Chapter I.
John Stuart Mill and the Contemporary Debate in Political Theory.

§I.i. Mill's place in the contemporary debate in political philosophy between the liberals and the communitarians. The intention of this thesis is to present an argument for the re-location of J. S. Mill's social and political theory in the contemporary debate between right-based liberalism and communitarianism, and in so doing to demonstrate the fruitfulness of that re-location. Mill's theory in the formulation presented here, it will be claimed, has the ability potentially to dissolve some of the tensions between contemporary liberals and their communitarian critics, and to indicate that at significant points where compatibility appears least likely the possibility of a synthesis of their antagonistic positions exists.

To suggest a re-location of Mill within this debate is to imply his existing presence in the discussion. What is that existing location? It is that Mill is recognized by all participants as being significant in the development of contemporary liberal theory, insofar as he is considered to be a member of the group of classical liberal theorists from whose doctrines present liberal theory has been derived and modified. As such, he is regarded as an historical figure and his theory as having been exhaustively dissected and analyzed, with the result that whilst much of value is contained in it, this has now been utilized and it has ultimately taken its place in the ranks of developmentally important but superseded theories. Nods of acknowledgment in Mill's direction are a feature of just about all contemporary liberal *and* communitarian writings, but his impact on the present debate is considered minimal. Mill's teleological orientation and his development of a universal virtue politics is generally regarded as out of joint with current thought concerning the role and function of political theory

The reason for Mill's relegation to the shelves of past political theory lies in his apparent irrelevance to the primary concern of contemporary political philosophy. The central problem facing political theorists today is widely considered to be that of

value-relativity or moral pluralism.[1] The position of a large number of moral and political philosophers with regard to moral pluralism is articulated by Charles Taylor, who states simply that 'the whole notion of a cosmic moral order . . . has faded for us.' Taylor understands the present concern of political philosophy as that of determining the moral significance (if any) of that which is left over after we no longer see human beings as playing a role in a larger cosmic order or divine history.[2] The outcome of the rejection of cosmic virtue theory and the variety of universal normative doctrines which rest upon it is the admission to legitimate existence of a plurality of moral doctrines, each defensible as coherent and consistent in its own terms and simultaneously in conflict, in part or in whole, with the others. The result of this admission of a paradigm shift in ethical theory is an upheaval of the ground of political theory.

This shift is interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, it is a boon insofar as it enables people with different outlooks, talents, and capacities to explore those differences in creative and beneficial ways: on the other, it is a problem with tragic dimensions insofar as differences in beliefs and goals leads inevitably to different and incompatible values and judgments, which engenders disharmony and frequently results in conflict.[3] The central issues of moral pluralism are, then, those of incommensurability and incompatibility between indistinguishably valued and valid moral codes. Supporters who would praise it as an advance in moral and political thinking must show how these issues are satisfactorily to be resolved. Critics who would argue that it illustrates the unbridgeable chasm between those who espouse one morality and those who espouse another, equally valid but in conflict with the first, must provide an alternative account of the ground of political theory.

In one interpretation of moral pluralism the existence of a multiplicity of morally valuable but incompatible forms of life is inextricably linked to advocacy of autonomy

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1 The identification of pluralism, particularly moral pluralism, in this way is made by a broad cross-section of political philosophers. The degree of subscription to such a view varies according to the degree of optimism exhibited by the theorist. For identification of pluralism as perceived to be the central problem for the development of contemporary political theory, see e.g. Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel*. Boston, 1988; J. Donald Moon, *Constructing Community: Moral Pluralism and Tragic Conflicts*. Princeton N.J., 1993; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. 2nd ed., Notre Dame, Ind., 1984; Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Cambridge, 1982; Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*. New York, 1983.

2 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, Mass., 1989. p.13.

3 Moon holds this view. See Moon, *op.cit.*, pp.3-4 for a representative perspective of the liberal understanding of the role of pluralism.

and individuality. Furthermore, the concept of moral perfectibility is, in this condition, unattainable insofar as whilst it is possible to perfect one form of moral life, other equally moral forms cannot be perfected simultaneously. There are, according to this view, incompatible virtues which cannot be ranked according to any impersonal criterion of moral worth. Such 'free-standing' virtues do not derive from a common source or any common ultimate principle.[4] This is the position of a group of liberal theorists in the debate. The individual exists and operates in a context containing a plurality of valid and worthy forms of life and it is the conditions of choice which are more important to political theory than the actual form of life chosen.[5] This interpretation rejoices in the opening up of opportunities for unique individuals to pursue a form of life which matches their potentialities in talents and capacities, whilst at the same time it advocates the development of political theory which is grounded in reason rather than in universal virtue theory.[6]

Opposed to this view is that which identifies the origin of moral pluralism in Western societies during the last two centuries with the dominance of liberal political theory in those societies. Antipathy to the rise of individualism and the promotion of individual autonomy over group-membership is a significant part of the focus of this alternative response to moral pluralism. From its perspective, taken by the group whose ideas are usually collected together under the rubric 'communitarianism,' liberalism's advocacy of autonomy and individualism has been adopted by a wide cross-section of the community to be advocacy of selfish consumerist materialism and that all principles are matters of convenience to their believers. The result has been the fragmentation of co-operation, and the disintegration of harmony into a situation of conflict between groups, ideas, and beliefs.[7] The way forward, according to the communitarians, is the

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4 Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford, 1986. pp.133, 395-7, provides a detailed account of these parameters of moral pluralism.

5 This is the position Galston notes is taken by contemporary liberal theorists such as Rawls, Dworkin, Ackerman, and Larmore. (See William A. Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtue and Diversity in the Liberal State*. Cambridge, 1991. p.7.)

6 The position of liberal theorists on this point is not, however, unanimous. Nor does the concept of moral neutrality imply the eschewal of morality in political theory. Rather it is the reduction of the moral ground of political theory to a narrow field, whilst at the same time expanding the rational ground. For this argument see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Oxford, 1972, where the model of rights-based rather than goods-based political theory was articulated in a powerful form. Via this method, Rawls argues that the condition of moral neutrality is established. (Rawls' claim has been challenged frequently. For an interpretation of Rawls as promoting rather than excluding moral pluralism in his theory see Raz, *op.cit.*, pp.130-32.)

7 The communitarian position is recognized here as being as variegated as that of contemporary liberals. Their joint focus on the debilitating effects of individualism and the pursuit of the autonomy of the individual in a situation of maximum liberty upon the cohesion and harmony of the community *qua* community, however, may be found to be a part of all varieties of

development of a doctrine which recognizes the value-significance of locality, traditions, customs, and geographical, temporal, and ethnic considerations.[8] The

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communitarian criticism of contemporary liberalism. For a more detailed yet still concise understanding and appreciation of the liberals' position and that of their communitarian critics, see e.g. C. F. Delaney (ed.), *The Liberalism-Communitarianism Debate*. Lanham, Md., 1994, or Raymond Plant, *Modern Political Thought*. Oxford, 1991. Daniel Shapiro's article 'Liberalism and Communitarianism' in *Philosophical Books*, July 1995, pp.145-55, provides a concise account of the current state of the debate.

8 In the nineteen eighties there emerged an opposition to the Rawlsian right-based deontological liberalism which had displaced the older, good-oriented teleological variety. The main thrust of this opposition was the claim that Rawls and his followers were ignoring the important and irremovable elements of human existence which are bound up in the relation of the individual with the particular community in which he or she exists. The group of theorists most associated with the development of the early criticism of right-based liberalism are Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer, and Charles Taylor. Their criticism has been directed primarily toward four elements of contemporary liberalism. They oppose the liberal conception of a self divorced from ends, the insistence on the neutrality principle as the underpinning of justice as fairness, the relation of the individual to the community and the concept of liberal autonomy, and, perhaps unfairly but certainly to good polemical effect, the liberal anticipation of the universalisability of the core concepts and principles of their theory. These criticisms, with their emphasis on the inextricable relation of the individual with the community and context in which he or she is formed, came to be known as communitarian criticism, and their proponents 'communitarians'. What follows is a brief account of those criticisms. (It must be emphasised again that the purpose of this exercise is not to pretend to state communitarian criticisms in the detail necessary for a full understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. It is simply to locate the broad parameters of the debate in order to provide a context in which to locate the re-examination and claim for contemporary relevance of Mill's socio-political theory.)

The communitarian criticism of the liberal view of the self as independent of and prior to the ends which constitute the good and the 'good life' is a direct attack on the Rawlsian formulation of the foundation of justice as fairness. The original communitarian objection centred upon their counter-claim that the 'self' is constituted by and is inextricable from its ends. To attempt to separate self from ends is an artificial process and is both damaging to the fabric of society as a conceptual approach, and is, in any case, doomed to fail. The considerable force of these criticisms has driven contemporary liberal theorists to modify and revise their conceptualization of right-based theory to accommodate them. The modifications made by liberals had to retain the concept of the self as prior to ends, and this was achieved in two ways. It was possible, they argued, either to restrict right-based liberalism to the relatively narrow sphere of politics or to argue for the capacity only to step outside the relation between self and ends whenever necessary, and still retain the account of the self as independent of ends. This revised version of the existence of self, whilst an improvement on the original position *viz-a-viz* the connection of theory with existential behaviours, did not satisfy the communitarian critics. (It has already been noted that Rawls's modification to his original position is one of narrowing of focus. For the beginning of a compatibilist account see e.g. Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism*. Oxford, 1991, and Jack Crittenden, *Beyond Individualism: Reconstituting the Liberal Self*. Oxford, 1992.)

The focus of what Shapiro calls the 'second wave' of communitarian criticism was an attack on the modified liberal account of the self. This takes two forms: If the self responds to its environment in large areas of life in the way depicted by the contemporary liberal revisionists, then the primary element of liberalism - liberty of the individual to act regardless of the consequences providing they do not impinge upon others' similar liberty - is compromised. In such circumstances, autonomy can no longer be claimed as the primary value for the individual. Secondly, there is no evidence that the most significant element of the respect and

theories presented by those committed to the irremovable presence of such values in political theory attempt to reintroduce the intimacy of 'village' community life within the massive communities which comprise Western societies via, for example, the development of distinct but overlapping spheres of interest.[9]

The result is a polarization between those theorists who argue for a value-neutral political philosophy, centred upon the concept of justice as fairness, and who are self-described as 'political liberals' insofar as they do so within the parameters of liberalism; and their critics, the communitarians, who reject the political liberals' solution as destructive of the natural and organically evolved relations between human beings. Despite recent interesting attempts to reconcile the two poles, they remain at their core implacably opposed to one another.[10] The communitarians reject the

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value individuals place on others is always based on their making rational life choices. To admit this is to deny that the central claim of contemporary liberalism is universally recognized, and to acknowledge that it is, in fact, only one of a spectrum of possible claims. (See e.g. Margaret Moore, *Foundations of Liberalism*. Oxford, 1993; Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics*. Oxford, 1993.) This second wave criticism also expands and refines the original criticism made by the communitarians of the failure of contemporary liberalism to acknowledge the inextricability of the individual from the community he or she inhabits.

9 See e.g. Walzer, *op.cit.*

10 The outcome of the debate has been the shifting of position, particularly among the liberals, to accommodate what is perceived to be powerful criticism of original positions, without retreating from the core liberal view. The communitarian attack on contemporary liberalism's neutrality principle has been particularly effective. See e.g. the critiques presented in MacIntyre and Taylor. The response by some liberal thinkers has been to shift to what might be regarded as a more compatibilist ground. What is here referred to as compatibilism is a cluster of differing approaches to the problem of neutrality taken by a variety of liberal thinkers. As representative of these several positions see e.g. Crittenden, *op.cit*; Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*. Oxford, 1991; Galston, *op.cit*; Macedo, *op.cit*; Moon, *op.cit*; Raz, *op.cit;* and John Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical.' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14 (1985) pp.223-251. This possibly compatibilist ground is made up of a variety of views each of which sits at a varying distance from the strict neutrality requirement of the original position and embraces part of the communitarian criticism of that position. Some liberal thinkers simply acknowledge the force of the communitarian criticism and agree that neutrality in social and political organization is impossible. (See e.g. Galston, Macedo, and Moon, for arguments that the neutrality principle is an impossible condition to achieve.)
Those commentators who concentrate primarily on the political arena admit the existence of certain traditional conceptions of what it is to be a citizen in a democratic polity as powerful shapers of the notions individuals hold regarding co-operation and justice. These notions are, however, limited to the political sphere, and do not necessarily apply in a more comprehensive account of human existence. In the larger world, modes of thought and behaviour conflict and in order to obtain co-existence, if not compatibility, between them, some neutrality principle is necessary as the ground of justice as fairness. For the political organization of society there remains, for this variety of compatibilism, the requirement of a neutrality principle. (Rawls developed this position in response to communitarian criticism, and it is the foundation of what is now termed 'political liberalism'. See e.g. John Rawls, *op.cit.*, pp.223-251; see also Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity*. Cambridge, 1987.)

liberals' conception of individualism and autonomy as the heart of political philosophy, whilst the liberals cannot accept the communitarians' subsumption of the individual agent into the larger life of the community.

Within this debate, Mill's socio-political theories are categorized as Aristotelian. In other words, they demonstrate the classic Aristotelian tripartite form of first, an account of human nature and its *telos*; second, an ethical doctrine which relates to that ground, and which is presented in the form of a universally applicable code of moral values and judgments that identifies 'good' and 'the good life' in terms of what is demonstrated to be the purpose of human existence; and third, a socio-political theory whereby the end of existence for human beings is achieved via the implementation of rules, processes, and institutions which comprise his political system. It matters little to contemporary theorists, except at an historical level, whether or not Mill's tripartite account is defensible. The criticism of the past concerning the cohesion and coherence of his thought is irrelevant in the face of existential moral pluralism. Aristotelian virtue politics - that is accounts of a common human nature, and the production of a universally applicable code of moral values and judgments, with which to form the ground of political doctrine - are unable to withstand the empirical fact of moral pluralism. If it is the case that it is possible to discover defensible moral codes which are recognized as such and yet are mutually incompatible, Mill's version of virtue politics is redundant.[11]

A broader view of liberalism, which argues from a different approach - that of the value of the spectrum of liberal principles to the development of both individual and society - sees neutrality as the key element in the political organization of society. They acknowledge that only with some sort of neutrality principle in place can the competing interests of groups within the society be fairly adjudicated. They go further, however, and argue that the same neutrality principle is valuable as a means of promoting the existence and spread of *all* liberal principles via political processes and institutions to all areas of the community.(For a version of this view, see Kymlicka, *op.cit.*)

Some liberals acknowledge that neutrality, even if it were possible at either a broad or narrowly political level, would not be beneficial to either individual or community. If a way of life is demonstrated to be valuable, so goes this argument, then it must be recognized as such by the community as well as by the state. In such circumstances, the state is required to legislate to promote and protect this collective value. Furthermore, such valuable ways of life are intimately connected with temporal and physical location, and with the culture and tradition of the peoples in which they have arisen It was the mistake of the early *laissez-faire* liberals to believe that minimalist government and free competition would so protect and enhance valuable ways of life. (Joseph Raz, for example, takes this view.)

The link between existential behaviours of human beings and the construction of political theory has also been invoked in the debate concerning the possibility, and the value, of the neutrality principle. This link has been employed to support the compatibilism of the broad approach to contemporary liberal theory (as opposed to the narrowly political approach now employed by Rawls). This approach is demonstrated in Crittenden, *op.cit.*

11 This characterization of virtue politics, and subsequently the denial of their relevance to contemporary political debate is depicted eloquently in Moon, *op.cit.*, pp.13-15, 26-33.

§I.ii The relocation of Mill in the contemporary debate. Mill's relocation in the contemporary debate is at the point of understanding the nature of moral pluralism and its relation to the concept of an absolute morality. Hanging over the contemporary debate is the spectre of relativism, and it is Mill's subsumption of relativist moralities into a universalistic, absolute morality that is the pivotal theme of the thesis. To focus the thesis project an examination of the epistemological ground of moral pluralism sets the scene.

The kinds of objectivity claims characteristic of traditional philosophy are perceived by contemporary theorists to have failed. Instead, they argue for the existence of a plurality of moral positions. This amounts to a denial of any absolute morality, and substitution of the claim that there can be no communication between communities at the level of morality insofar as each has its own equally valid and defensible account of what it is to act morally and that they do not in any significant way overlap.[12] There is in this position a tension between acceptance of existential moral pluralism and the unacceptability of the consequence of this - the relativization of truth claims. Some contemporary theorists embrace the concept of relativism, in Crittenden's case with the *caveat* that this acceptance does not imply an equality of value between relative moral stances on particular or general issues, but the majority are uneasy with the label.[13] Instead they have pursued a search for a middle path.

One seemingly effective way to escape the dilemma of relativism is to deny its existence. This is accomplished by denying the existence of transcendental truths including those of morality. The process involves first locating individual propositions and judgments as existing purely within discursive communities. Within the parameters of the community, rationality, truth and validity are then noted to be inextricably linked to the constitutive elements which comprise that particular community, and which distinguish it from all others.[14] In such situations, there is no way to extract a proposition and its evaluation and judgment from the language, culture, institutions and practices of the particular community in which it occurs, and

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12 This is the position taken e.g. by Rorty, MacIntyre, Walzer and David Wong. See Galston, *op.cit.*, p.22.

