Stewart, viii, 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, viii, 9-29. Haakonssen points out the differences between systems of Smith and Stewart. (Haakonssen (1984); Haakonssen (1996) 226.)

<sup>20</sup> Stewart, viii, 21-5.

Revolution.<sup>21</sup>

Another significant point is that Stewart emphasized the importance of applying general principles to politics, and, therefore, thought that the aim of science was to discover general laws using a deductive approach. According to Stewart, philosophy could correct the narrowness of political empiricism, while history could provide no reliable theories. As a guide, knowledge of the past was inferior to ‘the sagacity of our conjectures with respect to the future’, especially in commercial society which was unlike any preceding society.<sup>22</sup> Stewart stated:

there are plainly two sets of political reasoners; one of which consider the actual institutions of mankind as the only safe foundation for our conclusions, and think every plan of legislation chimerical, which is not copied from one which has already been realized; while the other apprehend that, in many cases, we may reason safely *a priori* from the known principles of human nature combined with the particular circumstances of the times.<sup>23</sup>

He claimed that politics should employ the latter method, because it was difficult, almost impossible, either to conduct experiments in human affairs or to draw reliable causal inferences from history. Having said that, he did not ignore the role of experience in political theorizing. He insisted that political theorizing must be grounded on the observation of societies that had existed or were then in existence.

Nothing, indeed, can be more absurd than to contrast, as is commonly done, experience with theory, as if they stood in opposition to each other. Without theory ... experience is a blind and useless guide; while, on the other hand, a legitimate theory ... necessarily presupposes a knowledge of connected and well ascertained facts, more comprehensive by far than any mere empiric is likely to possess.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Collini et al. (1983) 38. As far as the theory of government was concerned, Stewart’s argument was conservative in that it advocated the current British constitution in terms of the theory of balance, grounded on the arguments of such thinkers as Montesquieu, Hume, and Blackstone. (See Collini et al. (1983) 49-50.) Stewart admitted, however, that it was under an ‘equitable constitution’ that desirable policies would be pursued. (Stewart, viii, 25.)

<sup>22</sup> Collini et al. (1983) 32-3.

<sup>23</sup> Stewart, ii, 220.

<sup>24</sup> Stewart, iii, 329.

The objective of politics thus understood was not to explain each phenomenon, but to discover general laws from an examination of phenomena. Stewart's view was that the general principles, which were independent of spatial and temporal particularities, could offer useful knowledge in terms of the future development of society.

Stewart's preference for abstract, general principles and geometrical reasoning in politics might be associated with his knowledge of mathematics. His father Matthew, professor of mathematics at the University of Edinburgh, instructed him in mathematics. In 1772 Stewart substituted for his ailing father in the mathematics class at the University. He was convinced that moral, as well as physical, science could obtain the certainty of mathematics. He stated: 'it appears that it might be possible, by devising a set of arbitrary definitions, to form a science which, although conversant about moral, political, or physical ideas, should yet be as certain as geometry.'<sup>25</sup>

Significantly, Stewart gave little importance to the role of historical study in politics. His attitude was underscored by his conviction that history was nothing but the historian's own theoretical construction.<sup>26</sup> He stated that, 'By far the greater part of what is called matter of fact in politics, is nothing else than theory; and very frequently, in this science, when we think we are opposing experience to speculation, we are only opposing one theory to another'.<sup>27</sup> Stewart's teleological view of history, reinforced by his belief in the possibility of artificial improvement in terms of legislation and education, was distinct from Smith and Millar who were more sceptical about the possibility of the improvement of mankind. Hence, Stewart simplified the four-stage theory of social development, elaborated by such thinkers as Smith and Millar, into a dichotomy of barbarous and civilized societies.<sup>28</sup>

#### iv

As a student at the University of Edinburgh, James Mill was greatly influenced by Stewart. There are several crucial affinities between the views of Stewart and James Mill. They agreed that the study of society should employ a method which involved

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<sup>25</sup> Stewart, iii, 115.

<sup>26</sup> Haakonssen (1996) 244.

<sup>27</sup> Stewart, ii, 224. See also *ibid.*, i, 191-2.

<sup>28</sup> Haakonssen (1996) 253.

deduction from the laws of human nature. They also agreed that intellectual or moral factors played a decisive role in the development of society. As will be seen below, these ideas similarly characterized J. S. Mill's projected science of society.<sup>29</sup> James Mill followed Stewart in downplaying historical knowledge in politics. In his essay on 'Government', he developed an argument on parliamentary reform without any reference to history, which was reminiscent of Stewart's view that historical knowledge was of little importance in politics and it was even mischievous to depend on it.<sup>30</sup> In addition, James Mill followed Stewart in his dichotomy of barbarous and civilized societies. It is well-known that James Mill intended his *History of British India* (1817) to be a continuation of the works of the Scottish philosophical historians, particularly John Millar.<sup>31</sup> James Mill certainly employed the language of Scottish philosophical history, but it is doubtful that his practice of it was, as Duncan Forbes argues, a straightforward adoption of the Scottish tradition in which he had been educated.<sup>32</sup> J. H. Burns argues:

The faults [of *History of British India*] are rather those of an imperfectly realized conception of philosophical history in which the object is indeed to relate social phenomena to 'the law of human nature,' but in which it is recognized that such phenomena, and the development of society, can be understood only by way of 'a joint view of all the great circumstances taken together.'<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> J. S. Mill's acquaintance with Stewart's views was due to some extent to James Mill's instruction. As early as the early 1820s, J. S. Mill read Stewart's work, including *Elements of the Philosophy of Human Mind*. In his *Autobiography*, Mill wrote that he had read Stewart's works several times by the early 1830s. (JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 71, 188-9.) In addition, in 'Definition of Political Economy', he referred with approval to Stewart as a philosopher who properly claimed that 'the first principles of all sciences belong to the philosophy of the human mind'. (JSM, 'Definition', CW, iv, 311.) See also Mill's later favourable comment on Stewart in his *Inaugural Address delivered to the University of St. Andrews*. (JSM, *Address*, CW, xxi, 240.)

<sup>30</sup> See Stewart, i, 191-2.

<sup>31</sup> For James Mill's intention, see James Mill (1817: *India*) i, 431-2.

<sup>32</sup> Forbes (1951) 23-4. John Burrow follows Forbes by stating that 'Mill's book [i.e. *History of British India*] is not only the last, it is also the most elaborate and detailed example of Scottish philosophic history'. (Burrow (1966) 48.)

<sup>33</sup> Burns (1976) 19.

More recently, Knud Haakonssen and Jennifer Pitts have emphasized the gulf which separated much Scottish philosophical history and the more simplistic theory of progress put forward by James Mill.<sup>34</sup> Haakonssen argues that what made ‘[James] Mill’s *History of British India* such an arid rationalist exercise when compared with, for example, the works of Smith and Millar’ were first, his inattentiveness to unintended consequences, and second, his tendency to attribute all change to the intervention of individuals and subsequently the lack of any ‘theoretical conception of social and institutional change’.<sup>35</sup> In a similar vein, Pitts argues that James Mill, unlike the Scottish historians who preceded him, failed to pay sufficient attention to the differences between non-European nations, and saw them all as essentially ‘rude’ or ‘barbarous’.<sup>36</sup> Pitts goes on to remark: ‘To a great extent ... [J. S. Mill] shared his father’s judgements of Indian society, about the usefulness of making a dichotomous distinction between civilized and barbarous peoples, and about the proper relationship between India and its British rulers.’<sup>37</sup> Though her argument is suggestive, she does not discuss who influenced James Mill as far as this dichotomous distinction was concerned. James Mill’s argument was novel in comparison with Smith and Millar, but the distinction he employed was common among the contributors to the *Edinburgh Review* in its pioneer years. Crucially, most of them, including James Mill, had been taught by Stewart.<sup>38</sup>

It is the concept of progress, grounded on this distinction between barbarous and civilized, that characterized both James Mill’s and J. S. Mill’s outlooks,<sup>39</sup> and, therefore, in this regard, William Thomas’ claim that ‘[James Mill] adapts utilitarian ideas to support an argument that is insular, morally intolerant, and implicitly authoritarian’ is misconceived.<sup>40</sup> It is not utilitarianism but his idea of progress, which seems to be associated more with Stewart’s dichotomy between barbarous and civilized

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<sup>34</sup> Haakonssen (1996) 294-309; Pitts (2005).

<sup>35</sup> Haakonssen (1996) 631.

<sup>36</sup> Pitts (2005) 131.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. Jeffrey (1818: Hall) 475; Jeffrey (1827: Baber) 44. See also Demata (2002).

<sup>39</sup> See Pitts (2005) 123-62.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas (1979) 101.

societies than Scottish philosophical history as represented by Smith and Millar, that led to James Mill's authoritarian view on barbarous nations, particularly India.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. Saint Simon and the Origin of Social Science

#### i

Saint Simon attempted to create a new science of society, 'the science of social organization' as he called it. His science of society, according to Robert Wokler, was an attempt to combine, in physiological terms, the insight of four thinkers, namely the anatomy of Félix Vicq d'Azyr, the physiology of Marie François Xavier Bichat, the psychology of Pierre Jean George Cabanis, and the philosophy of history of Condorcet.<sup>42</sup> On the basis of the physiology of the human body, Saint Simon conceived the positive science of social organization, a science which aimed to inquire into the internal function and structure of the social body. To his mind, there was a close and necessary connection between every aspect of social existence, such as the moral, intellectual, religious, legal, economic, and political. A crucial change in one aspect brought about inevitable, corresponding changes in the others. In the social body, political form was merely one factor among several in determining social condition. This belief led him to question the possibility of a political solution to social disorder. He insisted that existing theories of politics should be replaced by the study of social organization which examined a number of factors. The fundamental factor in determining the state of society was an ideological one. If there was ideological uniformity, society could be stabilized; if not, it became unstable. In light of history, society developed through a progressive spiral of stable epochs alternating with unstable ones.

Saint Simon stated that humanity as a collective entity had grown from generation to generation, according to invariable laws, including the 'law of the perfectibility of the human species'.<sup>43</sup> Society progressed from the stage of savagery towards that of perfection. In this progress, society had passed through two alternative modes of social

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<sup>41</sup> For James Mill's authoritarian view on India, see Collini et al. (1983) 114-8.

<sup>42</sup> Wokler (1987) 332-3; Wokler (2006) 704-9.

<sup>43</sup> Saint Simon (1958) 32-33.

existence, which he named the ‘organic and critical epochs’. The organic epoch was characterized by ‘unity and harmony in all spheres of human activity’. Power was possessed by ‘the truly superior’.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, the critical epoch was distinguished by ‘anarchy, confusion, and disorder in all directions’.<sup>45</sup> In this epoch, faith in the dogma which was the source of order in the preceding organic epoch was lost; the legitimacy of all power was doubted.<sup>46</sup> Even though he preferred the organic epoch, Saint Simon believed that neither could be avoided; in order to enter the next organic epoch, society had to pass through a critical epoch.

In European history, the first organic epoch was that of Ancient polytheism, lasting until Socrates appeared in Greece and Augustus in Rome. This epoch was followed by the first critical epoch in which classical philosophers undermined polytheism. The second organic epoch was from the preaching of the Gospels to the Reformation. After the Reformation, European society had entered the second critical epoch. Saint Simon and his followers thought that this critical epoch would be replaced by a new organic period in which they would take a leading role in providing a new morality. Even though each critical epoch was unfavourable, they regarded it as an advance on the previous organic epoch, because the law of continual progress was operating even in the critical epoch.<sup>47</sup> In a well-organized society, moral and intellectual progress could be rapidly achieved, thus rendering the existing institutions insufficient and new ones necessary. Thus, society would remain unstable until new institutions were established, but this unstable state was superior to the preceding stable state.<sup>48</sup>

Saint Simon’s interpretation of the Middle Ages was significant in that it clearly reflected his relativism.<sup>49</sup> To his mind, each organic epoch was characterized by a dominant class whose talent and ideology made its members the rulers of society at that particular stage of the moral development of society. He stated: ‘Absolutely speaking,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 53-5.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>49</sup> From the same perspective, he saw, for example, merits in slavery and in the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle in the ancient world.

there is nothing good, nothing bad. Everything is relative – that is the only absolute; everything is relative, above all to the time, in so far as social institutions are concerned.’ In general, Enlightenment philosophers, including Condorcet from whom Saint Simon learnt about the philosophy of history, tended to see the Middle Ages as a church-ridden and superstitious age, and as representing a retrograde step in the development of human mind, and, therefore, welcomed its being superseded by their own enlightened age. In contrast, Saint Simon appreciated medieval culture in its own right from the viewpoint of historical relativism. He thought that the Middle Ages were a necessary step in the progress of society; it was ‘the veritable cradle of our modern civilization’. Catholicism provided a creed and a vision of the world as the basis for social organization.<sup>50</sup> Even though the theocratic or feudal political system which originated in this period should now be extinguished, he claimed:

it was impossible to establish a better political system at that time, because, on the one hand, all the knowledge that men had was yet superficial and vague, general metaphysics provided the only principles that could serve as guides to our medieval forebears, and therefore general metaphysicians had to direct the scientific affairs of society. On the other hand, the only means by which a great people might increase in prosperity in those barbarous times being conquest, soldiers had to be put in charge of directing the national affairs of the several states. Thus, the fundamental basis of the old political system was, on the one hand, a state of ignorance ...; and on the other hand, an absence of skill in the arts and craft which ... left [people] with no other means of adding to their wealth than to seize the raw materials held by other people.<sup>51</sup>

By ‘progress’, Saint Simon specifically meant the ‘progress of moral conception’;

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Mill’s statement in his letter to Gustav d’Eichthal: ‘institutions which if we consider them in themselves, we can hardly help thinking it impossible should ever have produced any thing but the most unqualified mischief (the Catholic church for example) may yet, at a particular stage in the progress of the human mind, have not only been highly useful but absolutely indispensable; the only means by which the human mind could have been brought forward to an ulterior stage of improvement.’ (JSM to Gustav d’Eichthal, 7 November 1829, CW, vii, 41.)

<sup>51</sup> Saint Simon (1865-78) xx, 37-8, translated and quoted in Simon (1956) 328. For this point, see Simon (1956) 325-30.

political and institutional progress was seen as a derivative of moral progress, or ‘the realization, that is the putting into practice of this conception’.<sup>52</sup> While moral progress was continual, the progress of political and social institutions was not continual. In the organic epoch, institutions could fully reflect the advance in moral conceptions and society was, therefore, stable, grounded on the new moral concept. Well-organized society in this epoch could provide a shelter under which moral progress could proceed rapidly. Ironically, it was this moral progress that made the existing institutions obsolete, whereupon society entered a critical epoch where there was no harmony between the moral and institutional conditions of society, as well as no agreement over what was the new, proper moral concept. Once a new moral concept was articulated in the critical epoch, society would again stabilize.

Saint Simon stressed the importance of the elite class who possessed the talents and outlook appropriate to the needs of society at its particular stage of development. In the critical epoch, where the existing elite ossified, a new class was expected to emerge, a class which would later displace the existing elite. As it emerged, the rising class contributed to the formation of the new moral concept and corresponding institutions appropriate to the coming organic epoch, even though its taking over from the old elite could not be done without a prolonged struggle. In his own age, this rising class was what Saint Simon called the ‘industrial’ class, and he regarded himself as its theoretical advocate. Saint Simon thought that the industrial class was more valuable than other classes such as aristocracy or clergy. Hence, he hoped for the reorganization of society, led by the industrial chiefs as the ‘temporal power’, replacing the aristocrats, and by the men of science as the ‘spiritual power’, replacing the church of the medieval age.

## ii

Saint Simon never used the expression ‘social science’ to refer to his own science of society, but his views are often regarded as one of the origins of the ‘social science’ which philosophers of the nineteenth century were eager to create. According to historians of social science, the French term ‘science sociale’ emerged first in the later eighteenth century, and its English equivalent, ‘social science’, appeared in the early

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 28.

nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> Some members of the Bentham circle were among the earliest to employ the expression ‘social science’. The earliest use of the expression in English in published writings, according to Robert Wokler, appeared in 1824 in William Thompson’s *Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth most conducive to Human Happiness*.<sup>54</sup> Even though not in published writings, Bentham himself used the expression in a private letter as early as 1821.<sup>55</sup> J. S. Mill also used the expression in a private letter to Gustav d’Eichtal, dated 8 October 1829,<sup>56</sup> and then in a published article ‘Definition of Political Economy’ in 1836. His use of the expression was perhaps a consequence of his acquaintance with the views of French philosophers, Saint Simon and his former disciple Auguste Comte among others. Just after his Mental Crisis, Mill was particularly interested in the Saint Simonian science of society in the form of the philosophy of history. Significantly, Mill’s interest in history, which coloured his project of a science of society, was initially excited by the French historians, such as Saint Simon, Comte, and Guizot, not the Scottish tradition of philosophical history, of which he was by no means ignorant, thanks to his early education by James Mill.<sup>57</sup>

Around 1830 Mill was eager to absorb Saint Simonian ideas, particularly on the development of society. In his *Autobiography*, Mill recalled that: ‘The writers by whom, more than by any others, a new mode of political thinking was brought home to me, were those of the St. Simonian school in France. In 1829 and 1830 I became acquainted with some of their writings’.<sup>58</sup> During this period, Mill formed a very close friendship with a Saint Simonian, Gustav d’Eichthal, who stayed in Britain from April to December 1828 and met young English intellectuals including Mill.<sup>59</sup> Impressed by Mill, d’Eichthal attempted to recruit him for the Saint Simonian cause and gave him

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Senn (1958); Burns (1959); Burns (1962) 7-8; Iggers (1959); Baker (1964); Head (1982); Wokler (2006) 702-4.

<sup>54</sup> Wokler (2006) 702. Thompson’s use of the term is found in Thompson (1824) viii.

<sup>55</sup> Jeremy Bentham to Toribio Núñez, 9? May 1821, Bentham (1968-) x, 333.

<sup>56</sup> JSM to Gustav d’Eichtal, 8 October 1829, CW, xii, 36.

<sup>57</sup> In a letter to Macvey Napier, dated 20 October 1845, Mill wrote: ‘[the writings] of Millar I have long known, and there is, as you say, a considerable similarity between some of his historical speculations and Guizot’s’. (JSM to Macvey Napier, 20 October 1845, CW, xiii, 683. [Napier (1879) 510.]

<sup>58</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 171.

<sup>59</sup> For d’Eichthal’s visit to Britain, see D’Eichthal (1977).

copies of the Saint Simonian journal *Le Producteur* and a copy of Auguste Comte's *Système de Politique Positive*.<sup>60</sup> Even though Mill never converted to Saint Simonianism,<sup>61</sup> his articles in the early 1830s, particularly 'The Spirit of the Age' in 1831, revealed his acceptance of some Saint Simonian ideas, such as the cycle of organic and critical epochs, and the role of the elite class in promoting social health.

In 'The Spirit of the Age', Mill attempted to develop the Saint Simonian idea that 'the only wholesome state of the human mind' was 'a state in which the body of the people, i.e. the uninstructed, shall entertain the same feelings of deference & submission to the authority of the instructed, in morals and politics'.<sup>62</sup> He claimed the necessity of political and social reform which would give power to the new elites, instead of the existing aristocrats. Having defined his contemporary age as 'an age of transition' in which 'Mankind have outgrown old institutions and old doctrines, and have not yet acquired new ones [which were fit for them]', Mill pointed out that this anarchical state was a consequence of the disagreements among the intellectual elites of his day.<sup>63</sup> According to Mill, in a transitional state of society, 'there are no established doctrines', and 'the world of opinion is a mere chaos'.<sup>64</sup> This state would continue until 'a moral and social revolution ... has replaced worldly power and moral influence in the hands of the most competent'.<sup>65</sup> As Alan Ryan states, "'The Spirit of the Age' is not the 'real Mill'; appropriately, it is a transitional Mill that it reveals.'<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, some of the Saint Simonian ideas Mill absorbed and illustrated in this series of articles, especially those regarding history, were incorporated into his project of the science of society that culminated in *A System of Logic*.

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<sup>60</sup> See CW, vii, 34, note 11.

<sup>61</sup> Mill learnt 'eclecticism and comprehensive liberality' from the Saint Simonians. (JSM to Gustav d'Eichthal, 7 November 1829, CW, xii, 41.) As I. W. Mueller points out, what was appealing to Mill at first glance was their anti-sectarianism, and, ironically, this was the very reason Mill never became a Saint Simonian in spite of his enthusiasm. (Mueller (1956) 52.)

<sup>62</sup> JSM to Gustav d'Eichthal, 7 November 1829, CW, xii, 40.

<sup>63</sup> JSM, 'The Spirit of the Age [1]' (9 January 1831), CW, xxii, 230-3.

<sup>64</sup> JSM, 'The Spirit of the Age [3]' (6 February 1831), CW, xxii, 252.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-3.

<sup>66</sup> Ryan (1974) 41.

#### 4. Concluding Note

At the turn of the nineteenth century, there were attempts to create a new science which inquired into the nature, history, and prospects of civilized society. Both Dugald Stewart and Saint Simon thought that the drastic change of European society, brought about by commercialization and democratization, had made the existing science of politics outdated. In the face of the social and political turmoil caused by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, they intended that their new science of society would contribute to the stabilization and development of European civilization. Their project inspired political theorists of the next generation, including J. S. Mill.

While Europe was in turmoil, a newly founded nation, the United States of America, was rapidly developing. Some European observers saw that she had reached the same stage of civilization as European nations; she posed a threat to, as well as excited the envy of, the European. J. S. Mill depicted the situation as follows:

The progress of political dissatisfaction, and the comparisons made between the fruits of a popular constitution on one side of the Atlantic, and of a mixed government with a preponderating aristocratic element on the other, had made the working of American institutions a party question. For many years, every book of travels in America had been a party pamphlet, or had at least fallen among partisans, and been pressed into the service of one party or of the other.<sup>67</sup>

Mill himself regarded America as a civilized society in its most advanced form, and examined the characteristics of her society as symptoms of civilization. In the next chapter, I examine Mill's view of American society in light of the early nineteenth-century British controversy over America.

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<sup>67</sup> JSM, 'Tocqueville [2]', CW, xviii, 155-6.

## **Chapter 3. J. S. Mill and the American Experience**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter is devoted to an examination of the views of America held by J. S. Mill and his contemporaries. Observation on the American experience contributed to Mill's understanding of the nature of contemporary civilized society. The publication of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* in 1835 led Mill to pay attention to America and the relationship between government and society in general. Observations on America, especially through the eyes of Tocqueville, occupied a crucial place in the development of Mill's political thought. Whatever the immediate causes that encouraged Mill to pay attention to America, it should be noted that her democratic form of government and its relation to the climate, habits, and manners of her society were frequently referred to in debates about various domestic issues, especially parliamentary reform, in Britain. Hence Mill's view of America should be examined in the context of this intellectual climate, together with his relationship with Tocqueville.

In this chapter, I first show how America had been discussed in early nineteenth-century Britain: the conservative, critical view of the Tories; the middle-of-the road view represented by the Whigs; and the favourable view of Jeremy Bentham and his circle. Second, I examine how Mill interpreted Tocqueville's account of American society. He thought that Tocqueville's account was full of insight and accepted most of his theses, though not completely. Third, I discuss Mill's view of America. He saw the existence of the middle class as the most important characteristic of American society. This was where America and Britain possessed a common feature. In light of the contemporary British controversy over America, Mill's views on America can be seen to follow the typical strategy of Philosophic Radicalism. In other words, he wished to provide a counter-argument to the anti-reformers who referred to America as an example showing how democracy had adverse effects on society.

### **2. The Tory View of America**

Generally speaking, in the early nineteenth century, the Tories argued against domestic reform. Their conservatism coloured articles relating to America in the

*Quarterly Review*, the most important organ of conservative opinion at that time.<sup>1</sup> Their views of America were generally critical, as they feared that the introduction of democratic or popular government into Britain would destroy the established order of British society and thereby infringe their class interests. They eagerly attempted to expose the faults of America, and in turn advocated the existing British system.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to political reform, the Tories denied the applicability of the American system to Britain, emphasizing the differences between American and British social conditions. In the debates on the first Reform Bill, Robert Peel stated that, while Britain attempted to introduce foreign electoral systems, ‘In France, in Spain, in Portugal, in Belgium, the utmost efforts have been exhausted to establish a form of government like ours – to adjust the nice balance between the conflicting elements of royal, aristocratical, and popular power – to secure the inestimable blessings of limited monarchy and temperate freedom.’ Even though America might have succeeded in introducing popular government, it did not mean that it would be safe to make the British government more popular than it was. He went on to claim: ‘the circumstances of the two countries are so totally different, that no inference could be drawn from the success of such a form of government in the United States, in favour of the application of its principles to this country.’<sup>3</sup> In his view, the suitability of government for a society depended on its circumstances, and, accordingly, that American governmental devices, such as the secret ballot and universal suffrage, could not be effectively introduced into Britain.

Several Tory-biased books on America were published in the late 1820s and early 1830s. These included Basil Hall’s *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828* (1829), Frances Trollope’s *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), and

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. P. James and J. Barrow, ‘Gass’s Voyages and Travels’, *Quarterly Review*, 1 (1809); R. Southey, ‘History and Present State of America’, *ibid.*, 2 (1809); J. Barrow, ‘America’, *ibid.*, 7 (1812); J. Barrow, ‘Inchiquin’s United States’, *ibid.*, 10 (1814); R. Southey, ‘Lewis and Clarke’s American Travels’, *ibid.*, 12 (1815); J. Barrow, ‘Humboldt’s American Researches’, *ibid.*, 15 (1816); J. Barrow and W. Gifford, ‘Birkbeck’s Notes on America’, *ibid.*, 19 (1818); and J. Barrow ‘Fearon’s Sketches of America’, *ibid.*, 21 (1819).

<sup>2</sup> D. P. Crook points out that conservative disapproval of America was not only from a political, but also from a cultural and economic point of view. See Crook (1965) 97-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., ii, 1351-2. (3 March 1831)

Thomas Hamilton's *Men and Manners in America* (1833). Thanks in part to their cutting style and entertaining content, these works created a furore and helped to disseminate conservative views not only in Britain but also on the Continent.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, they became points of reference for those attempting to give an account of America. This may be the reason why Mill's article on America of 1836 was published in the form of a critical review of these Tory works.

Among Tory writers, Thomas Hamilton offered one of the most important arguments against popular government.<sup>5</sup> He stated that, although it was the fashion 'to call the United States the land of liberty and equality',<sup>6</sup> the Americans did not actually believe in the idea that all men were equal, an idea from which they derived the philosophical justification for their political and social institutions. Furthermore, Hamilton stated that the importance of landed property had been overlooked in America, because property in the form of land was, thanks to the vast expanse of the West, available to everyone for the moment. But such resources would be exhausted in the future, and then America's circumstances would become similar to those of Britain, where the majority of the people were without property of any kind, and then there would be 'the great struggle between property and numbers; on the one side hunger, rapacity, and physical power; reason, justice, and helplessness on the other'.<sup>7</sup> If Britain, following the American experience, abandoned her own established institutions and introduced popular government based on a fallible philosophy, she would become corrupt like America.<sup>8</sup>

Hamilton's attack was directed against American governmental devices such as representation and the presidency: 'The institutions of the United States afford the

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<sup>4</sup> Hall's book was translated into French, and Hamilton's into German and French. Trollope's work had run through four editions by 1832 and a fifth edition was published in 1839.

<sup>5</sup> Crook (1965) 113. He was brother of William Hamilton, whom Mill later criticized in *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* (1865).

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton (1833) i, 109.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 309-10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 243, 309-10. See also Crook (1965) 113-6. Even when he referred favourably to America, Hamilton did so with reservations. For instance, in his praise for the American free school system, he never failed to point out that such a good institution could also be found in his home country of Scotland, and to emphasize that the Scottish example came before that of America. (Hamilton (1833) i, 85, 225-9.)

purest specimen the world has yet seen, of a representative government; of an executive, where duties are those of mere passive agency; of a legislature, which serves but as the vocal organ of the sole and real dictator, the people.’<sup>9</sup> The policies of each President were inevitably directed towards his re-election, and were in accord with the passions or prejudices of the numerical majority of the people.<sup>10</sup>

A characteristic of Hamilton’s work was that he pointed out the similarities between America and Britain. He paid considerable attention to the similarities between their commercial circumstances. He asserted that what had been called equality in America was seen even in Britain: ‘On the whole, the difference is not striking, I should imagine, between the social habits of the people of New York, and those prevalent in our first-rate mercantile cities. In both, the faculties are exerted in the same pursuits; in both, the dominant aristocracy is that of wealth; and in both, there is the same grasping at unsubstantial and unacknowledged distinctions.’<sup>11</sup> In order to understand Mill’s argument on America in its historical context, it is important to note Hamilton’s focus on the affinities between the two nations. Such a perspective had been given little emphasis by preceding writers, while philosophical writers after Hamilton, including Tocqueville and Mill, laid great stress on the similarities between American and European society.

### **3. The Whig View of America**

It is not seriously doubted that those generally called the Whigs, though ‘Whig’ was an elusive term in the early nineteenth century, took a crucial role in bringing about domestic reforms in Britain during the Age of Reform. As Joseph Hamburger points out, the Whigs occupied an ambiguous position in that they were essentially a party of aristocrats, yet claimed to be reformers and advocates of the people’s interest. They were often accused of founding their policies on no principle or of holding incompatible principles, and thereby of not defining their position with regard to the central issue of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., i, 371.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., ii, 62.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., i, 109. He also wrote: ‘There is quite as much practical equality in Liverpool as New York.’ (ibid.)

aristocracy versus democracy.<sup>12</sup> James Mill's condemnation of the Whigs' middle-of-the road position was severe:

In their speeches and writings, therefore, we commonly find them playing at *seesaw*. If a portion of the discourse has been employed in recommending the interests of the people, another must be employed in recommending the interests of the aristocracy. Having spoken a while on the one side, they must speak a while on the other. Having written a few pages on the one side, they must write as many on the other. It matters not how much the one set of principles are really at variance with the other, provided the discordance is not very visible, or not likely to be clearly seen by the party on whom it is wished that the delusion should pass.<sup>13</sup>

Compared with the Tories, the Whigs often offered a more favourable view of America, criticizing misinterpretations by Tory writers.<sup>14</sup> Of importance was the fact that the Whig approval of the American government was grounded on the theory of balance and check, in terms of which the British constitution could also be justified. Hence, the Whig view of America was not necessarily associated with a criticism of Britain. Even though they advocated constitutional reform in Britain, their strategy was a gradualist one; they did not wish for a dramatic change in the British constitution which would lead to republican or popular institutions, and never supported any reform that might change the established order of the nation. Accordingly, their allusions to American experience were not in terms of a good example which Britain should follow, but an inspiration for the limited and moderate reform which they wished to achieve. As D. P. Crook points out, 'Praise of American democracy *per se* was ... outside the true Whig tradition'.<sup>15</sup> They were prepared to be critical of America, if the American

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<sup>12</sup> Hamburger (1965) 65-8. J. S. Mill stated: 'the term Whig had never been the symbol of any principles.' (JSM, 'Walsh's Contemporary History' (July 1836), CW, vi, 342.) John Arthur Roebuck wrote: 'Every reform, therefore, which will be proposed by the Whigs will be inadequate for the purposes of the People, while it will serve the turn of its proposers.' (J. A. Roebuck, 'Prospects of the Coming Session', Roebuck (1835) ii, 23rd pamphlet, 6.)

<sup>13</sup> James Mill (1824: ER) 218. See also J. S. Mill's view in JSM, 'Periodical Literature: Edinburgh Review', CW, i, 296. J. S. Mill's article appeared in the second number of the *Westminster Review* (April 1824), as a sequel to James Mill's article of the same title in the first issue of the *Review* (January 1824).

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Jeffrey (1819: Dispositions) 405.

<sup>15</sup> Crook (1961) 7.

example was not useful for their cause.

In his review of Jeremy Bentham's *Plan of Parliamentary Reform in the Form of a Catechism* (1817) in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1818, James Mackintosh criticized Bentham's proposals, which amply reflected American democracy. Mackintosh doubted that, 'all interests will be best protected, where the representatives are chosen by all men'.<sup>16</sup> He insisted that universal suffrage and secret ballot were of no use in securing the interests of all classes. Mackintosh stated that Bentham's use of the American experience did not support his radical proposal. In Mackintosh's view, universal suffrage did not exist in America because of the existence of slavery. Moreover, thanks to the existence of the vast frontier, a majority of the people possessed property, and the greater part of the people 'are either landholders, or just about to be so'. Even if it were admitted that universal suffrage was established in America, it could not be introduced into Europe, as there were crucial differences between America and Europe where 'crowded cities and unequal fortunes' existed.<sup>17</sup>

#### **4. Jeremy Bentham, the *Westminster Review*, and America**

##### **i**

Despite his life-long hostility to the natural rights doctrine, which gave the philosophical foundation to the American Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, as well as to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, Bentham greatly approved of the United States in his later years.<sup>18</sup> He came to be interested in America in two ways.<sup>19</sup> First, he regarded America as potentially a vast

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<sup>16</sup> Mackintosh (1818) 184.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-1.

<sup>18</sup> He described himself as 'at heart more of a United-States-man than an Englishman'. (Jeremy Bentham to Andrew Jackson, 14 June 1830, Jackson (1929) 146.) In 1817, Bentham referred to his 'two works in which I have appeared in the character of a Philo-Yankee'. (Jeremy Bentham to John Adams Smith, 22 December 1817, Bentham (1968-) ix, 137.) While these two works are assumed by the editor of the *Correspondence* as *Plan of Parliamentary Reform* and *Letters to Lord Pelham*, Philip Schofield suggests that the relevant works are *Plan* and *Papers relative to Codification and Public Instruction*, both of which appeared in 1817.

<sup>19</sup> For Bentham's view on, and relation with, America, see Williamson (1955); Crook (1965) 11-68; Hart (1982) 53-78; 'Editorial Introduction', Bentham (1998) xii-xxi.

ground for experiments in codification. Bentham wanted the United States to emancipate herself from the yoke of the common law by the introduction of a complete and rationalized utilitarian code of law, what he termed the 'pannomion'. He thought that under a democratic form of government, rulers might be so placed that they only had motives to promote the general interest, unlike under a monarch, where they tended to promote their own sinister interests. This seems to be the reason why he believed that his ideal system of code might be introduced in America.

Second, Bentham paid full attention to many of the constitutional features of the United States, and approved of her democratic form of government. Among his contemporaries, he was one of the most doctrinaire in his approval of the American representative system. For Bentham, it was not direct democracy, but well-arranged representative democracy, which had been seen only in America, that was the only form of government which could deliver the greatest happiness of the greatest number in terms of the identification of interests between the ruler and the ruled. D. P. Crook writes that America could provide support for Bentham's constitutional theory, even though he might not have derived most of his democratic ideas from the experience of America.<sup>20</sup> Bentham's admiration for American government developed alongside his radical critique of the British constitution.

Bentham's *Plan of Parliamentary Reform* contained a number of favourable references to the United States as a good example of 'pure representative democracy', often being contrasted with vices in the British constitution. He found positive aspects of 'pure democracy' in the United States, not merely of 'democratic ascendancy in a mixt government'. Nowhere else did there exist 'so *regular*, so *well-regulated* a government' as in the United States.<sup>21</sup> In addition, his *Radicalism not Dangerous* (1820) had a section entitled 'Defence from Experience in the Case of the United States'. Bentham stated that, though 'the features or elements of radicalism, *secrecy*, *universality*, *equality*, *annuality* of suffrage' were virtually realized in some states of the United States, subversion of the rights of property, which the opponents of democracy

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<sup>20</sup> Crook (1965) 14. Frederick Rosen and Philip Schofield argue that, in the 1790s, Bentham did not regard the United States as a model of democratic government because of her unique circumstances. See Rosen (1983) 35; Schofield (2004) 397-8.

<sup>21</sup> Bentham (1817) xli-xlii. [Bowring, iii, 447.]

feared, had never come about, and ‘nowhere in the Union have any of those of symptoms of misrule at any times shown themselves’.<sup>22</sup>

Bentham’s praise of the United States was based on a utilitarian perspective. He thought that America successfully introduced constitutional devices which enabled her to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The American government was, he believed, superior to that of Britain in that it pursued only the general interest, and never served the separate and sinister interest of the few.

## ii

Bentham’s view of America influenced the tone of his fellow utilitarians’ arguments. The *Westminster Review*, Bentham’s newly-founded periodical intended to form the political organ of the Philosophic Radicals, often published articles which discussed America. In his article in the first number of the *Review*, Peregrine Bingham, one of the most important contributors in the first few years of the *Review*, posed the following question: ‘if it [a great mass of happiness in America] be enjoyed, how far this good effect is ascribable to the nature of the government, how far to other causes?’ His answer was that almost all good phenomena in America were attributable to her governmental system, particularly representative government, and bad phenomena, such as slavery, to peculiarities of American society.<sup>23</sup> This mode of argument became a typical strategy which most Westminster Reviewers followed. Most articles on America in the *Review* contained more or less favourable accounts of the current condition of American society, and were, either explicitly or implicitly, combined with a critique of the state of Britain. The Westminster Reviewers compared various aspects of Britain with those of America: expensive government with cheap government; the existence of the Anglican Church with the absence of such an established church; the lack of a free press with the existence of it; economic stagnation with rapid economic growth; and limited education with universal education.

As far as America was concerned, another important contributor to the *Westminster Review* was John Neal, an American writer and critic, and a propagandist of

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<sup>22</sup> Bowring, iii, 612-3.

<sup>23</sup> Bingham (1824) 103.

utilitarianism in America. He met Bentham and other members of the utilitarian circle during his visit to England in 1824, and Bentham invited him to stay at his house in Queen's Square Place.<sup>24</sup> Neal's *Westminster Review* article on America formed a good example of the positive tone of the *Review*. As for slavery in the south of the United States, for instance, he was optimistic about the future, even though he condemned the current situation: 'if they [i.e. the proposals he had in mind] were adopted forthwith ... and acted upon throughout, slavery would be no more, in the whole United States of North America, within fifty years from today'.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, even though the Westminster Reviewers criticized American tariff policy and the legal system, as well as slavery, they were in general sympathetic and optimistic. They insisted that no matter how unsatisfactory her current condition, America was improving, and would continue to improve. This, they believed, was due to her popular government.

### iii

The Philosophic Radicals' praise of America was closely associated with a critique of the state of Britain. In his commentary on the *Quarterly Review* in the second volume of the *Westminster Review* in 1824, James Mill wrote: 'Whoever speaks against the Americans, is to receive implicit credit [from the *Quarterly Review*], and no questions asked. Whoever says any thing in their favour, is to be told that he or she is a liar, and a knave, and a fool; agreeably to the most approved rules of the aristocratical logic.'<sup>26</sup> It was, to his mind, a result of the *Quarterly Review*'s usual mode of praising 'the blessings of the British Constitution'.<sup>27</sup> Even when the Westminster Reviewers found favourable views on America in rival periodicals, they saw them as hypocritical. J. S. Mill, for example, dismissed the *Edinburgh Review*'s favourable comments on America as follows:

an article on America, in the thirty-first volume, contains an unusual proportion of democratic sentiments. The same observation applies to another article on the same

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<sup>24</sup> See King (1966).

<sup>25</sup> Neal (1826) 186-7.

<sup>26</sup> James Mill (1824: QR) 487.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.

subject, in the thirty-third volume, where a charge which had been brought against the Review of illiberality towards America, seems to have extorted from it sundry expressions in favour of popular governments, exceeding perhaps, in boldness, any which had yet appeared in its pages.<sup>28</sup>

Alexander Brady states that ‘they [i.e. the Philosophic Radicals] looked to America to demonstrate the virtues of democracy, and abundant praise of the United States became their orthodox practice’.<sup>29</sup> They praised the United States as they believed that the principle of utility was applied more assiduously in the United States than in Britain. Furthermore, they thought that the experience of America could offer grounds for attacking the existing British constitution and supporting its reform. As one Westminster Reviewer asserted, the worth of the institutions which had been introduced into America but not yet into Britain, such as representative democracy, a free press, and religious liberty, had ‘demonstrated practical results in the multiplied advantages of the many’, and could not be ‘destroyed by the railing of the interested few’.<sup>30</sup>

Given this intellectual milieu, it is unsurprising that Mill came to be interested in America. Like his fellow radicals, he had an interest in America as the only nation where democracy was realized in practice, and recognized that it had a crucial significance for all European thinkers and politicians who argued, whether for or against, democracy. It was this intellectual climate that led Mill to attempt to rebut anti-democratic or anti-parliamentary reform arguments, using the example of America.

This is not to deny the importance of Tocqueville in the development of Mill’s political thought. The deepening of his understanding of American society, and the subsequent crucial developments in his political thought, were stimulated by the appearance of Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. Most of Mill’s ideas on America had found antecedents in the periodical literature (including the *Westminster Review*) and books published before *Democracy in America*. Hence, it is not true that Mill derived his knowledge about America exclusively from Tocqueville’s study.

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<sup>28</sup> JSM, ‘Periodical Literature: Edinburgh Review’ (April 1824), CW, i, 300-1. The articles in question were Sydney Smith’s ‘Travellers in America’ and Francis Jeffrey’s ‘Dispositions of England and America’, which appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* of December 1818 and of May 1820 respectively.

<sup>29</sup> Alexander Brady, ‘Introduction’, CW, xviii, xviii.

<sup>30</sup> Patmore (1824) 556.

Nevertheless, Mill thought that the works which had appeared before Tocqueville were not only fragmentary and superficial but also party-biased, and thereby lacked any philosophical perspective with which the relevant phenomena could be systematically understood.

By discussing America, Mill, like his contemporaries, attempted to offer a practical argument within the political context of his age. At the same time, however, he aspired to develop an analytical, value-free argument without relation to the context. For the Mill of this period, Tocqueville was a philosopher who offered a deeper, broader, and more impartial account of phenomena in America than any writer before him. As will be seen, what Mill gained from Tocqueville was above all a perspective from which he was able to interpret America comprehensively and impartially.

