Chapter IX
Mill's Understanding of Customary Morality and Its Identity with Moral Pluralism [II]
Mill's Analysis of the Connection between Reason, Habit, and the Development of Customary Morality. His Ambivalence explained.

§IX.i. The pattern of Mill's analysis: reason and the formulation of codes of action. Reason is the most important element in Mill's development of social and political theory, and is at the heart of his program of action. It is the instrument which locates the actions (the means) that bring about the satisfaction of desires for happiness.[1] It is also the faculty in all human beings which guides action toward the development of a harmonious and balanced achievement of happiness across the spectrum of potentials unique to the reasoning individual. Reason, according to Mill, is the instrument which enables agents to bypass or ignore immediate pleasures in order to achieve long-lasting happinesses. Reason has the power to override the instinct to gratify immediate desires, and does so for the sake of a rationally-determined qualitatively superior end.

Because of reason's guiding role in the choice of action with which to achieve this end, Mill's social and political theory focused on its cultivation and development in both private and public spheres of action. At the same time he recognized its limitations inasmuch as it is impossible for agents to act at every moment with an awareness of the rational grounds for so acting. As Mill noted, in theory reasoning to determine the best possible course of action to achieve the greatest possible happiness is a process that is required to be undertaken in each differing set of circumstances, regardless of their similarity. In practice, however, such constant re-reasoning in similar situations is resource-wasteful Human psychophysiology has, instead, recourse to bypass mechanisms which are set up in consciousness to make the process more efficient. These are mechanisms which Mill, following earlier theorists, called Laws of Association. In all areas of perception, including those of codifying the actions most conducive to the achievement of happiness, this method of conservation is practiced for all repetitive responses to circumstances. Only infrequently do agents use reason solely as their guide to choice of action. In the majority of cases, agents act using a

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1 See Ch.III.§iv.

mixture of reason and habitual response. In a large number of cases, agents act using as guidance only their habitual response to similar circumstances.[2]

Mill understood the development by reason of codes of action, whether in the private or the public sphere and by individual agents or by the community, to be the formal recognition of responses found to be worthwhile choices over time and space in repeated or similar circumstances. The payback of such habitual responses is assessed as worthwhile in the achievement of happiness and so becomes the rationale for their inclusion in the sets of conditional and unconditional rules and precepts which guide the actions of all individuals.

Mill was also keenly conscious of the significance of circumstances and environment to reason's formulation of codes of action.[3] Codes of action are not developed in a vacuum, but in an environment which is either in a steady state or in one of transition. The environment in which a reasoning agent develops codes of action that become the basis of his or her habitual response to similar sets of circumstances provides much of the raw material from which the choice of action is extrapolated. The environment comprises, among other things, the totality of the institutions and processes currently present in the community that contribute to the organization and functioning of that community. The customs, traditions, cultural heritage, and economic and technological sophistication of the community provide a set of parameters within which the best choice of action to suit particular circumstances is made. In such an environment, the wisdom and practices of earlier generations has already laid down a body of rules and precepts to govern much of private and public choice of action.

The particular circumstances and conditions in which the reasoning agent exists also contribute significantly to the development of personal, and interpretation of public, codes of action. Education, opportunities for the exercise of other-directed dispositions, the example of others' actions, the resources available to the agent (including time), are all contributing factors in the development and entrenchment of codes of action in the individual. The result of the existence of widely varying circumstances and conditions affecting agents in any environment is that not only is a broad range of subtly different codes of action likely to be developed by reasoning agents but there is also a wide spectrum of difference between agents in terms of their cultivated and developed reasoning powers.

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2 See Ch.II §§v-vii.
3 See Ch.III.§v.

The development of codes of action by fully-reasoning agents has been depicted. That is one end of the spectrum recognized by Mill. The other is that of the non-reasoning agent, and of those without sufficient resources to engage fully in the process of decision-making. Mill acknowledged that in such cases both environment and the particular circumstances and conditions of an individual's life are major influences on his or her non-reasoning.[4] Lack of potential in reasoning faculties is one cause, but it is only one among many. Lack of time, of formal education, of contact with experienced others who can act as guides and exemplars produces a group of non-reasoners in even the most sophisticated environments.

The important question for Mill was from where does the non-reasoning agent receive his or her code of conduct covering actions in the private and the public sphere? The answer is from the same sources as all other agents, except that in the case of the non-reasoning and resource-poor agents they tend to rely far more greatly and with little demand for justification on the existing codes of behaviour found in the community. Non-reasoners nonetheless employ codes of action to conduct their affairs because they are able to utilize the reasoning of other resource-rich agents. They are inculcated with the dominant rules and precepts of action which apply in their group(s) and community (in all spheres, not only the ethical and moral spheres). Non-reasoning agents comply with these public codes of action to achieve the same end as do reasoning agents - the achievement of happiness via acceptance and approbation of others.

Mill regarded his analysis of reason's transmutation into habitual responses as the origin of codes of action, and to be demonstrably true insofar as it rests firmly on the ground provided by his account of human nature and its particular and general end. At the same time he was at pains to point out that in existential society the exercise of reason and the subsequent development of codified habitual responses has not resulted in the formulation of rules and precepts exclusively directed toward the achievement of happiness and the attainment of *telos*. The problem, he noted, is located in the paradoxical nature of the development of habitual responses. The benefit of access to community wisdom was acknowledged by Mill to be potentially of great assistance to the agent in developing a broad ethical code of action as well as formulating a code of public conduct. But he also noted that, because of the normative force of such wisdom, should it be flawed in any way it could operate to the detriment of the agent's

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4 Mill, 'Utilitarianism.' *Works*. Vol.10 p.212; 'Autobiography.' *Works*. Vol.1 pp.260-261; 'On Liberty.' *Works*. Vol.18 p.271.

achievement of happiness by providing what appear to be compelling arguments to act in ways indifferent to or counterproductive of happiness.

Mill was well aware of the existence of these flaws in codes of action which caused them to be indifferent to or counterproductive of happiness, and realized that for his enlarged principle of utility to be installed as universal practice this problem must be dissolved. To this end Mill's concern was to discover how during the transmutation of reason into habitual response these flaws crept into the process, deflected it from its original purpose of providing an efficient and resource-conserving guide to the achievement of happiness, and resulted instead in the development of rules and precepts, embedded in the ethos of the community and employed by every particular agent in the conduct of their lives which bear no relation to the achievement of happiness and which in many cases are counterproductive to that end.

To do this, he directed his analysis to the effect of time and usage on the occulting of the original end of action, and to discover the results of this occulting at the level both of the reasoning and of the non-reasoning agent. Such occurrence is incremental and takes place over significant periods of time. The paradox, Mill noted, is that while a significant number are a distortion of and ultimately unrelated to the universal virtue ethic of happiness achievement, many such habitual responses retain their connection to the end of existence. The important question to be answered was how the flaw enters the process. If this could be determined, then steps might be taken in the form of a program of action to minimize or even prevent its occurrence. Accordingly, the focus of Mill's understanding of the effect of development of this process which he called 'customary morality' was the extent of the occulting of the original purpose for action and how this might be reversed.

Mill realized that once this question was answered, he would possess all the information required to set about constructing a socio-political theory and doctrine of action whereby the formulation of codes of action could be refined in order not only to produce the codes most conducive to the achievement of happiness, but also to maintain their connection with their original end despite the action of time and changing environment. Alteration, should it be required, would be conducted in the clear realization of the purpose and end of that alteration. Mill's analysis of this problem follows in the form of an examination of his understanding of the relation of reason to customary morality, or what may now be seen to be its equivalent contemporary expression 'moral pluralism.'

§IX.ii. Reason and the concepts of perfection and progress. Reason as the instrument with which to achieve harmony and balance. Mill's promulgation of reason, and of those activities and processes that lead to its development in agents, now appears in a different light. The fundamental motivation for action remains the satisfaction of desires for pleasure, and the original purpose of reasoning is to guide action toward the achievement of that end. However, once the abstract concepts of perfection and progress are introduced, the role of reason is significantly altered.

In Mill's development of a Theory of Life or broad ethical doctrine which rests on the empirically demonstrable evidence of science, it is reason that turns dispositional satisfaction into purpose, and guides individuals to the achievement of greater general happiness and consequently a higher and more complete attainment of the end of existence. By employing the abstract concepts of perfection and progress at a limited, empirical level, and by applying limited perfection to the totality of human nature via the Aristotelian notion of balance and harmony, reason was anticipated by Mill to be able to discern the most balanced and harmonious amendment of nature to the end of the greatest possible happiness. In this way, Mill's account of what is the *telos* of the individual was modified into *harmonious* self-realization, and reason is the primary factor in the achievement of that end.

When Mill's understanding of the nature and function of reason in the harmonious and balanced achievement of *telos* is examined from this perspective, there emerges a clear connection between his account of human nature, his broad ethical doctrine, and the development of his socio-political theory. Reason's operation in the lives of agents is a complex process which cannot be separated from the other elements of consciousness. Once this is recognized, part of the explanation of agents' failure to follow the dictates of reason in their search for happiness is that reason, as the process of evaluation and judgment of what is the most beneficial pattern of action for the individual agent, has its roots in human nature.

Mill recognized that reason is not autonomous in that it is not isolated from the other components of consciousness. Reasoning, understood as the striving for harmony and balance in the pursuit of happiness is a continuous process of evaluation and judgment. This process is not detached from the original composition of human nature.[5] The processes of evaluation and judgment have a set of dispositions at their base. The presence and acknowledgment of these dispositions is one of the major differences

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5 See Ch.II.§§iv-v.

between Mill and his *à priorist* opponents. It is also the ground for Mill's rejection of the mechanical reasoning of the Benthamists. His complex account of human nature which is directly contrasted by him to the simplistic account that underpins Benthamist utilitarianism, and his belief in synergetic interaction between self- and other-interest, is the result of this perspective.[6]

What are these evaluative dispositions, according to Mill? They are the moral disposition (previously described as Mill's version of the moral sense), the aesthetic disposition or sense, and the sympathetic disposition.[7] These three evaluative dispositions work in conjunction, stated Mill, because 'every human action has three aspects: its *moral* aspect, or that of its *right* or *wrong*; its *aesthetic* aspect, or that of its *beauty*; its *sympathetic* aspect, or that of its *lovableness*.'[8] It is the balancing of these three aspects by the evaluative dispositions which underpin the reasoning process that Mill placed at the centre of perfectibility.[9] Their joint cultivation and development is expressed in the form of a higher order of reasoning which assists the individual agent in the achievement of the personal degree of perfectibility inherent in his/her nature across the spectrum of dispositions developed in harmony and balance. To underline this point Mill noted that some theorists err by setting the aesthetic and sentimental dispositions above the moral, but 'the error of the moralists in general, and of Bentham, is to sink the [the aesthetic and sentimental dispositions] entirely.'[10]

Because of this inextricable connection with the original dispositions in human nature, Mill acknowledged that reason is always able to be overridden by more powerful desires for pleasure. This is recognized by Mill in his rejection of the inevitability of achievement of possible perfection in individuals. From infirmity of character, he states, men often 'make their election for the nearer good, though they know it to be the less valuable; and this no less when the choice is between two bodily pleasures than

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6 Mill's acceptance of the Darwinian thesis of natural selection, together with the belief that the physiological and the intellectual aspects of human existence interact, are the underlying reasons for his elevating the psychophysiological understanding of reasoning to prominence. For Mill's acceptance of Darwin's thesis, see Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book III Ch.XIV §6, *Works* Vol.7 pp.498n-499n; Mill to Alexander Bain, April 1860, 'Later Letters.' *Works*. Vol.15 p.695; Mill to H.C.Watson, January, 1869, 'Later Letters.' *Works*. Vol.17 pp.1553-1554

7 For Mill's recognition of the importance of aesthetic sense, see Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.XII §6, p.949; 'Bentham.' *Works*. Vol.10 pp.112-113; 'Utilitarianism.' p.221. For Mill's recognition of the power and significance of imagination, see Mill, 'Autobiography.' p.114; 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy.' *Works*. Vol.1 p.17.

8 Mill, 'Bentham.' pp.112-113.

9 Mill, 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy.' p.6.

10 Mill, 'Bentham.' p.113.

when it is between bodily and mental.'[11] The reason Mill gives for this succumbing to the nearer happiness ties his understanding of the progress of society tightly to that of the perfecting of the individuals' natures. 'Capacity for nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant,' he noted, and went on to point out that it is easily killed, 'not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance; and in the majority of young persons it speedily dies away if the occupations to which their position in life has devoted them, and the society into which it has thrown them, are not favorable to keeping that higher capacity in exercise.'[12]

Mill's confirmation of the important role played by reason in the achievement of harmony and balance between the cultivation and development of the spectrum of dispositions, capacities, and faculties serves to explain Mill's almost exclusive concentration on development of the rational faculty in his socio-political theory. The relation of reason to the perfectibility of individual human natures, and the circumstances in which it best flourishes, was acknowledged by Mill to be the core theme of his *On Liberty*.[13] That work, he wrote, is the advocacy of a single truth, which is 'the importance, to man and society, of a large variety in types of character, and of giving full freedom to human nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting directions.'[14] In the light of the above examination, Mill's promotion of the development of reason via education, experience of participation, and the example of the instructed class, will be seen to chime with his teleological theory and the development of his broad ethical doctrine, and to be illustrative of his intention to address the causes rather than the symptoms of the apparent incompatibility of codes of action in society.[15]

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11 Mill, 'Utilitarianism.' p.212.

12 *Ibid.*, p.213.

13 Mill, 'On Liberty.' pp.263-265.

14 This aspect of romanticist theory was influential on Mill's work, as he acknowledged in his Autobiography. While not completely acceptable to Mill, Goethe's romanticist views are, he wrote, 'penetrated throughout by views of morals and of conduct in life, often in my opinion not defensible, but which are incessantly seeking whatever defence they admit of in the theory of the right and duty of self-development.' These views were subsequently modified by Mill, in which form they had considerable influence on the development of his ideas. At the same time, and alongside the Goethian influence, not only von Humboldt's, but also the ideas of Maccall and Warren on self-realization, are acknowledged by Mill to form part of his development of this central theme in his work. See Mill, 'Autobiography.' p.259.

