A FURTHER REINTERPRETATION OF THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF JOHN STUART MILL.

by

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M.A., University of Glasgow, 1970

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
Philosophy

January 1972

APPROVAL

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Degree: Master of Arts

Title of Thesis: A Further Reinterpretation of the Moral Philosophy of John Stuart Mill

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ABSTRACT

Those of Mill's critics who focus their attention on Utilitarianism assume that Mill must have held that certain ethical sentences, including one expressing the principle of utility, are properly describable as true. In this thesis I set out to demonstrate the spuriousness of this assumption.

I begin by showing that in several important works - works which he thought much more highly of than he did Utilitarianism - Mill denied that the truth (or falsity) of any ethical sentences can ever be established. Next I produce evidence that his reason for this denial lies in his commitment to the view that ethical sentences are really disguised imperative sentences, and hence have no truth-value. Finally, it is argued that there is nothing in Utilitarianism that is inconsistent with the meta-ethical position which we have found him to adopt in his other works related to ethics.

In a short concluding chapter I devote as much space as I deem permissible in a thesis of this type to show that reinterpretation of Mill's ethical theory on an imperative model renders it more plausible than it is generally taken to be, since all theories which allow truth-values to ethical sentences are open to knock-down objections.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my thanks to two people who have been of great help to me in writing this thesis: to Dr. L. Kenner, my senior advisor, whose criticisms were much appreciated; and to my friend Dr. Alister Browne of the University of British Columbia, whose advice I didn't always take, but doubtless should have.

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF THE REINTERPRETATION

(1) The orthodox interpretation.

John Stuart Mill, says Urmson, [1] is a philosopher whose work is so travestied by critics and commentators that it is hard to believe that they have ever read his books at all. These strong words are due to his conviction that what he calls 'the received view' of Mill is plainly false. On this view, Mill is said to hold that a particular action is right if, and only if, it promotes the ultimate end, which he takes to be the general happiness. The 'received view' is thus the view that Mill was an act-utilitarian. The thesis of Urmson's paper is that, irrespective of the merits of act-utilitarianism, this was not Mill's theory. For Mill, he claims, argues frequently in favour of two propositions which are contrary to the tenets of act-utilitarianism: that a particular action is justified by showing that it is in accordance with some moral rule; and that a moral rule is justified, or shown to be acceptable, by showing that its adoption would tend to promote the ultimate end (i.e. the general happiness). These are the tenets of rule-utilitarianism.

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1 'The Interpretation of the Moral Philosophy of J.S. Mill', Philosophical Quarterly for 1953, p. 33.

Now there is another view which is invariably attributed to Mill by his critics and commentators; so much so that it, too, might appropriately be labelled 'the received view'. This is the view that Mill was what would nowadays be termed 'an ethical objectivist'. An ethical objectivist is one who believes that certain ethical sentences are properly describable as true or false. To be an ethical objectivist one need not go so far as to provide an exhaustive list of true ethical propositions. Most ethical objectivists have been either unwilling or unable to provide such a list for critical scrutiny;[2] in section (2) of this Chapter, where I discuss the ethical objectivist/subjectivist distinction in some detail, it should become apparent that the majority of ethical objectivists are more concerned to set up a method for determining true ethical sentences than to elaborate on the content of such sentences. One feature which ethical objectivists have in common is that they all accept the minimal claim that some (i.e. at least one) ethical sentences are properly describable as true, and some (i.e. at least one) as false. Let me label the view that Mill accepted this claim 'the orthodox interpretation', to distinguish it from Urmson's 'received

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2 A Noteworthy exception to this general rule is W.D. Ross, who provides a list of 'prima facie duties' in his book The Right and the Good, Chapter 2.

view'.[3]

It should be mentioned that the view that Mill was an act-utilitarian is not as plainly false as Urmson takes it to be; at least, the view that Mill was what would now be termed a rule-utilitarian is not as obviously true as Urmson thinks. The claim that Mill was really a rule-utilitarian has come under attack from many quarters. These attacks vary in the extent of their disagreement with Urmson. A strong line is taken by Maurice Mandelbaum,[4] who holds that there are no grounds whatever for classifying Mill as a rule-utilitarian, however rule-utilitarianism is defined. But J.D. Mabbott adopts an intermediate position: he argues[5] that it is doubtful whether Mill is as clearly or consistently committed to rule-utilitarianism as Urmson believes, and suggests that this absence of a consistent, clear commitment can be explained by the fact that Mill was not aware of the difference between act- and rule-utilitarianism. Mabbott quotes several passages from Utilitarianism which he thinks support the traditional view that Mill was an act-utilitarian.