## 5. Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*

### i

In an article entitled 'Rationale of Representation', written in July 1835, immediately after the publication of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Mill insisted on the need to apply perspectives to the study of politics which were different from those put forward in Samuel Bailey's *The Rationale of Political Representation*, which Mill saw as a good example of Benthamite reasoning on the subject. Mill stated that Bailey dealt only with 'the advantages of a representative government, and the principles on which it must be constructed in order to realise those advantages'.<sup>31</sup> He insisted that these formed only one branch of the philosophy of government. Hence, he thought that the Benthamite theory of government was not so much wrong as insufficient. He wrote:

The philosophy of government, a most extensive and complicated science, would comprise a complete view of the influences of political institutions; not only their direct, but what are in general so little attended to, their indirect and remote influences: how they affect the national character, and all the social relations of a people; and reciprocally, how the state of society, and of the human mind, aids, counteracts, or modifies the effects of a form of government, and promotes or

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<sup>31</sup> JSM, 'Rationale of Representation', CW, xviii, 18.

impairs its stability.<sup>32</sup>

He claimed that to acquire scientific knowledge of polity and society, the distinction needed to be made between the influence of political institutions and that of social circumstances, and consideration given to their mutual influences.<sup>33</sup>

The need to distinguish between government and society as a source of causation had often been insisted upon, albeit from a strategic point of view, by other Westminster Reviewers in the controversy over America. In this sense, Mill's perspective was by no means unique. Nevertheless, Mill thought that such a perspective was lacking in Benthamite politics, and insisted that it should be introduced into the study of politics. Additionally, he emphasized the view that politics should deal with the mutual and comprehensive influences between polity and society. Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, in Mill's view, had done so. The fact that Mill referred, in the footnote given to the passage cited above, to Tocqueville's work as the most important recent contribution to the study of politics, indicates the huge impact which Tocqueville had on Mill.<sup>34</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, the concept of democracy had many connotations, such as the rise of a social and political system led by the middle class; the diffusion of political liberty and suffrage with a representative institution; and an anarchic political condition. Tocqueville's use of the term contained two main meanings: first, democratic government; and second, equality of condition in society.<sup>35</sup> In addition, he used the term 'democracy' to indicate the psychological tendencies which led to equalization, and which such equality in turn naturally encouraged. His broadened definition of the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> By the expression 'scientific knowledge', Mill meant knowledge of the causation of phenomena. For this point, see Chapter 5 below.

<sup>34</sup> JSM, 'Rationale of Representation', CW, xviii, 18. For the relation between Tocqueville and Mill, see Crook (1965) 176-86; Mueller (1956) 135-69; Pappé (1964); Robson (1968) 105-14; Hamburger (1976). Mill's recollection of what he learnt from Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* can be found in his *Autobiography*, CW, i, 199-201.

<sup>35</sup> Schleifer (1980) 263-74; Siedentop (1994) Chap. 4; Welch (2001) 65-6; Richter (2004) 62. Mill wrote: 'It is necessary to observe that by Democracy M. de Tocqueville does not in general mean any particular form of government. ... By Democracy, M. de Tocqueville understands equality of conditions ....' (JSM, 'Tocqueville [2]', CW, xviii, 158-9.)

term ‘democracy’ gave his ideas greater significance,<sup>36</sup> and it was this which, as I will demonstrate later, inspired Mill.

Tocqueville regarded democratization as a universal and inevitable process not only in America but also in the rest of the world. He called this gradual equalization the ‘great democratic revolution’.<sup>37</sup> He accounted for the equalization of conditions, a process in which aristocracy gave way to democracy in the West, focusing on the development of commerce and manufacture, the subdivision of land, the diffusion of knowledge, the diffusion of moveable property, and social mobility. What especially attracted Tocqueville was the fact that in America ‘the middle classes can govern a nation.’<sup>38</sup>

## ii

Tocqueville stated that the factors which made democracy in America work well included such constitutional features as federalism, communalism, and a well organized judicial power. The federal system enabled each state both to maintain its uniqueness and to enjoy benefits provided by the federal government, such as security against foreign invasion and economic freedom.<sup>39</sup> The separation of powers between the executive and legislative, and the balance of powers between the Senate and the House of Representatives within the legislative body, were sufficiently secured by the presidential system and the bicameral legislature respectively.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, in terms of judicial review, judicial power was given huge authority and, therefore, was able to correct any popular excesses.<sup>41</sup> The jury system was also crucial in that it taught people the notion of equity in a practical way, and encouraged them to take responsibility for their acts. It encouraged people to combat the ‘selfishness which is like rust in society’.<sup>42</sup> Under the municipal system, citizens were encouraged to exercise public

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<sup>36</sup> Welch (2001) 66.

<sup>37</sup> Tocqueville (1994) 9.

<sup>38</sup> Tocqueville (1957) 278.

<sup>39</sup> Tocqueville (1994), Part 1. Chap. 8, esp. 114.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., Part 1. Chap. 8, esp. 117ff (legislative power), 121ff (executive power).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 101ff.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 274. He called jury system ‘a free school which is always open and in which each juror learns his

rights and perform public duties in their everyday life. As a result, the corruption engendered by sinister interest could be prevented.<sup>43</sup>

Mill was interested in Tocqueville's analysis of the devices which made American democracy work well. This was because Mill regarded America as the most unsuitable nation for democracy, as I shall show below. He regarded the municipal system as particularly important.<sup>44</sup> In Tocqueville's view, local self-government in America played an intermediate role between the governing and the governed, a role which had been played by the aristocrat and the privileged class under the *ancien régime* in France. Tocqueville thought, therefore, that democracy enabled ordinary people to cultivate their virtue in terms of political participation.<sup>45</sup>

Mill agreed with Tocqueville that national character could be cultivated under a democratic government. The argument that the system of government had beneficial effects on the state of society and national character was significant, for the good educational effects of democracy could provide effective counterevidence against those who opposed democracy on the grounds of the poor intellectual capacity of people.<sup>46</sup> He also shared Tocqueville's view that the evils of democracy should be rectified by democracy itself.<sup>47</sup> However, while Tocqueville had sympathy for the aristocracy, Mill insisted that they needed to be reformed in order to function under a democracy. Mill thought that the aristocracy had to be defeated in order to achieve constitutional reform in Britain. Subsequently, Mill did not totally concur with Tocqueville's favourable opinion of the American legal profession, which he thought played an aristocratic role in terms of their professional knowledge and conservative tendency. Mill stated: 'the minds of lawyers were ..., both in England and America, almost universally perverted by the barbarous system of technicalities – the opprobrium of human reason – which

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rights'. (ibid., 275.)

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Part 1. Chap. 5, esp. 66-9.

<sup>44</sup> JSM, 'Tocqueville [1]', CW, xviii, 58.

<sup>45</sup> Tocqueville (1994) 243.

<sup>46</sup> Mill stated: 'as we do not learn to read or write, to ride or swim, by being merely told how to do it, but by doing it, so it is only by practising popular government on a limited scale, that the people will ever learn how to exercise it on a larger'. (JSM, 'Tocqueville [1]', CW, xviii, 63.)

<sup>47</sup> JSM, 'Tocqueville [2]', CW, xviii, 188-9.

their youth is passed in committing to memory, and their manhood in administering'.<sup>48</sup>

### iii

Tocqueville identified unskilful legislation and the abuse of power by the majority over the minority as the vices of democracy. He stated that democracy not only tended to fail to choose men of merit because of the lack of the intellectual ability of people, but also had neither the desire nor the disposition to do so. He argued that, in their political careers 'it would be difficult [for the men of distinction] to remain completely themselves or to make any progress without cheapening themselves'.<sup>49</sup> Both Tocqueville and Mill thought that this tendency was not unique to America, but common to civilized nations. Furthermore, Mill found a unique circumstance at work which promoted it in America. He wrote that, 'America needs very little government', as 'She has no wars, no neighbours, no complicated international relations; no old society with its thousand abuses to reform; no half-fed and untaught millions crying for food and guidance'. Accordingly, 'The current affairs which her Government has to transact can seldom demand much more than average capacity'.<sup>50</sup>

As far as the tyranny of the majority was concerned, Mill praised Tocqueville's argument as a proper analysis of American society, even though he doubted whether it could be applied to European nations, including Britain. In Mill's view, the reason why the risk of the tyranny of the majority was greater in America than in Britain was that there was no leisured class in America. While Tocqueville argued that democratic government in general was apt to depend heavily on public opinion, and so its policy was much more hasty and short-sighted than that of an aristocracy,<sup>51</sup> Mill denied that legislative and administrative instability was an essential feature of democracy. In so doing, Mill distinguished between the concept of delegation, under which the person elected had to follow the instructions of his electors to vote in certain ways, and that of

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<sup>48</sup> Tocqueville (1994) 263-70; JSM, 'Tocqueville [1]', CW, xviii, 85.

<sup>49</sup> Tocqueville (1994) 197-9.

<sup>50</sup> JSM, 'Tocqueville [2]', CW, xviii, 175. See also his comment: 'the United States of America are a standing proof that under democratic ascendancy a country may be very well governed with a very small portion of talent.' (JSM, 'The British Constitution' (19 May [?] 1826), CW, xxvi, 381-2.)

<sup>51</sup> Tocqueville (1994) 202, 249 (legislative), 207-8 (administrative).

representation, under which he was not so bound:

The idea of a rational democracy is, not that the people themselves govern, but that they have *security* for good government. ... Provided good intentions can be secured, the best government ... must be the government of the wisest, and these must always be a few. The people ought to be the masters, but they are masters who must employ servants more skilful than themselves.<sup>52</sup>

By the end of the 1820s, Mill had come to place emphasis on the role of elites in society. It had led him to alter his attitude towards one element of the radical reform programme, namely the so-called pledge doctrine, a demand that the elected representative be bound by particular pledges made to those electing him to act in certain ways.<sup>53</sup> Mill not only ceased to think that the pledge was a necessary element of radical reform, but also came positively to oppose it.<sup>54</sup>

Mill did not deny the need for constitutional checks on the exercise of power. However, while many radicals argued that the pledge was vital in checking and limiting the power of governors, as any governing minority was apt to abuse power in support of their own sinister interest, Mill thought that the majority could neither recognise their true interest nor were capable of checking power by means of the pledge.<sup>55</sup> In 1832 he stated that, 'The true idea of popular representation is not that the people govern in their own persons, but that they choose their governors', and, therefore, 'The sovereignty of the people is essentially a delegated sovereignty. Government must be performed by the few, for the benefit of the many.'<sup>56</sup>

Joseph Hamburger states that 'in 1835 [J. S. Mill] reverted to the orthodox Radical

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<sup>52</sup> JSM, 'Tocqueville [1]', CW, xviii, 71-2. This distinction was not Mill's invention. It had a long history in the eighteenth century. (See Kelly (1984).)

<sup>53</sup> Burns (1957) 36-8.

<sup>54</sup> As early as October 1830, Mill had argued: 'The true idea of a representative government is undoubtedly this, that the deputy is to legislate according to the best of his own judgement, and not according to the instructions of his constituents, or even to the opinion of the whole community.' (JSM, 'Prospects of France [4]' (10 October 1830), CW, xxii, 150.)

<sup>55</sup> Mill stated that the number of subscribers to the *Examiner* decreased due to the appearance of his articles on the pledge in the magazine. See JSM to Thomas Carlyle, 17 July 1832, CW, xii, 112-3; JSM, *Autobiography*, early draft, CW, i, 180.

<sup>56</sup> JSM, 'Pledges [1]' (1 July 1832), CW, xxiii, 489.

position that justified pledges as a means of achieving a degree of popular control of a representative',<sup>57</sup> and refers to Mill's essay 'Rationale of Representation', published in July 1835, as a new attempt to reconcile popular representation and government by the wisest few. Mill, however, made the same attempt as early as 1832. What Mill insisted on, both in 1832 and 1835, was that the pledge was undesirable under an *ideal* popular representation, despite being useful in the current situation.<sup>58</sup> He did not cease to argue against the pledge in principle in 1835. In 'Rationale of Representation', he stated that a condition essential to good government was that 'political questions be not decided by an appeal, either direct or indirect, to the judgement or will of an uninstructed mass, whether of gentlemen or of clowns; but by the deliberately-formed opinions of a comparatively few, specially educated for the task'.<sup>59</sup>

#### iv

Mill thought that Tocqueville's account was full of insight and accepted most of his theses. Nevertheless, Mill thought that Tocqueville could not sufficiently distinguish between those factors which had to be attributed to the peculiarity of American society on the one hand, and those which were inherent in democracy and, therefore, applicable to other democratic nations on the other. It was this confusion which caused Mill's disquiet, for he had been emphasizing the importance of the distinction between the influences attributable to political institutions and those attributable to social peculiarities. Nevertheless, Mill's high estimation of *Democracy in America* arose from the mode of argument which allowed Tocqueville to investigate both political and social affairs comprehensively in terms of a single concept, namely democracy. His later

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<sup>57</sup> Hamburger (1965) 98.

<sup>58</sup> In 'Tocqueville [1]', Mill stated: 'such a government, though better than most aristocracies, is not the kind of democracy which wise men desire'. (JSM, 'Tocqueville [1]', CW, xviii, 73.)

<sup>59</sup> JSM, 'Rationale of Representation', CW, xviii, 23. In his article on Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Roebuck rebutted Mill's emphasis on delegation. See Roebuck (1835) i, 20th pamphlet, 1-4. It should be noted, however, that, even though the pledge might be popular among radicals and their supporters, not all the Philosophic Radicals gave it such great importance as Roebuck. For instance, Francis Burdett, like J. S. Mill, explicitly opposed the pledge, and James Mill had less interest in it and gave priority to other programs, such as the extension of suffrage and secret ballot. See Thomas (1979) 142, 215-6.

criticism of Tocqueville focused not on the comprehensiveness of the concept, but on the lack of a causal foundation for it. In Mill's view, it was not 'democracy', but 'civilization', which could be scientifically grounded.

## 6. J. S. Mill's Analysis of American Society

### i

Scholars have tended to pay little attention to the fact that Mill thought America was the nation where the tendencies of civilization were revealed in their most advanced form. Mill's notion of civilized society reflected his view of American society. His article on America, entitled 'State of Society in America', published in January 1836, is significant in that it formed part of a process in which he rejected Tocqueville's concept of democracy and came to adopt that of 'civilization' as the key to understanding the state of society. As far as 'State of Society in America' is concerned, it is the perspective from which he examined the cause of phenomena, rather than his comments on the particular features of American society, which is important.

Mill noted that 'the government is only one of a dozen causes which have made America what she is',<sup>60</sup> and that 'nearly all which has been complained of as bad in America, and a great part of what is good, are accounted for independently of democracy'.<sup>61</sup> Through the analysis of American society, he intended to clarify the mutual relations between political institutions and the state of society in which they existed. He grounded his analysis on the idea that phenomena should be distinguished into those which were associated with political institutions on the one hand, and those whose causes were social circumstances, and not political institutions, on the other. He stated:

Democracy may be studied in America – but *studied* it must be; its effects are not apparent on the mere surface of the facts; a greater power of discriminating essentials from non-essentials than travellers or politicians usually possess, is required for deducing from the phenomena of American society inferences of any kind with respect to democracy. The facts themselves must first be sifted, more

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<sup>60</sup> JSM, 'America', CW, xviii, 98.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 105.

carefully than they ever are by any but a most highly-qualified observer. Next, we have to strike off all such of the facts as, from the laws of human nature, democracy can have nothing to do with, and all those which are sufficiently accounted for by other causes. The residuum alone can, by even a plausible conjecture, be traced home to democracy.<sup>62</sup>

From this perspective, what he did in this essay was to connect the development of the middle class with phenomena which could not be attributed to democracy. The phenomena which he saw as the result of peculiar factors of American society, and thereby which existed independently of democracy, included the equality of wealth, the lack of a leisured class (except in the southern states of America where slavery existed), high wages, a high rate of literacy, and a tendency to imitate, especially in literature.

The last element is of particular interest. Mill stated:

to all intents except government, the people of America are *provincials*. Politically, the United States are a great and independent nation, but in all matters social or literary, they are a province of the British empire. ... The characteristic of provincialism, in society and literature, is imitation: provincials dare not be themselves; they dare do nothing for which they have not, or think they have not, a warrant from the metropolis.<sup>63</sup>

In Mill's opinion, as far as social and cultural factors were concerned, America was a mere province of Britain, and the disposition of the Americans to imitate reflected their provincial character. This view led him to the following conclusion:

Subtract from the British empire London and Edinburgh, and all or nearly all who are born to independence; leave at the summit of this *frustum* of the social pyramid the merchants of Liverpool, the manufacturers of Manchester, the bar of London spread over the whole of England, and physicians, attorneys, and dissenting clergy; then raise the working classes to the enjoyment of ample wages – give them universally the habit of reading, and an active interest in public affairs; and you will have a society constituted almost identically with that of the United States, and the only standard with which this last can either be likened or contrasted. The present

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 106-7.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 100.

government of France has been called *la monarchie des épiciers*; America is a republic peopled with a provincial middle class.<sup>64</sup>

Focusing on the existence of the middle class, Mill thus established a perspective in terms of which he could compare England and America. According to Mill, because of its aristocratic form of government and the existence of a huge inequality in wealth, the England of his age could not be regarded as a democratic state in either of Tocqueville's conceptions of democracy. Nevertheless, England was similar to America in certain vital respects. In contrast, even though Lower Canada was moving towards an equalization of conditions, which Tocqueville regarded as a movement towards the democratization of society, the features found in America could not be seen there. The fact that certain features of the democratic state of America could not be found in Canada – a democratic nation in its social aspects in Tocqueville's sense of the term – but could be found in England – a non-democratic nation in any sense of the term – meant that these features were not attributable to democracy.<sup>65</sup> To Mill's mind, the cause to which these features should be attributed was the existence of the commercial, middle class. Thus, Mill developed his concept of civilization in the latter half of the 1830s, in which he examined the implications of the existence of the commercial, middle class.

## ii

Apart from his analysis of America as a civilized nation, it is worth examining Mill's view of American democracy put forward in 'State of Society in America'. His analysis followed in some degree the typical strategy of Philosophic Radicalism. Among those writers looking at America in order to investigate democracy, the Tory writers, in Mill's view, had been mistaken in arguing 'as if the experiment of democracy had been tried in America under circumstances wholly favourable', in spite of their correct understanding that 'tranquillity and prosperity, in a country placed in the peculiar physical circumstances of America, proves little for the safety of democratic institutions among the crowded population, the innumerable complications and causes

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>65</sup> JSM, 'Tocqueville [2]', CW, xviii, 192.

of dissatisfaction, which exist in older countries'.<sup>66</sup> The Tories claimed almost all the bad effects could be explained in terms of democracy, and almost all the good effects in terms of other causes. In their view, the success of American democracy was due to the specific circumstances of American society, and not to democratic government.

Mill pointed out that that 'America is, in many important points, nearly the most unfavourable field in which democracy could have been tried'. He went on to say:

In everything which concerns the influences of democracy on intellect and social life, its virtues could nowhere be put upon a harder trial than in America; for no civilized country is placed in circumstances tending more to produce mediocrity in the one, or dullness and inelegance in the other. Everything in the position of America tends to foster the spirit of trade, the passion of money-getting, and that almost alone.<sup>67</sup>

The practical implication of this argument is clear. If undesirable phenomena in America were ascribed to democracy, the example of America would be unfavourable to the pro-democratic argument. Mill, however, thought that much of the American experience, especially its negative features, should be seen as the effect of the connection of democracy with the specific social conditions of America, in particular the lack of a leisured class, the class which he regarded as a counterbalance against the harmful effects of democracy.

As far as the lack of a counterbalance was concerned, Mill was optimistic in that he thought that the further accumulation of wealth might lead to the formation of such a class. Additionally, he argued that improvement in American society had taken place in many areas under democratic government. What he intended to offer here was a pro-democratic argument, namely that a democratic form of government could produce beneficial effects on society. His argument proceeded as follows. Democracy, with well-arranged institutional devices, was functioning well and had positive effects on society in America, which in itself was a most unfavourable nation for democracy. If so, the democratic form of government could be introduced into Britain as well, which, to his mind, was more suitable to democracy than America. Having pointed out the

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<sup>66</sup> JSM, 'America', CW, xviii, 107.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 107.

similarities between America and Britain caused by the existence of the middle class, he could thus develop a counter-argument against those who denied the possibility of introducing democratic government into Britain on the grounds of the differences in condition of the two nations.

## Chapter 4. J. S. Mill and the Notion of Civilization

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to clarify J. S. Mill's notion of civilized society. As many scholars point out, his essay 'Civilization', which appeared in the *London and Westminster Review* of April 1836, constituted the earliest formulation of the project which was fully developed in his mature works, such as *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government*.<sup>1</sup> In 'Civilization' and other articles written around 1840, including 'Bentham' (1838) and the two reviews of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835 and 1840 respectively), Mill saw contemporary society as 'civilized', and discussed what he approved and disapproved of in such a civilized society. At the same time, he often expressed an aspiration to offer a system of social science in terms of which civilized society could properly be understood. His speculation in this period, therefore, was characterized by his aspiration to create a science for inquiring into the nature and prospect of civilized society, a science that he called a 'Science of Society'.

In the first part of this chapter, I consider James Mill's idea of the middle class, which he saw as 'a creature of civilization'.<sup>2</sup> James Mill viewed the middle class in the same positive way as contemporary Whig thinkers, including Thomas Babington Macaulay who attacked his essay on 'Government'. They based their view on the arguments of the philosophical historians of eighteenth-century Scotland, who illustrated that the growth of commerce and the corresponding diffusion of wealth among society had brought about an increasing demand for liberty and power on the part of the middle class.<sup>3</sup> J. S. Mill developed his notion of civilization in this intellectual milieu.<sup>4</sup>

In the second part of this chapter, I examine Mill's notion of civilization, developed in the late 1830s. In this period, Mill came to understand the various phenomena of

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Ryan (1974) 47; Capaldi (2004) 137-9.

<sup>2</sup> James Mill (1811: Chas) 417.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Collini et al. (1983) Chaps. 1-3; Fontana (1985) 13-4.

<sup>4</sup> Biancamaria Fontana states: 'If Mill was firm and explicit in his opposition to Whig journalism, his article on "Civilization" ... could have been printed in the *Edinburgh [Review]* alongside the essays by Macaulay and Carlyle ..., without causing any surprise to the reader.' (Fontana (1990) 51.)

contemporary civilized society through his concept of ‘civilization’. He sought to give a systematic and comprehensive account of the features of civilized society, such as corruption and the so-called ‘tyranny of the majority’.

## 2. James Mill’s Notion of the Middle Class

### i

J. S. Mill thought that civilization was contemporaneous with the growth of the middle class. Though there was little agreement in defining who comprised the middle class,<sup>5</sup> such a view was shared by most thinkers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They argued that the development of commerce and liberty brought out the development of the middle class. In the early nineteenth century, the Edinburgh Reviewers, amongst others, often expressed a favourable view of the middle class. Francis Jeffrey, for example, expected the middle class to correct the bad consequences of the division of labour, though he could not help thinking that they also inevitably had negative influences over society.<sup>6</sup>

The Whig thinkers generally expressed a favourable view of the middle class, but they feared that it would have excessive power. As I will demonstrate below, J. S. Mill, much inspired by Tocqueville, expressed the same concern. Having said that, it does not mean that their opinions had common ground. The Whigs based their view on the traditional constitutional argument about the balance of powers, while Mill’s opinion was that social progress would not have been achieved without social antagonism.

In order to clarify the characteristics of J. S. Mill’s notions of civilization and the middle class, it is helpful to compare it with James Mill’s. Apart from the dichotomy between the ‘ruling-few’ and the ‘subject-many’, James Mill often divided society into three classes: the aristocratic or higher class; the middle class; and the lower or labouring class. He placed great importance on the middle class. Despite their

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<sup>5</sup> Fontana states: ‘The 18th-century Scottish writers who saw in the growth of the middling ranks the distinctive feature in the development of modern commercial society, were quite vague as to who *precisely* the middling ranks were.’ (Fontana (1985) 108.)

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Francis Jeffrey to Francis Horner, 18 September 1806, Cockburn (1852) ii, 110; Jeffrey (1812: Crabbe) 280. See also Mackintosh (1818). For the Whig view of the middle class, see Clive (1957) 124-50.

disagreement about the proper method of political science and what degree of political reform was desirable, James Mill and the Edinburgh Reviewers, including Macaulay, agreed that the middle class was an intrinsic element of civilization. Their view had a common source, namely the philosophical historians of eighteenth-century Scotland, such as Hume, Smith, Stewart, and Millar, who had shown that the growth of commerce and the corresponding diffusion of wealth among society brought about an increasing demand for liberty and power on the part of the middle class.<sup>7</sup>

## ii

In an advanced society, James Mill stated, in order to retain their superiority over the poor, wealthy rulers exerted a malevolent influence on society by associating elegance not with beautiful, but with costly things. As a consequence, ‘cost’ and ‘elegance’ came to be synonymous terms, and subsequently ‘the very thought of seeking for elegance ... is extinguished in the breasts of those among whom it is of most importance that the taste of real elegance should be diffused’.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, to wealthy rulers, ‘it appears far more eligible to pay court to a monarch, and, by holding his favour, to retain the monopoly of honour and power, than to contend with the whole body of the people in the acquisition and display of those higher qualities’.<sup>9</sup> James Mill went on to write that, ‘if the habits and feelings of the upper ranks, and of the owners of wealth in general, have, in modern times, an undeniable bias to the side of arbitrary government, we can only look for a counterbalancing power in the character of the other classes of society’. He hoped for ‘a counterbalancing power’ against ‘an undeniable bias to the side of arbitrary government’.<sup>10</sup> He expected the middle class – ‘a creature of civilization’<sup>11</sup> – to be the counterbalancing power, a power which played several important roles in society: to control the government with, or instead of, the higher or aristocratic class on the one hand; and to instruct the lower class on the other. ‘The middle class’, James Mill stated,

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<sup>7</sup> See Collini et al. (1983) Chaps. 1-3; Fontana (1985) 13-4.

<sup>8</sup> James Mill (1836: *Aristocracy*) 286. See also James Mill (1826: *State*) 255-6.

<sup>9</sup> James Mill (1811: *Chas*) 417.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

had no existence in the rude state of society; and it increases as the benefits of civilization increase. It has always been our faith and trust, that in this class, and the circumstances connected with it, a power is really provided sufficient to prevent the passive or active principle of despotism in the other classes from finally consummating their deplorable consequences, and rendering civilization its own destroyer.<sup>12</sup>

James Mill admitted that, in the current situation, the rich ‘have the power of setting the fashion, and their example forms the general taste’, and thereby the middle class had undesirable tendencies under their influence.<sup>13</sup> The rich regarded wealth as honourable or virtuous, and successfully imposed such a standard of virtue on the people. In his view, ‘Nothing is more remarkable in human nature, than the intense desire which we feel of the favourable regards of mankind’, and the reason why the desire for wealth was unbounded was because it enabled those who possessed it to ‘procure over the favourable regards of society’.<sup>14</sup> However, James Mill was firmly convinced that such undesirable tendencies among the middle class could be corrected, for the association of honour or virtue with wealth was, though strong, not intrinsic. This association was initially caused by the political arrangements in which the rich abused their power to promote their own sinister interest.

James Mill conceived two remedies for such an undesirable condition in the middle class: first, an education system by which the negative influence of the aristocracy was reduced; second, political and social reform in order to disassociate wealth from the idea of virtue. As for the former, James Mill wrote:

We may conceive that certain trains might, by the skilful employment of the early years, be rendered so habitual as to be uncontrollable by any habits which the subsequent period of life could induce, and that those trains might be the decisive ones, on which intelligent and moral conduct depends. The influence of a vicious and ignorant society would in this case be greatly reduced ....<sup>15</sup>

As far as social and political reform was concerned, James Mill aimed to remove the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> James Mill (1836: *Aristocracy*) 286.

<sup>14</sup> James Mill (1819: *Education*) 32.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. J. S. Mill’s early education was a realization of this idea.

immoral influence of wealth. The ballot, for example, would contribute to this aim. If the ballot enabled the constituents to ‘give their suffrages only to those whom they regarded as best endowed with the qualities which fit men for the duties of legislation, the men of property would exert themselves to attain and to display those qualities’.<sup>16</sup>

While James Mill was critical of the association of wealth and political power and condemned the current inequality of wealth, he did not desire an equality of wealth in society. He wrote: ‘Reformers are far from thinking evil of inequalities of fortune; on the contrary, they esteem them a necessary consequence of things which are so good, that society itself, and all the happiness of human beings, depend upon them’. He justified the inequality of wealth on the grounds that man had to have a certain degree of fortune in order to be independent and to cultivate his own mental and intellectual faculties. Furthermore, he claimed that only such a man was fitted for the business of government. Thus he stated that ‘the business of government is properly the business of the rich’.<sup>17</sup>

In James Mill’s opinion, however, the wealthy men of his time suffered from the ‘corruptive operation’ of a large fortune which was accumulated thanks in large measure to an artificial social and political arrangement.<sup>18</sup> In favour of inequality of fortune resulting from ‘the natural laws of accumulation’, James Mill condemned extreme inequality on the grounds that it was ‘the result of unnatural restraint put upon the natural laws of distribution’.<sup>19</sup> He stated that ‘artificially-made, unnatural inequalities’ brought in enormous fortunes for a small number, and ‘the operation of large fortunes tends to the corruption of taste, in everything to which the word elegance is with propriety applied’.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> James Mill (1830: Ballot) 36-7.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 37. See also James Mill (1836: Aristocracy) 284.

<sup>18</sup> James Mill (1820: Government) 505. By the expression ‘corruptive operation’, James Mill meant, as J. S. Mill noted, ‘not that a people are corrupted by the amount of the wealth which they possess in the aggregate, but that the inequalities in the distribution of it have a tendency to corrupt those who obtain the large masses, especially when these come to them by descent, and not by merit, or any kind of exertion employed in earning them’. (JSM, ‘Use and Abuse of Political Terms’ (May 1832), CW, xviii, 12.)

<sup>19</sup> James Mill (1836: Aristocracy) 285.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

According to James Mill, the large fortune limited the intellectual ability of its owner: 'intellectual powers are offspring of labour. But an hereditary Aristocracy is deprived of the strongest motive to labour. The great part of them will, therefore, be defective in those mental powers'.<sup>21</sup> Unlike those possessing a huge wealth, 'Men of independent, but few enormous incomes, sufficiently numerous to form a class and a public, are obliged to seek distinction among themselves by qualities which recommend them to the respect and affection of their follows.'<sup>22</sup> James Mill believed that men of a moderate fortune, unlike the existing ruling class,<sup>23</sup> could be satisfied with moderate fortune and, therefore, could be free from the corruptive operation of excessive fortune. He thought that, once wealth was disassociated from virtue by means of education and political reform, the middle class would be satisfied with moderate wealth.<sup>24</sup>

James Mill's analysis of the middle class was concerned with its moral and intellectual status rather than its economic condition, though good economic circumstances were necessary for mental and intellectual cultivation.<sup>25</sup> Unlike J. S. Mill, who generally used the expressions the 'middle class' and the 'commercial class' interchangeably, James Mill included in the middle class intellectual professionals, whom J. S. Mill excluded from his definition of the middle class.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, James Mill's image of the middle class as the embodiment of civilization was closely associated with his use of the term 'progress', by which he initially meant the development of intellectual and moral qualities.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> James Mill (1820: Government) 493.

<sup>22</sup> James Mill (1836: Aristocracy) 290.

<sup>23</sup> James Mill (1820: Government) 495.

<sup>24</sup> See James Mill (1819: Education) 33.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Fenn points out that James Mill's favourable opinion on the middle class relied primarily on the view that 'they are the bearers of the intellectual elite, who give society its tone and also provide the catalyst of progressive ideas in all fields of the arts and the sciences'. (Fenn (1987) 75.)

<sup>26</sup> James Mill (1820: Government) 505. Hence, it is not plausible to insist that James Mill was eager to advocate the interest of the industrial middle class, based on the supposition that, by the middle class, he meant the capitalist or industrial class. He excluded the rich merchants from his definition of the middle class. (ibid.) A typical interpretation of James Mill's notion of the middle class from an economic point of view can be found in Sabine (1993) 662.

<sup>27</sup> Notwithstanding, it is worth pointing out that James Mill never overlooked the importance of

### 3. J. S. Mill's Notion of the Middle Class and Civilization

#### i

Though both James and J. S. Mill emphasized an indissoluble connection between the middle class and civilization, there was a crucial difference between them. While James Mill tended to ascribe the vices of civilized society to the existence of aristocracy, J. S. Mill believed that the vices were the inevitable consequences of civilization, and, subsequently, was highly critical of the middle class. In order to understand the difference between the two Mills, it is necessary to clarify what they each actually meant by the expression 'middle class'.

While James Mill's use of the term 'middle class' embraced intellectual elites, as well as men of moderate fortune, J. S. Mill's notion of the middle class was almost entirely associated with their economic condition, and thereby he often identified the middle class with the commercial class.<sup>28</sup> Those to whom J. S. Mill referred as the middle class included the manufacturing and mercantile classes, except 'the protected trades' and 'the very rich manufacturers and merchants of all denominations', and the propertied class of the towns, the bulk of which were the ten-pound electors.<sup>29</sup>

In spite of this hope, however, what characterized J. S. Mill's notion of the middle class was a sceptical attitude towards them and thereby commercial society itself. He doubted that the people, those in the middle class in particular, were capable of acting according to their own interests: in other words, he did not think that the people could recognize the importance of cultivating their own moral and intellectual abilities at the expense of quick economic profits. Subsequently, he came to doubt that the middle class could take a leading role in the progress of society. To his mind, the fact that the middle class had been gradually growing in social, economic, and political power did not mean that they had been improving their moral and intellectual abilities. In June

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economic condition. Without the improvement of their economic condition, men could not have developed their moral and intellectual faculties. For this point, see Collini et al. (1983) 117-9.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, JSM, 'Tocqueville [2]', CW, xviii, 196, where he stated: 'the American Many, and our middle class, agree in being commercial classes'.

<sup>29</sup> JSM, 'Reorganization of the Reform Party' (April 1839), CW, vi, 475-6. See also his comment in JSM, 'Tocqueville [2]', CW, xviii, 200: 'The American Many are not essentially a different class from our ten-pound householders.'

1834 he expressed concern over the middle class: ‘The middle classes of this country [i.e. England] ... are repeating the very same series of errors by which almost all governing bodies have been ruined.’<sup>30</sup>

This was in contrast to his earlier insistence that the ruling few intended to leave the people ignorant in order to promote their own sinister interest, and, therefore, believed that the people were capable of understanding their own true interest once the influence of the ruling few was removed. His view of current British society in the mid-1820s was almost the same as that of James Mill’s.<sup>31</sup> As for the ability of the people, James Mill claimed that, though it might be true that a majority of the people would make a bad choice due to lack of information – this was the very reason why representative government was superior to other forms of government. According to James Mill,

The people may have a want of information for one thing, and no want of it for another. ... The highest degree of knowledge is required to perceive on each occasion what is best to be adopted as a measure of government. But it requires no knowledge beyond that of a people in any tolerable state of civilization to know who are the men among them in best esteem for worth and understanding.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, in James Mill’s view, the reason why people remained ignorant was because ‘so much has been done to make them ignorant; so little done to make them instructed’.<sup>33</sup> Hence, education would reduce the risk of making a wrong choice.

Such a claim was accepted fully by J. S. Mill before his Mental Crisis of 1826-7. Before the Crisis, Mill was eager to rebut the traditional case for the British constitution in terms of the notion of balance of powers. In his view, it was a poor argument as the members of the House of Commons were ‘the real governors’ and they acted in subservience to the sinister interest of a narrow oligarchy.<sup>34</sup> He also attempted to rebut

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<sup>30</sup> JSM, ‘Notes on the Newspapers [4]’ (June 1834), CW, vi, 218.

<sup>31</sup> For J. S. Mill’s views at that time, see, for example, JSM, ‘Parliamentary Reform’ (read at the Mutual Improvement Society in August 1824), CW, xxvi, 261-85; JSM, ‘Law of Libel and Liberty of the Press’ (April 1825), CW, xxi, 1-34; JSM, ‘The British Constitution’ (read at the London Debating Society in 19 May [?] 1826), CW, xxvi, 358-85.

<sup>32</sup> James Mill (1825: ER on reform’) 222-3. See also James Mill (1820; Government) 504.

<sup>33</sup> James Mill (1825: ER on reform) 227.

<sup>34</sup> JSM, ‘Parliamentary Reform’, CW, xxvi, 264; JSM, ‘The British Constitution’, *ibid.*, 359, 377. See

the class representation theory, according to which the House of Commons was seen to represent the interest of all components of society. He claimed that, while it was merely the separate and sinister interest of each class that was represented there, it was the general interest that should be represented in the House of Commons. Those particular interests opposing the general interest did not need to be represented.<sup>35</sup> Good government could not be secured without making it dependent on those having no sinister interest, and the only persons who had no sinister interest were the people. As for the ability of people, he followed James Mill in insisting that not every person should always be required to have any special abilities because ordinary people could be guided by the wisest person among them, and that ‘if they [i.e. people] are ignorant, it is precisely because that discussion, which alone can remove ignorance, has been withheld from them’.<sup>36</sup>

Another important feature of Mill’s view before the Crisis was his exclusive reliance on the principle of self-interest. He stated: ‘There is a principle in man, far more constant and far more universal than his love for his fellows – I mean his love for himself.’<sup>37</sup> It was unacceptable to state that, as those pursuing their own interest were ill-educated, what was needed was to educate them to be benevolent. If the people could be perfectly benevolent, government would not have been needed. If ‘they [i.e. the people] love themselves better than they love the community of which they are members’, what should be done was to ‘let things be so arranged that the interest of every individual shall exactly accord with the interest of the whole’ and to ‘let every individual be so educated, as to know his own interest’.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast, around 1830, Mill came to be sceptical about the middle or commercial class. He came to doubt whether they were capable of understanding their own interest in the long run, namely their interest in their own intellectual and moral improvement in preference to immediate economic benefits.<sup>39</sup> Further, he extended his criticism to

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also James Mill (1824: ER) 215.

<sup>35</sup> JSM, ‘The British Constitution’, CW, xxvi, 363-66, 375, 380-1.

<sup>36</sup> JSM, ‘Law of Libel and Liberty of the Press’, CW, xxi, 11. See also CW, xxvi, 380-2.

<sup>37</sup> JSM, ‘Cooperation’ (read at the Cooperative Society, 1825), CW, xxvi, 324.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Mill did not cease to think that the ruling class prevented the improvement of the people: ‘while these

commercial society itself, where the commercial, middle class was flourishing.<sup>40</sup> With regard to this point, he came to be highly critical of previous political thinkers, who, he believed, underestimated the need to improve human ability. He wrote to Gustav d'Eichthal that French philosophers like Auguste Comte

deduce politics like mathematics from a set of axioms & definitions, forgetting that in mathematics there is no danger of partial views: a proposition is either true or it is not, & if it is true, we may safely apply it to every case which the proposition comprehends in its terms: but in politics & the social science, this is so far from being the case, that error seldom arises from our assuming premises which are not true, but generally from our overlooking other truths which limit, & modify the effect of the former.<sup>41</sup>

Comte, to Mill's mind, failed to recognize that 'Government exists for all purposes whatever that are for man's good: and the highest & most important of these purposes is the improvement of man himself as a moral and intelligent being, which is an end not included in M. Comte's category at all.'<sup>42</sup> Apparently, this criticism reflected Mill's discontent with Bentham (more accurately, what he saw as Benthamite politics), in that one of his criticisms of Benthamite politics was that it dealt only with the problem of political machinery, overlooking the importance of moral improvement by means of political institutions.<sup>43</sup>

## ii

While examining Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Mill came to pay

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[the sinister interests of the ruling class] exist, those, who would otherwise be the instructed classes, have no motive to obtain real instruction in politics & morals, & are subjected to biases from which the students of the physical sciences are exempt.' (JSM to Gustav d'Eichthal, 7 November 1829, CW, xii, 40.)

<sup>40</sup> The romantic ideas of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his followers led Mill to recognize the problem of the moral corruption of the commercial class. In his *A Lay Sermon, Addressed to the Higher and Middle Classes*, published in 1817, Coleridge criticized contemporary society, employing the distinction between 'civilization' and 'cultivation', which Mill borrowed in 'Civilization'. See Coleridge (1990) 117-8, 172-6.

<sup>41</sup> JSM to Gustav d'Eichthal, 8 October 1829, CW, xii, 36.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> See JSM, 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy' (1833), CW, x, 3-18; JSM, 'Bentham' (1838), CW, x, 75-115.

a great deal of attention to ‘the vastness of all that is implied in the words, growth of a middle class’.<sup>44</sup> In so doing, he employed the concept of civilization, a concept which was common among early nineteenth-century European thinkers. In April 1836, the year following his review of *Democracy in America*, Mill published an essay entitled ‘Civilization’ in the *London and Westminster Review*. This essay was unusual in that, unlike most of his periodical articles, it had been published neither in the form of a literary review nor in the form of a report on parliamentary debates. The purpose of the essay was to discuss the current condition of society rather than to trace its historical development.<sup>45</sup> It had two aspects: theoretical and practical. In other words, it combined abstract ideas with the politics of his time. As far as the theoretical aspect was concerned, Mill attempted to explain various phenomena of contemporary civilized society from the point of view of the growth of the middle class. Having shown the theoretical characteristics of civilization, he examined contemporary phenomena, such as the corruption of the commercial, middle class and the tyranny of the majority, from a practical standpoint.

At the outset of ‘Civilization’, Mill defined the term civilization, not as synonymous with improvement in the broader sense of the term, but as indicating a narrower meaning: ‘that kind of improvement only, which distinguishes a wealthy and populous nation from savages or barbarism’. ‘The present era is’, in his view, ‘pre-eminently the era of civilization, in the narrow sense.’<sup>46</sup> The features of civilization in this sense of the term, according to him, included the following: dense population; dwelling in fixed habitations in towns and villages; highly developed agriculture, commerce, and manufactures; co-operation in large bodies for common purposes; the enjoyment of the pleasures of social intercourse; and the establishment of social arrangements for protecting persons and their property.<sup>47</sup> In addition to these, in the European nations, including Great Britain, which were at a higher stage of civilization, a remarkable trend

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<sup>44</sup> JSM, ‘Civilization’, CW, xviii, 121.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce Mazlish states that ‘Mill’s treatment of the savage seems to me a parody, in which he shows himself totally ignorant of anthropological knowledge’. (Mazlish (2004) 75.) Jennifer Pitts shares this view. (Pitts (2005) 139.)