15 The syncretic compound of Mill's intellectual position is clearly demonstrated in this claim, which turns out to be a combination of the nineteenth century doctrine of the rights of individuality together with the claim made by the romanticists for the moral nature of human beings to develop itself in its own way. See Mill, 'Autobiography.' pp.260-261.

§IX.iii Reason and the significance of circumstances and environment to its cultivation and development. Recognition of the link between the state of the society and the possibility of limited perfection in individual agents was important for Mill, in that it sets up the framework within which his socio-political theories must operate. In complex societies, individuals are under pressure of time and opportunity, and it is easy for them to lose their high aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, through lack of opportunity for their exercise. In such circumstances, 'they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them, but because they are either the only ones to which they have access, or the only ones which they are any longer capable of enjoying.'[16] It turns out, then, that the evaluative dispositions or senses, make their contribution to the process of judgment between choices of action and objects only in certain circumstances. Such circumstances are those that obtain when human beings are in a stable and secure position; that is, in a condition of some sophistication and civilization and not immediately oppressed by any life-threatening expectations. In the event of those circumstances obtaining, it is the contribution of the evaluative dispositions through the process of reasoning that enables the perfectibility of the individual to take place.

Mill believed that the circumstances and environment of the agent are significant factors in the failure of agents to realize harmoniously their possible perfection.[17] This is underscored in Mill's acceptance that within some individuals there exist powerful potentials that may be developed in socially disruptive ways, coupled with his rejection of the argument that these powerful potentials are inevitably antisocial. Powerful impulses, he wrote, are identical with energy and while energy may be turned to bad uses, it is also the source of all good outcomes. Mill's argument rests on his belief that it is a question of balance and harmony. 'Strong impulses,' he argued, 'are only perilous when not properly balanced; when one set of aims and inclinations is developed into strength, while others which ought to co-exist with them, remain weak and inactive.'[18] The optimistic claim Mill is making here is that the natural inclination of the individual human being is toward possible perfection, and, providing the circumstances - that is the availability of exemplars, of the means of educating and experiencing, of liberty and recognition of the value of individuality - exist, then human beings will move naturally toward a condition of perfection and its concomitant, a high degree of happiness for both individual and society. From this positive perspective,

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16 *Loc.cit.*
17 Mill, 'Spirit of the Age III.' *Works* .'/ol.22 pp.256-57.
18 Mill, 'On Liberty.' pp.263-264.

Mill proceeded to construct a theoretical social and political system designed to achieve such an end.

§IX.iv. Mill's development of reason as the means whereby human beings may influence positively the progress of their community existence, and his belief in the conjunction of both individual and community ends via the exercise of that faculty. The underlying distinction between the progress of the community and the perfectibility of the individual as explained above lies in the degree to which each is motivated by the desires of human nature. This primary motivation in individual agents is almost non-existent in the community. There it must rely on the development of social and other-directed dispositions in individual members of the community. This was recognized by Mill as a fragile set of dispositions, and easily overridden.

The effect of the minimal presence of the pleasure/pain generators of action in community life is implicit in Mill's understanding of the way in which societies achieve progress over time, and is expressed in his philosophy of history. There the reasoned responses of the community are more vigorous in critical periods of history, and, after a period of turmoil, the result is a rational agreement between individuals to bring about conditions of greater 'unsocial sociability' in order to further private ends. In times of social stasis this reasoning process is replaced by the habitual responses and unquestioned actions that characterize adherence to the rules and precepts of customary morality. The result, in static periods of history, may be wholly beneficial to the achievement of happiness, or may contain many habitual practices that are counterproductive to that end. Insofar as habitual and nonreasoned behaviours are found to be antagonistic to Mill's goal of maximizing the happiness of both individuals and the community, they are an obstacle to his achievement of this end.

Mill's response to the problem of nonreasoned behaviour was the installation and promotion of reason as the only means whereby community progress, and so the achievement of the greatest possible happiness, may be brought about. Two points of significance to the further unraveling of Mill's interrelation between human nature, broad ethical doctrine, and the development of socio-political theory, are reinforced in this response. The first is that reason flourishes best when it is employed in the satisfaction of the individual's desires, including the desire for public approbation, status, and reputation. The second is that Mill's awareness of the incalculable mass of intervening variables, both in the lives of individual agents and in the organization and development of the community, restricts the development of theory and doctrine to the

level of guidance only. It cannot be presented in the form of a body of strict rules and precepts applicable to all agents in all possible combinations of circumstances.[19]

§IX.v. The effect of this understanding of the role of reason in the development of codes of action upon Mill's formulation of holistic, naturalist theory. It has been demonstrated above that Mill's recognition of the complexity both of individual human nature, and the way that nature is affected by its circumstances and experiences, together with his recognition of the crucial part played by reason in the satisfaction of the desires of individual natures, coalesce to form the ground of his account of perfectibility. It has also been noted that Mill did not then go on to claim discovery of laws of social behaviour. The complication of human interests, the multiplicity of effects of action, and the way in which experience interacts with circumstance and the previous associations of agents was recognized by him as rendering the explanatory powers of that theory down to the level of a guide only. The same explanatory process is applicable to the relation between the individual and the achievement of progress in the community.

Mill regarded this conclusion as a considerable advance in terms of discovering the way in which reason's transmutation into habitual response becomes distorted from its original intention to guide agents toward the achievement of happiness and instead commands or commends them to the performance of other, indifferent or counterproductive acts. When applied to the formulation of codes, rules and precepts with which to guide and govern action in both the private and the public spheres of agents' lives the complexity of the shaping forces which press upon the formation of such codes may be seen to subject both reason and the development of habitual response to constant mutating pressure. The matrix in which the codes of action are formed is extraordinarily fluid, and is so both at the level of the individual agent and at the community level. The multiplicity of past and future circumstances and environments each contributes to the ultimate form of such codes. With such a complex genesis, it is to be expected not only that alternative codes of action will be developed designed to achieve the identical end of happiness for individual and community, but that other codes will also develop which are flawed in that regard. Mill's analysis of the formation of customary morality, or moral pluralism, demonstrates both his understanding of the importance and necessity of such codes together with his explanation of his ambivalence toward them.

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19 Mill, 'Three Essays on Religion.' *Works*. Vol.10 p.387.

§IX.vi. Customary morality and its relation to Mill's understanding of improvement, perfectibility, and progress. Mill's responses to the direct criticisms of the anti-utilitarians, and his engagement with the contemporary problem of moral pluralism have been presented in piecemeal fashion at the appropriate places in this understanding of his naturalist and holist philosophy. The concluding stage of the present interpretation is to examine how Mill made the final shift from his original account of human nature and its *telos*, via the theory of the Art of Life, to the development of a socio-political program of action whereby to bring about the most propitious and conducive setting for the achievement of the greatest possible happiness for both individual and community.

To achieve his goal of a realizable program of socio-political action, Mill examined first evidence of how the framework of rules and precepts which comprise customary morality (both in his own time, and at all earlier stages of the history of societies) came about. He also and importantly analyzed the internal tensions in his society at all levels of belief, and discovered with the assistance of the previously examined evidence of science and product of the Art of Life that these had come about through correctable mutations of the fundamental desire for happiness. By identifying the causes of such mutations, Mill anticipated he could formulate a program whereby they might be corrected and reshaped into an ongoing process of melioration of circumstances and conditions conducive to the achievement of happiness of both individuals and the community.

Mill was confident that such corrective and meliorative change to the existing context might be achieved. The distinction he made between improvement, perfectibility, and progress illustrates not only that he recognized such change to be both incremental and slow to bring about, but also that his plan of approach to achieve that end is viable in all contexts across time and space. The final preparative step prior to formulating social and political theory to this end was to depict clearly the nature and effect of customary morality on the achievement of *telos*.

§IX.vii. The relation of customary morality to the processes of consciousness and the development of habit. The examination of Mill's understanding and evaluation of customary morality starts with his affirmation that the establishment of the good life in society is the recognized end of moral action, and consequently 'supposes morality to be founded on the good of society.' Every child is born with the disposition to behave in a manner that we term moral, and that disposition is both fragile and uncomplicated. With the passing of time and the exposure of children to the experiences of private life,

social and cultural environment, and education, every child 'gradually rises to the very complex idea of "society", and learns in what manner his actions may affect the interests of other persons.'[20] The germs of social feeling, the dispositional potential to produce pleasure and to minimize pain for others, are molded and educated into the extraordinarily complex set of volitions and responses we understand to be the moral faculty.

Mill also drew attention to the fact that in agents with fully-formed characters habit is the basis of moral evaluation and judgment, and habits are formed through experience and education interacting with disposition.[21] It has already been noted that habitual moral action is the physical process that contributes to the cultivation and development of virtue. By examining Mill's understanding of the formation of the habitual responses the result of which is the development of settled character in agents, the reason for his ambivalence toward customary morality will be made clear.

The first stage in habit formation in the sphere of moral judgment and action, and so in the formation of settled character, is the discovery by each agent of what may be termed private truths. The reasoning process that discerns private truths of ethical value, Mill asserted, does so in terms of satisfaction of the desires of the moral disposition or sense and its product is a relative judgment. The degree of relativity is connected to the level of cultivation of the dispositions etc., the circumstances of the case, the environment, experiences, and education of the agent. That the ethical evaluation or judgment appears to the evaluating agent as a truth is also explained by Mill.[22] In the explanation Mill's methodological preference for grounding his arguments on the evidence of science flags an acceptance of some version of correspondence theory, and this is in fact the basis of his understanding.

'There is,' stated Mill, 'no knowledge *à priori;* no truths cognizable by the mind's inward light, and grounded on intuitive evidence.'[23] Whatever is understood to be true must, according to this claim, be the product of reason utilizing evidence and experience. Nothing 'can be the object of our knowledge except our experience,' he continued, 'and what can be inferred from our experience by the analogies of experience itself.'[24] Implicit in this understanding is a form of relativism; one that understands truth to be that which is the outcome of reasoning from evidence and

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20 Mill, 'Sedgwick's Discourse.' *Works* Vol.10 p.59.
21 Mill, 'Utilitarianism.' p.224. See also Ch.II.§§vii-ix.
22 Mill, 'Sedgwick's Discourse.' pp.56, 59.
23 Mill, 'Coleridge.' *Works.* Vol.10 p.125.
24 *Ibid.,* p.129

experience with all the limitations that attach to finite experience and evidence.[25] What must be discovered, according to Mill, is some method that will 'enable us to decide whether anything, and what, is proved true.' To this end he endeavored to formulate a theory of reasoning in which the rules are laid down for our thinking operations, and that theory is found in the *Logic*.[26]

What is important for our understanding of Mill's account of the origin of customary morality is the function and limitations of real-world propositions, as opposed to speculative or verbal ones, in the arena of moral judgment.[27] It is only through the use of real propositions that agents may discover truths which have never previously been discovered, and they do so by virtue of other truths which have.[28] Mill regards the process, whereby agents use as the raw material of discovery real propositions, as the 'Logic of the ascertainment of truth' and contrasts its use to the narrow verifying power of Formal Logic. Formal Logic 'however useful and even necessary to accurate thought' is only a part of the more comprehensive Logic of Experience, 'which alone can give a meaning . . . to the reasoning process itself.'[29] The final link in the chain of reasoning via which Mill understands the discovery of truths not already known is experience.

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25 It is the case that Mill understood the requirements of life to extend beyond the limitations of experience and evidence available to individual agents. In this condition it is necessary for agents to accept the authority of other minds. (see Mill, 'Spirit of the Age II.' *Works*. Vol. 22 pp.243-244) Nonetheless, to know the truth of something in the strongest sense of the term an agent must experience, reflect, and reason directly the content of that truth. (See Mill, 'On Genius.' *Works*. Vol.1 p.331.)

26 Mill, 'Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy.' *Works*. Vol.9 p.370.

27 Mill's contribution to epistemological theory follows in the tradition of Leibnitz and Kant, and this is acknowledged by him in the *Logic*. Where Leibnitz distinguished between propositions as being either truths of reason or truths of fact, and Kant added to that framework the distinction of analytic and synthetic truths, Mill reframed their theories in terms of the distinction between verbal propositions and real propositions. Propositions which are simply verbal, in Mill's understanding, are those 'in which the predicate connotes the whole or part of what the subject connotes, but nothing besides' and do nothing but reveal 'the whole or some part of the meaning of the name.' Propositions which are real, on the other hand, 'predicate of a thing some fact not involved in the signification of the name by which the proposition speaks of it.' Any proposition, either general or particular, which asserts some additional attribute in, but not connoted by the name of, the subject, is a real proposition. See Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book I Ch.II §§2-4, pp.113, 115-16, 116n

28 Mill, 'Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy.' p.371. The distinction Mill makes between knowledge acquired by reasoning from evidence and knowledge transmitted as fact through the medium of other agents is significant to his understanding of the discovery of moral truths.

29 *Loc. cit.* Writing to Sterling in 1839 Mill stated the extent and purpose of his logic of truth. 'Mine,' he wrote, 'professes to be a logic of *experience* only, & to throw no further light upon the existence of truths not experimental, than is thrown by shewing to what extent reasoning from experience will carry us.' Mill to John Sterling, November 1839, 'Earlier Letters.' *Works*. Vol.13 p.412.

Mill's philosophy of evidence, using the cumulation of truths of experience as the basis of reasoning, is his method of examining real propositions in order to discover new truths.[30] The limitations of such a process are obvious: agents do not know all the truths of experience possible that might be applied to the real proposition; nor is the reasoning power of agents infallible The strengths of the process are, however, considerable. It is applicable in areas of less than complete understanding; it provides a working model for examination of areas where counterfactuals can be produced using extreme circumstances; it is capable of underpinning 'knowledge' on which to ground hypotheses; and it is responsive to new understanding and new 'truths.' Mill refers to formal logic in terms that demonstrate its similarity to the coherence theory of truth, and to the wider logic of experience and truth in terms which are similar to those used of the correspondence theory of truth.[31] In this sense, Mill's method of discerning what is moral 'truth' for the individual agent is through correspondence combined with reasoning.

That moral 'truths' so discovered are similar between agents is not surprising. The moral sense or disposition is similar in essence in each agent; their circumstances and environments, while differing in detail are at any time broadly similar; and their end - that is the satisfaction of the desires of the moral sense - is identical. They all must also use reason to articulate the feelings of the moral sense in the form of moral judgment and evaluation. The transition of species-beneficial behaviours from psychophysiological and experiential origins into their expression as moral rules and precepts is thus explained. At the same time, there is implicit in this explanation the expectation that differing contexts would contribute to the production of differing conclusions concerning the appropriate action to bring about such ends, and result in differing moral rules and precepts.

