

## Chapter V.

### The *Telos* of Existence: Mill's Formulation of the 'Philosophia Prima peculiar to Art' [II].

**§V.i. Justification of the shift from the conclusions of Mill's method of science to the normative principles of his Art, or Theory of Life.** The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the translation of Mill's psychophysiological conception of happiness, together with his understanding of the *telos* of human individual and species existence, into the ground of his broad ethical doctrine, without changing its composition or qualities. As such, it will confirm the naturalistic foundation of Mill's ethical doctrine, and coupled with that doctrine will, in later chapters, carry forward as the driving force behind his development of his socio-political theory.<sup>1</sup> What is the value of such a demonstration?

The articulation of the boundaries and relationships entailed by the worlds of logic and feeling, which is the core endeavour of Mill's mature work, has been characterized as a striving to express the relation between psychology and ethical doctrine.<sup>2</sup> The success or failure of the expression of this relation is the crux of any naturalistic ethics. For Mill's theory to withstand the scrutiny of critics armed, for example, with Moore's accusation that Mill is guilty of the naturalistic fallacy, there must be evidence in his work of both acknowledgment and incorporation into his ethical doctrine of existential 'properties which by their nature hold an imperative force, or exert a normative tug

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<sup>1</sup> There has been already provided a foreshadowing of the manner in which this is achieved by Mill in the way in which the abstract concept of justice as a core concept of morality is underpinned by an account of justice in terms of feeling, reason, and environment. The relation of justice, the disposition for desert and happiness signals the relation of the indicative and the imperative formulations of the *telos* and first principle of action.

<sup>2</sup> See Eldon J. Eisenach, 'Self-reform as political reform in the writings of John Stuart Mill,' *Utilitas* Nov. 1989, esp. p.246. From the perspective of researchers in the psychobiological disciplines, there is a considerable body of evidence to support an ethical theory grounded in psychophysical responses, and which anticipates the eventual dismantling of the *is/ought* barrier. See e.g. Michael Ruse and Edward O. Wilson, 'Moral Philosophy as Applied Science,' *Philosophy* Vol.61 1986 pp.173-192. For social theorists' embrace of this evidence see e.g. Peter Corning, 'Human Nature *Redivivus*,' in J. R. Pennock and J. W. Chapman (eds) *Human Nature in Politics*. New York, 1977 p.61; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York, 1977 pp.52, 218.

upon us.’<sup>3</sup> The key terms used by Mill in his normative theory - ‘pleasure,’ ‘desire,’ and ‘happiness’ - have been shown to have their meaning grounded in his psychophysiological account of human nature. In order to blunt the force of critical accusations such as Moore’s, what must now be demonstrated is the manner in which Mill translated those terms into the ground of his ethical theory, without alteration or addition to their meaning.

Mill’s naturalist orientation and experientialist methodology indicates that his normative understanding of the end and purpose of human existence must chime with that discovered by science, and his methodology affirms that this is the case. From his acknowledged methodological perspective, that is as an experientialist, empiricist, and naturalist, Mill was required to ground teleological theory in the evidence of the natural sciences. Furthermore, he affirmed that from the perspective of a social and political theorist, he was determined to derive and develop a practical and realizable prescriptive theory from his *telos* for human beings.<sup>4</sup> This is clearly demonstrated in the relation he delineated between the method of science and the Art of Life, or Practice.<sup>5</sup>

The task to be undertaken here continues the adherence to Mill’s methodology. It is to examine the shift made by Mill of the conclusions reached by the method of science into the sphere of the method of art without alteration of their content or qualities. The rationale for his so doing is not difficult to discover. It is the fundamental requirement of his *à posteriorist* methodology that he eschew any transempirical principles in the development of an ethical doctrine. His justification of the shift is another matter. An examination of this justification occupies the second half of the chapter, and there it is found that Mill’s ‘larger proof’ of the principle of utility draws upon evidence other than that provided by the method of science. Where Mill incorporates other material is in his taking the conditional imperative discovered by his method of science and reinforcing it to become the ultimate principle of action underpinning a normative theory.

The discovery of the ‘larger proof’ of Mill’s principle of utility is, then, the discovery of the nature of that other material. The chapter examines three strands of ‘larger

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Blair Rice, *On the Knowledge of Good and Evil*. Westport, Conn., 1955 p.96. See also H. A. Prichard ‘Does Moral Philosophy Rest On a Mistake?’, and W.D. Ross *The Right and The Good* Oxford, 1930, for further argument in support of Moore’s position.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. R. P. Anschutz, *The Philosophy of J. S. Mill*. Oxford, 1953 pp.61-62; E. Nagel, *John Stuart Mill’s Philosophy of Scientific Method*. New York, 1950 pp.xv, xxxii.

<sup>5</sup> See Mill, ‘A System of Logic.’ Book VI Ch.XII, *Works*. Vol.8. pp.943-952.

proof' - they are the joint impact on Mill's thought of his ambition, of his intellectual influences, and, most importantly, of the *Zeitgeist* of the age. The common thread running through them is the theme of progress and perfectibility, and it is this that turns out to be the key to the shift made by Mill from the indicative evidence and conclusions of science into the formulation of his normative account of the *telos* and ultimate principle of action that provides the foundation of his enlarged Utilitarianism.<sup>6</sup> Mill is discovered to incorporate a logically deduced 'self-evident first principle' into his broad ethical doctrine, but it is one that is firmly rooted in his naturalistic ground and reflects, in an intensified form, the conclusions of the method of science. The last section of this chapter will examine the effect of this account of Mill's ground for the principle of utility on the general understanding of his concept of 'happiness.'

Mill's key statement which encapsulates his teleological theory is, on examination, ambiguous and open to a variety of interpretations.<sup>7</sup> While it is commonly understood to be prescriptive, what emerges below is that it is not always used by Mill in this way. There is discernible in his writing a variety of meanings for the expression, and it (or its equivalent) is used indicatively and conditionally as well as imperatively. The unraveling of the relation between these meanings will not only establish the connection between Mill's naturalist foundation and the development of his broad ethical doctrine, but will also provide a key to the interpretation of his meaning in many significant instances of his use of the key phrase that underpins his principle of utility. How is this unraveling to proceed?

**§V.ii. Mill's translation of the indicative conclusions of the method of science into the imperatives of the Art of Life. The acceptance by the Art of Life of the pursuit of happiness as the naturalistic ground of prescriptive theory.** Mill's methodology continued with the return to the Art of Life of the indicative conclusions of science concerning the naturalistic ground of what comprises the good life. They are that the *telos* for human beings is the survival and melioration of both the

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<sup>6</sup> Mill's understanding of progress and perfectibility, as the particular and general expressions of the achievement of *telos* are touched upon in this chapter, and are more fully explored in Part Three, Chapter VII.

<sup>7</sup> Mill's prose style has been the subject of both praise and negative criticism. It has been praised for its lucidity, its openness, and its ability to explore subtle shades of meaning. It has also been criticised for its looseness, particularly when dealing with issues in philosophy that often hang on the making of fine distinctions in order to express complex argument. For examples of praise, see G. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*. London, 3rd Ed. 1963 p.714; B. Blanchard, *On Philosophical Styles*. Manchester, 1954 p.24. For examples of negative criticism, see R. P. Anschutz, *op.cit.*, p.5; and G. Scarre, *Logic and Reality in the Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*. Dordrecht, 1989 p.12.

individual and the species, and this is accomplished at the natural, prerational level by the reward of pleasure that attaches to the performance of those activities which contribute to that end. At the rational level, the end is forwarded by a more efficient mode of stimulation: with the contribution of reason and the awareness of context, it is discovered that the performance of actions which, under conditions of security, peace, and stability, result in the state of mind called happiness are also those that contribute to the survival and melioration of both individual and species. The good life, then, is concluded by science to be the life which achieves its purpose, and it is identical with the life of happiness.<sup>8</sup>

According to Mill, the work of the practitioner of the Art of Life begins at the point where that of the scientist leaves off. The method of science provides the evidence whereby to achieve the goal of art, and it is then the province of the artist-as-ethicist to utilize that evidence as the ground of normative theory.<sup>9</sup> The fact that Mill accepted the conclusions of science and proceeded to translate both the *telos* and first principle of action directly into the ground of his broad ethical doctrine is evident throughout his work. The question to be addressed here is whether he did so with or without any addition or alteration to the conclusions of science. It has been noted by Mill's critics that, in their understanding of his doctrine of utility, there arises a serious problem concerning the viability of happiness to function as the core of a normative theory. 'Be happy' is unsatisfactory as the ground of a normative theory of action because it has no connection with several of what they regard as necessary components of any system of ethics.<sup>10</sup> The deduction of all the principles of action that operate in the public sphere from the single principle of utility is, they argue, impossible. The implication is that for Mill's thesis to be realizable, some additional element must be present in his ethical doctrine.

Furthermore, the same principle of action is required by Mill to encompass every aspect of the life of the individual. This means that the normative theory Mill developed from the conclusions of science was intended to apply to the private lives of individuals as well as to their public activities. But the injunction to act in the way that achieves happiness in the public arena is of a different order to that which prescribes happiness as the sought for end in the private sphere. To operate at both levels

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<sup>8</sup> This process of the method of science is described by Mill in 'A System of Logic' Book VI Ch.XII §2, p.944.

<sup>9</sup> The relation of the rules of art to the doctrines of science is described by Mill in 'A System of Logic' Book VI Ch.XII §2, pp.944-45.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Alan Ryan, *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*, 2nd Ed. London, 1987 p.xxxiii.

simultaneously appears to be an impossible burden for the single principle to bear. This is a further indication that in order for happiness to function as the core of Mill's ethical doctrine there must be superadded some other, transempirical, buttress to overcome this problem.

It would appear at first sight, then, that while Mill has been shown to rest his normative theory firmly on the naturalistic account of the working of human nature, he has been forced by that account to impose too great a strain on the single principle of action that assists human beings toward their end and purpose. It seems that the naturalistic ground is unable to bear the weight of the many constituent elements that comprise a normative theory intended to embrace every aspect of human life, and the rescue of the happiness thesis as the core of Mill's broad ethical doctrine can only be achieved either by the addition of stipulated axioms of behaviour, or the admission of an intuitive understanding of obligation. If this is the case, then any argument for Mill's normative theory to rest firmly and coherently on naturalistic grounds is at risk.

On further examination, however, the difficulty is resolved by a close reading of Mill's presentation of the product of the Art of Life - what he terms his 'theory of life.' By using Mill's account of what is the Art of Life and what is its goal as a blueprint, the translation of the conclusions of science into the ground of broad ethical theory is discovered to be one containing not one but several gradations of imperative force, with each of the problems noted above dealt with in one or other gradation. That this is the case is confirmed by Mill in his assertion that all prescriptive elements in his ethical, social and political theory must be grounded on evidence provided by natural objects or causes, and that the rules and precepts of morality, of prudence, and of aesthetics 'only qualify for the status of philosophies if they rest on a firm foundation of scientific evidence.'<sup>11</sup>

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The Art of Life is stated by Mill to be an holistic endeavour, which has as its end the development of an integrated set of imperatives to guide and to command agents in the best manner whereby to achieve the good life. It is, according to Mill, the development of a 'theory of life' which extends beyond morality and into the other important departments of life - those of prudence and policy, and of aesthetics, nobility, and beauty. As such it is a system of rules and precepts that encompasses the individual's private as well as public sphere of action. Furthermore, it was understood by Mill to embrace motive as well as act. The goal set for the method of science by

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<sup>11</sup> Mill, 'On the Definition of Political Economy,' *Works*. Vol.4 p.312.

Mill's Art of Life was, accordingly, to discover both the single principle of action and the end of existence that are the existential equivalents to the abstract concept of the *holistic* good life. Such a principle, according to Mill, if 'rightly chosen, will be found, I apprehend, to serve quite as well for the ultimate principle of Morality, as for that of Prudence, Policy, or Taste.'<sup>12</sup>

With this information concerning the breadth of his intention, commentators are made aware that Mill's understanding of the rules and precepts developed by Art cannot be confined solely a set of sanctionable commands intended for imposition on the lives of individual agents. It is simply impractical to attempt to impose rules and regulation on agents' private lives, and impossible to do so on their thoughts and motivations. The application of the principle of happiness must, then, be effected in different ways in the different departments of life. Examination of the evidence found in Mill's work confirms that this is the case, and suggests the distinction between the types of application.

**§V.iii. The imperatives to act in Mill's Art or Theory of Life.** Taking Mill's theory of life to be the equivalent of the development of a broad ethical doctrine, and that that doctrine was intended by him to cover the three departments of life - prudence, taste, and morality - there is strong evidence to support the claim that Mill differentiated between types of rules and precepts applicable to these departments.<sup>13</sup> This will be exhibited here by taking these three major areas of action in the life of the individual together with the motivation to act, and showing the type of imperative Mill anticipated to be helpful in the achievement of the greatest happiness in each area.

The first type of imperative is related closely to the conditional imperative implicit in the evidence of science. It is applicable to the activities of 'lower' nature that are confined to the agent's private sphere, and states that if the product desired by the performance of the activity is pleasure, then the agent should act in a particular manner. The instruments used by Mill to promulgate this type of conditional imperative are those of education and reflection upon experience, together with guidance and example from the 'instructed class.'<sup>14</sup> Thus if an agent wishes to gain the greatest pleasure from the exercise of a particular 'lower' appetite, he or she should look to the wisdom of both their own and others' experience and education in order to discover the most efficient way of doing so. There is of course the option available to

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<sup>12</sup> Mill, 'A System of Logic' Book VI Ch.XII §7, p.951.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.951.