<sup>46</sup> JSM, ‘Civilization’, 119.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

could be found, a trend that saw power passing ‘more and more from individuals, and small knots of individuals, to masses’, whereby ‘the importance of the masses becomes constantly greater, that of individuals less’.<sup>48</sup> As for the causes of all the phenomena of civilized society, he stated: ‘There are two elements of importance and influence among mankind: the one is, property; the other, powers and acquirements of mind.’<sup>49</sup> Along with the broader diffusion of wealth and knowledge, the development of the ability of people to co-operate with others strengthened the influence of the masses.<sup>50</sup> In his view, ‘There is not a more accurate test of the progress of civilization than the progress of the power of co-operation.’<sup>51</sup>

The progress of civilization brought about a substantial transfer of power from the few to the masses. The masses thus became more influential, in all spheres, including the political. In the political sphere, democratization of government was its consequence.<sup>52</sup> Mill insisted:

The triumph of democracy, or, in other words, of the government of public opinion, does not depend upon the opinion of any individual or set of individuals that it ought to triumph, but upon the natural laws of the progress of wealth, upon the diffusion of reading, and the increase of the facilities of human intercourse. ... The distribution of constitutional power cannot long continue very different from that of real power, without a convulsion. Nor, if the institutions which impede the progress of democracy could be by any miracle preserved, could even they do more than render that progress a little slower. Were the Constitution of Great Britain to remain henceforth unaltered, we are not the less under the dominion, becoming every day more irresistible, of public opinion.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 120-1.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that Mill’s emphasis was on the diffusion, not accumulation, of wealth. He stated: ‘a further increase of the wealth of particular individuals beyond this point [i.e. a comfortable subsistence], makes a very questionable addition to the general happiness; and is even, if the same wealth would otherwise have been employed in raising other persons from a state of poverty, a positive evil’. (JSM, ‘The Quarterly Review on the Political Economists’ (30 January 1831), CW, xxii, 249.)

<sup>51</sup> JSM, ‘Civilization’, CW, xviii, 122.

<sup>52</sup> Unlike Tocqueville, Mill used the term democracy only to indicate a democratic government.

<sup>53</sup> JSM, ‘Civilization’, CW, xviii, 126-7. Mill used here the term ‘natural’ in the sense that it is

Mill's concept of civilization was comprehensive in that all phenomena could be explained in terms of it, and, therefore, it was capable of explaining democratization. Mill thought, accordingly, that Tocqueville misunderstood the cause of contemporary phenomena; in his opinion, equalization of conditions, which Tocqueville called 'democracy' and which he identified as the cause of contemporary phenomena, was merely one of the symptoms of civilization, and not the cause of it.<sup>54</sup>

### iii

Having shown the features of civilization, Mill attempted to explain, in light of his concept of civilization, phenomena which he had discussed in such early articles as 'The Spirit of the Age'. In the mid-1830s, he came to regard phenomena which he found in contemporary society as inherent in civilized society. As he recalled in his *Autobiography*, the essay 'Civilization' was not only an attempt to offer a theoretical view of civilization, but also an attempt 'into which I threw many of my new opinions, and criticised rather emphatically the mental and moral tendencies of the time'.<sup>55</sup> In 'Civilization' and subsequent writings, such as 'Bentham', 'Tocqueville [2]', and 'Coleridge', he discussed not only the positive aspects of civilization, such as the diffusion of property, knowledge, and the power of co-operation, but also the negative ones, such as the diminishing of the influence of individuals. His critical view of civilized society implied that such negative elements were inevitably involved in the process of civilization, and, therefore, it was of huge practical importance for him to consider how these evils could be cured. While taking it for granted that vices were

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understandable and predictable in terms of scientific inquiry. This expression did not imply that it was invariable.

<sup>54</sup> Mill stated that 'this growing equality is only one of the features of progressive civilization; one of the incidental effects of the progress of industry and wealth: a most important effect, and one which as our authors [i.e. Tocqueville] shows, re-acts in a hundred ways upon the other effects, but not therefore to be confounded with the cause'. (JSM, 'Tocqueville [2]', CW, xviii, 192.)

<sup>55</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 211. This caused Bain's discontent with the essay: 'I never felt quite satisfied with the article on Civilization. The definition given at the outset seems inadequate; and the remainder of the article is one of his many attacks on the vicious tendencies of the time .... To my mind, these topics should have been detached from any theory of Civilization, or any attempt to extol the past at the cost of the present.' (Bain (1882b) 48.)

inevitably involved in the process of civilization, he was convinced that artificial measures could cure them. He asserted:

human affairs are not entirely governed by mechanical laws, nor men's characters wholly and irrevocably formed by their situation in life. Economical and social changes, though among the greatest, are not the only forces which shape the course of our species; ideas are not always the mere signs and effects of social circumstances, they are themselves a power in history.<sup>56</sup>

He was convinced that artificial improvement was not only necessary but also possible, and he expected the intellectual elites to play a key role in the improvement of mankind. Furthermore, he thought that solutions to these problems had to be sought without relinquishing the benefits of civilization: measures should be taken which strengthened 'the weak side of Civilization by the support of a higher cultivation'.<sup>57</sup>

#### iv

In 'Civilization', Mill took up two particular topics from a practical point of view: the corruption of the commercial spirit and the tyranny of the majority, both of which he associated with the progress of civilization. In this section, I examine these topics.

As early as 1828, Mill had come to be highly critical of the commercial spirit in general, and that of the English in particular. He wrote to Gustav d'Eichthal, who praised the English middle class:<sup>58</sup>

this superiority ['of the English to the French in all those qualities by which a nation is enabled to turn its productive and commercial resources'] is closely connected with the very worst point in our national character, the disposition to sacrifice every thing to accumulation, & that exclusive & engrossing selfishness which accompanies it. ... I fear that the commercial spirit, amidst all its good effects, is almost sure to bring with it wherever it prevails, a certain amount of this evil; because that which necessarily occupies every man's time & thoughts for the greater

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<sup>56</sup> JSM, 'Tocqueville [2]', CW, xviii, 197-8.

<sup>57</sup> JSM, 'Civilization', CW, xviii, 143.

<sup>58</sup> In his letter of 1828 to Comte, d'Eichthal wrote: 'As for the industrial aspect [of England], you can imagine I felt only one thing, admiration.' (Gustav d'Eichthal to Auguste Comte, 17 October 1828, D'Eichthal (1977) 7.)

part of his life, naturally acquires an ascendancy over his mind disproportionate to its real importance ....<sup>59</sup>

In 'Civilization', Mill examined the implications of the commercial spirit from the viewpoint of the concept of civilization. In his view, in the process of civilization, every individual learnt to cooperate and to help each other, and came more and more to depend on the social arrangements which were gradually being improved with the progress of society. This tendency decreased the necessity for self-dependence. The negative features of the middle class reflected this tendency. The decrease of self-dependence, or the increase of dependence on the social system, removed inducements that called forth energy. No inducements remained but the desire for wealth. This was why people in a civilized society tended to concentrate their energies on money-getting. The middle class devoted their energy to the pursuit of wealth, while the energy of the aristocrat, whose desire for wealth was already sufficiently satisfied, was nearly extinct. This tendency to money worship encouraged moral corruption – getting money was like 'quackery'. Moreover, the intellectual sphere was inevitably involved in this commercialization of society. Literature was apt to pander to the masses to make sales, and subsequently became 'more and more a mere reflection of the current sentiments'. Quality was sacrificed for quantity, serious thought for immediate comfort. As a result, the influence of the leading individuals over society was diminished.<sup>60</sup>

Mill's views on the corruption of the commercial spirit makes it clear that his identification of civilized society with commercial society never implied terminological confusion. In 'Tocqueville [2]', he stated:

M. de Tocqueville ... has, at least apparently, confounded the effects of Democracy with the effects of Civilization. He has bound up in one abstract idea the whole of the tendencies of modern commercial society, and given them one name – Democracy; thereby letting it be supposed that he ascribes to equality of conditions, several of the effects naturally arising from the mere progress of national prosperity, in the form in which that progress manifests itself in modern times.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> JSM to d'Eichthal, 15 May 1829, CW, xii, 31-2. See also JSM to Gustav d'Eichthal, 8 October 1829, CW, xii, 34-8.

<sup>60</sup> JSM, 'Civilization', CW, xviii, 129-135.

<sup>61</sup> JSM, 'Tocqueville [2]', CW, xviii, 191-2. See also *ibid.*, 196, where he stated: 'The defects which M.

In regard to this point, H. O. Pappé points out: ‘Tocqueville thought that equality as such was the source of the commercial and industrial spirit with all its consequences, promising as well as threatening. Mill attributed the evil consequences to aspects of the commercial as such, not to the idea of equality.’<sup>62</sup> Tocqueville and Mill shared a fear of the excessive tendency towards social conformity in democratic society, which would cause social stagnation. There was, however, a crucial difference between them. On the one hand, Tocqueville thought that the tendency towards equalization freed individuals from the yoke of social custom and tradition, but, at the same time, it induced in them a sense of isolation, which led them to feel impotent and to follow public opinion. On the other hand, Mill, who associated the tyranny of majority with the moral corruption of the commercial class, thought that the prejudices of the commercial class tended to repress individuality. Accordingly, in his opinion, both the problems of the tyranny of majority and the corruption of the commercial spirit should be understood together in terms of the progress of civilization.

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Scholars have examined the notion of the tyranny of the majority in the thought of Mill, either through *On Liberty*, or in light of his relationship with Tocqueville. Mill’s understanding of this phenomenon deepened gradually from ‘Tocqueville [1]’ (1835), through ‘Civilization’ (1836) and ‘Bentham’ (1838), to ‘Tocqueville [2]’ (1840). In such earlier essays as ‘Tocqueville [1]’ and ‘State of Society in America’, the problem of majority rule was seen as peculiar to American society. At this stage, Mill even concluded that Britain was more fit for democracy than America, because Britain, unlike America, had an aristocratic class which he expected would buffer the excessive influence of the majority.<sup>63</sup> It was in the essay on ‘Bentham’ that Mill first explicitly expressed his anxiety about the tyranny of the majority. In ‘Bentham’, he questioned whether it was ‘the proper condition of man, in all ages and nations, to be under the

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de Tocqueville points out in the American, and which we see in the modern English mind, are the ordinary ones of a commercial class.’

<sup>62</sup> Pappé (1964) 230.

<sup>63</sup> See pp. 58-60 above. Mill stated: ‘America is ... nearly the most unfavourable field in which democracy could have been tried.’ (JSM, ‘America’, CW, xviii, 107.)

despotism of Public Opinion'.<sup>64</sup> He went on to say that, though the majority should be sovereign, a remedy which prevented the numerical majority from swallowing up everyone else had to be considered. Where the exercise of power by the majority was excessive, 'the rights of the individual human being' would be 'in extreme peril'.

Mill pointed to three social groups who would counterbalance the commercial, middle class – the agricultural class, the leisured class, and the learned class – and take crucial roles in correcting its influence.<sup>65</sup> The agricultural class was first referred to in 'Tocqueville [2]' in 1840, while the others had already been mentioned in 'Civilization' in 1836 and before. According to Mill, the evils of civilization were first, the power of the masses was the only substantial power, and second, each individual would become deprived of moral vigour. His proposed solutions for these problems were to form a combination of individuals whose influence was declining, and to create educational, political, and social institutions by which individual character could be developed.<sup>66</sup>

In the case of the former, concerning the learned class, he favoured co-operative organizations, with the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in mind. He thought that isolated individuals, those of intelligence in particular, should enjoy the advantages of civilization, namely 'the spirit of co-operation'.<sup>67</sup> With regard to the second remedy, in 'Civilization' he examined the problem of the 'relaxation' of the leisured aristocracy. In this period, he repeatedly criticized existing educational institutions, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in particular, which had been strongly associated with the existing establishment of church and state.<sup>68</sup> In order to improve the character of the aristocratic class, Mill hoped that an end would be put 'to every kind of unearned distinction', letting 'the only road open to honour and ascendancy be that of personal qualities'.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> JSM, 'Bentham', CW, x, 107.

<sup>65</sup> JSM, 'Tocqueville [2]', CW, xviii, 198.

<sup>66</sup> JSM, 'Civilization', CW, xviii, 136.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 138ff. Mill had already criticized the institutions of higher education in 'Sedgwick's Discourse' (April 1835), CW, x, 95-159. For this point, see Alexander Brady, 'Introduction', CW, xviii, xxv-xxvii.

<sup>69</sup> JSM, 'Civilization', CW, xviii, 146-7. In January 1836, three months before the publication of J. S. Mill's 'Civilization', James Mill had expressed a very similar view to this. See James Mill (1836:

Subsequently, in ‘Tocqueville [2]’, Mill began to show an interest in the agricultural class. Mill thought that the agricultural class had not been corrupted by the commercial spirit. Generally, they were willing to accept the guidance of the intellectuals, and had local attachments to place and occupation. The disposition of the agricultural class was opposite to that of commercial class. Their disposition was, according to Mill, composed of ‘moderate wishes, tranquil tastes, cultivation of the excitements and enjoyments near at hand, and compatible with their existing position’.<sup>70</sup> He insisted that artificial devices should be introduced to maintain this disposition. This included economic and social reform, such as the reform of the system of rack-renting and tenancy at will along with the repeal of the Corn Laws, and educational improvements so that knowledge could be diffused and their minds trained.<sup>71</sup>

Importantly, in ‘Bentham’ and ‘Tocqueville [2]’, Mill attempted to connect the idea of the necessity of counterbalancing powers against the middle class with a view that organized social antagonism was needed for the development of society. He feared the tyranny of the majority because it would stunt social development, rather than because it would lead to the oppression of the minority by the majority. He believed that, ‘The unlikeness of one man to another is not only a principle of improvement, but would seem almost to be the only principle’.<sup>72</sup> He stated:

All countries which have long continued progressive, or been durably great, have been so because there has been an organized opposition to the ruling power, of whatever kind that power was: plebeians to patricians, clergy to kings, freethinkers to clergy, kings to barons, commons to king and aristocracy. ... Wherever some such quarrel has not been going on – wherever it has been terminated by the

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Aristocracy) 301-2. It should also be noted here that J. S. Mill later abandoned his hope for the leisured class. On 13 April 1847, Mill wrote to John Austin: ‘I have even ceased to think that a leisured class, in the ordinary sense of the term, is an essential constituent of the best form of society.’ (JSM to John Austin, 13 April, 1847, CW, xiii, 713.)

<sup>70</sup> Mill claimed that the reason why the agricultural spirit was not seen in America was that the agricultural class there was ‘to all intents and purposes a commercial class’. (JSM, ‘Tocqueville [2]’, CW, xviii, 198.)

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 199. In ‘Coleridge’, Mill referred to Coleridge’s argument that the landed property represented ‘[t]he interest of permanence, or the Conservative interest’ in society. (JSM, ‘Coleridge’, CW, x, 152-3.)

<sup>72</sup> JSM, ‘Tocqueville [2]’, CW, xviii, 197.

complete victory of one of the contending principles, and no new contest has taken the place of the old – society has either been hardened into Chinese stationariness, or fallen into dissolution.<sup>73</sup>

In his view, ‘The evil is not in the preponderance of a democratic class, but of any class.’<sup>74</sup> However, he also argued that it was a natural tendency of civilization that the importance of the masses became gradually greater, and the tendency towards social conformity gradually became stronger. Hence, social antagonism, he claimed, should artificially be created in order to encourage social development.

Around 1830, especially in ‘The Spirit of the Age’, Mill accepted Saint Simonian ideas of the necessity of social conformity by the instruction of intellectuals in order to achieve social stability. However, in the mid-1830s, he came to the view that such stability meant that society was at a deadlock, and conformity constituted a disturbing factor in social development. Subsequently, he came to see that diversity in society was necessary for its development. Even though Mill continued to believe in the importance of instructed elites, his tone had changed. While he used to think that their role was to bring about an agreement of opinion for social stability,<sup>75</sup> he now insisted that the elites should form one of the counteracting powers against the majority in order to maintain the social diversity that was a necessary condition for social development and civilization.

#### **4. Concluding Note**

In the late 1830s, Mill came to see contemporary society as a commercial civilization led by the commercial middle class. In light of his notion of civilization, he attempted to give a systematic and comprehensive explanation of its tendencies, such as

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<sup>73</sup> JSM, ‘Bentham’, CW, x, 108. For his reference to China as an example of a nation being at a standstill due to the lack of social antagonism, see also ‘Tocqueville [2]’, CW, xviii, 188-9. Mill probably took the idea of Chinese stagnation from his reading of Guizot, as Tocqueville did also. (Varouxakis (1999) 296-305.) For Mill’s argument on China, see Levin (2004) 94-120.

<sup>74</sup> JSM, ‘Tocqueville [2]’, CW, xviii, 196.

<sup>75</sup> As far as such a view was concerned, John Austin’s influence on Mill was vital, as well as that of the Saint Simonians. In particular, it was not the Saint Simonians, but Austin, who grounded this view on a utilitarian basis. For the influence of Austin on Mill, see Friedman (1968).

the corruption of commercial spirit and the so-called ‘tyranny of the majority’, and to propose practicable solutions for them, such as the creation of social antagonism in order to counterbalance the dominant middle class.

While fostering a better understanding of characteristics of commercial society, in 1837 Mill resumed writing a work on logic, which he had commenced in the early 1830s, but had had to suspend it in 1832 due to problems regarding the theory of induction. He thought that the progress of methodological argument – the science of science as he called it – could encourage the improvement of science in general and then the improvement of man and society.<sup>76</sup> He had been confident about contributing to the renovation of methodology since the mid-1820s. In the next chapter, I shall examine Mill’s projected science of society, formulated in the *Logic* – the most important result of his longstanding interest in methodology.

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<sup>76</sup> JSM to John Sterling, 20-22 October 1831, CW, xii, 79.

## Chapter 5. J. S. Mill's Projected Science of Society

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to expound Mill's ambitious system of moral science, with reference mainly to *A System of Logic*. Since as early as around 1826, writing a book on logic had been one of Mill's most important self-appointed tasks. In his *Autobiography*, Mill recalled that he first 'formed the project of writing a book on Logic' during the study meeting, which he held with his friends twice a week at George Grote's house, where topics relating to logic were discussed, drawing on the works of such thinkers as Henry Aldrich, Richard Whately, and Thomas Hobbes.<sup>1</sup> In 'the early part of 1830' he actually began to 'put on paper the ideas on Logic', which eventually resulted in the publication of the *Logic* in 1843.<sup>2</sup> However, due to difficult problems regarding induction, he interrupted his writing on logic between 1832 and 1837.<sup>3</sup> Significantly, during this interruption, much of his intellectual effort was devoted to the examination of contemporary society, which contributed to broadening and deepening his understanding of contemporary commercial society. The fruits of this work can be found in such essays as 'De Tocqueville on Democracy in America' (1835 and 1840), 'Civilization' (1836), 'Bentham' (1838), and 'Coleridge' (1840), as well as in the *Logic*, where his system of moral science was formulated.

He set down the discovery of what he called 'universal law', or simply 'law', as the chief objective of every scientific study. The term 'law' referred to the invariable uniformities in the relationships between phenomena: 'It is the custom of philosophers, wherever they can trace regularity of any kind, to call the general proposition which expresses the nature of that regularity, a law'.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the point of his work on logic was to clarify the scientific method by which such laws could reasonably be determined.

The ultimate task of the scientist of society, in Mill's opinion, was to explain

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<sup>1</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 125.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>4</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, vii, 316.

scientifically the empirical uniformities of social phenomena by showing their connection to the psychological laws of human nature, which operated in conjunction with given social conditions. He emphasized the point that social science should be grounded on the knowledge of human nature; in other words, every social science should be deduced from the science of human nature.<sup>5</sup> Even though this idea was not unique, in that it had been put forward by earlier thinkers, including Dugald Stewart and James Mill,<sup>6</sup> Mill went further by giving a detailed explanation of what sorts of deductive method were to be applied for the study of various social phenomena, and pointing out why an inductive method was not feasible when investigating social phenomena.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine Mill's essays in the 1830s, among others 'Definition of Political Economy', in which he presented the earliest formulation of his system of moral science. One of the characteristics of his thought at this period was what I call political relativism. Mill came to emphasize the way in which the state of society affected, or rather restricted, the form of government which it was feasible for a given community to adopt. His system of moral science reflected this political relativism. The second part of this chapter focuses exclusively on the *Logic*, where I explain why Mill concluded that experimental, inductive methods were not sufficient when studying social phenomena. This is followed by an examination of his detailed discussion of deductive methods. Finally, I expound his system of moral science as developed in the *Logic*. In so doing, I will investigate the role of ethology as the '*axiomata media*' of moral science.

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<sup>5</sup> To refer to the study of social phenomena, Mill employed several different terms. Even within a single work, the *Logic*, such terms were used as 'the study of the phenomena of Society' (ibid., viii, 875.), 'the study of Politics' (ibid.), 'political or social science' (ibid.), 'the philosophy of society' (ibid., 876.), 'Social Science' (ibid., 877, 895.), and 'Sociology' (ibid., 895.). In addition, he had previously used such terms as 'speculative politics', 'the natural history of society', and 'the science of social economy'. (JSM, 'Definition', CW, iv, 320-1.) See also note 17 of this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Fontana (1985) 81-105.

## 2. J. S. Mill's Formulation of a System of Moral Science in the 1830s

### i

By 1830 at the latest, Mill came to hold two relativist viewpoints: the first was that different societies were at different stages of development; the second was that societies might vary even when they were at the same stage. Moreover, he came to believe that relativism of this kind had a huge importance in the study of politics. In other words, he focused in the notion of 'society', and subsequently thought that the value of political institutions depended on the state of society in which they were established.

In 'Miss Martineau's Summary of Political Economy', which he published in the *Monthly Repository* in May 1834, Mill criticized political economists for regarding a class society which consisted of landlords, capitalists, and labourers, as universal. He emphasized the importance of applying a relativist perspective to the study of political economy:

They revolve in their eternal circle of landlords, capitalists, and labourers, until they seem to think of the distinction of society into those three classes, as if it were one of God's ordinances, not man's, and as little under human control as the division of day and night. Scarcely any one of them seems to have proposed to himself as a subject of inquiry, what changes the relations of those classes to one another are likely to undergo in the progress of society; to what extent the distinction itself admits of being beneficially modified, and if it does not even, in a certain sense, tend gradually to disappear.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, he often expressed the view that political problems were relative, and attempted to ground this view on solid scientific foundations. This attempt took the form of a criticism of what he regarded as Benthamite politics on the one hand, and the form of an interest in historical knowledge on the other. In September 1840 he claimed:

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<sup>7</sup> JSM, 'Miss Martineau's Summary of Political Economy', CW, iv, 226-7. In regard to this statement, of further importance was Mill's anxiety that the overlooking of the possibility of institutional and social change would discourage the hope for human improvement. He went on to say: 'We only ask of those to whom we are indebted for so much, that they will not require of us to believe that this is all, nor, by fixing bounds to the possible reach of improvement in human affairs, set limits also to that ardour in its pursuit, which may be excited for an object at an indefinite distance, but only if it be also of indefinite magnitude.' (ibid., 227.)

‘whoever knows these two principles, possesses more of the science of politics than was known even to eminent thinkers fifty years ago’. The principles in question were as follows: first, ‘the successive changes which take place in human affairs are no more left to chance in the moral than in the physical world, but that the progress of society, social, moral, and political, together with the whole train of events which compose the history of the human race, are as much the effect of certain fixed laws as the motions of the planets or the rotation of the seasons’; and second, ‘the changes in political institutions are the effects of previous changes in the condition of society and of the human mind’.<sup>8</sup>

It should be noted, as Frederick Rosen points out,<sup>9</sup> that Mill’s relativism never meant that he abandoned a psychological theory based on the universal laws of human nature, even though, ‘The more highly the science of ethology is cultivated, and the better the diversities of national character are understood, the smaller, probably, will the number of propositions become, which it will be considered safe to build on as universal principles of human nature’.<sup>10</sup> What he meant was that the way causal laws determining man’s character and behaviour actually operated was complex and depended on a given condition of society, itself the result of historical events. In his system, ethology would be the bridge between the universal laws of human nature and social phenomena actually observed, as I shall show.

## ii

Even though his interest in logic can be traced back to the mid-1820s, it was in the early 1830s that Mill came to emphasize the importance of methodological argument in general, and to the moral sciences in particular. In so doing, his political relativism was reflected in his formulation of a system of moral science, of the relation between sciences, and of the methodologies applied to them.

In ‘Definition of Political Economy’ which, though first published in 1836, was written in the early 1830s,<sup>11</sup> Mill gave a general account of the whole system of moral

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<sup>8</sup> JSM, ‘Essays on Government’ (September 1840), CW, xviii, 151. See also JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 919.

<sup>9</sup> Rosen (2007) 133.

<sup>10</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 906.

<sup>11</sup> For the process of writing ‘Definition of Political Economy’, see John Robson, ‘Editor’s Note’, CW, iv,

science – a comprehensive system within which political economy was placed.<sup>12</sup> In his view, moral science, whose subject-matter was ‘Man ... considered as a being having a moral or mental nature’, consisted of three categories. The first category, which formed a part of ‘pure mental philosophy’, dealt with ‘what belongs to man as an individual man, and would belong to him if no human being existed besides himself’. This study clarified ‘all the laws of the mere intellect, and those of the purely self-regarding desires’. The second, which constituted another part of pure mental philosophy, and on which ‘*morals*, or *ethics*, are founded’, discussed those laws of human nature regarding the feelings called forth in relation to others, such as ‘the *affections*, the *conscience*, or feeling of duty, and the love of *approbation*’.<sup>13</sup>

The third category was conceived as ‘certain principles of human nature which are peculiarly connected with the ideas and feelings generated in man by living in a state of *society*’.<sup>14</sup> Mill stated:

It shows by what principles of his nature man is induced to enter into a state of society; how this change in his position acts upon his interests and feelings, and through them upon his conduct; how the association tends progressively to become closer, and the co-operation extends itself to more and more purposes; what those purposes are, and what the varieties of means most generally adopted for furthering them; what are the various relations which establish themselves among men as the ordinary consequence of the social union; what those which are different in different states of society;<sup>15</sup> and what are the effects of each upon the conduct and character of man.<sup>16</sup>

This science was comprehensive in that it was to embrace ‘every part of man’s nature,

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309. For Mill’s argument on the definition and method of political economy, see Chapter 8 below.

<sup>12</sup> Besides the expression ‘moral science’, Mill employed such phrases as ‘psychological science’ or ‘mental science’ for this branch of science. (JSM, ‘Definition’, CW, iv, 316, 324.)

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>15</sup> When this essay was republished in 1844 as part of *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*, the following sentence was inserted at this point: ‘in what historical order those states tend to succeed one another’. This insertion, as J. H. Burns points out, reflects his strong interest in the theory of social change at that period. (Burns (1976) 7.)

<sup>16</sup> JSM, ‘Definition’, CW, iv, 320.

in so far as influencing the conduct or condition of man in society'; it was to be 'the scientific foundation of *practical* politics, or the art of government, of which the art of legislation is a part'.<sup>17</sup>

On the one hand, political economy was conceived as dealing with only one kind of motive, the desire for wealth and aversion to labour; it was intended to show what would happen as a consequence of the pursuit of wealth in a given state of society.<sup>18</sup> Mill stated that political economy dealt with the desire for wealth 'as if it were the sole end',<sup>19</sup> even though no political economist 'was ever so absurd as to suppose that mankind are really thus constituted'.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the subject-matter of politics was the state of society. In order to examine such a complex phenomenon as society in which man was often moved by many motives, it was useless to focus on only one set of motives, as political economy did. Moreover, the conclusions of political economy, which presupposed a certain state of society, were subject to the conclusions of politics, which discussed the nature and condition of that society.

As far as the methodology of such sciences as political economy and politics was concerned, Mill presented two types of reasoning: what he termed the method of 'practical men' and the method of 'theorists'. The method of practical men, which he also called 'the method *à posteriori*', was an operation of induction, while the method of the theorist, also called 'the method *à priori*', did not mean merely an operation of deduction, but meant the mixed operation of induction and deduction.<sup>21</sup> To Mill's mind, the true method of moral science was that of the theorist. However, due to such difficulties inevitably involved in the subject-matter of moral science as the complexity of the premises of reasoning and the impossibility of experiment, one could never be assured that all the operative causes had been identified. In order to eliminate these problems, Mill proposed an *à posteriori* process to verify the accuracy of the temporary

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 320-1. For this science, Mill proposed such names as 'social economy', 'speculative politics', 'the science of politics', and 'the natural history of society'. (ibid.)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 322.

<sup>21</sup> To Mill's mind, *a posteriori* reasoning was induction from 'specific experience'. (ibid., 324.)

conclusions reached by deductive reasoning.<sup>22</sup>

Compared with the *Logic*, the argument in ‘Definition of Political Economy’ left some ambiguities. The most important difference was that, while in ‘Definition of Political Economy’ Mill did not propose the existence of more than one method *à priori*, in the *Logic* he recognized the existence of two kinds of method *à priori* – the geometrical method and the physical method. This recognition enabled him to distinguish James Mill’s method (the geometrical) from his own (the physical). In ‘Definition of Political Economy’, he did not, therefore, distinguish, from a methodological perspective, between a comprehensive study of society, which he thought employed the inverse deductive method, and such separate studies of social phenomena as political economy and political ethology, which used the direct deductive method. Despite such ambiguities, this essay was of huge importance in that he attempted to formulate the relationship between the branches of moral science, and to argue that all studies of social phenomenon should employ the deductive approach, employing what he called ‘the principle of the Composition of Forces’.<sup>23</sup>

### **3. J. S. Mill’s Formulation of a System of Moral Science in the *Logic***

#### **i**

Mill wrote that every phenomenon existed in two relations to every other; either in that of simultaneity or in that of succession. He stated: ‘Of all truths relating to phenomena, the most valuable to us are those which relate to the order of their succession.’ This was because the law of simultaneity was a derivative law of the law of succession.<sup>24</sup> Of uniformities of succession, only one had been found capable of being regarded as rigorously universal, namely ‘the Law of Causation’, a law which, in the simplest terms, stipulated ‘every fact which has a beginning has a cause’.<sup>25</sup> The ultimate objective of every scientific inquiry, therefore, was to ascertain the universal law of causation, or simply universal causation.

According to Mill, cause was the ‘unconditional invariable antecedent’ of every

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>23</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 167.

<sup>24</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, vii, 324.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 325.

phenomenon. Cause should not only be ‘invariable’ in the sense that the antecedent had always been followed by the consequent, but also ‘unconditional’ in the sense of being independent from any other antecedents. For instance, day was always followed by night, but this did not mean that day was the cause of night, for the alternation of day and night was caused by earth’s rotation.<sup>26</sup> Significantly, Mill was interested only in what he called ‘physical causes’, and subsequently he saw causation as a relation between observable phenomena.<sup>27</sup> This means that he did not intend to investigate ‘metaphysical’ causes, which were non-physical phenomena in themselves, and about which man could have no knowledge, even when they were supposed to exist ‘behind’ physical phenomena. Therefore, ‘The only notion of a cause ... is such a notion as can be gained from experience.’<sup>28</sup>

As an empiricist, Mill attempted to develop an inductive method which could be applied to both natural and moral science, and then claimed that the law of universal causation was the foundation of any logic of induction. In other words, he believed that the notion of universal causation found in the natural world could also be applied to human actions. At the same time, he was vitally concerned with human freedom, and eager to develop an argument that showed that the law of universal causation was compatible with the notion of the freedom of human will. He developed this point in Chapter II of Book VI of the *Logic*, entitled ‘Of Liberty and Necessity’, which he thought to be ‘the best chapter’ in the *Logic*.<sup>29</sup>

Mill stated that there were two main theories of the causation of human actions: the theory of free will and that of necessity.<sup>30</sup> The former theory, however, was improper in that it conflicted with the law of causation – effect always had antecedent causes. In favour of the doctrine of necessity, he introduced a distinction between the doctrine of necessity properly understood and that misconceived, namely ‘fatalism’.<sup>31</sup> The term

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 338-9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> JSM to Robert Barclay Fox, 14 February 1843, CW, xiii, 569. See also JSM to Alexis de Tocqueville, 3 November 1843, CW, xiii, 612.

<sup>30</sup> Mill later called it ‘determinism’ in *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy*.

<sup>31</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 839.

‘necessary’ properly understood merely meant, according to Mill, the uniformity of sequence, and, therefore, ‘Applied to the will, it only means that the given cause will be followed by the effect, subject to all possibilities of counteraction by other causes.’<sup>32</sup> But, in common use, it often wrongly implied ‘the operation of those causes exclusively, which are supposed too powerful to be counteracted at all’. As the following statement clarifies, Mill understood the doctrine of necessity to refer to the ‘capability of being predicted’,<sup>33</sup> and not of inevitable compulsion.

Correctly conceived, the doctrine called Philosophical Necessity is simply this: that, given the motives which are present to an individual’s mind, and given likewise the character and disposition of the individual, the manner in which he will act may be unerringly inferred: that if we knew the person thoroughly, and knew all the inducements which are acting upon him, we could foretell his conduct with as much certainty as we can predict any physical event.<sup>34</sup>

Mill subsequently claimed that human moral freedom could be compatible with ‘the doctrine that our volitions and actions are invariable consequents of our antecedent states of mind’.<sup>35</sup> This doctrine only meant that, once his character and circumstances were known, a man’s action could be predicted. It did not mean that the man’s actions were compelled by his character and circumstances. Man could resist certain motives, even though his wish to resist needed its own antecedent. Mill thought that fatalism, which denied such a possibility, was represented by Owenism. Though correct in endorsing that ‘whatever is about to happen, will be the infallible result of the causes which produce it’, Owenism was wrong in further claiming that ‘character is formed *for* him, and not *by* him; therefore his wishing that it had been formed differently is of no use; he has no power to alter it’.<sup>36</sup> According to Mill, however, ‘He has, to a certain extent, a power to alter his character.’<sup>37</sup> In opposition to fatalism, Mill denied that the doctrine of necessity implied that our actions were inevitably compelled in any way.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 838.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 836-7.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 837.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 840.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 840.

‘The causes, therefore, on which action depends, are never uncontrollable’,<sup>38</sup> and it was controllable even by the man himself. Subsequently, Mill stated that moral freedom did not consist in the ability to act against our volition, which was not an unconditional cause, but was a consequent of an antecedent. It consisted in a man’s creating his own volition, or, at least, in wishing to create his own volition, by forming his own character in a particular way.<sup>39</sup> The Owenite, on the contrary, failed to recognize that ‘his own desire to mould it in a particular way, is one of those circumstances [contributing to the formation of his own character], and by no means one of the least influential’.<sup>40</sup> Mill’s purpose here was to insist on the importance of man’s ability to form volitions, and thereby, mould his own character. Mill did not attempt to point out the manner in which such volitions were produced, in other words to point out the unconditional and ultimate causes of volitions. He thus regarded moral freedom as a belief in the possibility of the self-formation of character. He thought that moral freedom thus understood did not contradict the doctrine of necessity. This doctrine, if properly conceived, merely meant that man’s actions were always caused by a certain antecedent state of mind, and Mill was prepared to admit that the desire for moral freedom had its antecedent cause.<sup>41</sup>

## ii

According to Mill, induction was a logical process to ascertain the laws of causation;<sup>42</sup> inductive reasoning was conducted by either observations or experiments, or both. One inductive operation was ‘simple enumeration’, an operation that relied

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 839.

<sup>39</sup> In the seventh edition of the *Logic* (1868), the following sentence was added: ‘And hence it is said with truth, that none but a person of confirmed virtue is completely free.’ (ibid., 841.)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 841.

<sup>41</sup> See further Chapter 7 below.

<sup>42</sup> Mill stated: ‘To ascertain, therefore, what are the laws of causation which exist in nature; to determine the effects of every cause, and the causes of all effects, – is the main business of Induction; and to point out how this is done is the chief object of Inductive Logic.’ (ibid., vii, 378.) The process of generalization was also designated by this term. (ibid., 307.) These two processes were very similar, but he distinguished between them in that exceptions might be involved in generalization, while an ascertained law of causation did not have exceptions. See ibid., 445.

only on observation.<sup>43</sup> To Mill's mind, simple enumeration was incapable of ascertaining causation, for the conclusion derived from this operation only meant that any contrary instances had not yet been observed, and did not mean that such counterexamples would never be discovered in the future. Accordingly, Mill claimed that, in conducting inductive reasoning in order to ascertain causation, experiment was required, along with observation. This claim encouraged him to examine experimental methods in detail.

In Chapter VIII of Book III of the *Logic*, entitled 'Of the Four Methods of Experimental Inquiry', Mill examined four experimental methods: the methods of agreement; of difference; of residues; and of concomitant variation.<sup>44</sup> He stated that he took them from John Herschel, who had been inspired by Francis Bacon. Mill formulated the method of agreement thus: 'If two or more instances of the phenomenon under investigation have only one circumstance in common, the circumstance in which alone all the instances agree, is the cause (or effect) of the given phenomenon.'<sup>45</sup> The method of difference was thus expressed: 'If an instance in which the phenomenon under investigation occurs, and an instance in which it does not occur, have every circumstance save one in common, that one occurring only in the former; the circumstance in which alone the two instances differ, is the effect, or cause, or a necessary part of the cause, of the phenomenon.'<sup>46</sup> Mill expressed the method of residues thus: 'Subduct from any phenomenon such part as is known by previous inductions to be the effect of certain antecedents, and the residue of the phenomenon is the effect of the remaining antecedents.'<sup>47</sup> The method of concomitant variation was formulated as follows: 'Whatever phenomenon varies in any manner whenever another phenomenon varies in some particular manner, is either a cause or an effect of that

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>44</sup> JSM, *Logic*, Bk. iii, Chap. 8, *ibid.*, 388-406. In addition to these four methods, Mill presented the joint method of agreement and difference, which combined the methods of agreement and of difference. (*ibid.*, 396.)

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 390.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 398.

phenomenon, or is connected with it through some fact of causation.’<sup>48</sup> These were, according to Mill, ‘the only possible modes of experimental inquiry’,<sup>49</sup> and, therefore, if these could not be applied to the study of social phenomena, the causal laws of social phenomena could not be ascertained through an inductive, experimental method.

In Mill’s view, the methods of agreement, of residues, and of concomitant variation were inconclusive. These could affirm only the existence of some causal connection between phenomena, and could not clarify the law of connection. What the method of agreement could show was merely that ‘there is a “uniformity” between an antecedent and consequent, that they are invariably connected’,<sup>50</sup> and, this method could not, therefore, specify which was the cause and which was the effect. In others words, it could not show that the antecedent was the cause of the consequent. The method of residues could lead to the conclusion that one or more consequents were the effect of one of a set of antecedents, but could not clarify that a particular antecedent was the cause of a particular consequent.<sup>51</sup> Through the method of concomitant variations, it was possible to show that there was a casual relation between the antecedent and the consequent, but impossible to decide whether the antecedent was the cause of the consequent or whether both of them had another cause.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, Mill claimed that only the method of difference could specify casual laws. He saw this method as ‘the most perfect of the methods of experimental inquiry’.<sup>53</sup> In employing this method, it was necessary not only to produce the consequent in terms of producing the antecedent, but also to exclude the consequent by excluding the antecedent. Otherwise, neither could be ascertained.<sup>54</sup>

A further advantage of the method of difference was that it could treat not only the cases in which a single cause acted alone to produce an effect, but also those cases where there was a ‘plurality of causes’, cases in which there might be several different

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 401.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 406.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 394.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 397-8.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 401.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., viii, 881.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., vii, 393.

antecedents that produced the same effects.<sup>55</sup> None of the other three methods could effectively solve the difficulties caused by a plurality of causes. There was, however, a particular case in which all the methods of experimental inquiry, including that of difference, were not applicable. This case Mill termed the ‘intermixture of effects’.<sup>56</sup> The intermixture of effects referred to cases in which multiple causes interfered with each other to produce a single effect. What Mill termed the ‘composition of causes’ was one common type of such an intermixture.<sup>57</sup> In such a case, it was impossible to find the two examples that the method of difference needed, namely two examples which shared all antecedent circumstances and differed only in the feature in question. All the possible causes of this particular feature would be included within other features which the antecedents in both examples shared. In order to examine a case involving the intermixture of effects, an alternative method was required. This was what Mill termed the deductive or *à priori* method. The most significant kinds of phenomena in which the intermixture of effects occurred were social phenomena. Accordingly, in the study of social phenomena, only the deductive method was applicable. Mill concluded that the experimental method could not be used in the study of social phenomena, due to the impossibility of experimentation.<sup>58</sup> Not only that, even empirical laws could not be ascertained by this method, as I shall show.

It should be noted here that the notion that social phenomena could not be investigated through experimental methods did not mean that it was impossible to dissolve a certain social phenomenon into the elements which composed it, and then to ascertain the cause of each element through induction. Social phenomena could be investigated by deduction from propositions which had been ascertained by induction. This idea was related to Mill’s distinction between what he called ‘chemical

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 434-5.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 443.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> The experimental method was also called as the ‘chemical method’, the ‘method *à posteriori*’, or the ‘direct induction’. Mill criticized this method as empiricism. It should be remembered that Mill identified his own position with ‘the School of Experience’, and stood in opposition to what he called empiricism, which he thought bad generalization and unscientific surmise. See Anschutz (1953) 73; R. F. McRae, ‘Introduction’, CW, vii, xxi-xxii.

combination' and 'mechanical composition'.

