

John Stuart Mill's Location in Contemporary Debate:

A Case for Its Reassessment.

In the end, political theory can make no contribution to how we govern ourselves except by struggling, against all the impulses that drag us back to our own culture, toward generality and some reflective basis for deciding which of our traditional distinctions and discriminations are genuine and which spurious, which contribute to the flourishing of the ideals we want, after reflection, to embrace.

Ronald Dworkin. *A Matter of Principle*. Cambridge, Mass., 1985 p.219.

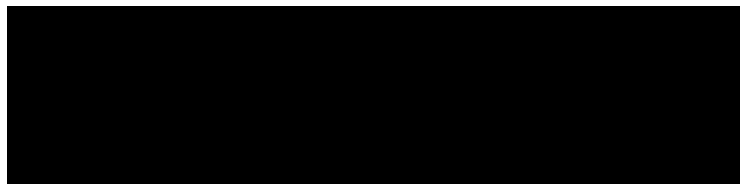
A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all other sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



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Raymond Bale

Abstract.

John Stuart Mill's Location in Contemporary Debate: A Case for Its Reassessment.

Contemporary theorists regard Mill as historically significant only and without impact on the two main strands of contemporary debate, which concern the possibility of the development of universal theory in a context of moral pluralism, and the attack upon liberal theory by the cluster of arguments collectively referred to as 'communitarian'. The argument of the thesis is that this regard should be revised. Its interpretation of Mill's political philosophy is interded to demonstrate the fruitfulness of a re-examination of his thought in relation to the contemporary debate. It does so by way of analysis of the broad rather than the narrow spectrum of ideas which comprise his materialist philosophy, arguing that only by accepting Mill's claim for his thought to be both holist and naturalist can the full extent of its value be recognized. Via this method of interpretation, the thesis reaches the conclusion that Mill's universal virtue ethics recognized and incorporated moral pluralism, and did so in a way that produced a set of necessary conditions that each code of action must satisfy to retain legitimacy as a moral code. To the extent that these conditions are satisfied, the plurality of codes of action are both reconcilable and commensurable. Furthermore, Mill's understanding of the autonomous individual at the level of human nature has as a crucial factor the existence of a hard-wired disposition in agents to perform other-directed actions. The cultivation and development of this disposition is essential for the achievement of the greatest possible individual happiness. Individuality is achieved only by the participation of agents in groups and society. The conclusion of the thesis is that considerable evidence is found in Mill's work to confirm the claim that its re-examination from this perspective will contribute fruitfully to the debate on both major issues in political philosophy, and accordingly his position in the debate should be revised.

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