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3 For proof that this is the orthodox interpretation of Mill see Appendix A.

4 'Two Moot Issues in Mill's Utilitarianism', in Mill - A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. J.B. Schneewind.

5 'Interpretations of Mill's Utilitarianism', Philosophical Quarterly, (1956).

It is not germane to this paper to take sides in the debate between Urmson and his critics;[6] I will argue in section (3) of this Chapter that Mill's meta-ethical position can be determined regardless of whether or not he was really an act-utilitarian. What I do wish to show in this paper is that what I have labelled 'the orthodox interpretation', viz. the view that Mill was an ethical objectivist, is plainly false; that there is no textual support for the orthodox interpretation in Mill's writings, and much which counts against it. The purpose of this thesis, in a nutshell, is to discredit the orthodox interpretation.

(2) The ethical objectivist/subjectivist dichotomy.

It has earlier been stated, rather tersely, that an ethical objectivist is one who believes that certain ethical sentences are properly describable as true; and that an ethical subjectivist is one who denies that any such sentences are properly called true. Let me now describe

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6 But my intuitions are that Mabbott is right. For the terminology of 'act- and rule-utilitarianism' is a very recent one: these labels were first appended to the two varieties of utilitarianism by R.B. Brandt in his Ethical Theory (1959), though these varieties had earlier been distinguished by J.J.C. Smart in his article 'Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism' (Phil. Q. for 1956). Smart has since stated that he prefers the labels 'act' and 'rule' (c.f. Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics, p.2.).

these opposing views in more detail, to make clear just what it is that I am claiming when I claim that Mill was an ethical subjectivist.

In practice, all of those philosophers who hold that certain ethical sentences, $S_1 \ldots S_n$, are properly describable as true also hold that there is a valid method by which the truth of $S_1 \ldots S_n$ can be established. It is because ethical objectivists believe that they have discovered a method by which the truth of certain ethical sentences can be established that they hold that these sentences can properly be described as true. And it is because ethical objectivists all hold that certain ethical sentences are properly describable as true that they feel committed to accepting that there is such a thing as moral knowledge --- knowledge that certain objects possess moral goodness, and that certain actions (or types of action) are moral duties. In short, ethical objectivists are also ethical cognitivists. The ethical objectivist is not <u>logically</u> committed to ethical cognitivism. This point is emphasised in section (2) of Chapter II of this thesis. But while it is not <u>logically</u> necessary for the ethical objectivist to be an ethical cognitivist, ethical objectivists seem to feel constrained by the demands of plausibility to embrace some form of ethical cognitivism.

While ethical objectivists are united in agreeing that there is a method by which the truth of certain ethical sentences can be established, they do not agree on just what this method is. That is, while they are united in agreeing that there is such a thing as moral knowledge, they do not agree on how this knowledge is to be obtained. In the history of moral philosophy ethical objectivists have plumped for one or other of three methods for determining the truth of ethical sentences: analysis of moral language; intuition; and perception by the moral sense. Let us take a closer look at each of these putative methods.

(a) The moral sense: some eighteenth century moral philosophers, notably Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Butler (arguably), held that everyone (or at any rate almost everyone) has an immediate awareness of moral distinctions. They further held that this awareness could only be conceived of satisfactorily as a form of sense-perception: the goodness or badness of objects, and the rightness or wrongness of actions were, they held, perceived by means of a sixth sense - the 'moral sense'. Hutcheson, for example, claimed that there were important similarities between the moral faculty and the physical senses:[7] moral perceptions, he claimed, are as much cases of direct awareness as are the perceptions of the

colours of material objects; we can see the moral worth of benevolent actions, and the wickedness of torture, without having to be told so by others or to deliberate with ourselves. Moreover, the moral faculty, like our other senses, is not mislead by considerations of self-interest; we can no more feel approval for a selfish action that we can enjoy the taste of a noxious medicine because our doctor tells us that it will do us good.