13 Crittenden, *op.cit.*, p.164.

14 The parameters are those which comprise the culture, traditions, beliefs, customs and mores of the community. And in this depiction, 'community' may be interpreted to mean sub-cultures, social or professional organizations, clubs, associations and the like. Knowledge of the context in which a proposition has operative force is essential for effective evaluation and judgment of that proposition.

to assess it against any external benchmark. There is, according to this argument, no neutral or universal perspective from which transcendental judgments can be made. Both observers and the observed are conditioned and restricted by unbreakable contextual bonds.[15]

William Galston notes the force of this denial of relativism when he writes that 'for those who can go beyond the metaphysical impulse, Rorty's position, "there is no such thing as the 'relativist predicament,' just as for someone who thinks that there is no God there will be no such thing as blasphemy."' neatly encapsulates the middle path of acceptance of moral pluralism. MacIntyre defends a similar position in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, as do other significant figures in the contemporary debate.[16] This is presently the most influential position in the endeavour to justify moral pluralism whilst escaping the taint of relativism.

There is an alternative view of moral pluralism, which retains the notion of absolute morality and at the same time recognizes moral relativisms, and it is represented by Jeffrey Stout's argument. There are, Stout notes, similarities between many moral judgments across many different types of communities. They cluster together around nodal points of 'good' and 'evil,' yet are distinct in their precise evaluation of acts.[17] These nodal points are, it would appear, derived from some universally recognized and understood code of value and judgment, and are simply interpreted in different ways due to the contextual differences in the location and culture of the interpreters.[18] Stout's analysis of this phenomenon contains an account both of relativist moralities and of a universal and absolute morality. The manner in which he argues that these integrate points toward the way in which Mill understood their existence, their origin, and their relation.

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15 This is the representative position of moral pluralists, expressed by Richard Rorty in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Cambridge, 1989, and paraphrased in Galston, *op.cit.* p.22.

16 Galston, *op.cit.*, pp.23-24; Rorty, *op.cit.*, p.50; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame, Ind., 1988 pp.1-12

17 Stout, *op.cit.*, p.90

18 Stout makes an interesting point which illuminates Rorty's position. Those who recognize moral disagreement as being a fundamental problem of contemporary political theory are acknowledging implicitly that there is some deeper level of understanding where agreement is possible. 'Talk of moral disagreement only makes sense,' he argues, 'if there is some truth of the matter in ethics to disagree over. (See Stout, *op.cit.*, p.24.) If this is the case, and logically it would seem to be so, then Rorty's view commits him to denying also the possibility of moral disagreement. 'Truth of the matter,' in Stout's view, is more than the mere warranted assertibility within an epistemic context.(Stout, *op.cit.*, p.27.) It is rather the scientific regulative ideal, or a version of the Kantian *ding-an-sich*. More is said on this point below.

There are different things meant by moral relativity, Stout notes. Of these the most significant are the justification of moral beliefs relative to epistemic context; the interpretation of moral sentences relative to the language used; and the implicit qualifying conditions applicable to the justifying agent. Analysis of each of these conditions of relativity is important in any understanding of moral evaluation and judgments which occur in a context foreign to the observer.[19] These, however, are weak forms of relativism in ethics and morals. On the other hand, to deny the absolute truth of some moral statements, regardless of epistemic, language, or other qualifying conditions, would be to claim a strong moral relativism which cannot be justified. The proposition that slavery is evil, according to Stout, is an absolute moral judgment, and to argue that it is not is to argue for a strong relativism.[20]

Before noting Stout's defense of absolute morality, something more must be said concerning epistemic context and implicit qualifying conditions as varieties of weak relativism. Epistemic context may also be referred to as 'environmental relativity' and the relativity of implicit qualifying conditions is the equivalent of the circumstances and upbringing of particular agents.[21] One of the central strands of Mill's holistic and naturalist philosophy developed below embraces these two types of relativity in a way that chimes with the perspective presented by Stout.

Stout's pivotal move whereby he can reconcile the weak forms of moral relativity noted above and the existence of an absolute morality is to discern the distinction between moral justification and moral truth. The first step taken by Stout is to define moral truth in a manner similar to that used to define scientific truth. In this sense, truth is something that may be beyond present understanding. This is the view of philosophers who subscribe to the notion of moral truth as a regulative ideal which can only be realized in a unified and completed account of morality far in advance of any partial belief systems of any human community that actually exists.[22] (The alternative understanding which is used by other moral pluralists presents an account of truth as also being relative. They argue that there are true moral statements and good moral arguments, and even moral facts, but only *within* moralities. This is because moral statements, they claim, when properly analyzed are found to contain irremovable

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19 Stout, *op.cit.*, p.82.

20 *Loc cit.* See also Chris Swoyer, 'True For.' in M Krausz and J.W. Meiland (eds.) *Relativism: Cognitive and Moral*. Notre Dame, Ind., 1982 pp.91-92.

21 Stout, *op.cit.*, pp.85-86, 88-89, 91.

22 *Ibid.*, p.22.

reference to a system of rules adequate with respect to a particular group's ideal of morality. Stout rejects this argument as fatally flawed.[23])

Stout's argument continues with the claim that while it is possible to hold false beliefs, they are overturned with the discovery of new evidence. However, until such time as new evidence emerges it is worthwhile that the belief is considered true. To behave in this way is simply to acknowledge epistemic relativism. By translating such conditions to the moral sphere Stout develops a compatibilist position between absolute and relative morality. Disagreement over moral truth-value in this environment either within or between societies is, he argues, a matter of the relativism of implicit qualifying conditions or epistemic relativism. Such disagreement is not evidence for the non-existence of absolute moral truth.

The process of construction of a morality which charts a middle-path between absolutism and relativism is, then, to accept that there exists a moral truth, albeit as yet unverified, and to continue testing epistemically-conditioned moral beliefs through questioning. This is the point at which justification grounded in presently available and warranted beliefs is recognized as the most useful tool available with which to make judgments and choices, in moral matters as in all other matters. 'When we test our beliefs for truth or rational acceptability,' Stout concludes, 'we appeal not to the thing-in-itself - to which, by definition, we could never have access - but rather to further beliefs not currently in question.' The impossibility of taking a God's-eye view of moral issues is acknowledged and the way forward is to 'search your available resources for all relevant considerations and deliberate wisely.' This is justification of moral belief grounded in available evidence, with the implicit understanding that it is only an approximation of what is absolute truth.[24]

Stout's depiction of the ongoing search for truth in morality means that the relativity of justification is available to the absolutist. This would embrace epistemic relativity and the relativity of implicit conditions. The absolute moral truth may not be known, but it nonetheless exists. In that case, 'an absolutist who avoids conflating the relativity of justification with relativity of truth' Stout concluded, 'can go a long way to explaining protracted moral disagreement by saying that whereas moral truth is one, people who are raised in different ways, trained in the use of different vocabularies, exposed to different models of excellence, immersed in different traditions, and familiar with

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23 *Ibid.*, p.91.

24 *Ibid.*, pp.22-23.

different evidence relevant to the determination of moral truth are likely to be justified in accepting somewhat different moral beliefs.'[25] This pattern of approach would allow fruitful examination and evaluation of moral diversity across cultures, historical periods and social classes.

The two positions occupied, to a greater or lesser degree, by contemporary theorists are now becoming clearer. The pessimistic view is that value and belief systems are relative to their historical and existential circumstances, and is epitomized by MacIntyre, when he argues that we are 'condemned' to life in a world of relative values, ends, and beliefs. The opposite and optimistic view based on the same evidence is that expressed by Crittenden whose view on relativism chimes with that of Stout in its claim that it 'does not trap liberals in solipsism and emotivism. Rather it reinforces those liberal values of tolerance and use of reason.'[26]

The key to unraveling the disagreements between different varieties of moral pluralism is, according to this interpretation, first to discover that in each which is sound and verifiable, and then to use that as the ground on which to seek reconciliation. If no such ground exists, the problem may lie elsewhere in the epistemic context of the different societies or the relative variables in the circumstances of the individuals who are in disagreement. The moral relativism or pluralism in the latter case may simply be the result of arguing from totally different premises.

This thesis argues that Mill's socio-political theory, which is undoubtedly a comprehensive virtue politics and falls within the bracket of what Moon terms the 'standard form' of political theory,[27] is able to embrace the existence of what is presently depicted as moral pluralism and to reconcile it with a universalist virtue teleology. Mill's methodology, it will be seen below, recognized that his culturally and environmentally transcendent principle of moral motivation and action rests on an absolute moral truth in the sense depicted by Stout. In Stoutian terms, the absolute truth that happiness is the sole good was acknowledged by Mill to be without definitive proof. Nonetheless, Mill asserted that it is the case, and then, using that assertion as his unproven first principle, began to construct an holistic naturalist philosophy upon it.

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25 *Ibid.*, p.94.

26 Crittenden, *op.cit.*, p.163.

27 Moon, *op.cit.*, p.13.

Abstract and absolute happiness is Mill's regulative ideal and his ultimate principle of action is the normative expression of the universal human striving for happiness, but the possibility of achieving a life of pure happiness was accepted by him as beyond the reach of individual agents or communities (at least in the social circumstances and environment prevailing then and now). Because Mill recognized this to be the case, he was always prepared to modify and improve his theory and praxis whereby the individual and community achievement of happiness is maximized in response to forthcoming new evidence. Rather than develop a closed ethical doctrine and a radical program of action for its installation, Mill focused instead on incremental means with which to increase the amount of happiness for all individuals and communities in any of the multiplicity of environments and contexts in which they live.

Mill's search for common ground on which to analyze the claims of competing moralities yielded the enlarged principle of utility. His defense of this ground, via the presentation of empirically verifiable evidence, is the first step in his construction of a political philosophy. The second is to describe the broad ethical doctrine which rests upon that ground, and is applicable to all agents in all societies over time and space. Finally, he noted the existence of the relation between the plurality of existing moralities and the unifying morality contained in the enlarged principle of utility. The combination of these three levels of analysis was then employed by him in the construction of a normative ethical doctrine and a program of social and political action with which to bring about the end of the principle of utility - the greatest possible happiness for each individual and for the community.

Mill could not, from his perspective in the Age of Progress, anticipate the fragmented and depressed state of moral philosophy at the end of the twentieth century. Nor could he have anticipated the dominance of the belief in moral pluralism which now sits astride the development of political theory. His work contains, however, a prescient response to the contemporary problems which are recognized as retarding its development. It contains a blueprint for commensurability and compatibility between what are now considered implacably antagonistic positions. It is also remarkable in its advocacy of what are now considered to be possible courses of action whereby such antagonisms might be overcome. Accordingly, the thesis will argue that a relocation of Mill within the contemporary debate will prove fruitful. It will be so as a means of restating the central problem facing the development of political theory in a way that dissolves some of the force of that problem and suggests an alternative approach which accommodates the claims of both political liberals and communitarians concerning the

nature of relations between individuals in society in a defensible compatibilist framework.

§I.iii. The framework of criticisms and conditions the thesis interpretation of Mill is required to satisfy. In order to demonstrate Mill's potential to act as a catalyst for the untangling of the present gridlock in political thought, his theory as presented here must develop a form of virtue politics able to withstand the criticism of those theorists who deny the possibility of such an endeavour in the face of moral pluralism. Equally importantly if it is to act as a conciliatory theory, it must at the same time acknowledge and accommodate the necessary conditions which underpin both the political liberal and the communitarian positions, and which are the defining core of their antagonism. What are these criticisms and conditions?

The two major criticisms that must be addressed in the thesis argument are directed at Mill's understanding of human nature and its *telos*, and the development of a universally applicable ethical doctrine from that understanding. The rejection of virtue politics by the political liberals is on the following grounds: virtue politics is only possible a] if there is a universally applicable account of human nature; and b] if there is a universally applicable account of what it is to be morally good. According to political liberalism, it is not possible to provide a convincing account in either sphere. Political liberals deny the existence of a common human nature, and proceed on the assumption that there exists a range of natures underlying the spectrum of moral value and judgment positions. If Mill's theory in the formulation presented here is to be successful in its endeavour, it must demonstrate convincingly that the political liberals are misguided in their beliefs in this area. To disarm the political liberals' objections requires that the thesis interpretation of Mill demonstrates that there is an account of human nature that embraces *all* human beings, and that there is an understanding of what is morally good that is applicable to *all* agents in *all* circumstances and conditions.

Communitarians do not deny the existence of a core universal human nature. It is not, however, a major factor in their understanding of the human relations which comprise societies. For them, the environment, circumstances, and context in which societies develop is of greater significance. It is this variety of cultural and contextual differences which underpins the variety of moral positions, and as such confirms the validity of each of those positions. Communitarians regard the circumstances and environment in which human beings are raised and in which they continue to exist as being of paramount importance to their survival and flourishing.

The communitarians' dismissal of human nature as of less significance than environment, circumstances, and context in the sphere of socio-political theory must also be addressed by the thesis argument. Mill's theory must be shown to demonstrate that while these conditions are of great importance in the development of such theory, they are, in fact, subservient to the greater importance of the universal human nature he used as the ground of his holistic theory. (The communitarians' acknowledgment of the pervasive and inescapable moral pluralism, which is the spur for their development of hierarchical levels or overlapping spheres of community within the larger sphere of mass society, is similar enough in its presentation to be addressed simultaneously with that of the political liberals.)

The political liberals and the communitarians also have basic positions which are logically extricable from the belief in the existence of moral pluralism.[28] These are the beliefs which separate them in terms of their understanding of the relation of the individual to the particular community of which he or she is a member. The liberals assert the primacy of individualism, autonomy, and liberty; the communitarians assert the primacy of the group and a significant subordination of individual interests to that of group cohesion. Both positions are compatible with moral pluralism, but both also are compatible with universal moral values and judgments. It is as much a matter of stipulation of the preferential condition of human beings in society as it is a matter of the problem of moral pluralism that underlies the antagonism between the political liberal and the communitarian positions. If this interpretation of Mill's political theory is to act as a bridge between these positions, it must demonstrate convincingly that they are in some important way compatible, and are so in a way unconnected with moral pluralism. It must show that the individualism, autonomy, and liberty which lies at the core of political liberalism is able to co-exist, without loss of integrity, with the communitarians' understanding of the priority of the group.

A synthesis of the criticisms that must be addressed satisfactorily and the theoretical differences that must be reconciled if the thesis argument that Mill's socio-political theory should be re-located in the contemporary debate is to be sustained, produces the following demands on the reinterpretation of Mill's holistic theory: a] It must present an account of human nature that is universal. The account must be able to withstand the criticism of political liberals, and it must be able to convince

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28 This is not to deny the logical problem which arises when individual morality, in the sense understood by Fishkin and others, is argued to be opposed to general obligation. (See James S. Fishkin, *The Limits of Obligation*. New Haven, 1982 pp.153, 170-71.)

communitarians that it is as significant (if not more so) to human interaction as are environment, context, and circumstances of time and place. b] It must demonstrate that there is a universally applicable set of moral values and judgments that overrides *or* underpins the moral pluralism which is regarded as the bedrock on which the spectrum of group positions rests. c] It must demonstrate the importance of historical factors in the realization of socio-political theory. d] And finally it must acknowledge the significance, if not the primacy, of the liberals' claim for individualism and the communitarians' claim for collectivism in a way that presents a reconciliation of the two polarities which can satisfy the claims of both parties.

§I.iv. The context and content of contemporary theoretical debate. Mill's possible response to the variety of extant theoretical positions. The primary problem confronting contemporary political philosophy has been identified as how to develop socio-political theory applicable to mass society in the face of irremovable and irreconcilable differences of beliefs concerning right action, good, and the good life. The responses of the various groups to this problem, and their justification for holding those positions, are the context in which the thesis argument is developed. What follows is an overview of that context to note the number of points at which it is engaged by the present interpretation of Mill's theory.

Two purposes are served in this way first, the criticisms and differences between the communitarians and political liberals which form the broad outline of the conditions Mill's theory must satisfy if it is to be fruitful is expanded. The detail of those criticisms and differences is fleshed out. Secondly, the pattern of Mill's virtue politics is linked to the contemporary debate in a way which signals those points at which his theory rejects the currently accepted view, while presenting an alternative which overcomes the problems that lie at the heart of that view. These are the points at which the thesis argument must be able to demonstrate its validity if the thesis claim is to be sustained. Once these are isolated, the depiction of the methodology and pattern of presentation of Mill's holistic theory will be seen to address them.