On the one hand, chemical combination was a process where two or more substances combined to form another, which took on properties which differed from the properties of its constituent elements to such an extent that they could not have been predicted from the properties of its elements. In this case, 'most of the uniformities to which the causes conformed when separate, cease altogether when they are conjoined'. An example of chemical combination was the production of water from the combination of hydrogen and oxygen: 'Not a trace of the properties of hydrogen or of oxygen is observable in those of their compound, water.'<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, mechanical composition was defined as 'the principle which is exemplified in all cases in which the joint effect of several causes is identical with the sum of their separate effects';<sup>60</sup> in other words, it was a mode 'of the mutual interference of laws of nature, in which, even when the concurrent causes annihilate each other's effects, each exerts its full efficacy according to its own law, its law as a separate agent'.<sup>61</sup> The difference, therefore, between them was, according to Mill, the difference 'between the case in which the joint effect of causes is the sum of their separate effects, and the case in which it is heterogeneous to them; between laws which work together without alteration, and laws which, when called upon to work together, cease and give place to others'.<sup>62</sup>

In order to understand a social phenomenon which is the result of the mechanical composition of causes, Mill stated that the phenomenon should be dissolved into the elements of which it was composed, and then the causal law of each element ascertained. Accordingly, he thought that it was possible to ascertain a scientific law by deduction, in the narrow sense of the term, from premises which had been ascertained by induction.

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<sup>59</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, vii, 371.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 373.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. In his *Autobiography*, Mill stated: 'I then recollected that something not unlike this was pointed out as one of the distinctions between chemical and mechanical phenomena, in the introduction to that favorite of my boyhood, Thomson's *System of Chemistry*. This distinction at once made my mind clear as to what was perplexing me in respect to the philosophy of politics. I now saw, that a science is either deductive or experimental, according as, in the province it deals with, the effects of causes when conjoined, are or are not the sums of the effects which the same causes produce when separate. It followed that politics must be a deductive science.' (JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 167.)

As I shall demonstrate below, these operations – direct induction and deduction in its narrow sense – comprised, along with verification as the third process, deduction in the broad sense of the term, or what Mill called the ‘deductive method’.

### iii

At the outset of Chapter X of Book VI of the *Logic*, Mill attempted to define ‘a state of society’,<sup>63</sup> which was the subject-matter of scientific inquiry:

What is called a state of society, is the simultaneous state of all the greater social facts or phenomena. Such are, the degree of knowledge, and of intellectual and moral culture, existing in the community, and in every class of it; the state of industry, of wealth and its distribution; the habitual occupations of the community; their division into classes, and the relations of those classes to one another; the common beliefs which they entertain on all the subjects most important to mankind, and the degree of assurance with which those beliefs are held; their tastes, and the character and degree of their æsthetic development; their form of government, and the more important of their laws and customs. The condition of all these things, and of many more which will spontaneously suggest themselves, constitute the state of society or the state of civilization at any given time.<sup>64</sup>

What he called the state of society were the conditions ‘not of one or few organs or functions, but of the whole organism’,<sup>65</sup> and

There is no social phenomenon which is not more or less influenced by every other part of the condition of the same society, and therefore by every cause which is influencing any other of the contemporaneous social phenomena. There is, in short, what physiologists term a *consensus*, similar to that existing among the various organs and functions of the physical frame of man and the more perfect animals.<sup>66</sup>

The existence of a given state of society was ‘a necessary consequence of the influence exercised by every one of those phenomena over every other. It is a fact implied in the

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<sup>63</sup> Mill used ‘the state of society’ and ‘the state of civilization’ interchangeably.

<sup>64</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 911-2.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, 912.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 899.

*consensus* of the various parts of the social body'.<sup>67</sup> Of importance was the fact that he regarded the form of government as an element constituting the state of society; in other words, he thought that the form of government would inevitably be influenced by other social phenomenon. This view was similar to that of Saint Simon, and reflected his relativist attitude towards political institutions.<sup>68</sup>

Having defined 'a state of society', Mill formulated a system of social science which examined the various aspects of society. In Mill's view, the science of society consisted of two major categories: the 'General Science of Society' and 'Special Sociological Enquiries'. He conceived the General Science of Society as a study which 'inquires into the laws of succession and coexistence of the great facts constituting the state of society and civilization at any time'.<sup>69</sup> Two sciences constituted the General Science of Society: Social Statics and Social Dynamics. The former was 'the theory of the mutual actions and reactions of contemporaneous social phenomena',<sup>70</sup> while the latter aimed 'to observe and explain the sequences of social conditions'.<sup>71</sup> According to Mill, the law of coexistence should be seen as a derivative law of the law of succession, because 'the proximate cause of every state of society is the state of society immediately preceding it'.<sup>72</sup> Special Sociological Enquiries, which included political economy and political ethology, dealt with one class of actions in a given condition of society. In this field of study, the question was 'what effect will follow from a given cause, a certain general condition of social circumstances being presupposed'; the conclusions of Special Sociological Enquiries, therefore, 'must be limited and controlled' by those of the General Science of Society, whose subject was the states of societies themselves.<sup>73</sup>

Mill insisted that all social scientific studies should be based on the science of

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 912.

<sup>68</sup> Mill saw 'the necessary correlation between the form of governments existing in any society and the contemporaneous state of civilization' as 'a natural law'. (ibid., 919.)

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 908.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 918.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 924.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 912.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 911.

human nature. In other words, every law of social phenomena had to be deduced from the laws of human nature. Unless it connected with the law of human nature, a law of social phenomena was merely an empirical law, not a scientific law. In Mill's opinion, associationist psychology was expected to take a role of the science of human nature, as I shall demonstrate below.

As far as methodology was concerned, in Mill's view, the deductive method should be employed in the study of social phenomena, as stated above. He conceived two kinds of deductive method, methods termed respectively the geometrical method and the physical method. Of these two, only the latter was appropriate for the study of social phenomena.

By the geometrical method, which he also termed the 'abstract method', Mill meant a method that was grounded on the assumption that 'each of them [i.e. social phenomena] results always from only one force, one single property of human nature'.<sup>74</sup> Remarkable examples of this method, according to Mill, were Hobbes's politics grounded on the single motive of self-preservation, and what Mill famously called 'the interest-philosophy of the Bentham school', which he thought grounded the theory of government only on the single comprehensive, but ambiguous, premise that 'men's actions are always determined by their interest'.<sup>75</sup> In Mill's view, this method was crucially deficient, in that there was in practice no phenomena 'which does not depend on a conjunction of very many causes'.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, a different kind of deductive method was required. This was what Mill called the 'physical method', 'the concrete deductive method', or the 'method *à priori*'. Mill stated:

The Social Science ... is a deductive science; not, indeed, after the model of geometry, but after that of the higher complex physical sciences. It infers the law of each effect from the laws of causation on which that effect depends; not, however, from the law merely of one cause, as in the geometrical method; but by considering all the causes which conjunctly influence the effect, and compounding their laws with one another. Its method, in short, is the Concrete Deductive Method ....<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 888.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 890.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 888.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 895.

Physical method was associated with what Mill called ‘the principle of the Composition of Forces’, which appeared typically in dynamics, and which regarded a phenomenon as the sum of separate effects.<sup>78</sup> Under this method, it could hardly be assumed that all the operative causes had been identified, due to the complexity of social phenomena and the impossibility of experiment. It was necessary, therefore, to verify its conclusions. Mill wrote:

This remedy consists in the process which, under the name of Verification, we have characterized as the third essential constituent part of the Deductive Method; that of collating the conclusions of the ratiocination either with the concrete phenomena themselves, or, when such are obtainable, with their empirical laws. The ground of confidence in any concrete deductive science is not the *à priori* reasoning, but the consilience between its results and those of observation *à posteriori*.<sup>79</sup>

It should once again be noted here that Mill thought it impossible to verify empirical conclusions ascertained by simple enumerative induction. In the study of social phenomena, no empirical law could be ascertained by simple enumerative induction. Accordingly, another kind of inductive generalization had to be employed. This was what Mill termed ‘approximate generalization’. Where no empirical law could be ascertained even by approximate generalization, Mill proposed an alternative mode of verification, which he termed ‘indirect verification’, by which the law was verified by ‘concrete phenomena’, and not by empirical law.<sup>80</sup>

Mill argued that it was a deductive method of this sort – the physical or concrete deductive method – that should be employed in every study of social phenomena. The method itself was divided into two branches: first, the ‘Direct Deductive Method’; second, the ‘Inverse Deductive Method’. The direct deductive method consisted of three logical steps: first, direct induction to ascertain premises; second, deduction (in its narrow sense) to deduce conclusions from the ascertained premises; and third, verification of the conclusions in terms either of empirical laws or of concrete facts. This method could be employed only in Special Sociological Enquiries, and not in the

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<sup>78</sup> See pp. 93-5 above.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 896-7.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 909.

General Science of Society. This was because the social phenomena in question in Special Sociological Enquiries were ‘in the main dependent, immediately and in the first resort, on different kinds of causes; and therefore not only may with advantage, but must, be studied apart: just as in the natural body we study separately the physiology and pathology of each of the principal organs and tissues, though every one is acted upon by the condition of all the others’.<sup>81</sup>

In Mill’s view, the direct deductive method could not be used in the General Science of Society, for the state of society – the subject-matter of the General Science of Society – was a condition of the whole organism, in which many causes influenced each other. Moreover, he wrote:

So long a series of actions and reactions between Circumstances and Man, each successive term being composed of an ever greater number and variety of parts, could not possibly be calculated from the elementary laws which produce it, by merely human faculties. The mere length of the series would be a sufficient obstacle, since a slight error in any one of the terms would augment in rapid progression at every subsequent step.<sup>82</sup>

A different kind of concrete deductive method had to be employed in the General Science of Society. This was what Mill called the ‘Inverse Deductive Method’ or the ‘Historical Method’. In this method, unlike in the direct deductive method, investigation began by determining the empirical laws of social phenomena, and proceeded by showing that it was likely to result from the known laws of human nature.

Given Mill’s detailed formulation of the methodologies employed in the moral sciences, a crucial question arises here: while insisting that deducing the laws of social phenomena from the laws of human nature would be impossible under the direct deductive method, why did Mill think that social phenomena could be linked with the laws of human nature in the inverse deductive method. The answer is this: while Mill had a *direct* connection in mind when discussing the direct deductive method, in the inverse deductive method he proposed an *indirect* connection between these laws, by means of what he called the ‘*axiomata media*’ or the ‘middle principle’. *Axiomata*

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 900.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 916.

*media* was a set of laws that were distinguished ‘on the one hand from the empirical laws resulting from simple observation, and on the other from the highest generalizations’.<sup>83</sup> To Mill’s mind, the most general laws were ‘*too* general, and include too few circumstances, to give sufficient indication of what happens in individual cases, where the circumstances are almost always immensely numerous’, and it was impossible thereby to deduce directly the lower empirical laws from it.<sup>84</sup> Mill was convinced that the indirect connection between the highest and lowest generalizations by means of *axiomata media* could be as scientifically accurate as a direct connection.

#### 4. Psychology in J. S. Mill’s System of Moral Science

##### i

Mill used the term ‘human nature’ in two different, though related, ways: on some occasions, he referred to it as abstract and universal; on others, as empirical and historical, and, thereby alterable. Universal human nature was the subject-matter of psychology, while empirical human nature, or more exactly the way in which empirical human nature was formed in particular circumstances, was the subject-matter of the science of the formation of character, ethology.<sup>85</sup>

The subject-matter of psychology was the laws of the mind, namely the laws of succession and coexistence of mental states whose cause was other mental states.<sup>86</sup> Psychology, Mill claimed, was an empirical science in that all knowledge of human actions should be ascertained in terms of experience – external observation and introspection. Psychological laws were formed by generalizations from such experience, and no further rationalization was required as far as these laws were concerned. In this sense, psychological laws were ultimate laws.

Psychological laws always operated in conjunction with the circumstances in which

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 870.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> See Valladão de Mattos (2005) 34-40.

<sup>86</sup> Mill stated that only a state of mind caused by an antecedent state of mind could be the subject-matter of psychology. When a state of mind was produced by a state of the body, the relevant law was a law of the body, and belonged to physiology. See JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 849-51.

man was placed. The diversity of circumstances resulted in the diversity of human nature actually observed. The way in which empirical human nature, which Mill often called ‘character’, was formed, or the way in which universal psychological laws were affected by the circumstances in which they operated, was the subject-matter of ethology.

Even though Mill believed in the existence of universal elements in human nature and hoped to identify them, his interest lay rather in the empirical elements of human character.<sup>87</sup> Mill stated:

The more highly the science of ethology is cultivated, and the better the diversities of national character are understood, the smaller, probably, will the number of propositions become, which it will be considered safe to build on as universal principles of human nature.<sup>88</sup>

This view was a consequence of his gradual realization of the significance of diversity of human character. Furthermore, this realization was associated with Mill’s disapproval of certain elements of human nature which he thought should be changed for the better. There were, in human nature, inherent propensities which were often contrary to the progress of society; the natural traits of human character were not always superior to artificial ones.<sup>89</sup> Although Mill recognized negative elements in human nature, he did not think that man was by nature incapable of growing. In order to achieve the improvement of mankind, it was necessary both to suppress bad propensities in human nature and to cultivate good ones. Though he regarded some innate propensities as necessary engines for the progress of man and society, he saw the process of civilization as a process of redressing the negative elements of human nature. He stated:

Civilization in every one of its aspects is a struggle against the animal instincts. Over some even of the strongest of them, it has shown itself capable of acquiring abundant control. It has artificialized large portions of mankind to such an extent,

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<sup>87</sup> See Robson (1998) 346.

<sup>88</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 906.

<sup>89</sup> This point would be developed in his posthumous essay on ‘Nature’. See JSM, ‘Nature’, CW, x, 393, in which Mill stated: ‘it remains true that nearly every respectable attribute of humanity is the result not of instinct, but of a victory over instinct’.

that of many of their most natural inclinations they have scarcely a vestige or a remembrance left.<sup>90</sup>

As John Robson states, Mill saw human nature as ‘both the efficient cause and final end of improvement’.<sup>91</sup> Ethology was a science that showed both the original and the desirable condition of human nature, while psychological analysis based on associationism revealed human nature as an inherent efficient cause.

## ii

Mill insisted that every scientific law of social phenomena had to be grounded on the laws of human nature. In his view, associationist psychology and its derivative science, ethology, formed the science of human nature.<sup>92</sup> In this respect, Karl Popper accuses Mill of committing what he calls ‘psychologism’, by which he means ‘the plausible doctrine that all laws of social life must be ultimately reducible to the psychological laws of “human nature”’.<sup>93</sup> Though Mill placed great emphasis on psychology as the scientific foundation for the study of social phenomena, he never insisted that social phenomena could be understood in terms only of psychological laws. In short, Mill did not commit ‘psychologism’ in Popper’s definition of the term. Popper’s accusation seems to be based on a misunderstanding of Mill’s methodology and projected science of ethology. To clarify this, it is necessary to understand how Mill used such terms as ‘deduction’, ‘explanation’, and ‘empirical law’.<sup>94</sup>

Mill wrote that the term ‘deduction’ had two meanings: first, ‘discovery’, a process in which unknown laws were derived from known laws; and second, ‘explanation’, a process in which known laws were derived from other known laws.<sup>95</sup> As far as Mill’s

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<sup>90</sup> JSM, *PPE*, CW, ii, 367. See also JSM, ‘Civilization’, CW, xviii, 119-48.

<sup>91</sup> Robson (1998) 347.

<sup>92</sup> Nicholas Capaldi states that, ‘For Mill, the science of human nature is ethology and not psychology.’ (Capaldi (1973) 415.) However, this statement is inaccurate, as Mill thought that psychology was the science of human nature, and ethology was, despite its importance, a mere derivative science, and not in itself the ultimate science. See JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 861-74.

<sup>93</sup> Popper (1945) ii, 85ff.

<sup>94</sup> Kubitz (1932) 216ff; Brown (1984) 233-7.

<sup>95</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, vii, 454.

vision of the study of social phenomena was concerned, the latter process, explanation, is worthy of examination here. According to Mill, the term 'explanation' had two meanings: one was to point out the cause or causes of a certain fact, namely to ascertain the law or laws of causation which produced a phenomenon; and the other was to resolve a law into other laws, or to resolve several laws into one law.<sup>96</sup>

There were three modes of explanation. The first was to regard a certain phenomenon as a complex effect and 'resolve [the effect] into the laws of separate causes, together with the fact of their coexistence'. An example of this mode was the law of the motion of a planet being resolved into the law of tangential force and the law of the centripetal force.<sup>97</sup> The second mode was to point out an intermediate link between what was once thought cause and effect. For example, the act of touching a certain object was followed by the sensation of touch. However, touching the object was not a direct cause of the sensation, just a remote cause, namely the cause of the cause. The direct effect of touching the object was a change in the state of a nerve, which was the direct cause of the sensation.<sup>98</sup> In these two modes, a law was resolved into two or more laws. In addition to these two modes, there was a third mode in which several laws were resolved into one law. This was a mode of explanation in which less general laws were resolved into a more general law by subsumption, namely 'gathering up of several laws into one more general law which includes them all'. An example was where the law of gravity on the earth and the law of centripetal force of a planet were explained in terms of the law of universal gravitation.<sup>99</sup>

The next topic to be examined here is Mill's formulation of the relationship between a 'derivative law' and an 'ultimate law'. According to Mill, a derivative law was a law that could be resolved into a higher law or a set of higher laws. In other words, the derivative law was a law which could be deduced from a higher law or laws. On the contrary, an ultimate law could not be resolved into any other. In short, the derivative law could be explained by a higher law, while an ultimate law could not be explained. A derivative law was derived either from ultimate laws or other higher derivative laws. It

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid. It should be noted that, in all cases, the resolution passed from less general to more general laws.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 464-5.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 465.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 469.

is worth emphasizing here that Mill's claim that a certain derivative law could be resolved into other higher laws, either ultimate or higher derivative, does not mean that the derivative law depended *only* on other higher laws. The derivative law might depend *both* on other higher laws *and* on the 'collocation' of these laws, which was irreducible into any individual laws.<sup>100</sup>

An ultimate law could be ascertained only by induction, as it did not have a law or laws from which it could be derived, while a derivative law was always ascertained by deduction from other higher laws. It was impossible to ascertain a derivative law by induction. What could be ascertained by induction was an 'empirical law', which was a derivative law whose higher laws were still unknown. A question here is: what kind of induction did Mill have in mind in order to ascertain an empirical law. Mill thought, as I have shown, that not only scientific, but also empirical, laws could not be ascertained by simple enumerative induction.<sup>101</sup> In order to discover empirical laws, there was a superior mode of generalization. This was what he termed 'approximate generalization'.

Mill thought that simple enumerative induction was insufficient in order to ascertain the empirical laws of social phenomena. A general proposition attained by induction of this sort did not mean that a phenomenon that had never been noticed would never occur in the future. In Mill's opinion, 'A phenomenon has never been noticed; this only proves that the conditions of that phenomenon have not yet occurred in human experience, but does not prove that they may not occur to-morrows.'<sup>102</sup> Hence, it was necessary to employ another mode of generalization which eliminated this defect. As for this, Mill wrote:

There is a higher kind of empirical law than this, namely, when a phenomenon which is observed presents within the limits of observation a series of gradations, in which a regularity, or something like a mathematical law, is perceptible: from which, therefore, something may be rationally presumed as to those terms of the series which are beyond the limits of observation.<sup>103</sup>

This was 'approximate generalization', expressed in the form, '*Most A are B*', not

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<sup>100</sup> JSM, *Logic*, Bk. iii, Chap. 14, *ibid.*, 484-508.

<sup>101</sup> See p. 98 above.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, viii, 789.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 789-90.

'Every A is B'. Mill stated that 'the degree of probability of the inference [by approximate generalization] in an average case, will depend on the proportion between the number of instances existing in nature which accord with the generalization, and the number of those which conflict with it'.<sup>104</sup>

Crucially, there were two kinds of empirical law that Mill had in mind. He distinguished between higher and lower empirical laws. In his view, a lower empirical law was too specific to be deduced from the ultimate psychological laws of human nature, and, therefore, it had to be deduced from other higher empirical laws which could be deduced from the ultimate laws. In other words, the lower empirical law should be seen as a derivative law of the higher empirical laws, not of the highest, ultimate laws. Of the two kinds of empirical law, it was only the higher empirical laws that could become what Mill called the '*axiomata media*' or the 'middle principle', because *axiomata media* had to be deduced directly from the ultimate laws.<sup>105</sup> He insisted:

The lowest generalizations, until explained by and resolved into the middle principles of which they are the consequences, have only the imperfect accuracy of empirical laws; while the most general laws are *too* general, and include too few circumstances, to give sufficient indication of what happens in individual cases, where the circumstances are almost always immensely numerous. In the importance, therefore, which Bacon assigns, in every science, to the middle principles, it is

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., vii, 591.

<sup>105</sup> Mill stated: 'The empirical laws which are most readily obtained by generalization from history do not amount to this [i.e. *axiomata media*]. They are not the "middle principles" themselves, but only evidence towards the establishment of such principles. They consist of certain general tendencies which may be perceived in society; a progressive increase of some social elements, and diminution of others, or a gradual change in the general character of certain elements. ... But these and all such results are still at too great a distance from the elementary laws of human nature on which they depend, – too many links intervene, and the concurrence of causes at each link is far too complicated, – to enable these propositions to be presented as direct corollaries from those elementary principles. They have, therefore, in the minds of most inquirers, remained in the state of empirical laws, applicable only within the bounds of actual observation; without any means of determining their real limits, and of judging whether the changes which have hitherto been in progress are destined to continue indefinitely, or to terminate, or even to be reversed.' (ibid., viii, 924-5.)

impossible not to agree with him.<sup>106</sup>

He conceived *axiomata media* as a set of laws which were not only sufficiently generalized to be deduced from the highest, ultimate laws, but which also were sufficiently particular to be connected with the lowest empirical laws.

The logical process of converting a lower empirical law into a derivative law was a process in which, first, a lower empirical law was explained by deducing it from higher empirical laws; and second, the higher empirical law was explained by the highest, ultimate laws. In this process, the lower and highest laws were expected to be *indirectly* connected through the medium of the higher empirical laws. Mill never thought that the highest, ultimate psychological laws of human nature could *directly* explain each empirical law of social phenomena. Ascertaining a scientific law of social phenomena meant establishing an *indirect* connection between the lower empirical law of social phenomena and the ultimate laws of human nature, by means of *axiomata media*.

Given the argument thus far, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, the ethological law of the formation of character was a derivative law of the psychological laws of human nature; therefore, making the ethological law scientific meant explaining it in terms of psychological laws, in other words, establishing a *direct* link between psychological and ethological laws. This logical process would employ either the first mode of explanation, in which the law of an effect of combined causes was resolved into the separate laws of causes, together with the fact of their collocation, or the third mode, in which two or more laws were resolved into one. Mill's claim that ethological laws were derived from psychological laws does not mean that he thought that ethological laws could be reduced *only* to psychological laws. As seen above, a derivative law was not a law which was derived only from other causal laws, but a law which was derived from a combination of causal laws and their collocation, itself irreducible into any causal laws. In other words, a derivative law did not depend only on the causal laws of which it was the consequence.<sup>107</sup>

Second, the explanation of lower empirical laws of social phenomena in terms of the ultimate psychological laws was conducted by the second mode of explanation. In other

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 870-1.

<sup>107</sup> JSM, *Logic*, Bk. iii, Chap. 16, sec. 2-3, *ibid.*, vii, 517-9.

words, the ultimate psychological laws and the lower empirical laws of social phenomena were indirectly, not directly, connected by means of ethological laws, laws which were derivative laws of psychological laws, and from which the lower derivative laws could be deduced. Hence, as far as the lower empirical laws of social phenomena were concerned, what Mill had in mind as a logical operation was deduction from ethological laws as *axiomata media*, and not from the ultimate psychological laws. Mill never insisted that the lower empirical laws of social phenomena could, or should, be reduced to the psychological laws of human nature.<sup>108</sup> Accordingly, to connect empirical laws of social phenomena with the ultimate psychological laws by means of ethological laws did not involve the operation of reduction.<sup>109</sup>

To sum up, the connection between the psychological laws of human nature and social phenomena was indirect; there can hardly be found in his thought the logical operation which Popper defined as psychological reductionism. Hence, Popper's criticism of Mill appears misconceived, and his misinterpretation is caused by his ignorance of Mill's projected science of ethology.

## 5. Concluding Note

In the following chapters, I examine the indispensable constituent sciences of his system: first, the science of history; second, that of the formation of character, or ethology; and third, that of political economy. The chapters devoted to the science of history and that of the formation of character show that these sciences were, in spite of his failure to give a complete account of them, more significant than scholars have assumed. As far as the science of political economy, which has attracted much attention, is concerned, I show its place in his system of the science of society, rather than examine Mill's economic doctrines.

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<sup>108</sup> JSM, *Logic*, Bk. vi, Chap. 10, sec. 6, *ibid.*, viii, 924-5.

<sup>109</sup> JSM, *Logic*, Bk. iii, Chap. 12, *ibid.*, vii, 464-72.

## Chapter 6. Historical Knowledge and the Theory of Social Change

### 1. Introduction

This chapter aims to examine Mill's interest in historical knowledge, his ideas about its nature and role, and his aspiration to form a science of history which dealt with the laws of social change. Political theorists, who tend to put great weight on such works as *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government*, have paid little attention to Mill's view of history. However, if his formulation of a system of moral science, presented in Book VI of *A System of Logic*, is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that history occupied a more significant place in his thought than scholars have tended to assume.

In this chapter, I consider, first, Mill's view of historical knowledge before the early 1830s. During this period, his attitude towards history was wavering. Next, I examine Mill's view of the role of historical knowledge in the 1830s. Through the 1830s, his interest in history as a source of empirical knowledge was growing. He gradually realized the significance of empirical knowledge in general, and that derived from history and travels in particular. He was convinced that this was not only useful but also necessary in order to avoid making a fatal mistake in politics, namely seeing particular experience as universal. This idea was closely associated with his reaction against Bentham, whose argument, to Mill's mind, was ahistorical. Finally, I discuss Mill's views on history in the mid-1840s. What characterized his thought at this stage was a strong concern with the laws which were governing historical change in society. In the mid-1840s, Mill presented some crucial ideas about history in review articles on the works of French historians, such as Guizot and Michelet. Importantly, Mill was not so much interested in the particular events of history as in theoretical views about history; what he was concerned with were the principles of explanation, or the laws of historical development, not historical events themselves. The reason why Mill was interested in history was not because of an interest in the past in itself, but because he hoped that a historical perspective would increase his understanding of the present and the future.

As Georgios Varouxakis writes, Mill 'saw France as a laboratory of mankind in the realm of new ideas and movements in the same way as his compatriots (and most Continental observers) saw Britain as a laboratory in terms of industrial and economic

development'.<sup>1</sup> In the 1830s and early 1840s, Mill often referred to the modern French school of history, Comte and Guizot among others; he thought that these thinkers had contributed to innovation in historical study by employing original and distinctive approaches to the great questions of the study of politics. To Mill's mind, what distinguished their approach from the old ones were, first, their vision of history as a progressive development, and second, their analysis of what they called the 'state of society' as an explanation for changes in the form of government. It is, however, disputable whether these were as original as Mill claimed. Duncan Forbes notes that 'J. S. Mill's "discoveries" and "new" insights in historical understanding are often things which were well known enough to eighteenth-century thinkers.'<sup>2</sup> The thinkers Forbes has in mind are the Scottish philosophical historians in particular. Even though in the 1830s Mill paid little attention to the affinities between his views and those of the philosophical historians of eighteenth-century Scotland, his growing interest in history in the early 1840s led him to become aware of them. In October 1845 Mill wrote to Napier that, 'there is, as you say, a considerable similarity between some of his [i.e. Millar's] historical speculations and Guizot's'.<sup>3</sup> Crucially, this awareness led Mill to recognize the significance of his father's historical work, *History of British India*. Although he continued to regard James Mill's method of reasoning in politics as inadequate,<sup>4</sup> in the mid-1840s he came to see James Mill as 'the last survivor of that great school' and as 'the philosophical historian of India'.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. J. S. Mill and Historical Knowledge (i) the Late 1820s and Early 1830s**

In his *Autobiography*, Mill recalled that history was his 'strongest predilection' in boyhood.<sup>6</sup> According to his *Autobiography*, he read many historical works during his early education under the supervision of James Mill;<sup>7</sup> those works included, for

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<sup>1</sup> Varouxakis (2002a) 95.

<sup>2</sup> Forbes (1954) 670.

<sup>3</sup> JSM to Macvey Napier, 20 October 1845, CW, xiii, 683. [Napier (1879) 510.]

<sup>4</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 889-94.

<sup>5</sup> JSM to Auguste Comte, 28 January 184[3], CW, xiii, 566 [Haac (1995) 129.]; JSM, *PPE*, CW, ii, 321.

<sup>6</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 15.

<sup>7</sup> See 'Appendix B: Mill's Early Reading, 1809-22', CW, i, 551-81.

example, histories by William Mitford, Adam Ferguson, William Robertson, David Hume, Edward Gibbon, and John Millar, as well as Herodotus. At this period, Mill even attempted to write histories of Rome and Holland.<sup>8</sup> As far as this period is concerned, an episode which is worth noting here is that, when he was reading Mitford's *History of Greece*, James Mill warned him against 'the Tory prejudices of this writer, and his perversions of facts for the glorification of despots and discredit of popular institutions'.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from reading history in his early years under the guidance of James Mill, Mill's attitude towards history can be roughly divided into three periods: first, the late 1820s and early 1830s; second, the 1830s; and third, the 1840s. The changes in his attitude towards history reflected, to a large degree, the development of his political thought.

In the 1820s Mill's enthusiasm for France often took the form of an aspiration to write her history. He intended to write a 'French political history from Louis 14th downwards', as well as a history of the French Revolution, with which he was deeply impressed. He eagerly gathered materials for this, even though he had abandoned the project by the mid-1830s.<sup>10</sup> A feature which characterized his historical interest in the late 1820s was his intention to rebut biased, ignorant, and conservative interpretations of history. A good example of this was his 'defence of the early French revolutionists against the Tory misrepresentations of Sir Walter Scott in his *Life of Napoleon*', which appeared in the radical organ the *Westminster Review* in April 1828,<sup>11</sup> a year which marked the final phase of what he called his 'Youthful Propagandism'.<sup>12</sup>

In *History of British India*, James Mill stated that the information travellers and historians provided tended to be fragmentary or biased, and therefore was not fully

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<sup>8</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 17. In the early draft, he mentioned his interest in writing a history of India as well. (JSM, *Autobiography*, early draft, *ibid.*, 16.)

<sup>9</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> JSM to Thomas Carlyle, 17 September 1832, CW, xii, 120. See also JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 135.

<sup>11</sup> JSM, 'Scott's Life of Napoleon', CW, xx, 53-110. He later called this article 'a labour of love'. (JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 135.)

<sup>12</sup> This phrase is the title of Chapter IV of his *Autobiography*.

credible.<sup>13</sup> This view of empirical knowledge seemed to be shared by Mill in the 1820s. For example, in a speech entitled ‘The Use of History’, which he delivered probably in the first half of 1827 to the London Debating Society, Mill stated:

it appears self-evident, that the knowledge which is necessary to the statesman is knowledge of men: that the experience which he stands in need of, is experience of men: that he who knows mankind best, if he have integrity of purpose, is the best qualified to be a statesman, and that the volume which should be his guide is not the book of history but the book of human nature.<sup>14</sup>

Mill did not, however, entirely deny the role of empirical knowledge; what he was critical of was a particular way of using it:

there is a right way of consulting experience, and there is a wrong way – And the question now is, which is the right way, and which is the wrong. Our opponents hold that the oracles of experience are written legibly in the page of history – we say that they are not, or, if they are, that like other oracles they are so ambiguous that they might be read to eternity and never understood.<sup>15</sup>

This was because, first, it was meaningless to compare one phenomenon with an other, due to the fact that all the circumstances in which they were produced were never the same, and second, the impossibility of experiment made it impossible to distinguish the true causes of an effect from the circumstances which happened to surround it.<sup>16</sup>

During this period, though believing that the study of social phenomena should be deductively grounded on the science of human nature, Mill had not yet worked out how to use empirical knowledge in deduction. Much inspired by Macaulay’s critique of James Mill and the subsequent controversy between Macaulay and the Westminster Reviewers, Mill came to think that the deductive reasoning of James Mill, despite his claim that theory should reflect all experience,<sup>17</sup> failed to involve the process of

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<sup>13</sup> James Mill (1817: *India*) i, x.

<sup>14</sup> JSM, ‘The Use of History’, CW, xxvi, 393.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 393-4.

<sup>17</sup> See James Mill (1836: *Theory and Practice*). See also JMS, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 35: ‘I recollect also his [i.e. James Mill’s] indignation at my using the common expression that something was true in theory but required correction in practice; and how, after making me vainly strive to define the word theory, he

modification based on experience within the procedures of logic.

In the early 1830s, Mill came to hold the view that he called the mechanical composition of causes, and to recognize an important role for empirical knowledge in deductive reasoning. This new idea about methodology reflected his view of the role of history. According to his own recollection, in the early 1830s, he came to recognize the role of history in the study of politics: ‘any general theory or philosophy of politics supposes a previous theory of human progress, and ... this is the same thing with a philosophy of history.’<sup>18</sup>

Apart from his interest in historical facts and narratives during his childhood, the theoretical view of history by which he was first inspired was the philosophy of history set out by Saint Simon, which he encountered in the late 1820s, namely ‘the natural order of human progress; and especially ... [the] division of all history into organic periods and critical periods’.<sup>19</sup> Relying on this perspective, Mill stated that society was either in its natural state or in its transitional state. The natural state was a state in which ‘worldly power, and moral influence, are habitually and undisputedly exercised by the fittest persons whom the existing state of society affords’, while the transitional state was a state in which ‘worldly power, and the greatest existing capacity for worldly affairs, are no longer united but severed’.<sup>20</sup> Mill saw the age in which he lived as ‘an age of transition’, and stated that an important characteristic of this age was social instability which was caused by the fact that the uninstructed multitude had lost their faith in the instructed.<sup>21</sup>

### **3. J. S. Mill and Historical Knowledge (ii) the 1830s**

In the 1830s, Mill was interested in history from two different points of view: one

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explained its meaning, and shewed the fallacy of the vulgar form of speech which I had used: leaving me fully persuaded that in being unable to give a correct definition of Theory, and in speaking of it as something which might be at variance with practice, I had shewn unparalleled ignorance.’

<sup>18</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 169.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>20</sup> JSM, ‘The Spirit of the Age [3]’ (6 February 1831), CW, xxii, 252.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

was 'scientific'; the other, 'moral or biographic'.<sup>22</sup> As a scientific inquiry, to Mill's mind, history 'exhibits the general laws of the moral universe acting in circumstances of complexity, and enables us to trace the connexion between great effects and their causes'. As a moral or biographic inquiry, 'it represents to us the characters and lives of human beings, and calls on us, according to their deservings or to their fortunes, for our sympathy, our admiration, or our censure'.<sup>23</sup> Mill now referred favourably to the moral function of history, which he had at one time dismissed.<sup>24</sup>

In order to combine scientific and moral interests, or, to use his terminology, 'logic' and 'poetry', Mill emphasized in particular the role of imagination. While he had once thought that scientific accuracy was by no means compatible with poetic imagination, he now came to think that these could be made compatible within the study of history. As far as his attitude towards history at this period is concerned, an important article is 'Carlyle's French Revolution', published in the *London and Westminster Review* of July 1837, in which Mill praised the poetical aspect of Carlyle's work, even though he criticized Carlyle for undervaluing 'general principles'.<sup>25</sup> Mill stated that, thanks to his imagination, Carlyle's epic poetical narrative of history dealt successfully with historical figures as 'real beings, who once were alive, beings of his own flesh and blood, not mere shadows and dim abstractions', though it tended to 'set too low a value on what constitutions and forms of government can do'.<sup>26</sup>

In 1836 Mill stated that history was 'the record of all the great things which have been achieved by mankind'. Students could learn from history as such 'a certain largeness of conception'; 'the great principles by which the progress of man and the condition of society are governed'; and 'the infinite varieties of human-nature'. In addition, it could correct 'anything cramped or one-sided in his own standard of it [i.e. human nature]' by showing 'the astonishing pliability of our nature'.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> JSM, 'Alison's History of the French Revolution [1]' (July 1833), CW, xx, 117-8.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. JSM, 'Modern French Historical Works', (July 1826), *ibid.*, 15-52; JSM, 'Scott's Life of Napoleon' (April 1828), *ibid.*, 53-110.

<sup>25</sup> JSM, 'Carlyle's French Revolution' (July 1837), *ibid.*, 162.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 134, 162.

<sup>27</sup> JSM, 'Civilization', CW, xviii, 145.

At this period, Mill had attained a relativist perspective on politics, a perspective that, in his own terms, recognized that ‘all questions of political restitutions are relative, not absolute, and that different stages of human progress not only *will* have, but *ought* to have different institutions’.<sup>28</sup> There were two kinds of empirical knowledge to which Mill attached a high value in order to redeem a lack of imagination, an ability which was crucial for relativism. These were history and travel, or, in his own words, ‘Intelligent investigation into past ages, and intelligent study of foreign countries’. He explained how these could be useful in the study of politics:

We would not exaggerate the value of either of these sources of knowledge. They are useful *in aid* of a more searching and accurate experience, not *in lieu* of it. No one learns any thing very valuable either from history or from travelling, who does not come prepared with much that history and travelling can never teach. ... Even to the philosopher, the value both of history and of travelling is not so much positive as negative; they teach little, but they are a protection against much error.<sup>29</sup>

In Mill’s view, due to a lack of imagination, man was generally apt to regard his own experience as universal, even when it might be confined to his own society. In order not to commit such a mistake, Mill placed emphasis on empirical knowledge. According to Mill, ‘The correction of narrowness is the main benefit derived from the study of various ages and nations: of narrowness, not only in our conceptions of what is, but in our standard of what ought to be.’<sup>30</sup> Such an attitude towards empirical knowledge apparently reflected the discontent that Mill held towards Benthamite politics, for Mill thought that it failed to take the actual diversity of man and society into consideration, due to an undue reliance on the universality of the laws of human nature.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 171.

<sup>29</sup> JSM, ‘America’, CW, xviii, 93.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> In ‘Bentham’ in 1838, Mill criticized Bentham for lacking imagination: ‘the faculty by which one mind understands a mind different from itself, and throws itself into the feelings of that other mind, was denied him by his deficiency of Imagination. ... The Imagination which he had not, was that to which the name is generally appropriated by the best writers of the present day; that which 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.’ (JSM, ‘Bentham’, CW, x, 91-2.) Interestingly,

It was in 'Definition of Political Economy', published in 1836, that Mill raised and attempted to resolve the methodological question of how to make better use of empirical knowledge in politics. He gave empirical knowledge a crucial role, especially in verifying the conclusions of deductive reasoning from the laws of human nature. His view of history in this essay was similar to that expressed in 'State of Society in America'; he claimed that history was not completely reliable at all the stages of reasoning. According to Mill:

Knowledge of what is called history, so commonly regarded as the sole fountain of political experience, is useful only in the third degree. History, by itself, if we knew it ten times better than we do, could, for the reasons already given, prove little or nothing: but the study of it is a corrective to the narrow and exclusive views which are apt to be engendered by observation on a more limited scale. Those who never look backwards, seldom look far forwards: their notions of human affairs, and of human nature itself, are circumscribed within the conditions of their own country and their own times. But the uses of history, and the spirit in which it ought to be studied, are subjects which have never yet had justice done them, and which involve considerations more multifarious than can be pertinently introduced in this place.<sup>32</sup>

A further investigation into proper scientific method in the late 1830s and early 1840s brought about a vital change in his views on historical knowledge, which were reflected in the historical argument contained within the *Logic*. Crucially, the passage quoted above, together with some other passages regarding history, was deleted when the essay was republished as part of *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy* in 1844. As J. H. Burns points out, this modification reflected a change in Mill's attitude towards history, which was a consequence of his deepened understanding of Comte's position.<sup>33</sup> Comte's impact on Mill can be seen in the *Logic*, where Mill identified the laws of the development of society with the subject-matter of his projected science of society. Among the methods of the study of social phenomena

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Mill later ascribed British misrule in India to 'the inability of ordinary minds to imagine a state of social relations fundamentally different from those with which they are practically familiar'. (JSM, *PPE*, CW, ii, 320.)

<sup>32</sup> JSM, 'Definition', CW, iv, 333.

<sup>33</sup> Burns (1976) 7.

formulated in the *Logic*, it was in the inverse deductive method, which was also suggestively termed the 'Historical Method', that historical knowledge was expected to play an important role. The first logical stage of the inverse deductive method was to establish a link between the higher and the lower empirical laws by showing that the lower could be derived from the higher. In this process, historical knowledge was of vital importance.

#### 4. J. S. Mill and Historical Knowledge (iii) the 1840s

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Some of Mill's central ideas on history which he had formed by the mid-1840s can be found in a series of essays which appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, and which considered the contemporary works of French historians, such as 'Michelet's History of France' (January 1844) and 'Guizot's Essays and Lectures on History' (October 1845). In 'Michelet's History of France', Mill depicted the development, not the mere classification, of historical study. The first stage, which was, in Mill's opinion, represented by the works of Pierre Henri Larcher,<sup>34</sup> was characterized by a type of study which was 'to transport present feeling and notions back into the past, and refer all ages and forms of human life to the standard of that in which the writer himself lives'.<sup>35</sup> Historians of this kind could not understand anything different from that which they saw, and thereby tended to severely criticize the past. The second stage of historical study, in contrast, aimed to 'regard former ages not with the eye of a modern, but, as far as possible, with that of a contemporary'.<sup>36</sup> Historians of this type sought to see the past as a whole, not as a mere collection of fragmentary facts of which the whole consisted. In order to do so, what was required was an ability to imagine what was

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<sup>34</sup> Pierre Henri Larcher (1726-1812) was a French classical scholar, to whom Mill referred as 'the translator of Herodotus'. (JSM, 'Guizot on History', CW, xx, 222) Larcher published *Histoire d'Hérodote*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1786), which was the French translation of Herodotus's *Histories*, and subsequently his commentary on it was published in English as *Larcher's Notes on Herodotus. Historical and Critical Remarks on the Nine Books of the History of Herodotus*, 2 vols., trans. W. D. Cooley (London, 1829; new edn. 1844).