§IX.viii. The development of customary morality. Mill was aware, however, that the reasoning process is in most agents not consistently at the forefront of consciousness, nor is it employed in every instance of moral judgment and evaluation. Repetition of like circumstances and conditions leads to the compression of the evaluative and judgmental process into what is understood as an habitual response. The significance of the development of habits in Mill's enlarged principle of utility has been examined above.[32] His application of the concept to the development of

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30 See Mill, 'Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy.' p.371.
31 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book II Ch.III §9, pp.206-208.
32 See Ch. II.§vii.

customary morality is both logical and, in terms of the development of moral sense theory, traditional.[33] Where the development of habitual moral responses is important to the emergence of a body of customary morality is in the occulting and eventual absence of memory of the original desires of the moral sense. In this way the original end of moral evaluation and judgment is obscured, and in its stead the habitual or customary judgment becomes the foundation of the moral code. There is no objection by Mill to this process of occulting. It is, in fact, the basis of the transition from other desires for means to ends into desire for the means for its own sake. It is the process whereby a means is transmuted into an end.[34]

At this point, however, an additional modifying factor becomes significant to the process of agents' development and adoption of a moral code. Many agents do not have either the capacity or the inclination to trouble themselves with the burden of discovering moral 'truths.' They do not, therefore, form habitual moral judgments in the way described above. Instead they adopt without examination the prevailing judgments of the community of which they are a part. These judgments are learned by rote, and applied to circumstances and conditions as they arise. Providing the existing customary moral code is an accurate reflection of the desires of the moral sense, while this is not the most satisfactory condition, it will nonetheless achieve the same end as the judgments and evaluations reasoned in direct response to the promptings of the moral disposition or sense.[35] In fact, it is a condition Mill proposed to be inculcated by the religion of humanity as a stage along the path of education in the purpose and end of the enlarged principle of utility.[36] Agents, according to the thrust of Mill's religion of humanity, will act in ways that promote the achievement of *telos* for the community, first by obeying the rules and precepts of the new religion, and later, as

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33 A clear exposition of habit development as the ground of much moral evaluation and judgement occurs in John Gay's *Dissertation Concerning the Fundamental Principle and Immediate Criterion of Virtue*, first published in 1731, whose work was familiar to Mill. (See Mill, 'James Mill's Analysis of the Human Mind.' *Works* Vol.31 p.98.) Gay's thesis is derived from what he takes to be the self-evident principle that virtue is the mode of action that brings about the good life. It is this development by Gay of what he terms 'resting places' in the rational process that is the genesis of Hartley's associationist theory. As agents pass through life they reach settled understandings of the principles and grounds upon which they act. Rather than trace back every problem to its first principle or axiom, he wrote, agents 'choose out certain truths and means of happiness, which we look upon as Resting Places, in which we may safely acquiesce, in the conduct both of our understanding and practice; in relation to the one, regarding them as axioms; in the other, as ends. Once these resting places are well-known and familiar, reason halts its progress whenever they are reached, and as time passes they become accepted as principles.

34 For a complete account of this process, see Ch.II §vii.

35 Mill, 'Perfectibility.' *Works*. Vol.26 pp.430-31

36 Mill, 'Utility of Religion.' *Works*. Vol.10 pp.403-404, 416.

they are made aware of the principle of utility by education and example, will do so in full knowledge and understanding of why their actions in the public sphere are necessary to achieve that end.

§IX.ix. Mill's ambivalence toward customary morality, and its significance to his broad ethical doctrine. There is, however, another more common application of direct inculcation of customary morality Mill noted that does not rest on such a principled foundation. These are the rules and precepts of moral behaviour that have another purpose which was identified by Mill as the support of systems and institutions that have no connection with happiness nor to the achievement of the *telos* of either individual or community. This cluster of systems and institutions includes organized religion, the maintenance of class and rank divisions, the protection of customs and traditions that are beneficial to the few, and the continuance of a political system whereby the realization of individuality is suppressed in favour of concentration of power in the hands of an elite and passive submission by the many.[37]

Customary morality in this second sense may be defined, according to Mill, as a generally accepted although unreasoned pattern of valuing, judging, and performing 'moral actions' and as such is nothing more than a pattern of ingrained habitual behaviours. The paradoxical nature of customary morality is revealed when it is realized that for the mass of society the notion that such a code rests upon some more fundamental principle than itself is beyond comprehension.[38] The distinction between codes of conduct which have as their end the achievement of happiness and the attainment of *telos* and those which are simply supportive of a *status quo* of hierarchy is not made, and the outcome is one of acceptance of all codes as being justified for some people in some place and at some time.

Despite its problematic nature, Mill acknowledged the benefit to both individual and society of the accumulated wisdom of past experience, and he accepted that such

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37 Social institutions and customary morality and traditions were noted by Mill to be the core of what constitutes the fabric of society. See Mill, 'A System of Logic' Book VI Ch.X §2, p.911-912. In 'On Liberty' (pp.221,271-73.) Mill argued that conformity to customary morality and the traditions of social institutions and processes are, at certain periods in history, stultifying and repressive to the self-realization of the ordinary members of that society. Previous historians and philosophers were ignorant, Mill wrote, of the manner in which customary morality brought about 'a state of things so repugnant to man's self-will and love of independence'. Nor were they aware of how imperatively that morality 'demands the continuance of those influences as the condition of its own existence'. (Mill, 'Coleridge.' p.132.) He was particularly opposed to what he considered to be the counterproductive influence of organized religion. (Mill. 'Autobiography.' pp.43, 47.)

38 Mill, 'Utilitarianism.' p.227.

wisdom is enshrined in social organization as, among other things, customary morality. It derives from the accepted practices and beliefs of the group and is one of the major causes which produce, and phenomena which characterize, states of society generally.[39] However, a morality of this nature, understood by many to be obligatory, is a static force, and when the level of progress achievable in the state of stable, or organic, society is reached, and the conditions of that society propel it into a state of transition, then both custom and customary morality act as obstacles to the improvements required before a new stable state of society can be achieved and the conditions for further progress established.

There is a further important aspect of this second form of customary morality recognized by Mill as a criterion of public approbation which plays a significant part in agents' activities in the public sphere. Human beings are social animals, and desire the approval and sympathy of their fellow creatures. The satisfaction of this desire brings with it a degree of happiness in the same manner as does the satisfaction of other desires. The way in which this desire is satisfied is in the achievement of a reputation for integrity, honesty, and virtue. Such a public reputation is achieved by adherence to the positive and customary laws of the society, by performance of both perfect and imperfect obligations, which turn out to be those conforming to the customs and mores of the group.

What is important to note here, however, is that Mill was aware that the approbation and sympathy which attaches to the performance of such obligations occurs not because of their value to the community, but merely because they form part of the customary morality of the time. Thus the happiness that accompanies such public approbation may be mistaken and at odds with the primary criterion of happiness, which is focused on both individual and species survival and advancement. This major flaw in the effect of the imposition of custom, tradition, and a generally accepted moral code is what separates it in status from customary morality developed through reason or inculcated by education and example which has as its end the achievement of happiness and thus the attainment of the *telos* of both individual and community.[40]

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39 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.X §2, pp.911-12.

40 Mill's argument against the despotism of custom and customary morality over the advancement of the general good takes place most forcefully in his depiction the circumstances of historical periods of transition. As such it is an integral part of his philosophy of history. For evidence of Mill's recognition of customary morality as potentially an aid to the realization of individual and collective happiness as well as potentially a counterproductive force, see e.g. Mill 'Autobiography.' p.171; 'Three Essays on Religion.' p.369ff.; 'Considerations on Representative Government.' p.371ff 'On Liberty.' p.272; 'Utilitarianism.' p.227. For an

The failure of such codes to satisfy the necessary conditions set down in the previous chapter provides the explanation for their being regarded by Mill as counterproductive to that *telos*.

The same pattern of development of the multiplicity of moral codes in contemporary society is susceptible to the same explanation. So, also, are such codes amenable to the same process of evaluation to discover whether or not they satisfy the necessary conditions required by Mill in order that they be acknowledged conducive to the achievement of happiness and the attainment of *telos*. To extrapolate further, Mill's response to the contemporary understanding of moral pluralism would also be one of ambivalence. The important task, he would be anticipated to argue, is to discover their particular connection with the end of existence, and then, with that knowledge, to determine which are indifferent, which counterproductive, and to modify or banish those: with the remainder to evaluate them in terms of their efficiency in achieving their end, and to rank them accordingly. The means of performing such a task is at hand in the shape of the necessary conditions which signify engagement with and contribution to the survival and melioration of both individual and species.

§IX.x. Context and customary morality. The impact of context was noted by Mill to extend beyond the particular circumstances of the individual, and to encompass the customs, traditions, and mores of the society. Its examination here illustrates Mill's awareness of the greater context in which agents operate and the effect of that context on their possible achievement of their greatest possible individual happinesses. It demonstrates Mill's understanding of the common perception of moral codes as being in some way over and above ordinary human existence, together with his explanation of why this condition develops in societies.

Customary morality, in Mill's words, is locked into the environment in which it flourishes because it is 'that which education and opinion have consecrated.' It is ingrained in the responses of the mass of society, so much so that 'it presents itself to the mind with the feeling of being *in itself* obligatory.' To suggest to the majority of people that customary morality is, in fact derived from other fundamental principles such as the pursuit of happiness, is to present them with a paradox. To them, he noted, 'the superstructure seems to stand better without, than with, what is represented as its foundation.'[41]

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41 outline of his philosophy of history, see Mill, 'A System of Logic' Book VI Ch.X, pp.911-30.
Mill, 'Utilitarianism.' p.227.

Whilst acknowledging the impact on the achievement of happiness made by the traditional unexamined practices of customary morality, Mill was aware that the often ancient origins of the particular elements of customary morality are no longer available for criticism, and their continued practice further occults that end. Their general acceptance, in fact, serves to obscure and divert attention from the grounds upon which they rest. The effect of many of the elements of customary morality, as Mill noted, is to act as an obstacle to the achievement of the happiness that accompanies the cultivation and development of the capacities of the individual agent. This effect is compounded as the collection of customs and traditions found in a given society mutate over time to take on a status in the hierarchy of social and political organization that is accepted without criticism. Because of this deadening of inquiry into the beneficial, or otherwise, nature of entrenched behaviour, and the resulting imperviousness to criticism that is its concomitant, Mill focused on the improvement in education and the status of the educated as exemplars to be the way to overcome this problem.[42]

§IX.xi. Mill's understanding of right actions and good outcomes, and their relation to customary morality, and moral pluralism. In Mill's thought, the relation between right and good at the level of agent interaction rests on their link to the production of community happiness and so to the achievement of species *telos*. Right actions in the public sphere are those that generate happiness for all those affected by the act (including the acting agent).[43] The outcome of a public act is good, according to Mill, if it produces such happiness. With the passing of time and the changing of context, however, Mill noted that some public acts come to be regarded as right and their product as good due to other considerations. Such considerations are those of tradition, of culture, of anticipated outcome for the actor in terms of religious and social approbation, and of location in time and space. Mill concluded that acts in the public sphere are frequently judged to be right and their outcome good on the evidence of their practice and support from previous generations, but this affirmation is not infallible and may change over time.

Acts of this order which have become separated from their original motivation Mill classified as belonging to the customary morality of a society or group. Acts of customary morality may, and often do, continue to be conducive to community

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42 Mill, 'On Liberty' p.261; 'A System of Logic' Book VI Ch.X §3, p.913; 'Spirit of the Age I' *Works*. Vol.22 p.233; 'De Toqueville ..' *Works* Vol.18. p.72.

43 It is important to remember that Mill's depiction of other-directed happiness-producing acts is, in its original form, linked to the satisfaction of a disposition and so to the concurrent creation of happiness for the acting agent.

happiness, but Mill also recognized that they may mutate into indifferent or counter-productive forms in terms of their contribution to the achievement of the *telos* of species existence. Part of the process of such change is found in the emergence of a general acceptance of their time-honored worth which masks recognition of their underlying and continuing aid in the striving for community happiness. Religious practices were singled out by Mill as illustrative of this point: acts originally conducive to the happiness of the community insofar as they both contributed directly to the quelling of fear and the explanation of the unknown and also inculcated rules and precepts beneficial to the melioration of the group, mutated over time into formal utterances and ritualistic acts. They had reached a stage of development where they were useful only in maintaining the social and political power of the priesthood, but at the same time were revered on account of their now occulted original purposes.

There is clearly a relation between the forming of habit and the development of customary morality, and this is recognized by Mill. It is also clear that custom, tradition, and group responses to actions and events will vary according to the context and circumstances in which they develop. Significantly, however, and identified by Mill, is that the class of acts that qualify unreservedly to be classified as objectively good by all agents over all periods of recorded history is not large.[44] They comprise the acts and forbearances that contribute to the self-preservation and melioration of others. At one level they are contributory directly to that end and on another they contribute indirectly via the recognition, and acceptance (or tolerance) of equal liberty and autonomy in others as is required by each individual agent.

This, then, is the core of the problem of customary morality as understood by Mill. On the one hand, the original and fragile disposition to aid others toward the achievement of *telos* is embedded in human nature. The end of other-directed action is to satisfy the desires of that disposition for repetition of the pleasure which attaches to its cultivation and development. In order to achieve this end, reason as part of consciousness, determines that there is required both autonomy and liberty for the individual agent. (Coercion of actions toward this end does not result in pleasure. Rather it is counterproductive to happiness in that it frustrates other dispositions.) On the other hand, recognition, acceptance (or tolerance) of liberty and autonomy in others is not a disposition. In fact, it frequently runs counter to the natural and

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44 Mill, 'Utilitarianism.' p.220.

uncultivated dispositions of agents. Rather, it is purely a rational process, one developed as a means whereby the agent can secure to him- or herself the freedom of movement and action to achieve such satisfaction by the installation of liberty and autonomy as primary values of what it is to be a moral person.