(b) intuition: other eighteenth century philosophers, notably Clarke, Cudworth, and Richard Price, agreed with moral sense theorists that everyone (or at any rate almost everyone) possessed a faculty through which he could obtain moral knowledge. But, unlike the moral sense theorists, these philosophers held that the moral faculty was a function of man's reason or intellect. They argued that the information yielded

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7 An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, ed. Selby - Bigge, p. 392seqq. W.D. Hudson notes (Ethical Intuitionism, p. 19) that Hutcheson's ethical theory owed much to his uncritical acceptance of Locke's empiricist epistemology. Locke had taught that the ultimate materials of thought were simple ideas, which were supplied both by sensation and reflection. External objects are apprehended by the former, the mind's own operations by the latter. Since Hutcheson held that moral ideas were simple ideas in Locke's sense (i.e. irreducible), he concluded that moral ideas, like other simple ideas which arise from external objects, must be the product of some form of sensation.

by the moral faculty is much more certain than a moral sense theory allows. To regard the moral faculty as a sixth sense would, in their opinion, mean conceding that telling lies, for example, merely seemed to us to be right but perhaps was not actually right. This implication was to them as repugnant as the proposition that two and two merely seemed to add up to four. The view of these philosophers was that the moral principles which constitute the basic premises or moral reasoning are 'clear and distinct ideas' - ideas which could not conceivably be false.[8] Since Cudworth, Clarke and Price held that the truth of basic moral principles can be known by intellectual intuition, these philosophers are called the 'intuitionists', and their theory 'intuitionism'.

Intuitionism, unlike moral sense theory, has managed to survive the eighteenth century, and has since been accepted, in some form or other, by many notable moral philosophers. Recent advocates of the theory include Sidgwick, G.E. Moore[9], and H.A. Pritchard. Pritchard,

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8 This moral theory owes an abvious debt to Cartesian intuitionism i.e. to Descartes' claim that the ultimate constituents of all reasoning are clear and distinct ideas. Descartes, impressed by the apparent certainty of mathematical propositions, held the axioms of Euclidean geometry to be examples of clear and distinct ideas. The contention of the 'ethical intuitionists' is that the basic moral judgments (e.g. promise-breaking is wrong) provide other examples of such ideas.

for example, argues that moral philosophers have made the same mistake as that made by epistemologists, viz. the mistake of looking for proof when none is necessary. According to Prichard, in deciding what we ought to do, reasoning and argumentation are quite out of place. That a certain action is our moral duty is something which we simply <u>see</u> to be true:

> "The sense of obligation to do, or of the rightness of, an action of a particular kind is absolutely underivative or immediate... This apprehension is immediate, in precisely the sense in which a mathematical apprehension is immediate, e.g. the apprehension that this three-sided figure, in virtue of its being three-sided, must have three angles. Both apprehensions are immediate in the sense that in both insight into the nature of the subject directly leads us to recognise its possession of the predicate; and it is only stating this fact from the other side to say that in both the fact apprehended is self-evident". [10]

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9 Moore states in the preface to <u>Principia Ethica</u> that he is 'not an 'Intuitionist' in the ordinary sense of the term'. For the ordinary intuitionist holds, according to Moore, that moral truths of all kinds can be known by intuition. Moore disagrees with this view. Instead he puts forward the claim that only a small and very special class of moral judgments <u>are</u> self-evident; the truth of others must be established, if it can be established at all, by some means other than intuition. It turns out that in Moore's opinion all moral judgments which are not self-evident must, to be justifiable, be based on those which are. Thus Moore's doctrine is not substantially different to that of the eighteenth century intuitionists.

10 'Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?', p. 90-1.

Prichard admits that the realisation that the execution of our moral obligations sometimes conflicts with our own best interests may lead us to doubt whether these obligations are really obligatory. We may demand <u>proof</u> that our moral intuitions are veridical, that our feeling that we ought to perform a certain action is not illusory. But Prichard holds that this demand is illegitimate:

> "Nevertheless, the demand, though illegitimate, is inevitable until we have carried the process of reflection far enough to realise the self-evidence of our obligations, i.e. the immediacy of our apprehension of them. This realisation of their self-evidence is positive knowledge."[11]

(c) conceptual analysis: one group of moral philosophers holds that it is possible to show ethical sentences to be true in exactly the same way in which we show sentences about empirical or 'natural' fact to be true. For ethical sentences, they claim, are really disguised empirical assertions. They argue that if ethical sentences were not covertly empirical, we could not hope to justify them as against conflicting ethical sentences.