The communitarians'[29] variety of responses have in common a deep pessimism concerning the possibility of constructing any theory of political purpose and

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29 Both contemporary liberalism and communitarianism are recognised to be broad church theories, with each embracing individual theorists who are in some degree at odds with one another on significant issues. What follows is a depiction of the key areas in which each side may be said to hold a commonly accepted view of the wider understanding of the conflict, whilst disagreement concerning details and relations between the issues is acknowledged. It does not pretend to sophistication nor adequately to reflect the nuances of the debate. It does

organization adequate to comprehend and embrace the moral, cultural, ethnic, geographical, and economic pluralism that characterizes contemporary societies. They[30] take the opposite approach to the political liberals, and rather than eschew moral pluralism in order to achieve a political theory capable of application in a specified range of different societies, they argue for a return to the past in that they promote a return to a pattern of small, self-contained and self-governing Rousseauian communities within the larger society.[31] In this way, the present moral pluralism will be accommodated and agents will have the choice of which community with which set of moral values to join. The communitarians have recognized the significance of contingent circumstances and intervening variables in the development of local communities and of the sets of moral values and judgments such communities espouse.

Furthermore, communitarians reject both the endeavour to discover a unifying moral code on the grounds that centuries of evidence of the attempts to do so are available to demonstrate that it has not been successful, and the project of eschewal of morality by means of striving for morally-neutral grounds for development of political theory as being self-evidently impossible. Rather than pursue these chimera, they argue, it is now time to formulate an alternative approach, and this they believe should be via a reinvigoration of the spirit of community.

Liberal theorists' acknowledgment of moral pluralism as the central problem confronting political theory is similarly an acknowledgment of the failure of virtue politics, including utilitarian liberalism, to address it. To replace it, they have developed a variety of liberalism which differs from its predecessor primarily in holding that right is prior to good in the construction of political theory. This development of what is fundamentally a deontological variety of liberalism came about as a means of shucking off the perceived problems of teleological utilitarianism by reworking the concept of the individual in society. The original position of contemporary liberalism understood the concept of the individual as operating with a highly-developed capacity to reflect

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not do so because the thesis claims and argument cut across rather than contribute to the bulk of this intellectual antagonism, and as such do not engage directly with any particular theorists' position on these issues.

30 'They' is used here, and in the generalization concerning political liberals, with recognition that the groups signified are not homogeneous. There is a spectrum of communitarian thought, just as there is significant difference between political liberals in terms of their detailed theories and doctrines.

31 Political liberals recognize also that it is unlikely that their understanding of the best way to organize politics as a means to just and equitable conflict resolution will be acceptable to all existing societies or that all existing societies are capable of employing their framework of organization. To this end, Rawls has restricted the applicability of the present version of his theory to advanced Western societies.

and evaluate on his or her ends, over and above any naturalistic connection with them. This conception of agents as capable of psychophysiologically-neutral reason coupled with the abandonment of the utilitarian focus on the natural striving for good as happiness as the ground of political theory in favor of the claim that what is right has priority in a world of scarce resources is considered to be the major advancement in political philosophy in the late twentieth century.[32]

Speaking broadly, the political liberals appear to want to sequester the problem of moral pluralism and to promote political theory as the development of means only. They do so in a way that exposes their reliance on certain assumptions concerning the nature of human beings. This has affected both their justification for proposing a *cordon sanitaire* around considerations of moral value and their construction of a new 'political' liberalism.[33] Political liberalism rests squarely on the separation of the rational processes of human beings from the remainder of their psychophysiological construction. Agents are understood as able, at least in the sphere of political action which incorporates the search for justice as fairness, to operate rationally, mutually disinterestedly, and with the aim of achieving a 'maximin' result in their deliberations whereby they are marginally better or worse off only. Within this sphere of operation, particular and localized moral values and judgments are set aside and reason alone is able to achieve a fair and just outcome.

The two major elements of contemporary liberalism are indissolubly linked. Central to the abstract conception of right prior to good is the perception of individuals as able to operate, at least in the political sphere, as purely rational beings. Whilst acknowledging self-interest to be the primary psychophysiological motivating force, right-based theory nonetheless argues that, in certain conditions, individuals are capable of mutual disinterest. Contemporary liberalism's articulation of mutual

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32 The seminal text for this change of focus is accepted as that of Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. Since the statement of his original position, he has made some modification which centres upon a separation of the political sphere from that of the non-political. This new position is presented in his work, *Political Liberalism*, [New York, 1993]. The result of this modification is to blur the distinction between the rational self which should prefer right to good, and the natural self which prefers good above all else. A more fruitful alternative to the new Rawlsian position is taken by commentators who argue that it is consistent with liberalism to withdraw from a comprehensive account of ends, and to claim only that the theory requires that we are able to isolate and reflect on particular ends. By taking this last position, contemporary liberal theory is brought closer to existential behaviour and achieves a higher degree of realizability. Representatives of this position include Kymlicka, Macedo, and Crittenden.

33 This takes them outside the definition of ideology, as understood by Eatwell and Wright. (See Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright, *Contemporary Political Ideologies*. London, 1993 pp.7-8.)

disinterest acknowledges the force of each individual's self-interest as a primary motivation to action in known circumstances, and thus retains the link to classical utilitarian atomism. It argues, however, that the condition of ignorance concerning the reasoner's eventual position in the political society has the result that each particular rational agent operates within the political sphere in a way that will produce the right distribution of goods. The condition of ignorance combined with the motivation of self-interest results in mutual disinterest. Agents choose the most favorable condition for all concerned from self-interested reasons only, and the result is a fairness of resource allocation unobtainable in any other way.[34] Taken together, the priority of right over good and mutually disinterested reasoning to reach a fair distribution of scarce resources form the core of contemporary contractarian liberalism.[35]

The neutrality principle which lies at the heart of the construction of political theory by contemporary liberalism in its original form is, then, a necessary requirement of the original claim for the priority of right over good. Whatever principles of justice or methods of reaching decisions concerning the distribution of scarce resources are developed and used, the requirement of neutrality is that they do not rest upon *any* account of good or 'the good life' imported from the non-rational or non-political spheres.[36] It is a rejection of any teleological approach to the political organization of

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34 The imagined conditions in which this reasoning takes place, the 'veil of ignorance' and the 'original condition', is the theoretical requirement for such a just allocation. The rationally determined process of distribution is the 'maximin' theory of allocation of resources and goods.

35 This is the core of Rawls' theory as presented in *A Theory of Justice*. With his separation of political liberalism from social liberalism, the contract is now operative only in the political sphere. See also John Rawls 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical.' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (14) 1985 pp.223-251.

36 Opponents of contemporary liberalism often conflate it with its classical predecessor as regarding its dicta as universalizable. Communitarian critics of contemporary liberalism regard it as holding that certain fundamental liberal principles are applicable across time and space. There is, according to this view of liberal theory, a set of immutable rules and precepts that can be applied successfully to any and every community to bring about the condition of individual autonomy within a just and fair socio-political organization. Political liberals explicitly reject the concept of universality of liberalisms' tenets in all contexts and circumstances. However, the universalism of a single principle of contemporary liberalism - that of the capacity of the individual agent to make rational life choices within the political sphere of action, unencumbered by psychophysiological or contextual baggage - remains important to the development of that theory. Without it the power of the right-based theory is considerably diminished, as the existence of an ineradicable ends-connection is admitted. It is important for contemporary liberalism that the extent of universality of this principle is determined.
If it is held to apply across the broad front of an individual's existence, then it becomes vulnerable to the communitarians' criticisms. If, on the other hand, it is held to operate only in the narrower sphere of public political action, it appears to be in tension with the remaining areas of the individual's life. Either way, there is a tension within the principle which will be explored further below.
Mill's position on universalizability of the core concepts of his enlarged principle of utility, as

society, and a denial that such programs of perfectionism have any value in that sphere. Once the admission of an account of good and a method of its achievement is made, the neutrality principle is violated, and the possibility of the discovery of right action is compromised.

On first consideration, Mill's holistic theory is irreconcilable with the positions taken by both political liberals and communitarians. Mill's theory rejects the possibility of value-neutral concepts of rights; it rejects as sterile the concept of deontological liberalism; and it rejects the concept of psychophysiologically-neutral reasoning. More importantly, it also rejects the belief that moral pluralism is the ineradicable *modus operandi* of complex, Western societies. Additionally, Mill was committed to the view that neutrality is impossible. In this he is in the same camp as the communitarians, the revisionist liberals, and also those liberals who wish neutrality were possible, but reluctantly admit its non-existence. The position taken by Mill, and which is developed at great length in his holistic theory, is that there is a universal human nature, and also that there is a crucial purposive element built into that nature. From the combination of human nature and its purpose, Mill derived a broad ethical doctrine part of which is a universal moral code of values and judgments. Because the connection between human nature and its purpose is the origin of morality, and because reason is posterior to the desires which lead to the attainment of purpose, Mill regarded good as prior to right.

Further examination of his work, however, reveals that Mill was aware of the existence of what is now termed moral pluralism. He understood it to be an ancient rather than a modern phenomenon, and termed it 'customary morality.' The difference between his response to moral pluralism and that of many contemporary commentators is that he did not abandon his belief in a universal moral code in the face of evidence of a variety of apparently distinct and irreconcilable customary moralities. His examination of the relation of the plurality of moral codes, extant both in his time and in history, to his account of human nature and its *telos*, together with his location of those codes in the context and circumstances of their time, provides the means whereby a bridge might be erected between the opposing views of today's theorists. Each complete or partial

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it is presented below, recognizes the significance of environment, context, circumstances, and the intervening variables unpredictable in the development of societies. The desirability of universalizing the enlarged principle of utility is tempered with acknowledgment that existential conditions will always limit the extent to which this can occur. Recognition of this boundary was the spur for Mill's development of a socio-political theory which had as its purpose the alteration of existential conditions in order to facilitate an ever-increasing progress toward universal practise of the core tenets of enlarged utilitarianism.

customary morality, according to Mill, originates as an attempt to facilitate the achievement of the purpose of existence for human beings. As such, it builds upon the universal moral code and expresses it at a second level.

With the passing of time and the changing of circumstances and context, however, the customary moralities also mutate. That some do so in ways that continue to be beneficial to human beings is recognized by Mill. That some do not, and in fact may become counterproductive to that end, is also acknowledged. That human beings are likely to believe in and operate from a belief in opposing customary moralities was, for Mill, an expected occurrence. The way in which Mill understood, acknowledged to be ambivalent in their contribution toward achieving the good life, and incorporated customary moralities, both beneficial and counterproductive, into the development of his socio-political theory provides the groundwork for a shift in the perception that moral pluralism is the irreducible condition of modern societies.

The way in which Mill's holistic theory may contribute fruitfully to a reconciliation between the opposing sides in contemporary debate through a repositioning of their joint responses to moral pluralism has been adumbrated. Even were this problem to be resolved, however, there remains the problem of opposing conceptions of the place and role of the individual within the group. Mill's theory also provides a means whereby the liberal and the communitarian views may be seen to meld.

The traditional liberal value which chimes with the pairing of self-interest and mutual disinterest is autonomy. This has the requirement of maximized liberty of action for the individual within the boundaries of the group. The existence of liberal autonomy depends on the existence within the group of a cluster of institutions and practices: concentration of physical force in the state, impartiality of the law, participation in government, toleration, and acceptance by institutions and organizations wielding power of the right to free association, speech, travel, and self-affecting actions. This cluster continues to act as the set of necessary political 'rights' in contemporary as it did in traditional liberal accounts of political organization. It is not possible to pursue the desires of self-interest nor to exercise the reason underpinning mutual disinterest without the existence of these necessary conditions. Autonomy of the atomistic individual within the social framework is, then, a fundamental principle of contemporary liberalism as it was of classical liberalism.[37]

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37 This is not, of course, the universally accepted view of autonomy by liberal theorists and commentators. For an alternative understanding of autonomy which locates it as a part of, rather than distinct from, the organization of society, see e.g. Raz and Kymlicka.

In opposition to this view is that of the communitarians, who argue, with varying degrees of emphasis, the case that the individual is bound to the community of which he or she is a part. Individuals gain identity only in community, approbation and self-esteem are achieved only as a member of a group. Without the group, the individual is metaphorically a Robinson Crusoe figure, isolated, alone, and existing in a non-moral world. The community is not prior to, but the means whereby, the agent is confirmed in his or her existence, and, as such, requires the collaboration of agents in its maintenance and flourishing.

Mill accepted as central to his enlarged utilitarianism the principle of individual autonomy. He did not understand it in the presently popular interpretation, however. Rather, the liberty of the individual was necessary in order to achieve self-realization - a state of being identical to the achievement of the greatest possible happiness, and only attained through experience - and self-realization entails the performance of other-directed actions, and so of contributing to the flourishing of the community. Mill's liberalism is considerably removed from the atomistic depiction of agents as mutually disinterested, just as it was from Bentham's individualism. Rather than promote the defensive, selfish acquisitiveness which characterizes much of the popular understanding of individualism (and which is the target of much communitarian criticism[38]), Mill's individual achieved individuality both by exercise of faculties in the private sphere *and* by contributing to the increase in the quality of life of the community. For Mill, public- and other-directed actions were as vital a part of the process of self-realization and the achievement of individuality as were the self-interested and private pursuits of the agent. The potential for reconciliation of the liberal and the communitarian view is present in Mill's holistic theory, and may be drawn out in a way that suggests a bridge between the two positions which sacrifices neither to the claims of the other.

§I.v. Mill's methodology and the methodology of the thesis. The thesis methodology chimes with that of Mill, on the grounds that the best way to interpret the web of ideas of a single thinker is to retrace those ideas using that thinker's pattern of approach. It has long been recognized that Mill was an outstandingly broad thinker, whose work contains complex arguments on issues central to what are now frequently considered to be self-contained sub-disciplines within the spectrum of philosophical

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38 For a communitarian's critique of this understanding of liberalism, see Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda*. New York, 1993.

studies.[39] The recently completed, and authoritative, *Collected Edition of the Works of John Stuart Mill* comprises thirty-three substantial volumes.[40] With a writing career of almost half a century and admitted expertise in a considerable number of areas, it is unsurprising to discover that by far the largest proportion of the analytical work done on Mill's thought has confined itself to one, or perhaps two, areas of his thought.

Mill's methodology across the spectrum of his interests and writing has also been recognized as consistent. Briefly stated, it was first to distill from all sides of an argument those elements which he regarded as being demonstrated as true, and then to use them in the construction of his own position. The result is, in most cases, recognizable as a synthesis of opposing arguments with the addition of Mill's original thought.[41] The second aspect of Mill's method which is significant to the present thesis methodology is that whilst he refined and added to his arguments in support of his intellectual positions throughout the period of his working life, he did not abandon any demonstrably true claim in order to do so. Conflict between these claims, when it did occur, was acknowledged and incorporated into his revised position in the form of an admittedly speculative compromise, until either evidence emerged to overturn one or other of the conflicting claims or to justify the compromise. Finally, and understandably given the period over which the arguments were developed and the complexity of their ground, it happened that in many instances the revisions were not always collected together as a formal expression of a particular position. This means

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39 Mill has also been examined extensively and with admiration for his work in the fields of economics, history, and aesthetics. In his own time, he was regarded as an authority in botany (which he saw as a hobby). His commentary on contemporary European, particularly French, politics, was read with interest by the leading foreign policy specialists of his time. During the most fertile period of his creativity, he was also actively involved in significant political events and movements of his time, and at the same time was employed as an analyst and policy advisor to the British East India Company.

40 *The Collected Edition of the Works of John Stuart Mill.* Vols. I-XXXIII. Edited by John M. Robson. Toronto, 1969-1991, has been used extensively throughout the writing of this thesis. It has been the single most valuable resource available to me, and I would like to take this opportunity of expressing my admiration and awe of Professor Robson and the band of scholars who have made the totality of Mill's work accessible to students of his thought who would otherwise be unaware of the complexity of that thought. Hereafter the references to this collection will be indicated by *"Works"*.

41 Mill's syncretic methodology is not without its critics. They argue that the resulting theory is loosely constructed and has no easily observable paramenters, and admits of too many incompatible ideas. It is very difficult to state with precision Mill's position on any major philosophical topic: see e.g R.P.Anschutz, *The Philosophy of J.S.Mill.* Oxford, 1953 p.5; John Plamenatz, *The English Utilitarians* Oxford, 1949 p.122. It has, however, a similar number of supporters, whose position is most succinctly stated by George Sabine, who wrote that it is 'the qualifications and not the theory' which carried Mill's meaning (see George Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 3rd Ed. London 1963 p.706.)

that to discover Mill's comprehensive ground for any particular claim, the scholar has to be aware that it is likely to be diffused over the mass of Mill's writing, and in many instances to occur merely as fragments inserted into an argument on what is ostensibly another topic.

This holistic approach to understanding and interpreting knowledge, ethics, the world and the place of human beings within it has been rejected for much of the present century and replaced by an increasingly narrow specialism.[42] Philosophy, which for many centuries was the umbrella term for the holistic approach taken by Mill to matters of intellectual interest, has been divided and re-divided as thinkers and commentators sacrifice breadth of vision for depth of understanding. As a consequence of this subdivision the relation of the material examined to the context in which it occurs is atrophied. The result has been an intensification of Snow's culture divide[43] to the extent that thinkers in contiguous sub-disciplines are sometimes unable to comprehend the concerns of one another, nor to locate those concerns in their historical or environmental contexts.