The result of the pursuit both of cultivation and development of the disposition to other-directed actions and the rational acceptance of liberty and autonomy is mixed. Beneficial actions become entrenched as custom and tradition, and as such are regarded by Mill as contributory to the end of existence of individual and community. Liberty and autonomy - necessary requirements for such actions if they are to be performed willingly they must be performed without coercion - are secured to them. However, with the passing of time, and the occulting of the original purpose of the actions (that is, when the actions become habitual rather than deliberately chosen) the reluctance of agents to grant to others the liberty and autonomy they require for themselves results in the mutation of customary morality into indifferent or counterproductive forms. In these mutated forms can be recognized the restraining and limiting of liberty and autonomy, as the uncultivated and possibly unrecognized disposition in agents to minimize others' opportunities for freedom of choice and action in order to enhance their own comes into play. This is the tension that permeates customary morality. This is why it sometimes continues to be beneficial to the achievement of end, and at others is indifferent and counterproductive to the achievement of happiness and the concurrent attainment of *telos*.

§IX.xii. The role of customary morality in Mill's holistic theory. What does this mean in terms of Mill's end for human life? Mill acknowledged that customary morality may be a beneficent force within social organization. The problem Mill concluded is that, because much existing customary morality is not derived by reason directly from the pursuit of happiness, it may sanction inappropriate, or counterproductive, behaviour. It is the promulgation of irrational rules of conduct in this manner which lies at the heart of Mill's objection to the tyranny of the mob.[45] Acceptance of such customary morality is an impediment to the achievement of self-realization, of the happiness that accompanies it, and of the *telos* of both individual and community. It may appear to be a compromise acceptable to all involved, but 'the conditions of compromise weigh heavily upon . . . the higher natures . . . who from a combination of natural and acquired advantages, have the greatest capacity for feeling happiness.' In other words, by acting as a restriction upon choice,

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45 Mill, 'On Liberty,' p.222.

it prevents the self-realization of agents whose natural raw faculties require a higher level of cultivation and development to fulfill their possible perfection, and thus achieve their greatest possible happiness.[46]

This understanding of customary morality is that it is the code of behaviour accepted uncritically by the majority, and they, 'being satisfied with the ways of mankind as they now are (for it is they who make them what they are) cannot comprehend why those ways should not be good enough for everybody.' Thus, while Mill asserted that the quality of society is improvable, and that it is the authority of the instructed class becoming more widespread that is the catalyst for improvement, he was also aware of the barrier presented by customary morality to the discussion necessary for such improvement to take place. Mill recognized that political systems require both circumstances and degrees of civilization, and can only be as well chosen as the wisdom of the age would allow. Mill's judgment of the wisdom of customary morality is that it is, in many cases, a hindrance to both the self-realization of the individual and to the realization of society.

'To discuss, and to question established opinions,' wrote Mill, 'are merely two phrases for the same thing. When all opinions are questioned, it is in time found out what are those which will not bear close examination. Ancient doctrines are then put upon their proofs; and those which were originally errors, or have become so by change of circumstances, are thrown aside. Discussion does this.'[47] Insofar as customary morality impedes discussion, it is an impediment to Mill's purpose for government, which is the self-realization of individuals.

§IX.xiii. Summary of the significance of customary morality for Mill's development of social and political theory. Mill's ambivalent attitude toward customary morality has been explained as originating in his recognition that the disposition for sociability in agents exposes them to the approbative/disapprobative power of the community, and that this power acts in conjunction with the evaluative function of reason on agents' choices of action. This link between the perfecting of human nature and the positive power of the community over individuals' actions has an implication for the complete understanding of Mill's criterion of happiness. In society the individual has two avenues for the garnering of the happiness that attaches to the development of any disposition. One is internal and recognized by the introspection of the possessor, and the other is external and found in the interaction

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46 Mill, 'On Marriage.' *Works.* Vol.21. p.37; 'On Liberty.' pp.261, 266.
47 Mill, 'Spirit of the Age I.' p.233.

between the individual and his or her society.[48] Taking introspection alone as the gauge of perfectibility, there is the possibility that an antisocial instinct might be developed in the same way, and with the same resulting happiness, as a social instinct. It is in the concurrent pursuit by individual agents of the external avenue for the achievement of happiness that underpins Mill's case against such development.

In this schema of interaction between agent and community, the internal recognition of the happiness that accompanies the cultivation and development of the social dispositions is crucial, because without it the individual cannot judge either how actions will affect his or her external interests, or the way in which other individuals will respond to those actions. The responses of others to the performance of public acts enables the individual to judge in what way the performance of those acts affects the worldly interests of the actor, including such standing he or she has in the affections and approbative reasoning of others.[49] Mill's recognition of the powerful influence of external circumstances, such as the formal institution of positive law together with the less formal ones of tradition and customary morality, in the shaping and development of individuals' moral faculties is the basis of his anticipation of the extirpation of antisocial instincts. Self-respect which consists in large part of the reputation, status, and standing of the individual in the community, brings with it, if this account is correct, a happiness that is a reflection of the entirety of self-realization.

Mill's endorsement of this implication, which requires the harmonious and balanced development of all elements of individual human natures, permeates his understanding of the enlarged greatest happiness principle.[50] The consequences of anti-social acts are not confined to their effect on the individual's conscience, but also appear in the alteration of the status of the individual in the eyes of the community. In this way, customary morality and mores are valuable aids in the perfecting of individual human natures. They are, when directed toward the end of existence for both individual and community, valuable aids to the achievement of that end. It is only when they do not have this focus, and instead are directed to other, stipulated or possibly unremembered or unknown ends, that Mill was opposed to them.

Concurrently with his grounding of the theory of moral value on the existence of a set of internal sanctions, each of which comprises 'a feeling in our own mind; a pain more or less intense, attendant on violation of duty, which in properly cultivated moral

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48 Mill, 'Bentham.' p.98.
49 *Loc. cit.*
50 Mill, 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy.' p 7.

natures rises, in the more serious cases, into shrinking from it as an impossibility,' Mill was also aware that these feelings which form the bedrock of all ethical action are frequently occulted by the patterns of behaviour inculcated by the socialization of individuals, and it is this that leads people to believe that morality is in some way an externally observable set of rules and precepts. Mill rejected this position and argued forcefully that, given the crucial psychophysiological impulse in human beings to achieve the *telos* of the species, the '*ultimate* sanction . . . of all morality [is] a subjective feeling in our own minds.'[51]

At the same time, Mill recognized the existence and force of a commonly-accepted moral code of behaviour, reinforced by externally supported sanctions of duty, and observed that such behaviour is bound up with 'the hope of favour and the fear of displeasure' from either other human beings, the laws of the society, or God. These rules and precepts which form the basis of customary morality are, according to Mill, identical in the system that comprises the enlarged principle of utility as they are in any other system of morals, insofar as they conduce to the same end. However, many customarily accepted objective goods. he noted are frequently dissevered from their origin in human nature, and instead promulgated for some other purpose. They become entrenched in the behaviour of particular communities of agents through education, tradition, and conformity over a period of generations. Mill did not find this surprising. Human beings, he pointed out, tend to recognize and obey the external laws of man and god as outside, over and above their private concerns 'the more powerfully, the more the appliances of education and general cultivation are bent to the purpose'[52]

Customary morality, then, was the obstacle against which Mill expended considerable effort in the construction of an alternative social and political system. One of the most important aspects of that alternative system was Mill's argument for deliberate assistance for the individual agent in the recognition that his or her fragile disposition to other-directed action must be cultivated and developed in order to achieve the greatest possible individual happiness. This he anticipated to occur via education, example, and the provision of experience of such goods to the inexperienced in order that they may be converted to a preference for the higher good. Incrementally, this will lead their preferences away from narrowly experienced, solely self-interested goods to a broader and socially-integrated understanding of the totality of what

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51 Mill, 'Utilitarianism.' pp.228-29. (Emphasis added.)
52 *Loc. cit.*

comprises individual good.[53] This is only possible, as is demonstrated in the case of the natural desire for justice and its transformation into an objective good, if the original good is found in human nature as a pleasure that may be transformed into a happiness.

The conclusion Mill drew from this analysis in conjunction with his recognition of the impact of circumstances and environment on the character development of agents is that the faculty of reason in many agents is fallible, and at times of failure is an impediment to the achievement of harmonious self-realization. There may be some inherent weakness or imbalance in the original potentials of the individual, but actions and objects do not stand alone in the life of an agent, nor can they be considered in isolation. Every action is both reflection and reinforcement of the state or character of mind of the performing agent, and the striving for perfection that is natural to human beings is a striving to amend the agent's character as a whole.[54] And an agent's state of mind and character are formed in the crucible of his or her experiences, education, and environment, which are also the context and circumstances in which failure occurs.

Mill recognized this, and believed that the promulgation of his enlarged principle of utility would act to reverse this situation. Remedying the problems that beset the development of the evaluative and judgmental capacity of reason in individual agents, and so enabling them to achieve greater happiness, became the purpose of Mill's development of socio-political theory In the face of the impediment of customary morality, the end of theory, for Mill, was the development of an enlarged utility that would promote the return to the emotional source of happiness in the individual - that is the cultivation and development of the specifically human capacities - whilst at the same time satisfying the desires of the external senses for the simple pleasures that accompany the satisfaction of animal appetites.

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53 *Ibid.*, pp.211-12.
54 Mill, 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy.' p.8.

Chapter X.
Confirmation of the validity of the thesis interpretation of Mill's thought, and a summary of its impact on Mill's location in contemporary debate.

§X.i. The purpose of the chapter. The final chapter looks first at the central concept of Mill's socio-political theory and doctrine, that is his theory and doctrine of liberty, to note the degree to which it provides support for the thesis argument insofar as it may be presented as the core of his program of action designed to achieve the end of existence both for the individual and the community. Secondly, and using the confirmation of the thesis argument provided by that examination as its ground, it returns to the issues discussed in Chapter I and which comprise the central problems of contemporary political debate in order to reassess Mill's location in that debate. The conclusion is drawn that it is worthwhile in terms of potential fruitfulness to relocate Mill in the forefront of debate on the grounds that his analysis of the patterns of human behaviour and their purpose and end contains much that deserves further examination in that context.

Once the problem of flawed habitual response formation was identified, Mill was in possession of all the information he required to formulate means to attain the end of the enlarged principle of utility. Significantly, however, Mill's development of social and political theory is predicated on his awareness of the impossibility of developing precise rules of behaviour in what is an originally complex and continually shifting environment. His sensitivity to the mass of intervening variables at the level of individual agents and across the community has been noted above.[1] His response was to aim instead for the development of a set of general principles regarding human behaviour and its striving for the achievement of *telos* from which could be derived the rules and precepts most conducive to that end in the particular environment for which they are designed.

The first sections of this chapter examine the concept most associated with Mill, namely that of liberty, in order to examine the support found there for the interpretation of his holist and naturalist theory which forms the body of this thesis. It will be seen that Mill's requirement for the greatest possible liberty in both private and

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1 See Mill, 'Three Essays on Religion.' *Works*. Vol.10 p.387. for affirmation of this position.

public life for all individuals chimes with the depiction of his enlarged principle of utility as presented above. Liberty, for Mill, is the means whereby the development of individuality, harmonious self-realization, the achievement of the greatest possible happiness, and so the attainment of *telos* are all made possible. The linkage between Mill's understanding of the necessary requirement of maximal liberty of thought and action for the survival and melioration of both individual and species reinforces the thesis argument.

Examination of the concept of liberty which occupies the central position in Mill's social and political theory reveals that it is the first stage in his transformation of the enlarged principle of utility into a program of action. It identifies the main methods whereby human nature may be assisted in its striving for modification and alteration toward the end of achievement of the greatest possible happiness. Each of these will be seen to be the extension of his understanding of human nature and its *telos* into the realm of praxis. No attempt will be made here to examine the already well-known details of the remainder of Mill's social and political theory, beyond making observations concerning how each extends and confirms the thesis claims concerning Mill's holistic and naturalist philosophy. Mill's socio-political theory will be seen not to focus on the pressing issues of his time, although it is applicable to those issues. Rather it is directed toward the wider concern of how best to promulgate and install awareness of the enlarged principle of utility as the principle of action most suited to the achievement of the greatest possible happiness for both individual and the community in all societies and in all environments.

Given this confirmation that the thesis interpretation of Mill's holist, naturalist philosophy is valid, the last half of the chapter consists of a summary of the way in which Mill's thought engages with the contemporary debate, and concludes that such engagement warrants Mill's relocation in that debate from a position of relatively little impact to one which requires much greater awareness and re-examination of his thought and ideas. The final sections return to the problems of contemporary political theory as laid out in Chapter I. and evaluate the potential usefulness of Mill's philosophy as presented here in terms of its fruitfulness as a method of dissolving some of the tensions within them. The conclusion reaffirms, but now from a stronger position, the thesis claim that Mill's thought deserves to be relocated and given active status in contemporary debate and that such relocation will be both worthwhile and fruitful.

§X.ii. Liberty is a means which requires an end. Mill's theory of individuality, and its place in his naturalist framework. Individuality as the end for which liberty is necessary. It makes sense to ask what is liberty for; what is the purpose of negative and positive liberties in the life of the agent. The question is infrequently asked, however, and liberty is often regarded as the primary end of liberal theory.[2] The opposite is the case in Mill's holistic philosophy. Liberty, it is there discovered, is the necessary means whereby individuality is achieved. The greatest possible happiness for the individual agent is brought into being by the cultivation and development of his or her individuality, and its achievement is the purpose of liberty in Mill's understanding. Accordingly, the unraveling of Mill's account of liberty must demonstrate its coherence and consistency with his placement of the achievement of individuality as the focal point of his naturalistic philosophy. So before examining Mill's theory of liberty, the prior question to be answered is what does Mill understand by 'individuality,' and how did he relate it to the classical liberals' focus on individualism?

Mill's theory of individuality is an illustration of his improvement upon the original elements of Benthamist utilitarian theory. The transformation of Bentham's conception of what is an individual also brings out the relation between Mill's understanding of the concept of individuality and the concept of harmonious self-realization. The balanced and harmonious realization of potentials across the spectrum of dispositions etc., within each particular agent, which is the core of Mill's naturalistic holist theory, is nowhere more explicitly presented than in his understanding of the purpose of liberty - the achievement of individuality. The contrast between Bentham's account of the individual and his or her place in the scheme of utilitarianism and that of Mill highlights the relation between Mill's understanding of the necessary requirement of liberty and his account of human nature and its *telos*.