<sup>35</sup> JSM, 'Michelet's History of France', CW, xx, 223.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

unknown to the present, an ability that poets usually possessed. Mill thought that Carlyle represented this stage of historical study.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, there was a higher and ‘scientific’ stage. The aim of the third and highest stage of historical study was, according to Mill, ‘not simply to compose histories, but to construct a science of history’, by regarding history as ‘a progressive chain of causes and effects’ and pointing out the laws of causation.<sup>38</sup> Mill stated:

In this view, the whole of the events which have befallen the human race, and the states through which it has passed, are regarded as a series of phenomena, produced by causes, and susceptible of explanation. All history is conceived as a progressive chain of causes and effects: or (by an apter metaphor) as a gradually unfolding web, in which every fresh part that comes to view, is a prolongation of the part previously unrolled, whether we can trace the separate threads from the one into the other, or not. ... To find on what principles, derived from the nature of man and the system of the universe, each state of society and of the human mind produced that which came after it: and whether there can be traced any order of production sufficiently definite, to show, what future states of society may be expected to emanate from the circumstances which exist at present – is the aim of historical philosophy in its third stage.<sup>39</sup>

Mill’s formulation of the development of historical inquiry is interesting in several ways. First, this formulation can be seen as a variant of Comte’s so-called ‘three-stage theory’, which Mill endorsed as the general theory of the development of mankind. It depicted the development of human speculation as passing through three successive stages: first, the ‘theological’; second, the ‘metaphysical’; and third, the ‘positive’ stage. Second, it seemed, whether deliberately or not, to correspond approximately to the development of Mill’s own attitude towards history. In the first stage, as I have shown above, he was eager to rebut the Tory interpretations of history from the point of view of radical politics. The second stage, the mid- and late 1830s, saw Mill emphasizing the

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<sup>37</sup> See JSM, ‘Carlyle’s French Revolution’ (July 1837), *ibid.*, 133: ‘This [i.e. Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History*, 3 vols. (London, 1837).] is not so much a history, as an epic poem: and notwithstanding, or even in consequence of this, the truest of histories.’

<sup>38</sup> JSM, ‘Michelet’s History of France’, *ibid.*, 225.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

role of imagination in the study of social phenomena, and from this perspective he was highly appreciative of the works of Carlyle, which he now thought represented the second stage of historical study. The third stage consisted in his historical discourses in the first half of the 1840s, specifically on contemporary French historians. At this point, Mill was largely concerned with the philosophy of history.<sup>40</sup>

In Mill's opinion, it was the works of contemporary French historians, such as Michelet, Thierry, and Guizot, that needed to be examined in order to understand the development of historical study from the second to the third stage: 'M. Guizot does not ... remain in what we have called the second region of historical inquiry: he makes frequent and long incursions into the third.'<sup>41</sup> Mill went on to say that Guizot was 'the Kepler, and something more, of his particular subject [i.e. history]', a subject which had not yet had its Newton.<sup>42</sup> He praised Guizot particularly for his 'talent for the explanation and generalization of historical facts'. Given his high praise for Guizot's historical works, it is not surprising that Mill devoted a great deal of effort to the detailed examination of Guizot's works, resulting in an essay which dealt exclusively with his works, 'Guizot's Essays and Lectures on History'.

Before examining Mill's review of Guizot's historical works, it is necessary to comment briefly on his comparative neglect of German historical scholarship. Given Mill's favourable view of the philosophy of history which was developed by those whom he called the 'Germano-Coleridgian school',<sup>43</sup> it may seem odd that Mill relied exclusively on French scholarship, and his detailed studies, though he was interested in it, was not extended to German scholarship which was likewise flourishing at this time.<sup>44</sup> In part, this was a consequence of Mill's political radicalism and reaction against intuitionism, which, to Mill's mind, provided the philosophical foundation for conservatism, and on which German history was based. Furthermore, Stefan Collini

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<sup>40</sup> See Collini (1999) 132-3.

<sup>41</sup> JSM, 'Michelet's History of France', CW, xx, 228.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> JSM, 'Coleridge', CW, x, 138-9.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. JSM to John Austin, 7 July 1842, CW, xiii, 529; JSM to Sarah Austin, 22 August 1842, *ibid.*, 542; JSM to Macvey Napier, 15 October 1842, *ibid.*, 551. Needless to say, Mill's neglect of English historical scholarship was apparent; to his mind, it was 'merely empirical'.

points out another probable reason for Mill's neglect: Mill had formed his basic ideas before 'the fashion of looking to Germany for cultural nourishment had become at all widespread'.<sup>45</sup>

## ii

In 'Michelet's History of France', Mill, relying on Guizot, argued that any social phenomenon was usually the result, not of a single cause, but of the combination of causes operating together, and that there were mutual interactions between men, institutions, and circumstances in the course of history. According to Mill, Guizot

does not exaggerate the influence of some one cause or agency, sacrificing all others to it. He neither writes as if human affairs were absolutely moulded by the wisdom and virtue or the vices and follies of rulers; nor as if the general circumstances of society did all, and accident or eminent individuals could do nothing. He neither attributes everything to political institutions, nor everything to the ideas and convictions in men's minds; but shows how they both co-operate, and react upon one another.<sup>46</sup>

Mill then insisted that the antagonism between, rather than the coexistence of, various principles and forces in society after the downfall of the Roman Empire enabled some European nations to progress. He wrote: 'we ascribe chiefly to this cause [i.e. social diversity] the spirit of improvement, which has never ceased to exist, and still makes progress, in the European nations'.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, Mill asserted, with Charlemagne as his example, that the talented individual could contribute to the progress of society within the limits of causal laws operating at the time. He wrote:

A great ruler cannot shape the world after his own pattern; he is condemned to work in the direction of existing and spontaneous tendencies, and has only the discretion of singling out the most beneficial of these. Yet the difference is great between a

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<sup>45</sup> Collini (1999) 138-9.

<sup>46</sup> JSM, 'Michelet's History of France', CW, xx, 229.

<sup>47</sup> JSM, 'Guizot on History', *ibid.*, 269-70. He had presented this idea as early as 1836 in 'Guizot's Lectures on European Civilization'. In regard to this idea, he referred to China as a good example of stationariness due to lack of social diversity. (*ibid.*, 270.) See also JSM to Auguste Comte, 25 February 1842, CW, xiii, 502. [Haac (1995) 51-2.]

skilful pilot and none at all, though a pilot cannot steer save in obedience to wind and tide. Improvements of the very first order, and for which society is completely prepared, which lie in the natural course and tendency of human events, and are the next stage through which mankind will pass, may be retarded indefinitely for want of a great man, to throw the weight of his individual will and faculties into the trembling scale.<sup>48</sup>

Despite his belief in the prevalence of a pre-determined course of history, Mill thought that the science of history could be used not only for predicting the future course of society, but also for amending the historical tendencies which the science revealed. Great men could not only prepare people for what was inevitable, but could also play an active role in accelerating, delaying, counteracting, and correcting these tendencies.<sup>49</sup>

Apart from these ideas, there was a further important argument which Mill put forward: how and why the transition from feudal to modern free society took place. Importantly, it was at this point that Mill was critical of Guizot. In spite of his high praise for Guizot's achievement, Mill thought that Guizot had failed to ascertain the causal laws of historical change in general, and the causal laws of change from feudal to modern society in particular. Mill wrote:

[Guizot's] subject is not history at large, but modern European history; the formation and progress of the existing nations of Europe. Embracing, therefore, only a part of the succession of historical events, he is precluded from attempting to determine the law or laws which preside over the entire evolution. If there be such laws; if the series of states through which human nature and society are appointed to pass, have been determined more or less precisely by the original constitution of mankind, and by the circumstances of the planet on which we live: the order of their succession cannot be determined by modern or by European experience alone: it must be ascertained by a conjunct analysis, so far as possible, of the whole of

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<sup>48</sup> JSM, 'Guizot on History', CW, xx, 279-80.

<sup>49</sup> It should be remembered that Mill thought that the power of the individual tended to diminish, and in turn the power of the masses became greater, as civilization advanced. (JSM, 'Civilization', CW, xviii, 121.) Collective action tended to predominate over that of individuals, and subsequently the change of society would deviate less from a preappointed course.

history, and the whole of human nature.<sup>50</sup>

According to Mill, what Guizot sought was ‘not the ultimate, but the proximate causes of the facts of modern history’. Mill went on to state that Guizot’s subject was not history at large, but only modern European history, and, therefore, what Guizot had achieved was only to point out ‘in what manner each successive condition of modern Europe grew out of that which next preceded it; and how modern society altogether, and the modern mind, shaped themselves from the elements which had been transmitted to them from the ancient world’.<sup>51</sup> Mill thus concluded that Guizot had failed to understand the ultimate cause of social change.<sup>52</sup>

Mill’s discontent with Guizot was clearly expressed in another section of ‘Guizot’s Essays and Lectures on History’, where he examined Guizot’s explanation of why European feudalism had declined.<sup>53</sup> Mill stated that Guizot never succeeded in giving scientific explanations, namely in ascertaining the causal laws which governed the decline of feudalism, even though he did refer to all the vital phenomena which contributed to the decline. To Mill’s mind, Guizot’s claim that feudalism did not ‘contain in itself the elements of durability’ meant that he attributed the decline of feudalism to its inherent defects. Such an argument, however, was merely ‘an easy solution which accounts for the destruction of institutions from their own defects’.<sup>54</sup> Mill found a clue to the explanation of the decline of feudalism in Guizot’s own analysis of its origin. Guizot insisted that the reason why feudalism established itself was not because feudalism was a good form of society, but because society could not be better. What Mill saw as inspirational was Guizot’s understanding of feudalism as ‘a product of this [limited] condition of the human mind, and the only form of polity which it admitted of’. This tied in with Mill’s view that the achievement of desirable or

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 262. Mill had appreciated Guizot’s mode of argument in his joint essay with Joseph Blanc White of 1836, ‘Guizot’s Lectures on European Civilization’.

<sup>51</sup> JSM, ‘Guizot on History’, CW, xx, 262.

<sup>52</sup> See also JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 914-5.

<sup>53</sup> Mill used either ‘feudality’ or ‘feudal system’ where we now usually used ‘feudalism’. I follow the present usage of the term unless quoting his statements.

<sup>54</sup> JSM, ‘Guizot on History’, CW, xx, 287-8.

acceptable political and social institutions depended on the condition of human mind.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, feudalism had contributed to the improvement of man when it was established. In other words, at a particular period in European history, ‘a great progress in civilization had been accomplished, under the dominion and auspices of the feudal system’.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, the progress of civilization which resulted from feudalism became, in turn, the cause of the decline of the system. Mill stated:

the fall of the system [i.e. feudalism] was not really owing to its vices, but to its good qualities – to the improvement which had been found possible under it, and by which mankind had become desirous of obtaining, and capable of realizing, a better form of society than it afforded.<sup>57</sup>

Mill concluded that various phenomena which were once thought to have been the cause of the decline of feudalism were not the true causes; the higher cause of these phenomena was the fact that people had improved their intellectual and mental abilities under feudalism, and this was the ultimate cause of its fall. According to Mill:

the feudal system, with all its deficiencies, was sufficiently a government, contained within itself a sufficient mixture of authority and liberty, afforded sufficient protection to industry, and encouragement and scope to the development of the human faculties, to enable the natural causes of social improvement to resume their course.<sup>58</sup>

For Mill, the ultimate cause of the decline of feudalism was the improvement of human ability which had been accomplished under it.<sup>59</sup>

### iii

The reason why Mill could criticize Guizot’s position with conviction was that Mill

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 288-9.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> In a similar vein, in ‘Michelet’s History of France’, Mill wrote favourably of the Catholic Church: ‘it was not only a beneficent institution, but the only means capable of being now assigned, by which Europe could have been reclaimed from barbarism.’ (JSM, ‘Michelet’s History of France’, *ibid.*, 240.) He had presented the same view as early as 1829. See JSM to Gustav d’Eichthal, 7 November 1829, CW, vii, 41.

had been much inspired by another French writer, Auguste Comte, so far as the question relating to the ultimate cause of social development was concerned. In the *Logic*, Mill had paid attention to ‘the state of the speculative faculties of mankind’ as the ultimate factor of social change.<sup>60</sup>

Before examining his attitude towards Comte, it is helpful to mention briefly Mill’s situation around 1840. Intellectualism – seeing human intellectual elements as decisive in historical change – was not unique to the French thinkers to whom Mill had been attracted. British thinkers, such as Dugald Stewart and James Mill, with whose views Mill was familiar, had also developed a similar argument. Further to this, Mill himself had been emphasizing the importance of intellectual factors from a very early period. His sympathy for the French mind in general, its intellectualistic tendency in particular, was not the cause of his intellectualism, but a symptom of it. In addition, Mill’s intellectualism, particularly at this stage, no doubt reflected the fact that in the late 1830s he became disillusioned with the contemporary political climate.

In the reformed parliament after the passing of the Reform Act of 1832, the Philosophic Radicals had a vision of a new political realignment, and Mill published many articles in support of it.<sup>61</sup> The state of the parliamentary radicals in the late 1830s, particularly the decline in their numbers at the general election of 1837, discouraged him from continuing to commit a great deal of effort to the radical cause in actual politics. Specifically, the failure of the campaign for the reorganization of the Reform Party, which was triggered by the resignation of Lord Durham as Governor General in Canada in October 1838, who Mill thought might be prepared to lead reformers in a challenge to the Whig government as well as to their Tory opponents, discouraged Mill’s political journalism, and Mill subsequently abandoned his editorship and proprietorship of the *Westminster Review* in the middle of 1840. Mill thereafter devoted his energies towards bringing about change, not in actual politics in the short term, but in thought in the long term. In July 1841 Mill wrote to Macvey Napier, the editor of the

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<sup>60</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 926.

<sup>61</sup> Even though Mill often wished to hold a seat in the House of Commons, his position at the East India Company did not allow him to candidate. For his wish to enter Parliament, see, for example, JSM to John Pringle Nichol, 29 January 1837, CW, xii, 324; JSM to John Robertson, 6 August 1837, *ibid*, 345; JSM to Auguste Comte, 18 December 1841, CW, xiii, 492. [Haac (1995) 43.]

*Edinburgh Review*: ‘We are entering upon times in which the progress of liberal opinions will again, as formerly, depend upon what is *said & written*, & no longer upon what is *done*, by their avowed friends.’<sup>62</sup>

iv

In Mill’s opinion, an intellectual factor, ‘the state of the speculative faculties of mankind’, actually influenced both on social change, the subject-matter of social dynamics, and on social stability, the subject-matter of social statics. This factor was decisive for the development of society, in that

its influence is the main determining cause of the social progress; all the other dispositions of our nature which contribute to that progress, being dependent on it for the means of accomplishing their share of the work. ... the progress of industry must follow, and depend on, the progress of knowledge.<sup>63</sup>

This was also the decisive factor in social stability:

as the strongest propensities of human nature ... evidently tend in themselves to disunite mankind, not to unite them, – to make them rivals, not confederates; social existence is only possible by a disciplining of those more powerful propensities, which consists in subordinating them to a common system of opinions. The degree of this subordination is the measure of the completeness of the social union, and the nature of the common opinions determines its kind. But in order that mankind should conform their actions to any set of opinions, these opinions must exist, must be believed by them. And thus, the state of the speculative faculties, the character of the propositions assented to by the intellect, essentially determines the moral and political state of the community ....<sup>64</sup>

Mill thought that such notions were not only deducible from the laws of human nature but also verifiable by empirical laws. In other words, the laws of social change could be derived from the law of ‘the order of progression in the intellectual convictions

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<sup>62</sup> JSM to Macvey Napier, [30 July 1841], CW, xiii, 483. See also Mill’s comment in a *Morning Chronicle* article: ‘Without a change in the people, the most beneficent change in their mere outward circumstances would not last a generation.’ (JSM, ‘Ireland [20]’ (19 November 1846), CW, xxiv, 955.)

<sup>63</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 926.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

of mankind' as *axiomata media*. Mill continued:

From this accumulated evidence, we are justified in concluding, that the order of human progression in all respects will be a corollary deducible from the order of human progression in the intellectual convictions of mankind, that is, from the laws of the successive transformations of religion and science.<sup>65</sup>

As far as 'the order of progression in the intellectual convictions of mankind' was concerned, Mill believed that Comte had provided a promising starting point. This was the three-stage theory, according to which the development of the human mind went through three successive stages: first, the 'theological' stage, where all events were explained in terms of supernatural agencies, God's will in particular; second, 'metaphysical', where phenomena were explained in terms of abstract ideas; and third, 'positive', in which there was no absolute explanation, but useful generalizations obtained by observation.<sup>66</sup> Mill regarded this formulation as plausible. He stated:

Speculation he [i.e. Comte] conceives to have, on every subject of human inquiry, three successive stages; in the first of which it tends to explain the phenomena by supernatural agencies, in the second by metaphysical abstractions, and in the third or final state confines itself to ascertaining their laws of succession and similitude. This generalization appears to me to have that high degree of scientific evidence, which is derived from the concurrence of the indications of history with the probabilities derived from the constitution of the human mind.<sup>67</sup>

Hence, Mill was convinced that it was possible, on the one hand, to connect 'the correlative condition of all other social phenomena' with 'each of the three states of human intellect which it distinguishes, and with each successive modification of those three states',<sup>68</sup> in other words, to regard every law of social phenomena as derivative from the law of the three stages; and on the other hand, to scientifically establish the law of the three stages by deducing it from the ultimate laws of human nature. In short, Mill thought it was possible to explain the laws of the historical change of society by linking indirectly every social phenomenon and the laws of human nature by means of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 927.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 928. See also Comte (1975a) 21 and *passim*.

<sup>67</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, xiii, 928.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

intellectual factors in the guise of *axiomata media*.<sup>69</sup>

## 5. Concluding Note

As far as theory and methodology were concerned, Mill was firmly convinced that he had succeeded in settling the question of how the law of social change could be linked with the psychological laws of human nature. However, given his view of human nature, Mill had to face a crucial difficulty in explaining the relationship of empirical laws, which showed that society had advanced, to the ultimate laws of human nature.<sup>70</sup> In addition, he came to realize that progressive change was an exceptional phenomenon in world history, in that only a few European nations had accomplished it. Furthermore, he feared that advanced European nations would lapse into what he termed 'Chinese stationariness'. He could not, therefore, help concluding that it was difficult to explain European experience by direct derivation from the ultimate laws of human nature.<sup>71</sup> It was the science of the formation of character, which Mill termed 'ethology', that bridged the gap between these laws. Not only that, ethology was expected to play a significant role in a practical point of view: to show how the course of history could take a more attractive direction in the future than science suggested. The next chapter is devoted to an examination of the significance of ethology in Mill's thought.

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<sup>69</sup> Comte insisted that social change also had three successive stages corresponding to the three stages of the development of human mind: from the military, through the legal, to the industrial. Mill paid little attention to it. In Mill's opinion, this formula, though reasonable, should be seen as a derivative law of the ultimate law of the development of human mind. See *ibid.*, 924-5.

<sup>70</sup> He later stated: 'The natural tendency of men and their works was to degenerate ... we ought not to forget, that there is an incessant and ever-flowing current of human affairs towards the worse, consisting of all the follies, all the vices, all the negligences, indolences, and supinenesses of mankind ....' (JSM, *CRG*, *CW*, xix, 388.)

<sup>71</sup> See Feuer (1976) 90; Alexander (1976) 138ff. In 'Grote's History of Greece [2]' (October 1853), Mill wrote: 'That the former [i.e. stationary] condition is far more congenial to ordinary human nature than the latter [i.e. progressive], experience unfortunately places beyond doubt.' (JSM, 'Grote's History of Greece [2]', *CW*, xi, 313.)

## Chapter 7. Ethology

### 1. Introduction

This chapter inquires into J. S. Mill's aspiration to form a science of the formation of character, a science which he named 'ethology' after a Greek-origin word, 'ethos'. In spite of their interest in Mill's notion of human cultivation, recent studies do not give sufficient consideration to ethology, on which he grounded the practice of human cultivation.<sup>1</sup> This is due to the fact that Mill failed fully to develop ethology. Even when referring to ethology, recent scholarship is mainly concerned with how his later works reflected his interest in the formation of character, and not with the ideas which Mill actually developed earlier in his careers.<sup>2</sup>

In the first section, I present a brief account of two views concerning the formation of character, namely Owenite environmentalism and phrenology, both of which were popular in early and mid-nineteenth-century Britain. Not only were these views well known to Mill and his contemporaries, but also they constituted Mill's main target. In this sense, his project of ethology can be seen, in the intellectual context of early and mid-nineteenth-century Britain, as an attempt to offer an alternative to these theories of the formation of character. In the next section, I discuss Mill's interest in the formation of character in the 1830s which eventually led him to conceive a science of the formation of character in *A System of Logic*. In so doing, I examine Mill's disenchantment with Bentham in light of his interest in the formation of character. Next, his ethology project itself will be examined, relying mainly on Book VI of the *Logic* and his correspondence with Auguste Comte. This section aims to show that the ethology project occupied a central place in his system of social science. In the third section, I point out the practical implications of the project, taking into consideration his notion of approximate generalization and his formulation of the relationship between science and art.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Semmel (1984); Habibi (2001).

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Carlisle (1991); Ball (2000). Janise Carlisle fails to understand Mill's methodological argument, which is vital for understanding his project of ethology.

## 2. Theories of the Formation of Character in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain

### i

In this section, I first examine phrenology, in particular Gall's version of the doctrine. Recent studies have shown that phrenologists had a huge interest in educational practices that would mould the human character, but many early nineteenth-century thinkers, including Mill, thought that phrenology was a form of physiological determinism. This was because it claimed, in theory at least, that the moral and intellectual faculties were innate. Apart from the fact that phrenology had gained huge popularity in Britain, the immediate reason why Mill was so concerned about phrenology in the early 1840s was that Comte was eager to persuade him that the science of human nature should be physiology in general, and phrenology in particular. In order to rebut Comte's claim, he needed thoroughly to read Gall's work, which Comte had highly praised.

Second, I deal with Owenism, which has been characterized as a form of environmental determinism, in that it insisted that man's character was exclusively the result of the influence of the circumstances which surrounded him. One of the important advocates of Owenism was James Mill; J. S. Mill's early education was heavily influenced by the Owenite perspective, together with associationist psychology.<sup>3</sup> His interest in the formation of character originated with his criticism of the Owenite notion of the formation of character in the late 1820s.<sup>4</sup>

As I shall demonstrate below, Mill criticized both Owenism and phrenology. To his mind, both theories were guilty of committing 'fatalism', an extreme and false version of determinism. He was convinced that his ethology would be constructed on better philosophical ground, namely determinism properly conceived.

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<sup>3</sup> For the affinities between the arguments of Owen and the utilitarians, James Mill among others, see Ball (2000) 30-1.

<sup>4</sup> Mill stated that the abstract conclusions of the science of political economy should be affected 'by ethological considerations'. (JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 904-7.) However, it does not mean that his project of ethology originated with his recognition that the doctrines of political economy should be modified in their practical application according to the specific conditions in which these doctrines operated.

Phrenology was a physiological science of human nature and character which studied the relationship between man's character and the morphology of the skull. It had been widely diffused in early nineteenth-century Europe, including Britain; it was advanced in the 1790s by the Viennese physician Franz Joseph Gall.<sup>5</sup> Based on careful observation and extensive experimental measurement, he offered several premises on which phrenology was grounded. First, moral and intellectual abilities and aptitudes were innate. In this sense, whatever practical implications phrenologists insisted on, phrenology was, from a theoretical point of view, deterministic. Second, the exercise or manifestation of abilities and aptitudes depended on the organ of the mind. In other words, the brain was the organ on which all propensities, sentiments, and faculties were dependent. Significantly, in opposition to Cartesian mind-body dualism, Gall claimed that the mind was not independent from the body, but part of the organization of the body as a whole. Third, the brain was composed of many particular cerebral organs, which Gall called 'faculties', and each of these faculties corresponded to each particular character trait. Gall thought that mental faculties could be anatomically reified within the brain. Fourth, the form of the head or cranium represented the form of the brain, and, accordingly, reflected the relative development of the organ of the brain. In other words, he thought it possible to diagnose internal mental faculties in terms of external craniological observations. Hence, it was physiology, not philosophy, that could provide the clue to understanding the human mind.

Gall's phrenology was grounded on cerebral anatomy; he showed how mental faculties were physically embodied within the brain. Based on his interpretation of the relationship between the brain and the mind, he attacked the view that man was capable of indefinite improvement, and denied that the drastic change of human character was possible. He stated: 'Just so invariable is the organization of the human race; consequently, [man's] moral and intellectual character can experience no essential

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<sup>5</sup> Gall never called his theory 'phrenology'. The earliest known use of the term 'phrenology' in English was by the American physician Benjamin Rush in 1805, though he used it as equivalent to psychology. The more specific usage became popular in Britain, when T. I. M. Forster called the doctrines of Gall and Spurzheim 'phrenology' in 1815, and Spurzheim adopted the term. See Noel and Carlson (1970); Wyhe (2004) 17.

change.’<sup>6</sup> He claimed that ‘man cannot, in any manner, arrest the development of his organs, nor consequently, relax the energy of their functions and cause himself to be urged either more or less imperiously to do good or evil’.<sup>7</sup>

Given that all faculties and qualities were innate, the next question was ‘whether the faculties and qualities inherent in our organization, are capable of a constantly and indefinitely progressive course of improvement’.<sup>8</sup> According to Gall, ‘the generality of men have been the slaves of ignorance, error, prejudice, and superstition’, and ‘Bad propensities and moral evil are, therefore, inherent in human nature.’<sup>9</sup> Hence, in his opinion, education was of no use in developing either good or evil inclinations: ‘In vain will you endeavour, by any education, to change the pigeon into an eagle, and the eagle into a pigeon.’<sup>10</sup>

While Gall’s contribution to the development of phrenology as a science was immense, it was not his version of the doctrine, but that put forward by his followers, Johann Gaspar Spurzheim and George Combe among others, that was diffused in Britain. Spurzheim was Gall’s most important collaborator, and he successfully disseminated phrenology in Britain. He first came into contact with Gall around 1800, attending his lectures while an anatomy student at the University of Vienna. He soon became Gall’s assistant, and then partner. Due to a ban on lectures on phrenology in Vienna, Gall and Spurzheim moved to Paris, and collaborated on a treatise on phrenology, *Anatomy and Physiology of the Nervous System*, the first volume of which appeared in 1810.<sup>11</sup> While collaborating, they gradually realized that they disagreed with each other on various issues. They separated, both intellectually and socially, in 1812. After their separation, while Gall remained in Paris, Spurzheim moved to Britain, and presented his own version of phrenology, which was a reconstruction of Gall’s position.

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<sup>6</sup> Gall (1835) vi, 278.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., i, 218.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., vi, 279.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., i, 216.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., i, 212.

<sup>11</sup> Gall and Spurzheim (1810-19). The second, revised edition was published in the 1820s as Gall (1822-25). It is this edition that J. S. Mill read in the early 1840s.

Spurzheim, unlike Gall, was eager to explore the practical implications of the doctrine, in other words to show how human character could be reformed in terms of education based on phrenology. Gall complained that Spurzheim ‘too frequently deviated from the pure path of observation and had thrown himself into ideal-metaphysical and even theological reveries’.<sup>12</sup> Spurzheim expressed a more optimistic view of the possibility of human progress than Gall.<sup>13</sup> This becomes clear when I compare Spurzheim’s interpretation of the nature of the faculties with that of Gall. Spurzheim added new organs and gave favourable explanations about each organ. Gall believed that man was both good and evil; his interpretation of the nature of organs included both positive and negative elements. On the contrary, Spurzheim depicted each faculty as good by nature, and consequently presented an image of the ideal human character. Spurzheim argued that evil should not be seen as an inherent characteristic of human nature, but the result of circumstances which disturbed the proper operation of the innate faculties. Thus, Spurzheim and his most notable follower, George Combe, believed that the human character could be improved by changing the surrounding circumstances. Their attempt to fuse physiology and the practice of moral education was attractive to elements within both the middle and working classes in Britain.<sup>14</sup>

The remarkable flourishing of phrenology in early nineteenth-century Britain became the subject of much scholarly attention throughout Britain, especially in Edinburgh. What is now called the ‘Edinburgh Phrenology Debate’ commenced with Thomas Brown’s attack on Gall which appeared as early as 1803, and was followed by a number of other criticisms, including John Gordon’s severe critique of Spurzheim in 1815 and Francis Jeffrey’s scathing article on Combe’s work in 1826.<sup>15</sup> All those articles were published in the *Edinburgh Review*. Mill, therefore, probably read them,<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Temkin (1947) 309.

<sup>13</sup> Wyhe (2004) 33-42.

<sup>14</sup> See Cooter (1984) esp. 101-33.

<sup>15</sup> Brown (1803); Gordon (1815); Jeffrey (1826: Phrenology); Jeffrey (1826: Note). Besides these criticisms, one of the most important attacks on phrenology was undertaken in the late 1820s and early 1830s by William Hamilton. For the so-called Edinburgh Phrenology Debate, see Cantor (1975a); Shapin (1975); Cantor (1975b); Shapin (1979).

<sup>16</sup> In his *Autobiography*, Mill stated that James Mill ‘made [him] read through all the volumes of the

and would have been by no means ignorant of Spurzheim's and Combe's version of phrenology, even though he might not have read their works. As far as Gall's views were concerned, there is circumstantial evidence to show that Mill knew about them from his early years, even though his reading of Gall's work in the early 1840s was of more crucial significance. During his stay in France in 1820-1, Mill attended Joseph Diez Gergonne's lectures at the University of Montpellier, which dealt with Gall's phrenology.<sup>17</sup> Mill's knowledge of phrenology seems to have been primarily based on Gall's version, rather than that of his followers which gained popularity in Britain. This might partly explain why Mill did not take any notice of the educational implications of phrenology.

### iii

In *A New View of Society*, which first appeared in 1813, Robert Owen discussed the formation of human character. His central idea was, in simple terms, that man's character was formed by the environment which surrounded him. He famously stated:

Any general character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community, even to the world at large, by the application of proper means; which means are to a great extent at the command and under the control of those who have influence in the affairs of men.<sup>18</sup>

From this environmentalist point of view, he insisted that man could influence the formation of another's character by environmental planning, including education; and in turn, he denied that man could form his own character. Crucially, his claim implied that man was no longer required to take any responsibility for his own character and actions which reflected his character. For, if man's character was entirely formed by the circumstances surrounding him, he could not be involved in the formation of his own character. According to Owen, the greatest of all errors was 'the notion, that individuals form their own characters'.<sup>19</sup> He went on to claim: 'Man therefore never was, nor can

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[*Edinburgh*] *Review*, or as much of each as seemed of any importance' in 1823. (JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 93-5.)

<sup>17</sup> Mill (1960) 110ff.

<sup>18</sup> Owen (1972) 19.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* 133.

he ever become a free agent or a responsible being.’<sup>20</sup> This was a crucial implication of his environmentalism which Mill later severely attacked.

James Mill approved Owen’s doctrine on the formation of character. Along with Francis Place, he is said to have helped Owen edit *A New View of Society*; it is said that James Mill gave it ‘the clarity that is missing from most of [Owen’s] later works’.<sup>21</sup> In addition, James Mill wrote a favourable review of Owen’s *New View* when it was published. In his review, James Mill endorsed the view that ‘human beings are the creatures of the circumstances in which they are placed; and that not merely opinions and faculties, but dispositions and habits, and almost everything which constitutes character, are altogether the offspring of the impressions which, from sources over which he had no control, are made upon the individual’.<sup>22</sup> The practical implication which Owen, and then James Mill, put forward was that ‘the character of every man is bad to the most enormous pitch of depravity, or good to the highest degree of excellence, exactly as it has been operated upon by circumstances’.<sup>23</sup> What was meant by ‘circumstances’ included, for example, government and the legal system, as well as education. As far as education was concerned, James Mill claimed: ‘The first operation which naturally presents itself to every mind to be undertaken for the improvement of character, is the education of the young.’<sup>24</sup> From this viewpoint, he showed enthusiasm for a number of educational projects, such as the Lancasterian School and the Chrestomatic School.

J. S. Mill’s reaction against Owen’s view was closely associated with his own experience, as the Owenite doctrine constituted the philosophical foundation of James Mill’s educational theory and practice.<sup>25</sup> Apart from his enthusiasm for several projects

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<sup>20</sup> Owen (1826-7) 59.

<sup>21</sup> Donnachie (2000) 116-7.

<sup>22</sup> James Mill (1813: Character) 96.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>25</sup> In his *Autobiography*, J. S. Mill commented on James Mill’s educational theory and practice: ‘In psychology, [James Mill’s] fundamental doctrine was the formation of all human character by circumstances, through the universal Principle of Association, and the consequent unlimited possibility of improving the moral and intellectual condition of mankind by education. Of all his doctrines none was more important than this, or needs more to be insisted on.’ (JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 109-11.)

of public education, one of the most important educational practices undertaken by James Mill was J. S. Mill's early education, keeping the latter away from any society which James Mill thought would have a negative influence.

Whatever he acquired in his early education, by the early 1830s, namely soon after recovering from his 'Mental Crisis', J. S. Mill came to see that his education by James Mill, grounded on Owenite environmental determinism, was deficient. He recalled that he became 'a dry, hard logical machine' or 'a mere reasoning machine', as a result of his education.<sup>26</sup> In addition, to Mill's mind, his education failed to form 'a character whose instinct and habit are openness', and made him a passive man.<sup>27</sup> J. S. Mill thus concluded that James Mill denied the possibility of moulding man's character by his own will and endeavours, and his paternalism had been apt to make J. S. Mill passive and dependent. This was to deny any sense of independence. Reflection on the experience of his own education was one of the factors which prompted Mill to develop a science of the formation of character.

### **3. The Project of the Science of the Formation of Character**

#### **i**

Even before coining the term 'ethology' and sketching its outline in the *Logic* in 1843, Mill had often expressed his interest in the formation of character. This was closely connected with his disenchantment with what he saw as the Benthamite view of man, as well as with his reaction against Owenite doctrine. His criticism of the Benthamite view was grounded on the assumption that Bentham never saw man as 'a being capable of pursuing spiritual perfection as an end; of desiring, for its own sake, the conformity of his own character to his standard of excellence, without hope of good or fear of evil from other sources than his own inward consciousness'.<sup>28</sup> His reaction against Bentham was not only from a theoretical perspective. He also believed that Bentham's position had a practical or moral defect in that it tended to discourage man from desiring the cultivation of his own character, and, therefore, offered no guide for

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 110, 111. The phrase, 'a dry, hard logical machine', in the early draft was replaced with 'a mere reasoning machine' in the final draft.

<sup>27</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, rejected leaves, *ibid.*, 612.

<sup>28</sup> JSM, 'Bentham', CW, x, 95.

doing so.<sup>29</sup> For Mill, it was crucial to believe in the possibility that man could alter his own character, and, moreover, to ground this belief on a solid scientific foundation.

Significantly, as John Robson points out, the term ‘character’, including ‘national character’, occupied a prominent place in Mill’s criticism of what he saw as Bentham’s universalism.<sup>30</sup> In ‘Remarks on Bentham’s Philosophy’, which appeared in the year following Bentham’s death in 1832, Mill criticized Bentham for lacking ‘[the deep] insight into the formation of character, and knowledge of the internal workings of human nature’,<sup>31</sup> and for not considering political institutions as ‘the great instrument of forming the national character’, focusing almost exclusively on the question of the machinery of institutions.<sup>32</sup> A more detailed critique is found in ‘Bentham’ of 1838, where he argued that Bentham’s view of man was very limited due to his lack of imagination.<sup>33</sup> To his mind, Bentham recognized ‘no such wish as that of self-culture’.<sup>34</sup> In Bentham’s system, Mill stated, it was impossible to find any discussion of ‘self-education; the training, by the human being himself, of his affections and will’.<sup>35</sup> Mill thought that Bentham’s view was so limited that he could not only not understand the individual, and even more so society, which consisted of many individuals. To his mind, though an understanding of the national character of a people was necessary in order to inquire into the society to which they belonged, Bentham gave

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<sup>29</sup> Mill stated that ‘[Bentham’s system of ethics] recognises no such wish as that of self-culture, we may even say no such power, as existing in human nature; and if it did recognise, could furnish little assistance to that great duty of man, because it overlooks the existence of about half of the whole number of mental feelings which human beings are capable of, including all those of which the direct objects are states of their own mind’. (ibid., 98.) Mill stated that Coleridge provided what was lacking in Bentham’s thought, namely a theory of national education or the formation of national character. (JSM, ‘Coleridge’, CW, x, 141.)

<sup>30</sup> Robson (1998) 353.

<sup>31</sup> JSM, ‘Remarks on Bentham’s Philosophy’, CW, x, 8. Along with ‘Remarks on Bentham’s Philosophy’, Mill published, in Edward Lytton Bulwer’s *England and the English* (1833), ‘A Few Observations on Mr. Mill’, where he criticized James Mill for overlooking the diversity of human character. (JSM, ‘A Few Observations on Mr. Mill’, CW, i, 589-94.)

<sup>32</sup> JSM, ‘Remarks on Bentham’s Philosophy’, CW, x, 9.

<sup>33</sup> JSM, ‘Bentham’, ibid., 91-2.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

‘no account of national character and the causes which form and maintain it’.<sup>36</sup> Mill stated:

That which alone causes any material interests to exist, which alone enables any body of human beings to exist as a society, is national character. ... A philosophy of laws and institutions, not founded on a philosophy of national character, is an absurdity. But what could Bentham’s opinion be worth on national character?<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, in the mid-1830s, Mill claimed: ‘Each nation, and the same nation in every different age, exhibits a portion of mankind, under a set of circumstances, different from what have been in operation anywhere else.’<sup>38</sup> In his view, the requirement of improvement, both of the people and of the society where they lived, varied according to the condition of that society. The practice of improvement required a knowledge of the nature and condition of each society. Subsequently, the standard and immediate ends of improvement were provided not by the universal principle of utility, but by secondary principles. Even though he endorsed Bentham’s notion of the principle of utility as the first and ultimate principle, Mill regarded the concept of utility or the greatest happiness as ‘much too complex and indefinite an end to be sought except through the medium of various secondary ends, concerning which there may be, and often is, agreement among persons who differ in their ultimate standard’.<sup>39</sup>

Even though Mill’s disenchantment with Bentham at this period was strong, it should be noted that his critique of what he regarded as Benthamite utilitarian theory did not lead him to abandon, or even doubt, utilitarian theory in itself. In his opinion, the deficiency in Bentham’s version of utilitarian theory was caused not by any innate deficiency in the theory, but by the fact that Bentham’s view of man and society was extremely narrow. Mill never regarded his interest in the formation of character as incompatible with utilitarian theory; rather, what he attempted was to incorporate the theory of the formation of character into utilitarian theory. He believed that such an attempt would not undermine utilitarian theory, but would help to make it more philosophically elaborate and practically reliable than Bentham’s conception of it.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>38</sup> JSM, ‘America’, CW, xviii, 94.

<sup>39</sup> JSM, ‘Bentham’, CW, x, 110-1.

According to Mill, Bentham and James Mill had stated that the morality of an action depended wholly on its consequences, independently of motive; he criticized their exclusion of motive from the judgement of the goodness of an action in terms of the principle of utility. In ‘Sedgwick’s Discourse’ (April 1835), Mill stated:

In estimating the consequences of actions, in order to obtain a measure of their morality, there are always two sets of considerations involved: the consequences to the outward interests of the parties concerned (including the agent himself); and the consequences to the characters of the same persons, and to their outward interests as far as dependent on their characters.

He went on to state that, while in the first consideration there was generally not much difficulty, the latter required a complex examination. For, ‘In all these cases there will naturally be as much difference in the moral judgments of different persons, as there is in their views of human nature, and of the formation of character’, and, therefore, ‘Clear and comprehensive views of education and human culture must therefore precede, and form the basis of, a philosophy of morals.’<sup>40</sup> Having said that, he claimed that the utilitarian theory could take both sorts of consequences into consideration:

It is not true that utility estimates actions by this sort of consequences; it estimates them by *all* their consequences. If he [i.e. Sedgwick] means that the principle of utility regards only (to use a scholastic distinction) the *objective* consequences of actions, and omits the *subjective*; attends to the effects on our outward condition, and that of other people, too much – to those on our internal sources of happiness or unhappiness, too little; this criticism is, as we have already remarked, in some degree applicable to Paley; but to charge this blunder upon the principle of utility, would be to say, that if you judge of a thing by all its consequences, you will judge only by some.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, he claimed that it was not only necessary, but feasible to consider both the external and internal elements of an action in estimating its utility.

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<sup>40</sup> JSM, ‘Sedgwick’s Discourse’, *ibid.*, 55-6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 69. See also JSM, ‘Bentham’, *ibid.*, 98.

As I have shown, in Mill's opinion, the science of human nature was psychology, which investigated the universal, ultimate laws of human nature.<sup>42</sup> In other words, the subject-matter of psychology were the laws of succession and coexistence of mental states whose cause was other mental states. Psychology, he claimed, was an empirical science in that all knowledge of human nature should be ascertained in terms of experience, namely external observation and introspection. Psychological laws were formed by generalization from such experience, and no further rationalization was required. These laws always operated in conjunction with the circumstances in which man was placed. A diversity of circumstances, therefore, resulted in a diversity in humans. The way in which empirical human nature, namely character in the ordinary sense of the term, was formed, or the way in which universal psychological laws were affected by the circumstances in which they operated, was the subject-matter of ethology. As a derivative science of psychology, ethology was conceived by Mill as the means of clarifying how human character was formed in particular circumstances in accordance with the ultimate laws of psychology. According to Mill:

Men do not all feel and act alike in the same circumstances; but it is possible to determine what makes one man, in a given position, feel or act in one way, another in another; how any given mode of feeling and conduct, compatible with the general laws (physical and mental) of human nature, has been, or may be, formed. In other words, mankind have not one universal character, but there exist universal laws of the Formation of Character.<sup>43</sup>

One of the theoretical roles of ethology was to act as what Mill called the '*axiomata media*' between the ultimate laws of human nature and the laws of social phenomena.<sup>44</sup> As I have shown, Mill insisted that no empirical laws of social phenomena could become scientific without being deduced from the psychological laws of human nature. In his opinion, 'The actions and feelings of human beings in the social state, are, no doubt, entirely governed by psychological and ethological laws',<sup>45</sup> but the length and

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<sup>42</sup> See pp. 100-2 above.

<sup>43</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 864.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 869-70.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 896.

complexity of ‘a series of actions and reactions between Circumstances and Man’ made it impossible to connect directly the laws of social phenomena with the ultimate psychological laws.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the connection would be indirect by means of ethology as *axiomata media*.