Recently, however, there has been a shift in the opposite direction and a broadening of inter-disciplinary analysis. It is acknowledged that an inevitable consequence of such a broadening of approach is a loss of intensity and depth of understanding in particular areas, but the resulting syntheses of what were previously disparate ideas and insights into patterns of interconnectivity is proving remarkably fruitful. Nowhere is this more the case than in the interaction between the fields of physiology, neurology, and the social sciences. The integration of the observations and theories of what were once considered unrelated fields of study is now regarded as an exciting advance in developing an understanding of human beings, their relations, and their functioning. The concept of holistic theorizing is no longer rejected with the same alacrity as it was earlier this century. Mill's intellectual method is now returning to favour.

The methodology used in the development of the present thesis argument is to begin with the generally accepted understanding of Mill's position on a given subject, but then to search for those modifications, additions, and revisions that occur across the

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42 There are many theorists who recognize and criticize this approach. See e.g. Mario Bunge, 'From Neuron to Behaviour and Mentation.' in T. Archer and S. Hansen (eds.) *Behavioural Biology: Neuroendocrine Axis*. Hillsdale, N.J., 1991 p.1; J. Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill*. London, 1989 pp.3-4; Richard Wollheim, 'The Good Self and the Bad Self.' *Proceedings of the British Academy* Vol.LXI 1975 p.373.

43 C. P. Snow, 'The Two Cultures.' *New Statesman and Nation*, Oct.6. 1956, pp.413-414.

mass of his writing, and which flesh out the basic terms he used in a way that provides a more detailed understanding of the meaning he intended them to convey. It is also to take Mill's own methodology - that of beginning the discovery of the meaning and purpose of any idea or action by driving back through the levels of its development until its origin is located and then providing an explanation of the relation of that idea or action to the larger pattern of which it is a part - and to use it as the primary tool of analysis of his work.

Mill's method of constantly revising his position in the light of new evidence, and retaining all demonstrated truths in theories and doctrines unless they are subsequently proved to be false, resulted in the diffusion of his holistic naturalist theory over time and location. By using this thesis methodology it has been possible to collect and collate those modifications in a way that has produced an integrated, coherent, and consistent account of Mill's holistic theory in the realm of social and political organization which grounds that theory in a remarkably modern and defensible account of human nature and its *telos*. The end product is an interpretation of Mill's thought which begins in psychophysiology, proceeds through broad ethical doctrine, through social and political theory, and concludes in the development of a political program which is designed to achieve what Mill understood to be the purpose and end of existence.

§I.vi. The pattern of presentation of the thesis argument. The matter of relocation of Mill in contemporary debate pivots on moral pluralism - what is it, according to Mill, and how did he believe it to be reconcilable with a universal virtue theory and so able to be accommodated in political theory? The method of answering these two questions is first, to acknowledge Mill's theory as naturalist and holist in its form and scope. Secondly, to present the development of that theory in the manner Mill both prescribed and followed in its formulation. As the development of Mill's theory is presented, so the points at which he engages the problem of moral pluralism are highlighted and, cumulatively, they provide the pattern of ideas, theory, and program of practice which are claimed here to be his contribution to the resolution of that problem, and so justification of his relocation in the current debate.

The unfolding of the thesis argument begins from the position that examination and evaluational analysis of any problem in normative theory must include the methodology of the participating philosophers. There has always been a conflict between philosophers concerning what moralities are like. Part of the reason for such disagreement is that many theorists argue a case concerning what *is* from the viewpoint

of what *ought to be*.[44] From this perspective the support each provides for views of what is (or ought to be) morality rests on a variety of definitional accounts of the nature of morality each of which claims to embrace all moral judgments. An additional aspect of disagreement between rival moral philosophies is that there has been, until the emergence of the present dilemma, a reluctance to acknowledge that there are different classes of moral judgments, and different sorts of moralities applicable to each class. With the recognition of the existence of classes of moral judgments, the focus of moral philosophy, and so of political philosophy, changed and became one of identification of classes and debate concerning their reconcilability.[45]

The possibility that rival accounts of what it is to be moral are not, in fact, irreconcilable is the impetus for re-examination of Mill's theory. The position from which the thesis starts is the hypothesis that rival moralities may all be 'one-sided views of the same thing' and that 'each perhaps compensat[es] for some inadequacy in one of the others,' put forward by Neil Cooper in 1981.[46] This hypothesis will be seen to chime with Mill's understanding of the nature of moral philosophy. Furthermore, Cooper's suggested framework of enquiry - that the development of moral theory would be best served by beginning from a descriptive analysis of what morality is, independent of individual prejudices and desires, and secondly that such analysis must recognize the context in which morality is to operate together with its purpose and function in that context - chimes with Mill's methodology of beginning with the empirically demonstrable evidence of science from which to develop the Art of Life.[47]

Mill's position, it will be demonstrated below, was that the fundamental moral system does not cover *all* of what a morality ought to be. Beyond the sphere of fundamental morality there is a diverse region of moral beliefs which comprise what is termed here a broad ethical doctrine. To discover the relation between the fundamental morality - termed below 'narrow morality' - and the plurality of moral beliefs consistent with the fundamental morality - termed below Mill's 'broad ethical doctrine' - a set of other physical and mental relations need to be described analytically. These are the relation between the agent and the group of which he or she is a member; that relation which

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44 For recognition and criticism of this approach, see e.g. Neil Cooper, *The Diversity of Moral Thinking*. Oxford, 1981, p.1; R. N. Stromberg, *European Intellectual History Since 1789*. New York, 1968, p.2.

45 If they are not reconcilable, the question of developing a political philosophy which rests on a universally accepted moral code becomes problematic. The end product of this change of focus is the claim that they are not, hence the core issue in contemporary debate in political theory.

46 Cooper, *op.cit.*, p.2.

47 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.XII, *Works*. Vol.8. pp.943-52 ; Cooper *op.cit.* pp.2-3.

exists between the agent and his or her particular context; and finally the relation of the group and the context of time and space in which it exists. The purpose of this project is not to rediscover that the human species is sociable in a highly complex way, but to discover why it is so. Mill's project was, in the interpretation developed here, predicated on the belief that human existence both at the level of the individual and of the species has a purpose and end. It began with an examination of the nature of human beings and how that nature embodies the *telos* of existence.

Once an account of human nature, understood as the descriptive analysis of what it is to be a human being, how and why human beings interact, and what is the effect of context on both individual and community, is complete, then the next stage, according to both Cooper and Mill, is to analyze the value systems and normative codes that already exist. Again this is a descriptive project. (In Mill's case, it overlaps with the development of a prescription not to replace that which already exists but as a means for its improvement in order to achieve the *telos* of existence discovered in the analysis of human nature.) What emerges in this stage of the thesis is a clear description of what comprises fundamental, universal, or narrow morality, and the variety of classes of moral judgments and different patterns of moral beliefs observable in human interaction.

When the descriptive account of broad ethical doctrine is complete, then the evidence is sufficient for a normative ethics to be developed. Physical relations are known, as is their relation to context; existing moralities are known, together with their contextual application; and, most importantly, the purpose and function of both universal and particular moralities are known. At this point. Mill was satisfied that it was possible to move to the next and crucial step of delineating a normative code. He recognized that the requirement was not for a new normative theory, but modification and improvement of the old in order to achieve greater efficiency in terms of purpose and function in whatever existential context it was required to function. Mill's final holistic and naturalist theory is a complex, subtle and flexible understanding of the ethical ground for political theory.

Mill's holistic and naturalist approach was, then, two-directional with one direction being via human psychology.[48] This is confirmed in that he began his analysis with a comprehensive examination of the composition of human nature and the purpose of

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48 The form and structure of Mill's approach to the development of his ethical doctrine and program of action are simply asserted here. Justification for this assertion is made in the opening chapters.

human existence. Within this approach examinations of the relation of sensation and perception, perception and desire, desire and reason, of reason, habit and character, and of all to the achievement of *telos* are conducted in depth to provide the ground on which to examine existing patterns of behaviour and motivation to ends. The emergence of Mill's broad ethical doctrine and the narrow universal morality which it encompasses is then grounded firmly on this understanding of human nature and the purpose and end of existence.

The second direction of approach was contextual. This is confirmed in that Mill's understanding and appreciation of the effect on the achievement of *telos* in both individuals and in society as a whole of the historical and geographical environment of community, the circumstances and conditions which affect the nature of each particular agent, and the multiplicity of intervening variables which occur across the environment was a significant force in his understanding and development of his enlarged principle of utility. The contextual conditions of both individual and community are the modifying influences which proscribe the inculcation and exercise of Mill's broad ethical doctrine. His recognition of this boundary underpins his anticipation of incremental shifts toward the achievement of maximal happiness for both individual and community. This was expressed clearly by him in his understanding of perfectibility in individuals and the progress of society.

Mill's methodology in the discovery and formulation of a comprehensive, universal virtue ethics is a two-stage process, and has been used to set the pattern of presentation for the thesis argument [49] It begins in science, in the presentation and analysis of empirically demonstrable evidence to discover the purpose and end of human existence. As such, it begins with a descriptive account of verifiable and concrete evidence. This is followed by the operation of what Mill termed the Art of Life, where the evidence of science is examined to determine in theory the most beneficial way forward. This end is defined and is the completion of the first two-stage process. This is the point at which the unverifiable first principle of ethics is introduced. It is the primary prescriptive stage of the process.

The end to be attained is then passed from the Art of Life back to the method of science and the process begins anew. This time the method of science examines and describes the existential means and combinations of circumstances via which the *telos*

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49 Mill's methodology is fully explained by him in 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch. XII, *Works.* Vol.8. pp.943-52. It is presented here in the merest outline, and is fully explored and explained in the body of the text.

is presently achieved. The most efficient means are compared with those of lesser efficiency, and noted against those which are counterproductive. Again, it is a process of description. The most efficient means described by science are then returned to and converted by the Art of Life into a body of rules and precepts for the command and guidance of agents in order that they may best be assisted in attaining the teleological end discovered by science. This is the secondary process of prescription from which results Mill's broad ethical doctrine. The two cycles of Mill's two-stage process are presented below as the body of the thesis.

The unfolding of the thesis argument is in three parts, with the first part concerned solely with Mill's understanding of human nature and its *telos,* both at the level of the individual and of the species. The three chapters which make up Part I examine the origins of action in human nature as springing from the interrelation of sensation and perception, and the emergence of desire for repetition of pleasant sensations and the relation between desire, reason, and volition. The analysis of the fundamental elements of human nature and the concepts used by Mill in his presentation of the enlarged principle of utility are presented in some detail. Desire, reason, volition, habit and character, are all examined together with a comprehensive account of Mill's understanding of the nature of happiness. Finally, the depiction of Mill's understanding of the *telos* of human existence provides him with the complete grounds from which to discern the *philsophia prima* of his Art of Life.

Part II examines Mill's development of a broad ethical doctrine, via the Art of Life, upon the foundation of evidence provided in Part I. The ultimate principle of action - the striving for happiness - is explained in Chapters IV-VI, as is the emergence of a body of secondary principles with which both agents and communities achieve their respective ends. Mill's general theory of value is presented together with his understanding of the place within it of moral rights and duties. Mill's recognition of the expression of *telos* in the individual as the achievement of self-realization and its links with the realization of the happiness of the community is unraveled in conjuction with his recognition of the significance of context and the impact of intervening variables. Mill's understanding of the emergence of moral pluralism in tandem with his depiction of a universal virtue theory is explained. Mill's theory and doctrine of conduct explores the relation between these, and their significance in assisting agents and communities toward the achievement of happiness and the attainment of *telos*, and examination of this concludes the presentation of the product of Mill's Art of Life.

Parts I and II provide an interpretation of Mill's development of his naturalist and holist philosophy from the vantage points of the laboratory and study. His understanding of the interrelation of moral pluralism and the universal virtue ethics of happiness is presented there in conditions of artificial clarity and distinction. Part III presents Mill's understanding of those relations as they were taking place in the existential conditions of his time, and provides an account of the way in which he believed them to be susceptible to incremental improvement. Through an examination of his understanding of perfectibility in individual agents and of progress in the community, and the way in which such perfectibility and progress may be improved through the promulgation of the principle of utility, together with his recognition of the ambivalent condition of customary morality and its relation to reason, habit and the formation of character, Mill's recognition of the problem of moral pluralism and his solution is confirmed. In the final chapter of the thesis, the antagonistic elements of contemporary liberalism and communitarianism are seen to be addressed by Mill in his development of a program of social and political action whereby the enlarged principle of utility, with its recognition of moral pluralism and context and their joint relation to the universal and absolute principle of happiness, is put into practice. Part III presents a review of Mill's enlarged principle of utility in a way that suggests its fruitfulness as a means whereby the present debate between liberal and communitarian thinkers concerning the problem of moral pluralism might be moved forward toward resolution.

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Part One.
Mill's Account of Human Nature and His Discovery of Its *Telos.*

Part One. Introductory Remarks.

The conceptual centre of Mill's holistic philosophy is the supreme value of happiness. Achievement of happiness is the ultimate principle of action, which lies at the heart of Mill's enlarged Utilitarianism. This is uncontroversially true. What is controversial - on those occasions it has been examined - is the meaning of the term 'happiness,' both within Mill's doctrine and elsewhere It would appear that the shape and content of happiness is regarded as either so well known as to need no further explanation, or so vague and elusive as to be beyond precise depiction. Mill, himself, is accused of ambiguity or worse when at one point he states that happiness is the sole criterion of good, and at another that some happinesses are more worthwhile than others. The logical first step in an examination of any political doctrine which has happiness as its key concept is to produce an accurate account of what the theorist meant by the term. Accordingly, the focus of Part I is Mill's understanding of the nature of happiness and its function in human existence.

The discovery of Mill's meaning for the term takes the form of a detailed examination of his account of human nature and immediately there is engagement with contemporary debate in that political liberals, for example, argue that it is a redundant exercise. There is no single, universal human nature, according to their observations. Rather, there exists a plurality of human natures. Mill's account of human nature, and of the place of happiness within it, must be able to withstand the scrutiny of their objection if it is to be part of the claim for his relocation in the present debate concerning moral pluralism.

In Part I, Mill is shown to provide demonstrable and testable evidence for the location of the happiness principle at the centre of his naturalist and holist philosophy. This is the first stage of development of Mill's socio-political theory during which the method of science is used by Mill to discover the bedrock on which to develop the Art of Life. There emerges a detailed analysis of the ground of Mill's ethical doctrine: that the

sovereign masters, pleasure and pain, are the foundation of the principle of utility. Examination of Mill's understanding of the concepts which underpin the happiness principle, of how they are related, and of their purpose and function in the existence of individual human beings and in the existence of the human species, and the emergence of his account of the relation of happiness to the *telos* of both individual and community existence provides a comprehensive understanding of the platform on which Mill was to erect his broad ethical doctrine.

Part I also engages the contemporary debate at four further points. The first of these concerns acceptance or rejection of the notion of end. Mill's approach was classically Aristotelian in that it recognized the necessity of teleological perspective. However, rejection of a single teleological end and the substitution of multiplicity of ends is part of each argument made by the opposing sides in the current debate. This view is expressed as one of despair (for the communitarians) or of frustration (for the political liberals). However, as both groups substitute a plurality of ends - within the community or based on rational life choices - as their alternative position, whilst eschewing the concept of a universal end, they do not stray very far from the teleological viewpoint. What is more important to discover is the nature of the end or ends in Mill's theory and to note its relation to those of the liberal and communitarian thinkers.

Ends, of course, can be stipulated, and so become simply an expression of the point of view of the theorist. Alternatively, they can be sought for in evidence. This is the method of the experientialist and empiricist, and as such is Mill's method. Today, evidence is presented by contemporary theorists that a multiplicity of ends exist. This view then goes on to note that not all can be achieved by all people, nor can all ends possible to individual agents be achieved. Because this is the case, argue contemporary theorists, ends are not as significant as means. Mill, it will be seen below, accepts the evidence of plurality of ends, but rejects both the claim that this is equivalent to proof that there exists no single, universal end, and the promotion of means to a position of greater significance than ends. Mill's commitment to Aristotelian virtue theory committed him also to discovery and verification of a unifying principle among ends. To do this required him to search for common ground between ends. Mill believed that common ground to lie in the nature common to all human beings. The evidence presented below demonstrates his understanding of what that end comprised, together with how it was to be attained, by all agents and via a multiplicity of partial ends.

If Mill's theory can provide a defensible account of common human nature this satisfies one of the political liberals' qualifying conditions for the development of universal virtue politics. However, it does not satisfy the communitarians' criticism concerning the relation between human beings (with an accepted common nature) and their environment. In order to do so, and after acknowledging how the contextual circumstances of agents' lives impinge upon and shape that nature, Mill must convincingly demonstrate that there are in human nature some elements the cultivation and development of which is of greater importance to the achievement of worthwhile lives than are the customs, traditions, and sense of belonging to a particular locality or group which are given this primacy by the communitarians. This point is addressed below in Mill's account of the significance of environment and intervening variables in agents' lives to their achievement of *telos*. (This point is touched upon here, and is addressed in greater detail in Part III.)

Part I also shows that Mill recognized the present antagonism concerning the relation between the individual and the community. Liberal theory gives priority to the liberty and autonomy of the individual over group-membership, whilst communitarian theory reverses this order. What emerges below is that Mill's discovery and delineation of the way in which human nature is conditioned to strive for the achievement of *telos* demonstrates the relation between individual and community to be symbiotic.

