

THE BLACKWELL GUIDE TO

MILL'S

Utilitarianism

EDITED BY HENRY R. WEST

The Blackwell Guide to Mill's *Utilitarianism*

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Henry R. West is Professor of Philosophy at Macalester College. He is the author of *Mill's Utilitarian Ethics* (2004) and (with Joel Feinberg) co-author/editor of *Moral Philosophy: Classic Texts and Contemporary Problems* (1977). He has contributed to philosophical periodicals and written encyclopedia articles including "Utilitarianism," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and "Mill, John Stuart," in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*.

Introduction

John Stuart Mill was the foremost British philosopher of the nineteenth century. His *System of Logic* and his *Principles of Political Economy* established his reputation as a philosopher and an economist, and they were adopted by British universities as authoritative textbooks in those fields. But it is his two shorter essays, *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism*, that are most widely read today. Utilitarianism continues to be one of the most prominent ethical theories of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and Mill's *Utilitarianism* is the classic work defining and defending that theory.

Utilitarianism is the theory that actions, laws, policies, and institutions are to be evaluated by their utility, that is, by the degree to which they have better consequences than alternatives. Such a theory then requires an answer to the question what consequences are good and what are bad. For Mill, the answer is happiness and unhappiness, pleasure and pain. In his words,

actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. (Mill 1861, reprinted as Part II of this volume, Ch. II, para. 2. Subsequent citations of this work will simply be by roman numeral for chapter, and arabic numeral for paragraph.)

By “pleasure” and “pain” Mill does not mean only “bodily” pleasure and pain. He includes “higher” pleasures such as those “of the intellect, the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments” (II, 4). And there would be corresponding psychological pains, such as boredom, grief, shame, and so on.

Utilitarianism is thus a *hedonistic* theory (from the Greek word for “pleasure”), but its hedonism is to be understood in this broad sense to include all mental or psychological pleasures and pains, not just those of the bodily senses. It is also a specific form of *consequentialism*, in that there might be a theory that evaluated actions, laws, and so on, by their consequences, but included other values as ends

beyond pleasure and pain. Some consequentialists regard such things as knowledge, beauty, love, friendship, and justice as values good in themselves and not just from their contribution to pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

In Britain in the nineteenth century, utilitarianism was not just a philosophy. It was also the creed of a political movement, the “philosophical radicals,” who published journals and elected members to Parliament. James Mill, John Stuart’s father, was one of the leaders of this movement, and the young John Stuart was a participant. They looked back to Jeremy Bentham as the founder of the movement, and we can look back to Bentham as the originator of modern utilitarianism.

John Stuart Mill’s life was an interesting one. He was tutored by his father, learning Greek at the age of 3. And he fell in love with Harriet Taylor, a married woman with whom he had a “Platonic” relationship until her husband died and they were able to be married. He was never associated with an academic institution, employed full time, until his retirement, by the East India Company. But he led an active life of writing (his *Collected Works* run to 33 volumes) and he served one term in Parliament, where he introduced, although it was defeated, a bill to give women the right to vote. The details of Mill’s life are recounted in this volume by Susan Leigh Anderson in Chapter 1, “Mill’s Life.” Bentham’s philosophy, so far as it relates to Mill’s, is summarized in this volume by Gerald J. Postema in Chapter 2, “Bentham’s Utilitarianism.” In Chapter 3, John Skorupski reports Mill’s “naturalistic” epistemology and metaphysics and his “political liberalism” to give some sense of “The Place of *Utilitarianism* in Mill’s Philosophy.”

Part II of this volume contains the complete text of *Utilitarianism*. There are five chapters, the first of which, entitled “General Remarks,” might be regarded as a preface. The second chapter, “What Utilitarianism Is,” presents a succinct formulation of the utilitarian “creed” and then attempts to answer objections to it, objections supposedly based on mistaken interpretations of its meaning. Chapter III, “Of the Ultimate Sanction of the Principle of Utility,” is a discussion of the sources of motivation for conformity to a morality based on the general happiness. Chapter IV is Mill’s presentation “Of What Sort of Proof the Principle of Utility is Susceptible.” The final and longest chapter, which Mill had begun writing as a separate essay, is “On the Connection between Justice and Utility.” This last chapter is in the form of an answer to another objection to utilitarianism, but in this case the objection could be better described as due to an inadequate and incomplete analysis of the idea and sentiment of justice, rather than a mistaken interpretation of utility. Mill’s project in the chapter is to show that, when properly understood, justice is consistent with, subordinate to, and an important branch of utility, rather than opposed to it.