It might seem at first sight that the naturalist is claiming that ethical sentences can be <u>deduced</u> from non-ethical ones. If this were his position, he would be open to the objection that sentences containing moral terms (such as 'right' and 'ought') cannot

validly be deduced from premises none of which contain these terms; every term which appears in the conclusion of a valid argment must also occur in one of the premises. But the naturalist position is not that ethical sentences can be deduced from non-ethical ones; rather it is that ethical sentences mean the same as certain non-ethical ones, because the basic ethical expressions are definable in terms of non-ethical expressions. Obviously, if such definitions are acceptable, we can derive ethical sentences from non-ethical ones. For example, if 'we have a moral duty to do x' means 'we are required by society to do x', then from 'society requires us to keep promises' we can derive the ethical sentence 'we have a moral duty to keep promises'.

A great variety of naturalist definitions of ethical terms have been proposed by moral philosophers. F.C. Sharp, for example, defined 'good' as 'desired upon reflection';[12] while R.B. Perry proposed that the expression 'x has moral value' means 'x is the object of someone's interest'.[13] The important thing

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11 Op. cit, p. 96.

12 'Voluntarism and Objectivity in Ethics', Philosophical Review, Vol. 50 (1941).

13 Realms of Value.

> to notice about such definitions is that in putting them forward the naturalist commits himself to ethical objectivism. For in claiming that fundamental ethical expressions, when subjected to analysis, are found to be reducible to non-ethical expressions he is, ipso facto, putting forth a method of determining the truth or falsity of ethical sentences; it follows from the claim that 'x is good' means the same as 'x is the object of a desire' that we can test whether it is true that any thing is good simply by determining whether or not it is desired.

The three types of ethical objectivism have now been described. It has been noted that corresponding to each of these types there is a putative method for establishing the truth of certain ethical sentences (usually those sentences which express the basic moral principles). But some moral philosophers refuse to accept that it is possible to establish the truth of any ethical sentences at all. In this sense they commit themselves to denying that moral knowledge is possible. These are the 'ethical subjectivists', and their theory is ethical subjectivism. The reasons why ethical subjectivists reject objectivism in all its forms will be discussed in Chapter III of this thesis. What I wish to do now is to outline the two main variants of their theory, viz. emotivism and prescriptivism.

(a) emotivism: emotivism is the theory that ethical terms really add nothing at all to the factual content of the sentences in which they appear. The function of ethical terms, on the emotivist view, is two-fold: their main function is to express the inner feelings or attitudes of the person using them; their secondary function is to evoke similar feelings and attitudes in others, and thereby to influence their conduct. To say, for example, 'stealing is wrong' is both to express your attitude towards theft and to attempt to discourage others from stealing.

The interesting corollary of the emotivist account of function of moral discourse is that when two people utter conflicting ethical sentences they are not really contradicting one another. For on this account if A says, 'promise-breaking is wrong' and B says, 'promise-breaking is not wrong', A and B are merely expressing their different attitudes towards promise-breaking. And statements of attitude, unlike empirical statements, cannot contradict one another:[14] there is no contradiction between the sentences 'A likes banana sandwiches' and 'B does not like banana sandwiches' (unless of course A and B are the same person); there is merely an indication that two people have different tastes in sandwiches.

This corollary has the consequence that, if genuine moral disagreements are to be solved, the disputants must hold certain ethical attitudes in common. Many so-called

moral disagreements are really disguised factual disagreements. Take the following example: A holds of a proposed course of action that it is the right thing to do; B that it is wrong. B would persuade A to change his mind if he could demonstrate that this action will have consequence C_1, of which A disapproves. Their disagreement would then be revealed as a factual one; for the question whether the proposed action will or will not have consequence C_1 is one of fact. On the morality of the issue, A and B are in complete agreement (actions which have consequences of type C_1 are to be avoided). Genuine moral disagreements arise only where there is agreement between the disputants on what the facts of the case are. They arise when, for example, A and B concur on the facts about actions of type t (e.g. concur on the nature of the consequences of such actions); yet A holds that actions of type t are always wrong, while B contends that they are often permissible and sometimes even our moral duty.

The arch-emotivist, A.J. Ayer,[15] contends that genuine moral disagreements are in principle irresolvable: for they are the result of differences in attitude -- differences which stem from the different moral 'conditioning' or upbringing which the disputants have had. When two people

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14 This is the point of C.L. Stevenson's distinction between disagreements in belief and disagreements in attitude (Ethics and Language, Chapter 1, part 2.).

have had the same sort of moral upbringing, this will be reflected in similar moral attitudes; between such people there are likely to be few genuine moral disagreements. Conversely, the incidence of genuine moral disagreements between two people will increase in rough proportion to the difference in their upbringing.