The final point in the contemporary debate which intersects with the material presented in Part I is the part played by reason in the choice of life-plans, in the adoption of moral rules and precepts, and in the development of normative theory and doctrine. The essence of one depiction of the neutrality principle requires that rational choices may be made in a condition of ignorance. In that condition rational deliberation takes place concerning which desires are to be held, and the deliberators, whilst acting self-interestedly, are also compelled to act with mutual disinterest. Communitarian critics of the neutrality principle object that it is impossible for reason to operate *in vacuuo*. It is impossible, they argue, to reason without utilizing the experiences and knowledge which accumulate throughout life. Because this is the case, all reasoning is shaped by the environmental, cultural, and particular circumstances in which reasoners have developed.

With reference to the neutrality principle and in other areas of the debate, both liberals and communitarians place reason in a special and isolated position in one of three understandings, all of which regard reason as a separate entity from desire. The first regards reason as prior to and the organizing principle of desires. The second argues

that reason is separate from desire, and frequently in conflict with it. Finally, and perhaps significantly, the relation between the separate entities of reason and desire is considered central to the argument being presented, but is not addressed directly. Each of these views has had a significant impact on the development of theories of volition and consequently on the development of ethical theory.

By contrast, Mill's understanding of the relation of reason and desire gives priority to desire, argues that reason is inextricable from desire in that they are both constant elements of consciousness, and, most significantly, regards reason as without any detached influence on volition. Mill's separate analysis of desire and reason, and his understanding of the relation between them, is crucial for his understanding of happiness. It is also the ground for his rejection of the neutrality principle, and as such is a further engagement with contemporary debate. If Mill's theory is to be reconsidered within the contemporary debate, it must be able convincingly to argue a case for the reversal of what is taken today to be the relation and order of priority between reason and feelings. As the thesis argument unfolds, this reversal will be seen to be the *sine qua non* of Mill's theory

Beyond providing responses to these four areas of contention recognized by the contemporary debate, Mill's naturalistic theory also contains a thorough account of the development of human beings from their original state of raw nature, when they are comprised of potentials in dispositions, faculties, and capacities only, to the point where they are each fully-developed characters in their own right. The impact upon this development of environment and particular circumstances is made clear.

The result of the analysis undertaken in Part I is a full understanding of the evidence provided by the method of science which was utilized by Mill in his development of a broad ethical doctrine via the Art of Life. It also demonstrates where Mill's theory diverges from that of contemporary theorists. At the end of Part II, should contemporary theorists wish to reject Mill's broad ethical doctrine, they will have also to reject the naturalist ground on which it rests.

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Chapter II.
The Wellsprings of Action: Mill's Indicative Account of Human Nature, Motivation, and Actions.

§II.i. Mill's starting point in the development of political theory. Comparison of the positions of thinkers concerning any particular aspect of political theory will go beyond the boundaries of that aspect to include, if only implicitly, the epistemological foundations employed that sustain those positions. Differences and disagreements on the surface of a debate frequently reflect the fundamental differences between the foundations on which the opposing arguments are erected. This, of course, implies that defense of an argument will also require defense of the fundamental ground on which it rests. To that end, the ground of Mill's enlarged principle of utility which is the substance of this part of the thesis must be examined and depicted in detail. The claim of this thesis is that Mill's philosophy is both naturalist and holist, and that this intellectual stance informs the totality of his political thought. The chapters which comprise Part One are intended to substantiate that claim. In so doing, Mill's starting point in the development of political theory will be seen to be different in certain key areas to that of many of the contributors to the contemporary debate.

There are two broad epistemological positions regarding the origin of knowledge. Either it is solely the product of observation, experience, and reasoning which draws on such evidence as those processes provide; or there is some portion of knowledge discoverable without reference to those processes. The existence or otherwise of *à priori* knowledge is the fundamental divide between the two epistemological positions, but, more importantly in the context of this thesis, it is the location of the conflict between two approaches to the development of socio-political theory. If there are basic and unalterable truths about human beings' motivations and action located somewhere outside experience, then those truths, discoverable by the exercise of reason alone, must be part of the foundation of any political theory.[1] If, on the other hand, all knowledge of motives and actions accumulates and develops within human beings as the individual agent interacts with the circumstances of his or her

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1 The classical claim for such truths is in Plato's theory of forms. Subsequently, other theorists (e.g. Descartes, Leibniz, Kant) have developed alternative accounts of innate knowledge of timeless and incorrigible truths known to reason, and impervious to experience.

environment and experience, then political theory must be shaped in a way that accommodates and builds upon the product of experience.[2]

In the mid-nineteenth century, Mill championed the *à posteriori* position against that of the intuitionists. His target was their claim that some knowledge is innate, which supported their assertion that immediate perception of rightness and wrongness, of goodness and badness, in actions and objects, is a significant part of what comprises ethical values and judgments. The conclusion of the *à priorists'* chain of argument grants to an external object the power of being the cause of a perception, rather than merely that of a sensation. Once this is established, it is a logical step to locate moral goodness and evil externally *in* objects and actions, and to reduce the role of individual agents to that of passive receivers of a timeless and unquestionable idealism. Such an assertion, if unchallenged, would result in the denial of the validity of Mill's experientialist argument.

Mill's method of simultaneously attacking the intuitionists' position and of presenting an argument in support of that of the experientialists resulted in his development of a detailed account of the working of human nature that would confirm the naturalistic origin of all human knowledge. At the same time it laid the ground for the development of a body of normative theory which recognized and incorporated actual rather than ideal human behaviour and motivation. The beginning of this account is found in his penetrating criticism of Reid's conflation of sensation and perception, and its resulting subsumption of the significance of the process of sensation-reception into the more complex process of perception.[3] Mill's distinction between the two processes is the first step in the development of his holistic naturalist theory.

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2 The most well-known of these positions is that which takes Locke's description of the original state of an individual's mind as a *tabula rasa* as the complete expression of the position. Locke's actual description is more complicated than this, as is that of Hume. It is the complexity of the empiricists' understanding that has been partly responsible for its vulnerability to narrowly focussed attacks.

3 Mill's major intuitionist opposition was the common-sense theory of Reid and Stewart. Reid's thesis noted the relation of reason to feeling, and claimed that while in a general sense feeling may be categorized as a species of thought, it was understood by him to be the lowest degree of reasoning. However, Reid went on to argue '*that I have such a feeling* is indeed an affirmative proposition and expresses testimony grounded in an intuitive judgment [and] as feeling distinguishes the animal nature from the inanimate, so judging seems to distinguish the rational nature from the merely animal. (See T. Reid, 'Essays on the Active Powers of Man.' *The Works of Thomas Reid.* Sir Wm. Hamilton (ed), 8th Ed., Edinburgh, 1895, Vol II, Essay V Ch.VII, p.671b.)

From this original linking of feeling and reason and the associated claim that the judgment that is grounded in feeling is the distinguishing characteristic of human rationality, Reid then went on to describe the perceptions of the senses: to include in those perceptions the recognition of qualities in an external object; and to describe that process of immediate

§II.ii. Mill's understanding of the distinction and interrelation of sensation and perception. Mill's account of the impact of pleasure and pain as the fundamental impulses controlling human existence differs in degree of sophistication and clarity from those of earlier theorists. This difference hinges on the separation Mill made between the concept of a sensation and that of a perception. The conflation of sensation and perception into the single term 'perception' was, he pointed out, the cause of a great deal of misconception, not only in epistemological theory but also in the development of ethical doctrine.[4] 'There are few of the great truths of psychology which are not . . . wrapped up in phrases more or less equivocal or vague,' Mill wrote, and 'one of the principal of these phrases is Perception, a word which has wrought almost as notable mischief in metaphysics as the word Idea.'[5]

How did Mill set about dispelling the vagueness and equivocation that attach to the term? Theoretical confusion, he noted, begins with the failure to ask the correct question concerning the nature of sensations. If we ask 'what information do we obtain through the use of a sense?' the question is clear, because there is in the question an implicit understanding of the function and purpose of the senses as receivers of information only. If, however, we ask 'what are the perceptions of a sense?' we are, again by implication granting to the sense in question the unaided power of perception, which it does not have.

The origin of this failure to distinguish between the simple reception of sensations by the senses, and the complex process of perception, is found, Mill argued, in the division commonly made of feelings into those of the body and those of the mind.[6] This is not the case, he stated, and noted that all sensations are 'states of the sentient

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recognition as 'an *act* of the mind, proceeding from its own spontaneous activity.'(See Reid 'Essay on the Intellectual Powers.' *The Works of Thomas Reid.* Vol.I, Essay I Ch.II, p.230; Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book I Ch III §iv, *Works.* Vol.7 p.53.)

4 An early example of this conflation is found in Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy.* Foulis Edition 1755, Vol.I Bk.I Ch.I, p.4, where he wrote 'Our natural senses soon introduce to the mind some perceptions of pleasure and pain. . .'

5 Mill, 'Bailey on Berkeley's Theory of Vision.' *Works.* Vol.11 p.251. The depiction of the development of Mill's account of human nature, his ethical theory, and subsequently his social and political theory, that is to be presented in this thesis begins with his understanding of the distinction between sensation as the product of the senses, and perception as the product of other processes of mind.

6 As noted above, Reid understands feeling as a species of thought, but it is so in the lowest possible degree of understanding of the term. It is related to reason only as far as it is an element that forms part of the ground of judgment (and even there it is understood to be closer to animal rather than rational human nature). See Reid, 'Essays on the Active Powers of Man.' Essay V Ch.VII p.671b.

mind, not states of the body as distinguished from it.'[7] The external senses, as receptors of sense-data, are affected from without by stimuli, and the stimulation received by the senses is forwarded to the brain where it produces a state of mind. At the same time Mill affirmed that the process of perception is likewise a state of mind, albeit one of considerably more complexity than the simple state of mind that indicates the registration of sense-data. Mill's primary task was to distinguish and clarify the difference between the two states.

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Mill's initial step in the process of clarification was to isolate the function of the senses from the process of perception. He did this first by defining both the nature of the senses and the type and range of information received by them. The only information agents have of the so-called real world external to the agent are sense experiences, received by the senses. A sense receives nothing but those sense experiences which it is designed to receive.[8] The reception of the sense experience is termed 'sensation,' and Mill was careful to note the distinction between the various senses and the types of sense experience to which they respond.

There are two groups of senses, according to Mill. The first of these is comprised of the physical organs of sense, each of which responds only to the external sense experiences for which it is fitted. Mill understood the second group to be internal 'mental' senses, which also respond to appropriate stimuli. The major problem Mill discerned in understanding the processes of mind that comprise perception is attached to the improper distinction commonly made between these different groups of senses, and their corresponding sensations. He noted that, in general usage, sensations are called 'bodily feelings' when agents recognize them as occasioned by bodily states and signaled by the external senses. The confusion occurs when other kinds of feelings, 'thoughts for instance, or emotions, which are immediately excited not by anything acting upon the bodily organs, but by sensations, or by previous thoughts, received by the internal senses' are called 'mental feelings' and are thus elevated out of the sphere of sensations and into a class of their own.[9] This creation of a non-existent sub-class of feelings, according to Mill, is the origin of a chain of errors concerning the concept of consciousness. It is a mistake not to recognize that the distinction is not between classes of feelings, 'but in the agency which produces our feelings.' All the sensations

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

8 *Ibid.*, § 9, p.65; 'Bailey on Berkeley's Theory of Vision.' p.252.

9 It is this particular point of confusion which Mill understood to be the fundamental flaw in Reidian common-sense theory.

produced in either group of senses, Mill asserted, are alike in being states of mind, and as such are the raw material of further processes that take place in consciousness.[10]

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Once the character of sensations is delineated, and the mistake of dividing them into bodily and mental feelings is rectified, Mill moved on in his account to discuss the nature of the complex process of perception. If the function of the senses is limited to reception of sense-experiences, and the term for a received experience by either set of senses is 'sensation,' what did Mill understand by the term 'perception'? Mill noted that the sense experiences received by the senses are remembered by the mind and recalled when further similar sense experiences are received by the senses. Once present in the mind, it is this second class of information, which through habitual association springs rapidly into consciousness, that enables the process of mind to take place that is called 'perception.' In fact, Mill pointed out, the process is a two-part one: the information obtained through the sense is sensation, and - so rapidly as to appear simultaneous - the mind draws inferences from that information in conjunction with previously stored information. While many theorists use the term 'perception' to explain the whole process, the correct use of the term should be confined to the second part only.[11]

It follows that sensations, according to Mill, are a very small part of what we perceive. The associations which form a large part of perception, and which are 'naturally and even necessarily generated by the order of our sensations and of our reminiscences of sensation,' play a much greater part in our understanding of what constitutes the world around us.[12] This observation by Mill is vitally significant to the unfolding of his account of human nature. While crucial to his understanding of happiness, he acknowledged from the beginning that the contribution of sensation-reception to the complex and elaborate processes which comprise that understanding is not as great as that of the other elements of consciousness. Nonetheless, without that original stimulus there would not occur any of the more sophisticated behaviours which form the greater part of his account of human nature.

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Mill went on to explain the process of perception in two ways. In the first, the data obtained through the use of a sense, or senses, is received by the mind and becomes the material of experience. In other words, it is stored as memory. Repetition of the

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

11 Mill's argument is contained in his explication of Berkeley's theory of vision, and found in 'Bailey on Berkeley's Theory of Vision.' pp.248-251.

12 Mill, 'Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy.' *Works.* Vol.9 p.178.

data is associated with the experience(s), and is, in its turn, the material of reasoning. The occurrent sensation is linked to those retrieved from memory. This process is the starting point of all knowledge, wrote Mill, and 'consists of generalizations from experience.'[13] It is this neutral sense of 'experience' that is indicated in his summarization of the process. 'Sensation, and the mind's consciousness of its own acts,' he affirmed, 'are not only the exclusive sources, but the sole materials of our knowledge.'[14] Perception in this understanding is the set of mind processes that remember, associate, and pattern the experiences of the senses. The result of this set of processes is the production of a coordinated body of information, including the sensation, from which a response to that sensation may be made.[15]

§II.iii. 'The sovereign masters, *'pain* and *pleasure*'': why important, and how experienced? Armed with this knowledge of the distinction made by Mill between the operation of the senses and the process of perception, we are in a position to examine his account of the centrality of pleasure and pain to the workings of human nature. To feel desire for pleasurable sensations, and aversion to those of pain, is accepted as the natural response of normally constituted human beings. At the same time, pleasure and pain also underpin the processes which form the core of Mill's socio-political theory. There can be no doubt that an account of Mill's understanding of what constitutes pleasure and pain at the levels of physiology and psychology is important to any understanding of their operation as elements of his prescriptive theory. It is this primary link between what Mill termed his 'philosophy of mind' and his broad ethical doctrine which leads into a comprehensive understanding of his theory of human nature.

Pleasure and pain, Mill stated, are classes of sensations 'which are highly interesting to us on their own account, and on which we willingly dwell, or which by their intensity compel us to concentrate our attention on them.'[16] We pay greater attention to the sensations themselves rather than to the existence of that which they mark. They are the major types of physiological and psychological responses to stimuli that occur in human beings.[17] Insofar as sensations are the flow of information from the

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13 Mill, 'Coleridge.' *Works*. Vol.10 p.125. This is a position that has appealed to theorists promoting a variety of different ethical and political theories. It may be traced back through such theorists as Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hutcheson in *A System of Moral Philosophy*, and Bacon's *Novum Organum* to its early appearance in Aristotle.

14 *Loc.cit.* See also Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.IV §2, pp.849-850.

15 The response is within the province of reason: see below.

16 Mill, 'An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy.' p.212.

17 Indifference is considered here to be an absence of response to stimuli. Except in

environment to the agent, the sensations of pleasure and pain are also the most significant classes of sensations. As such, they are the basic elements of Mill's account of the working of human nature. Delineation of the detail of his understanding of the way responses to these particular types of sensation affect receiving agents at the psychological and physiological levels will provide a ground from which to examine their purpose and function in Mill's developed ethical doctrine, and social and political theory.

What is it that impels human beings to strive for pleasure, and how significant is that striving to Mill's understanding of human nature? Mill built on his analysis of the process of perception by examining the nature of the experiences which are its raw material. In this analysis, some of the data obtained through the use of the senses is experienced as a sensation or feeling of either pleasure or pain.[18] The pleasure or pain associated with the experience, and with subsequent repetitions or possible repetitions of the sensations or feelings, excites a response in the agent. The response is either in the form of appetite (desire) for or aversion to the present or future sensations, depending on the previous experience and association. Such desires (or aversions) are, stated Mill, the ground of all volition.[19] Furthermore, he noted, the choice between the possible responses appropriate to the significance of the sensation of pleasure (or pain), that is the range of choices of action, is the outcome of reason.

Mill's analysis of the role of perception as part of the origin of desire has introduced a cluster of new processes into his account of human nature. These processes - desire, volition, and reason - are, together with sensation, memory, and perception, all constituent elements of what Mill understood by consciousness, and it is his examination of their nature and interaction, as they come together to strive after pleasure and to avoid pain, that forms the body of the next segment.