Mill rejected Bentham's individualism as being only a partial account of what it means to be an individual. Bentham's idea of the world, he wrote, was 'that of a collection of persons each pursuing his separate interest or pleasure, and the prevention of whom from jostling one another more than can be helped, must be attempted by hopes and fears derived from three sources - the law, religion, and public opinion.' Mill believed such a theory to fail because inadequate. For example, volition, and self-education which for Mill was the training of the individual's faculties toward the achievement of the desires which underpin volition, was 'a blank in Bentham's system,' thereby

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2 Mill's recognition of this point is found in 'On Liberty.' *Works*. Vol.18 p.261.

leaving it incapable of development.[3] A revision was required to amend Bentham's theory to incorporate Mill's more subtle and existentially demonstrable account of human nature.

Mill's concept of individuality is not a theory of individualism, in the sense that Bentham understood it. It is not a theory that argues for the recognition only of the atomic individual, and the rejection of the concept of society as a separate entity. Instead, in similar fashion to his understanding of human nature as organic rather than machine-like, so too did Mill regard society. For Mill, the setting of social interaction is the sphere in which the individual discovers and realizes a crucial portion of his/her individuality. The cultivation and development of other-directed dispositions is as important to the achievement of harmonious self-realization as is the bringing to fruition of the potentials in the purely self-interested capacities. To distinguish his understanding of what it is to be an individual from that depicted in Bentham's individualism, Mill referred to it as his 'theory of individuality.'[4]

What, according to Mill, is individuality? In each agent, Mill wrote, 'the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being . . . it is not only a co-ordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilization, instruction, education, culture, but is itself a necessary part and condition of all these things.'[5] It is, in essence, the realization of the unique pattern found within each human being of potentials for excellence in the spectrum of dispositions, capacities, and faculties. This 'raw material of human nature,' the irreducible individuality of each particular agent, is realized only through the processes of association and experience. However, while the strength and depth of the individual's desires and feelings indicate the potential degree of realization possible, it cannot come about unaided.[6] This is to say that to realize the individuality within the agent requires cultivation, and the difference in degree of desires and feelings within agents will be reflected in the different levels of strength of individuality achieved by cultivation.

Furthermore, the location of the agent in time and space, and the shaping impact on the realization of potentials made by the particular and general environments in which he or she lives, will also have a significant effect on the development of individuality. Mill's understanding of individuality thus demonstrates the flexibility and subtlety of

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3 Mill, 'Bentham.' *Works.* Vol 10 pp.97-99.
4 Mill, 'Autobiography.' *Works.* Vol.1 p.221.
5 Mill, 'On Liberty.' p.261.
6 *Ibid.*, p.263.

his approach. 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.

Mill also emphasized the relation between individuality and happiness. The principal ingredient of individual and social progress, according to Mill, is the cultivation and development of the spectrum of dispositions etc., that comprise the nature of each human being. The link between the happiness that is the result of harmonious self-realization and Mill's focus on the significance of the development of individuality is explicit. 'It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves,' Mill wrote, 'but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation, and as the works partake of the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified, and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to.'[7] The holistic conception of the interrelation between the individual agent and the community, and their synergetic production of happiness, is clearly expressed here within Mill's argument for the entrenchment of the necessary condition of liberty in society.

How is individuality to be achieved? Mill has already been demonstrated to assert that it is the amendment of human nature that is the purpose and end of existence. His understanding of what comprises individuality in agents is summarized by him in *On Liberty*, and may be seen to chime with his fundamental principle of duty. Mill restated that principle using von Humboldt's concise expression of his [Mill's] thesis. The *telos* of an agent's existence, discovered by reason from the evidence of science, is, Mill concluded, 'the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole.' To achieve this end which is the paramount purpose of existence, he continued, the object of all effort is the achievement of 'the individuality of power and development.'[8] The link between this general thesis of cultivation and development of the potential dispositions etc., in the individual agent to their highest degree in harmony and balance is a reiteration of that already made by Mill in his understanding of the method whereby the greatest happiness may be obtained. It is underscored in Mill's statement of the two necessary requisites for its

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7 *Ibid.*, pp261, 266.
8 *Ibid.*, p261.

achievement: 'freedom and a variety of situations.' In short, Mill's understanding of individuality is identical to the achievement of harmonious self-realization.

The development of individuality was thus tightly linked by Mill to the achievement of the *telos* of existence. He noted explicitly first the link between the development of individuality and the achievement of the end of existence for the particular agent, and secondly the relation between that achievement and the community *telos*. At the particular level, individual agents require different conditions for the achievement of their particular ends and unless the means are available for them to achieve these ends 'they neither obtain their fair share of happiness, nor grow up to the mental, moral, and aesthetic stature of which their nature is capable.'[9] This is a restatement of the assertion made in the previous chapters that the achievement of the greatest possible happiness for the individual is to be found in the harmonious cultivation and development of the spectrum of potentials in his or her particular nature. At this level, agents may be advised of the experiences of others both in the present and in time past, but such experience (whether of another agent or translated into custom or tradition) may be inappropriate or incorrect as a guide to action.[10] More importantly, according to Mill, unless the agent makes a personal evaluation and judgment concerning attitude and action, 'he gains no practice either in discerning or in desiring what is best. The mental and moral, like the muscular powers, are improved only by being used. The faculties are called in to no exercise by doing a thing merely because others do it, no more than by believing a thing only because others believe it.' The dispositions and faculties whose cultivation is essential for the development of individuality are, Mill stated, 'exercised only in making a choice.'[11]

The link made by Mill between individuality and social being is further evidence of the bridge he observed to exist between the achievement of happiness in the particular agent and the increase in the happiness of the community. It is clear that Mill's account of the development of individuality in particular agents is closely connected to his account of the discovery of complex pleasures and the achievement of happiness through the exercise of dispositions etc. As such it is not a process that takes place in isolation: rather, because the spectrum of capacities includes other-directed dispositions, a significant part of individuality must be developed in the public sphere. This, Mill understood, requires not only the performance of other-directed actions within the immediate vicinity of the agent but also participation in the processes and

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9 *Ibid.*, p.266.
10 *Ibid.*, p.262.
11 *Ibid.*, p.262.

institutions of society.[12] Again Mill underlined the connection between happiness, harmonious self-realization, and individuality by linking the achievement of individuality with the increase in happiness in the community. Each agent becomes, he wrote, 'more valuable to himself, and is therefore more capable of being valuable to others' in proportion to the development of his individuality.[13]

§X.iii. The realization of individuality in a multiplicity of contexts. Mill's recognition of the effect on individuality of intervening variables is important to the shape of the necessary conditions required for its development. The greatest happiness of the individual is linked, as contributor, to the greatest happiness of society. At the same time, Mill linked the failure of the individual to achieve that happiness to the circumstances that prevail both in the life of the individual and in society. He was well aware of the possibility of the imperfect development of faculties and dispositions in the context in which the individual is located, but did not regard this as grounds for despair. There is, Mill believed, considerable evidence to suggest that human beings can overcome disadvantageous circumstances. This evidence is found in both the nature of the individual, and in the possibility of creating a social and political system that will act deliberately to enhance the circumstances necessary for self-realization. 'It is the privilege and proper condition of a human being,' he wrote, 'arrived at the maturity of his faculties, to use and interpret experience in his own way. It is for him to find out what part of recorded experience is properly applicable to his own circumstances and character.'[14]

The admission here of differences between circumstances and experiences, and the implicit recognition of intervening variables, is the key to the flexibility of Mill's understanding of how the achievement of *telos* is to take place. The goal of happiness is the same for each particular agent: the recognition, cultivation and development of his or her particular combination of potentials across the spectrum of natural of powers, within the particular realm of circumstances that comprise their existence. However, the development of a unique individuality involves the incorporation of the infinite variety of circumstances, environments, and experiences of particular agents. This is the justification for Mill's advocacy of individuality, and so of liberty of thought, opinion, and action.

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12 This is one of the central themes of *Considerations on Representative Government.*
13 Mill, 'On Liberty.' p.270.
14 *Ibid.*, p.262.

Mill's promotion of individuality as the best means whereby individual reason may be brought to recognition of the necessity to contribute to the progress of the community is an undoubted link between the unique perfectibility of the individual agent and the achievement of community progress. The nexus between Mill's account of human nature and its *telos*, and the development of his broad ethical doctrine, is extended via the theory of individuality into his social theory. His parallel advocacy of liberty is equally contributory to this end, insofar as it is the necessary condition wherein individuality is fostered and may flourish. In Mill's own words, 'What worse can be said of any obstruction to good, than that it prevents this?'[15] The next step in the examination of Mill's social theory is to determine what Mill understood the scope and boundaries of liberty to consist in.

§X.iv. Mill's understanding of the relation between individuality and liberty. It is the depiction of the circumstances required in society for the achievement of individuality by agents that forms the basis of Mill's essay, *On Liberty*. It is the establishment of the conditions necessary for the development of individuality that lies behind his formulation of civil liberties. He depicts these as, first, 'liberty of conscience, in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects.' Second, the 'liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like subject to such consequences as may follow; without impediment from our fellow-creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, and wrong.' And third, from this liberty of each individual follows 'the liberty, within the same limits, of combination among individuals; freedom to unite for any purpose not involving harm to others.'[16] These are broad conditions, however, and as has been noted above, Mill's appreciation of the significance of intervening variables in shaping the character of agents must be anticipated to have influenced his theory at this point.

The focal chapter of *On Liberty* - Chapter III: 'Of Individuality, as One of the Elements of Well-Being.' - is the place where the nexus between Mill's account of human nature and its *telos*, his broad ethical doctrine, or Art of Life, understood as the attainment of that *telos* via the achievement of happiness, and the necessary condition of liberty of thought, opinion, and action as the means whereby that end is to be accomplished, is presented in some detail. The development of individuality, which Mill depicts as essential to well-being, is the expression in agents of the co-ordinate

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15 *Ibid.*, p.267.
16 *Ibid.*, pp.225-226.

cultivation of the dispositions, faculties and capacities that contribute to the increase in happiness which indicates the achievement of the end of existence.[17] To this end, the central theme of *On Liberty* is that without liberty individuality cannot be achieved, and without individuality, the greatest possible happiness for agents is beyond their grasp.

The relation between individuality and liberty is essential and yet it is not widely recognized, according to Mill. One of the most telling points in his examination of the limits of liberty is that the nature of liberty is easier to comprehend than is its end. Furthermore, Mill recognized that while all agents are aware of the need and significance of individuality, they do not accord it its full value in the achievement of happiness.[18] The problem as he perceived it was one of lack of recognition of the interaction between liberty and individuality present in the common modes of thinking. So, according to Mill's optimistic perspective, it is only a matter of difficulty of comprehension that separates agents from the realization that to increase individuality to its highest possible degree is to bring about the conditions and circumstances necessary for the achievement of the greatest possible happiness.

§X.v. Mill's account of liberty. The concept of liberty of the individual has been interpreted in radically different ways, and it is important to realize that Mill's understanding and use of the term differs significantly from the popular theories of the nineteenth century. The most well-known of these was the Romanticists' claim that the nature of the individual agent must be encouraged to develop to heroic proportions in whichever direction its impulse took it. This view was considered by Mill to be both an exaggeration of the bounds of liberty, and an indefensible ground on which to rest social theory.[19] Nonetheless, he accepted that, in Goethe's case at least, there was a consistent defense of the right and duty of self-development underpinning it.

Where Mill differed from the Romanticists was in his acknowledgment that the realization of the individual is inextricably bound up with the progress of the community. Whilst, on the one hand, Mill advocated freedom to act and a variety of situations in which to act as the foundation of self-realization, on the other he was aware that 'quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress' is the development of character within the rules of conduct.[20] The relation between the

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17 *Ibid.*, p.261.
18 *Ibid.*, p.262.
19 Mill, 'Autobiography.' (Early draft) *Works.* Vol.1 p.260.
20 Mill, 'Sedgwick's Discourse.' *Works.* Vol.10 p.70.

progress of society and the perfectibil ty of individuals, he believed, centres upon the inability of individuals to achieve poss ible perfection without the development of the moral faculty through actions perfor med in conformity to the rules and precepts governing behaviour in society.[21]

The effect of this belief on Mill's thec ry of liberty is that of a perimeter or boundary. By following through the conclusion t iat the achievement of individual *telos* requires the freedom from restraint which enables agents to cultivate and develop fully their potentials for excellence, Mill recognized part of that perimeter to be comprised of negative liberty. As such, the means whereby negative liberty is established for the individual within the community becor es a further necessary condition for harmonious self-realization.[22] At the same time, Mill was equally aware that negative liberty in itself is insufficient for the achievement of that end.

The necessary conditions for the creat on of positive liberty were also recognized by Mill to form a part of the boundary of individual freedom. Without guidance and example, without the opportunity to participate in public affairs, the individual agent possessed simply of negative liberty is only free to act as he or she desires within the confines of existing knowledge and e:perience. To go beyond the small degree of happiness that attaches to the untutored and inexperienced development of dispositions and capacities, and to achi ve the greatest possible happiness that attaches to the harmonious realization of self, th e agent requires assistance. It is the provision of this assistance that Mill considered t o comprise the final necessary condition for the achievement of the *telos* of existence.

What was Mill's rationale behind his ad vocacy of positive liberties? His understanding of human nature and its *telos*, and his c evelopment through the Art of Life of a broad ethical doctrine has been shown above o have led him to the position of being sure of what contributes to the realization of self, and of how that realization is to be assisted into being. Mill recognized that there are varieties and degrees of self-realization and self-respect, some which are private t o the individual but most of which attach to worldly success and esteem. Of these, he singled out and identified as the most important form of self-respect that which comes from the development of 'a just

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21 This acknowledgement by Mill of the importance of social rules and precepts once again stresses the significance he attached o customary morality, and the tension in his work between his advocacy of the development of such a morality with which to promote the principles of enlarged Utilitarianism and his criticism of existing mores and habitual responses.