The psychology which Mill had in mind was associationist psychology. He took much of his associationist theory from James Mill, especially from his *An Analysis of Phenomena of the Human Mind*, first published in 1829.<sup>47</sup> According to James Mill,

When the idea of the Pleasure is associated with an action of our own as its cause; that is, contemplated as the consequent of a certain action of ours, and incapable of otherwise existing; or when the cause of a Pleasure is contemplated as the consequent of an action of ours, and not capable of otherwise existing; a peculiar state of mind is generated which, as it is a tendency to action, is properly denominated MOTIVE.<sup>48</sup>

Having shown what a motive consisted of, he went on to insist that the morality of an action did not depend on a motive of any kind. In his *Fragment on Mackintosh*, published in 1835, James Mill rebutted James Mackintosh who stated that Bentham claimed that the principle of utility ‘ought ... to be the chief motive of human conduct’.<sup>49</sup>

In fact he [i.e. Bentham] never said, that the principle of morality was a motive at all. He knew better the meaning of the word. His doctrine of motives was, that neither morality nor immorality belongs to motives, but to a different part of the mental process.<sup>50</sup>

What Bentham stated was, in his view, that ‘the morality of an act does not depend upon

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 916.

<sup>47</sup> See James Mill (1829: *Analysis*) Chap. 19, 22, 24.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., ii, 211.

<sup>49</sup> Mackintosh (1832) 195.

<sup>50</sup> James Mill (1835: *Fragment*) 158-9. For a similar view expressed by Bentham, see Bentham (1996) 100: ‘A motive is substantially nothing more than pleasure or pain, operating in a certain manner. Now, pleasure is in *itself* a good: nay, even setting aside immunity from pain, the only good: pain is in itself an evil; and, indeed, without exception, the only evil; or else the words good and evil have no meaning. And this is alike true of every sort of pain, and of every sort of pleasure. It follows, therefore, immediately and incontestibly, that *there is no such thing as any sort of motive that is in itself a bad one.*’

the motive'.<sup>51</sup>

J. S. Mill thought that motives did not always arise in association with pleasure and pain, and that they might include 'a habit of willing' or 'purpose' which did not relate to pleasure and pain. On this point, he criticized Bentham because he never imagined that 'any human being ever did an act merely because it is right, or abstained from it merely because it is wrong' without considering the outward interest derived from it.<sup>52</sup> In the *Logic*, Mill stated:

A habit of willing is commonly called a purpose; and among the causes of our volitions, and of the actions which flow from them, must be reckoned not only likings and aversions, but also purposes. It is only when our purposes have become independent of the feelings of pain or pleasure from which they originally took their rise, that we are said to have a confirmed character. "A character," says Novalis, "is a completely fashioned will:" and the will, once so fashioned, may be steady and constant, when the passive susceptibilities of pleasure and pain are greatly weakened, or materially changed.<sup>53</sup>

Mill criticized Bentham and James Mill for excluding motive from the evaluation of the utility of an action, and then claimed that the utility of an action had to be estimated in terms both of the motive and of its external results.<sup>54</sup>

### iii

Mill's 'General Science of Society' consisted of two branches: 'Social Dynamics' and 'Social Statics', the terminology and content of which he learnt from Comte. Mill claimed that every study of social phenomena, including the General Science of Society,

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<sup>51</sup> James Mill (1835: *Fragment*) 161.

<sup>52</sup> JSM, 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy', CW, x, 13.

<sup>53</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 842-3.

<sup>54</sup> Contrary to Mill's impression, Bentham allowed motives to have some significance as far as they affected the consequences of an action. Mill's ignorance of Bentham's argument might have been caused by his too ready acceptance of criticism against Bentham, particularly by Carlyle, who, in his essay 'Signs of the Times' published in 1829, accused Bentham of a view that 'our happiness depended entirely on external circumstances'. (Carlyle (1829) 447.) For Carlyle's criticism of utilitarian theory, see Welch (2006).

should be founded on psychology as the science of human nature. He agreed basically with Comte as far as Social Dynamics was concerned, but disagreed about Social Statics, and about the question of what sort of knowledge should form the science of human nature on which all the sciences of society, including Social Dynamics and Social Statics, should be grounded. While Comte was convinced that it was physiological knowledge in general, and phrenology in particular, that should be regarded as the science of human nature, Mill thought that phrenology was inappropriate as the science of human nature. In Comte's phrenology-based system, Mill found a fatal defect, namely a determinist tendency, which he also found in Owen's system.

Comte denied any role for psychology in his system of social science. For him, psychology was an attempt to discover 'the laws of individual life' from which the laws of social life could be derived. Such an attempt, however, was impossible. To his mind, 'the knowledge of the law of individual life can never enable us to make deductions of successive social phenomena; for each stage is deducible only from the one immediately preceding'. As the character of man was formed, to some extent, by the social environment surrounding him, the laws of his pre-social nature were biological. He identified 'the preponderance of the affective over the intellectual faculties', and the inferiority 'in strength and steadiness' of social affection compared to self-regarding affection, as laws of this kind.<sup>55</sup> Crucially, these laws were the very ones that Mill regarded as psychological when he discussed, in 'Definition of Political Economy' (1836), the laws of human nature applied to isolated individuals and the laws regarding 'the feelings called forth in a relation with others'.<sup>56</sup>

In the *Logic*, Mill stated: 'All states of mind are immediately caused either by other states of mind, or by states of body. When a state of mind is produced by a state of mind, I call the law concerned in the case, a law of Mind. When a state of mind is produced directly by a state of body, the law is a law of Body, and belongs to physical science.'<sup>57</sup> Physiologists, according to Mill, usually thought that all states of mind were produced by states of the brain as a bodily organ. Mill thought that Comte shared this view with

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<sup>55</sup> Comte (1975b) 180ff.

<sup>56</sup> JSM, 'Definition', CW, iv, 319.

<sup>57</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 849-50.

the physiologists in claiming that uniformities of succession among states of mind were derived from uniformities among bodily states. In this sense, no laws of mind in Mill's sense could exist; and consequently, mental science became a mere subsidiary study of physiology. Accordingly, Comte stated that psychology was not a science, but remained 'in the chimerical nature of its objects and pretension, almost on a par with astrology'.<sup>58</sup> On the contrary, Mill thought that there existed uniformities of succession among mental states. One of Mill's statements about the difficulty of regarding physiology as the science of human nature can be found in Chapter XI of Book III of the *Logic*, where he pointed out that there were cases, especially of physiological phenomena, which involved 'much difficulty in laying down with due certainty the inductive foundation necessary to support the deductive method'.<sup>59</sup> To his mind, it was almost impossible to 'separate the different agencies which collectively compose an organized body, without destroying the very phenomena which it is our object to investigate'. Hence, he claimed: 'it is possible to study the laws of man's mind and actions apart from other men, much less imperfectly than we can study the laws of one organ or tissue of the human body apart from the other organs or tissues'.<sup>60</sup> This was why he thought psychology was more developed and, therefore, more reliable than physiology.<sup>61</sup>

Comte thought that the explanation of social phenomena could not logically be derived from non-sociological premises, even though he admitted that knowledge of human nature might be of use in the verification of the conclusion of reasoning, and not in the reasoning itself. In the meantime, however, he insisted that the science of human nature was not psychology, but phrenology. While thinking that psychology could not exist as an independent science, he saw that phrenology had been well developed. While

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 850-1. Mill's reference was to *Course on Positive Philosophy*, 43rd lesson, Comte (1975a) 795-820.

<sup>59</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, vii, 456.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 457.

<sup>61</sup> In this regard, it is worth noting that, according to John Robson, Chapter IV of Book VI of the *Logic*, which included the general statement that psychology, not physiology, should be the science of human nature, was added at the final stage of writing, namely in January 1843, when the other chapters, including a chapter on ethology, had already been completed. Significantly, it was around the same time that Comte told Mill that physiology should be the science of human nature. See John Robson, 'Textual Introduction', CW, vii, lxxviii-lxxv, lxxv, and table 4.

Comte appreciated Gall's phrenological ideas and regarded phrenology as the scientific foundation of social science, Mill often expressed a negative attitude towards Comte's view in their correspondence, which commenced soon after Mill's reading of the fourth volume of Comte's *Course on Positive Philosophy*, published in 1839, which concentrated mainly on Social Statics. Mill, in a letter to Comte of 18 December 1841, wrote that 'I believe in the possibility of a positive psychology'. He went on to write that the psychology in question,

would certainly be neither that of Condillac, nor of Cousin, nor even of the Scottish school. I believe it to be fully contained in the analysis of our intellectual and affective faculties which, as part of your system, serves as proof of phrenological physiology, with the primary purpose of separating truly primordial faculties from those that are merely necessary consequences of the former produced by their combination or interaction.<sup>62</sup>

Here, Mill claimed that psychology would be useful even in Comte's phrenology-based system, subsidiary even though it was. Then, on 9 June 1842, he told Comte that he had read again Gall's *On the Functions of the Brain and of Each of its Parts* (1822-5), and confessed that he had never been persuaded by Gall's argument.<sup>63</sup> To Mill's mind, Gall's phrenology was so unscientific and premature that it could not be regarded as the science of human nature on which all social sciences should be founded. Not only that, Gall's argument was crucially defective in that it ignored the alterability of character. He had never accepted phrenological ideas, and went on to claim that the theory of education was

so neglected today that most thinkers do not even know how far general conditions, together with the degree of general nervous sensitivity can, according to the laws of physiology and of the mind, not only modify [man's] character, but sometimes even determine its types. Differences in individual or national character, which can be sufficiently well explained by circumstances with which we are most familiar, are commonly resolved by the simple expedient of an unknown difference in physical

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<sup>62</sup> JSM to Auguste Comte, 18 December 1841, CW, xiii, 492. [Haac (1995) 42.]

<sup>63</sup> JSM to Auguste Comte, 9 June 1842, *ibid.*, 525. [Haac (1995) 75.] On 6 May 1842, Mill had informed Comte that he had begun reading Gall's book. (JSM to Auguste Comte, 6 May 1842, *ibid.*, 519. [Haac (1995) 69.]

organization, or even, among metaphysicians, by basic differences in psychic constitution.<sup>64</sup>

Mill thought that phrenology was deterministic, in that it presupposed the innate fixed character or ability of man, and in turn denied the possibility of altering human character. Comte's system of social science was, therefore, fundamentally defective, as he grounded it on an improper knowledge of human nature. On 30 October 1843, when the *Logic* had already been published, Mill again criticized Comte for relying on phrenology, and suggested ethology, which he had outlined in the *Logic*, as the proper alternative:

The foundations of social dynamics are, to my view, fully established today. But not so for social statics, where history does not hold first place and can only be adduced more or less as an accessory (though I am not denying the importance of its secondary role). Transforming static sociology to a truly positive state consequently requires, if we compare it to social dynamics, a far greater perfection in the science of individual man. It requires above all a very advanced state of the secondary science I have called ethology, that is, the theory of how external circumstances, either individual or social, influence the formation of moral and intellectual character.<sup>65</sup>

To Mill's mind, the three-stage theory was scientifically established. Hence, Social Dynamics could rely on historical knowledge as far as it was consistent with the three-stage theory. In contrast, in Social Statics, the fundamental theory had not yet been ascertained. In this science, it was initially necessary to ascertain the fundamental theory which could be explained by the laws of human nature. Hence, in Social Statics, it was necessary to rely more on a knowledge of human nature than in Social Dynamics.<sup>66</sup> Mill claimed that psychology and its derivative science, ethology, and not phrenology, could provide such a knowledge of human nature.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> JSM to Auguste Comte, 9 June 1842, *ibid.*, 526. [Haac (1995) 76.]

<sup>65</sup> JSM to Auguste Comte, 30 October 1843, *ibid.*, 604-5. [Haac (1995) 197-8.]

<sup>66</sup> In Mill's opinion, Comte's claim that divorce should be banned in order to promote social stability was an example of a fallacy of a simple enumerative generalization, for this proposition was derived from observations that the banning of divorce had contributed to social stability in certain societies.

<sup>67</sup> In the same letter, Mill clearly gave priority to psychology over phrenology, insisting that anatomical

Crucially, Comte thought that it was the deterministic character of phrenology that made it possible to predict accurately the future course of history by means of social science. For Comte, to consider the alterability of human character meant to introduce random, unscientific factors into scientific inquiry. As Robert Brown points out, 'Comte's elimination of psychology as an independent science from his system of sociology was founded on programmatic considerations rather than on the scientific evidence available to him.'<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, from a practical point of view, Comte thought that the notion of free will could not be endorsed, as this might imply that the course of history predicted by social science might fail to come into reality. Comte's theory, from Mill's perspective, put the cart before the horse, in that it rejected any knowledge of human nature which seemed incompatible with his system of social science.

Moreover, Comte, unlike Mill, believed that the natural course of history predicted by Social Dynamics should be seen as desirable, and did not, therefore, require any modification. In Comte's view, once science had shown the course of history, man did not need to, or was not able to, change its direction. On the contrary, Mill believed that it was necessary, as well as possible, to make the future course of affairs more attractive than science predicted, and that this was where man exercised his freedom. He was convinced that ethology could give a scientific foundation to man's practice of shaping a more attractive future through his own capabilities.<sup>69</sup>

Another reason why Mill regarded ethology as of huge importance was that his attitude towards human nature was not entirely favourable, though he admitted that society, especially European society, had been advancing. In the *Logic*, he stated:

The words Progress and Progressiveness are not here to be understood as synonymous with improvement and tendency to improvement. It is conceivable that

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explanation should be applied only to '*residues* (to use my logical terminology)'. (ibid., 605. [Haac (1995) 198-9.]

<sup>68</sup> Brown (1984) 190.

<sup>69</sup> Mill often expressed concern about Comte's disregard for liberty. See, for example, JSM to Harriet Mill, 15 January [1855], CW, xiv, 294, where he wrote: 'opinion tends to encroach more & more on liberty, & almost all the projects of social reformers in these days are really *liberticide* – Comte, particularly so'.

the laws of human nature might determine, and even necessitate, a certain series of changes in man and society, which might not in every case, or which might not on the whole, be improvements. It is my belief indeed that the general tendency is, and will continue to be, saving occasional exceptions one of improvement; a tendency towards a better and happier state. But this is not a question of the method of the social science but an ultimate result of the science itself.<sup>70</sup>

In his view, it was not always possible to derive an attractive vision for social change directly from the laws of human nature. In this respect, his project of ethology can be seen as a product of his concern both to place empirical laws regarding improvement of society on a scientific basis, and to understand how society could be improved in the future.

#### **4. The Practical Dimension of Ethology**

##### **i**

In order to understand the practical significance of science in general, and ethology in particular, it is helpful to look at Mill's formulation of the relationship between science and art. In the very final chapter of the *Logic*, entitled 'Of the Logic of Practice, or Art; Including Morality and Policy', Mill stated that science and art, though closely related, should be distinguished. He stated:

The art proposes to itself an end to be attained, defines the end, and hands it over to the science. The science receives it, considers it as a phenomenon or effect to be studied, and having investigated its causes and conditions, sends it back to art with a theorem of the combinations of circumstances by which it could be produced. Art then examines these combinations of circumstances, and according as any of them are or are not in human power, pronounces the end attainable or not. The only one of the premises, therefore, which Art supplies, is the original major premise, which asserts that the attainment of the given end is desirable. Science then lends to Art the proposition (obtained by a series of inductions or of deductions) that the performance of certain actions will attain the end. From these premises Art concludes that the performance of these actions is desirable, and finding it also

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<sup>70</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 913-4.

practicable, converts the theorem into a rule or precept.<sup>71</sup>

According to Mill, art defined the ends; each art was coupled with its corresponding science which clarified the possible courses of action, from which art chose the policies which were thought best to promote the ends in the given circumstances. Crucially, in his system, both the defining of the ends – teleology – and the selecting of the means to promote those ends were not the role of science, but of art. The fundamental principle of teleology was the promotion of happiness.<sup>72</sup> Education in the widest sense of the term, including the formation of character, was one of the most important arts, and its corresponding science was ethology. Mill stated: ‘The character itself should be, to the individual, a paramount end, simply because the existence of this ideal nobleness of character, or of a near approach to it, in any abundance, would go further than all things else towards making human life happy.’<sup>73</sup> In relation to education, Stefan Collini points out that ‘Mill’s conception of society is an exceptionally and pervasively educative one’, and that Mill regarded their effect on the shaping of character as ‘the ultimate test of all institutions and policies’.<sup>74</sup>

## ii

As previously stated, Mill’s notion of the formation of character was essentially that of environmental determinism, in spite of his criticism of Owenite environmental determinism. In criticizing Owenite determinism, which he called ‘fatalism’, in favour of environmental determinism properly understood, Mill emphasized the importance of an individual’s possessing a desire to form his own character, whatever the cause of this desire. Accepting the view that man’s character was formed by the circumstances in which he was placed, Mill insisted that man’s desire to form his own character was in itself a constituent circumstance, and consequently he went on to state: ‘If they could place us under the influence of certain circumstances, we, in like manner, can place ourselves under the influence of other circumstances. We are exactly as capable of

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 944-5.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 951.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 952.

<sup>74</sup> Stefan Collini, ‘Introduction’, CW, xxi, xlvi.

making our own character, *if we will*, as others are of making it for us.’<sup>75</sup> The reason why Mill laid great stress on the possibility of man’s having such a desire was that he thought fatalism was not only theoretically wrong in misunderstanding the term ‘necessity’, but also practically harmful in that, by insisting that ‘we have no power of altering our character’, it had a depressing effect.<sup>76</sup> According to Mill, ‘this feeling, of our being able to modify our own character if we wish, is itself the feeling of moral freedom which we are conscious of.’<sup>77</sup> He went on to answer the question of who could feel morally free. Both a person ‘who feels that his habits or his temptations are not his masters, but he theirs’, and one ‘who believed that he could resist them’ could feel morally free.<sup>78</sup> However, it was necessary that ‘we must feel that our wish, if not strong enough to alter our character, is strong enough to conquer our character when the two are brought into conflict in any particular case of conduct’.<sup>79</sup> Thus, Mill emphasized the significance of feeling morally free, and regarded it as desirable that a person should have such a feeling.

Mill claimed that the most vital antecedent that brought about such a desire was neither the operation of institutions nor of education, but ‘experience of the painful consequences of the character we previously had’.<sup>80</sup> As he never attempted to investigate further the nature of such antecedent experience, it seems reasonable to conclude that his speculation was insufficient as a philosophical argument. However, as G. W. Smith points out, of vital importance was that Mill’s notion of the formation of character was essentially environmental determinism, which implied that, first, the desire for self-reform could not ultimately be self-induced, and second, ‘the external (i.e. social) circumstances which either stimulate or inhibit its occurrence take on crucial significance for the individual’s actual engagement in the process of

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<sup>75</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 840.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 841.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> In the seventh and eighth editions of the *Logic*, in 1868 and 1872 respectively, Mill added the following sentence: ‘And hence it is said with truth, that none but a person of confirmed virtue is completely free.’ (*ibid.*)

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 840-1.

self-development'.<sup>81</sup> Ethology was designed to offer scientific knowledge concerning the relationship between human character and external circumstances. In other words, ethology should be seen as the scientific foundation of the practice, or art, of education. Thus, ethology was strongly connected with Mill's concern for the improvement of mankind. In regard to the practical significance of ethology, Mill wrote:

we must remember that a degree of knowledge far short of the power of actual prediction, is often of great practical value. ... It is enough that we know that certain means have a *tendency* to produce a given effect, and that others have a tendency to frustrate it. When the circumstances of an individual or of a nation are in any considerable degree under our control, we may, by our knowledge of tendencies, be enabled to shape those circumstances in a manner much more favourable to the ends we desire, than the shape which they would of themselves assume. This is the limit of our power; but within this limit the power is a most important one.<sup>82</sup>

As far as methodology was concerned, as I have shown, the direct deductive method was the only mode of reasoning that was applicable to ethology.<sup>83</sup> Like all other sciences that employed this method, ethology could provide hypothetical conclusions. In other words, what ethology discussed were not facts but tendencies, because a science of this kind did not consider factors which might counteract the factor in question.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, the reason why Mill laid emphasis on the significance of the knowledge of tendencies was that man could avail himself of such knowledge in order to 'shape those circumstances in a manner much more favourable to the ends we desire'.<sup>85</sup>

This notion of the formation of character of the individual could be extended to the collective character of the people belonging to a certain nation, in other words, national character. To Mill's mind, 'Ethology is the science which corresponds to the art of

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<sup>81</sup> G. W. Smith states: 'There is something of an irony here, however, in that the deficiencies of his answer to Owen at the purely metaphysical level point him in a potentially very fruitful direction in his social philosophy.' (Smith (1991) 249.)

<sup>82</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 869-70.

<sup>83</sup> See pp. 98-9 above.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 870.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 869.

education; in the widest sense of the term, including the formation of national as well as individual character.’<sup>86</sup> While ethology was the science that discussed the character of the individual, political ethology was the applied science that was designed to discuss national character. Accordingly, political ethology was to the art of national education what ethology was to the art of personal education. Mill intended political ethology to show how national character could be formed in a given state of society, or how a certain factor that constituted a state of society affected the collective character of the people belonging to that society. It should be emphasized that his interest lay not only in a descriptive explanation of the differences of national character in various nations, but also in a prescriptive discussion as to the means by which a desirable national character could be formed and what political and social institutions could contribute to the formation of such a desirable national character. Mill believed that once the causes forming national character were ascertained, it would be possible to form a favourable national character by introducing into society institutions which would have a good influences on the current national character, and by removing, or reforming, those which had negative effects. Given the notion of ‘the necessary correlation between the form of government existing in any society and the contemporaneous state of civilization’, Mill insisted that the scientific knowledge of the formation of national character which political ethology could provide could help to create a virtuous cycle which would improve both individuals and social arrangements. He thought that social arrangements, including government, if in a suitable form for a given society, could contribute to the cultivation of the national character of those belonging to that society, and, in turn, those cultivated individuals would themselves come to desire even better arrangements. This cycle of mutual influence would result in the creation of a free people with free institutions.<sup>87</sup> Mill’s project of political ethology had a practical purpose.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 869. See also JSM, *Address* (1867), CW, xxi, 217.

<sup>87</sup> In *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill referred to representative democracy and local administration as ‘free institutions’.

<sup>88</sup> See Mill’s statement: ‘The aim of practical politics is to surround the society which is under our superintendence with the greatest possible number of circumstances of which the tendencies are beneficial, and to remove or counteract, as far as practicable, those of which the tendencies are injurious. A knowledge of the tendencies only, though without the power of accurately predicting their conjunct

Mill published several important works in the 1850s and 1860s, including *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government*, without having fully developed an ethology which would have been the immediate scientific foundation for the political and social arguments advocated in those works. This does not mean, however, that he either abandoned the project of ethology or came to think that he could remove ethology from his system of moral science.<sup>89</sup> Rather, this was because, first, Mill was convinced that the empirical laws of the formation of character, even though still remaining unscientific at that time, would become scientific before long; and second, and more importantly, he believed that empirical laws in themselves were, though not reliable as scientific knowledge, useful in practice or art. This becomes clear when his notion of ‘approximate generalization’ is examined. According to Chapter XXIII of Book III of the *Logic*, ‘approximate generalization’ was a logical operation that derived a conclusion in the form, ‘*most A are B*’ or ‘*A is often B*’, not ‘*every A is B*’.<sup>90</sup> Mill stated: ‘the degree of probability of the inference [in terms of approximate generalization] in an average case, will depend on the proportion between the number of instances existing in nature which accord with the generalization, and the number of those which conflict with it’.<sup>91</sup> Mill insisted that ethological laws should not be regarded as scientific, but as approximate generalizations. These remained unscientific unless they were explained by higher laws.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, to his mind, approximate generalization was sufficient for practical purposes. He claimed that while ‘so little use can be made, in science, of approximate generalizations, except as a stage on the road to something better [i.e. universal truths]’, they were often useful for practical guidance.<sup>93</sup>

In Mill’s view, there were two cases in which approximate generalization might be particularly useful even for scientific purposes, in other words cases where approximate

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result, gives us to a certain extent this power.’ (JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 898.)

<sup>89</sup> As late as the 1850s Mill expressed his aspiration to write on ethology. See, for example, JSM to Harriet Mill, 7 February [1854], CW, xiv, 152; JSM to Alexander Bain, 14 November 1859, CW, xv, 645.

<sup>90</sup> See pp. 104-5 above.

<sup>91</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, vii, 591.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, viii, 861-2.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, 592.

generalization was ‘capable of being transformed into complete generalizations exactly equivalent’.<sup>94</sup> The first case was that in which the ‘reason for stopping at the approximation is not the impossibility, but only the inconvenience, of going further’;<sup>95</sup> second, that in which ‘the proposition, Most A are B, is not the ultimatum of our scientific progress, though the knowledge we possess beyond it cannot conveniently be brought to bear upon the particular instance’.<sup>96</sup> This case was generally found in the moral sciences. Approximate generalization was, to Mill’s mind, of especial use, among the moral sciences, in ‘the science of politics, or of human society’, which dealt with ‘the properties not of individuals, but of multitudes’. According to Mill, it could be seen, from a scientific point of view, that ‘what is true approximately of all individuals is true absolutely of all masses’, and, therefore, practical politicians ‘must in general both reason and act as if what is true of most persons were true of all’.<sup>97</sup> These notions explain why Mill could develop arguments in his later works based on provisional ethological knowledge, that is knowledge which had not yet become scientific, and therefore represented merely a kind of approximate generalization.

## 5. Concluding Note

On 3 April 1844, Mill told Comte: ‘Since my meditations on ethology will not be ripe for some time, I may meanwhile undertake a project that, for me, would only be the task of a few months, that is to say – a special treatise on political economy ....’<sup>98</sup> Knowledge of the science of political economy, whose subject-matter was ‘the nature of

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 602.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 593.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 603. See also James Mill’s statement in his *Fragment on Mackintosh*: ‘I suppose nobody, at least nobody now alive, will dispute, that, taking men generally, the bulk of their actions is determined by consideration of these objects. As little, I suppose, will it be disputed, that in deliberating on the best means for the government of men in society, it is the business of philosophers and legislators ... to look to the more general laws of their nature, rather than the exceptions.’ (James Mill (1835: *Fragment*) 278-9.) For this statement, see also Collini et al. (1983) 113-4. Bentham expressed a very similar view to this. (E.g. Bentham (1983b) 119; Bentham (1983c) 65, 68; Bentham (1990) 183; Bentham (1996) 155, 284.)

<sup>98</sup> JSM to Auguste Comte, 3 April 1844, CW, xiii, 626. [Haac (1995) 228.]

Wealth, and the laws of its production and distribution',<sup>99</sup> was of importance in that it contributed to the development of the necessary conditions for the intellectual and moral improvement of mankind. Mill believed that the progress of man's intellectual and moral abilities could be achieved only where wealth had been widely diffused in society, and thereby the material needs of most of the people had been to a certain degree met, and where the level of production facilitated the emergence of a class able to devote its time and effort to intellectual activity. In the next chapter, I examine Mill's political economy.

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<sup>99</sup> JSM, *PPE*, CW, ii, 3.

## Chapter 8. Political Economy

### 1. Introduction

My interest in this chapter lies in J. S. Mill's notion of the nature of political economy, and his formulation of its relationship with such neighbouring sciences as the 'General Science of Society' and political ethnology. Mill began studying political economy in 1819 when he was thirteen years old. According to his own recollection,

My father [i.e. James Mill] ... commenced instructing me in the science by a sort of lectures, which he delivered to me in our walks. He expounded each day a portion of the subject, and I gave him next day a written account of it, which he made me rewrite over and over again until it was clear, precise, and tolerably complete. In this manner I went through the whole extent of the science .... After this I read Ricardo, giving an account daily of what I read, and discussing, in the best manner I could, the collateral points which offered themselves in our progress.<sup>1</sup>

Mill's writings on political economy spanned the period from 1822 until 1872 when the seventh edition, and the last in his lifetime, of *Principles of Political Economy* was published; topics ranged from pure economic theory to a comparative study of capitalism and socialism. Political economy constituted one of what he called the 'Special Sociological Enquiries'. This implied two things. The first was that political economy could be an independent science. Comte denied the viability of political economy as an independent science, claiming that social phenomena should be investigated in the totality of their elements. In other words, Comte claimed that no study that inquired into any portion of those elements was possible, except in constant connection with parallel studies that simultaneously investigated all co-existing portions of what were complex social phenomena. All independent study of a particular element of social life would necessarily result in failure. To Comte, therefore, despite recognizing that wealth constituted one of the important elements in determining the condition of and change in society, an independent science of political economy, that inquired exclusively into the phenomena relating to the pursuit of wealth, was

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<sup>1</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 31.

impossible.<sup>2</sup> In his *Logic*, Mill argued against such a notion. In Mill's view, despite the existence of a 'universal *consensus* of the social phenomena, whereby nothing which takes place in any part of the operations of society is without its share of influence on every other part', it was possible to see that 'different species of social facts are in the main dependent, immediately and in the first resort, on different kinds of causes; and therefore not only may with advantage, but must, be studied apart'.<sup>3</sup>

The second implication was that the conclusions of political economy were subject to the conclusions of the General Science of Society. As the independent science of political economy was concerned with man as an economic being, its conclusions were necessarily hypothetical, in that it ignored other aspects of man, such as the intellectual, the moral, and the political. Political economy was designed to deal with the desire for wealth as if it were the sole end.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the conclusions of political economy, which presupposed a certain condition of society, were subject to the conclusions of the General Science of Society whose subject-matter was the nature and condition of society itself. In this sense, political economy was an abstract science and its conclusions were hypothetical.

In order to understand these implications of Mill's notion of political economy, it is useful to note that Ricardian political economy had become the target of criticism by the early 1830s when Mill first conceived of writing an essay on the method and scope of political economy. The first part of this chapter deals with this criticism of Ricardian political economy.

As far as methodology was concerned, Mill attempted to combine inductive and deductive approaches, though following David Ricardo, he continued to hold the view that political economy was a deductive science. The second part of this chapter aims to examine Mill's notion of political economy as a science.

Mill was happy to adopt Ricardo's interpretation of the method and province of political economy, as well as some of his economic doctrines. Nevertheless, he regarded his own political economy as 'a newer & better' version, distinguished in several ways

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<sup>2</sup> Comte (1975b) 80-154.

<sup>3</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 900.

<sup>4</sup> JSM, 'Definition', CW, iv, 322.

from the old political economy.<sup>5</sup> To his mind, the elements that made his argument ‘newer & better’ were as follows: first, he did not give the highest priority to economic growth; and second, he thought that the current capitalist system was merely provisional.<sup>6</sup> In the third and last part of this chapter, I examine these ‘newer & better’ aspects of his political economy.

## 2. Ricardian Political Economy and its Critics

### i

At the outset of his *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, Ricardo stated that the object of political economy was to determine the laws which regulated the distribution of wealth among landowners, capitalists, and labourers in the form of rent, profit, and wages respectively.<sup>7</sup> He employed a deductive or geometrical manner of reasoning. He stated that political economy should be ‘a strict science like the mathematics’.<sup>8</sup> The reason why he claimed that the deductive approach should be used in political economy was that he thought that, ‘There are so many combinations, – so many operating causes in Political Economy, that there is great danger in appealing to experience in favor of a particular doctrine, unless we are sure that all the causes of variation are seen and their effects duly estimated.’<sup>9</sup>

In Ricardo’s view, the deductive science of political economy consisted of the following steps. The first was to determine certain axioms about human nature. These axioms were discovered either by introspection or by casual, not necessarily comprehensive, observation of a few examples, and were regarded as grounded on ‘universal’ experience. The second was to deduce laws regarding the production and distribution of wealth from these axioms. In so doing, unrealistic, simplified, and idealized assumptions were presupposed as the conditions in which these laws

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<sup>5</sup> JSM to Harriet Mill, 7 February [1854], CW, xiv, 152.

<sup>6</sup> Mill wrote in his *Autobiography*: ‘In those days [i.e. before his Mental Crisis] I had seen little further than the old school of political economists into the possibilities of fundamental improvement in social arrangements.’ (JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 239.)

<sup>7</sup> Ricardo, i, 5

<sup>8</sup> David Ricardo to James Mill, January 1821, Ricardo, viii, 331.

<sup>9</sup> David Ricardo to Thomas Robert Malthus, 7 October 1815, *ibid.*, vi, 295.

operated.<sup>10</sup> Ricardo claimed that political economy was an abstract science in that it took into consideration only one of the causes of human action, namely the desire to maximize material advantages, even if there were other causes that were actually operating. This idea reflected his distinction between what he called the ‘questions of fact’ and those ‘of science’. While, on the one hand, the question of fact concerned the actual cause of an action, the question of science, on the other hand, concerned the interest rationally served by an action. Political economy treated only the question of science.<sup>11</sup> The object of Ricardo’s political economy was to determine how abstract economic causal laws operated under ideal conditions. Consequently, he eliminated political and moral considerations from political economy.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from close personal links between Ricardo and the Philosophic Radicals, it has often been claimed that Ricardian political economy accorded well with the activism of Philosophic Radicalism.<sup>13</sup> Ricardo’s theories, such as those of capital accumulation, of diminishing return, and of rent, had anti-landlord implications, in that they set the interests of the landed class against those of all other classes in society. For example, in *An Essay on the Influence of a Low Price of Corn on the Profit of Stock* in 1815, Ricardo claimed that the Corn Laws brought about an increase in the price of food, which caused a rise of money wage costs, while depressing real wages.<sup>14</sup> He concluded that the Corn Laws benefited only the landowners, while hampering the interests of all other classes. This argument against the Corn Laws appealed to the Philosophic Radicals, who levelled their criticisms at aristocratic landlords.

Even though Ricardian political economy was closely associated with Philosophic

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<sup>10</sup> Ricardo called these idealized presuppositions ‘strong cases’. See David Ricardo to Thomas Robert Malthus, 4 May 1820, *ibid.*, viii, 184.

<sup>11</sup> David Ricardo to Thomas Robert Malthus, 22 October 1811, *ibid.*, vi, 64.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted, however, that the very strict limitations that Ricardo imposed on the scope of political economy does not mean that he did not have any practical objectives. Rather, he was convinced that ‘Political Economy, when the simple principles of it are once understood, is only useful, as it directs Governments to right measures in taxation’. (David Ricardo to Hutches Trower, 12 November 1819, *ibid.*, viii, 132-3.)

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Stokes (1959) 82-139; Winch (1996) 356; Lipkes (1999) 18. Ricardo, however, often took a more moderate position on several political matters. See Winch (1996) *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Ricardo, iv, 1-42.

Radicalism, the Philosophic Radicals were not the sole group who became its propagators and enthusiasts. For example, John Ramsay McCulloch, a Whig and Edinburgh Reviewer, published in 1818 a favourable review of Ricardo's *Principles*, thanks to which the sales of the *Principles* began to take off.<sup>15</sup> As a leading political economist, McCulloch contributed more than seventy articles to the *Edinburgh Review* in the next two decades. In addition, he also wrote an article on political economy for the famous *Supplement to the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Editions of the Encyclopaedia Britannica*.<sup>16</sup> John Maynard Keynes pointed out the extent to which Ricardo influenced intellectuals and politicians in early nineteenth-century Britain:

Ricardo conquered England as completely as the Holy Inquisition conquered Spain. Not only was his theory accepted by the city, by statesmen and by the academic world. But controversy ceased; the other point of view completely disappeared; it ceased to be discussed.<sup>17</sup>

## ii

In the early 1830s, however, when Mill first conceived of an essay on the method of political economy, Ricardian political economy had become the target of criticism.<sup>18</sup> Besides Malthus's enduring and comprehensive critique, Samuel Bailey's severe attack

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<sup>15</sup> McCulloch (1818). After the death of Ricardo, James Mill stated in a letter to McCulloch that they were Ricardo's 'two and only genuine disciples'. (Bain (1882a) 211). Nevertheless, as Donald Winch states, James Mill criticized McCulloch for his failure 'to follow Ricardian logic to its proper [practical] conclusion'. (Winch (1996) 356.)

<sup>16</sup> McCulloch (1824). Malthus wrote to Napier, the editor of the *Supplement*, that neither McCulloch nor James Mill were equipped to compose the article on political economy, as they claimed that the Ricardian doctrines, though 'yet *sub judice*', had been established, and they had 'adopted a theory which will not stand the test of experience'. See Thomas Robert Malthus to Macvey Napier, 27 September 1821, Napier (1879) 29; Thomas Robert Malthus to Macvey Napier, 8 October 1821, *ibid.*, 31-2. See also John Ramsey McCulloch to Macvey Napier, 30 September 1821, *ibid.*, 29-31.

<sup>17</sup> Keynes (1973) 32. For the propagation of Ricardian political economy in early nineteenth-century Britain, see, for example, Blaug (1958); Marchi (1970).

<sup>18</sup> For the decline of Ricardian political economy in the 1820s and 1830s, see, for example, Meek (1950); Blaug (1958) 58-63.

on Ricardo's theory of value had appeared as early as 1825.<sup>19</sup> One of the most energetic opponents of Ricardian political economy in the late 1820s and the 1830s was a group now known as the 'Cambridge Inductivists', which included, among others, William Whewell, Richard Jones, Charles Babbage, and, to a lesser extent, Malthus.<sup>20</sup> They shared a strong opposition to the Ricardian deductive approach, and instead advocated an inductive approach.

Despite their close friendship, there were fierce disputes between Ricardo and Malthus on various economic topics, such as the bullion system, the Corn Laws, and gluts. In addition, they disagreed on the scope and method of political economy. Malthus criticized Ricardo both for his narrow view of the scope of political economy and for his extreme reliance on deduction. While Ricardo claimed that political economy should deal with man's behaviour as if he always acted according only to economic interest, Malthus insisted that all the causes of man's economic action in practice had to be taken into account. In order to understand the actual causes of man's behaviour, generalization – induction from extensive observations of actual phenomena – was needed. He pointed out the disadvantages of Ricardo's extremely deductive approach as follows: 'The principal cause of error, and of the differences which prevail at present among the scientific writers on political economy, appears to me to be a precipitate attempt to simplify and generalize.'<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted, however, that Malthus, unlike other Cambridge inductivists, did not deny the necessity of deduction itself. Significantly, he wrote to Whewell in 1831 that Jones erred by being extremely inductive, while Ricardo erred by being extremely deductive: 'My apprehension at present is that the tide is setting too strong against him

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<sup>19</sup> Bailey's work in question is his *A Critical Dissertation on the Nature, Measures, and Causes of Value Chiefly in Reference to the Writings of Mr. Ricardo and his Followers* (London, 1825). Mark Blaug regards it as 'the most incisive and devastating of all the contemporary attacks on the Ricardian economics'. (Blaug (1958) 52.)

<sup>20</sup> Cannon (1978) 29-71. As either graduate or fellow, or both, most of them were closely associated with the University of Cambridge. In addition, some of them were Liberal Anglicans who pursued religious, educational, and political reform, as well as innovation in science. Jones succeeded to Malthus's chair of history and political economy at the East India College, Haileybury in 1834.

<sup>21</sup> Malthus (1986) 7.

[i.e. Ricardo]; and I even think that Mr. Jones is carried a little out of the right course by it.'<sup>22</sup> As J. A. Schumpeter and Mark Blaug point out, Malthus agreed with Ricardo on the use of theorizing or generalization which employed deduction in political economy.<sup>23</sup> Crucial differences in their views, however, related to the manner of deduction. First, while Ricardo's interest lay in how a single cause would operate *ceteris paribus*, Malthus took into account the simultaneous operation of plural causes. Malthus stated: 'In political economy the desire to simplify has occasioned an unwillingness to acknowledge the operation of more causes than one in the production of particular effects.'<sup>24</sup> Second, unlike Ricardo, Malthus emphasized the importance of verifying conclusions drawn from deductive reasoning by referring to empirical data. In his view: 'The tendency to premature generalization occasions also, in some of the principal writers on political economy, an unwillingness to bring their theories to the test of experience.'<sup>25</sup> He claimed that theory should be abandoned if it were inconsistent with 'general experience'.<sup>26</sup> To his mind, a reference to experience was useful not only in rejecting mistaken theory, but also in enhancing the value of theory to practice.<sup>27</sup> Subsequently, Malthus was convinced that considerations other than economic ones, such as political and moral, should have an important place within political economy. To his mind, 'the science of political economy bears a nearer resemblance to the science of morals and politics than to that of mathematics'.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the dispute between Malthus and Ricardo to a great extent reflected the differences in their views on the proper object and province of political economy. Donald Winch depicts the Ricardo-Malthus controversy as a conflict between 'wealth' and 'happiness',

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus to William Whewell, 31 May 1831, Marchi and Sturges (1973) 391.

<sup>23</sup> See Schumpeter (1954) 539; Blaug (1980) 58.

<sup>24</sup> Malthus (1986) 5. See also Thomas Robert Malthus to David Ricardo, 23 February 1812, Ricardo, vi, 82: 'It really appears that a desire to simplify, which has often led away the most scientific men, has induced you to ascribe to one cause phenomena that properly belong to two, and not to give sufficient weight to the facts which (to me at least) appear to make against your doctrine.'

<sup>25</sup> Malthus (1986) 10.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> See *ibid.*, 16. It should be remembered that the subtitle of his *Principles* was 'Considered with a View to their Practical Application'.

<sup>28</sup> Malthus (1986) 5.

in other words, ‘a conflict between the concerns of political economy strictly delimited, and those of a more general science of morals and politics’.<sup>29</sup>

In the mid-1810s, as the Napoleonic Wars ended, the English agricultural market was disrupted as a joint consequence of economic dislocation and bumper harvests. The landed class demanded further tariff protection, thereby provoking public debate over the Corn Laws. Malthus argued for agricultural protectionism from political, moral, and economic perspectives, and not from the standpoint of economic laws alone. In two pamphlets, published on 3 and 10 February 1815 respectively, Malthus argued in favour of retaining high tariffs to protect the prosperity of farmers and the rural population on the grounds that national security and progress depended on their prosperity.<sup>30</sup> He did not deny that free trade was desirable in abstract theory, but in the actual condition of Britain in the 1810s, it might produce unfavourable effects on ‘national quiet and happiness’.<sup>31</sup> In his pamphlet, *An Essay on the Influence of a Low Price of Corn*, published around 24 February 1815, Ricardo argued against Malthus, relying on his theories of population and rent. Ricardo thought that England’s prosperity depended on her commerce and industry, which was being stifled by the protectionist Corn Laws, and stated: ‘If then the prosperity of the commercial classes, will most certainly lead to accumulation of capital, and the encouragement of productive industry; these can by no means be so surely obtained as by a fall in the price of corn.’<sup>32</sup> He tended to identify economic growth with the improvement of society, and gave a high priority to capital accumulation. He advocated the abolition of the Corn Laws, which caused food prices to increase.