In Chapter I, Mill contrasts his own tradition, which he calls the “inductive,” with the “intuitive” school. According to his opponents, we have a natural faculty, or sense or instinct, informing us of right and wrong. According to the inductive school, right and wrong, as well as truth and falsehood, are questions of observation and experience.

In Chapter II, Mill attempts to answer several objections. One is that to suppose that life has no higher end than pleasure is a doctrine worthy only of swine. It is in reply to this objection that Mill argues for pleasures of high “quality”: those of the intellect, the feelings and imagination, and moral sentiments. And the procedure for determining what are higher pleasures is to see what pleasures are preferred by those who are competent judges because of their experience of both kinds. In Chapter 4 of this volume, “Mill’s Theory of Value,” Wendy Donner addresses this distinction between pleasures and pains based on quality as well as quantity, as well as the question of who is a competent judge of the difference. She emphasizes the importance of personal development and self-development in becoming a competent judge.

A second objection is that happiness is unattainable. To this Mill replies that he does not mean a life of rapture, but moments of such, with few and transitory pains, and many and various pleasures. Another objection is that people can do without pleasure and that it is noble to do so. Mill agrees that it is noble when self-sacrifice increases the amount of happiness or decreases the amount of unhappiness in the world, but self-sacrifice is not good in itself. Another objection is that it is expecting too much to require that people always act from the motive of promoting the general happiness. To this Mill replies that utilitarianism is a standard of right and wrong action, but ninety-nine hundredths of our actions can be done from other motives so long as they are in accordance with the utilitarian standard. It is in this context that Mill says:

In the case of abstinences indeed – of things which people forbear to do, from moral considerations, though the consequences in the particular case might be beneficial – it would be unworthy of an intelligent agent not to be consciously aware that the action is of a class which, if practiced generally, would be generally injurious, and that this is the ground of the obligation to abstain from it. (II, 19)

This passage has been cited to support the claim that Mill is a *rule-utilitarian* rather than an *act-utilitarian*. According to act-utilitarianism, the right act in any situation is that which can be expected to have best consequences in that particular situation. According to rule-utilitarianism, it is necessary to set up a moral code with rules governing some types of situations, and in those situations, one is to act in accordance with the useful rule, not make a case-by-case analysis of consequences. In Chapter 5 of this volume, “Mill’s Theory of Morally Correct Action,” Alan Fuchs interprets Mill as a rule-utilitarian. On the other hand, in Chapter 8, “Mill’s Theory of Rights,” L. W. Sumner interprets Mill as an act-utilitarian so far as what acts are objectively right and wrong, but he thinks that Mill advocates an indirect procedure for deciding how to act in many circumstances. Where there is a useful rule in place, one should decide how to act by following the rule, thereby doing the right thing more often than if one tried to decide case by case. As you can see, this is a controversial point in Mill

scholarship. In Chapter 5, Fuchs also places Mill's theory of morally correct action within the context of what Mill calls the "Art of Life," which includes other areas of life besides morality.

Some other objections that Mill takes up in Chapter II are: that utilitarianism renders people cold and unsympathizing, to which Mill replies that it need not do so; that it is a godless doctrine, to which Mill replies that if one believes that God desires the happiness of creation, then utilitarianism can be regarded as profoundly religious; that utilitarianism permits expediency to override principle, to which Mill replies that the expedient – in the sense of what is in the interest of the agent or for some temporary purpose but not for the general interest or in the long run – is not what utilitarianism advocates.

Another objection is that there is not time, previous to action, for calculating the effects of choices on general happiness. To this Mill replies that throughout all of human history humans have been learning by experience the tendencies of actions, and these beliefs have come down as the rules of morality for the multitude "and for the philosopher until he has succeeded in finding better" (II, 24).

In Chapter III, Mill is addressing what motives there are to be act in accordance with a utilitarian standard. His claim is that all the motives that now lead people to obey customary morality can lead them to obey utilitarian morality. In Chapter 6 of this volume, "Mill's Theory of Sanctions," Dale E. Miller explores the "external" and "internal" sanctions that enforce moral behavior, especially the role of sympathetic feelings in Mill's philosophy.