§II.iv. How is pleasure sought and pain avoided? The elements of consciousness. To argue, as Bentham did, that the 'sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*' are 'springs

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circumstances of unusual pathology, it does not figure in accounts of human behaviour and nature. Concerning indifferent sensations, Mill wrote, 'our attention does not dwell on; our consciousness of them is too momentary to be distinct.' See Mill, 'An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy.' p.242.

18 Mill understood 'sensation' and 'feeling' to be synonymous. See Mill, 'An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy.' p.115, where he quotes James Mill's account with approval: '...when having a sensation [and] I say I feel the sensation, I only use a tautologous expression; the sensation is not one thing, the feeling another; the sensation is the feeling.'

19 See Mill, 'Sedgwick's Discourse.' *Works*. Vol.10 p.50; 'Utilitarianism.' *Works*. Vol.10 p.238; 'An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy.' pp.298-299.

of action' turns out to be, in Mill's account, an ellipsis. Pleasure and pain are classes of sensations, and all sensation is information *received by* the senses. Senses, both internal and external, are passive. The next problem for Mill to unravel in his analysis of the operation of human nature was how these passively received items of information are translated into triggers for action.

To claim that sensations of pleasure and pain are distinguished from indifferent sensations by their intensity and interest for the receiving agent, and that such sensations *qua* sensations are objects of interest to the receiving agent, is apparently to state the obvious, yet it is clear from the preceding sections that it is by no means a simple matter to present it in a plain and unambiguous manner. Mill's striving for clarity in his account of sensations and their distinction from perception is the first step in his establishment of a naturalistic foundation for his broad ethical doctrine. The second step is to present a lucid account of what it is to desire pleasure, and how it is that such desire eventuates in action. While it is undisputed that agents desire the repetition of pleasant sensations and the avoidance of unpleasant ones, and that they act on those desires, the clear delineation of how desires are translated into actions is a complicated procedure. What is Mill's understanding of the nature of this process? How does an agent become aware of such desires, and what is the outcome of that awareness? Mill's answer is found in his account of the relation between the passive reception of sensations, understood as a conscious process, and the remainder of the chain of consciousness that results in external actions.

§II.v. The chain of consciousness from sensation to choice of action [I]: sensation, desire, memory, perception, volition. The origin of desire, in Mill's analysis, is found in the operation of consciousness. Mill regarded sensation, perception, and desire as states of consciousness, and a state of consciousness as identical to a feeling.[20] Feelings, or states of consciousness, are the simple mental elements out of which are shaped the complex and recondite patterns of thought that are the constituent parts of human character.[21] Mill had already noted that a state of consciousness, after it has passed, leaves behind the capacity in the human mind for reproducing, but with an inferior degree of intensity, another state of consciousness

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20 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book I Ch.III §3, p.51. Mill acknowledges that this is not the case in popular language, but it is the way in which he employs the terms consistently. The interaction between the psychological and physiological elements of human beings, implied in this usage, is a thread that runs throughout Mill's work (see e.g. 'A System of Logic.' Book.VI Ch.IV §4. pp.856-60., and particularly 'Theism.' *Works*. Vol.10 pp.461-462), and will be amplified at various points throughout this thesis.

21 Mill, 'Bain's Psychology.' *Works*. Vol.11 pp.347-348.

resembling the original.[22] Mill called this depiction of the operation of memory, 'the First Law of Association,' and from it we can discover the generation of desire. The original reception of an intense and interesting sensation by the senses (which is termed 'pleasure') generates the physiological appetite for more of the same sensation. This appetite is termed 'desire,' and is, at this stage and in its simplest form, attached only to a single sensation.[23]

The experience of the original single sensation leaves an impression of that sensation in the agent's memory, which is the next link in the chain of consciousness noted by Mill. The memory of the original sensation (and the desire for its repetition or continuation) is then combined with the next occurrence of the sensation to reinforce the intensity of the desire for a continuation or recurrence of that sensation of pleasure (or, in the case of pain, for the reverse). The satisfaction of the desire, however, is not within the power of the receiving sense that generates the desire, nor of the feeling that is the combination of the sensation and its associated memories.

To satisfy the desire for continuation or repetition of the pleasurable feeling first requires an awareness of the link between the intense and interesting sensation, and that of which it is the mark. The second level of the process is the perception of the cause of the pleasure (or pain). This is the process of relating the sensation of pleasure (or pain) to the event or object the existence of which it is a mark. This process of relating a sensation to its cause is another mental state, and is characterized by Mill as the operation of the Second Law of Association.[24] The conjunction of the experience of pleasure (or pain) with that of which it is the mark is perceived by the receiving agent. The memory of previous occurrences of the pleasure is then associated with

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22 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.IV §3, pp.852, 854. Mill acknowledges his debt to Hume as the early developer of the principle of association of ideas. It should be noted here that Mill's adherence to Associationist methods was not without modification. He rejected the claim that the mechanical application of the laws of association alone could explain the structure and nature of all complex sentiments, emotions and volitions. Mill rejects the analogy of mechanism for that of chemical reaction whereby the constituent parts may generate something that was not discernible in those parts. This analogy, which led him to speak of 'mental chemistry' is an important indication of the way in which his enlarged theory of utility was to develop.

23 Mill's understanding of desire is linked to the intensity of the sensation experienced. This was not the case for some of the earlier theorists, (e.g. Hutcheson, *op.cit.*, Vol.I. Book I Ch.I. p.7. who refers to 'a new motion of the soul, distinct from all sensation, perception, or judgment, a *desire* of that object or event.' Echoes of Hutcheson's understanding may be found today in the argument that it is reason that distinguishes desirable ends. See e.g. Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* Oxford, 1986 p.140-41, 321; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford, 1972 p.409ff.)

24 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.IV §3, p.852.

previous occurrences of the cause, and the desire for the feeling of pleasure now has a focus in an object or action. This is the origin of the shift from desire for a pleasure (or avoidance of a pain) to impulse to action, or volition. The desire for the feeling of pleasure is linked by association to the cause of the pleasure, and makes itself felt as a state of consciousness that impels the agent toward the repetition of the cause of the pleasure. This state of consciousness is termed 'volition.'[25]

This, then, is the explanation of Mill's assertion that desire for future pleasure (i.e. the repetition of previously experienced pleasure), or for avoidance of future pain, is the origin of all volition.[26] The greater the intensity of the feeling of pleasure so the greater the desire for that pleasure, and, providing the cause of that pleasure is known, the more intense the volition to bring about a repetition of that cause and so of that pleasure. Desire for pleasure is analyzed by Mill in such depth to ensure its understanding as the primary and ineradicable origin of *all* action. It is often discovered to be at many levels removed from the immediate cause of action, as Mill carefully pointed out, but will always be found to be the starting point in the chain of motivation.[27]

At this point in Mill's explanation, the desire for pleasure is the simple original impulse to action. Volition toward an end is the expression of unmodified desire. Relation to reason at this original stage is not strong. But reflection, and empirical evidence, easily demonstrate that pleasures often conflict, and are often accompanied by pain. It is not possible to obtain simultaneously conflicting pleasures, nor is it practical to experience pleasures that are accompanied by a greater intensity of pain.[28] It is in the operation of reason in conjunction with desire and volition that human beings solve these problems.

§II.vi. The chain of consciousness from sensation to choice of action [II]: volition, reason, choice, action. Mill's understanding of the operation of reason includes the

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25 Mill 'A System of Logic.' Book I Ch.III §14, pp.74-75

26 Hume also argued that without desire there is no volition, and without volition, there is no action. The relation between desire, will, and reason, is not clearly demonstrated, however, in the writing of the earlier theorists, and conflation of will and reason leads to problems of explanation: see again Hutcheson, *op cit.*, Vol.I. Book I Ch.I, p.7.

27 This important point will be further expanded below, when Mill's response to objections to his analysis are examined.

28 This is not the same as saying that agents do not attempt to do so; but in the first case they are frustrated, and in the second case either: i] they are disabled by the pain from experiencing further pleasure (a physiological event), or ii] the pain is transformed into pleasure (a psychological event).

process whereby the problems associated with conflicting and impractical desires are overcome. How did Mill explain the nature of reason, and how did he demonstrate the link between desire, memory, volition, and reason?

A complication enters the smooth unraveling of Mill's account of human nature at this point. Mill had more than a single conception of the nature of desire as the expression of appetite.[29] At one level, Mill was aware of and accommodated the existence in all human beings of a type of desire, focused by perception and expressed as volition, which is similar to the origin of action in *all* animals. All animals respond to the promptings of pleasure and pain, so all animal actions are, on this parallel account, actions to satisfy animal appetites and aversions. Mill recognized that human nature contains a range of similar animal appetites and aversions and they are often satisfied equally directly.[30]

At another level, Mill's explanation of human behaviour noted the presence of a second type of desire found only in human beings. For a clear understanding of Mill's account of human nature the differences between these two types of desire is significant, particularly as he considered the second type to be more beneficial, because specifically human.[31] Accordingly, there needs to be clarified whether the pleasure desired by these two types of desire is a similar or identical 'interesting and intense sensation.' If so, then what is it that is different about specifically human desires? If it is not and there is more than one sort of pleasure, then what is the difference between the pleasures desired by each type of desire? A more detailed account of Mill's understanding of human dispositions and capacities provides the explanation of the relation between these and pleasure, and which also locates answers to these queries, will be the subject of the following section. It is sufficient to draw attention here to the existence of this complication in order to underline the importance Mill attached to the process of mind - reason - responsible for maintaining coexistence between the different types of desire.

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29 See Mill, 'On Liberty.' *Works*. Vol.18 p.263; 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.IV §4, p.859; 'Utilitarianism.' pp.210-211.

30 Mill noted that animal pleasures are brain-states, as are all sensation-receptions See e.g. Mill, 'Bain's Psychology.' p.353, where he states that 'the central organ of the nervous system, the brain, must in some way or other co-operate in all sensation,' but the complex sensations that accompany specifically human pleasures are beyond the capacities of non-human species to comprehend and analyse.

31 The central issue in Chapters III and IV is the depiction of the reason why the major thrust of Mill's normative theory is directed toward the amendment of human nature in a way that first locates, and then satisfies, the specifically human set of desires.

A second, and equally important, complication has a significant effect on the relation between desire for pleasure and eventual action in order to achieve it, and that is the environment in which human beings operate. The human environment, in terms of individual circumstances, culture, the structure of society, and so on, will be explored in detail in a later chapter.[32] At the moment, and in the context of the chain of consciousness, it is sufficient to note that in the complex arena of human society, many pleasant sensations are the product of a conjunction of circumstances. Because of this complexity, and because of the existence of the two types of desires - the animal desires, and the specifically human desires - it is also the case that the circumstances that bring about one pleasant sensation, in one type of desires, may be antagonistic to the circumstances that bring about some other pleasant sensation, in either the same or the other type of desires.

Given that these complications are present and are the cause of considerable conflict between desires for different pleasurable sensations, how do human beings organize their pleasure-seeking activities efficiently? For agents practically to satisfy their desires for pleasurable sensations, and to accommodate the possibly conflicting volitions that accompany them, a further level of consciousness, beyond sense reception and perception, is required. This is part of the province of reason.[33] Its role in conjunction with desire and volition is to distinguish between and rank pleasurable sensations, to weigh pleasant sensations against their accompanying painful ones, to co-ordinate volitions, and to organize the often oblique routes to satisfaction of desires. The employment of reason was understood by Mill to be the way human beings discern between the intensity of desire for, and compatibility of, competing pleasures. It is also the instrument with which agents plot pathways to distant pleasures and desire-satisfaction. As desire, the generator of volition, is the motivation for the achievement of ultimate ends, so reason is the judge of means and subordinate ends. So, while reason alone cannot will to action, nor can the simple desire or aversion alone unravel and organize the complexity of human existence. Desire and

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32 Mill's explicit recognition of the importance of environment, cumulative experience, circumstances, and other intervening variables, at this early stage in the development of his holistic theory presages its major significance in the unfolding of that theory. It is the earliest indication of Mill's awareness of the link between the degree of realization possible for his socio-political theory and the context in which that realization is undertaken.

33 Mill, 'Sedgwick's Discourse.' p.50. 'Reason is not an end in itself: it teaches us to know the right ends, and the way to them; but if we desire those ends, this desire is not Reason, but a feeling.' A great part of Mill's intellectual output centred upon the methods of reason, but, as is made clear here, and frequently occurs elsewhere in his work, reason is an instrument to be employed by will. It does not, at base, bring about any action not previously willed. The relation between desire and will in cases where the obtaining of pleasure or the avoidance of pain (the foundation of desire) is not immediately apparent will be considered below.

reason are both necessary to the achievement of pleasure, according to Mill; the former for the origin, and the latter for the implementation, of pleasure-seeking volition.[34]

On the face of it, Mill's account of the operation of human nature as presented here appears to be flawed. Granted that there are occasions where action is performed as a means only to the satisfaction of desire, or to achieve a subordinate end, and that an agent does not obtain immediate pleasure from those actions, this does not seem to exhaust the occurrence of all non-pleasurable actions. There are, it would seem, many occasions where individual agents act for motives other than pleasure or the avoidance of pain. There are many instances that may be cited where the result of deliberate and willed action by individuals has knowingly led to pain and sometimes death for those individuals.[35] Empirical evidence of acts willed and performed without expectation, nor receipt, of pleasure, together with empirical evidence of acts willed and performed with foreknowledge of the pain that would affect the actor, appears to present problems for Mill. These problems are addressed in the next sections.

§II.vii. The origin and significance of habit in Mill's account of human nature: volitions transformed into habits; habits the foundation of character; volition and occulted desire. So far, the understanding Mill developed of the operation of human nature is one that takes place on three levels: at the fundamental level pleasant sensations are feelings that are of an interest and intensity such that the experiencing agent desires their prolongation or repetition. At the second level, perception discovers the cause of the pleasure; the cause is then desired for its effect. This is the origin of volition. At the third level, reason enters as the ranking and judging process of both ends and means, whereby the claims of conflicting desires and the volitions that attach to them are evaluated, and means apprehended for the achievement of those that are both practical and obtainable. However, there appears to be evidence to disprove Mill's claim that all volitions are grounded in desire. It is not difficult to discover, by reflection, past willing of action that is not intended to satisfy, nor

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34 In a work written in French and unpublished during his lifetime ('Traité de Logique.' *Works*. Vol.26 p.187) Mill refers with approval to the argument put forward by Jean Pierre Cabanis, and developed by Antoine, Comte Destutt de Tracey (see Cabanis, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*. Paris,1815 2 Vols; Destutt de Tracy, *Eléments d'idéologie*. 4 Vols. Paris 1801-1815.) that *penser est sentir* (to think is to sense). Mill wrote this in 1820-21, and it is important for the development of his holistic theory insofar as it demonstrates that the link between psychology and physiology was an early component of Mill's thought, and continued to be developed by him throughout his productive life.

35 Examples of such acts are too numerous to mention in the text. Hagiography is replete with powerful illustrations of this objection to Mill's account of human nature.

achieves the satisfaction of, a desire. At the same time, it appears that many actions are performed that run counter to the claim that all actions are willed, and so performed, in order to achieve pleasure or the avoidance of pain. Such are the actions of martyrs.

Mill's response to these objections was to delineate a fourth level in the drive toward pleasure and away from pain. It is this fourth level which marks the second important point at which Mill's theory will be seen to engage the contemporary debate. That it does so at the level of non-normative and ethically-neutral examination of what Mill considered to be scientifically demonstrated and objectively verifiable facts provides it with considerable strength as the foundation of his normative theory. Its presentation here will be referred to in later chapters as the origin of his explanation of what is presently considered to be irreducible moral pluralism.

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Mill's account of human nature incorporates a fourth level of understanding of behaviour that recognizes the eventual diminution of awareness of the original pleasure in an action and of the motivating desire. This is the level of habit, and it is an important element in Mill's understanding of the motivating forces behind all human action.[36] The process begins with the relaxation of the thought that attaches to the desire-volition-reason-action chain. Gradually, and through the influence of constant association of actions with pleasure, agents 'come to desire the means without thinking of the end.' Actions continue to be performed, but without any reference to their origin in pleasurable sensation. This is not yet understood by Mill to be habit. It is, instead, an intermediate stage in which agents come to desire some actions for the sake of the action itself. In the final stage, according to Mill, there is no longer any conscious awareness of pleasure, either in the action or in the resulting sensation. Nonetheless the action is still performed but the performance is undertaken without

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36 Mill's account of the development and operation of habit in human nature may be traced back to both Francis Bacon and John Gay. Gay recognized that some agents act to achieve ends without apparent reason or understanding. He also acknowledged that they sometimes act in ways that are counter-productive of their own pleasure. His explanation for these actions was to develop the notion of 'resting places' in the rational process. At such points agents reach a settled understanding of the principles and grounds upon which they act. Rather than trace back every problem of choice to its origin in the desire for pleasure or the aversion of pain, intermediate stages in the process are understood once for all, and reason halts its progress whenever they are reached. These he termed 'resting places' and they form the foundation of habitual processes of thought and act on. See John Gay, *Preliminary Dissertation Concerning the Fundamental Principle of Virtue or Morality.* London, 1731 pp.xix-xxxi. (Published as a Prefix to King's *Origin of Evil.*) There is a similarity between Gay's 'resting places' and Bacon's *'axiomata media'*. See Mill's reference to Bacon's account in 'A System of Logic.' Book.VI Ch.V §5, p.870

expectation or thought of its being pleasurable in itself nor of producing pleasure. Through successive stages the pleasure-motive for performance of the action has diminished just as the intensity and interest produced by the sensation has become dulled through familiarity. It is at this point that the action is said by Mill to have become habitual.[37]

Two important corollaries are attached by Mill to this account of the development of habit which provide him with a ground from which to address criticism of his claim that all volition (and, therefore, all action) derives from the desire for pleasure and the aversion to pain. First habitual action is the foundation of a confirmed character, with the concomitant traits of steadiness and constancy which emerge 'when the passive susceptibilities of pleasure and pain are greatly weakened, or materially changed.' Secondly, such habits, which are volitions without reflection, are commonly called 'purposes,' and, as such, they are universally ranked alongside conscious appetites and aversions among the causes of human willing.[38] From these corollaries Mill is able to argue that it is possible for *all* actions to be traced back, through the levels demonstrated above, to their origin in the desire for pleasure or for the avoidance of pain.