<sup>14</sup> Mill, 'On Genius.' *Works*. Vol.1 p.333; 'Spirit of the Age II.' *Works*. Vol.22 pp.241,244.

them of refusing to do so, and instead to perform the activity in whatever fashion is momentarily appealing.<sup>15</sup>

A similar type of conditional imperative occurs in Mill's promulgation of the rules and precepts that apply to the development of the specifically human capacities in the private sphere. Here, however, Mill is concerned to achieve more than a moderate and healthy exercise of capacities. The integral part played by reason in the nature of human beings is brought to the fore when dealing with these capacities, and it is reason that must be engaged by this type of imperative. Happiness, which requires reason for its achievement, cannot be legislated into being. It must be desired. And while it is natural for human beings to desire happiness, it is an advance in social theory for them to be able to discern the manner in which their greatest happiness is achieved. So while Mill was aware that it is impossible to command people to be happy, it is possible to persuade them through reasonable argument that one way of acting is more profitable than another in the pursuit of happiness, and that one type of happiness is qualitatively superior to another.<sup>16</sup>

This second type of conditional imperative is crucial for the development of Mill's socio-political theory, and its requirement of the concurrent existence of conditions of liberty and acceptance of individuality form a significant part of that theory.<sup>17</sup> The individual agent is anticipated by Mill to follow the instruction and guidance of the wise, through rational persuasion, until he or she has reached a sufficiently knowledgeable state to be capable of forming their own conclusions concerning the most efficient manner of achieving happiness in the cultivation and development of specifically human capacities. Suggestion, not compulsion, is at the heart of the second type of imperative, and this works because, according to Mill, 'reason itself will teach most men that they must, in the last resort, fall back upon the authority of still more cultivated minds, as the ultimate sanction of the convictions of their reason itself.' For Mill the key to the achievement of realization of potentials, and thus to happiness, is the exercise of 'the human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference' and such exercise can only take place in circumstances where the agent is free to choose between options. Satisfaction of this requirement confirms that conditional imperatives can only

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<sup>15</sup> The link between liberty and happiness begins here, and will be further investigated as the thesis unfolds.

<sup>16</sup> Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' *Works*, Vol. 10 p.214.

<sup>17</sup> This requirement is examined further in Chapters VIII-IX.

be the suggestions of the instructed class, and must be understood as 'a guide and not a rule.'<sup>18</sup>

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The third type of imperative found in Mill's development of the Art or Theory of Life is concerned only with actions performed in the public sphere. The conditional imperatives so far described are applicable in the private sphere in matters of prudence and taste. They concern the achievement of the *telos* of the individual agent, and are guides and suggestions as to how best the ultimate principle of action may be exercised in order to achieve the maximum of happiness in that sphere. When Mill turned his attention to the public sphere and the department of morality, there is seen a significant change in the nature of the imperative. The activities of agents in the public sphere are those that impact on the happiness both of other individuals and of the group. As such they are not solely the province of private choice, but they are nonetheless firmly linked to the naturalistic ground found in Mill's account of human nature. In prescribing rules and precepts to operate in the department of morality Mill asserted their origin in an unconditional imperative.<sup>19</sup> The nature of this type of imperative has already been described in the example of the imperative of justice, noted earlier. The manner in which justice, originally a subjective feeling for desert linked to happiness (and injustice similarly linked to unhappiness) which occurs in the natural dispositions and capacities of the individual agent, is translated into justice as an objective, considered, and unconditional imperative, provides the pattern for the development of unconditional rules and precepts of morality that govern the public actions of agents.

Using this pattern, the statement of the principle of utility - that all actions must be directed to the greatest happiness of the greatest number - that occurs in *Utilitarianism* may be unraveled and re-examined.<sup>20</sup> Mill's starting point in his development of the rules and precepts that govern public action in the enlarged utilitarian theory is the extension of the self-evident fact that 'each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness' to the claim that 'the general

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<sup>18</sup> Mill, 'Spirit of the Age II,' p.244; 'Of Liberty,' *Works*. Vol.18 p.262.

<sup>19</sup> The unconditionality is not Kantian. It is the reasoned conclusion of the members of the collective to which it applies. Mill allowed that the nature of the collective, in terms of culture, social and economic environment, and religious beliefs, may change, thus bringing about a change in the form of this type of imperative, but not in its content and end. See Chapter IX below.

<sup>20</sup> Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' p.218 '...the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned.' This statement is directed to the public actions of agents, and not to every action performed by every agent. This is the nub of the following explanation.



happiness is desirable.<sup>21</sup> (The legitimacy of this extension is a matter of debate, and is further examined below. For the moment, it is taken simply as a significant step in Mill's argument.) There is a clear implication for the public conduct of agents contained in this shift. It is expressed by Mill in the form of two aspects of public action which come together at this point, one positive and one negative. The negative aspect is the injunction to refrain from performing any action that will cause another agent unhappiness.<sup>22</sup> The positive aspect is, when performing actions in the public arena, to perform those actions whose result will be the greatest possible aggregate happiness.<sup>23</sup> The imperative to act in the one case and to refrain from acting in the other is unconditional in its formulation. Its commands affect those actions which impact on the happiness of agents other than the actor and thus are not within the discretion of the acting agent.

It is a mistake, however, to understand the spread and number of the positive acts that fall within the bounds of the unconditional imperative to be large. Mill made clear that these are few in number, and fewer still are the individual agents whose actions ever impact on more than a small group of other human beings.<sup>24</sup> Most of the other-affecting actions performed by agents impact only on those human beings that are connected to them by bonds of kinship, friendship, or proximity. Within this sphere of action the performance of other-affecting acts is linked to the achievement of happiness for the actor via the cultivation and development of the potentials in those faculties whose exercise requires interaction with others. That this is the case would suggest that those actions fall at least partially under the umbrella of conditional imperatives.<sup>25</sup> The scope and range of positive actions that fall under the aegis of the unconditional imperative is, then, those actions that affect strangers and unseen others. As Mill pointed out, these are few in number in the lives of most agents.

The unconditional imperative is thus affirmed by Mill to operate largely in the negative mode, commanding agents to refrain from actions that would impinge upon the happiness of others. This is not an inconsiderable task, and its result is, as Mill noted, the enlargement of the opportunity of all agents to achieve the greatest degree of happiness possible to them as individuals operating within particular circumstances, with a particular spectrum of potentials, and in a particular environment. Furthermore,

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.234.

<sup>22</sup> Mill 'On Liberty' pp.224-5.

<sup>23</sup> Mill 'Utilitarianism' p.218.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.220.

<sup>25</sup> This point is taken up and examined further below.

the logic sustaining the unconditional imperative is identical to that which supports the Golden Rule: the achievement of the greatest personal happiness is possible only if others refrain from impeding one's efforts to achieve that end. This will come about only if others have a guarantee that they, in turn, will be left unimpeded in their similar endeavour. This logic is also found in the development of objective justice, as noted above.<sup>26</sup>

Taking the pattern of development of objective justice as set out by Mill to be the blueprint for the development of the spectrum of application of the unconditional imperative, it is possible to present a general account of its ground in human nature. The subjective desires of individual agents (which include desires to achieve the happiness that attaches to the performance of other-affecting, other-benefiting acts) are similar across the broad mass of human beings. The realization of those desires, again across the broad mass, requires conditions of stability, peace, and certainty, to sustain the freedom of action necessary for their attainment. The manner in which the desire for desert, as a subjective feeling linked to happiness (and frustration of that desire being similarly linked to unhappiness) which occurs in the natural dispositions and capacities of the individual agent, is translated into justice as an objective, considered, and unconditional imperative, provides the pattern for the development of unconditional rules and precepts of morality that govern the public actions of agents. The instincts, feelings, and dispositions to realize desires for happiness are taken up and organized by reason, not only within the individual life but across the communal life of the group. Reason distills from the common subjective desires a set of objective rules and precepts which will assist the achievement of those desires by establishing the conditions conducive to that achievement. The unconditional imperative of the moral code, and the rules and precepts of positive law, may thus all be traced back to their origin in Mill's account of human nature.

**§V.iv. Virtue.** This is the point at which to introduce Mill's recognition of the importance of virtue in the achievement of individual happiness. According to Mill, the fulfilling of the negative requirements of moral rules and precepts is insufficient to bring with it the happiness that attaches to the exercise of the specifically human capacities requiring the participation (as partner or object) of others in the exercise of those capacities. Positive acts that generate happiness for others are necessary to bring about the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The great proportion of these acts, as noted, are those that affect agents in close proximity to the actor. These

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<sup>26</sup> See Chapter III §iii.

acts produce a mixture of happiness containing both self-interested and other-interested elements.<sup>27</sup> The remainder of these acts are those that affect distant strangers, and as such are characterized by Mill as purely disinterested acts of benevolence. These are virtuous acts, beyond the perimeter of positive law and the moral code, and the final task of this section is to note the degree to which they are grounded by Mill in his account of human nature, and in that way to discover the type of imperative Mill directed toward them.<sup>28</sup>

The desire to be virtuous is the motive to perform actions that will increase the general happiness of the community. It is the underpinning of other-directed acts that affect beneficially those human beings beyond the immediate relations of the actor. This desire, according to Mill's opponents, is not an original possession of human beings. Because this is the case, it has been projected by the opponents of Mill's enlarged utilitarianism as evidence that agents desire things for reasons other than their contribution to the happiness of the desiring agent.<sup>29</sup> Rather than being disconcerted by this criticism, Mill agreed with it. He did so because, as he pointed out in *Utilitarianism*, virtue as a disinterested desire to act in ways that increase the common good is artificial in both its origin and expression. Moreover, he confirmed that the doctrine of utility 'maintains not only that virtue is to be desired, but that it is to be desired disinterestedly, for itself.'<sup>30</sup> This appears to confirm not only that virtue is unconnected to happiness, at the same time as being an integral part of the department of morality, but also that the desire for virtue is distinct from the naturalistically grounded desires for all other things. When examined more closely, however, Mill's complete account of the nature of virtue is discovered to rest on the desire to satisfy an original disposition or instinct in human nature.

Mill's account starts with his acknowledgment that virtue is more than feeling alone. It is, in addition, comprised of reason and action.<sup>31</sup> The confluence of these three elements are represented in the three stages of development in the virtue present in an individual agent. The first stage is the origination of what eventually develops into virtue as a feeling or disposition, which Mill called '*conscience*.' In this original state it is weak and easily overridden by stronger feelings. It is not, by itself, sufficiently powerful in the particular agent to create the faith in its existence in other agents

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27 In 'Three Essays on Religion' Mill refers to them as acts of 'sympathetic selfishness' (*Works* Vol.10, p.394.)

28 Mill, 'Thornton on Labour and Its Claims,' *Works* Vol.5, pp.650-51.

29 Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' pp.234-35.

30 *Ibid.*, p.235.

31 Mill, 'Periodical Literature: Edinburgh Review,' *Works*, Vol.1 p.323.

necessary to sacrifice self-interested ends in order to achieve benefit for the whole. Nonetheless, at this embryonic stage, Mill wrote, 'all our hopes of happiness or moral perfection to the species must rest . . . entirely upon his having faith in the actual existence of such feelings and dispositions in others, and in their possibility for himself.'<sup>32</sup> While sympathy for the proximate others in an agent's life underpins most other-directed actions, the weaker disposition to act in ways that are beneficial to the species will be seen eventually to underpin virtuous action.

The exercise of reason in reflecting on the conditions and circumstances necessary to achieve maximum personal happiness reaches the conclusion that acts performed for the benefit of the whole are an efficient means whereby to achieve happiness for the whole, and incidentally happiness for the individual. That this is the case is the result of the experience of generations, and has become a firmly held part of moral theory. For Mill to admit that virtue is desired for the ability it has to achieve the larger happiness is entirely consistent with his assertion that happiness is the only thing desirable as an end. When virtue is understood as a means, it is desirable that it should be employed to achieve the utilitarian end.<sup>33</sup> The success of this second stage of the development of virtue as an artificial means to the achievement of the end of the species nonetheless remains bound to the original existence in human beings of the weak disposition of 'conscience.'

The third and completing stage of the coming into being of virtue is its transformation into an end in itself. This stage is also firmly connected to its origin in human nature. The motivation to act in a virtuous way is linked by Mill to the 'psychological fact' of virtuous action being able to produce in agents happiness, which is 'a good in itself, without looking to any end beyond it.' This does not impede or diminish the efficiency of virtue as a means, but does increase its value to the performing agent. Moreover, according to Mill, the mind is 'not in a state conformable to Utility, unless it does love virtue in this manner.' To reach this stage of development, the artificial construct of virtue has tapped into the original disposition found in human nature and provided it with the strength and faith that was acknowledged by Mill to be missing in its primitive state.<sup>34</sup>

There are then three discernible elements to virtue. The first is the existence of an admittedly weak impulse in human beings to act in ways beneficial to the species as a

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32 Mill, 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy,' *Works*, Vol.10 p.15.

33 Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' p.234.

34 *Ibid.*, pp.235, 237.

whole. The second is the rational conviction that to do so is worthwhile, as a means to achieving the end of existence for the species, that is the greatest possible happiness for the whole. The third is the translation of rationally driven virtuous acts into a source of pleasure, and thus an end in themselves. The complex chain of virtue is thus grounded on the existing seed of conscience in the individual agent, is assisted by reason to become a means with which to achieve the larger end of utilitarianism, and finally becomes desired for its own sake for the pleasure that accompanies its exercise.

That the motivation to perform virtuous acts is ultimately found to be a weak original disposition in human nature is accepted by Mill as one of several such instances where the chain of connection between sophisticated and complex pleasure and the originating disposition or capacity is slender. Without the provision in human nature of the processes whereby 'things originally indifferent, but conducive to, or otherwise associated with, the satisfaction of our primitive desires' he wrote, 'become in themselves sources of pleasure more valuable than the primitive pleasures . . . life would be a poor thing.'<sup>35</sup> Mill's confirmation of the occasional fragility of the link between the original disposition and the eventual happiness, both for the individual and the species, together with the modification to the disposition made by reason, is his clear signal that retracing the path from action to its origin in desire for happiness and its constituent pleasure is sometimes serpentine but always possible.