In Chapter IV, Mill gives a psychological argument for his theory that happiness and unhappiness are the ends of all conduct and therefore of morality as a part of all conduct. In Chapter 7 of this volume, "Mill's 'Proof' of the Principle of Utility," Henry R. West discusses the validity and soundness of Mill's argument.

Chapter V, the longest of *Utilitarianism*, is a discussion of the objection that justice is independent of utility and often takes precedence over it. Mill recognizes that the subjective mental feeling (which he calls the "sentiment") of justice is different from that which commonly attaches to expediency or the general promotion of happiness. (In Chapter V, Mill uses the term "expediency" differently from the way that he used it in Chapter II, where it means something self-interested or of temporary benefit. In Chapter V, he uses it to refer to general utility in contrast to the more limited demands of duty or justice.) He admits that the sentiment of justice does not arise from the idea of utility. But in the course of the chapter he argues that what is moral in the sentiment does depend upon utility: that justice is a particular kind or branch of general utility and that there is even a utilitarian basis for distinguishing justice from other moral obligations and making its requirement more demanding. After analyzing the concept of justice, Mill concludes that the idea of penal sanction, as the essence of law, is the generating idea of the notion of justice, but it does not distinguish justice from moral obligation in general. To explain the difference between justice and other branches of morality, Mill appeals to the distinction between those duties in which a cor-

relative *right* resides in some person or persons and those moral obligations that do not give birth to any right.

Justice implies something which it is not only right to do, and wrong not to do, but which some individual person can claim from us as his [or her] moral right. No one has a moral right to our generosity or beneficence, because we are not bound to practice those virtues towards any given individual. (V, 15)

In Chapter 8 of this volume, L. W. Sumner analyzes “Mill’s Theory of Rights.” When asked why society ought to recognize such rights, Mill says that he can give no other reason than general utility. It is an extraordinarily important and impressive kind of utility that is concerned: that of security – security is something no human being can possibly do without. On it we depend for all immunity from evil and the whole value of every good beyond the passing moment (V, 25).

Having analyzed the concept of justice, Mill argues against the notion that justice is independent of utility by showing that there is great controversy about what policies, in punishment, wages, and taxation, are just and unjust. He says that if justice is something that the mind can recognize by simple introspection, it is hard to understand why that internal oracle is so ambiguous. For instance, some argue against deterrent punishment, saying that it is unjust to punish anyone for the sake of example to others; that punishment is just only when intended for the reform of the criminal. Others maintain the extreme reverse, that to punish persons for their own benefit is unjust, violating their right to choose their own lives, but they may be justly punished to prevent evil to others. And there are conflicting conceptions of the just amount of punishment. Likewise there are conflicting conceptions of just wages and just taxes. Mill says that one cannot settle these disputes by appeal to justice itself. They each have utilitarian arguments in their favor, and appeal to utility is the only way to adjudicate the conflicting claims.

Mill’s *Utilitarianism* is a classic source of utilitarian ethical theory, and there have been different interpretations and different criticisms and defenses of the position taken in that work. The chapters in Part III of this volume, “Essays on the Text,” are primarily concerned with interpretation and critical discussion of Mill’s theory. But utilitarianism as an ethical theory has had a life beyond Mill. In Part IV a few of these controversies are presented. In Chapter 9, “Contemporary Criticisms of Utilitarianism: A Response,” William H. Shaw addresses and replies to some of the most prominent criticisms of utilitarianism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In Chapter 10, “The Scalar Approach to Utilitarianism,” Alastair Norcross makes the radical suggestion that right and wrong, duty and obligation, are not the most fundamental concepts for a utilitarian ethics. He claims that relatively good and relatively bad consequences give moral reasons for action which are on a scale of better and worse, not a sharp line between right and wrong, wrong and permissible. In contrast, in Chapter 11, “Right, Wrong, and Rule-Consequentialism,” Brad Hooker defends a rule-based consequentialist

ethics as the one which is most in accord with our considered moral judgments, and he claims that Norcross's scalar approach would not stand up to that test. Finally, utilitarianism has applications to practical ethics. Utilitarian arguments have been made to support mercy-killing and many other difficult decisions in bio-medical ethics; to support animal rights; women's liberation; the preservation of the environment; and positions on many other issues. In Chapter 12, "Some Implications of Utilitarianism for Practical Ethics: The Case Against the Military Response to Terrorism," Bart Gruzalski makes a case study of what consequences could be foreseen before the United States invaded Afghanistan and also before it invaded Iraq as responses to the terrorist attacks upon the World Trade Center and other targets. He considers first the consequences for American interests, a perspective that he calls "chauvinistic consequentialism." Then he considers the consequences from an impartial utilitarian perspective. From either perspective, he thinks that the consequences could be foreseen to be bad.