Included in 'all actions' are the actions that appear to be neutral in their object and the actions that agents choose to perform despite foreknowledge of their painful consequences. In the first case, the original pleasurable sensation and the desire to obtain it has been occulted either by changed circumstances, or the passing of time. Nonetheless, it remains the originator of the volition to act. In the second case, the original pleasure is still being sought, only now it may be understood by the agent to be a 'purpose' rather than a conscious appetite. As such, the original pleasure may not be overtly experienced. It does, however, remain the originator, and explanation, of the volition to act. In both sets of cases, Mill believed he had demonstrated that the actions involved are traceable to original sensations of pleasure (or pain).[39]

This description of the translation of desire for pleasure into habitual action, and the corollaries that attach to it, may[40] remove the problem of the link between either

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37 This account of the formation of habits is found in Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.II §4, p.842.

38 *Ibid.*, pp.842-843.

39 This fourth level of understanding the operation of human behaviour is vitally important to the development of Mill's ethical doctrine, and is taken up and enlarged in Chapter III..

40 Many moral philosophers reject Mill's account of motivation, and continue to argue more sophisticated versions of the charges set out here. Any attack on this important element of

neutral, or foreknown to be painful, consequences of actions and the will to act, but in their stead new problems emerges. Even if it is accepted that the chain of consciousness from original pleasant sensation to volition and choice of action is demonstrated, and, furthermore, that habit is the steadying force in mature life which enables individuals to develop purposeful characters, Mill's account is still to explain non-rational behaviour and diverse character development. Sensations are similar for many human beings, *ergo* on Mill's account desires are similar, volitions similar, and the development of habits similar. How, then, does Mill's account of the operation of human nature explain the differences in character that occur between individual human beings? Also, there is evidence to suggest that some agents act deliberately in ways that are counter-productive to the achievement of personal pleasure. Can Mill's account accommodate such actions, and justify them in terms of desire for pleasure and aversion to pain? These new objections to Mill's account of human nature as being driven by the reasoned pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain must be dealt with if that account is to have explanatory value. It is in his understanding of the concept of character that the beginning of Mill's response is to be found.

§II.viii. The importance of character in Mill's theory, and differences in character explained. The concept of character is used by Mill to express the summation of the manner in which the component parts of individual human nature mature and develop into a settled and steady framework. The important change that takes place in this development is the shift by the agent away from the direct desiring of pleasures into a pattern of behaviour which, while it rests on occulted desire, functions as if independent of desire. 'It is only when our purposes have become independent of the feelings of pain or pleasure from which they originally took their rise,' Mill wrote, 'that we are said to have a confirmed character.'[41] Just as the purposes of individual agents, understood as their personal cluster of habits of willing and action, vary from agent to agent, so do agents' characters vary. It is in Mill's understanding of the development of those habits of volition, and his account of the

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Mill's thought (and, concurrently,on the argument of this thesis), from a non-empiricist perspective, would do well to concentrate on this point. However, there is considerable empirical evidence now emerging to support Mill's account, particularly in the work of contemporary ethology. See e.g. T. Archer and S. Hansen, *Behavioural Biology: Neuroendocrine Axis*. Hillsdale, N.J.,1991; J. Macaulay and L. Berkowitz, *Altruism and Helping Behaviour*. New York, 1970 Mario Bunge, *The Mind-Body Problem*. Oxford, 1980; J. C. Eccles, *Evolution of the Brain Creation of the Self*. London, 1989; W. D. Hamilton, 'The Genetical Evolution of Social Behaviour,' *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 1964 [7] pp.1-52.

41 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.II §4, pp.842-843.

differences that occur between the characters of agents, that there emerges the beginning of a response to the new objections to his account of human nature.

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There are three elements to Mill's explanation of differences in character. Each demonstrates Mill moving away from the Benthamist position of his father and of his early education. The first of these is the explanation of the manner in which the circumstances and environment of agents contribute to the shaping and tempering of character. The second is the observation that the clusters of associations which contribute to the type and intensity of the responses made by an agent to pleasurable sensations vary between agents. Finally, and most importantly, Mill noted that the original dispositions and capacities found in individual human natures, while similar in number and type, differ in degree of influence and potential realization between agents.

The impact of circumstances and environment upon the development of character is recognized by Mill as being one of the major shaping forces in the life of all individuals. He did not, however, subscribe to the position taken by Bentham and James Mill, that the formation of *all* the aspects of character is by circumstances.[42] Instead, while agreeing that circumstances afford an adequate explanation of by far the greatest portion of character, Mill noted two modifying factors.[43]

The first of these is the relation of the existing character of the agent to circumstances and the actions performed in those circumstance.[44] Circumstances affect different agents in different ways and to different degrees, in cumulative fashion. This means that agents experiencing identical circumstances will be affected differently, owing to their original differences in natural dispositions and capacities, and the cumulative effect of their previous responses to experiences upon those dispositions and capacities. The second modifying factor is the capacity in agents to discover and experience pleasure in the response of their nature to the impact of circumstances. This pleasure is found in the realization of the capacities of the individual agent's nature, and like all other pleasures becomes the origin first of the desire and subsequently the will to shape and form the agent's own character. The pleasure that accompanies self-realization is thus transformed into the impetus for agents to realize their capabilities and to determine their own character.[45] The first of the two modifying

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42 Mill, 'Autobiography.' *Works*. Vol.1).111.

43 Mill, 'A System of Logic.'Book VI C ı.IV §4, p.859.

44 Mill, 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy.' *Works*. Vol.10. p.8.

45 It is this capacity for self-modification and -improvement that is the the feeling of freedom, particularly of moral freedom, felt by individuals. And it is to promote the exercise of this capacity that is the rationale for freedom expressed in *On Liberty*. See Mill, 'Autobiography.'

factors links to Mill's understanding of the operation of associations, and the second to his understanding of the original dispositions and capacities of individual human beings.

Mill's first modifying factor demonstrates that his understanding of the manner in which individual human beings link sense experiences and associate them to form the basis of volition is significantly different to that of his father and Bentham. Mill agreed that impressions experienced often in conjunction become associated, and that each calls up readily and instantaneously the ideas of the whole group; but he disagreed with the Hartleyian position of Bentham, and his father when they insisted that the complex idea so conjured up always *consisted* of those simple ideas in conjunction.[46] Where the Benthamist associationist theory understood the effect of a composite cause to be the sum of the effects of the constituent causes when separate, Mill rejected that account.[47] He rejected the Benthamist claim that human beings function mechanistically, that is by simply responding to input, and that if the input is known the output (agents' actions) is predictable. Mill proposed instead an alternative analogy, whereby the interaction between agent and information resembles a chemical process, and the results often cannot be predicted from the input.[48] The subtlety of Mill's depiction of the way in which the contextual background of an agent's life informs and modifies his or her responses to objects and actions has been noted previously to be significant for an understanding of his engagement with the problems of contemporary political philosophy, and this will be fully explored in the chapter on customary morality and its ground in the circumstances, environment, culture, and physical and temporal location of the groups involved.

Mill's second modifying factor further strengthened his rejection of the Benthamist account of the impact of circumstances and associations by pointing out that an important contributing factor to both is the nature of the desires of the individual.[49] This, it has already been demonstrated, is signaled in the individual's responses to sensations. At the moment of original response to sensations, i.e. prior to any shaping by circumstances or environment, Mill argued that individual human beings have a range of dispositions and capacities similar in number and type, but differing in potential realizability. This is an uncontroversial claim, but will emerge to be a

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p.177; 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.II §3, p.841.

46 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.IV §3, p.854.

47 Cf. Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. London: Athlone Press 1970 [FP 1789] p.74, and Mill, 'Bentham.' *Works*. Vol.10 pp.93-94.

48 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.IV §3, p.854.

49 Mill, 'Autobiography.' p.177.

foundational one for the subsequent development of Mill's broad ethical doctrine. This is because Mill had already noted that dispositions develop in circumstances and, conversely, that the circumstances have an impact on the development. Therefore, Mill concluded, character development is an interaction between changes in the development of the dispositions and changes in the circumstances in which they have originally been developed.[50] This second factor will emerge as highly significant in Mill's development of socio-political theory - particularly in his recognition of environment as a limiting factor in the realizability of any theory of public or private action, at any given time.

Using the notion that individual agents, because of innate differences in dispositions and capacities, respond to circumstances differently, and subsequently develop different associations, it becomes clear how Mill can answer the objections made above. Agents may desire to shape their own characters, but this does not mean that they will be always successful. The interaction between dispositions and sensations, and the environment and circumstances in which they are associated, may lead those agents to develop characters that exhibit traits that are both counterproductive to the agent's pleasure and detrimental to the lives of others. Conversely, the same interactions may, in other agents operating within different circumstances and in a different contextual environment, contribute to the development of characters that are considered by observers to be heroic and exemplary.[51] What is apparent, however, is that the relation between what human beings consider to be pleasure or pain, and the dispositions and capacities inherent in their individual natures is of central importance to the understanding Mill has of the nature and operation of human beings. This relation will be further explored in the following section.

§II.ix. The importance of dispositions and capacities in Mill's account of human nature: the relation between these and pleasure/pain. The conception of human beings as imbued with potentials for both feelings and actions, forms part of the historical development of empiricist accounts of human nature. However, earlier

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50 Mill, 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy.' pp.7-8. Both modifications, but particularly the belief in differing degrees of dispositions and capacities possessed by particular agents, are important for the subsequent development of Mill's account of human nature and ethical doctrine. Their importance may be gauged from their role in underpinning the central position taken by Mill in *On Liberty*, where he wrote, 'Such are the differences among human beings in their sources of pleasure, their susceptibilities of pain, and the operation upon them of different physical and moral agencies, that unless there is a corresponding diversity in their modes of life, they neither obtain their fair share of happiness, nor grow up to the mental, moral, and aesthetic stature of which their nature is capable.' Mill, 'On Liberty.' p.270.

51 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.II §4, p.842.

depictions of the relation between the elements of human nature and the various pleasures were unclear. If it is to function as part of a defensible naturalistic foundation for his ethical doctrine and social and political thought, Mill's account needs to be more thorough. It must show the distinction between the parts of human nature that are possessed in common with all other animals and what are specifically human dispositions and capacities, together with the role they play in human nature and existence. It must also do this in a way that remains consistent with his claim that all action is motivated from the desire of pleasure or the avoidance of pain.

Furthermore, it must simultaneously demonstrate an understanding of the difference between the types of desire, and the sorts of pleasure that stimulate them, found in both the common animal and the specifically human aspects of human nature. Such a demonstration will lead toward an explanation of the purpose pleasure and pain have in Mill's understanding of human nature. (Of particular interest for the development of the thesis argument in this segment is Mill's Aristotelian cast of mind, which emerges here in his affirmation of the location of specifically human pleasure and happiness in activity. The link between this and the development of a virtue politics becomes stronger as Mill's account of human nature unfolds.)[52]

§II.x. The importance of dispositions and capacities in Mill's account of human nature: the relation between these and pleasure/pain. As Mill understood it, there is within each human being at birth a cluster of dispositions, capacities, and talents, which are present at that time as potential for realization only. This is 'the raw material of human nature,' and is the origin of the individuality of a particular agent. The potential strength and depth of an agent's unrealized dispositions and capacities, which varies in degree both between dispositions and agents, indicates the parameters within which they may develop. 'Those who have the most natural feeling,' acknowledged Mill, 'are always those whose cultivated feelings may be the strongest.'[53] Mill is here making two important claims about human nature. The first is that the potentials within each agent are developed to different levels of realization, and the second is that the difference in degree of desires and feelings within agents is reflected in their differing strength of individuality. In each agent, Mill wrote, 'the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being . . . it is not

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52 Cf. Aristotle, *Ethics*. 1174b-1176a (See also W. F. R. Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*. Oxford. 1968 pp.75-83), and Mill, 'On Liberty.' p.270; 'A System of Logic', Book VI Ch.IV. §4. p.859; 'Utilitarianism.' pp.210-11; 'Autobiography.' pp.260-261. The relation between 'pleasure' and 'happiness' in Mill's account of the working of human nature is the subject of the following chapter, where the similarity to Aristotelian naturalism is further noted.

53 Mill, 'On Liberty.' p.263.

only a co-ordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilization, instruction, education, culture, but is tself a necessary part and condition of all these things.'[54] The core of what it is to be human is found in the cultivation and development of the cluster of inherent dispositions, capacities, and talents.[55]

It is uncontroversial to state that individual agents are endowed with different potentials in every aspect of their natures, and it is logically impossible for a potential to be developed beyond its degree of possible realization. It is less obvious what Mill understood by 'disposition.' He nowhere defined the term, but used it to express the inclination or tendency in human nature to act in a certain way under given circumstances. While tendencies cannot be known other than approximately, their existence is undeniable, and the manner in which they operate is observable.[56] Furthermore, the receipt of particular complexes of pleasurable sensations interacts with a tendency (or disposition), and generates the desire, and then the volition, to act.

This imprecise depiction is reinforced in its significance when we note the elements of human nature regarded by Mill as tendencies or dispositions. These include selfishness, altruism and kinship altruism (which he refers to as 'sympathy'), imagination, and most powerfully the search for happiness and the avoidance of suffering.[57] These are the major elements of what Mill took to be the specifically human portion of human nature, and as such are of primary interest to him in his development of social and political theory. The exercise of dispositions, he asserted, is the generating force of all civilized actions, and in so asserting confirmed the link between the subject matter of broad ethical doctrine and his naturalistic account of the operation of the most basic elements of human nature.[58]

§II.xi. The 'higher' and 'lower' aspects of human nature, and their characteristic pleasures. The classifying of the dispositions, capacities, and faculties of what Mill called the specifically human portion of human nature as 'higher' than those of the portion of human nature comprised of shared animal instincts and

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54 *Ibid.*, p.261. Mill's understanding of individuality demonstrates the flexibility and subtlety of his approach to the development of his subordinate political principles. It takes into account the differences between human beings in terms of their natural attributes, and is aware of the impact of circumstances upon the realization of individuality.

55 The nature of specifically human potential capacities and talents is examined in the following section, as is the manner of the realization of their degree of possible development.

56 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.V §4; ChIX. §2, pp.869-70, 898.

57 Mill, 'Three Essays on Religion.' *Works*. Vol.10. pp.393-395; 'Autobiography.' p.115; 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy.' p.6.

58 Mill, 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy.' p.7.

appetites is one of the instances where the neutral terminology of the method of science also carries an evaluative connotation. The taxonomic understanding of 'higher,' in the sense that human beings are both complex and more advanced in their development than are other species of animals, and may be placed at the top of the list of animals in terms of that development, is an example of the value-neutral ranking that occurs in scientific inquiry. Such a ranking is, however, understood by many non-scientists to imply value. In fact, Mill did ultimately view these specifically human characteristics in just that way when developing his social and political theory. But he did not do so when considering them as the product of the method of science.[59]

Mill's understanding of human nature lays as much stress upon the grosser aspects of that nature as it does upon the more elevated faculties. Mill presented the instincts and appetites human beings have in common with other species in terms of sensuality and selfishness; he referred to them as being realized in 'a beast's pleasures' or in 'sensual indulgences.'[60] The pleasures that accompany the satisfaction of the animal appetites that comprise this part of human nature may be categorized as both simple and passive. This does not mean, argued Mill, that these simple pleasures (and avoidances of pain) can or should be ignored or suppressed. The continued existence of any unsatisfied appetite or desire causes unpleasantness or pain in the form of dissatisfaction or frustration. Repression, commended by the church or ordered by the state, of the brute appetites and instincts was, Mill believed, counter-productive, and liable to hinder rather than assist the expression of what is specifically human in human nature.[61]

Mill was not, however, recommending indiscriminate indulgence in the exercise of animal desires. Animal appetites possessed by human beings, according to Mill, may all be cultivated and developed in order both to achieve a greater intensity and interest in the sensations that accompany their expression, and modified to contribute to the highest expression of what is specifically human in human nature. It is this amendment of the grosser appetites of human nature through the refinement of the type of pleasures that accompany their satisfaction which is implied when Mill argued that modification not repression of the elements of human nature is 'the very aim and

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59 The conflation of the scientific and the evaluative understandings of terms is the cause of much of the confusion concerning the overlap between Mill's psychophysiological theory and his ethical doctrine, and is addressed in detail in the following chapters.