Mill's understanding of virtue, once unraveled, is found to conform to the pattern of his relation of action to human nature. The complexity of his account of virtue is also reflected in the types of imperative applicable to it. In its original form, the disposition to act according to conscience is both weak and requiring support. At this stage the only possible application of an imperative is conditional. Agents must be convinced that so acting will bring some benefit. They cannot be impelled to do so. When the second stage of development has taken place, the injunction to act is directed to reason and may be expressed more forcefully. Such expression is, however, through the medium of praise and censure, because, as Mill has pointed out, virtuous acts are those that fall outside the unconditional imperatives of the moral code and positive law. In the final stage, praise ceases to be an instrument of persuasion or censure that of compulsion, and instead the agent is anticipated by Mill to act virtuously from a desire to achieve the happiness that attaches to such action.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.236.

**§V.v. Mill's Art or Theory of Life Recapitulated.** The art of life develops an holistic theory of right action that is applicable to all departments of life, and to both the public and private spheres of action. It was intended by Mill to bring about the achievement of the greatest happiness for both individual and the community, and, according to his methodology, consists in a comprehensive set of rules and precepts. However, Mill did not claim unconditional imperative status for all rules and precepts. There is a clearly defined sphere of action in which the choice of the individual is paramount. Nonetheless, within that sphere Mill did claim that the rational individual should take advantage of the example and guidance of those who have experience and wisdom. This then is the realm of conditional imperatives. It is the duty of the enlightened to instruct, to guide, to persuade, and to exemplify, the manner in which individuals may achieve happiness in that sphere. It is the duty of the individual agent to weigh and evaluate such advice and example, to the extent that that is compatible with the present experience, education, and potential for cultivation and development inherent in the agent at the particular time.

At the same time, Mill did assert a system of unconditional imperatives. The clearest demonstration of his development of unconditional imperatives is in the manner in which justice, as a subjective feeling linked to happiness (and injustice similarly linked to unhappiness) which occurs in the natural dispositions and capacities of the individual agent, is translated into justice as an objective, considered, and unconditional imperative. This provides the pattern for the development of unconditional rules and precepts of morality that govern the public actions of agents. There are circumstances, however, where the clear classification of the rules and precepts cannot easily take place. This is evidenced in his account of virtue and the manner in which it can be inculcated in agents.

The conclusion to be drawn from the development by Mill of a variety of types of imperatives from the evidence of science is twofold. In the first instance, it is apparent that the criticisms of some commentators to the effect that Mill's single principle of action is unable to bear the burden of his broad ethical doctrine are dissolved. Mill's range of imperatives running from persuasion to compulsion is applicable both to motivation and behaviour in the private and public spheres of agents' lives. In the second, there is no introduction of new material by Mill into his normative theory beyond that supplied by the evidence and conclusions of science. The range of imperatives rests firmly on the ground supplied by his account of human nature.

This leaves the question of ‘larger proof’ and intensification of the conclusions of science to be explained. These can be addressed jointly inasmuch as the evidence that supports the process of intensification is the matter of the larger proof that happiness is the core constituent of the good life. This evidence will form the content of the last section of this chapter.

**§V.vi. Mill’s unproven first principle defended: the rationale for the ‘greatest possible’ happiness as the *telos* of the Art of Life. The ‘larger proof’ of the principle of utility.** Mill acknowledged that the installation of the principle of utility, or happiness, as the generator of the good life was open to criticism. There is, he admitted, no possibility of any formal proof that the *telos* of happiness is identical to goodness.<sup>36</sup> However, he went on to note that there is an alternative method of demonstration that provides a ‘larger’ proof of the unique position held by happiness in the achievement of the end of human existence. This proof, he affirmed, is able to be demonstrated in an intellectually satisfying way, thus providing ‘considerations . . . capable of determining the intellect either to give or to withhold its assent to the doctrine; and this is equivalent to [formal] proof.’<sup>37</sup>

When Mill’s evidence is examined it becomes apparent that the substance of the larger proof is linked to the concept of melioration. It is found in Mill’s demonstration of the efficiency of the principle of utility in achieving the greatest degree possible of particular and general happiness in both the individual and the community. It turns out that the matter of why the greatest happiness should be striven for is the province of Mill’s theory of melioration. There is below a preliminary expression of that theory as it provides the rationale for Mill’s confirmation of the principle of utility as the empirically demonstrable first principle of the Art of Life.<sup>38</sup> Mill’s appeal to the rational faculty for assent turns out to be an appeal to progressive reason.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.207.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.208.

<sup>38</sup> Chapter VIII contains a fuller analysis of Mill’s understanding of the concept of melioration as it is expressed in his conception of progress and perfectibility.

<sup>39</sup> Mill’s context and environment were conducive to an acceptance of progress. (That he understood it somewhat differently to the majority of Victorian thinkers emerges below.) It is worthwhile noting that there is currently the view that progress is a discredited concept, and that the outlook for humankind is generally regarded pessimistically. That this has an impact on the present acceptance of moral pluralism as irreducible will be explored in a later chapter. It is flagged at this point only that Mill’s understanding of the distinction between progress and improvement will be seen to impact on his claim for a universal morality and the development of a virtue politics.

Mill's embrace of meliorism is evident from the initial stages of his translation of the conclusions of science into the imperatives of Art. From the outset, the indicative evidence provided by science was used by him to develop a prescriptive doctrine intended to achieve the greatest possible maximization of the scientifically deduced end. Yet the method of science makes no judgment concerning the concentration of action upon perfecting the approach to the achievement of happiness. Why did Mill argue not merely for happiness, but for the 'greatest possible' happiness of both individual and community? Had he not done so, he would have avoided a significant portion of the criticism drawn by his presentation of the enlarged theory of Utilitarianism. The alternative advocacy of the necessity of a sufficiency of happiness only would have opened the way to the installation of happiness as one of several conditions required in order to achieve the good life. The adoption of a plurality of ends would not mean abandoning the core thesis of utility, understood as 'well-being' or 'human good,' which is the achievement of that condition for each and for all.<sup>40</sup> Mill was prepared to modify and enlarge the principle of utility in any way necessary in order to reflect the actual circumstances of human beings. Why, then, did he not rest content with the achievement of a sufficiency of happiness?

Mill was aware of, and rejected, the plurality-of-ends argument. His counterargument claims that the diffusion of the *telos* across a plurality of categories is an invitation to include stipulated ends in the development of social and political theory, and the adoption of more than one principle of action was rejected by him on that ground, and is noted above. The installation of happiness as the ultimate principle of action in the development of socio-political theory is first demonstrated by Mill in his account of human nature to be grounded in empirically demonstrable reasoning, and then he went on to show that all the alternative categories of end argued to be sought by human beings are linked to the ultimate striving for the achievement of that single, overarching end.<sup>41</sup>

This routing of all particular ends through the general end of happiness is in itself an argument for an increase in happiness to be identical with an increase in the degree of achievement of the good life. The conclusion of Mill's account of human nature is that the achievement of subsidiary ends necessarily contains an increase in happiness,

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<sup>40</sup> Professor Skorupski's critique of Mill's utilitarianism revolves around this point. See John Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill*. London, 1989 pp.15-16, 301-303. This is the point where Professor Skorupski and Alan Ryan note that Mill's theory is vulnerable. See Alan Ryan, *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*. 2nd Ed. London, 1987 p.xxxiii, 213ff.

<sup>41</sup> Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.XII §7, p.951. This position placed Mill in opposition to Comte, as he acknowledged.



because those ends are only desirable to the individual agent insofar as they are desired for the pleasure that attaches to their realization. And it is Mill's promotion of the achievement of particular ends, in other words the realization of the potentials for excellence in the spectrum of faculties and capacities present in each individual agent, that is the location of his intensification of the *telos* and first principle of the method of science. The anticipation of a natural increase in happiness was not sufficient for Mill to let things run their natural course, however, and the reason for his determination to develop a program for its multiplication lies in part with his acute awareness of the malleability of human nature.

Mill's scientific detachment dissolved when he turned his attention to the practical and concrete concept of individual end, and it is there that the evidence from which he was to derive his Art of Life takes on an evaluative hue. Whilst accepting happiness and its constituent pleasure as the indicator of the good life, and promoting its pursuit as the focus of his normative theory, Mill also had a Hobbesian understanding of what sentient human beings' natural appetites might lead to without sufficient guidance and regulation. The unfettered pursuit of the pleasures which accompany the realization of dispositions, 'even [of] those which are necessary to our preservation,' Mill wrote, would, unless regulated by rules, by example, and by training, 'fill the world with misery, making human life an exaggerated likeness of the odious scene of violence and tyranny which is exhibited by the rest of the animal kingdom.'<sup>42</sup>

In order to avoid this, modification of human nature became the goal of Mill's social and political theory.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the discovery of the most efficacious method of modification requires first, knowledge of those dispositions in human beings and how they operate, and then discernment of how they might be channeled in such a way as to produce an advance in the attainment of their proper ends. In other words, 'to know and take heed of the properties of the things we have to deal with, so far as these properties are capable of forwarding or obstructing any given purpose' and once known, to discover how this evidence of science might be used by the Art of Life, or Practice.<sup>44</sup>

It is apparent that from the beginning Mill's development of both a broad ethical doctrine, and his socio-political theory, is firmly grounded in his account of how human nature functions in what Hobbes had termed the 'state of nature.' His first and

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<sup>42</sup> Mill, 'Three Essays on Religion', p.393.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.391, 396-397.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.379-380.

optimistic premise is that all individual animals are innately disposed to preserve and to enhance their individual existence, and to contribute to the survival and melioration of the existence of the species. Furthermore, human beings have the same innate dispositions and instincts. Thus the concrete end of individual human existence is the achievement of private survival and the enhancement of private existence, together with contribution to the survival and enhancement or melioration of the species of which they are a member. And the psychophysiological motivation for this complex undertaking is the desirability of pleasure and happiness. His second, and potentially pessimistic, premise is that human beings, owing to their defining characteristic of reason, possess a unique capacity to distort both the pleasurable ends of activity and the means whereby they are achieved. This capacity is a two-edged instrument, allowing the possibility of scaling the heights of higher pleasures or sinking into the depths of gratification of animal appetites. Reason is the instrument whereby human beings may become either the happiest or the most miserable of creatures. It is at this point in his argument, and in order to assist the individual agent in the achievement of the qualitatively superior end, that Mill introduced the evaluative concept of perfectibility.

**§V.vii. The introduction of the concept of perfectibility in Mill's holistic theory.**

Perfectibility is not a scientific concept, nor has it any logical relation to the evidence and conclusions presented by the method of science that underpin Mill's broad ethical doctrine. Mill's introduction of the concept is apparent, however, as soon as his final assessment of human nature and its end are introduced. Mill wrote that human nature is to be understood as an organism 'which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing.'<sup>45</sup> His acknowledgment of progressivism is expressed in succinct form in his assertion that 'if Nature and Man are both works of a Being of perfect goodness, *that Being intended Nature as a Scheme to be amended*.'<sup>46</sup> Where human beings differ from other animals, according to Mill, is in their possession of specifically human capacities. These, he affirmed, are the key to the artificial perfecting of individual human nature, and the achievement of the end of existence.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the pivotal statement of his theory of obligation is his assertion that 'the duty of man is the same in respect to his own nature as in respect to the nature of all other things, namely not to follow it but to amend it.' Mill's position concerning perfectibility was summed up by him in the same place where he concluded that 'artificially created, or at least, artificially

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<sup>45</sup> Mill, 'On Liberty', p.92.

<sup>46</sup> Mill, 'Three Essays on Religion', p.391 (Emphasis added).

<sup>47</sup> Mill, 'On Liberty' *Works* Vol.18 p.261.

perfected, nature of the best and noblest human beings is the only nature which it is ever commendable to follow.<sup>48</sup>

The confluence of the principle of happiness and that of perfectibility which takes place at this point becomes, with further development, the driving force of Mill's socio-political theory. Pleasure, and its interaction with reason to produce happiness, had been proven to his satisfaction to be the sole motivation for all human action, and the purpose of that action to be the survival and melioration of the individual and the species. Amendment and perfection of faculties and capacities, Mill then concluded, will bring about both a positive and a negative good. The positive good achieved by cultivation and development is the production of the greatest possible happiness of both the individual and the species, thus achieving the *telos* of human existence. At the same time it has the negative benefit of avoiding the problems associated with the distorted development of human nature that accompanies the pursuit of inappropriate or exclusively lower pleasures. Thus the link between Mill's belief in perfectibility and his principle of utility is important insofar as its establishment shows the manner in which Mill believed the 'larger proof' of utility to be demonstrated.

**§V.viii. Mill's meliorist perspective of 'larger' proof.** The importance of this link and the nature of the relation between happiness and perfectibility is the subject of the following chapters where the nature and character of Mill's broad ethical doctrine is examined. Before entering upon such an examination, it is worthwhile to consider for a moment the impetus for, and the result of, Mill's making this connection. There are three avenues of possible explanation of Mill's adherence to the thesis of meliorism. The first is a combination of his classical influences in conjunction with the admittance of the Hobbesian understanding of human nature as given to excess in pursuit of pleasure. This line of explanation shows Mill as accepting the tendency in human beings to extremes of behaviour in their striving to satisfy desires, and constructing a social and political theory which will channel rather than repress this natural tendency in order to achieve the good life. This is expressed in the balance and harmony theory found in Aristotle, taken up by von Humboldt, and embraced by Mill.

The second explanation suggests that Mill's perfectionism is a continuation of the amalgam of influences experienced by him during his education, and subsequent development. These influences are, in the first instance and most significantly, those of James Mill, Bentham, Carlyle, Coleridge, and Comte. James Mill, following

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.396-7.