The chapters of this volume are intended to be understood by the general reader who is not a professional philosopher. Explanation in advance of a few philosophical terms may be helpful. *Utility*, *utilitarianism*, *hedonism*, and *consequentialism* were explained at the beginning of this Introduction. *Act-utilitarianism* and *rule-utilitarianism* have also been defined.

An alternative to utilitarianism or, more generally, to consequentialism, is a *deontological* theory. That would be a theory that has *duty* as the most fundamental ethical concept. For example, a deontological theory might regard the telling of the truth (or prohibition from lying), the keeping of promises, the helping of others in distress (and prohibition from murder, assault, rape, false imprisonment, or enslavement) as duties in themselves. They do not derive their obligatoriness from good or bad consequences. Sometimes these duties are called *prima facie* duties, which means duties at "first face": they are obligatory if not in conflict with some other duty. In case of conflict between duties, one *prima facie* duty must give way to another and thus is not a duty, all things considered.

Other alternatives to utilitarianism are *virtue ethics* and *rights based ethics*. Virtue ethics makes the virtues – honesty, loyalty, compassion, fairness, and so on – the fundamental concepts of ethics. These are character traits, and actions take their ethical worth from the character traits from which they flow. Utilitarianism recognizes valuable character traits, but, at least in Mill's system, acts can be right or wrong independent of the character traits from which they flow, and character traits are desirable or undesirable according to whether they tend to produce acts with good or bad consequences. Utilitarianism also recognizes rights, but they are not fundamental: they derive their authority from their utility. A rights based ethics makes rights fundamental: they are not based on their utility, although they may have utility.

Another concept that will appear in some of the chapters is that of *supererogation*. An act is supererogatory if it "goes beyond the call of duty." It is praiseworthy, but failure to perform it is not blameworthy. A *maximizing* form of

utilitarianism leaves no room for supererogatory acts. It is one's duty to do the best one can. A *satisficing* form of utilitarianism would leave room for supererogation: it would require acts that meet a certain level of good consequences but not require that one make the sacrifices necessary to produce the very best consequences that could be achieved.

The appeal of utilitarianism is that happiness is at least one of the good things in life, desired as an end, not just as a means to other values. The appeal of consequentialism enlarges this to include additional intrinsic values. A second appeal of both is that they provide a foundation for duties, virtues, and rights. If one asks why ought one to do certain kinds of actions, or why one ought to develop certain character traits, or why one ought to respect certain rights, the utilitarian has an answer. A duty, virtue, or right derives its value from its contribution to general happiness. This also provides a basis for critical evaluation of the duties, virtues, and rights that are recognized in a society or that ought to be recognized. John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism* is a powerful statement of this utilitarian theory.

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Mill, John Stuart (1861) *Utilitarianism*, in J. M. Robson (ed.) *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. X: *Essays on Ethics, Religion, and Society* (pp. 203–59). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969. (Reprinted as Part II of this volume; citations are to chapter by roman numeral and to paragraph by arabic numeral.)

Part I

The Background of Mill's *Utilitarianism*

- 1 Mill's Life
Susan Leigh Anderson
- 2 Bentham's Utilitarianism
Gerald J. Postema
- 3 The Place of Utilitarianism in Mill's Philosophy
John Skorupski

Chapter 1

Mill's Life

Susan Leigh Anderson

John Stuart Mill was born in London on May 20, 1806, the eldest son of James and Harriet Burrow Mill. James Mill (1773–1836) – philosopher, historian, economist, and psychologist – was the most influential person in Mill's life during his formative years. It is, therefore, appropriate to begin the story of John Stuart Mill's life with some background on his father.

James Mill was the son of a Scottish country shoemaker. But his proud mother, who had known better days, was determined that her first-born son should be brought up as a gentleman. With the help of the local minister and Sir John and Lady Jane Stuart of Fettercairn, who were impressed with the young man, James was able to attend Montrose Academy and then sent to study for the ministry at the University of Edinburgh.