Ayer concludes from all this that the only ethical questions which it is possible to answer are the following two questions: what are the moral attitudes of a particular person or group of people? and why do they have these attitudes?

> 'It appears then, that ethics as a branch of knowledge is nothing more than a department of psychology and sociology.'16

It is this conclusion which distinguishes Ayer's theory from the other main brand of ethical subjectivism, prescriptivism.

(b) prescriptivism: R.M. Hare, like the emotivists does not believe that it is proper to ascribe truth values to any moral statements. Consequently he is committed to the view that we cannot possibly establish the truth of any ethical sentences. But Hare's theory differs from that of the emotivists in several important respects.

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15 The emotivist theory of ethics was first advocated by a group of philosophers, including Ayer, as one implication of a (dubious) theory of meaning -- verificationism -- which they were anxious to defend. However, it is important to realise that the truth or falsity of emotivism is quite independent of the truth or falsity of verificationism. Emotivism has been espoused in its own right, notably by C.L. Stevenson in his book Ethics and Language.

In the first place, Hare emphasises that there is an analytic connection between sincerely accepting a moral principle and acting upon that principle when relevant situations arise. He holds that ethical sentences (like non-ethical sentences which express value-judgments) are 'prescriptive', i.e. they entail imperatives. But if ethical judgments entail imperatives, then it is not possible for a person to accept an ethical judgment yet fail to act on it; at least, not when action upon them is within his (physical and psychological) power. Thus Hare maintains that one who accepts that actions of type t ought to be performed is logically committed to performing such actions when relevant situations arise.

Moreover Hare, unlike the emotivist, is not prepared to leave the question: why do people have the moral attitudes which they have? to sociologists and psychologists. This question is one upon which Hare thinks the moral philosopher can shed considerable light. Ayer had postulated that the moral attitudes a man has are the product of his 'conditioning' -- his education and upbringing; he left it to the psychologist to explain just how this conditioning process works. But the prescriptivist view is that the moral attitudes a man has (which Hare prefers to call 'principles') are ultimately the product of his own

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16 Language, Truth and Logic (2nd edition), p. 112.

choice. They are the result of 'decisions of principle' -- decisions which every individual has to make for himself. Even if we derive our principles from the society in which we live, they have no power to guide our actions unless we have chosen to adopt them as our own.

The function of principles is to guide conduct. We appeal to them when we want to know the right thing to do. The way in which principles guide conduct is by serving as the major premises of practical syllogisms. The decision to repay a debt, for example, may be taken as the result of some such deliberation as the following:

Major premise: one ought to keep one's promise. (Principle)
Minor premise: I promised Jones that I would return the five dollars he lent me by today.

Conclusion: I ought to repay Jones his money immediately.

On the prescriptivist account, then, decisions and choices are justified by principles; the principles which we have are ultimately the product of our own choice, and thus have no truth-value. Their justification lies in the way of life of which they are a part, viz. the way of life which we have chosen to lead.

> '... if pressed to justify a decision (of principle) completely, we have to give a complete specification of the way of life of which it is a part. This complete specification it is impossible in practice to give; the nearest attempts are those given by the great religions, especially those which can point to historical persons who carried out the

> way of life in practice. Suppose, however, that we can give it. If the inquirer still goes on asking 'But why <u>should</u> I live like that?' then there is no further answer to give him, because we have already, ex hypothesi, said everything that could be included in this further answer. We can only ask him to make up his own mind which way he ought to live; for in the end everything rests upon such a decision of principle.' 17

In this section, the distinction between ethical objectivism and ethical subjectivism was drawn as follows: ethical objectivists hold that certain ethical sentences are properly describable as true, and attempt to justify this claim by providing a method by which the truth of these sentences can be established. Ethical subjectivists, on the other hand, deny that it is proper to ascribe truth-values to ethical sentences, and thereby commit themselves to denying that there is any method by which the truth (or falsity) of ethical sentences can be determined; even the prescriptivists, who hold that moral principles can be justified, do not accept that they can be justified <u>completely</u>. In Chapter II of this thesis it will be argued that Mill was an ethical subjectivist.

(3) One true principle of conduct, or many?

It has been noted that the claim that Mill was an ethical objectivist is identical to the claim that Mill held that some (i.e. at least one) ethical sentences are properly describable as true, and some (at least one) as

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17 <u>The Language of Morals</u>, p. 69.

false. My aim in this section of the thesis is to show that the question whether or not Mill was an ethical objectivist can be answered by determining whether or not he believed the principle of utility to be true. For, if he believed this principle to be true, he must be interpreted as an ethical objectivist; while if it can be shown that he advocated this principle not because he believed it to be true, but rather because he thought it indicated an acceptable way of life, he was committed to ethical subjectivism.