Condorcet and Helvétius, and incorporating the mechanistic associationist psychology of Hartley, had, as his son recorded in his *Autobiography*, 'a firm confidence . . . in the general progress of improvement, and the good which individuals could do by judicious effort.'<sup>49</sup> The confidence exhibited by James Mill in the inevitable progress that would follow the promulgation of the Benthamist Utilitarian doctrine has also been linked to J.S. Mill.<sup>50</sup> At a lesser degree of intellectual importance but far greater in terms of Mill's emotional sustenance, his friendship with Roebuck and Sterling and the Foxes, and his appreciation of the work of Wordsworth and the European Romantics provided a direct link between Mill and the possibility of a fully-rounded development of human nature. In a unique role in Mill's intellectual and personal development, Harriet Taylor was his acknowledged inspiration and guide in all things.<sup>51</sup>

The third strand of explanation is found in Mill's situation in space and time. The strength of Mill's commitment to his normative beliefs, and the theoretical presuppositions that buttress them, are inextricable from the influences of the cultural, social, and political milieu in which they were developed. The concept of melioration which underpinned the *Zeitgeist* of the mid-nineteenth century reflected the conviction that progress and perfectibility were the inevitable consequence of the extraordinary momentum found in all aspects of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>52</sup> The social, cultural, and religious context of nineteenth century England which provide the foundation for the ethos of meliorism are examined further in Chapter VIII. Here it is sufficient to note the change of focus from the community to the individual; the rapid advances in the material sciences, in agriculture, and in manufacturing; and the impact of speculative philosophy on the hold of Christianity over a newly mobile population. All three strands of change may be traced back to their origin in the movement of ideas and attitudes that came to be known as the Enlightenment.<sup>53</sup> Meliorism gained favour as an animating principle during the course of the eighteenth century, and was entrenched as the controlling idea of the nineteenth.<sup>54</sup> It is important to acknowledge, however,

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<sup>49</sup> Elie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*. Boston, 1955 pp.274,282; Mill, 'Autobiography,' *Works*, Vol.1 p.105.

<sup>50</sup> See e.g. Charles van Doren, *The Idea of Progress*. New York, 1967 pp.239, 247, 337.

<sup>51</sup> Mill, 'Autobiography' p.205; Michael St. John Packe, *The Life of John Stuart Mill*. London, 1954 pp.120, 127.

<sup>52</sup> The significance of the *Zeitgeist* in which prescriptive theory is developed is stressed by Maurice Mandelbaum, in his *Purpose and Necessity in Social Theory*. Baltimore, 1987 p.4.

<sup>53</sup> For an overview of the force of meliorative thought in the nineteenth century, see: Raymond Duncan Gastil, *Progress: Critical Thinking About Historical Change*. Westport, Conn., 1993 ; David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth Century Britain*. New Haven, 1990; Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*. New York, 1991.

<sup>54</sup> W. Warren Wagar, cited in Gastil *op.cit.* p.20.

that while Mill was permeated by the *Zeitgeist* of his age, he was not overwhelmed by it. He maintained throughout his development of social and political theory an awareness of the obstacles to melioration that were present even in the ethos that affirmed its primacy.<sup>55</sup>

From the perspective of a belief in both the desirability and the achieveability of perfection, insofar as it is available to the particular agent and to the community, it is now apparent the sort of larger proof Mill anticipated to provide to disinterested rational examiners as evidence of the goodness of happiness. Happiness accompanies and is the product of the skillful exercise of capacities, particularly those that are specifically human. An increase in the degree of skill, which is the result of the cultivation and development of capacities, brings with it an increase in the balance of happiness in the life of the individual agent. So, by perfecting their capacities, including those that are exercised in the public arena, agents increase their own and the community happiness. For Mill, the larger proof of the principle of happiness is found in its connection to the meliorist ethics of his age. To this end, his ambition was to develop a pragmatic system of cultivating the inclination to melioration in human beings, with the end of achieving a 'practical improvement . . . in the condition of mankind.' This he considered to be 'itself an ideal end.'<sup>56</sup>

There has been presented so far the general outline of Mill's broad ethical doctrine. What is now required is a more detailed examination of that doctrine in order to test both its relation to the ground of Mill's account of human nature and its *telos* and its ability to withstand objective scrutiny. Does it maintain throughout the connection with his understanding of the striving for happiness as the sole ground for ethical doctrine, or does it import other, possibly transempirical axioms? The following chapter examines Mill's recognition of the requirement in his theory of secondary principles of action with which to render the enlarged principle of utility into a practical theory of action, and its accompaniment, his general theory of value.

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<sup>55</sup> See e.g. Mill 'On Liberty' p.272; 'Utilitarianism' p.227.

<sup>56</sup> Mill, 'Autobiography' pp.69, 145-147.

## Chapter VI.

### Mill's Broad Ethical Doctrine: Secondary Principles of Action and A Theory of Value.

**§VI.i. Mill's recognition of the requirement of a subset of principles for the achievement of happiness.** The *telos* of human existence and the ultimate principle of action whereby that end is achieved meld in Mill's theory to form the principle of utility, or happiness. Their separate analysis in the previous chapters has resulted in their comprehension as abstract entities. Mill, however, was aware that while the prescriptive principle of happiness was necessary to act as a final arbiter of all actions, it was impractical at the level of particular action. To state that happiness is the prescriptive end of all action is to beg a series of practical questions. For the happiness principle to function in a pragmatic way Mill recognized that there was needed an intermediate level of prescription, able to guide action at the level of practice whilst being itself guided by the primary principle.<sup>1</sup>

Mill recognized that two factors must be accounted for in the presentation of any larger proof of the validity and justification of the principle of happiness as the foundation of a comprehensive prescriptive theory. Both are found to be core components of his understanding of human nature and the manner in which it is expressed. The first is that agents do already behave in ways that are intended to bring about happiness for themselves. Mill's theory required that he demonstrate why agents *should always* act in such a manner. The second is that while all individual agents are similar in their possession of a spectrum of dispositions, faculties, capacities, and talents, they are distinct from one another in their potentials and the level of realization of those potentials. Whatever prescriptive formulation of the principle of happiness Mill developed, he recognized that it must apply equally to individuals of widely different capacities, tastes, inclinations, and potentials.

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<sup>1</sup> Mill, 'Utilitarianism.' *Works*. Vol.10 pp.206-207. The movement downward, from primary to secondary principles, is justified as a legitimate method of generalization by Mill in 'A System of Logic.' Bk.VI Ch.V §5, *Works*. Vol.8 pp.870-871, on the grounds that '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.'

Mill was also aware that there is here an overlap between the problem of justification and that of practical application. Unless the application of a rule is fully worked out in terms of the whole of its province, there is little point in arguing about the validity of the rule. 'In such an instance, we must re-open the investigation,' Mill wrote, 'to inquire into the remainder of the conditions on which the effect depends; and only after we have ascertained the whole of these, are we prepared to transform the effect into a precept, in which those circumstances or combinations of circumstances which the science exhibits as conditions, are prescribed as means.'<sup>2</sup>

This is the point in Mill's unfolding methodology which sees the introduction of 'the art of Life or Society,' for the purpose of deriving from the evidence of science a typology of actions whereby the happiness that signals the achievement of the teleological end of existence may be maximized.<sup>3</sup> To work out fully the application of the principle of happiness in all the departments of life, Mill's method was first to reapply to the method of science this time to discern the variety of means to achieve that end. Once these theorems of practice had been 'embodied in the fewest and most extensive propositions possible,' Mill wrote, 'those propositions will express the general relation between the available means and the end,' and from these theorems the Method of Art will develop a set of secondary principles, which 'will follow as corollaries.'<sup>4</sup>

In this way, the translation of the highly abstract ultimate principle of action into a set of concrete *axiomata media*, via the method of science, placed Mill in the position from which he was able to present a broad ethical doctrine as penultimate stage to the practical expression of enlarged utilitarianism in socio-political theory. The final task of the method of science and the place at which it overlaps with the method of Art is, therefore, to determine which course or courses of action are most efficient in achieving the teleological end of existence. The execution of this task comprises the demonstration of the foundation of Mill's broad ethical theory to be located in his account of human nature.

**§VI.ii. Mill's secondary principles of action.** Secondary principles of action, according to Mill, are those principles which act as practical guides toward the achievement of happiness in the various departments of life and, following the pattern of his methodology, it is to be anticipated that they are derived from the evidence of

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<sup>2</sup> Mill, 'A System of Logic' Book VI Ch.XII §3, p.945.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Book VI Ch.XII §6, p.950.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Book VI Ch.XII §5, p.948.

science using the primary principle of happiness as the ultimate criterion of judgment.<sup>5</sup> Each second level principle was intended by Mill to have a narrower and more concrete application in the sphere of action, and thus to guide individual choices at the level of existential being. When these secondary principles of action are considered as a group they may, with little alteration, be understood also as an expanded and concrete account of the end of existence. In this way the secondary principles and their coalescence in what is Mill's theory of self-realization have the same melded relation as the ultimate principle of action and the *telos* of human existence. They form an expanded and concretized version of the principle of utility.

Mill's discovery of secondary principles of action was, using the terms of his methodology, via the communication of the Art of Life (the prescriptive art) with the method of science. The process, as described by Mill, is a figurative representation of how he understood universally-possessed desires, discoverable and demonstrable by science, to be satisfied via the paths of action discovered by reason. Once reason, as part of the method of science, has plotted the general pathways to desire-satisfaction, these are then codified by Art and become principles of action.<sup>6</sup> The role of the method of science is, then, a broad one: it is to discover the most efficient available means with which to achieve happiness across the complete spectrum of human beings' dispositions, capacities, faculties, and talents. These theorems are then transformed by the method of Art into secondary principles which all have as their benchmark the ultimate standard, or first principle of Mill's teleology - the principle of happiness. In this way, Mill expanded his single principle in an inclusive fashion that embraces all aspects of human nature, and thus avoided the problem faced by Aristotle of reconciling the conjunction of a dominant mode of behaviour and true happiness with the exclusive nature of that mode. Mill's secondary principles were explicitly intended to guide *all* agents to the greatest degree of happiness possible for them regardless of the original composition of their natures.

However, the process of transmuting these theorems of science into secondary principles of action, expressed as rules or precepts of behaviour, is an imprecise one. Mill recognized the limitation inherent in the method of art, in that principles of action cannot anticipate all possible conditions that might occur within its province.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, he affirmed that this does not diminish their value as guiding principles, and once formulated, 'those propositions will express the general relation between the

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Book VI Ch.XII §5, pp.947-948.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Book VI Ch.XII §3, p.945.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Book VI Ch.XII §4, pp.946-947.



available means and the end, and will constitute the general scientific theory of the art; from which its practical methods will follow as corollaries.’<sup>8</sup> These secondary principles, and the rules and precepts which express them, form, according to Mill, the body of doctrine that covers all aspects of life, and comprise the ground of his broad ethical doctrine. They provide the criteria against which to measure any aim to discover whether or not it ‘is worthy and desirable, and what is its place in the scale of desirable things.’<sup>9</sup>

Secondary principles of action were not, then, fully described by Mill. Rather, he was satisfied that their existence and form were discernible from the outline of their coming into being set out in the *Logic*.<sup>10</sup> The reasons for Mill’s omission of any detailed description of individual secondary principles reflect his continual program of refinement in his thinking: first, that the original derivation of the secondary principle is imperfect, owing to the finite nature of the scientific evidence available; second, the application of secondary principles can only be a flawed process, because of the impossibility of taking into account all the counteracting contingencies that occur in practice; and thirdly, the secondary principles ‘admit of indefinite improvement, and, in a progressive state of the human mind their improvement is perpetually going on.’<sup>11</sup>

In the interim, Mill was satisfied to operate with a set of ‘empirical generalizations from the observed results of conduct’ which are provided by the method of science, and are ‘completely attainable only by deducing, from the laws of life and the conditions of existence what kinds of actions . . . tend to produce happiness.’<sup>12</sup> The link Mill saw as existing between human nature and the circumstances and environment within which that nature is developed and shaped, and the secondary principles of action which stand as the ‘rules,’ ‘laws,’ ‘maxims,’ and ‘precepts’ of his broad ethical doctrine is clearly expressed here.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Mill argued that in their existing degree of precision they were not rules and precepts intended to be applied to specific actions. Rather they were applicable to classes of actions only, and

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Book VI Ch.XII §5, p.948.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Book VI Ch.XII §6, p.949.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Book VI Ch.XII §§2-3,5. pp.943-945,947-948.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Book VI Ch.XII §3, p.945; ‘Utilitarianism,’ p.224.

<sup>12</sup> Mill, ‘Utilitarianism,’ p.258n. The quoted text is Mill’s reiteration of Spencer’s position regarding secondary principles, taken from a letter from Spencer to Mill and with which Mill expresses complete agreement (excepting Spencer’s inclusion of the word ‘necessarily’ which Mill regarded as too forceful, and was suppressed by him in the ellipsis).

<sup>13</sup> The interchange between these terms occurs in many places throughout *Utilitarianism*, and has been noted previously by commentators. See e.g. John M. Baker, ‘Utilitarianism and “Secondary Principles”’, *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol.21 1971 p.70.

were guides that affirmed only the tendencies of actions either to cause or to impede happiness.<sup>14</sup>

**§VI.iii. Secondary principles of action and Mill's account of human nature.**

When Mill endeavored to find auxiliary support for his justification of the translation of the theorems of science into secondary prescriptive principles, he made a significant observation which grounds them firmly in human nature. As theorems of science, the propositions that describe the most efficient means to the achievement of happiness in particular classes of action are assertions of matters of fact. Their translation into secondary principles transforms them from matters of fact into propositions that 'enjoin or recommend that something should be,' and consequently outside the formal method for determining truth or falsity. Nonetheless, he wrote, 'in the largest sense of the words, even these propositions assert something as a matter of fact.' And the matter of fact collectively affirmed by them, he concluded, 'is, that the conduct recommended excites in the speaker's mind the feeling of approbation.'<sup>15</sup> Such approval, he went on to say, is not the end of the matter, nor is it sufficient reason for others to approve also. For this there must be demonstrated the complete theory of enlarged utility. It is, however, a clear indication of the grounding of the secondary principles in the dispositions found in human nature to respond approvingly to those actions and courses of action that lead to happiness (and consequently to the *telos* of existence).

There is a point to be noted here that bears upon any later analysis of Mill's theorizing in terms of consistency and coherence. For Mill to retain what he regarded as the important framework of capacities and dispositions which depict human nature, and to carry it forward into the development of secondary principles of action, he must incorporate also the shared animal dispositions and appetites into that development. Any failure to acknowledge and to incorporate this side of human nature into his foundation for ethical rules and precepts at this stage of its development will ultimately emerge as an area of weakness in his social and political theory. Accordingly, whatever the secondary principles turn out to be, they must embrace both specifically human capacities and shared animal instincts and appetites. Because this is the case, the secondary principles must be such that while they are recognized by reason they must also engage with desires, and so enable the satisfaction of desires to be achieved.