60 Mill, 'Utilitarianism.' p.211. This categorization need not be understood as containing either a moral or an aesthetic judgment. In fact, it will emerge below that to do so at this point is to mistake Mill's intention.

61 Mill, 'On Liberty.' p.92.

object of action.' It involves the totality of human nature, including the gratification of the animal instincts and appetites.[62] Mill rejected the arguments of those who would deny animal instincts in human beings, and stated simply that because the animal part of human nature exists and is a powerful motive to action, it must be taken into account.[63] It was not, though, the most important part.

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It is the specifically human elements in the nature of our species that Mill placed at the centre of his theory, and these are the elements that generate desires for a second type of pleasure. This more important, because specifically human, portion of human nature, Mill called 'higher,' in contrast to the 'lower' portion which corresponds to the various instincts and appetites of other animals. The higher portion of human nature is characterized by Mill as comprising a spectrum of dispositions, faculties, and talents 'more elevated than the animal appetites' and, as such, capable of experiencing pleasures of a different order. These specifically human dispositions include 'perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity' and 'justice, temperance, veracity, perseverance, regard for the public good': in fact all the qualities that make up the *Socratici viri*, together with the practical and creative faculties and talents.[64] And it is in Mill's depiction of the pleasures that are desired by the 'higher' dispositions, faculties, and talents, we come to the core of Mill's understanding of human nature.

The spectrum of dispositions, faculties, and talents that comprises 'higher' nature differ from the 'lower' appetites and instincts both in their complexity and development. The most significant difference is that they act in conjunction and co-operation with at least one, and often many, of the other elements of that nature.[65] Accordingly, the pleasures that accompany the exercise and refinement - what Mill

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62 Mill, 'Three Essays on Religion.' p.180.

63 Rather than condemn them, Mill wrote, a believer in the goodness of God would accept that it is more consistent to believe 'that this Being gave all human faculties that they might be cultivated and unfolded, not rooted out and consumed, and that he takes delight in every nearer approach made by his creatures to the ideal conception embodied in them, every increase in any of their capabilities of comprehension, of action, or of enjoyment.' Mill, 'On Liberty.' p.265.

64 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.IV §4, p.859; 'Utilitarianism.' pp.210-11; 'On Liberty.' p.262; 'Autobiography.' p 49.

65 This is easily shown by reflecting on the operation of any one of what Mill is referring to as 'higher' faculties. It has already been demonstrated above that perception, for example, requires both the senses as receptors of sense-experience, and memory of association. A talent for any activity will be found to incorporate aspects of a number of faculties and dispositions. Nonetheless, it is uncontroversial to claim that human beings are comprised in part of such dispositions, faculties, and talents, and that they may be examined both discretely and in conjunction with others.

calls the 'cultivation and development - of these dispositions, faculties, and talents is similarly complex.[66] Furthermore, desires for these various complex pleasures are in themselves different in complexity to those that attach to the 'lower' appetites and instincts. What they do have in common with the simpler desires and pleasures is that Mill considers them, also, to be capable of refinement. (The capability of refinement of the 'higher' dispositions and capacities is a crucial point in Mill's account of human nature in its status as the naturalistic foundation for his broad ethical doctrine, because it is the refinement of the second type of desires and pleasures that forms the starting point for both that doctrine, and his subsequent social-political theory.)

The difference between types of pleasure is located in the possibility, manner, and range of their refinement. The animal, or simple 'lower,' pleasures may be cultivated and developed - that is, in Mill's terms, they may be 'artificially perfected' - but only within a narrow range of amendment. The 'higher' pleasures which are the product of the satisfaction of the desires that attach to the specifically human dispositions, faculties, and talents, are able to be cultivated and developed through a far greater range of amendment. From the information Mill provided concerning the nature of pleasant sensations we may infer that the sensation of pleasure that satisfies the 'lower' desires is fundamentally similar to the pleasure that satisfies the specifically human, or 'higher' range of desires. The difference between them is found in their relative complexity. Whilst Mill noted the importance of satisfying the 'lower' desires for pleasure (and commended their amendment within the narrow range of possible refinement) his understanding of human nature was that once individuals become aware of the more complex and satisfying pleasures that attach to the amendment of specifically human dispositions, faculties, and talents, they will prefer to expend their energies in obtaining those pleasures.[67] What now must be explained is how agents discover the pleasures that attach to the cultivation and development of specifically human dispositions and why, when this is known, they prefer to expend their energies attempting to achieve complex rather than the more easily obtained simple pleasures.

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66 The clearest account Mill gives of the nature of complex pleasures is that found in 'Bain's Psychology.' pp.347, 350, where he presents the *a posteriorists'* understanding of the genesis of complex sensations (including the sensation of complex pleasures) to be susceptible of further analysis. The 'original elements may still, by an ordinary effort of consciousness, be distinguished in the compound.' Mill points out that the compound is not necessarily a summation of the elements, but 'may often form a still more intimate, and as it were chemical union.' Repetition of the experience of a complex pleasure obscures perception of its simple components, but they are recoverable by close observation.

67 Mill, 'A System of Logic', Book VI Ch.IV §4, p.859; 'Utilitarianism.' pp.210-11.

§II.xii. How do agents discover complex pleasure? Why do agents prefer complex pleasure? Why do agents sometimes turn away from amendment of their nature? The manner in which agents discover the complex pleasures that attach to the development and cultivation of dispositions, faculties, and talents can be inferred from Mill's account of the operation of the senses and the relation between the senses, perception, and reason. The external and the internal sets of senses comprise the sum of available senses, and consequently they must act as sense-data receptors for both the lower and the higher portions of human nature. The operation of the dispositions, capacities, etc., of the lower, animal aspect of human nature is, as might be expected, a simple process. Particular dispositions are linked to a sense, and respond to a pleasant or unpleasant stimulus received by a that sense with the simple desire for its repetition or avoidance. This process results in a will to act in order to repeat the pleasant stimulus or to avoid the unpleasant one, with minimal input from reason. This is the manner in which the same dispositions and capacities may be observed to operate in other animal species.[68]

Specifically human dispositions, capacities, and talents are more complex on account of their greater interaction with the characteristically human capacity for complex reasoning, and their exercise is, accordingly, the end of a far more complicated process. The first part of this process is the generation of the desire and volition that springs from a pleasantly stimulated complex capacity. The pleasurable sensations that stimulate these capacities to desire their repetition are the result of the combination of sense-data received by a number of the basic senses. The range of possible combinations of senses is linked to the range of specifically human dispositions and capacities. Some of these are stimulated into desire and volition by pleasurable sensations received only by the internal senses - the aesthetic sense, the imagination, and the moral sentiments. The will to exercise others requires coordinated reception of stimuli from both internal and external senses. So it is that the simple sensations of pleasure that are received by the individual senses combine into a complex sensation of pleasure when the senses are employed in the co-ordinate fashion required by the cultivation and development of a particular capacity. Agents experience the relation between the complex employment of the senses and the complex pleasures that

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68 The suggestion that animals use 'minimal input from reason' is legitimate. Anecdotal and empirical evidence supporting the claim that animals operate with a primitive form of reason is considerable, and is no longer rejected by most philosophers. See e.g. W. V. Quine, 'The Nature of Natural Knowledge' in *Mind and Language*. S. Guttenplan (ed.) Oxford, 1975 p.69, where Quine presents a powerful case for the existence of simple induction as a mind process in animals.

accompany them through the employment of their specifically human capacities. This is the origin of the desire for complex pleasures.

The second part of the process incorporates reason. Once a specifically human capacity is stimulated into desiring and willing, agents' reason then assumes a much higher profile in the satisfaction of desires for complex pleasures as it analyses and determines the best way to achieve the repetition of the particular combination of pleasurable sensations that comprise the complex pleasures. This is the means whereby the volition which is generated by the specifically human capacity is translated into action. The minimal input of reason into the satisfaction of animal desires is sufficient to achieve the simple pleasure that is the end of an uncomplicated response to the sense-data received by a single sense. The desire for a complex pleasure, which results from the combination of the stimulation of a number of senses, is more difficult to translate into action, and requires considerably more input from reason. Thus it is that the increase in involvement of the reasoning processes of consciousness is a signifying mark of the distinction between the lower and the higher portions of human nature.

The input of reason is significant also as a factor in the cultivation and development of dispositions and faculties to their highest degree of potential realization in the individual agent. While the refinement of pleasure can occur up to the limit of amendment, which itself is predetermined by the potential for development in any faculty that exists at birth in the particular individual, it can only take place with the assistance of reason. With the simple 'lower' appetites and their gratification, the exercise of particular dispositions can be amended by reason (within its narrow sphere of operation in the exercise of those animal dispositions) to achieve a refined, more satisfying pleasure. This is the reward that accompanies the cultivation and development of those capacities.[69] The contribution of reason to the cultivation and development of the specifically human capacities is much greater insofar as it has a much wider sphere of influence in the satisfaction of desires for complex pleasures. Given that the amendment and improvement of the 'higher' dispositions is the foundation of civilized societies illustrates the importance of reason in the naturalistic foundation of Mill's broad ethical doctrine.

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69 This is not to deny that the exercise of some of the lower dispositions cannot be refined in an extraordinarily sophisticated way. The satisfaction of the desires for the pleasures of food and drink are examples of these. On examination, however, it turns out that a considerable part of that sophistication comes about through the incorporation of the pleasures that attach to what Mill terms 'higher' capacities, such as the pleasures attaching to the exercise of the aesthetic sense.

The significance of a] locating reason as one of a cluster of elements that comprise consciousness, each of which interacts with the others; and b] underlining its function in the cultivation and amendment of capacities, particularly those that are crucial to the development of civilized society, is reinforced in the inextricable connection Mill understood to exist between mind and body. The link between psychology and physiology is thus found to be the ground of Mill's epistemology. This belief was first stated by Mill in 1833 when he was twenty seven, and reiterated in even stronger form in 1867 as he neared the end of his life. As a young man, developing his theory of aesthetics, Mill was keenly aware that the whole nervous system is susceptible to external impressions which can cause physical and moral states of enjoyment or suffering. 'All strongly pleasurable or painful sensations' he wrote, 'pervade the entire nervous system,' and, importantly, they are able to be reproduced by means of the imagination.[70] The relation between physiology and psychology, and the importance of their joint input into the social organization of the species was to remain an key element of his thinking throughout Mill's working life.

Mill's approach to the constitutional elements of human nature may be argued to be similar to that of Darwin, in that he understood them to be functional.[71] So much was this the case that in 1867 he asserted that the study of 'physiology, the science of the laws of organic and animal life . . . is the best introduction to the difficult questions of politics and social life,' and in the same place noted the relation between the art of political philosophy and the science of physiology in the study of human relations. The subject of both is 'Man: the same complex and manifold being, whose properties are not independent of circumstance, and immovable from age to age . . . but are infinitely variable, indefinitely modifiable by art or accident.'[72] From this perspective of the relation between physiology and psychology may be seen to stem Mill's organicist understanding of human nature, and his core belief in the cultivation and development of all the inward forces of that nature as the bedrock of ethical society.[73]

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70 See Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties.' and 'Tennyson's Poems.' *Works*. Vol.1. pp.361, 413.

71 For Mill's appreciation of Darwin's thought, see Mill to Alexander Bain, April 1860 in 'Later Letters.' *Works*. Vol.15 p.695; Mill to Hewett C. Watson, January 1869, in 'Later Letters.' *Works* Vol.17. pp.1553-54; Mill to Edward Livingstone Yeomans, March 1869 in 'Later Letters.' *Works*. Vol.17. p.1570

72 Mill, 'Inaugural Address to the University of St. Andrews.' *Works*. Vol.21. pp.240-242. This important linkage between physiology, psychology, and environment is echoed in the *Logic* where Mill asserts that, contrary to the arguments of the à priorists, 'our actions follow from our characters, and our characters follow from our organization, our education, and our circumstances.' See Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book.VI Ch.III §2, p.847.

73 Mill, 'On Liberty.' p.263.

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There are several objections that may be made against Mill's contention that it is the pursuit of complex pleasures in the form of amendment and improvement of specifically human capacities that underpins the development of civilized society. The most obvious of these is the claim that there is no inherent reason for agents to prefer complex over simple pleasures, and in fact there is much evidence to suggest that many agents deliberately choose an excess of a 'lower' pleasure in preference to modest amount of 'higher' pleasure. A brief look at how Mill defended his account of human nature from these objections will bring that account to a close.

Mill claimed that agents prefer the pleasures that attach to the cultivation of specifically human capacities (which take some effort to achieve) over the easily obtainable pleasures that come with the satisfaction of the animal appetites.[74] This is a contentious claim, and support for it must be established. One way of doing this has already been touched upon above. The failure to satisfy a desire of a 'lower' appetite is in itself the cause of an unpleasant sensation. This is the impetus for taking whatever action will bring about such satisfaction: it is simultaneously the prevention of unpleasure and the production of pleasure. Even more is it the case, Mill argued, that providing the agent is aware of the complex pleasures that accompany the exercise of higher capacities the failure to satisfy a desire for complex pleasure is the cause of unpleasant sensation. Accordingly, agents who are aware of such pleasures will act to satisfy the desires for them both for the sake of the pleasure, and to avoid the unpleasantness that accompanies the unsatisfied desire. Failure to do so results, said Mill, in more acute suffering than does failure to satisfy the desires of the lower appetites.[75] This explanation is augmented and strengthened by Mill's depiction of a particular aspect of what is specifically human in human nature.

One of the dispositions of human nature, Mill claimed, is the disposition to strive toward the cultivation and development of capacities through the medium of action. He described this important capacity as the disposition of agents to form their own character, and the accompanying wish for self-culture.[76] Mill amplified this description by further saying that such action is the action of the individual 'desiring, for its own sake, the conformity of his own character to his standard of excellence, without hope of good or fear of evil from other source than his own inward

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74 Mill, 'Utilitarianism.' p.210.
75 *Ibid.*, pp.211-12.
76 Mill, 'Bentham.' p.98.

consciousness.'[77] It is the cultivation of this disposition, found in the range of specifically human capacities, that brings about the achievement of the potentials inherent in the spectrum of dispositions, faculties, and talents in the individual agent, and which underpins 'all real amelioration in the lot of mankind.'[78]

Mill was aware that some individuals do, nonetheless, appear to reject the pleasures that accompany the development of the 'higher' capacities, and prefer only the pleasures that are found in the satisfaction of the 'lower' appetites. The elements that comprise Mill's explanation of this apparent rejection are important to note because they emerge again below as focal issues toward which he directed the development of his socio-political theory.

Some agents who are both aware and capable of developing the capacities that result in higher pleasures may postpone their development or ignore it altogether. This is because of a number of connected reasons. The most serious, for Mill, is that such agents have an 'infirmity of character,' a weakness which causes them to 'choose the lower description of pleasures in preference to the higher.' This flaw is not, according to Mill, innate in their original natures, but comes about because the ability to cultivate the important higher capacities is in most natures 'a very tender plant, easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance.' Weakness of character comes about because of poor exemplars, and lack of opportunity to develop those capacities which lead to the building of character. This is the vicious circle people are trapped in that prevents their choosing to exercise the capacities that bring higher pleasures, even though they originally have the capability to do so.[79]

A further reason, related to the first, is that the cultivation and development of capacities to achieve the highest pleasures is only possible if the circumstances in the individual agent's life are conducive to that development. Drudgery in occupation, lack of education, and poor living and social conditions cause agents to 'lose their high aspirations [and] addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them' but because they are the only ones to which they have access.[80] Both reasons Mill gave for agents rejecting higher pleasures in favour of those that accompany the satisfaction of animal appetites are rooted in the circumstances and environment of the agents.

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77 *Ibid.*, p.95.
78 Mill, 'Autobiography.' p.245.
79 Mill, 'Utilitarianism.' pp.212-133.
80 *Ibid.*, p.213.

Mill understood both the difference and the distance between the individual human nature as a state of undeveloped powers and properties and that same nature in a cultivated and developed state, and the degree of difficulty faced by many individuals in their personal circumstances when attempting to achieve such development. Moreover, he understood that the transformation of the inherent potentials of human nature is a process that takes place in a complicated and shifting arena. It is not a straightforward, nor - even if desired - an inevitable process. 'The simple fact is,' he pointed out, 'human interests are so complicated, and the effects of any incident whatever so multitudinous, that if it touches mankind at all, its influence on them is, in the great majority of cases, both good and bad.'[81] Because of circumstances and environment, individual agents may not, and may never, be aware of the more complex and intense pleasures that attach to the amendment and refinement of their specifically human natures.

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81 Mill, 'Three Essays on Religion.' p.387.