At the age of 17, James was hired to tutor Sir John and Lady Jane's only daughter, Wilhelmina, who was then 14. He taught her for four years, at Edinburgh during the school year, where the Stuarts spent their winters, and at Fettercairn during the summers. He fell in love with her; but having an "iron will," he was able to control his feelings. We do not know what Wilhelmina thought of her handsome, young, blue-eyed tutor, but she ended up marrying the son of the banker Sir William Forbes and later inspired a romantic passion in Sir Walter Scott. Some biographers maintain that Wilhelmina was the love of James Mill's life.

While at Edinburgh, James discovered Plato. He would later pass on his tremendous admiration for this philosopher to his son. James also read a number of skeptics – including Rousseau, Voltaire, and Hume – with the result that he ended up not following the profession for which he was trained.

After Edinburgh, James supported himself by tutoring for several years. In 1802, at the age of 29, James Mill left Scotland for London in the company of Sir John Stuart. He soon had a small income from writing for periodicals and editing, and in 1805 he married pretty Harriet Burrow who was about ten years younger than he was and the eldest daughter of a widow who ran a private lunatic asylum. They moved into a small house in Pentonville owned by Mrs Burrow.

John Stuart Mill, named after the squire of Fettercairn, was born the next year. Harriet soon resented the family's modest circumstances; and the impatient, sarcastic James, who perhaps missed the responsive intelligence he had found in Wilhelmina, began treating his wife more and more like a *hausfrau*. Although they produced nine children, there was very little affection in the relationship between James and his wife. Perhaps John picked up on his father's dismissal of his mother as not being very important because, except for one brief indirect reference, her existence is entirely ignored in his *Autobiography*.

James Mill was an extremely disciplined and hard-working man. In the year of his eldest son's birth he began to write a history of British India. He expected the project to take three years and believed it would make his name. In the end it took ten years to write his *History of India*, which became the standard work on the subject. It was published, in three volumes, in 1817 and led to an appointment at the East India Company in 1819, which finally gave him and his family economic security.

Meanwhile, James spent a considerable part of almost every day on the education of his children, especially his eldest son. James had unlimited faith in the power of education, and he particularly stressed the early training of character. Besides perseverance, temperance and self-restraint were two of his most important virtues. He was extremely suspicious of strong emotion, perhaps because of his own romantic failures. Unfortunately, James Mill's control over his feelings affected his relationship with his children, at least the older ones. John received little affection from the father he tried so hard to please. He lived for the rare moments when his father seemed to approve of him.

In 1808 James Mill had met Jeremy Bentham, the patriarch of the English Utilitarians, who was then 60 years old. He became Bentham's "lieutenant," and Bentham did what he could to help the Mill family through the early period of financial difficulty. In 1810 he installed the Mills in a cottage where John Milton had once lived, on the grounds of his own house at no. 2 Queen Square Place; but they found it too dank to stay very long and soon moved to Newington Green. Four years later Bentham tried again. He leased a house, close to his own, at no. 1 Queen Square Place, and sublet it to the Mills for a nominal fee. This was John's home from his eighth to his twenty-fourth years. During the summers, Bentham took the entire family to his country retreats, first to Barrow Green House in the Surrey Hills, and later to Ford Abbey, a wonderful country estate where ornamental Tudor work alternated with Inigo Jones additions. John particularly enjoyed its spacious rooms and the opportunity to take long walks, exploring the rolling hills of rural England. He also liked listening to Bentham play the Abbey organ.

Although not the original thinker that Bentham was, James Mill, through his own personality, drew a small circle of active reformers around them both. This group became known as the "philosophical radicals" for advocating democracy and complete freedom of discussion. These men were the avant-garde of their time, just as the Fabians were seventy-five years later.

James Mill wrote numerous articles that applied Benthamite principles to such subjects as government, education, freedom of the press, colonies, jurisprudence, and prisons. He also wrote several books, the most notable of which, besides his *History of India*, were his *Elements of Political Economy* (1821) and his *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* (1829).