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<sup>14</sup> Mill, 'A System of Logic,' Book III Ch.X §5, p.445. See also Baker, *op.cit.* p.70.

<sup>15</sup> Mill, 'A System of Logic,' Book VI Ch.XII §6, p.949.

Secondary principles are clearly of great significance to the unfolding of Mill's broad ethical doctrine. They indicate the relation between Mill's broad ethical doctrine and his account of human nature, and are flagged by him to be the core body of principles (subordinate to the ultimate principle of happiness) that operate across the complete range of actions, both private and public, performed by all agents. Inasmuch as they are the expression of Mill's intention to open out and concretize the ultimate principle of action they overlap and meld with his understanding of the *telos* of human existence.

It turns out that secondary principles of action, as depicted by Mill, are those principles that guide or command choices of action in all departments of life - prudential, moral, and aesthetic. They are not, however, codified and presented by him as a set of commandments or injunctions. Rather they are a set of core principles that are responsive to the circumstances and conditions of agents in context. In this flexible form, the guidance or command of secondary principles will vary from instance to instance, and reflect their application to concrete circumstances. The strength of this conceptualization is its capacity to respond to particular instances. From an analytical perspective, however, this capacity has been regarded with suspicion and rejection by many commentators.<sup>16</sup> Without a clear account of the secondary principles, examination of their power as practical instruments in the development of Mill's broad ethical doctrine becomes difficult.

There is a way around this difficulty. It is possible to examine more fully what Mill understood by the secondary principles of action by approaching them obliquely via his understanding of what constitutes value in motive and action, and consequently what underpins judgment. Just as the secondary principles of action represent the ultimate principle in a form with greater applicability to existential circumstances, so there is a similarly expanded account of Mill's concise theory of value: in other words, the cryptic assertion that 'that which contributes to the achievement of happiness is valuable' was recognized by Mill to require expansion if it is to function in the existential world. To do this, Mill developed what is understood here to be a general theory of value. It is this theory which links to the secondary principles of action and functions as the justification for commendation or command for action which is the

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<sup>16</sup> See e.g. R. P. Anschutz, *The Philosophy of J. S. Mill*. Oxford, 1954. p.5; John Plamenatz, *The English Utilitarians*. Oxford, 1949 p.122. Bafflement at Mill's attempt to develop a socio-political theory which chimed with, rather than dictated to, human nature and organization has now changed to recognition of his complexity of method. See G. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*. 3rd Ed. London, 1963 p.714.

domains of the secondary principles. By examining Mill's general theory of value, there will be presented further evidence with which to enlarge understanding of Mill's secondary principles and their role in the achievement of the greatest possible happiness.

**§VI.iv. Mill's general theory of value.** The understanding of value, and consequently of the meaning of 'good,' contained in Mill's work is one that has caused considerable debate among Mill scholars. What follows is a straightforward naturalist account of value to be found in his work.<sup>17</sup> It demonstrates how Mill's general theory of value emerged from the body of scientific evidence used by him in the development of the secondary principles of action and informs his theory of self-realization.<sup>18</sup> It also shows how specifically moral value and goodness are found to be a part of that general theory and that they rest on the same naturalistic foundation.

Mill's general theory of value and of goodness pivots on his assertion that 'happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end.' This follows Aristotle, as does Mill's equivalence of happiness with worthiness, and so with goodness.<sup>19</sup> This is the accepted view of Mill's theory of value.<sup>20</sup> Bearing in mind the failure of many critics to examine in detail his understanding of the term 'happiness,' it is unsurprising that its equivalence with goodness has caused problems in interpretation.<sup>21</sup> This is apparent

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17 That the unexamined usage of the evaluative terms 'good' and 'bad' results in 'just a tangle of ambiguities,' is acknowledged by contemporary philosophers. (See e.g. P.T. Geach, 'Good and Evil,' in *Theories of Ethics* Philippa Foot (ed.) Oxford, 1967 p.66.) In order to avoid 'the baneful effects' of such ambiguities, what follows is a depiction of the general theory of value found in Mill which has its roots in Aristotle's writing. Aristotle believed it worthwhile to formulate such a theory for its explanatory value in socio-political theorizing. Its depiction here serves the same purpose in this examination of Mill's social and political thought.

18 Mill's theory of self-realization is further examined in Chapters VII and VIII.

19 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. 1095a, 1097a. (Cf. Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' p.237.)

20 See e.g. F. Berger, *Happiness, Justice, and Freedom: The Moral and Political Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*. Berkeley, 1984 p.39, 49, who notes that Mill's value theory pivots around happiness, and W. Donner, *The Liberal Self: John Stuart Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy*. Ithaca, 1991 pp.3, 10-11, 18-23, who depicts Mill's general theory of value in terms of good-making characteristics.

21 A similar problem is found in interpretations of Aristotle's general theory of value. There has been identified in the *Ethics* a confusion between the dominant final end of theoretical wisdom and an end which is more inclusive and admits of a broad variety of goods. This confusion is outlined in W. F. R. Hardie, 'The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics,' in *Philosophy* Vol.XL No.154 Oct. 1965 pp.277-281. It arises in large part, according to Hardie, because Aristotle had an ambiguous approach to human nature. On the one hand, he recognized that agents with different natural talents and dispositions regard a variety of things as bringing about happiness and therefore good, (see *Nicomachean Ethics*. 1095b) but displayed on the other a personal preference for a particular type of happiness as the focus of the final good. Aristotle appears to be trapped between two impossible choices. To develop a *telos* that admits many goods as comprising an inclusive end would rescue him from the impossibility of reconciling

in the objections to Mill's theory of value made by many nineteenth and early twentieth century commentators which depend in large part on maintaining identity between the abstract understanding of happiness and that of good. Those commentators then narrowed the understanding of good to that of moral good only, and thus were able to claim Mill held the position that the abstract conception of happiness is identical to moral goodness. This version of Mill's principle of utility is then vulnerable to a series of well-known objections. However, the examination in Chapter III demonstrates this to be a misreading of Mill's understanding of happiness. The position taken here is that in order to see clearly the outline of the moral doctrine contained within an holistic theory, a broader understanding of the nature of goodness used in that theory must first be obtained.<sup>22</sup>

Part I has already established that while the concepts of pleasure and happiness are linked in Mill's work, a close examination of his understanding of the terms reveals that they are distinct. Furthermore, the term 'happiness' is used in both a general way, to indicate the holistic state of being of an individual, and in a more specific way to indicate the state of feeling that accompanies the steady satisfaction of desires for the repetition or continuation of particular pleasures. These distinct happinesses are achieved by the exercise of particular capacities, and increase with their cultivation and development toward a maximum determined by their potential. One of the most important points to emerge from Part I is that whilst happiness is the criterion whereby the movement toward the *telos* of both individual and community existence is measured, some happinesses are genuine, and some false.<sup>23</sup>

Genuine happinesses, according to Mill, are of two types: one type indicates the achievement of end in a particular capacity, disposition, or faculty which contributes to the self-realization of the individual; and a second type indicates the holistic achievement of end as a summation of the general state of self- or community-realization. The distinguishing mark of false happinesses is that they fail to

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the quest for theoretical wisdom with the desire-patterns of the majority of agents, but only at the cost of diminishing the value of contemplation. To maintain the claim for a dominant activity as the *telos* of human beings, whilst at the same time acknowledging that many agents are uninterested in or incapable of pursuing that activity, is simultaneously to undermine the claim. This dilemma is recognized by Vinit Haksar as present in Mill's work (see Vinit Haksar, *Equality, Liberty, and Perfectionism*, Oxford, 1979 pp.231-232.), and is compared with a similar difficulty found in Rawls' theory of justice. Mill's naturalist grounding as depicted in Part I provides the material with which plausibly to resolve this dilemma, and as Part II unfolds it is directed toward this end.

<sup>22</sup> See G. H. von Wright, *The Varieties of Goodness*, London, 1963 p.8; R. B. Perry, *General Theory of Value*, Cambridge, Mass., 1967 p.5.

<sup>23</sup> Mill, 'Three Essays on Religion,' *Works*, Vol. 10 p.396.

demonstrate any advancement toward the *telos* of existence. Furthermore, Mill noted that while genuine happinesses are, in terms of the achievement of end, more valuable than false happinesses, there is also a differentiation within the range of genuine happinesses, with some more valuable than others insofar as they are indicators of a greater achievement of end. The final point of distinction is that just as happinesses, which are the signs of movement toward the end of existence, differ in their characteristics - some are linked to shared animal desires and pleasures, others to specifically human capacities - so there is also a differentiation in the value of the various happinesses according to how they contribute to, or signify, the individual or community *telos* of agents *qua* human beings.

The echo of Aristotle's taxonomy is heard clearly in Mill's understanding of happiness. Adapting the pattern originally set down by Aristotle, in which the *telos* of an activity or object is regarded by all agents as a good, Mill demonstrated that the degree of achievement of each particular *telos* is signified by the happiness produced.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the Aristotelian use of good as signifying the achievement of end is originally indicative rather than prescriptive. (For example, there is no intrinsic goodness in bridle-making: the value of the activity lies in its contribution to the development of the holistic character of the performing agent.) That the same position was taken by Mill has been brought out in the foregoing chapters: every activity which achieves its end is accompanied by happiness, but it is the relation of the particular end to the self-realization which is the *telos* of the agent that determines its value. This position enabled Mill to acknowledge the false happinesses found in anti-social or self-destructive activities, and to differentiate those from the happinesses which accompany activities that contribute to the development of character and the purpose and end of existence. This differentiation is the ground of Mill's theory of value.

Granted that Mill's assertion repeated above is a clear indication that, in his theory, happiness is identical with goodness, it may be anticipated that just as happiness is a complex concept, so it will be paralleled in his writing by an equally complex account of what is goodness.<sup>25</sup> What follows is an understanding of his account of goodness presented as a general theory of value. Depiction of the method of discovering what is most valuable to particular agents and to the community was stated by Mill to be the

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24 See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a. Mill's concurrence with this position is delineated in Chapters III and IV above.

25 Recognition of the complex nature of Mill's understanding of 'good' is not uncommon. Vinit Haksar, (*op.cit.*, pp.231-232.) also notes the similarities between Mill's complex understanding of 'good', and that of John Rawls.

province of the method of ethics. The next step in Mill's unfolding Art of Life to be examined here is the depiction of his method of differentiating between those happinesses that are valuable and those that are disvaluable; and, among valuable happinesses, those that are more valuable than others.

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What information is required to depict Mill's general theory of value? The act of evaluation is one of comparison and ranking. When identical objects are compared, they are found to be equivalent on all points and so differentiation and ranking are redundant. However, when two non-identical objects or acts are compared, there is always found some difference in their qualities that enables a distinction to be made between them. At the level of comparison, the distinction is confined to noting the variables only. In order for an evaluation or judgment to be made concerning the ranking of the objects or actions, there must exist some criterion (or criteria) against which the variables between objects may be measured.<sup>26</sup> This second level of evaluation is one of ranking against an external standard, and the ground of any theory of value is the nature of the external standard used.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to a criterion of worth, a general theory of value must also contain an account of types or varieties of goodness; of the spheres of operation within which they operate; of the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value; and of the means whereby value is recognized. Finally, the developer of a naturalistic theory of value, unlike those who hold that moral value is of a different order entirely to non-moral value, must give a defensible account of the manner in which moral judgments are linked to non-moral evaluation and judgment.

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<sup>26</sup> See e.g. Philippa Foot, 'Moral Beliefs,' in *Theories of Ethics*, ed. Philippa Foot, Oxford, 1967 p.85, where she writes that 'there is no describing the evaluative meaning of 'good', evaluation, commending, or anything, of the sort, without fixing the object to which they are supposed to be attached. Without first laying hands on the proper object of such a thing as evaluation, we shall catch in our net either something quite different such as accepting an order or making a resolution, or else nothing at all.'

<sup>27</sup> See Perry, *op.cit.*, p.4. The nature of the external standard is crucial to the versatility of the theory of value being developed. It can be an intuited criterion, say in the form of innate awareness of the rightness or wrongness of actions; it can be a criterion set down by authority, or by revelation; it can be the result of speculative philosophy, such as the Kantian categorical imperative; it can be a purely physiological criterion, e.g. pleasure; or it can be a compound of criteria drawn from a number of areas. (For examples of the ground of criteria see F. Snare, *The Nature of Moral Thinking*, London, 1992 pp.35-36; G. H. von Wright, *op.cit.*, pp.1-17.) Any naturalistic theory of value such as Mill's, which is intended to incorporate a theory of moral value is vulnerable to criticism at precisely this point. (See Philippa Foot, *op.cit.*, pp.83-84.) Mill's general theory of value certainly is intended to incorporate a theory of moral value. (See Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' pp 223-224 )

Mill's goal was to develop a theory of value that would enable all agents to evaluate objects, actions, and states of being in terms of their contribution to the achievement of the greatest possible happiness for each agent. Granting that happiness is identical with goodness, and accepting that abstract happiness was translated by Mill into a demonstrable set of particular happinesses which combine to form a general state of happiness in the individual, it is reasonable to anticipate that his theory of value will follow the same pattern in order to depict what is the good life for both the individual agent and for the community.

The pattern for this development has already been outlined in Chapter III in the demonstration of the way the happiness that attaches to the satisfaction of the natural desire for desert is transformed into the concept of justice as a valuable (i.e. good) object, and just acts as good acts. Generalizing from this pattern provides the process whereby the broad spread of Mill's general theory of value may be unfolded. Once this generalization has been presented below, it will be tested for plausibility by applying it to two contentious aspects of Mill's broad ethical theory. It will be used to examine the claim made by Mill in *Utilitarianism* that the only evidence to demonstrate the desirability of anything is that it is desired, and the equally problematic assertion that, whilst happiness is affirmed as the sole criterion of good, there are qualitative differences between happinesses.<sup>28</sup> The ability of Mill's general theory of value to explain and to justify Mill's claim and assertion will confirm its foundation in his account of human nature and the end of human existence, and its function as a guide to the achievement of self- and community-realization.