After Ricardo’s death in 1823, his followers, such as McCulloch and Torrens, as well as James Mill, disseminated his economic doctrines. Meanwhile, the inductivist criticism of Ricardian political economy was carried on by the Cambridge Inductivists, who were, according to Lawrence Goldman, the only group that ‘attacked the very method of political economy – its reliance on deduction from “self-evident truths” of

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<sup>29</sup> Collini et al. (1983) 65.

<sup>30</sup> Malthus (1815a); Malthus (1815b).

<sup>31</sup> Malthus (1815b) 117.

<sup>32</sup> Ricardo, iv, 37.

human behaviour and its restriction to the existing economic state of Britain'.<sup>33</sup> For example, in *On the Economy of Machinery and Manufactures* in 1832, Babbage claimed the need for greater information in political economy, and accused political economists of 'too small a use of facts, and too large an employment of theory'.<sup>34</sup> Whewell, too, argued that political economy should be concerned with economic laws 'as they actually operated in different countries and different forms of society', and 'with actual facts and daily observations'. Furthermore, all propositions should be verified by reference to 'particular cases of human affairs'. He was convinced that, 'Political economy in short must be a science of *induction* and not of *deduction*. It must *obtain* its principles by reasoning upwards from facts, before it can *apply* them by reasoning downwards from axioms.' He then claimed that political economy 'cannot form a science of the nature of geometry and arithmetic, which deduce all their conclusions from a few definitions and conventions'.<sup>35</sup>

Richard Jones's *An Essay on the Distribution of Wealth*, which first appeared in 1831, was directed against Ricardo's work. Whewell later recalled the state of political economy at the time when Jones was preparing his *Essay*:

By the labors of various writers, culminating in the treatise of Mr. Ricardo, Political Economy had become in a great measure a *deductive* science: that is, certain definitions were adopted, as of universal application to all countries upon the face of the globe and all classes of society; and from these definitions, and a few corresponding axioms, was deduced a whole system of propositions, which were regarded as of demonstrated validity.<sup>36</sup>

Jones stated that 'Mr. Ricardo was a man of talent, and he produced a system very

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<sup>33</sup> Goldman (1983) 598-9.

<sup>34</sup> Babbage (1832) 119.

<sup>35</sup> Whewell (1831) 52. Around 1830, Whewell was attempting to explain economic doctrines in terms of mathematics. However, his point was that mathematics would be useful in the deductive process of deriving conclusions from ascertained scientific findings, not in the inductive process in which scientific truth was discovered. Even though he attempted to give mathematical expression to Ricardian doctrines, this did not mean that he accepted the Ricardian method of reasoning. Rather, his intention was to expose the errors in Ricardian deductions by applying mathematics to its doctrines. For Whewell's notion and use of mathematics in political economy, see Henderson (1996) 119ff.

<sup>36</sup> William Whewell, 'Prefatory Notice', Jones (1859) ix-x.

ingeniously combined, of purely hypothetical truths; which, however, a single comprehensive glance at the world as it actually exists, is sufficient to shew to be utterly inconsistent with the past and present condition of mankind'.<sup>37</sup> Jones, as well as Whewell, identified both the deductive or geometric mode of reasoning and the universalistic view that economic laws were valid in any place and time as the characteristics of Ricardian political economy. In this regard, they agreed with Malthus.

In Jones's view, Ricardo committed a number of errors because he underused the inductive method. Ricardo's theory of rent was, according to Jones, based on an account of the landlord-tenant relationship that was valid for only a tiny proportion of cases in the world. Jones exemplified types of relationship other than 'farmers' rent' (by which he meant the sort of relationship assumed by Ricardo), such as 'serf', 'metayer', 'ryot', 'cottier', and 'peasant', to which Ricardo's theory could not be applied. Ricardo's argument, therefore, was based on the observation of only one of the classes found in the world, and was absurd and meaningless; it could not be applied to 'one hundredth part of the cultivated surface of the habitable globe'.<sup>38</sup>

Jones criticized Ricardo not only for his extreme reliance on a deductive approach that restricted the applicability of his system to the existing economic order, but also for his narrow view of the domain of political economy. Ricardo claimed that science should not be confused with practice or art, and that the science of political economy should eliminate moral and political factors. Contrary to Ricardo, and along with Malthus, Jones thought that, in order to examine actual economic problems, factors other than the economic should be taken into consideration. That is, political economy should embrace political, social, and moral, as well as economic, concerns. He argued: 'There is a close connection between the economical and social organization of nations and their powers of production.'<sup>39</sup>

In antagonism with Ricardian political economy, Jones and Whewell aspired not only to redefine the province of political economy, but also to replace it with a new study, 'Beyond political economy, strictly so called'.<sup>40</sup> This new science employed the

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<sup>37</sup> Jones (1831) vii.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>39</sup> Jones (1859) 406.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

inductive approach, grounded on empirical materials derived from all areas of social existence:

If we wish to make ourselves acquainted with the economy and arrangements by which the different nations of the earth produce or distribute their revenues, I really know but of one way to attain our object, and that is to look and see. We must get comprehensive views of facts, that we may arrive at principles which are truly comprehensive.<sup>41</sup>

Their new inductive science was a science of statistics which aimed to ‘consider the results which they [i.e. various elements in society] produce, with the view to determine those principles upon which the well-being of society depends’. In their view, this science of statistics was distinguished from political economy in a significant way:

The Science of Statistics differs from Political Economy, because, although it has the same end in view, it does not discuss causes, nor reason upon probable effects; it seeks only to collect, arrange, and compare, that class of facts which alone can form the basis of correct conclusions with respect to social and political government.<sup>42</sup>

Grounded on observing the existing social order, and not limited to the economic, this inductive science of society would reveal ‘the shifting political and social influences which accompany the march of nations from rudeness and feebleness to power and civilization’.<sup>43</sup> This aspiration of Jones, Whewell, and their fellow inductivists was the driving force behind what is known as the ‘statistical movement’, which contributed to the creation of the ‘Statistical Section’ of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (1833) and the foundation of the Statistical Society of London (1834).<sup>44</sup>

There were some interesting terminological affinities between J. S. Mill and the Cambridge inductivists. First, in 1833, Jones made the following statement, which bore a strong resemblance to Mill’s favourable comment on history and travel as source of knowledge:

Supposing, however, that we determine to know as much as we can of the world as

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 568-9.

<sup>42</sup> Anon., ‘Introduction’, *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* (May 1838), 1.

<sup>43</sup> Jones (1859) 406.

<sup>44</sup> For the statistical movement in early nineteenth-century England, see Cannon (1978); Morrell and Thackeray (1981); Goldman (1983); Henderson (1996) 27-58.

it has been, and of the world as it is, before we lay down general laws as to the economical habits and fortunes of mankind or of classes of men: there are open to us two sources of knowledge, history and statistics, the story of the past, and a detail of the present condition of the nations of the earth.<sup>45</sup>

Second, as Goldman points out, there is a significant coincidence between them in their employment of the term ‘social economy’ to mean a comprehensive study of society.<sup>46</sup> While Whewell referred to the new inductive, statistical science of society, as represented in particular by Jones’s work, as ‘social economy’, Mill stated that the term ‘social economy’ would be the most appropriate for a comprehensive science of society that embraced ‘every part of man’s nature, in so far as influencing the conduct or condition of man in society’.<sup>47</sup> Having said that, this does not mean that either influenced the other as far as their terminology was concerned. Rather, they independently came to use this term, and there was a common source. They would both have found the term in use among French thinkers, the Saint-Simonians in particular.<sup>48</sup>

Given the intellectual climate in Britain in the early 1830, in which Mill came to doubt the validity of orthodox political economy, along with what he saw as Benthamite politics, it may seem odd that Mill did not refer to Jones and his arguments in his essay ‘Definition of Political Economy’, which was written in the early 1830s. In spite of his neglect of the argument of the inductivists in his published articles, there is no doubt that Mill absorbed some of their criticisms. These are the reasons behind looking at the inductivists’ critiques of Ricardian political economy before going on to discuss Mill’s notions of political economy. Yet the intention is not to suggest that the criticisms of Ricardian political economy converted Mill into an anti-Ricardian. He remained a Ricardian political economist at heart in that he accepted Ricardo’s view that political economy was a deductive science with a narrow scope.<sup>49</sup> The following sections

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Jones, ‘An Introductory Lecture on Political Economy, delivered at King’s College, London, February 27, 1833’, Jones (1859) 570. For Mill’s comment, see JSM, ‘America’, CW, xviii, 93-4.

<sup>46</sup> Goldman (1983) 605.

<sup>47</sup> For Whewell’s use of the term, see Goldman (1983) 605. For Mill’s, see JSM, ‘Definition’, CW, iv, 320.

<sup>48</sup> Goldman (1983) 605-7.

<sup>49</sup> On this point, see, for example, Hollander (1985); Riley (1998) 298.

examine Mill's views on the method and scope of political economy.

### 3. J. S. Mill on the Definition and Method of Political Economy

#### i

Having taken 'a complete course in political economy' directed by James Mill in 1819, Mill published his first piece in the field of political economy, entitled 'Exchangeable Value', in December 1822 in the *Traveller*.<sup>50</sup> One of the most important essays in political economy in his early years was 'Definition of Political Economy', in which he presented his view of the relationship between the science and art of political economy. In this essay, he stated that 'Science takes cognizance of a phenomenon, and endeavours to discover its law; art proposes to itself an end, and looks out for means to effect it'.<sup>51</sup> On this basis, he opposed the view that, 'Political Economy is a science which teaches, or professes to teach, in what manner a nation may be made rich', a view which he thought was represented by Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Such a consideration should be part of the art, rather than of the science.

Rules, therefore, for making a nation increase in wealth, are not a science, but they are the results of science. Political Economy does not instruct how to make a nation rich; but whoever would be qualified to judge of the means of making a nation rich, must first be a political economist.<sup>52</sup>

Another definition of political economy – 'The science of the laws which regulate the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth' – was insufficient, even though it did not confound science and art.<sup>53</sup> The law of the production of wealth might be related both to such physical sciences as chemistry and geology, and to psychological science. The former were not the subject-matter of political economy. Furthermore, he found problems even in such definitions of political economy as, 'The science which treats of the production and distribution of wealth, so far as they depend upon the laws of human nature', and 'The science relating the moral or psychological laws of the

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<sup>50</sup> JSM, 'Exchangeable Value [1-2]', CW, xxii, 3-6. In this article, he defended Ricardo and James Mill against the criticism by Robert Torrens.

<sup>51</sup> JSM, 'Definition', CW, iv, 312.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. See also Smith (1976) i, 428.

<sup>53</sup> JSM, 'Definition', CW, iv, 314.

production and distribution of wealth'.<sup>54</sup> To his mind, political economy was not concerned with all the laws of the production and distribution of wealth, but only with a certain portion of them, namely those laws operating in what he termed the 'social state'. Accordingly, he concluded that political economy dealt with man 'solely as a being who desires to possess wealth, and who is capable of judging of the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end', and only with 'such of the phenomena of the social state as take place in consequence of the pursuit of wealth'.<sup>55</sup> He concluded, therefore, that the complete definition of political economy should be:

The science which traces the laws of such of the phenomena of society as arise from the combined operations of mankind for the production of wealth, in so far as those phenomena are not modified by the pursuit of any other object.<sup>56</sup>

Having defined political economy as a science, Mill developed his methodology. As early as 1828 he had written a review of Richard Whatley's *Elements of Logic*, in which he agreed with Whatley that the method of political economy should be deductive and syllogistic.<sup>57</sup> In the early 1830s, however, he came to abandon his earlier view that syllogism was of much use in moral science, including political economy, though he maintained his belief in the use of a deductive method in moral science.<sup>58</sup> In 'Definition of Political Economy', he insisted that conclusions from such hypotheses 'might be totally without foundation in fact'. In this sense, a science which employed the deductive method was an abstract science, and its conclusions were hypothetical. Significantly, this did not mean that a deductive science was either imperfect or useless. In his opinion,

Geometry presupposes an arbitrary definition of a line, "that which has length but not breadth." Just in the same manner does Political Economy presuppose an arbitrary definition of man, as a being who invariably does that by which he may obtain the greatest amount of necessaries, conveniences, and luxuries, with the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 318.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>57</sup> JSM, 'Whatley's Elements of Logic', CW, xi, 1-35.

<sup>58</sup> See JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 189. See also JSM, 'Definition', CW, iv, 309-39. By 'the method *à priori*', Mill meant 'reasoning from an assumed hypothesis'. (ibid., 325.)

smallest quantity of labour and physical self-denial with which they can be obtained in the existing state of knowledge.<sup>59</sup>

In ‘Definition of Political Economy’, Mill also examined the role of verification in political economy. Verification had no place in scientific processes, but did have a place in the application of science; verification was a process in which a conclusion which had been reached from assumed premises was compared with what actually happened; it was not a process intended to verify premises in themselves by reference to empirical facts. This was because what actually happened was motivated by many motives other than economic ones, while reasoning in political economy was based only on hypothetical economic motives.<sup>60</sup>

## ii

More detailed argument on the definition and method of political economy can be found in the *Logic*. Oscar Kubitz regards the sections on political economy in the *Logic* as a complete development of the argument in ‘Definition of Political Economy’. He bases his conclusion on the following facts. First, in the *Logic*, Mill quoted many passages from ‘Definition of Political Economy’; and second, he republished ‘Definition of Political Economy’ with only minor changes, as part of *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*, in 1844, the year following the publication of the *Logic*.<sup>61</sup> However, there were crucial differences between ‘Definition of Political Economy’ and the *Logic*. First, in the latter, unlike in ‘Definition of Political Economy’, he proposed the existence of more than one deductive method; he conceived two kinds of deductive method – the geometrical method and the physical method. Second, he introduced the operation of *à posteriori* verification into the deductive method.<sup>62</sup>

In Mill’s opinion, ‘the chemical or experimental method’ was identified with the method of Coleridge and Macaulay amongst others,<sup>63</sup> while ‘the abstract or geometrical

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<sup>59</sup> JSM, ‘Definition’, *ibid.*, 326.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 323-4.

<sup>61</sup> Kubitz (1932) 232.

<sup>62</sup> Snyder (2006) 306.

<sup>63</sup> In his *Autobiography*, Mill stated that Macaulay used this method in his argument against James Mill. (JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 196.) In the *Logic*, Mill identified the chemical method as that employed by

method' was attributed to Hobbes and the Bentham school.<sup>64</sup> On the one hand, the chemical or experimental method was unsuitable in the social sciences because of the impossibility of experiment in these sciences. Moreover, even in chemistry, the deductive, namely the non-experimental, method was actually used.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, the geometrical method was insufficient in the social sciences in that it did not take into account the existence of counteracting causes. According to Mill, 'The phenomena of society do not depend, in essentials, on any one agency or law of human nature, with only inconsiderable modifications from others.'<sup>66</sup> He thought that Hobbes and the Benthamites were correct in thinking that the social sciences should be deductive, but they were incorrect in building their theory on too narrow a notion of acting causes in society.

Having denied the suitability of both methods in the social sciences, Mill instead presented 'the concrete deductive or physical method' as the sole suitable method.<sup>67</sup> This method consisted of three logical steps: induction, deduction, and verification. The first, inductive step used the experimental method in order to discover the laws of human action which jointly produced a certain sort of behaviour in a specific case. In the second, deductive step, the effect of the combination of causes which had been discovered in the first step was deductively ascertained. In the third and final step, the ascertained effect was verified. In the *Logic*, contrary to 'Definition of Political Economy', Mill incorporated verification into the scientific process.

Mill regarded political economy as a science which dealt with 'one large class of social phenomena, in which the immediately determining causes are principally those which act through the desire of wealth; and in which the psychological law mainly concerned is the familiar one, that a greater gain is preferred to a smaller'. He went on to state:

By reasoning from that one law of human nature, and from the principal outward circumstances ... which operate upon the human mind through that law, we may be

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Coleridge and his followers. (JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 885.)

<sup>64</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 888-94.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 882, 886.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 894.

<sup>67</sup> See p. 98 above.

enabled to explain and predict this portion of the phenomena of society, so far as they depend on that class of circumstances only; overlooking the influence of any other of the circumstances of society; and therefore neither tracing back the circumstances which we do take into account, to their possible origin in some other facts in the social state, nor making allowance for the manner in which any of those other circumstances may interfere with, and counteract or modify, the effect of the former.<sup>68</sup>

Whatever man's actual motivations were, political economists were to assume that the preference for a greater gain to a smaller one was the sole motivation for his economic actions. Reasoning in political economy, therefore, should be based on this general hypothesis. As a result, its conclusions would inevitably be hypothetical, for, 'They are grounded on some supposititious set of circumstances, and declare how some given cause will operate in those circumstances, supposing that no others are combined with them'.<sup>69</sup> In this sense, political economy should be seen as a hypothetical science.

#### **4. Beyond the Science of Political Economy**

##### **i**

Given the distinction between science and art, Mill wrote: 'If ... Political Economy be a science, it cannot be a collection of practical rules; though, unless it be altogether a useless science, practical rules must be capable of being founded upon it.'<sup>70</sup> Crucially, science was, to his mind, a necessary condition for the practice of the art. He stated:

No one who has to think of mankind, however perfect his scientific acquirements, can dispense with a practical knowledge of the actual modes in which the affairs of the world are carried on, and an extensive personal experience of the actual ideas, feelings, and intellectual and moral tendencies of his own country and of his own age. The true practical statesman is he who combines this experience with a profound knowledge of abstract political philosophy.<sup>71</sup>

Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* was first published in April 1848. On 22

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 901.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 900.

<sup>70</sup> JSM, 'Definition', CW, iv, 312.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 333.

February 1848, just before its publication, Mill wrote to John Austin: ‘I doubt if there will be a single opinion (on pure political economy) in the book, which may not be exhibited as a corollary from his [i.e. Ricardo’s] doctrines’.<sup>72</sup> As far as the scope and method of political economy was concerned, Mill basically endorsed Ricardo’s view that the science of political economy should be deductive and strictly distinguished from the art. Nevertheless, in the *Principles*, whose sub-title was ‘With some of their Applications to Social Philosophy’, he did not confine himself to the science of political economy, but was concerned as well with the art. As Neil de Marchi states, Mill ‘sought to combine the offices of theorist and practical man’, intending to ‘provide an up-to-date statement of the abstract science of political economy’.<sup>73</sup> In the *Principles*, his interest was in the application of the pure principles of political economy, combined with other laws, to practical questions of the time, as well as in the pure economic principles themselves.

Mill claimed that the conclusions of political economy should be examined in light of a more comprehensive science of society which, unlike political economy, took into consideration all the available laws relating to man’s actual behaviour. Having once criticized Adam Smith for confounding ‘the essentially distinct, though closely connected, ideas of *science* and *art*’,<sup>74</sup> he now saw Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* as ‘great and beautiful’<sup>75</sup> in its ‘teaching the applications along with the principles’.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, in writing his book on political economy, he took Smith’s work as a model, and expressed his aspiration to replace it with his own.<sup>77</sup> In the Preface to his *Principles*, Mill wrote that, ‘The most characteristic quality’ of *Wealth of Nations* was ‘that it invariably associates the principles with their applications’. He continued:

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<sup>72</sup> JSM to John Austin, 22 February 1848, CW, xiii, 731.

<sup>73</sup> Marchi (1974) 139-40.

<sup>74</sup> JSM, ‘Definition’, CW, iv, 312.

<sup>75</sup> JSM to Auguste Comte, 6 June 1844, CW, xiii, 631. [Haac (1995) 237.]

<sup>76</sup> JSM to Henry Chapman, 8 November, 1844, CW, xiii, 642. This does not mean that Mill abandoned the narrow definition of political economy as a science.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, JSM to Henry Chapman, 9 March 1847, *ibid.*, 708, where he stated that his new book would be ‘a book to replace Adam Smith, that is, to attempt to do for political economy what A. S. [i.e. Adam Smith] did at the time when he wrote’.

This of itself implies a much wider range of ideas and of topics, than are included in Political Economy, considered as a branch of abstract speculation. For practical purposes, Political Economy is inseparably intertwined with many other branches of social philosophy. Except on matters of mere detail, there are perhaps no practical questions, even among those which approach nearest to the character of purely economical questions, which admit of being decided on economical premises alone.<sup>78</sup>

## ii

In discussing the economic problems of his time, J. S. Mill aspired to combine the limited scope of the science of political economy with the expansive moral vision that suffused his conception of the art. In his attempt to apply the principles of political economy to actual problems, he was concerned not only with the economic, but crucially also with the intellectual and moral state of mankind. For Mill, the ultimate end was the improvement of mankind, not the improvement of their economic condition in itself. In January 1850 he wrote that, ‘At present I expect very little from any plans which aim at improving even the economical state of the people by purely economical or political means’, and even went on to say:

We have come, I think, to a period, when progress, even of a political kind, is coming to a halt, by reason of the low intellectual & moral state of all classes: of the rich as much as of the poorer classes. Great improvements in Education ... are the only thing to which I should look for permanent good.<sup>79</sup>

In the *Principles*, Mill devoted a great deal of effort to discussing the possibility of the moral transformation of the people, in the belief that such a transformation would make it possible to transform the social system. It should be recalled that as early as 1834 Mill had criticized the political economists for regarding the existing class society as invariable.<sup>80</sup> Even though in the mid-1830s Mill gave no clear indication as to the way in which existing social arrangements might be transformed, he now came to hold a

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<sup>78</sup> JSM, *PPE*, CW, ii, xci.

<sup>79</sup> JSM to Edward Herford, 22 January 1850, CW, xiv, 45.

<sup>80</sup> See JSM, ‘Miss Martineau’s Summary of Political Economy’, CW, iv, 226-7. See p. 83 above.

firm view on this subject. He came to see intellectual and moral development as the efficient cause.<sup>81</sup> In discussing the national characters of England and of the United States, for example, Mill insisted:

it is not the desire of wealth that needs to be taught, but the use of wealth, and appreciation of the objects of desire which wealth cannot purchase, or for attaining which it is not required. Every real improvement in the character of the English or Americans ... must necessarily moderate the all-engrossing torment of their industrialism; must diminish ... the aggregate productiveness of their labour.<sup>82</sup>

Such a view was reflected in Mill's argument as to what sort of society would be desirable. He shed new light on the problem of the so-called 'stationary state', the ultimate consequence of economic growth, where there would be no further increase in capital and wealth. In an opulent country with no further unused fertile land, such as Britain, profits were, according to the Ricardian argument, falling to their customary minimum rate, thereby such a country was 'on the very verge of the stationary state', even though the arrival of the stationary state was continually postponed by certain factors that prevented the fatal falling of profits to their minimum rate, such as technological advance and cheap capital imports.<sup>83</sup> The orthodox political economists generally believed that the arrival of the stationary state, though the inevitable consequence of economic growth, was undesirable, and therefore required both that those laws that tended to anticipate the arrival of the state be repealed and that policies that would contribute to postpone its arrival as long as possible be introduced.<sup>84</sup> Mill's notion of the stationary state was at variance with that of the orthodox political economists of the day. Mill did not fear the arrival of the stationary state; rather he saw

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<sup>81</sup> See pp. 124-6 above.

<sup>82</sup> JSM, *PPE*, CW, ii, 105. See also JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 906: 'In political economy for instance, empirical laws of human nature are tacitly assumed by English thinkers, which are calculated only for Great Britain and the United States. Among other things, an intensity of competition is constantly supposed, which, as a general mercantile fact, exists in no country in the world except those two.'

<sup>83</sup> JSM, *PPE*, CW, iii, 738.

<sup>84</sup> Ricardo recommended the repeal of the Corn Laws on the grounds that they accelerated capital accumulation, and thus accelerated the arrival of the stationary state. See Ricardo, *An Essay on the Influence of a low Price of Corn*, Ricardo, iv, 9-41.

it as a desirable condition. He criticized such political economists as Smith, Malthus, and McCulloch for tending to identify all that was economically desirable with the progressive state. He criticized them for their view that ‘prosperity does not mean a large production and a good distribution of wealth, but a rapid increase of it’, and consequently, that society would thus cease to progress when it reached the stationary state.<sup>85</sup> In Mill’s view, enduring economic growth was not necessarily good. He thought that, unless accompanied by favourable changes in human character and social arrangements, especially in the distribution of wealth, economic growth would merely result in a larger population and larger capital stocks, together with environmental degradation. Mill depicted a society that was growing economically in the following way:

There is a greater aggregate production, a greater produce divided among the labourers, and a larger gross profit; but the wages being shared among a larger population, and the profits spread over a larger capital, no labourer is better off, nor does any capitalist derive from the same amount of capital a larger income.<sup>86</sup>

In such a condition, only the landlord class benefited, and did so at the expense of the interest of the other classes of society.<sup>87</sup>

Unlike the mainstream of English political economy, Mill claimed that society could progress in the stationary state. Here, the term ‘progress’ did not mean economic growth, but the moral and intellectual cultivation of the people and the improvement of the social and political arrangements for the distribution, not the production, of wealth.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> JSM, *PPE*, CW, iii, 752.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 731.

<sup>87</sup> Mill concluded that, ‘The economical progress of a society constituted of landlords, capitalists, and labourers, tends to the progressive enrichment of the landlord class; while the cost of the labourer’s subsistence tends on the whole to increase, and profits to fall.’ (*ibid.*, 731-2.) For Mill’s argument on this point, see Riley (1998) 311-3.

<sup>88</sup> Mill’s distinction between the immutable laws of production and the artificially, alterable laws of distribution of wealth was of immense importance. In his view, the laws of production ‘partake of the character of physical truths. There is nothing optional or arbitrary in them.’ On the contrary, the laws of distribution were ‘a matter of human institution solely. The things once there, mankind, individually or collectively, can do with them as they like.’ (JSM, *PPE*, CW, ii, 199.) For this distinction, see also Ryan (1974) 164-6; Hollander (1985) 216-23.

Mill stated:

a stationary condition of capital and population implies no stationary state of human improvement. There would be as much scope as ever for all kinds of mental culture, and moral and social progress; as much room for improving the Art of Living, and much more likelihood of its being improved, when minds ceased to be engrossed by the art of getting on.<sup>89</sup>

For Mill, the stationary state was a desirable state of society where a stable population could be maintained at a reasonable level of material comfort and their energies would no longer be devoted exclusively to the ‘struggle for riches’, but instead to moral and mental cultivation, as well as to a better and more equitable distribution of wealth.<sup>90</sup> In the stationary state, he envisioned that the current three-class structure, as well as the economic institutions that were closely associated with it, might be forced to change, and subsequently two groups would emerge: ‘a well-paid and affluent body of labourers’ and ‘a much larger body of persons than at present, not only exempt from the coarser toils, but with sufficient leisure, both physical and mental’. This condition of society, Mill asserted, was ‘the most desirable condition of society’.<sup>91</sup>

In Book IV, Chapter VII of the *Principles*, entitled ‘On the Probable Futurity of the Labouring Classes’, Mill compared what he called the ‘theory of dependence and protection’ with that ‘of self-dependence’. The former claimed that the poor should be regulated on their behalf by the higher classes which were expected to ‘think for them, and to take the responsibility of their lot’.<sup>92</sup> According to this theory, the rich were to the poor what adults were to children. Mill criticized this theory on the following grounds. First, such an ideal class of the rich had almost never existed. He stated: ‘All privileged and powerful classes, as such, have used their power in the interest of their own selfishness.’<sup>93</sup> Second, and more crucially, the working classes of such advanced

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<sup>89</sup> JSM, *PPE*, CW, iii, 756.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 754. It should be noted that Mill thought that increased production was an important object for less-advanced countries, for a certain degree of material opulence constituted a precondition for mental and intellectual improvement. (ibid., 755.)

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 755.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 759.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 760.

countries as Britain no longer accepted ‘the patriarchal or paternal system of government’.<sup>94</sup> Having taken their interests into their own hands, they had realized that their interests were opposite to, not identical with, those of the rich. Thanks to the diffusion of wealth and the subsequent diffusion of knowledge through society, they were well enough cultivated not to be treated like children, and thereby should be regarded as partakers ‘in all discussions on matters of general interest’.<sup>95</sup>

In contrast, the theory of self-dependence would suit the labouring classes of civilized nations who had been far enough disciplined to improve their condition on their own. This view was associated with his view that local self-government was essential for the education and welfare of the people. As an indispensable school for democracy, it would permit the people to acquire invaluable experience of working towards common ends, and introduce them to the skills and ethics of collaboration.<sup>96</sup>

As a result of the increasing political power and importance of the labouring class, Mill pointed out, they had not only stepped up their demands for a new mode of distribution of the produce of their labours to their advantage, but had also come to be discontented with ‘the condition of labouring for wages as their ultimate state’.<sup>97</sup> Importantly, his vision for the stationary state and the future of the labouring classes was based on the premise that current social and political arrangements, as well as the current moral and intellectual state of people, were provisional and needed to be improved. He thought that, ‘Mankind are capable of a far greater amount of public spirit than the present age is accustomed to suppose possible. History bears witness to the success with which large bodies of human beings may be trained to feel the public interest their own.’<sup>98</sup> He thought that associations, which aimed not ‘for the mere private benefit of the individual members, but for the promotion of the co-operative cause’, would contribute to the improvement of condition of the people.<sup>99</sup> According to Mill, ‘association ... of interests, is the school’ in which the ‘excellences’ of ‘public

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 762.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 764.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, JSM, ‘Tocqueville [1]’, CW, xviii, 63; JSM, ‘Civilization’, *ibid.*, 123.

<sup>97</sup> JSM, *PPE*, CW, iii, 766.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 205.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 783.

spirit, generous sentiments, or true justice and equality' could be nurtured.<sup>100</sup> His theory of self-dependence did not imply that man should be isolated. Rather, improvement should aim not 'to place human beings in a condition in which they will be able to do without one another, but to enable them to work with or for one another in relations not involving dependence'.<sup>101</sup> The first form of association which had been practised was that of labourers with capitalists, in which everyone who contributed to the work in any form had a partner's interest in it according to the value of his contribution.<sup>102</sup> If mankind continued to improve, Mill expected that this association would be taken over by the association of labourers among themselves, which would be 'on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves'.<sup>103</sup> He admitted that such social systems as socialism and communism would not succeed in the present condition of society where man's actions were to a great degree dominated by the wealth-maximization motive, but believed that they might be established in the future when human character had been greatly improved.

## 5. Concluding Note

Mill admitted that the *Principles* 'was far more rapidly executed than the *Logic*'. He took only about two years to write it; he commenced writing in the autumn of 1845 and it was 'ready for the press before the end of 1847'.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, he might have completed it even more rapidly had famine not struck Ireland in 1846, and sparked the controversy over the Irish land question. In order to take part in the debate, Mill suspended work on the *Principles*, and contributed a series of articles on the Irish land problem, which appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* between October 1846 and January 1847. Mill's

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 768.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. See also JSM, 'Civilization', CW, xviii, 122, where he stated: 'There is not a more accurate test of the progress of civilization than the progress of the power of co-operation.'

<sup>102</sup> JSM, *PPE*, CW, iii, 769-75.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 775.

<sup>104</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 243. He had formulated a plan of writing a treatise on political economy by the mid-1844. See JSM to Auguste Comte, 3 April 1844, CW, xiii, 626 [Haac (1995) 228]; JSM to John Sterling, 29 May 1844, CW, xiii, 630.

*Morning Chronicle* series can be seen as a test case of what he was about to attempt in the *Principles*. In other words, it was an attempt to apply his political, social, and economic theories, combined with an expansive moral vision, to an urgent practical question of the time. In the next chapter, I examine Mill's contribution to the debate on the Irish land question at the time of the Great Famine in Ireland, a project to which he deployed many of the ideas that he had developed over the previous twenty years.

## Chapter 9. J. S. Mill and the Politics of the Irish Land Question

### 1. Introduction

This chapter discusses J. S. Mill's involvement with the Irish land question at the time of the Great Famine of 1846, which was caused by the failure of the potato crop. By the term 'Irish land question', I loosely indicate the issue of the structure and relationships of landownership, landholding, and the use of the soil in Ireland, an issue which became a matter of political controversy in early nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>1</sup> The Irish land question was itself an aspect of a larger issue, 'the Irish question'. On the eve of the Great Famine, Benjamin Disraeli spoke as follows in the House of Commons: you have a starving population, an absentee aristocracy, and an alien church, and in addition, the weakest executive in the world. That was the Irish question. ... The connexion with England thus became the cause of the present state of Ireland. If the connexion with England prevented a revolution, and a revolution were the only remedy, England logically was in the odious position of being the cause of all the misery in Ireland. ... That was the Irish question in its integrity.<sup>2</sup>

The land question was regarded as a central aspect of the political and constitutional, as well as economic, relationship between Britain and Ireland. Accordingly, a solution to the Irish land question would first be necessary in order to solve the Irish question as a whole.

Suspending his work on *Principles of Political Economy*, Mill exclusively devoted his time and effort to a series of articles on the problems of the Irish land system, which was published in a liberal periodical, the *Morning Chronicle*, during the Irish famine of 1846. Philip Bull states that Mill was one of the first thinkers who 'placed the question of Irish agricultural land tenure in a wider context embodying not only Irish cultural and social factors and English legal assumptions but also the general principles of political economy as then understood'.<sup>3</sup> As the topics Mill discussed were economic, and Mill drew on his knowledge of political economy, Mill's involvement with the Irish land

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<sup>1</sup> See Gray (1999) 1-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., lxxii, 1016. (16 February 1844)

<sup>3</sup> Bull (1996) 30.

question in the mid-1840s has been examined mainly from the perspective of his economics.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, given Mill's aspiration to create a new science of society in the 1830s and 1840s, his *Morning Chronicle* series is better understood from the point of view of his science of society, in which political ethology was hugely important, and not from the point of view of political economy alone.<sup>5</sup>

In the first section of this chapter, I examine how early nineteenth-century intellectuals thought about the nature of the Irish question and how they saw 'Irish national character'. In this context, 'Irish national character' referred to the traits of the Irish peasantry from a social point of view, even though the fact that the great mass of them were Roman Catholic in religion made the situation complex. Political economists especially had a huge interest in the Irish question, and their 'scientific' perspective was vital in their analysis of its economic aspects. A remedy for the Irish distress that most political economists put forward was the capitalization of Irish agriculture through the introduction of English capital, a policy proposal which Mill later criticized.

In the second section, I present an account of Mill's views on the Irish condition and his proposed solution for the Irish land question. He examined the question not only from an economic point of view, but also from an ethological point of view; he stressed how artificial social systems, including the land system, could contribute to the formation of national character. This section shows that both his diagnosis of the Irish distress and his proposed remedy for it were firmly grounded on the theoretical views of man and society, which, as I have shown in previous chapters, had been gradually developed in the 1830s and early 1840s.

## **2. The Irish Question and Irish National Character**

### **i**

The experience of colonization and plantation cast a long shadow over modern Irish history. Even though the penal laws against Catholics, which were enacted between 1667 and 1705, had gradually been abandoned in the later eighteenth and early

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Black (1960); Martin (1981).

<sup>5</sup> Zastoupil (1983), Carlisle (1991), and Kinzer (2001) emphasize the importance of political ethological concern in examining Mill's involvement with the Irish land question.

nineteenth centuries, the repeal of these laws did not reverse the near-monopoly of land ownership and political power in the hands of the Protestant elite. By the terms of the Act of Union of 1800, the British government and parliament took on direct responsibility for the condition of Ireland, but they had little interest in its improvement. Rather, economic and social divergence between England and Ireland increased after the Union. Britain's misgovernment made Ireland more vulnerable to social disaster. Eventually, however, the state of Ireland became a source of serious concern to the British government from the points of view of political control and military security. Alongside this growing concern, an awareness of the deteriorating socio-economic condition of Ireland, such as agricultural and industrial stagnation and overpopulation, leading to social instability, came to be increasingly felt by British politicians and intellectuals.<sup>6</sup>

In discussions of Irish national character, one of the fundamental questions was whether the Irish national character was due to the history of oppression and demoralization by England, or to heredity. The clash between those who advocated environmentalism and those who advocated biological determinism came to a head on this issue. Early nineteenth-century environmentalist arguments on national character originated in the tradition of philosophical history which flourished in late eighteenth-century Scotland. The posthumous, third edition of John Millar's *An Historical View of the English Government* was published in 1803.<sup>7</sup> This work contained a section on 'The Government of Ireland' which was characterized by historical environmentalism. Millar argued against the view held by many of his contemporaries that the 'average' Irish character was inconsistent with the requirements of economic and social development, and that the Irish were inherently 'disgraced by a greater portion of barbarity and ferocity, than the rude inhabitants of other countries'. The manners of the Irish 'exhibit that striking resemblance of lines and features, which may be remarked in the inhabitants of every country before the advancement of arts and civilization'. Irish national character was to a large extent a product of the 'acts of injustice' which had been perpetrated by successive English governments. Significantly,

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<sup>6</sup> See Mokyr (1985); Gray (1999).

<sup>7</sup> Millar (1803). The first edition of Millar's *Historical View* was published in 1787.

Millar laid little emphasis on the religious factor in discussing Irish national character.

Many contributors to the *Edinburgh Review* followed Millar in emphasizing the importance of government in the shaping of national character. Francis Jeffrey, for example, in a review of Millar's *Historical View*, expounded Millar's approach to national character; thereafter James Mill adopted Millar's view on Irish national character.<sup>8</sup> The reviewers often claimed that the dark side of the Irish national character was to a great extent due to oppression by the English. Hence, the backwardness of Ireland was not to be ascribed to inherited national character. James Mackintosh, for example, stated that English oppression took away 'skill and industry, hope and pride' from the Irish Catholics.<sup>9</sup> It is worth emphasizing that, even though they were conscious of the significance of the Catholic question,<sup>10</sup> most of the Edinburgh Reviewers, like Millar, saw the Irish question as essentially a social and economic, and not a religious one. The repeal of the remaining discriminatory laws against Catholics in 1829, though it did little for the improvement of the social and economic condition of the Irish people, reinforced this trend. Opposing a religious or fatalist view, a 'scientific' attitude, grounded in political economy, helped intellectuals look to the nature of the problem and suggest remedies.

## ii

In order to understand Irish economic history, historians have examined a number of causal factors: geographical, political, social, institutional, ethnic, demographic, and so on.<sup>11</sup> One of the most influential explanations for Irish economic backwardness places the responsibility on the Irish land tenure system. In fact, the land question has been a contentious issue since the early nineteenth century. In this view, Irish economic distress is attributed to the insecurity of tenure of the tenants, which led to under-investment, and in turn to low incomes in agriculture. The so-called 'land tenure hypothesis' was put forward by travellers, administrators, agricultural reformers, as well as political economists, in the first half of the nineteenth century. This hypothesis had a

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey (1803: Millar's View); James Mill (1813: Ireland).

<sup>9</sup> Mackintosh (1812) 352.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see Smith (1820).

<sup>11</sup> Mokyr (1985) 2-5.

crucial influence on British policies towards Ireland during and after the Great Famine.<sup>12</sup>

Among early nineteenth-century British intellectuals, especially political economists, there was a consensus that the miserable state of Ireland was to a great degree caused by its unproductive agriculture, even though there were disagreements on the remedies for it. As early as 1808 and 1809, Thomas Robert Malthus examined the rapidly increasing population in Ireland.<sup>13</sup> He thought that overpopulation in Ireland was due to the Irish reliance on potatoes as the food staple, and then identified British misrule as the cause of the Irish reliance on potatoes. He claimed the problem would be solved by ‘the abolition of the Catholic code, and the improvement of government’.<sup>14</sup> He regarded overpopulation in Ireland as the cause of the high rents which burdened the Irish tenantry, and he saw the Irish land system as an evil in so far as it allowed the number of poor people to multiply to dangerous levels.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, he thought that economic development and the subsequent improvement of social conditions could be achieved ‘through the retention of that system [of landed property], and the adjustment of Irish agriculture to the capitalist type of mixed farming’.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, he argued that the consolidation of holdings and the subsequent conversion of the cottier into a wage-labourer, which would deter improvident marriages and thereby rapid population growth, would be necessary. In addition, he feared that Ireland could not support its current population on the land, and looked for the development of manufacturing industry and the subsequent redeployment of population. By the mid-1810s, most of Malthus’s ideas had been widely accepted by political economists in Britain.<sup>17</sup>

Grounded on Malthus’s principle of population, as well as on Ricardo’s arguments on capital accumulation and rent, most British political economists claimed that the widespread subdivision of land was not desirable. John Ramsay McCulloch contributed

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<sup>12</sup> Mokyr (1985) 81-111.

<sup>13</sup> Malthus (1808); Malthus (1809).

<sup>14</sup> Malthus (1808) 354.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 339-41. Malthus criticized Hume’s and Smith’s view that the rapid growth of population in Ireland was caused by “wise institutions” and an “increasing demand for labour”. (*ibid.*, 339.)

<sup>16</sup> Black(1960) 86.

<sup>17</sup> See Semmel (1963) 8.

an essay on the ‘Cottage System’ to the third volume of the *Supplement to the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Editions of the Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1819, where he doubted that ‘the letting of small farms and patches of ground’ would encourage the improvement of the condition of the people.<sup>18</sup> Such a use of land, to his mind, contradicted the laws of political economy. Subdivision of land was harmful in so far as it disturbed the accumulation of capital and the division of labour, while it created a surplus and indolent population. He employed the examples of Ireland and France to support his claim, and referred to political economists such as Arthur Young and Edward Wakefield, as well as Ricardo, as authorities who shared his view.<sup>19</sup>

In the 1820s, a modest revival in corn production in Ireland led political economists to hope for an increase in agricultural productivity at a rate greater than that of the growth of population. However, they thought at the same time that this improvement would be unsustainable without structural change. Accordingly, they gave a high priority to capital investment in land. A re-organization of landholding which swept away the cottier system was vital, since only large-scale capitalist farming was efficient. The notion of the ‘Anglicization’ of Irish agriculture in terms of the introduction of English capital was central to the vision of most political economists of the day. The crucial element of Anglicization lay in the introduction into Ireland of a tripartite division of labour between landlords, capitalist farmers, and wage-labourers.