Despite all these achievements, James Mill's greatest creation was his own son. As James Mill confided in Bentham, young John Stuart Mill had been selected to be "a successor worthy of both of us." In preparation for filling this role, John was given perhaps the most rigorous and ambitious education that anyone has ever received, an education later described in great detail in his *Autobiography*. At 3 years of age, John was given lessons in Greek and soon began reading in that language, beginning with *Æsop's Fables*. When he was 8, he began studying Latin and added works in that language. His days were taken up with studying and then teaching what he had learned to his younger siblings, which he hated doing, although he admitted later that it helped him to learn how to explain things to others. He had no toys or children's books, except for a few gifts given to him by relatives or acquaintances, most notably a treasured *Robinson Crusoe*. He had no friends to play with; his father limited his contact with other young boys because "he was earnestly bent upon [his] escaping not only the ordinary corrupting influence which boys exercise over boys, but the contagion of vulgar modes of thought and feeling" (Mill 1957: 24), and his only exercise consisted of taking long walks with his father, reciting and discussing what he'd learned that day.

By his twelfth year, in addition to having read the Greek classics, John had learned algebra, geometry, and differential calculus. He had also written a number of "histories" and done some reading on science. At age 12 he began studying logic, beginning with the Latin treatises on scholastic logic. John claimed that the "first intellectual operation in which I arrived at any proficiency, was dissecting a bad argument, and finding in what part the fallacy lay." Later he asserted that the study of logic was a good activity for young philosophy students. He thought they "may become capable of disentangling the intricacies of confused and self-contradictory thought, before their own thinking faculties are much advanced" and that the study of logic would "form exact thinkers, who attach a precise meaning to words and propositions" (1957: 14–15). Demonstrating his firm belief in utilitarian principles, James Mill emphasized the *utility* of the study of logic.

John continued reading in Latin and Greek as well, particularly the orations in those languages, and he also began reading the most important dialogues of Plato. About Plato's influence on both father and son, John said: "There is no author to whom my father thought himself more indebted for his own mental culture, than Plato . . . I can bear similar testimony in regard to myself" (pp. 15–16).

At the age of 13, James Mill gave John a complete course on political economy, giving him lectures which John had to clearly, precisely, and completely summarize, and then having him read Adam Smith as well as a book which had just been

published by James's good friend David Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*.

James Mill seemed to have expected too much from the young boy, for even though John had praise for his excellent education, maintaining that "in the main his method was right, and it succeeded," he complained that his father "was often, and much beyond reason, provoked by my failures in cases where success could not have been expected" (p. 20). Still, John was not very critical of his father on this account, since he was convinced that "a pupil from whom nothing is ever demanded which he cannot do, never does all he can" (p. 22).

At 14, John was invited to spend a year in France with Jeremy Bentham's brother, Sir Samuel, and his family. From this time on, although his studies continued under his father's general direction, there were no longer formal lessons.

Mill concluded, in his *Autobiography*, that as a result of the formal instruction which he received from his father, he started life "with an advantage of a quarter of a century over my contemporaries." However, John did not feel superior to others because of this:

If I thought anything about myself, it was that I was rather backward in my studies, since I always found myself so, in comparison with what my father expected from me. (p. 23)

Mill believed that "any boy or girl of average capacity and healthy physical constitution" could have accomplished what he had, since he modestly believed he was "rather below than above par" in natural talent. What he thought was best about the education he received was that he was not "crammed with mere facts, and with the opinions or phrases of other people," using this as a substitution for forming opinions of one's own. Instead:

My father never permitted anything which I learnt to degenerate into a mere exercise of memory. He strove to make the understanding not only go along with every step of the teaching, but, if possible, precede it. Anything which could be found out by thinking I never was told, until I had exhausted my efforts to find it out for myself. (p. 22)

One controversial aspect of John's upbringing was that he was raised without any religious beliefs. Not only did his father find "it impossible to believe that a world so full of evil was the work of an Author combining infinite power with perfect goodness and righteousness," but he looked upon religion "as the greatest enemy of morality." He complained that religion held up as the ideal of perfect goodness a Being who created Hell, that is, a Being:

who would create the human race with the infallible foreknowledge, and therefore with the intention, that the great majority of them were to be consigned to horrible and everlasting torment. (p. 28)

Not only was this abhorrent, according to James Mill; but as long as people looked to religion for morality, “morality continues to be a matter of blind tradition, with no consistent principle, nor even any consistent feeling, to guide it.”