**§VI.v. Mill's criterion of goodness** The use of the adjectival terms 'valuable' and 'good' signify the satisfaction of a criterion (or criteria) by the noun to which they are attached.<sup>29</sup> Mill's criterion of value and so of goodness is unquestioned. It is happiness.<sup>30</sup> The evidence presented in Part I of the manner in which Mill derived the teleological end of existence together with the ultimate principle of action whereby that end may be attained from the descriptive, empirical enquiry of science, culminated in the conclusion that both are contained and expressed in the attainment of happiness. This is the origin of Mill's principle of happiness, and, as in Aristotle's holistic account of the life of human beings, happiness is the *summum bonum* of that life. Happiness is

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<sup>28</sup> Mill, 'Utilitarianism' pp.234, 211, 218.

<sup>29</sup> J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. Harmondsworth, 1977 pp.53-59; G.H von Wright, *op.cit.*, 1963 p.17.

<sup>30</sup> The *locus classicus* of Mill's criterion is found at the beginning of Chapter IV in 'Utilitarianism.' (p.234.) where he stated that, 'happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable as means to that end.'



thus identified with the goodness of the good life, and is stated by Mill to be the sole criterion of value.

However, just as the abstract concept of happiness is transformed by him into a variety of happinesses, logically the value that attaches to it is also transformed.<sup>31</sup> This is confirmed by Mill in *Utilitarianism*. Different qualities exist between and within types of pleasure, and between and within types of happinesses, and it is the particular judgment of the experiencing agent which discerns that difference.<sup>32</sup> Just as the abstract concept of happiness is concretized into a variety of existential and immediately recognizable particular happinesses, and they in turn are coalesced in the individual agent into a general happiness, so the varieties of value and of goodness may be understood to emerge from the abstract concept of 'good.' The *summum bonum* is thus understood as the coalescence of particular goods into a general good which expresses the holistic state of being of the individual agent (or community). When Mill wrote 'the ingredients of happiness are various, and each of them is desirable in itself' he specifically noted how particular happinesses are valuable both in themselves as ends and also as means to the larger end of general happiness.<sup>33</sup> Just as the end signified by happiness is the achievement of the *telos* of existence, so too the criterion of value in Mill's ethical doctrine is the contribution of any object, act, or state of being to that end. Furthermore, just as happiness understood both as a state of being attached to the cultivation and development of a particular disposition or capacity and as a general state of being is firmly grounded in Mill's account of human nature and its *telos*, so Mill's designation of degrees of value and goodness are also ultimately grounded in that account and end.

**§VI.vi. Types of goodness in Mill's general theory of value.** There are in any general theory of value, types of value and goodness, and in Mill's theory these reflect

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31 Happiness, as already demonstrated above, is a complex term. It is a general term for the holistic condition of both the individual and the community. It is a specific term for the state of feeling of an individual concerning the balance of pleasure and pain that attaches to the exercise of a particular capacity, talent, faculty, or disposition. See Chapter III.

32 Mill's general theory of value is found in 'Utilitarianism,' in concentrated form between pages 211-213. It underpins the defence of the enlarged principle of utility as it unfolds throughout that work. Misreading of this presentation is the ground of much criticism of Mill's ethical doctrine.

33 Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' p.235. The achievement of *telos* is signified in the state of happiness, *ergo* objects and acts that contribute to this end are good. Furthermore, to cultivate and develop a particular disposition or capacity is to be happy in that particular area of life. Particular happinesses and the pleasures of which they are comprised are also good. Just as happiness is a term applicable to the general condition of an individual's life and is applicable to particular areas of that life, so 'good' operates as both a general term to signify the value of the whole of life, and as a particular term to signify the value of a specific area of that life.

the types of desire and of happinesses that signify their satisfaction found in his account of human nature.<sup>34</sup> The continuation of the parallel unraveling of Mill's theory of value with that of happiness next notes the differentiation between types of value in terms of means and ends. The cultivated natural desires of agents provide the initial impulse to action toward some end (every end being defined as either a momentary pleasure or a steady happiness, or traceable to one of these), and reason is the process whereby the method of achieving the end is determined and set in train. Particular ends are those concerned with the cultivation and development of particular dispositions, faculties, and capacities. Once the ends are established for the individual agent these are recognized by reason as having value for that agent.<sup>35</sup> The general end, that is the *telos* of existence for every agent, is the achievement of the greatest possible happiness, and that is Mill's definition of the supreme value or good for that agent.<sup>36</sup>

The ends of the community are described by Mill in the same way, and in the same way those ends are recognized by reason as having value for the community, and in the larger sense for the species. Whatever brings about the increase in the total happiness of the community is valuable as an end in itself, and the summation of the variety of happiness-producing conditions in the group is the general good of the group.<sup>37</sup>

There is another type of value in Mill's theory which is attached to the means whereby ends may be achieved. Means are those courses of action recognized by reason as instrumental in the achievement of ends, both for the individual and for the community. Furthermore, as time passes some means to particular ends take on the happiness-producing characteristics of those ends and so become valuable both as ends-in-themselves and as means to further ends.<sup>38</sup>

**§VI.vii. Mill's *locus* of value examined.** How are we to discover the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value in Mill's work, and what is the value of so doing?<sup>39</sup> C.D. Broad's precise logical definition of intrinsic properties of a particular

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<sup>34</sup> For a comprehensive breakdown of the types and classes of goods to be found in general theories of value, see von Wright, *op.cit.*, p.65ff.

<sup>35</sup> Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' pp.234, 215.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.214.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.214.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.239. See also Chapter II.§v ii. Mill also notes that the value of the original end may diminish, and the means be transformed into solely an end. When this occurs, the value of the means is similarly transformed into a valued end.

<sup>39</sup> When examining Mill's understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic value it is worthwhile noting that there is a difference between the terms when applied to physical qualities and properties.

states them to be 'those which it is logically possible for it to have had even if nothing had existed except itself and its own parts, if it had parts.' Extrinsic properties, conversely, are 'those which it is logically impossible for it to have had if nothing had existed except itself and its own parts.'<sup>40</sup> Using this as the definition of intrinsic value, Mill's enlarged principle of utility, which is a] holistic, b] teleological, and c] embraces the public as well as the private sphere, cannot engage with the concept of particulars in isolation and without relation. In the case of the logical definition of intrinsic good, nothing corresponds to it in Mill's existential universe. For him, only the abstract happiness which denotes the achievement of *telos* possesses such goodness.<sup>41</sup>

But then to say that all value in Mill's general theory of value is wholly extrinsic in the causal as well as in the logical sense is misleading. Means to ends may become, Mill noted, valuable in themselves, and that value emerges once they are employed regularly as instruments with which to achieve the end of a particular happiness. This causal understanding of instrumental value, while coming close to Broad's logical definition of intrinsic value, is usually regarded as a version of extrinsic value.<sup>42</sup> It is plain from Mill's understanding of means that this was his view of them.<sup>43</sup> What is apparent is that there is a difference among commentators regarding the ground on which the various accounts of value are set and this is causing some confusion. The difference, it is suggested here, lies in the fact that Broad, Ross, Moore, and others, developed their respective value theories from a metaphysical perspective characterized by Stevenson as the perspective of the pure philosopher, whereas Mill, as already demonstrated, was concerned to develop a pragmatic, applied philosophy.<sup>44</sup> Mill, it is claimed here, recognized the shifting locus of value for agents as it occurs at different times and in different circumstances during the course of the agents' lives.

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and to evaluational qualities and properties: but often, and famously in the case of Moore, one account is used to illustrate the other. Disentangling this conflation will enable a clearer account of the manner in which Mill used evaluative terms to be understood.

40 C. D. Broad, *Ethics*, C. Lewy (ed.) (Dordrecht, 1985) p.252. These precise definitions have an affinity with the looser distinction made by Campbell between objective and subjective value. See C. A. Campbell, 'Moral and Non-moral Values: A Study in the First Principles of Axiology,' *Mind* Vol 44 No 175 July 1935, pp.273.

41 See Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' pp.207-208, where he wrote, 'whatever can be proved to be good, must be so by being shown to be a means to something admitted to be good without proof.' It might be argued that Mill's abstract and unprovable good which is the achievement of the *telos* of existence is an intrinsic good, insofar as its parts are characterized by Mill as concrete happinesses. I cannot see how this can be achieved, however, without the introduction of something other than the properties of abstract good, namely the properties of the *telos*.

42 Broad, *op.cit.*, pp.252-53; W. K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd Ed., Englewood Cliffs, 1973 p.81. For an expanded understanding of this point see also Campbell, *op.cit.*, pp.273-299.

43 Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' p.234.

44 Leslie Stevenson, 'Applied Philosophy,' *Metaphilosophy* Vol.1, No.3, July 1970 pp.258-67 *passim*.

This is a necessary requirement of a general theory of value which is to be employed in the existential world, and was recognized as such by Mill. It is also the origin of rejection of Mill's theory on the grounds that he argued not only for happiness as the sole good, but further claimed that there are qualitative distinctions between happinesses. In order to develop a general theory of good which corresponds to existential evaluations made by real human beings over the course of time, Mill's goal is a necessary one for a pragmatic political program.

The confusion may be clarified somewhat if the value of objects and actions that are means to the end of particular happinesses are referred to as instrumental or efficient values. This category is accepted by purely speculative philosophers.<sup>45</sup> Such values may then be considered intrinsic in the logical sense, but to remain dormant until employed in the task of bringing about a particular end. This corresponds with Mill's understanding of instrumental value.

What then of extrinsic values? The value of qualities or properties in the achievement of ends is dependent upon the existence and desirability of the ends in question. If there exist instruments or means to ends, and these have dormant intrinsic value as means, what category of value is contained in the ends? When Mill's ultimate end is considered it is found to be the abstract concept of happiness, and as such there is no single means whereby that end may be achieved. This is acknowledged by Mill in both his translation of the abstract end of happiness into a spectrum of particular ends, which, in each individual, may be summed and considered as a general end, and also in the derivation of a multiplicity of secondary principles of action from the abstract first principle, whereby the plurality of ends may be achieved. Mill's pragmatic approach to the translation of the abstract ultimate principle of action into a broad range of actions chimes with the existential variety of agents and of their circumstances and environment, as does his spectrum of differing happinesses that attach to the cultivation and development of capacities. This is, however, some distance from the clarity of Broad's definition, and becomes more so when the fact that what is a good for one agent, with one level of potential in a particular capacity, may be indifferent to another with a different level of potential, is factored into the description.

There is an alternative approach to the categorization of value that relates more closely to Mill's general theory of value than do the terms 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic.' This is to

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<sup>45</sup> See e.g. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, Oxford, 1930 p.65.

regard all objects, actions, and states of being (other than those categorized as instrumental) in 'the contributory sense of good and bad.'<sup>46</sup> All objects etc., are, on this view, evaluated according to their input into the achievement of the greatest possible happiness at either the individual or the community level, and corresponds to the degree with which they assist in the achievement of *telos*. This allows an object, action, or state of being to be valuable in the sense that it contributes to the achievement of a particular end (happiness) of agent A whilst simultaneously being indifferent to agent B insofar as it does not. Equally, another object etc., may be regarded as indifferent or bad by one agent and not by another according to the effect it has on their respective attempts to achieve a particular end (happiness). The fact of the different effects of the objects, etc., on the respective agents relates to the differences between agents in terms of original potentials in dispositions, capacities and talents, together with their differences in circumstances and environment. This interpretation of the effect of objects etc., is recognized by Mill in his acknowledgment that they are often of a mixed nature part valuable and part disvaluable, depending upon their context and the condition of the evaluating agent.<sup>47</sup>

That this schema reflects the differences between evaluations made by agents in the existential world demonstrates the pragmatic nature of Mill's general theory of value. Furthermore, it is implicit in this understanding of the contributory value of an object etc., to an end that the end in question may be itself regarded as good, bad, or indifferent, depending on the evaluating agent. This means that whenever an agent is unwittingly pursuing a false happiness the means to that end will be considered by that agent (reasoning in ignorance of the true facts) to be valuable and the end itself to be good; whereas an agent able to recognize the indifference or counter-productivity of the end pursued in terms of the *telos* of both individual and community, will categorize it as bad.<sup>48</sup> A confirmation of the emergence of Mill's value theory from his account

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<sup>46</sup> This approach is that taken by Broad and Ross, both of whom consider it to be a close cousin of Moore's 'principle of organic unities'. See Broad, *op.cit.*, pp.254-59; Ross, *op.cit.*, p.72; G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge, 1903 pp.27-36. Frankena summarizes the position in Frankena, *op.cit.*, pp.82-83.

<sup>47</sup> Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' pp.213, 217-18, 237-39; 'On Liberty,' *Works*. Vol.18 p.270. Mill's understanding of the intermingling of pleasure and pain in the sense-data generated by some actions and objects, is found above in Chapter III §iv. This is the link with Moore's principle of organic unity. See also Perry, *op.cit.*, p.136; Campbell, *op.cit.*, p.273. The development of the capacity to distinguish the various qualities of objects etc., and to organize life in a way that best harmonizes the valuable and minimizes the disvaluable is, of course, the object of Mill's social and political theory.

<sup>48</sup> Mill recognized the Platonic problem of elitism and moral and cultural dominance inherent in the notion that some agents are able to distinguish between valuable and disvaluable in terms of the end of the principle of utility, and others lack that capacity. (See Mill, 'On Liberty,' p.247.) A similar notion forms the ground of many doctrines rejected by Mill, and is regarded

of human nature is made when it is recalled that the origins of the desires for false happinesses in agents are to be found in their differences in original potentials in dispositions, capacities, etc., and in their different educations, circumstances, experiences, and environments. This points to the remaining factor to be considered here, which is the significance of variables and of settings to the development of Mill's general theory of value.