Most British political economists thought that it was the landlords’ duty to reform their estates, adopting their traditional paternalist role, but modified by capitalist motives. Hence, they criticized the landlords for not acting more decisively to encourage improvement along the lines of a modern, capitalist economy. They were clear in their view about the nature of the problem: they believed that there was a cycle in which excessive population on the land consumed a disproportionate proportion of its produce. The consequence of this was that wealth could not increase, nor capital accumulate, in order to afford other means of employment. This in turn further bound

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<sup>18</sup> McCulloch (1819) 378.

<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that Ricardo, though having the same opinions as McCulloch as far as small farming was concerned, thought that the Irish misery was due in large part to oppression and misrule by Irish privileged landlords, as well as by the English government. See, for example, David Ricardo to Hutches Trower, 24 July 1823, Ricardo, ix, 314.

the population to the land. They thought that the problem in Ireland was the want of employment, which produced subsequent starvation and discontent. According to an English traveller, Henry David Inglis, 'Men who are unable to turn to any business but agriculture, will agree to pay any rent, so long as want of employment prevails to so enormous an extent.'<sup>20</sup> The solution which the political economists advanced was that landlords should take responsibility for turning their own estates into more efficient agricultural units: farms should be made more compact and capital invested to secure more profitable farming conditions. What was needed to improve the condition of Ireland was, in their view, the will of landlords to improve. The absentee landlord often became the target of their criticism, not because absenteeism was thought to be incompatible with economic efficiency, but because it meant the abrogation of the paternalist role that political economists expected the landlord to take.<sup>21</sup>

### iii

During his visit to London in 1835, Camillo Cavour, a leading political figure in mid-nineteenth-century Italy, witnessed Nassau Senior, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Gustav de Beaumont discussing landed property:

I found Mr. Senior walking in the garden with M. Tocqueville and M. Beaumont, discussing the great subject of the division of property. An extraordinary thing was that the radical Englishman was in favour of large ownership and the legitimist Frenchman of small ownership. Mr. Senior thinks that the small proprietor has neither security nor comfort, and that it is much better for him to be in the employ of a large proprietor and have nothing to fear from bad luck or bad seasons. M.

Tocqueville refuted his argument very well both on moral and material grounds.<sup>22</sup>

In general terms, Tocqueville emphasized the importance of landed property in the formation of social and political habits. In *Democracy in America*, he examined the way in which the distribution of landed property affected the condition of society. He thought that the laws of inheritance had an 'unbelievable influence on the social state of

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<sup>20</sup> Inglis (1835) i, 64.

<sup>21</sup> See Bull (1996) 5-26.

<sup>22</sup> Whyte (1925) 122, quoted in Martin (1981) 16.

peoples'; power was diffused where the law required landed property to be divided into equal shares, and this wide distribution of property provided the foundation for democracy.<sup>23</sup> In an essay which he contributed, at Mill's request, to the *London and Westminster Review*, he wrote that there was 'nothing ... more favourable to the reign of democracy than the division of the land into small independent properties'.<sup>24</sup>

Tocqueville and Beaumont travelled through Ireland in July and August 1835. Beaumont visited Ireland again in the summer of 1837 to gather material for a work on Ireland. While Tocqueville did not publish any work on Ireland, Beaumont published *Ireland, Social, Political, and Religious* in 1839, in which he gave an analysis of Irish society on the eve of the Great Famine.<sup>25</sup> Even though Beaumont was an Anglophile and attempted to defend British policies in Ireland, he could not help concluding that the misery of Ireland was due largely to oppression by British governments. He began his book by stating: 'The dominion of the English in Ireland from the invasion of that country in 1169 to the close of the last century, has been nothing but a tyranny.'<sup>26</sup> In a devastating critique of British policy in Ireland, he questioned why a government with such enlightened institutions tolerated such oppression, referring to the desperation of the Catholics, the abusive land system, and the misery of famine. Beaumont observed that Ireland's English conquerors appropriated lands and bestowed on themselves feudal privileges, which prevented the development of an indigenous aristocracy and middle class by depriving the Irish of any commercial or territorial foundation on which these two classes could rise. The consequence was that an Irish municipal society could not form. To his mind, since their earliest history, the Irish people had never been able to achieve the circumstances in which commerce, liberty, and community identity could develop and thereby form a powerful union among themselves. In examining Ireland's sorry history and current miserable condition, he paid attention to the land system in Ireland, and subsequently suggested the introduction of peasant proprietorship as a means of improving the condition of Irish society as well as her agriculture. He

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<sup>23</sup> Tocqueville (1994) 51-2.

<sup>24</sup> Tocqueville (1836) 155. It is worth noting that Mill translated it into English.

<sup>25</sup> Mill gave it high praise in a letter to Beaumont dated 18 October 1839. (JSM to Gustav de Beaumont, 18 October 1839, CW, xvii, 1990-2.)

<sup>26</sup> Beaumont (2006) 5.

observed that the Irish economy was divided between wealthy landowners who expatriated profits and capital to England on the one hand, and impoverished tenant farmers, most of whom were forced to survive in rueful conditions, on the other. Significantly, Beaumont's interest in the Irish land system was not from an economic, but rather from a political point of view. He was concerned with the question of the relationship between land-holding, locality, liberty, and identity. He argued that wealth could be derived from small and medium holdings when a free economy was allowed to develop. These holdings would be the domain of a middle class, and it was out of this class that a conscious awareness of freedom and independence would emerge.

Continental authors, including Beaumont, provided Mill with a different perspective, both complementary and critical, from those of British authors. Contrary to the mainstream view of British political economists, J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi, a Genevan political economist and economic historian, pointed out the advantages of peasant proprietorship as it existed on the Continent.<sup>27</sup> A Prussian historian, Frederick von Raumer, pointed to Prussia where small farming had had a hugely favourable effect, and proposed the introduction of the same system into Ireland.<sup>28</sup> Along with Continental thinkers, British travellers who personally observed and thus were familiar with the Continental situation brought a further perspective to the British debate. One such traveller whose work Mill admired was Samuel Laing.<sup>29</sup> In his *Notes of a Traveller*, published in 1842, Laing criticized the conventional view held by most British political economists that a wide subdivision of land was not desirable for the development of society. He accused British political economists, such as Arthur Young and McCulloch, of having a 'narrow local view and prejudice'.<sup>30</sup> Based on his own observations in various Continental countries, Laing concluded that the subdivision of land and peasant proprietorship could check overpopulation, for under such a system, the peasant wisely delayed marriage until he had inherited or purchased sufficient land

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<sup>27</sup> Sismondi (1827); Sismondi (1837-8). For Mill's comment on Sismondi, see JSM, 'Ireland [30]' (11 December 1846), CW, xxiv, 988-91.

<sup>28</sup> Raumer (1836). For Mill's awareness of Raumer, see JSM to Sarah Austin, 9 January 1836, CW, xii, 292. Sarah Austin was the English translator of Raumer's *England im Jahre 1835*.

<sup>29</sup> See JSM to Sarah Austin, 26 February 1844, CW, xiii, 622.

<sup>30</sup> Laing (1842) 36.

to support his family. In addition, he insisted that small farmers were so industrious that their holdings were in a garden-like state of cultivation.<sup>31</sup> He stated that France was improving the condition of her people under ‘this very system of subdivision of property’, while the condition of the English labouring class was worsening with the progress of capitalization.<sup>32</sup>

The works illustrating the advantages of peasant proprietorship which attracted Mill’s interest included the following: Henry David Inglis’s *Switzerland, the South of France and the Pyrenees* (1831); William Howitt’s *Rural and Domestic Life of Germany* (1842); and George Poulett Scrope’s *How is Ireland to be governed?* (first edition in 1834; second, 1846). The latter proposed the reclamation of waste land, which Mill would also support in his *Morning Chronicle* series.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in the mid-1840s, William Thomas Thornton, Mill’s colleague at East India House, published two works, *Over-Population and its Remedy*, in 1845, and *A Plea for Peasant Proprietors, with the Outlines of a Plan for their Establishment in Ireland*, in 1848. In these works, which were similar in substance, Thornton argued strongly for the subdivision of the land, and proposed the reclamation of waste land by Irish peasants, severely criticizing the views of McCulloch regarding the effect of a wider distribution of landed property on the increase of population.

As far as Thornton’s works were concerned, Alexander Bain stated in his biography of Mill as follows: ‘I believe that it was his friend W. J. [*sic*] Thornton that first awakened him to the question of Peasant Properties. Thornton’s “Plea” was published before the *Political Economy* came out, and Mill read the proof sheets as it went through the press.’<sup>34</sup> In one of his *Morning Chronicle* articles, Mill acknowledged that he had been influenced by Thornton’s work.<sup>35</sup> As Bruce Kinzer, who has recently

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Scrope was one of the targets of Mill’s criticism. See, for example, JSM, ‘Poulett Scrope on the Poor Laws’, which appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* on 31 October 1846, where Mill attacked Scrope’s proposed Poor Law Bill. (JSM, ‘Poulett Scrope on the Poor Laws’ (31 October 1846), CW, xxiv, 923-6.)

<sup>34</sup> Bain (1882b) 86.

<sup>35</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [10]’ (23 October 1846), CW, xxiv, 911.

examined in detail whether and how Thornton influenced Mill on the land question, points out, what Mill had in mind, as far as the *Morning Chronicle* series was concerned, was not *A Plea*, but *Over-Population*.<sup>36</sup> Thornton's *Plea* had not been written when Mill was writing the *Morning Chronicle* articles, though Thornton had finished writing *Over-Population* by December 1845 and presented a copy of it to Mill early in 1846. Having said that, this does not mean that Thornton's *Over-Population* played a crucial role in Mill's conversion to an advocacy of peasant proprietorship. Rather, it reinforced Mill's conviction. His receptiveness to peasant proprietorship had been shaped by his close examination of the works on Continental systems of land tenure by both Continental and British thinkers. All the works mentioned above helped Mill recognize the advantages of peasant proprietorship.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. J. S. Mill and the Irish Land Question

#### i

J. S. Mill's involvement with the Irish question spanned more than forty years and embraced a variety of issues.<sup>38</sup> His involvement with the Irish land question at the time of the Great Famine in the mid-1840s was of particular importance. In 1845 he began writing *Principles of Political Economy*, but he temporarily put aside this project in the

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<sup>36</sup> Kinzer (2001) 55-6.

<sup>37</sup> In examining how Mill's experience of Indian revenue administration at the East India Company had a crucial impact on the development of his political thought, Lynn Zastoupil states that 'Mill's response to the Irish famine was conditioned by his knowledge of revenue affairs in India'. (Zastoupil (1994) 184. See also *ibid.*, 131-2, 170.) In the *Principles*, Mill examined the Indian land system within the chapter discussing the Irish land system, arguing that 'the comparison of the two' might be 'a source of some instruction'. (JSM, *PPE*, CW, ii, 319-20.) When discussing the Indian land system, he referred to the work of James Mill, whom he called 'the philosophical historian of India'. (*ibid.*, 321.) For James Mill on the Indian land system, see Stokes (1959) 81-139.

<sup>38</sup> His first article on Ireland was 'Ireland' which discussed the Catholic Question, and which was published in February 1826 (JSM, 'Ireland', CW, vi, 59-98), while his last involvement in the Irish Question was his parliamentary speech on John Francis Maguire's motion on the state of Ireland on 12 March 1868 (JSM, 'The State of Ireland', CW, xxviii, 247-61), following the publication of his *England and Ireland* in February 1868 (JSM, *England and Ireland*, CW, vi, 505-32). For a comprehensive analysis of Mill's involvement with the Irish question, see Kinzer (2001).

autumn of 1846 in order to contribute to the emerging debate on the Irish land question. On the occasion of the Great Famine of 1846, Mill found a propitious, as well as an urgent, opportunity to present a programme based on the principles that he had been developing. He published a series of forty-three articles, entitled ‘The condition of Ireland’, in the *Morning Chronicle* from 5 October 1846 to 7 January 1847.<sup>39</sup> The arrival of the potato blight in Ireland had been reported in early September 1845. Even though the rest of Europe had suffered to some degree from the potato blight, Ireland’s reliance on the potato as a staple food made its effects more severe. The Great Famine revealed that the current system in Ireland was no longer sustainable, and opened up a new range of possibilities of reform. In other words, radical reform, which had long been desired by critics of the existing system, now seemed practicable given the urgency of the situation. Mill recalled in his *Autobiography*:

the stern necessities of the time seemed to afford a chance of gaining attention for what appeared to me the only mode of combining relief to immediate destitution with permanent improvement of the social and economic condition of the Irish people.<sup>40</sup>

He thought that the most important institutional cause that had exacerbated the famine was the so-called ‘cottier-tenant system’ or ‘cottier system’, the system of land tenure that had been widely diffused in Ireland. According to Mill, ‘A cottier system may be defined, that in which the produce of the land is divided between two sharers – a landlord on one side, and labourers on the other; the competition of the labourers being

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<sup>39</sup> In addition to the series of articles entitled ‘The condition of Ireland’, Mill also published several further essays on Ireland in the *Morning Chronicle*, which were closely connected with the series, though not part of it: ‘Poulett Scrope on the Poor Laws’ (31 October 1846), CW, xxiv, 923-6; a series of four articles under the title ‘The Quarterly Review on French Agriculture’ (9-16 January 1847), *ibid.*, 1035-58; ‘The Irish Debates in the House of Commons’ (5 February 1847), *ibid.*, 1058-62; two articles on ‘The Proposed Irish Poor Law’ (17 and 19 March 1847), *ibid.*, 1066-72; and ‘Emigration from Ireland’ (7 April, 1847), *ibid.*, 1075-8.

<sup>40</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 243. In the same paragraph, Mill stated that the *Morning Chronicle* ‘unexpectedly entered warmly into my purpose’. However, its acceptance of Mill’s offer seems less surprising than he suggested, given that it had occasionally printed his articles on various topics and had been interested in Irish problems. For this point, see Kinzer (2001) 51-2.

the regulating principle of the division.’<sup>41</sup> As Mill was well aware, this system did not inevitably lead to the impoverishment of the agricultural class. Nevertheless, it produced calamitous results in Ireland where there had been overpopulation and cottier tenants were in a very vulnerable position, being subject to English landlords. In mid-nineteenth-century Ireland, overpopulation resulted in the further segmentation of land and soaring rent, and farmers, growing potato as their own staple food, were forced to export corn to England, even during the Great Famine.

Mill saw the cottier-tenant system as ‘the grand economical, as well as moral, evil of Ireland’.<sup>42</sup> Tolerated by a reckless and improvident landlord class, this system produced overpopulation and savage competition for subsistence. Furthermore, it produced a habitual disaffection from the law and destroyed all motivation to industry and enterprise. His proposed solution, as I shall illustrate below, was to replace this system with an alternative land system, namely peasant proprietorship, which he thought would contribute to the improvement of the moral, as well as economic, condition of the Irish people.

Significantly, Mill was firmly convinced that his proposal, as put forward in the *Morning Chronicle* series, was by no means utopian. Policies to improve the Irish condition had been discussed by many of his contemporaries, but some of them were obviously impracticable. One of the most popular views, put forward especially by political economists, was that Ireland could prosper through the introduction of large-scale farming carried on by capitalist tenants, and the simultaneous conversion of the cottier population into hired labourers. This policy, however, would not have been successful unless accompanied by such measures as clearances, organized emigration, and the creation of alternative employment. Mill thought that this would be impracticable. In contrast, he was convinced that his plan was, though apparently radical, not only theoretically well-grounded, but also practicable in the context of

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<sup>41</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [3]’ (10 October 1846), CW, xxiv, 889. See also his definition in the *Principles*: ‘By the general appellation of cottier tenure I shall designate all cases without exception in which the labourer makes his contract for land without the intervention of a capitalist farmer, and in which the conditions of the contract, especially the amount of rent, are determined not by custom but by competition. The principal European example of this tenure is Ireland ....’ (JSM, *PPE*, CW, ii, 313.)

<sup>42</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [3]’ (10 October 1846), CW, xxiv, 889.

mid-1840s Ireland.

ii

In the *Morning Chronicle* series, Mill proposed ‘the formation of peasant properties on the waste lands of Ireland’ as a potential remedy for Irish distress.<sup>43</sup> In advocating the reclamation of waste land, he developed an argument against such alternative proposed remedies as the enactment of the new Poor Law, the capitalization of Irish agriculture by the introduction of English capital, the fixity of tenancy, and the emigration of the Irish people to the United States, Canada, Australia, and elsewhere.

The Irish Poor Law, enacted in 1838, had introduced provision for the non-able-bodied poor in the workhouse and employment of the able-bodied poor in public works. At the time of the Great Famine, ‘A poor law, with extensive out-door relief to the able-bodied’ was being widely suggested.<sup>44</sup> While *The Times*, among others, argued in favour of it,<sup>45</sup> Mill criticized it in his *Morning Chronicle* series. His opposition to outdoor relief was based on several grounds. First, he thought that it would disturb the development of private industries, for the poor flocked to outdoor relief which provided easy money and work. Second, as the poor realized that they could get money whether or not they worked, they would be disinclined to work. Third, it would demoralize the peasant. It had harmful moral effects, in that it would ‘break down all the salutary barriers which the law erects to prevent the people from making what ought to be an extreme resource an habitual one’.<sup>46</sup>

In relation to the Poor Law scheme, Mill held an unfavourable opinion not only of outdoor relief, but also of public works, under the existing system. In November 1845, Peel’s government, faced with an unprecedented food shortage among the Irish peasantry, purchased £100,000 worth of corn from the United States and sold it at a low price. Peel also launched public works and repealed the Corn Laws.<sup>47</sup> These measures seemed sufficient, but in the summer of 1846, when the potato blight struck Ireland,

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<sup>43</sup> JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 243.

<sup>44</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [1]’ (5 October 1846), CW, xxiv, 881.

<sup>45</sup> For *The Times*’ position, see Gray (1999) 103-5.

<sup>46</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [2]’ (7 October 1846), *ibid.*, 886. See also Zastoupil (1983) 709.

<sup>47</sup> See Gray (1999) 11-35; Bew (2007) 177, 182.

Russell's government, which had come to power on 30 July 1846, failed to respond adequately. Influenced by a *laissez-faire* belief that the market would provide the food needed, Russell's government halted government food supply and public works other than relief in the form of wages from public employment.<sup>48</sup> To Mill's mind, public works were of little use in improving the condition of the Irish peasant. He stated: 'The best which will have been done with any part of this money [i.e. public money] is to drain and otherwise improve land for the benefit of the landlords: the worst, to squander it in jobs, or in useless or superfluous "public works"'. Even at best, 'it appears more probable that drainage by public money will be confined to lands already under culture, and will not increase the quantity, but only the productiveness, of the available soil; so that the competition for land remaining in unabated intensity, no one will gain but the landlord'.<sup>49</sup>

In Mill's view, some intellectuals and politicians both in England and Ireland were correct to recognize that the evils were to a large extent caused by the cottier-tenant system, but wrong to claim that the transformation of Irish agriculture into large-scale farming in terms of the introduction of English capital was the solution. Mill thought that this proposal was so counter-productive and inhumane that it would make the situation worse. It would require a massive expropriation of land, and subsequently the peasantry would be cleared off it, with no alternative employment available. It would not, therefore, contribute to the improvement of the condition of the Irish peasantry.<sup>50</sup> To his mind,

The introduction of English farming is another word for the clearing system. It must begin by ejecting the peasantry of a tract of country from the land they occupy, and handing it over *en bloc* to a capitalist-farmer. The number of those whom he would require to retain as labourers would be far short of the number he displaced.<sup>51</sup>

Mill argued that 'Improvement in the English sense, improvement by the more powerful instruments and processes of capitalist-farmers, though it raises a far greater net produce than the Irish system, yet from its very nature employs fewer hands.' This was not

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<sup>48</sup> See Bew (2007) 186, 188-9.

<sup>49</sup> JSM, 'Ireland [15]' (5 November 1846), CW, xxiv, 932-3.

<sup>50</sup> JSM, 'Ireland [4]' (13 October 1846), *ibid.*, 893ff.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 894.

appropriate for Ireland, where the pressure of overpopulation was acute.<sup>52</sup>

Mill was sympathetic towards the Irish demand for tenant-right as a means of mitigating the cottier system, and so admitted the merits of fixity of tenure, which had been proposed by the Repeal Association founded in 1840. Mill thought that such a measure would be ‘a real and a through remedy’. It would be able to convert ‘an indolent and reckless into a laborious, provident, and careful people’.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, he did not give his full support to it, for he thought that it would involve ‘a violent disturbance of legal rights, amounting almost to a social revolution’.<sup>54</sup> In order to make such a radical change politically feasible, it would need a prior change in the British public mind. In addition, he did not believe that it would contribute to easing the pressure of overpopulation. Instead, he hoped for milder and more efficient measures, that would make such a revolutionary step unnecessary.

As far as emigration was concerned, even though he appreciated the merits of colonization in general, Mill opposed the proposal of the mass emigration of the Irish people to North America and Australia on several grounds: it would be too costly; it would be of a compulsory nature; and it ignored the fact that the Irish people were not yet fit to be ‘missionaries of civilization’.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, he thought that those advocating mass emigration looked away from the real root of the evil, namely the system of cottier tenancy. As long as the system of cottier tenancy existed, there was no guarantee that the remaining Irish would not be as miserable as ever. To Mill’s mind, advocates of mass emigration as a remedy for Irish distress averted their eyes from the nature of the problem.<sup>56</sup> In other words, they failed to understand that, in Mill’s words, ‘the people are there, and the problem is not how to improve the country, but how it can be improved by and for its present inhabitants’.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. It should be noted that Mill did not completely reject the introduction of capital into Irish agriculture. In the *Principles*, he proposed the simultaneous creation of a peasant proprietorship on reclaimed waste land and the introduction of English capital.

<sup>53</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [5]’ (14 October 1846), *ibid.*, 896-7.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 897.

<sup>55</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [11]’ (26 October 1846), *ibid.*, 915.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 913-6.

<sup>57</sup> JSM, *PPE*, CW, iii, 991. See also Mill’s statement in the *Principles*, where he was severely critical of

### iii

Having rejected the other proposed remedies, Mill presented his own plan to improve the condition of the Irish peasants, the so-called plan of ‘waste land reclamation’. He was convinced that it could achieve both relief and reconstruction at the same time. The government would buy up waste land in Ireland, and reclaim it through a public works project. The land would then be distributed to Irish peasants, either through outright grants-in-deed, or through permanent tenures under quit-rent. Mill believed that, ‘Neither the economical nor the moral evils admit of any considerable alleviation while that baneful system [i.e. cottier tenancy] continues.’<sup>58</sup>

As I have shown above, in the early nineteenth century, many British political economists, including such authorities as Malthus, McCulloch, and Young, tended to see peasant proprietorship in a negative light. It was thought not to benefit from economies of scale and the division of labour.<sup>59</sup> In addition, it had been argued that in peasant society, property, including land, was usually divided equally among heirs on the death of the holder, which encouraged early marriage and abundant procreation, which then accelerated population pressure. The young Mill accepted these views. By the mid-1840s, however, he had revised his understanding of peasant proprietorship and became its ardent advocate, thanks largely to the wide-ranging study of land systems in a variety of nations.<sup>60</sup> A number of works which argued, with supporting examples, in favour of peasant proprietorship persuaded Mill to believe that peasant proprietorship could be economically successful in that it could achieve a significant degree of

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the British government: ‘To the owners of the rent it may be very convenient that the bulk of the inhabitants, despairing of justice in the country where they and their ancestors have lived and suffered, should seek on another continent that property in land which is denied to them at home. But the legislature of the empire ought to regard with other eyes the forced expatriation of millions of people. When the inhabitants of a country quit the country *en masse* because its Government will not make it a place fit for them to live in, the Government is judged and condemned.’ (Ibid., ii, 326.)

<sup>58</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [3]’ (10 October 1846), CW, xxiv, 889. See also JSM to Aubrey de Vere, 3 February 1848, CW, xiii, 730.

<sup>59</sup> Dewey (1974) 17-19; Kinzer (2001) 53. See also JSM, ‘Ireland’ (February 1826), CW, vi, 59-98.

<sup>60</sup> Bruce Kinzer lists the works to which Mill referred in the *Morning Chronicle* series and the *Principles* as far as land system was concerned. See Kinzer (2001) 56.

agricultural efficiency, and at the same time guard against overpopulation.<sup>61</sup> Mill referred, for example, to France, where small farming was widely diffused, as follows:

Every authentic statistical account of the condition of her industry and of her people has shown, and continues to show, that within that period [i.e. the last few decades] the state of her rural population, who are four-fifths of the whole, has improved in every particular; that they are better housed, better clothed, better and more abundantly fed; that their agriculture has improved in quality; that all the productions of the soil have multiplied beyond precedent; that the wealth of the country has advanced, and advances with increasing rapidity, and the population with increasing slowness.<sup>62</sup>

He contrasted the distressed state of Ireland in which cottier tenancy was widespread with various Continental nations where peasant proprietorship had produced good moral effects in improving the condition of people.

Mill gave the highest priority to a scheme of waste land reclamation: 'After the people are saved from present starvation, which must be presupposed in all plans, the formation of a peasant proprietary should, in our opinion, be the first object; all other things are of secondary importance.'<sup>63</sup> To his mind, 'All other schemes for the improvement of Ireland are schemes for getting rid of the people.'<sup>64</sup> He insisted that the government should take the land that had remained unused and pay only the shillings that it was worth. Crucially, Mill was convinced that it would not be unjust to landlords if the government compulsorily bought out the unused land at a price which reflected the present value, not at a speculative price, 'grounded on the improvements which are

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<sup>61</sup> JSM, 'Ireland [26]' (3 December 1846), CW, xxiv, 977. Prior to the *Morning Chronicle* series, Mill published 'The Claims of Labour' in the *Edinburgh Review* of April 1845, where he stated that peasant proprietorship would contribute to curb population growth. (JSM, 'The Claims of Labour', CW, iv, 389.)

<sup>62</sup> JSM, 'Ireland [19]' (16 November 1846), CW, xxiv, 950. To Mill's mind, the underdeveloped condition of French agriculture was not due to peasant proprietorship, but to 'the exclusive taste of the wealthy and middle classes for town life and town pursuits, combined with the general want of enterprise of the French nation with respect to industrial improvements'. (JSM, 'The Quarterly Review on French Agriculture [3]' (13 January 1847), *ibid.*, 1050.)

<sup>63</sup> JSM, 'Ireland [10]' (23 October 1846), *ibid.*, 912.

<sup>64</sup> JSM, 'Ireland [5]' (14 October 1846), *ibid.*, 898.

only to be effected by means of the purchase'.<sup>65</sup> In a *Morning Chronicle* article, Mill criticized the landed aristocracy for their 'defence of an imaginary idol called Rights of Property'.<sup>66</sup> He was at his most radical when rebutting the claims of the landed interest. Mill had been hostile towards the landed aristocracy since the 1820s. In the mid-1830s, for example, he stated that the landed interest successfully made others bear their burdens by enacting laws to force people to buy their produce at high prices and by exempting their land from taxation.<sup>67</sup>

Mill argued that, if schemes of land improvement were launched, based on the expenditure of public money, it should be on condition that the 'tenants of the land so improved' would be given 'a *permanent proprietary interest* in the soil'.<sup>68</sup> Mill recognized the good economic effect of having property in land. In his opinion, 'Property in the soil has a sort of magic power of engendering industry, perseverance, forethought in an agricultural people',<sup>69</sup> and that 'the feeling of proprietorship' was a 'never-failing source of local attachments'.<sup>70</sup> He thought that such a justification from the viewpoint of economic efficiency was well grounded on human experience. Nevertheless, he thought that an improvement in economic efficiency was not a sufficient justification for land reform, and that a further ethological justification was needed. He reiterated the point that the reform of the economic system should also contribute to the moral improvement of people; without such moral effects, the reform in the economic system would not be efficient, and it would end in failure. He stated: 'Without a change in the people, the most beneficent change in their mere outward circumstances would not last a generation. ... You will never change the people but by changing the external motives which act on them, and shape their way of life from the

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<sup>65</sup> JSM, 'Ireland [9]' (22 October 1846), *ibid.*, 910. See also JSM, 'Ireland [12]' (29 October 1846), *ibid.*, 919-23.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 920.

<sup>67</sup> See Martin (1981) 10. See also JSM, 'Notes on the Newspapers [2-3]' (April 1834), CW, vi, 168-218; JSM, 'Ireland [2]' (7 October 1846), CW, xxiv, 885.

<sup>68</sup> JSM, 'Ireland [16]' (6 November 1846), *ibid.*, 934-5.

<sup>69</sup> JSM, 'Ireland [5]' (14 October 1846), *ibid.*, 898.

<sup>70</sup> JSM, 'Ireland [10]' (23 October 1846), *ibid.*, 913.

cradle to the grave.’<sup>71</sup>

As John Robson states, Mill thought that property was ‘Essential to achieving and maintaining civilization’.<sup>72</sup> Peasant proprietorship, which secured tenure, would make the Irish people ‘not just better *farmers* but better *people*’.<sup>73</sup> Mill emphasized ‘how high a rank among civilizing agents belongs to the wide diffusion of property in land’.<sup>74</sup> From an ethological viewpoint, he found good moral effects in peasant proprietorship. In other words, he was convinced that the conversion of the Irish land system into peasant proprietorship would contribute to the improvement of Irish national character. This was the most important reason why he argued for peasant proprietorship. In advocating the introduction of peasant proprietorship into Ireland, his ultimate aim was the improvement of the moral state of the Irish people. Peasant proprietorship was, to his mind, ‘a measure of social reform and moral regeneration, a means of abolishing the worst of all forms of landed tenure, and raising up a class of peasantry to be an example and a guiding influence to the rest’.<sup>75</sup>

Mill’s proposals belonged to the environmentalist tradition of interpretation in relation to the formation of the Irish national character. He admitted that the current Irish national character was far from desirable, stating that, ‘The grand fundamental defects in the character and habits of the Irish peasants are want of industry and want of providence.’<sup>76</sup> However, his point was to claim that, ‘The faults of the Irish peasantry are the result of circumstances’,<sup>77</sup> and not due to heredity, and subsequently that Irish national character could be improved.<sup>78</sup> Once peasant proprietorship had been

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<sup>71</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [20]’ (19 November 1846), *ibid.*, 955.

<sup>72</sup> Robson (1998) 357.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>74</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [32]’ (15 December 1846), CW, xxiv, 997. See also JSM, ‘Ireland [25]’ (2 December 1846), *ibid.*, 974.

<sup>75</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [32]’ (15 December 1846), *ibid.*, 996.

<sup>76</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [20]’ (19 November 1846), *ibid.*, 955-6.

<sup>77</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [34]’ (17 December 1846), *ibid.*, 1004.

<sup>78</sup> Mill stated: ‘The curse of this system [i.e. cottier-tenant system] is, that it destroys, more utterly than any other system of nominally free labour, all motive either to industry or to prudence. ... A cottier-tenant system is essentially an anarchical system. Habitual disaffection to the law is almost inherent in it.’ (JSM, ‘Ireland [3]’ (10 October 1846), *ibid.*, 891.)

introduced, the Irish farmers would acquire such virtues as industry, conscience, and independence. Peasant proprietorship would, therefore, 'be not merely a sovereign remedy for Irish listlessness and indolence, but would do much to correct the still deeper seated and more intractable malady of Irish improvidence'.<sup>79</sup>

#### iv

It is difficult to assess the actual effect of Mill's articles on the British politics of the day,<sup>80</sup> but it is possible to understand the significance of his political ethology from his involvement in Irish affairs in the mid-1840s. Mill's diagnosis of the state of the Irish people in the mid-1840s was that, even though they did not yet possess the qualities necessary for self-rule, they had been sufficiently cultivated to the point where their consent to be governed by others was not only desirable but also necessary. In the ladder of civilization, according to Mill, Ireland was distinct not only from the advanced nations, such as Britain and America, but also from the lower nations like India. In the lower stage of civilization, where the people were not capable of understanding their true interest, their consent to be governed was not necessarily required, and, therefore, despotism was justified. In contrast, Ireland, unlike India, was not fit for despotism, which was legitimate only for governing the people of low development and slaves.<sup>81</sup> Hence, what Ireland needed were circumstances in which its people would attain such a suitable character that they would be capable of fulfilling the duties required by self-government, a government which would lead to the further improvement of their character.

Mill believed that economic reform would create the conditions by which the Irish farmers would raise themselves up to a position of moral independence, akin to the process which Mill envisaged for the working class in England, where commerce and industry had been sufficiently developed. He thought that the main superiority of the remedies he proposed was not that they contributed to the improvement of Irish

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<sup>79</sup> JSM, 'Ireland [26]' (3 December 1846), *ibid.*, 977.

<sup>80</sup> For the impact of his articles on public debate, see Kinzer (2001) 71ff.

<sup>81</sup> See Zastoupil (1983) 712. See JSM, *CRG*, CW, xix, 395 and 562-77. According to Zastoupil, in the 1830s Mill had advocated despotism in Ireland. (Zastoupil (1983) 714.) For this point, see JSM to John Pringle Nichol, 21 December 1837, CW, xii, 365.

agriculture, but that ‘they would surround the peasant with a new moral atmosphere; they would bring a set of motives to operate upon him which he has never before experienced, tending in the strongest manner to correct everything in his national character which needs correction’.<sup>82</sup> As I have shown, Mill held an environmentalist view that Irish national character was a reflection of the backward social condition of Ireland, which was due in turn to English misgovernment. This view implied that Irish national character could be changed through institutional reform. For Mill, the ultimate purpose of land reform was not ‘the improvement of Irish agriculture’ but ‘of the condition of the Irish people’.<sup>83</sup>

#### 4. Concluding Note

As time went on, the Irish distress deepened. By the beginning of December 1846, around 300,000 able-bodied people in Ireland were receiving relief in the form of wages from public employment.<sup>84</sup> The British government, however, was forced to recognize the failure of the public works policy.<sup>85</sup> The worst consequence of this relief was the demoralization of the Irish, who would work only for government wages, which were higher than any other.

Mill’s *Morning Chronicle* series was intended to build up public support for his scheme. Its target was ‘the spirit of routine’, which was ‘an obstacle to good, almost as strong and far more universal than selfishness’.<sup>86</sup> He criticized the views of what he regarded as obsolete English political economists and the public acceptance of them. In spite of his great efforts, however, his proposed measures were not implemented by the British government. Nevertheless, Mill contended that his objective had, to some degree, been met by the late December. In a letter to Bain of 28 December 1846, he wrote:

I continue to carry on the *Pol. Econ.* [i.e. *Principles of Political Economy*] as well as I can with the articles in the *Chronicle*. These last I may a little slacken now, having in a great measure, as far as may be judged by appearances, carried my point, *viz.*, to

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<sup>82</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [20]’ (19 November 1846), CW, xxiv, 955.

<sup>83</sup> JSM, *PPE*, CW, ii, 326.

<sup>84</sup> See Martin (1981) 25.

<sup>85</sup> See Bew (2007) 187, 189.

<sup>86</sup> JSM, ‘Ireland [19]’ (16 November 1846), CW, xxiv, 949-50.

have the waste lands reclaimed and parcelled out in small properties among the best of the peasantry.<sup>87</sup>

The final article of Mill's *Morning Chronicle* series was published on 7 January 1847, by which time he had resumed his work on *Principles of Political Economy*.

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<sup>87</sup> JSM to Alexander Bain, 28 December 1846, CW, xiii, 705. See also JMS to Alexander Bain, mid-November 1846, *ibid.*, in which he stated that his *Morning Chronicle* articles 'have excited a good deal of notice, and have quite snatched the initiative out of the *Times*'.

## Chapter 10. Conclusion

Among early nineteenth-century British thinkers, there was a widely accepted view that contemporary society was a commercial, civilized society, in which the influence of an emerging commercial class was rapidly increasing. J. S. Mill shared this view. In the late 1830s, Mill attempted to give a systematic and comprehensive analysis of civilized society in terms of the concept of civilization, a concept which reflected to a great extent his understanding of American, as well as British, society. He regarded the rise of the commercial, middle class as of great importance in characterizing contemporary society. He saw the excessive exercise of power by the majority and a subsequent excessive degree of social uniformity, which tended to repress individuality – a central theme in his later works and particularly in *On Liberty* – as inevitable consequences of the rise of the middle class.

From the mid-1830s onwards, Mill attempted to tackle questions regarding political institutions by considering them in light of their relationship to the state of society to which they belonged.<sup>1</sup> He claimed that what was a desirable form of government depended on the condition of society; in the *Logic*, he stated that ‘the necessary correlation between the form of governments existing in any society and the contemporaneous state of civilization’ was ‘a natural law’ which was ascertained by Social Statics.<sup>2</sup>

Representative democracy, for example, was the most suitable form of government for the nations which had reached an advanced stage of civilization, such as the United States and Britain, where commerce and industry had been sufficiently developed, wealth and knowledge had widely been diffused, and the ability of people to co-operate had been refined.<sup>3</sup> In this stage of society, the people were supposed to have been cultivated to the point where they could practice self-government. Compared to these advanced nations, Ireland remained at a lower stage of civilization. Though cultivated to the point where their consent to be governed by others was both desirable and necessary,

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 177.

<sup>2</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 919.

<sup>3</sup> JSM, ‘Civilization’, CW, xviii, 121-2.

the Irish people had not attained the qualities necessary for self-government. Based on such a diagnosis of the Irish social condition, Mill claimed that what Ireland needed was the creation of circumstances in which people would attain a suitable character and would be capable of fulfilling the duties required by self-government.

Along with deepening his understanding of contemporary society, Mill aspired to create a new science of society which would inquire into the nature, process of historical change, and prospects of commercial society. This aspiration culminated in the early 1840s and in particular in the publication of *A System of Logic* in 1843. In examining Mill's political thought between the late 1820s and the mid-1840s, I have concentrated on his projected science of society, which received its most detailed formulation in the *Logic*. It was here that his system of science of society, constituted by the General Science of Society – itself consisting of Social Dynamics and Social Statics – and Special Sociological Enquiries – including political ethology and political economy – was systematically and methodologically elaborated. Among the indispensable constituent sciences of his system, I gave particular attention to his projected sciences of history and of the formation of character, despite his failure to give a complete account of these sciences. The implications of his interest in history and the formation of character were more significant than scholars have assumed.

Stefan Collini states that 'Mill's failure to implement the programme of Book VI [of the *Logic*]' was due particularly to '[his] inability to make any progress with the Ethology'. He goes on to point out: 'In [ethology's] absence, Mill's science of politics wore a decidedly traditional look.'<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, a more complete understanding of Mill's projected science of society, in which ethology, as well as history, occupies a crucial place, can shed new light on Mill's mature works written in the 1850s and 1860s, including *On Liberty* (1859) and *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861). Even though Mill never completed his projected system of the science of society as he conceived it in the *Logic*, some vital ideas developed in this project were incorporated into his mature theory. In his mature works, he often referred to both laws of ethology and of history as if they had already been scientifically ascertained. Methodologically, the reason he could do so was because he employed such laws as 'approximate

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<sup>4</sup> Collini et al. (1983) 156.

generalizations’.

From the 1840s onwards, Mill’s concerns about the possibility of the degeneration of European civilization, concerns which he grounded on the scientific laws of social change, became more acute. He thought that the repression of individuality and excessive social uniformity – inevitably brought about by civilization – might result in social stagnation. In *On Liberty*, Mill stated that liberty had a utility for the life of the individual because it was an unfailing source of personal development, and it also had a social utility in that society would benefit from whatever sustained a diverse and rich life for its members. Mill’s advocacy of the freedom of opinion was grounded not only on his belief that it was vital in its own right in order to promote the happiness of the individual, but also because it constituted one of the necessary conditions for the progress of society. Mill argued that the diversity of opinion could produce social antagonism, which he thought was a necessary condition for the progress of society.

In *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill also expressed his concern regarding social degeneration:

there is an incessant and ever-flowing current of human affairs towards the worse, consisting of all the follies, all the vices, all the negligences, indolences, and supinenesses of mankind; which is only controlled, and kept from sweeping all before it, by the exertions which some persons constantly, and others by fits, put forth in the direction of good and worthy objects. ... the general tendency of things towards deterioration ..., once begun, would proceed with increasing rapidity, and become more and more difficult to check, until it reached a state often seen in history, and in which many large portions of mankind even now grovel ....<sup>5</sup>

Mill’s insight into history led him to conclude that the progress of man and society was not a fact of nature. Further, he came to realize that the general tendency of society was to degenerate, and not to progress. However, he also insisted that it might be possible to ‘counteract’ the natural tendency to degenerate ‘for an indefinite length of time’ by ‘good institutions virtuously administered’.<sup>6</sup> He was convinced that, within the limits of the inevitable laws of causality, a well-arranged political and social system –

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<sup>5</sup> JSM, *CRG*, CW, xix, 388.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

representative government in this case – could contribute to the great improvement of human character and thereby of social condition.

Mill did not, however, express unqualified approval of representative government. After his so-called Mental Crisis, he did not think that representative government was the best system for all societies. Its establishment would not be justified unless it contributed to the improvement of the people. For Mill, good government was not an end in itself, but an instrument to further the improvement of mankind. His case for representative government was that, if well arranged, it would facilitate the cultivation of national character in a certain state of society.<sup>7</sup>

To Mill's mind, the belief in our ability to build an attractive society by our own effort, even though constrained by the limits of the inevitable laws of causality, was 'the feeling of moral freedom'.<sup>8</sup> Mill intended his projected science of society to provide the philosophical foundation for moral freedom.

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<sup>7</sup> In his *Autobiography*, Mill stated that 'the choice of political institutions' was 'a moral and educational question more than one of material interests'. (JSM, *Autobiography*, CW, i, 177.) Stefan Collini states: 'It was precisely the cultivation of character in this sense which was the ultimate justification for Mill's much-criticised constitutional devices.' (Collini et al. (1983) 158.)

<sup>8</sup> JSM, *Logic*, CW, viii, 841.

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