The opinions on the subject of religion which James passed on to his son could have been a problem for young John, since others would have found these sentiments to be offensive. It was only his “limited intercourse with strangers, especially such as were likely to speak to [him] on religion” which prevented him from “being placed in the alternative of avowal [of atheism] or hypocrisy.” John Stuart Mill continued, throughout his life, to be disturbed by the automatic connection most people make between the rejection of religion and “bad qualities of either mind or heart.” As a result of this prejudice, atheists tend to keep silent about their beliefs. Mill suspected that:

The world would be astonished if it knew how great a proportion of its brightest ornaments – of those most distinguished even in popular estimation for wisdom and virtue – are complete skeptics in religion . . . (p. 30)

John’s year in France was a happy one. He enjoyed his first taste of freedom, “breath[ing] for a whole year, the free and genial atmosphere of Continental life” (p. 38). He spent most of the time continuing his studies, writing detailed accounts of the work he did to his father; but the Bentham’s insisted that he also learn to fence and ride, neither of which he enjoyed, and to dance, which to his great surprise, he loved. John also learned the French language and read classic French literature, and he spent much time in the company of the Bentham’s oldest son George, who introduced him to the joys of plant collecting during their long walks together. This became a lifelong hobby for John.

The Bentham’s did not stay in one place during this year. John traveled with them from the Chateau of Pompignan to the Pyrenees, where he discovered a passion for the mountains, and then to an estate near Montpellier. John took university courses at the Faculté des Sciences during their six months in Montpellier.

John was particularly impressed with the competent and dignified Lady Bentham, the daughter of a celebrated chemist, who was the undisputed head of the Bentham household. To see the roles reversed from what they were in his own home showed him the potential to be found in women.

John returned to England to find his father just finishing his *Elements of Political Economy*. John was asked to summarize each paragraph, an exercise which Jeremy Bentham did with all of his writings, “to enable the writer more easily to judge of, and improve, the order of the ideas, and the general character of the exposition.” Soon after, he began studying the French Revolution which, he recorded in his *Autobiography*, “took an immense hold of my feelings.” He also “read Roman law” during the winter of 1821–2 with John Austin, who “had made Bentham’s best ideas his own, and added much to them from other sources and from his own mind.”

At the beginning of these studies, James gave John, whose entire education had prepared him for the acceptance of the “principle of utility,” his first direct taste of Jeremy Bentham’s ideas; he had him read Dumont’s three-volume exposition and translation of some of Bentham’s published and unpublished works, the *Traité de Législation Civile et Pénale*. The reading of this work he later said was “an epoch in my life, one of the turning points in my mental history.” In his *Autobiography*, John wrote of the tremendous impact reading the *Traité* had on his life:

When I laid down the last volume of the *Traité*, I had become a different being . . . I now had opinions; a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; in one of the best senses of the word, a religion . . . And I had a grand conception laid before me of changes to be effected in the condition of mankind through that doctrine . . . the vista of improvement which [Bentham] did open was sufficiently large and brilliant to light up my life, as well as to give definite shape to my aspirations. (pp. 42–4)

John continued to read what he could of Bentham’s work, in addition to advanced work in “analytic psychology,” under his father’s direction. He read Locke, Helvetius, Hartley, Berkeley, Hume, Reid and others, as well as a book, published under the pseudonym of Richard Beauchamp, titled *Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind*, which impressed him because it was critical of the usefulness of religious belief.

From the summer of 1822 on, when he wrote his first argumentative essay, John “began to carry on [his] intellectual cultivation by writing still more than by reading” (p. 46). At this point he could only manage to compose a “dry argument.” He also conversed more with learned friends of his father’s and began to feel “a man among men,” rather than “a pupil under teachers.”

In the winter of 1822–3, John formed a society composed of young men who accepted Utility “as their standard in ethics and politics.” They met every two weeks for a period of three and a half years. John decided to call the group the “Utilitarian Society” and “the term [‘Utilitarian’] made its way into the language from this humble source.” John acknowledged that he’d taken the term from a novel he’d read:

I did not invent the word, but found it in one of Galt’s novels, the “Annals of the Parish,” in which the Scotch clergyman, of whom the book is a supposed autobiography, is represented as warning his parishioners not to leave the Gospel and become utilitarians. With a boy’s fondness for a name and a banner I seized on the word . . . (1957: 52)

In May 1823, James Mill obtained a position for John at the East India Company in the office of the Examiner of India Correspondence, initially working immediately under his father as a clerk and finally becoming an Examiner. James chose this occupation for his son because he thought it would allow him time to