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The broad terms of the above account of Mill's general theory of value provide considerable insight into Mill's understanding of the enlarged principle of utility, but the picture is incomplete. There remains a critical area of judgment to be explained which does not, at first sight, appear to be amenable to such a naturalistic interpretation of Mill's general theory of value, and that is the depiction of a criterion or criteria operating within what Mill termed the narrow sphere of moral values and judgments. The parameters within which such a depiction must remain have been clearly stated, with the most significant of these being the exclusion of any transempirical or non-naturalistic content. Unless Mill demonstrated a plausible account of how his objective moral code originated within these parameters, the interpretation of his naturalistic and holistic theory now being developed will be vulnerable and any relocation of his position in the contemporary debate will be questionable. The remaining section of this chapter examines the origin of Mill's code of moral values, judgments, and precepts.

**§VI.viii. The ground of moral duty located in Mill's account of human nature: its original condition, its function, and its translation into an objective moral code.** Mill recognized that the origin of moral values, judgments and actions in any comprehensive political philosophy is the bedrock of that philosophy. It is so because the primary aim of moral and political philosophy is the location of the foundation of principles of social and political organization, and that foundation comprises what are termed moral values, judgments and actions. On that metaethical ground the philosopher may build prescriptive theory. Therefore 'a clear conception of the ultimate foundation of morality is essential to a systematic and scientific treatment of the subject.'<sup>49</sup> It has already been demonstrated how Mill's broad concept of the good

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by him as a significant factor in the development of customary morality. His development of a theory to buttress the authority of 'enlightened instructors' is his attempt to defend his own doctrine from the charges he brought against others, and is examined in Part III.

49 Mill, 'Blakey's History of Moral Science,' *Works*. Vol.10 p.29. Here, Mill echoes Francis Hutcheson, whose stated aim was to discover and develop a moral code that eschewed mere dictat. 'The intention of moral philosophy', he wrote (*op.cit.*, p.1.), 'is to direct men to that course of action which tends most effectually to promote the greatest happiness and

life, of the variety of goods, and of the method of obtaining those goods is linked to his account of human nature and its *telos*. The important question remaining to be answered is whether he made a similar, and demonstrable, link between the elements of human nature and the narrower ground of moral goodness. Is the 'ultimate foundation of morality' to be discovered, according to Mill, in the evidence already presented by the method of science that all motivation and all action originates in the natural disposition of agents to strive for happiness?

As far as Mill was concerned, the centrality of feelings to this endeavour is uncontroversial. Moral goodness, values, and judgment fall within the boundaries of Mill's broad ethical doctrine insofar as they, too, are grounded ultimately in sense-reception, and the desire of agents to continue or replicate pleasant sensations and to avoid unpleasant ones. He believed, however, that the greatest difficulty for the moral philosopher is in determining 'whether they are simple or complex feelings, and if complex, of what elementary feelings they are composed.'<sup>50</sup> It follows that if a clear understanding of the nature and purpose of moral feelings is found in Mill's writing, then the ground upon which his ethical doctrine and subsequently his social and political theory rests is made firm.

The aim of this section is to demonstrate the claim that Mill developed a version of moral sense theory as 'the ultimate foundation' of his naturalist ethical doctrine. This, it will be argued, is the bond between Mill's understanding of human nature and his moral doctrine. It will be shown that the relation between the responses of a particular internal sense and moral actions and judgment, expressed in terms of the relation between the senses and the twin masters of pleasure and pain, allowed Mill to justify the claim that the totality of his broad ethical doctrine rests upon and is driven by happiness principle. This justification demonstrates the completeness of the nexus between Mill's ethical doctrine and his understanding of human nature.

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perfection.' This is to be achieved 'as far as is possible, by 'observations and conclusions discoverable from the constitution of nature, without the aid of supernatural revelation.' Mill's detailed knowledge of Hutcheson's theory of the moral sense can be stated with assurance. Included in the Somerville Collection, housed in the Somerville Library in Oxford, is a single volume copy of Hutcheson's *A System of Moral Philosophy*, (the Foulis edition of 1755) which contains an extensive index of the first section of the work, in Mill's handwriting, on the back flyleaves of the book. There is no reference to Hutcheson's theory throughout Mill's work, apart from a passing reference to it in the above mentioned critique of Blakey's ideas. Nonetheless, the similarities between Hutcheson's theory and many of the remarks, ideas, and positions made and taken by Mill is 'remarkable.

50 Mill, 'Sedgwick's Discourse,' *Works*, Vol.10 p.51.

In order for this claim to be sustained, Mill must be shown to have held a set of beliefs concerning the manner in which moral values and judgments are reached, and actions are willed, which ultimately rests upon an internal sense that responds to sense-data accompanying the performance or observation of actions and impulses that are categorized as moral. He must be shown to have located the discernment of moral value as the product of the operation of that sense, and recognized the manner in which that sense interacts with other processes of mind to reach moral judgments. And, finally, he must have located the origin of the will to act morally in some place other than abstract right reason.

Four questions form the framework of this examination. First, what evidence is present in Mill's work to support the claim that he operated using a variety of moral sense theory in the development of his ethical doctrine? Second, what evidence is there to link that variety of moral sense theory to his understanding of human nature and its *telos*, and the ultimate principle of action? Third, what is the purpose of the moral sense, and how is that purpose evidenced in agents' moral actions and judgments? And, finally, how is the individual agent's moral feeling reflected in an objective moral code of value, judgment, and action?

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The concept of the moral sense, in common with many other concepts in moral philosophy, has a variety of different meanings. There are, broadly speaking, four understandings of moral sense as a contributing element to human behaviour. The first of these regards the moral sense as in itself and alone the response to objects and actions that informs agents immediately of the moral status of those objects and actions. As such it is an attribute of human physiology and operates independently of mind. This is the moral sense that is the foundation of all purely emotive theories of ethics.<sup>51</sup> The second understanding of the moral sense is as a synonym for the innate knowledge of the eternal and immutable values of good and evil, right and wrong, inherent in objects and actions, possessed by and a defining characteristic of all human beings.<sup>52</sup> This understanding has a long pedigree, continuing to the present day, and

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51 The most thorough account of non-mediated moral sense is found in the work of A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*. 2nd Ed. Harmondsworth, 1971, and Charles L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language*. New Haven, Conn., 1944. As a pure doctrine it has been subjected to searching criticism, but in the context it is being discussed here it is by no means intended by its proponents to stand alone.

52 See Richard Price, *Review of the Chief Questions and Difficulties of Morals*. London, 1757; John Balguy, *The Foundation of Moral Goodness*. London, 1728-29; Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*. 2nd Ed., 1678. Reprint, London: J. Walthoe 1743; Thomas Reid, *The Works of Thomas Reid*. Sir William Hamilton (Ed.) 2 Vols. 8th Edition, Edinburgh: James Thin 1895. Reid acknowledges his debt to Price in 'Intellectual Powers.'



was the most popular account of the origin of moral actions and judgment during Mill's lifetime. The third understanding of the moral sense regards it as a faculty developed, to some degree, in all agents through the media of association and experience. While subjective, it is in no way a physiological attribute, and its product is a prudentialist ethics.<sup>53</sup> This associationist understanding was familiar to Mill through the influence of his father and Jeremy Bentham. The last variety of moral sense theory to be examined here understands it as a weak but essential disposition in human beings that functions to signal the moral value of an act or object in a similar fashion to the way other senses respond to their appropriate sense data. As such, it is an element of human physiology and can be either developed or repressed by agents, or simply atrophy through lack of use.<sup>54</sup> The first step toward answering the above questions is a determination of what variety of moral sense theory is to be found in Mill's work, what are its ingredients and parameters, its inclusions and exclusions.

How did Mill understand and respond to the types of moral sense theory listed above? At first sight, his position appears to be ambiguous. In *Utilitarianism*, Mill asserted that only 'a certain small degree' of moral feeling is capable of springing up spontaneously, and confirms that this small degree must be cultivated.<sup>55</sup> It is claimed here that further examination will demonstrate that it is this small degree of feeling that is Mill's bedrock foundation for utilitarian morality. However, at the same time and confusingly Mill also explicitly rejected the existence of the moral sense.<sup>56</sup> These contradictory positions must be explained and reconciled before the claim can be reasserted. Resolution of the problem is obtained by determining which of the varieties of moral sense theory is the subject of Mill's acceptance, and which of his rejection.

The claim made by emotivists that the moral sense operates independently of mind was rejected implicitly by Mill in his account of perception. The sensations received by the

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Essay IV Ch.3 p.495a.

53 See John Gay, *Dissertation Concerning the Fundamental Principle of Virtue or Morality*, 1731, 5th Ed. reprinted in L.A. Selby-Bigge's *British Moralists*, Vol.II §§849-887, Oxford, 1897; and David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, 2 Vols. 1749. Reprint, New York: Garland, 1971.

54 The concept is broached without being termed 'moral sense' in Cumberland's work *De Legibus Naturæ*, trans. John Towers, London 1750, and is first named in Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 Vols. 4th Ed. London: 1727 Reprinted 1963 by Peter Smith of Gloucester, Mass. See also Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, London, 1726; *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, London, 1728; and especially *A System of Moral Philosophy*, Glasgow, 1755.

55 Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' pp.230-31.

56 Mill, 'A System of Logic,' Book I Ch.III §9, p.65; 'Bailey on Berkeley's Theory of Vision,' *Works*, Vol.11 p.252; 'Bain's Psychology,' *Works*, Vol.11, p.353.

external and internal senses, both simple and complex, become part of the awareness of the human recipient through the operation of mind, understood as a combination of feelings, emotions, and reason, all of which are states of mind.<sup>57</sup> No sense, either alone, or in combination with one or more other senses, can do more than transmit sense-data to the mind of the receiving agent. Therefore, no sense, Mill stated, can provide independent evaluation or judgment concerning the sense-data to which it responds. The function of any sense is limited to the reception of sense-data, which is then transmitted via the nervous system to the brain, where it interacts with other elements of consciousness.<sup>58</sup> The first variety of moral sense theory can be set aside as incompatible with Mill's understanding of human nature.

There is found in Mill's rejection of the second variety of moral sense the cause of some confusion in understanding his utilitarian ethical doctrine. Several times Mill denied that there exists in human beings a 'moral sense.'<sup>59</sup> This confusion must be clarified if Mill's understanding of the narrow good of morality and his account of human nature and its *telos* is to be upheld.

On examination, Mill's vehement opposition turns out to be against a particular variety of moral sense theory. Its origin is found in his lifelong mission to oppose *à priorism*, in this case to oppose the intuitionists' belief both in direct perception of external reality and in the existence of innate knowledge, particularly of knowledge of the properties of good and evil that inhere in objects and actions.<sup>60</sup> This innate knowledge, according to Thomas Reid, one of the most influential of the nineteenth century intuitionists, is possessed by and is a defining characteristic of all human beings.<sup>61</sup> Such knowledge, according to Reid, which equates with the direct

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57 Mill, 'A System of Logic,' Book I Ch.III §4, pp.52-53.

58 *Loc. cit.*

59 See e.g. Mill, 'Nature,' *Works*, Vol.10 p.377; 'Utilitarianism,' p.230.

60 Mill's opposition to the persuasive theses presented by his lifelong opponents, the *à priorist* and intuitionist thinkers of the nineteenth century is mitigated by his fair-minded acceptance of those elements of their theories that he considered to be sound. This disinterested search for truth is least evident in his attack on the Reidian argument for an innate knowledge of moral values. The reason for this is discussed below in Mill's understanding of the ground of obligation found in coercion and fear of sanction.

61 Thomas Reid (1710-1796) was the originator of the Scottish 'common-sense' school of philosophy, which opposed the scepticism of the empiricists by developing an account of perception as immediate contact with mind-independent reality. The complexity of Reid's presentation of his theory of the moral sense, and his criticism of alternative theories is found in *The Works of Thomas Reid*, 2 Vols. 8th Ed., Sir William Hamilton (ed.) Edinburgh, 1895. See particularly: 'Essays on the Active Powers of Man' *Works* Vol.II Vol.II Essay III. Part III Ch.I. p.580a; Ch.II pp.580b, 581a; Ch.VII pp.594a, 674b; Ch.VI p.590; Ch.VIII p.595b Essay V Ch.V. pp.662b, 663a; Ch.VII pp.671b, 672a, 674b, 675b; 'Inquiry into the Human Mind' *Works* Vol.I. Ch.II §4 p.107a, §5 p.108a, Conclusion p.209a; 'Essays on the Intellectual

perception of objects and their properties, is the ground of moral action and judgment, and is the origin of moral obligation. And it is termed by Reid, 'moral sense.' Because of the importance of Mill's running battle with the intuitionists, and of the continuing persuasiveness of their ideas, Mill's rejection of the Reidian thesis of the moral sense is a clear guide to understanding his position concerning the foundation of moral goodness. Contained in his refutation of Reid's position is compelling evidence to support the claim that he adhered to an alternative understanding of the moral sense as the origin of a universal moral code.

Mill began his criticism of Reid's theory from a naturalist materialist position. He rejected any argument that rests on a conception of moral evaluation and judgment as the discovery of a quality inherent in a thing or act as a failure to realize that the force that motivates human beings in the moral sphere is 'subjective feeling, and is exactly measured by its strength.'<sup>62</sup> The detailed grounds of Mill's rejection of Reid's variety of moral sense theory have already been touched upon in Chapter II.<sup>63</sup> First, Mill argued that Reid conflated the distinct operation of the senses with the complex process of perception. The process of perception requires the contribution by the senses of sense-experiences, and to mistake the part for the whole is a mistake. The result of this mistake made by Reid and his followers using the faulty understanding of the function and purpose of the senses is that it grants to an external object the power of being the cause of a perception, rather than merely that of a sensation. Perceiving, in this Reidian sense, consists in the direct recognition of some quality in an external object as the exciting cause of a perception, and is regarded by the intuitionists as 'an *act* of the mind, proceeding from its own spontaneous activity.'<sup>64</sup> This, argued Mill, is simply not the case. Rather than being acts, perceptions are among the varieties of feelings or states of mind.<sup>65</sup>

A further objection to Reidian thought made by Mill that has an impact at the level of ethical theory follows from his criticism of Reid's conflation of sensation and perception. Using his account of reason as 'the operation of the senses,' Reid claimed that knowledge, in some instances, consists in the immediate recognition of qualities inherent in objects. This claim is rejected Mill. Neither perception nor knowledge is immediate and direct. All knowledge of 'facts,' he argued, is discovered through a

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Powers' *Works*. Vol.I. Essay I. Ch.II pp 230-.231b; Ch III p.376a.