22 For an account of negative liberties, see Mill, 'On Liberty,' pp.225-226.

regard for the good of all,' and made that the keystone of his doctrine for bringing about the amendment and perfection of particular human natures.[23]

Furthermore, to achieve such an holistic emendation of human nature and the development of character not only must human beings be free from restraint as far as is compatible with the freedom of others, but they must also be equipped to take advantage of that freedom in positive ways. Once in possession of these means to act, he wrote, 'we shall find that this feeling of our being able to modify our own character *if we wish*, is itself the feeling of moral freedom which we are conscious of. A person feels morally free who feels that his habits or his temptations are not his masters, but he theirs: who even in yielding to them knows that he could resist; that were he desirous of altogether throwing them off, there would not be required for that purpose a stronger desire than he knows himself capable of feeling.'[24] However, in order to reach this position of self-command, the particular agent requires more than native wit and unguided experiences. There must necessarily be available aids to guide and enhance the positive liberties which lie at the heart of Mill's social theory.

§X.vi. Mill's auxiliary theories of authority and education. Mill's theory of liberty recognizes that the freedoms outlined are necessary conditions for the development of individuality, and, by extension, the achievement of happiness. Concomitantly, in societies the liberty of the agent is logically joined to an obligation to respect the identical liberty of all other agents. To this end, there must be developed rules and precepts of behaviour backed up by social or judicial sanction. 'All that makes existence valuable to anyone.' Mill asserted, 'depends upon the enforcement of restraints upon the action of other people. Some rules of conduct, therefore, must be imposed.'[25] The rules of conduct that form the basis of codes of morality are the fundamental and enforceable rules that regulate social intercourse.

Accordingly, the first requirement for the constructive employment of liberty in the achievement of individuality is recognition of authority.[26] Mill did not mean by this an

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23 Mill 'Diary Entry April 9, 1854' *Works*. Vol.27 p.667.

24 Mill, 'A System of Logic.' Book VI Ch.II §3, *Works* Vol.8. p.841

25 Mill, 'On Liberty.' p.220.

26 There is a point of clarification to be made when discussing Mill's theory of authority. It is accepted in everyday use that the terms 'power' and 'authority' overlap to the point where they are often, in particular circumstances indistinguishable. Thus we may speak intelligibly of a 'position of power or authority.' However, it is not necessary to treat the terms as synonymous, and when Mill developed his theory of authority it is clear that he did not do so. Mill, instead, returned to the early distinction between the terms. Mill understood 'authority' as derived from the Latin *auctoritas*, meaning guidance, example, advice, the quality of leadership, prestige, and authorship that carries with it responsibility. It is in this sense that

unquestioning acceptance of the dictates of a ruling class, however. Authority is only required in the absence of knowledge of right action, in which case it acts as a guide; or in the possible absence of self-restraint, in which case it acts as a command. Authority acts, then, in the capacity of educator and of enforcer of recognized and accepted codes of behaviour. It is in examination of Mill's understanding of the nature and function of authority that his contentious referral to an 'instructed class' as the leaders of society is made clear. At the same time, Mill's insistence on the value of education, and of what such education consists, is revealed to be equally significant in his account of liberty as a means whereby to achieve individuality.

What did Mill understand by 'authority' and what is its relation to education? It is the case that particular and untutored agents cannot reach certain conclusions concerning all the matters of importance which occur in their lives. This is an impediment to their achievement of harmonious self-realization. Mill believed that it is only when an individual *knows* (knowledge being understood as the result of the interaction between education, experience, and disposition rather than mere rote learning of information) that the rules and precepts of morality and the desire for increase in virtue lead to self-realization and thus to happiness, that he obeys them and develops his individuality. However, until an individual has, and understands, experience in this manner, he must be guided by the rules and precepts as they are authorized by those who possess that knowledge.

Mill also recognized that it is not possible for all agents to reach the condition of knowledge that will bring about the greatest self-realization. Because human beings are diversely possessed of the raw materials of human nature, and because the study of moral and social philosophy requires more time and leisure than most men possess, the possible perfection of some natures will eventually encompass such knowledge, and with others it will fail to do so. In the latter cases, wrote Mill, 'reason itself will teach most men that they must, in the last resort, fall back upon the authority of still more

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he used the term when he argued that the dissent of 'the minority of thinking, or instructed persons...will have an ascendency..[and] their authority will be increased, not diminished, by the intellectual and scientific cultivation of the multitude.' This is to use the term in its original sense of responsible guidance, and not as a synonym for the ability to coerce. 'Though one man cannot *teach* another,' he wrote, 'one man may *suggest* to another.' Using this understanding of the term, he proposed that the many must turn to the authority of the instructed 'as a guide, not as a rule.' It is to this distinction that he referred when he wrote that 'this was a view of matters which, as it seemed to me, had been overlooked, or its importance not seen, by my first instructors: and it served still further to widen the distance between my present mode of thinking, and that which I had learnt from Bentham and my father.' Mill, 'On Genius.' *Works.* Vol.1 p.332; 'On Liberty.' p.262; 'Autobiography.' pp.615-6.

cultivated minds, as the ultimate sanction of the convictions of their reason itself.'[27] Mill's pragmatic conclusion was that with that assistance *all* agents will come closer to the achievement of their *telos* than would occur if they were left to their own devices.

Accordingly, the first requirement for the constructive employment of liberty is that of education.[28] Mill's conception of the value of education is derived from his understanding of associationism. Education, for Mill, does not comprise the mere absorption of knowledge in a mechanical manner. Rather, the possession of it operates as does chemical reaction in order to produce the most complex forms of intellectual ideas.[29] It commingles with the experiences and dispositions of the agent to bring about an increase in the holistic amendment of his or her nature. From this perspective, Mill drew the conclusion that the cultivation and development of dispositions etc., is achieved through the understanding of, and acting upon, more complex intellectual ideas. Education stimulates the generation of complex ideas, and so is a necessary condition for the achievement of harmonious self-realization. As such it acts to flag the path to the achievement of higher and greater happiness. However, education while necessary is insufficient on its own to exploit fully the possibilities of positive liberty.[30] Education is not identical to wisdom, to the Aristotelian *phronesis*, and so may falter when faced with unfamiliar circumstances.

Mill thus saw the relation between the individual and the rules of moral action as working on two levels. As an individual *knows*, through the understanding of experience, that adherence to codes of morality leads to self-realization and thus to happiness, so he or she obeys them and develops individuality. Until one has, and understands, experience in this manner, one must obey the moral codes as authorized by those who possess that knowledge.[31] Mill's understanding of authority is, then, the community wisdom, in the form of general consent between numerous and impartial inquirers who have the time and the developed faculties to discover the rules of conduct, or codes of morality, that guide individual and social actions. Such wisdom is expressed as advice or influence, and is subject at all times to scrutiny and question. Its availability to question (and, by implication, to modification) serves two major purposes for Mill. First, it ensures that authority itself is part of the process of individual realization of self, in that the individual agent reacts with and profits from

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27 Mill, 'Spirit of the Age II'. *Works*. Vol 22. pp.241.244. See also 'Autobiography.' pp.245-247; 'Writings of Junius Redivivus I.' *Works*. Vol.1 p.376.

28 Mill, 'Autobiography.' p.111.

29 See Chapter II §§iv-v.

30 Mill, 'Autobiography.' pp.113-115.

31 Mill, 'Spirit of the Age II.' pp.241,244.

the guiding principles. In this way, agents will progress from merely responding to the morality suggested by authority to *knowing* that morality. Secondly, it ensures that authority is a dynamic instrument in the organization of social life. While it is the guide and influence for internal and external action, at the same time it is being continually refined and improved under pressure of scrutiny.[32]

From this understanding of authority, we can determine its relation to education and its purpose for Mill's teleological end. The problems of the diversity of faculties in human beings, and of the impossibility of all human beings experiencing all the circumstances that would allow their achievement of complete self-realization, are mitigated by the theory of authority. Liberty of choice is allied to the guidance of authority, and together they promote the progress of all individuals toward self-realization. The existence of authority goes further in such promotion by itself providing an object of scrutiny that enables the development of human beings' higher faculties in the process of questioning that authority.

Mill argued in favour of 'the superiority of weight justly due to opinions grounded on superiority of knowledge,' and it is from statements such as this that some commentators draw the conclusion that Mill was elitist.[33] However, if we look deeper into Mill's role for the instructed class we discover that it is one of education of the multitude and not one of domination. Such education as he envisaged was not merely 'to *teach*, but to fit the mind for learning from its own consciousness and observation.' It must, argued Mill, encompass the cultivation and development of the spectrum of human faculties; it must educate the feelings as well as the intellect, in order to promote self-realization, otherwise it fails. The role of authority is to liberate the multitude, and in so doing to increase the number of the instructed.[34]

The authority of the instructed class, which is central to Mill's theory of education, is also a key element in his theory of individuality and of perfectibility. Self-realization is affirmed through liberty, and is denied by compulsion; therefore the contribution of authority to the discovery of individuality must chime with Mill's theory of liberty. The protection of the individual's self-discovery, and, at the same time, the facilitation of that discovery via the use of the authority of the instructed class, is demonstrated by Mill in his definition of that class. 'An enlightened instructor limits his operations,'

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32 Mill's positive view of customary morality is contained and explained in this position.

33 Mill, 'Autobiography.' p.261.

34 Mill, 'On Genius.' *Works*. Vol.1. p.358; 'Writings of Junius Redivivus I.' p.376; 'Debate on Wordsworth and Byron.' *Works*. Vol.25. p.434.

Mill wrote, 'to apprizing the learners what are the opinions actually entertained; and by strengthening their intellects, storing their minds with ideas, and directing their intelligence to the sources of evidence, not only on every doubtful, but on every undisputed point, at once qualifies and stimulates them to find the truth for themselves.'[35] Within this statement we may discern the value of authority to human beings in their quest for self-realization, and we may also discover the rationale for Mill's promotion of discussion as a most valuable tool for enlightenment.

§X.vii. Mill's program of action as a means to achieve individuality. The centrality of liberty as the means to individuality in Mill's account of the attainment of *telos* and its primary position in his enlarged utilitarianism is also found to be the hub of his program of action designed to bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest possible number. Participation, proportional representation, and votes for women, for example, are all concrete means to the achievement of individuality.[36] Mill's brief career as a Westminster politician was spent in advocating measures to this end.

By tracing the development of Mill's holist and naturalist theory from its foundation in his account of human nature and its *telos*, via his development of a broad ethical doctrine and his recognition of the achievement of individuality as the indicator both of happiness and of the attainment of the end of existence, it becomes clear that liberty - the concept most firmly connected to Mill's thought - is the means whereby that end is achieved. Participation, education, the franchise, and the role of the instructed class, all have as their end the achievement of happiness through harmonious self-realization which is identical to the attainment of *telos* in both individual and the community.

Mill's holist and naturalist philosophy is now seen to be complete in that it has been shown to examine human existence from its smallest unit of operation - the sensation - to its most complex formulation - the modern, technologically complex and socially diverse society - to produce a seamless, coherent, and consistent explanation of how and why humanity, both at the level of the individual agent and all intermediate levels up to and including that of the species, behaves as it does. Once identified as the end of existence, survival and melioration is linked to happiness as the achievement of

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35 Mill, 'Notes on the Newspapers.' *Works*. Vol.6 p.228; 'On Liberty.' p.247.

36 Reading e.g. Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government; The Subjection of Women; Proportional Representation and Redistribution*, as well as many articles written for journals and newspapers reveals a remarkable consistency of purpose. That purpose, it is claimed here, is to promulgate the means outlined above with which Mill anticipated agents best to achieve individuality through self-realization, and so to obtain the greatest possible personal happiness whilst contributing to the happiness of the collective.

harmonious self-realization, and armed with this conclusion, Mill fashioned a normative theory of action toward this end.

Where that normative theory gains its force and timelessness is in Mill's recognition of the impact of intervening variables on the lives of individual agents and of whole societies. This awareness led him to formulate that theory not as a closed, immutable system of rules and precepts governing action, but rather as a set of general principles from which can be derived the codes of action most in tune with the time and space for which they are intended. It is this subtlety, flexibility, and width of approach to the problem of provision of the conditions most conducive to the achievement of happiness that caused earlier commentators to reject Mill's work as internally incoherent. Today, however, his work is being reappraised as both coherent and consistent. It is claimed here that it is so because it has a foundation as relevant today as it was during Mill's lifetime.

Armed with this understanding of Mill's naturalist philosophy and the normative principles which comprise his enlarged Utilitarianism, a more detailed argument may now be made in support of the claim that Mill's thought should be relocated in the contemporary debate to a position in the forefront of discussion. The following sections appraise the relevance of Mill's thought and its potential fruitfulness in addressing the problems which are at the heart of political theory today.

§X.viii. Parsimony and modesty as features of Mill's holist, naturalist theory. A return to the original claims of the thesis made in Chapter I is now appropriate. Reinforcement of those claims may now be made by noting that in Mill's holist theory of the purpose and end of existence two additional features have emerged which contribute greatly to its force as applicable over both time and space. Firstly, it is parsimonious in that Mill's account of human nature and its *telos* requires no additional reasons for action, and that happiness-striving is universal and constant across time and space. Human nature according to Mill, has both individual- and community-focused dispositional elements built into it. Furthermore, their satisfactory cultivation and development is necessary for achievement of happiness and attainment of *telos*. From this ground, Mill's broad ethical doctrine evolves both with recognition of context and to the end of achievement of *telos*, and within its framework may be seen to allow for moral pluralism and to provide a criterion for its evaluation. The manner in which all action is evaluated is against a universal virtue ethic which yields the ultimate principle of action - the achievement of happiness.

The second, and equally significant point to be made concerning Mill's naturalist philosophy is that it is modest. The purpose for existence for both individual and community is identical to that found in every other life form. It is to survive and to meliorate the conditions of survival. While alternative teleological arguments must implicitly contain this element prior to development of any more complex reasons for human existence, Mill avoids controversy in this area by doing no more than resting the totality of his holistic and naturalistic theory upon this joint purpose. The linkage of happiness to this purpose, which occurs prior to the development of complex reasoning, is recognized by Mill as the connection between *telos* and the complexity of contemporary human social organization. His development of the enlarged principle of utility is modest in its claim to do no more that to direct agents to the modification of their actions in order that they may act in ways most conducive to this irreducible end.

Once these two points are made, criticism of the validity of Mill's theory must address three levels of his argument. The first requirement of an objection to his philosophy is to deny or trivialize his claim for the purpose of existence. Attempts to reject Mill's claim will reveal that it is an extremely powerful one. It allows other and more complex claims to be developed from it, but it is very difficult to remove as part of the ground of those more complex claims. Any such attempt must find evidence to support the denial that the human species is concerned at a literally vital level with its own continuation both at the level of the individual and of the community.

At the second level, if the claim that human beings have psychophysiologically grounded dispositions which underpin survival and melioration is acknowledged, then the claim that happiness is the motivating principle which guides agents to that end becomes equally forceful. To this end, Mill's argument that striving for happiness operates in all agents regardless of their cognitive development and in all environments and particular conditions (and so can be asserted as both existing and operating prior to the development of sophisticated reason, and in environments and particular circumstances of extreme harshness) is supported by an abundance of empirical evidence which is found both existentially and in the textual evidence of time past. Furthermore, Mill's depiction of the manner in which agents grow to accept as self-evidently right action patterns of behaviour which have no immediate or apparent connection to the happiness principle, and his explanation of their ultimate connection with that principle is highly plausible. So much is this the case that in order to present an alternative explanation, recourse to *à priorist* or intuitionist devices is the method most frequently adopted.

Skepticism remaining after consideration of the first two levels must then be directed toward Mill's incorporation of the existential conditions and environments in which human beings live in all parts of the globe. Unlike other theories which have as a precondition the existence of certain levels of organizational, educational, and technological achievement as a requirement of their existence, Mill's theory of enlarged utilitarianism can operate in all environments to the degree that the environment will support. This last point was recognized by Mill in the development of his key theory and doctrine of liberty, as well as in his understanding of the achievement of perfection in the individual agent and in the progress of communities.

Given that the interpretation of Mill's naturalist philosophy and the normative doctrine derived from it have been demonstrated to be coherent and consistent, in what way does it support the claim for his relocation in the contemporary debate in political theory? The remainder of this chapter will revisit the issues outlined in Chapter I and note the way in which Mill's thought addresses them. The conclusion is then drawn that while it is beyond the evidence presented here to claim that Mill's philosophy contains impregnable solutions to the problems in contemporary political theory, it does support the claim that Mill's thought when related to those problems engages the interest of those searching for such solutions, and that its further examination and analysis is warranted.

§X.ix. The engagement of Mill's holist, naturalist theory with the central concerns of contemporary debate in political theory. How do the theories and doctrines which comprise Mill's socio-political thought relate to the contemporary debate and its core problems? The two salients which epitomize Mill's socio-political thought are now seen to rest on his fully-worked naturalist philosophy. They are the crucial requirement of cultivation and development of individuality for the achievement of happiness, and the frequent impediment of customary morality to the achievement of this end.

Within these salients are three points at which Mill's thought may be seen to intersect with contemporary debate in political theory. They occur in his development of a web of co-dependent theories which together comprise his naturalist philosophy, wherein each strand is interlocked with and deriving some part of its explanation and strength from Mill's understanding of the others. These strands may, however, be separately examined and analyzed as has taken place above, and it is in this form that they are revisited here in terms of their potential for engagement with contemporary issues.

The three points are: Mill's universal virtue theory and its relation to customary morality; this is coupled with his recognition of both the multiplicity and the impact of context and environment on the sorts of happiness considered to be valuable in the achievement of individuality by agents and of progress by the community, and so of the emergence of a plurality of moralities; and finally his understanding of the necessity of agents to participate in community practices and institutions in order to achieve harmonious self-realization and its potential engagement with the problem of tension between the liberal and the communitarian positions.

These three points will be reviewed in turn to reinforce the claim for Mill's relocation in contemporary debate. The first of these is the restatement of Mill's universal virtue theory as able to acknowledge and incorporate a multiplicity of moral codes, and to reaffirm its capacity to distinguish between, to evaluate, and to compare those codes.

§X.x. Mill's universal virtue theory and its potential to engage the problem of moral pluralism. It will be recalled that the contemporary rejection of virtue politics is on the grounds that it is only possible if a] there is a universally applicable account of human nature, and b] there is a universally applicable account of what it is to be morally good, and that neither of these conditions prevail. Denial of the existence of a universal human nature and consequently a common ultimate principle of moral worth underpins the contemporary belief that there are fundamental differences between communities which impedes the development of a shared moral benchmark, and so militates against the development of a universal political theory.

Mill's account of human nature is both pre-rational and pre-cultural. By resting that account on his examination of the smallest operation of human nature, that is the body's response to the reception of external and internal sense data, Mill built a comprehensive understanding of human beings' psychophysiological profile. This profile has as its end the survival and melioration of the individual and the species, just as do all other living things. By locating human nature in a pre-rational and pre-cultural state, Mill avoided the barriers thrown up by religion, reason, and local beliefs concerning the relation of human beings to other animals and the fiercely defended variety of accounts of the end of existence.

Nonetheless, Mill did not eschew the impact of reason and culture on the development of human nature. Once the primitive operation of nature was established, Mill went on in his account to demonstrate the impact of the development of reason and of the increased sophistication of social interaction. In the pre-rational and pre-cultural state,

human beings are motivated solely by the desire to repeat or prolong pleasures, and these pleasures, according to Mill's account, attach to the performance of actions which contribute to the survival and/or melioration of either the individual or the species. As the faculties which comprise consciousness develop, so the pattern of behaviour which is followed to satisfy desires becomes more complex. Happiness becomes the ultimate satisfaction of the desire for pleasure in particular actions, and of the general desire for pleasure in the whole of existence.

Mill recognized that happiness is a generic, however, and varies from individual to individual and from society or culture to society or culture. At the same time, he did not attribute this to any variation between individuals or societies or cultures in terms of their human nature. The spectrum of potentials in dispositions, faculties, and capacities is the same in all human beings. His explanation is bound up with his understanding of the operation of reason in human beings together with the impact of the environment in which they exist.

The most efficient way of employing reason is to use it to form short-cuts from the problem it is employed to solve (the best means to achieve the satisfaction of desires) to the solution. Circumstances requiring the determination of the best means to achieve the desired end are often repetitive, in which case the efficient employment of reason is via the formulation of habitual responses. The repetition of circumstances in either the life of the agent or the context of the community in time and space will lead to the formulation of entrenched and community-wide habitual responses in order to achieve happiness. As the environment is different between societies, so the resulting habitual responses will be different. But the end remains the same: the efficient discovery of the best means whereby to achieve happiness. It is only a small step (and one recognized by Mill) for the habitual responses to circumstances in a society to become part of a recognized code of behaviour in that society. In this way habitual responses become the basis of the ethical and moral codes of the individual or society in which they are considered to be efficient means of achieving happiness.

Mill acknowledged that circumstances and the development of habitual responses will vary across the multiplicity of different environments occupied by societies and individuals in time and space. He also affirmed that the constant between all of these different contexts was the striving by each and every individual, regardless of environment and particular circumstances, for the achievement of happiness. Taking these two points together, the result is Mill's development of a universal virtue theory - so act that the outcome of action is the achievement of the greatest possible

happiness for all affected by the action - which refers all particular codes of action back to the universal striving for happiness, which itself is indicative of the attainment of *telos* for both individual and species

The potential effect of Mill's recognition of both a universal human nature and a universal virtue theory on the contemporary debate is that it can provide the means of reconciliation and commensuration of what now appear to be antagonistic ethical or moral codes. An ethical or moral code which operates in any social or cultural environment or in the circumstances of a particular agent can be evaluated against the benchmark of happiness-achievement. Insofar as it is directed to this end it is compatible with the universal virtue ethic defined by Mill. Should it not be directed to this end, it is either indifferent or counter-productive to the attainment of *telos*.

§X.xi. Mill's awareness of the significance of contexts on the implementation of the enlarged principle of utility. Compatibility between codes of action is not always overtly recognizable, however. Nor is there always a clear commensuration possible between codes. That this is the case is recognized by Mill and demonstrated in his insistence that his task as a theorist was to develop broad principles of action from which secondary and pragmatic principles most applicable to the context in which they are to operate could be derived.

Mill's understanding of the significance of context and intervening variables in the development of codes of action is one of the major strengths of his enlarged utilitarianism. It allowed Mill to acknowledge and accept that different codes of action will be efficient in achieving happiness in one context, but not in another. This has important implications for the evaluation of codes of behaviour which occur outside the context and experience of the evaluator.

There is a clear connection between this recognition of the value in happiness-achievement of codes of action which are not to the taste or liking of the evaluator and Mill's account of liberty. The frequently negative reactions of observers to practices of others in the search for happiness is explained by Mill to originate in the differences in context, intervening variables, and particular circumstances of practitioner and observer. The codes of action of one society are grounded in environmental differences to that of others. Mill's advocacy of tolerance is a direct response to this problem.

Mill's awareness of the complexity of the foundations on which different moral codes rest had an impact on his understanding of the evaluation and determination of compatibility of those codes. It is not sufficient, he noted, simply to point to the practices of other individuals, groups or communities which offend one's own and one's societal and cultural codes of action, to note how they are out of joint with one's own ethical and moral beliefs, and then to deny the value of such practices. Mill's understanding of the process of analysis requires that deep and detailed enquiry is undertaken to note the way in which such practices developed over time, to what degree they are codification of common habitual responses designed to achieve happiness in a particular context or set of circumstances, and the level of occulting and mutation that has occurred over time which may or may not have deflected the end of the code of action from its original intended purpose, before satisfactory evaluation of the compatibility and commensurability of codes of action may be accomplished.

Mill's approach to the problem of reconciliation between and evaluation of ethical and moral beliefs, and the codes of action which rest upon them, is grounded firmly in his account of human nature and its *telos*. The end of existence is attained via the happiness which accompanies the cultivation and development of dispositions etc., in harmony and balance. This occurs in different contexts, and is shaped by those contexts. The shaping takes place in the development of habitual responses to recurring circumstances and is eventually installed in the individual or community as a code of action whereby to achieve happiness. The underlying purpose and end of the plurality of codes of action which results from the multiplicity of contexts is, nonetheless, identical. It is the organization of action in order to achieve happiness for both individual and community. This does not imply that codes of moral action which are less efficient ought to be rejected in favour of those that are more so. Rather, it affirms that the context in which the codes operate is significant. Highly efficient means of happiness achievement in one environment will not necessarily be so elsewhere in time or space.

There remains the problem of conflicting ethical and moral codes within a single environment. It will be recalled in Mill's analysis of customary morality that he made a distinction between what are fundamental, universal and universally recognized rights of the agent, and all other 'rights' which are, on examination, discovered to be localized in time and place. (Call those other rights 'contextual rights.') For Mill, all goods must be connected to happiness, and all rights are such because they have good as their outcome. This means on the one hand that the obligation to obey the narrow moral rules and precepts which protect and enhance the fundamental and universal

rights of all agents is such that it should be enforced - by all means available, direct and indirect. The contextual rights, on the other hand, are those that apply to a particular form of the good life *chosen* by the agent.[37] The conclusion Mill drew regarding contextual rights is that they are all valuable insofar as they are conducive to the achievement of the *telos* of the particular agent for whom they are significant.

The apparent incompatibility of conflicting codes of action which incorporate contextual rights and occurring within the same context is, according to Mill, resolvable: i] by noting that if they do not act as preventatives to one another's achievement of their goals, they are only in conflict at a verbal level. At an essential level they are both directed toward the same end. ii] if they do conflict at this essential level, the solution to the impasse is by analyzing their respective happiness production capabilities. If one produces happiness and the other is simply a mutated response, and so indifferent to or counterproductive of happiness, then the happiness producing code is to be preferred. If both are indifferent, the dispute is verbal only. If both are counterproductive, then the solution is the alteration of both.[38]

So, Mill's philosophy contains a pattern of analysis applicable to all ethical and moral codes which will allow them to be compared against a common benchmark of evaluation. That benchmark is the achievement of happiness. It is not, however, a simple matter to perform such a comparison. The difficulty arises in the analysis of the context, environment, and intervening variables which underlie each code of action. How these are analyzed is a matter for further investigation. What is of interest here is whether or not Mill's understanding of human nature and its *telos*, and its operation in a multiplicity of contexts and environments, provides a means whereby compatibility and commensurability between apparently irreconcilable ethical and moral codes might be achieved. The claim of this thesis is that evidence has been presented sufficient to demonstrate that such a means is to be found in Mill's holist and naturalist philosophy.

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37 The term 'chosen' is misleading unless it is remembered that agents are conditioned by their context, intervening variables, circumstances and environment, as well as by the degree of potential in dispositions and capacities, to 'choose' between a fairly restricted number of alternatives. The choice, proposed by reason (or in its absence, the habitual responses of the agent or the contextual sub-group to which he or she is affiliated), is rationally the best available at the time and in the circumstances of the agent's life.

38 There will still be unresolveable disputes, even at the fundamental level. The right to life issue is an immediate contender. One possible solution is to note the relation of happiness to realized potential. The foetus has not, in this regard, achieved happiness of any description. The mother, however, may be acknowledged to be in the position where production of the child can be asserted to be the cause of great unhappiness. This is the line taken by those who promote the individual above the species happiness. Alternatively, the opposite argument can be made which rests on species happiness. This framework does not solve the problem, but it does provide an alternative path of debate.

§X.xii. Mill's recognition of the necessity of participation in communal activities and its potential to engage the tension between liberal and communitarian positions. There is a similarity in the tension that currently exists between communitarian and liberal thinkers, and the antagonism between the romanticists and the enlightenment thinkers of the nineteenth century. Political liberals operate from a position of rationalism whilst the communitarians admit a visceral, or in Mill's terms an instinctual emotional, component to social interaction. The tension between their several positions is traceable in part to this opposition.

Part of Mill's intellectual goal was to achieve a reconciliation between the opposing positions of the enlightenment and the romanticist thinkers.[39] This endeavour permeates his methodology and is evident throughout the above examination of his holist and naturalist philosophy. His attempt to achieve a syncretism between opposing systems of thought was originally considered to lead him only into a maze of qualification and contradiction, but this view is now being revised and Mill's holistic approach recognized as coherent and consistent.[40]

If the product of Mill's syncretic methodology is applied to the antagonism of liberal and communitarian thought as it has been demonstrated above to apply to the earlier tension between enlightenment and romanticist thought there emerges a blueprint of reconciliation. It has already been noted that when contemporary acceptance of the existence of a multiplicity of moral codes is examined using Mill's understanding of happiness as the criterion of a universal virtue ethic, the potential for a reconciliation and commensuration is possible. A similar reconciliation between the fundamental tenets of liberalism and those of communitarianism is also adumbrated in Mill's holist and naturalist philosophy.