62 Mill, 'Utilitarianism.' p.229.

63 See Ch.II §§ii-v.

64 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book.I Ch.III §4, p.53.

65 Mill's understanding of the term 'feelings' is identical with that of 'consciousness'. His separation of those feelings into sensations, emotions and thoughts will be examined below.

chain of experiences of simple and complex sensations, which are then associated, classified, and reflected upon, by the agent. The ramifications for ethical theory are apparent and significant. The innate faculty of 'knowing' qualities of external objects, described by Reid as the direct perception of them by reason, requires the existence of those qualities to be inherent in the objects. For theorists of the common-sense school, such as Reid and Stewart, 'good' and 'evil,' 'right' and 'wrong,' are qualities that fall under this head. Because this is the case, they argue, 'good' and 'evil' are both inherent in the object and known by the agent objectively, and beyond the influence of any human agency.<sup>66</sup>

Mill's epistemology, by contrast, requires every agent to experience, to observe, and to reflect upon, simple and complex sensations in order to achieve knowledge of the qualities of external objects. Experience of repeated conjunctions and sequences of sensations, which are transmuted by the cluster of mind-processes into perceptions, are the basis of knowledge.<sup>67</sup> By asserting that whatever comprises existence and however information concerning that existence is obtained, it is in the workings of the mind that the understanding and organization of that material takes place, with the resulting product of 'knowledge,' Mill placed the agent between the object and knowledge of the object.

The way in which Mill presented his case links with his account of human nature. Mill, as is commonly recognized, was an empiricist, but his was an empiricism he believed to be best expressed as experientialism.<sup>68</sup> For the experientialist, knowledge is not simply an untransformed associationist process. It must go through a process of 'experiential digestion' before it is incorporated into the knowledge-mass of the individual agent.<sup>69</sup> From this epistemological perspective, Mill argued that whatever the qualities of 'good' and 'evil,' 'right' and 'wrong' may be, they are not 'knowledge' in the Reidian sense. Actions, and their relations, may be believed to be good or evil,

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66 This certitude of the existence of an objective moral correctness has a long history as the centre of ethical theory. From the assertion of Augustine that free will consists in the capacity to choose evil over good, through the years of dominance of the Christian teaching, until the eighteenth century, the guiding rules of life had been those of the community, enforced by custom and tradition. Only with the advent of individualism and the loosening of the grip of customary morality did the concept of evaluation, and of individual judgment in these matters become significant.

67 Mill, 'On Genius,' *Works*, Vol.1, p.32.

68 Anschutz, *op. cit.*, pp.60-1.

69 Mill, 'Political Economy', *Works*, Vol. 3, p.877; 'A System of Logic,' Book VI Ch.I §2, Ch.4. §3, Ch.10 §8, pp.834, 854, 930.

but such a belief, according to Mill, is demonstrably grounded in the processes of consciousness, and is not inherent in the action.

Finally, Mill addressed Reid's slide from sense as reason, to reason as judgment. If there is no clear criterion of knowledge, as Mill claimed, then the extent of the knowable is blurred. Reid, Mill argued, made little or no distinction between belief and knowledge, and in so doing gave himself space to avoid many of the serious problems contained in his ethics. Reid's account of moral judgment understands it to be a form of intuitive perception which he termed knowledge. Mill objected to this account on the ground that it is unclear. It fails to distinguish between knowledge, belief, and judgment.<sup>70</sup> Reid asserted that the moral faculty or sense perceived directly the moral quality inherent in an act or its relations. Such perceptions are the ground of moral beliefs and values. From such beliefs and values, Reid argued for objective moral judgments. That these moral judgments are both objective and true is, according to him, self-evident given the manner in which they are reached.<sup>71</sup> This argument from direct knowledge of inherent moral qualities to impeccable and objective moral judgments is hopelessly flawed, according to Mill. It is the intuitionists' version of the transformation of 'feelings common to many persons, which are at once irresistible, and unaccountable,' and which, through shared belief in their importance, 'almost always pass into equivalent judgments and beliefs.' The fact that they do so, Mill argued, is in no way a warrant for their truth.<sup>72</sup>

The importance of this account of Mill's rejection of Reidian moral sense theory is twofold. In the first instance, it establishes clearly that Mill grounded his attack on the *à priorist* understanding of the moral sense firmly on his account of human nature, and on the relation between the senses and the other elements of consciousness in particular. It also dispels any confusion that attaches to Mill's several rejections of the moral sense as failing adequately to operate as the foundation of ethical doctrine. On each occasion, he may be found to be rejecting the Reidian intuitionist understanding of that sense. In the second instance, it brings into focus the relation between Mill's ethical doctrine and the concept of right reason. Mill's epistemology leaves no doubt that the notion of a moral code discovered and understood by right reason can have no place in the ultimate foundation of his ethical doctrine.

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70 Mill, 'Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy,' *Works*, Vol.9 p.62.

71 Reid, *op. cit.*, 'Essays on the Active Powers of Man,' Essay V. Ch.V. pp.662b,663a; Ch.VII p.675b.

72 Mill, 'Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy,' p.261n.

What, then, may be understood to comprise Mill's claim for the existence of a moral sense? Mill was unequivocal concerning the presence of an innate capacity to respond to the moral aspect of actions and judgments. This psychophysiological response, a response that precedes association, is a fact in human beings' natural constitution, and from it originate 'all our affections both of love and aversion' towards others. 'In this, the unselfish part of our nature,' he asserted, 'lies a foundation, even independently of inculcation from without, for the generation of moral feelings.'<sup>73</sup> Nonetheless, while certain that this capacity to feel a moral response is the 'firm foundation . . . of the social feelings of mankind, [and] the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures,' Mill recognized that it is a fragile attribute.<sup>74</sup>

To the extent that he could define it, Mill did so by referring to it as a predisposition to behave in a particular way, and stated that 'the operation of all moral forces is immensely influenced by [this] predisposition.' So much is this the case, he asserted, that 'without that element, it is impossible to explain the commonest facts of history and social life.'<sup>75</sup> 'This feeling,' he wrote, 'in most individuals is much inferior in strength to their selfish feelings, and is often wanting altogether. But to those who have it, it possesses all the characters of a natural feeling.'<sup>76</sup> Mill is not here denying the existence of the disposition in some agents. Rather he is acknowledging that it is present in all agents as a potential only, and that its development into a strong moral faculty able to balance the demands of selfish desires requires a conducive set of circumstances. 'The smallest germs of the feeling are laid hold of and nourished by the contagion of sympathy and the influences of education,' he wrote, 'and a complete web of corroborative association is woven around it' that develops and firms its influence upon behaviour.<sup>77</sup>

Mill's thesis that narrow happiness is achieved via the process in reason whereby pleasures and pains that attach to the exercise of a capacity are evaluated and balanced against one another has been demonstrated above. This process takes place also in the evaluation of the pleasures and pains that attach to the cultivation and development of the moral sense. In Mill's understanding, happiness is the achievement of an end, and the end is the realization of potential. The realization of the potential of the moral sense or disposition is a narrow happiness. And the necessity of this particular narrow

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<sup>73</sup> Mill, 'Sedgwick's Discourse,' *Works* Vol.10, p.60

<sup>74</sup> Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' p.231.

<sup>75</sup> Mill, 'Inaugural Address to the University of St. Andrews,' *Works* Vol.21 pp.241

<sup>76</sup> Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' p.234.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.232.

happiness is recognized by Mill as crucial for the achievement of the good life of a society (and of the species). It is the point on which rests the ultimate achievement of the species *telos*. So much is this the case that Mill argued that all moral systems that have their origins in custom and tradition 'yield by degree to the dissolving force of analysis' which discovers at their foundation this natural basis of a desire for the happiness that attaches to the cultivation and development of the moral sense or disposition. His understanding of the nature of revised Utilitarianism will be found below to rest on this claim, a claim Mill states categorically when he asserts that 'there is this basis of powerful natural sentiment; and this it is which, when once the general happiness is recognized as the ethical standard, will constitute the strength of the utilitarian morality.'<sup>78</sup>

Mill's understanding of the role of reason is, in part, to mediate between selfishness and altruism; to discern the means to the end of achieving the good life; to distinguish between means; and to maintain a balance and harmony between the cultivated and developed capacities.<sup>79</sup> The integration of reason with the emotions that arise from the excitation of the moral sense or disposition, as the foundation of moral character, is noted by Mill when he wrote that, 'energy of character is commonly the offspring of strong feelings. If, therefore, the most impassioned natures do not ripen into the most powerful intellects, it is always from some defect of culture, or something wrong in the circumstances by which the being has originally or successively been surrounded.'<sup>80</sup> This statement, with its echoes of Shaftesbury, also indicates the external influences that Mill understood to impact, for good or ill, upon the cultivation and development of that sense.<sup>81</sup> Mill extended the similarity between his thought and that of the early sentimentalists in his comparison of the judgments of the aesthetic sense with the discovery of moral values, based on his understanding of moral motivation as originating in the passions.<sup>82</sup> Finally, the *caveat* Mill placed on the operation of that moral sense is found in his appreciation of the power of environment and circumstances as forces that may distort or repress the development of passionate natures is a further chiming with the sentimentalists' theory.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' p.231.

<sup>79</sup> Mill, 'On Genius,' p.332.

<sup>80</sup> Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties,' *Works*, Vol. I pp.363-364.

<sup>81</sup> See Shaftesbury, *op.cit.*, Vol. I Treatise IV Book I Part III §.i.

<sup>82</sup> Mill used the term 'passion' in the sense of an intense and concentrated emotion, and not in the sense of an uncontrolled excitement. See Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties,' *Works*, Vol. I, p.363.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Shaftesbury, *op.cit.*, Vol. I Treatise IV Book I Part III §i.

Mill clearly flagged the significance to his ethical doctrine of a sense or disposition similar to that depicted by the early sentimentalists that operates as a state of consciousness in conjunction with other states of consciousness both to inform agents of virtuous motivation and to discern moral value in actions. His understanding of that sense or disposition was also similar to theirs in that it is acted upon by the general and particular circumstances of the individual agent, and the effect of this environment can be either beneficial or detrimental to its cultivation and development. The claim that Mill's theory contains a version of the moral sense appears, at this level of analysis, to hold.

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Mill's incorporation of the moral sense in the variety presented above is plainly stated in *Utilitarianism*, and, with the evidence of the development of his broad ethical theory so far presented as sounding board, it is seen to be the crucial element of that theory.<sup>84</sup> This claim is also reinforced by its appearance at a significant point in the key theoretical positions taken by Mill in his account of human nature. The desires that attach to the moral sense, the perception of moral sensations, their location in the external world via the process of reason, and the discovery by reason of means to satisfy them, lead to the expression of that sense as volition. The function of the moral sense as a key factor in the achievement of the *telos* of the species was tied by Mill to the payback in terms of happiness received by the acting agent in fulfilling the desires of that sense, when it is understood as one of the cluster of dispositions etc., which comprise human nature.

The transition between what are purely subjective sensations received by the moral sense and their expression as the objective moral judgments and evaluations that comprise the moral code of the community was demonstrated by Mill in some detail, in his analysis of the relation between happiness and justice.<sup>85</sup> Sensations and desires originating in the moral sense form the ground of the desire for desert, and, over time and with the experiential input of generations of agents, are transformed into moral rules and precepts.

While Mill was in no doubt as to the significance of the moral sense in the achievement of the end of existence, and so in the development of socio-political theory, he attached an important *caveat* to this process. The moral faculty, he noted, is frequently occulted by other and stronger feelings of self-interest and that occurrence

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<sup>84</sup> Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' pp.230-31.

<sup>85</sup> See Chapter III §iii for exposition of this demonstration.



is an obstacle to the achievement of the greatest happiness for the community. More insidious, however, is that it is also extremely malleable and susceptible of being cultivated in almost any direction (meaning it is responsive to the persuasion and sanctions of customary morality and traditions as well as the habits of behaviour inculcated by the existing body of positive law). On the one hand, this susceptibility confirms that the inculcation of the moral code in the community is as amenable to the teaching of the enlarged principle of utility as it is of any other theory; but on the other, Mill noted that such teaching may for a number of reasons diverge from, and become a distortion of, the scientifically demonstrated end of existence.<sup>86</sup> This process, with its potential as both an aid to the achievement of happiness and as an obstacle, was recognized by Mill under the heading 'customary morality,' and its relation to the central problem in contemporary political theory of moral pluralism is the main ground for the claim that Mill's position in the present debate should be reassessed. Accordingly, Mill's understanding of customary morality and its relation to moral pluralism is the subject of Chapters VIII and IX.

#### **§VI.ix. Mill's requirement of a theory of self-realization and a theory of conduct.**

There is now sufficient evidence of the way in which Mill's holistic theory is unfolding to anticipate the next stage of its development. The first stage of the process, that is examination of human nature and the discovery of its *telos* led Mill to formulate the ultimate principle of action. The second stage, that is the province of the Art of Life, translated the ultimate principle of action into the criteria and value-system of a broad ethical doctrine. During this two-stage process, the narrow sphere of moral value and judgment was also discovered to originate in the complex of human nature as a fragile disposition.

The next stage in the development of Mill's theory was to relate the *telos* of individuals and of the community, expressed in his broad ethical theory, to the conduct of agents' lives, both as particular agents and as a social whole. In order to do this, Mill recognized that he had to concretize the abstract level of theory found above. In the case of the *telos* of individuals, he did so via the development of his theory of self-realization, and in the case of employment of the value-system found in his broad ethical doctrine, he did so via the development of his theory of conduct. These form the content of the following chapter.

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<sup>86</sup> Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' p.232. Mill's provision of evidence that this is the case has been presented in Part I. His recognition of its significance and his incorporation of that significance into the development of social and political theory takes place in Chapters VIII and IX in Part Three.