Mill's engagement with the tension that now exists between liberals and communitarians takes place at the two levels which comprise his understanding of the *telos* of human existence: survival and melioration. Mill's understanding of human nature directs the communitarians to the logical precedence of the survival of the individual agent over that of the survival of the species. Without the existence of

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39 This endeavour is now well-recognized and is part of the contemporary understanding of Mill's thought. See e.g. John Skorupski, *English Language Philosophy 1750-1945*. Oxford, 1993 p.33.

40 For Mill's confirmation of this point see Mill to Carlyle, March, 1834. 'Earlier Letters.' *Works*. Vol. 12. p.113, which expresses Mill's position as settled at a very early age.

individuals there is no species. It follows that at the level of survival the primary task of the individual agent is the protection of self.[41] Communitarians may well set this observation aside as being true but not to the point. The point, they argue, is the flourishing of the species, and for that the individual agent's engagement with and subsumption in the processes and institutions which comprise community life are more important than the liberty and autonomy claimed by the liberals as the core of human existence. Nonetheless, Mill's recognition that in human nature the survival of self is of primary importance to the survival of the species underpins the second level of his understanding of *telos*.

Mill's distinction between his understanding of individuality and Benthamist individualism is directed to human existence once the indigencies of survival are satisfied. In this condition, the individual agent's attention turns to the satisfaction of desires for pleasure and ultimately for happiness. It is at this point, where Mill's individual is located *in* the community of which he or she is a member, that his theory has the potential to bridge the gap between the liberal and communitarian positions. Mill's individual is not atomistic, isolated, and solely self-interested. Rather, in order to achieve the greatest possible happiness, Mill demonstrated that individuals must necessarily cultivate and develop their other-directed dispositions. The flourishing and melioration of the community is predicated on the melioration of the individual agent. For Mill the achievement of individuality for the particular agent has as its outcome melioration of the community. This is his understanding of enlarged utilitarianism as the achievement of the greatest happiness for both individual and society.

In such a society, the liberty and autonomy of the individual is paramount. But Mill's understanding of this condition is not, as communitarians frequently portray it, the license of the individual to pursue selfish ends to the exclusion of communal flourishing. This course of action is specifically rejected by Mill as resulting in lop-sided and inharmonious self-realization, which is far from the condition of the greatest possible individual happiness. Rather it is the freedom necessary for individual

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41 Mill's argument recognizes that the instinct for survival is frequently overridden by individual agents, and many examples exist of agents having sacrificed their own survival for the sake of others. Mill's response is that such behaviour is the result of modification of nature - the primary injunction of his broad ethical doctrine - and not the original instinct for self-preservation. Reflection will confirm that if, at the level of unmodified human nature, the instinct for self-sacrifice was more powerful in *all* agents than that of self-preservation, then the optimal chance of survival of the species would be diminished rather than increased.

knowledge of what is the best balance of cultivation and development of dispositions etc., that will achieve the end of the greatest happiness.[42]

Mill's account of the manner in which individual agents achieve harmonious self-realization incorporates participation in the processes and institutions of society which has as its outcome both benefit to the cultivation and development of individuality in the agent and the increased melioration of that society. In so doing, Mill presented what may be seen to be a synthesis of the fundamental tenets of both liberal and communitarian theory in a way that remains faithful to both and points to a possible reconciliation between them Consequently, the antagonism that currently exists may be dissolved by a realignment of the opposing positions via Mill's holistic and naturalist understanding of human nature and its *telos*.

Realignment is not an easy task to achieve, however, and that such was the case also in the nineteenth century, was recognized by Mill in his development of a program of social and political action with which to achieve such an end. A brief return to Mill's pragmatic attempt to overcome the resistance of customary morality, of tradition and mores, and of the entrenched beliefs of his age concerning social interaction - seen in the light of an engagement with contemporary argument - will confirm the thesis claim for a relocation of Mill's thought in that argument.

§X.xiii. Mill's derivation of socio-political theory, with which to achieve incremental change, from his ultimate principle of action. The achievement of happiness by the individual agent is linked as a contributor to the greatest happiness of society through the self-interested cultivation of other-directed dispositions in order to obtain the happiness that accompanies their exercise. There is a similar connection between Mill's linkage of the failure of the individual to achieve that happiness - discoverable in the environment of, and circumstances that prevail in, the life of the individual - and the failure of communities to progress to a greater achievement of happiness. The conditions, circumstances, and environmental elements that contribute to the failure of individuals to achieve their potential excellence in dispositions etc., also operate at a wider level and impede the progress of the community.

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42 In contemporary debate many liberal theorists argue for the Millian understanding of liberty and autonomy. They do so however against an entrenched understanding of Benthamist individualism as the core concept of liberal theory. It is in terms of his explanation of the flawed nature of Benthamist individualism, and his coherent explanation of his alternative position, that Mill is contributory to the current argument.

Mill believed that both types of adverse conditions could be combated using the same means. He acknowledged the possibility of the imperfect development of faculties and dispositions in the context in which the individual is located, but did not consider it to be grounds for despair. There is, he argued, considerable evidence to suggest that human beings can overcome disadvantageous circumstances. Similar evidence, he noted, points to the way in which the problem of intervening variables and the states of society they engender may also be overcome. This evidence is found in both the nature of the individual, and in the possibility of creating a social and political system that will act deliberately to enhance the circumstances necessary for self-realization. Mill concluded that the link between reason and desire, and reason and the performance of public actions, could be used as the foundation on which to develop a comprehensive social and political theory that would enhance the probability of success in the achievement of happiness by both individuals and the community.[43]

Mill's subsequent development of a theory of public action to promote community happiness, and so the attainment of species *telos*, has reason as its primary instrument. His equally important promotion of the individuality of agents, directed toward the attainment of the *telos* of the individual agent, also rests on the requirement of an increase in the development and use of the faculty of reason. Furthermore, Mill's promotion of individuality as the best means whereby individual reason may be brought to recognition of the necessity to contribute to the progress of the community is an undoubted link between the unique perfectibility of the individual agent and the achievement of community progress. Mill's parallel advocacy of individual liberty is equally contributory to this end, insofar as it is the necessary condition whereby individuality is fostered and reason may flourish.

This illustration of the interconnections between Mill's account of human nature, his broad ethical doctrine in the shape of his understanding of its expression as perfectibility in the individual and progress in the community, and the bond between those elements of his holistic naturalist theory achieved by the cultivation and employment of the faculty of reason underscores the awareness Mill had of the symbiotic relation between the agent and the community and between both and their circumstances and environment. On examination, his employment of reason always has as its foundation the link between that capacity and the satisfaction of the desires of

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43 It is the central theme that runs through e.g. Mill, 'Speech to London Debating Society on "Perfectibility": May 1828' *Works*. Vol.26 pp.428-433; 'Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews: February 1867.' *Works*. Vol.21 pp.215-257; 'Speech to the Manchester Reform Club: February 1867.' *Works*. Vol.28 p.128.

the dispositions, etc., which comprise human nature, both in the private and the public spheres of action. Equally significantly, over the long period of his productive life Mill's awareness that the achievement of the greatest possible happiness for the individual is linked to the external assistance the individual receives from the society toward the achievement of self-realization and possible perfecting of potentials inherent in his or her human nature, was to become the central tenet of his social and political philosophy.

Mill's program of social and political action at the general level was then: i] to establish the limits of the fundamental rights. ii] to alter the body of contextual rights into one that is conducive to the achievement of the greatest possible happiness for the individual and the whole. To accomplish this for a particular society requires first analysis of the existing conditions within that society. These conditions are those which comprise the customary morality of the society. Fundamental rights and goods are then separated from contextually-linked rights and goods . The next step is to distinguish between contextual rights and goods in terms of their conduciveness to happiness. Mill's program of action then reinforces those which are conducive to happiness, and makes those which are indifferent, or counterproductive, to happiness the focus of incremental change to bring them back to their original purpose.

It is this general process that Mill believed to contain the principles from which a program of action conducive to the achievement of the greatest possible happiness for both individual and community in any particular society in time and space could be drawn. Those general principles - each of which is riveted to his account of human nature and its *telos* - comprise the pursuit of individuality, which requires the maximal amount of liberty and autonomy; and the cultivation and development of dispositions, which includes the necessity of participation in the processes and institutions of the community in order to develop other-directed dispositions (a requirement of harmonious self-realization). These ends are to be accomplished within existing contextual conditions incrementally, and not through violent upheaval and change.

Mill's suggestions for practice during his own time may or may not be viable. They may in fact be vulnerable to criticism in terms of elitism, of idealism, of failure to engage with whatever circumstances existed. This criticism is irrelevant. What is important is the pattern of Mill's prior justification for his program of action. Mill's contribution to the solution of the problems of contemporary political theory is not to segregate codes of moral action from that theory. It is to effect incremental change in the direction of greater efficiency of happiness achievement. This is an holistic

endeavour. It requires the gradual change of the whole community as well as of the pattern of behaviour of individual agents. It anticipates a shift in the pattern of customary behaviour, with awareness by the shifting agent of the purpose of the change. It will be achieved, according to Mill, via education, the example of the instructed class, and participation in the organization, processes and institutions of the community by the individual agent.

§X.xiv. Conclusion: the impact of Mill's thought on contemporary debate and affirmation of the fruitfulness of relocating him in that debate. The conclusion of the thesis argument parallels Mill's own conclusion concerning the manner in which the problems of formulating a theory of social and political action relevant to his own time might be resolved. This is the basis for the claim that the relocation of Mill's thought in contemporary debate in political theory is a fruitful endeavour.

The conclusion Mill drew from his analysis of human nature and its *telos* in conjunction with his recognition of the impact of circumstances and environment on the character development of agents is that the faculty of reason in many agents is fallible, and so is an impediment to the achievement of harmonious self-realization. There may be some inherent weakness or imbalance in the original potentials of the individual, but actions and objects do not stand alone in the life of an agent, nor can they be considered in isolation. Every action is both reflection and reinforcement of the state or character of mind of the performing agent, and the striving for perfection that is natural to human beings is a striving to amend the agent's character as a whole.[44] And state of mind and character are formed in the crucible of the agent's experiences, education, and environment, which are also the context and circumstances in which failure occurs. Mill recognized this, and believed that the promulgation of his enlarged principle of utility would act to reverse this situation. Remedying the problems that beset the development of the evaluative and judgmental capacity of reason in individual agents, and so enabling them to achieve greater happiness, became the purpose of Mill's development of socio-political theory.

The achievement of happiness by the individual agent is linked as a contributor to the greatest happiness of society through the self-interested cultivation of other-directed dispositions in order to obtain the happiness that accompanies their exercise. There is a similar connection between Mill's linkage of the failure of the individual to achieve that happiness - discoverable in the environment of, and circumstances that prevail in,

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

the life of the individual - and the failure of communities to progress to a greater achievement of happiness. The conditions, circumstances, and environmental elements that contribute to the failure of individuals to achieve their potential excellence in dispositions etc., also operate at a wider level and impede the progress of the community.

Mill believed that both types of adverse conditions could be combated using the same means. He acknowledged the possibility of the imperfect development of faculties and dispositions in the context in which the individual is located, but did not consider it to be grounds for despair. There is, he argued, considerable evidence to suggest that human beings can overcome disadvantageous circumstances. Similar evidence, he noted, points to the way in which the problem of intervening variables and the states of society they engender may also be overcome. This evidence is found in the nature of the individual, and confirms the possibility of creating a social and political system that will act deliberately to enhance the circumstances necessary for self-realization. Mill concluded that the link between reason and desire, and reason and the performance of public actions, could be used as the foundation on which to develop a comprehensive social and political theory that would enhance the probability of success in the achievement of happiness by both individuals and the community.

Mill's subsequent development of a theory of public action to promote community happiness, and so the attainment of species *telos*, has reason as its primary instrument. His equally important promotion of the individuality of agents, directed toward the attainment of the *telos* of the individual agent, also rests on the requirement of an increase in the development and use of the faculty of reason. Furthermore, Mill's promotion of individuality as the best means whereby individual reason may be brought to recognition of the necessity to contribute to the progress of the community is an undoubted link between the unique perfectibility of the individual agent and the achievement of community progress. Mill's parallel advocacy of individual liberty is equally contributory to this end, insofar as it is the necessary condition whereby individuality is fostered and reason may flourish.

This illustration of the interconnections between Mill's account of human nature, his broad ethical doctrine in the shape of his understanding of its expression as perfectibility in the individual and progress in the community, and the bond between those elements of his holistic naturalist theory achieved by the cultivation and employment of the faculty of reason underscores the awareness Mill had of the symbiotic relation between the agent and the community and between both and their

circumstances and environment. On examination, his employment of reason always has as its foundation the link between that capacity and the satisfaction of the desires of the dispositions, etc., which comprise human nature, both in the private and the public spheres of action. Equally significantly, over the long period of his productive life Mill's awareness that the achievement of the greatest possible happiness for the individual is linked to the external assistance the individual receives from the society toward the achievement of self-realization and possible perfecting of potentials inherent in his or her human nature, was to become the central tenet of his social and political philosophy.

The above summary of the thesis argument for the relocation of Mill in the current debate in political theory in terms of its potential to contribute to the resolution of the problems found there has returned to the set of questions and objections posed by liberal and communitarian thinkers both to the problem of moral pluralism for the development of political theory and by each group to the other. It has noted how the shape of Mill's doctrine of socio-political action as the pragmatic expression of his holist and naturalist philosophy contains much that may be useful in unraveling the problems of moral pluralism and the antagonism between liberal and communitarian thinkers which are at the centre of contemporary debate.

Mill's holist and naturalist political theory, it is claimed here, escapes the contraction and isolation of communities implicit in communitarian thinking, whilst at the same time enlarges the political liberals' concept of political theory from that of neutrality to that of recognition of a universal virtue ethic. Antagonism between different codes of morality do not occur within the parameters of that ethic. It is only when such codes require behaviours that are indifferent to or counterproductive of happiness for the individual or the community that they are found to be opposed. The same ethic acts as a bench mark of efficiency. The degree and efficiency of achievement of happiness is a means of comparison between codes of morality. On these grounds, the thesis concludes, Mill's thought deserves to be placed in the forefront of the contemporary debate because it contains much that is potentially fruitful in reaching a resolution of the problems which currently form the crux of that debate.

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