It will be remembered that I did not wish to preclude the possibility that Mill was a rule-utilitarian. It follows that I did not exclude the possibility that, if Mill were an ethical objectivist, there could for him be more than one true principle of conduct. For in this case all the moral rules which satisfy the requirements of rule-utilitarianism would properly be describable as true. Let me restate this argument in a less compressed form: according to rule-utilitarianism an action is one's moral duty if and only if the following conditions obtain:

(i) the action is in accordance with some moral rule, R.1. and,

(ii) action based on R.1. usually produces the best consequences.[18] On this account, then, there will exist a set of ethical principles, $R_1 \ldots R_n$, upon which we are

always obliged to act, because action based on them is generally optimific. But if the rule-utilitarian is an ethical objectivist then for him there will be several true moral principles, viz. that class of moral principles which satisfy the requirements of rule-utilitarianism. If rule-utilitarianism is objectively true, and the moral rules $R_1....R_n$ meet the requirements of the rule-utilitarian principle, then $R_1...R_n$ must be objectively true also.

For the ethical objectivist who is an act-utilitarian, on the other hand, there can only be one true principle of conduct, viz. the act-utilitarian principle itself. His act-utilitarianism commits him to regarding all other moral rules, such as those prescribing truth-telling and the repayment of debts, as mere rules of thumb, to be abandoned whenever the consequences of following them will be worse than those of some alternative course of action.

It should now be obvious that if Mill were both an ethical objectivist and a rule-utilitarian there would, for him, be more than one true moral principle; perhaps there would be many. If, on the other hand, Mill was an ethical objectivist and an act-utilitarian, then for him there would

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18 This characterisation of rule-utilitarianism is, I take it, much the same as that given by Hospers when he states rather elliptically, that the rule-utilitarian judges the rightness or wrongness of an act 'not by its consequences, but by the consequences of its universalization'. (Human Conduct, p. 316.)

be only one true moral principle, viz. the utility principle. Given that Mill was an ethical objectivist, there exist both these possibilities. Now I have already stated that I do not wish to become embroiled in the difficult, perhaps unanswerable, question whether Mill was an act- or a rule-utilitarian. Fortunately this issue can, for my purposes, be left an open question. It can be circumvented for the following reason: Both of the possible interpretations of Mill as an ethical objectivist can be rejected <u>given</u> that we can discredit the single claim that Mill held the principle of utility to be true. Consider these interpretations in turn:

(i) the objectivist-cum- act utilitarian interpretation: this interpretation could obviously be discounted <u>if</u> if were shown that Mill did not hold that the principle of utility was true, only that it was an acceptable principle. For it is analytic that one cannot be an ethical objectivist and yet not believe that <u>any</u> ethical sentences are true.

(ii) the objectivist-cum- rule-utilitarian interpretation: it has been noted that on this interpretation a set of moral rules, $R_1 \ldots R_n$, depend for their truth upon the truth of the (rule-) utilitarian principle. Thus if we show that Mill did not

regard his utility principle as true, then we can reject the claim that he held the subordinate principles $R_1 \ldots R_n$ to be true.

The conclusion to be drawn from this argument is that if we can discredit the view that Mill held the principle of utility to be true, then we will have good grounds for rejecting the orthodox interpretation. Much of Chapter II of this paper will be taken up with the attempt to show that, for Mill, the principle of utility was acceptable rather than true; that his aim in Utilitarianism was to persuade us to adopt the principle and live by it, rather than to demonstrate its truth. To achieve this goal, there is no substitute for a careful examination of the texts of Mill's ethical writings. But before I embark on textual exegesis there are two preliminary points which I would like to make, in order to anticipate certain objections to the effect that the whole enterprise of this paper is doomed to failure right from the start.

(4) Two preliminary points:

The objections which I now wish to consider run as follows: It is obvious from the outset that Mill could not have been an ethical subjectivist. No deep understanding of Mill's works is necessary in order to see this. A cursory glance at Utilitarianism is all that is required, if indeed it is required at all. Mill must have been an ethical objectivist, for the following reasons:

(a) utilitarianism is a normative ethical system; it proposes a criterion of right action. But one cannot propose a criterion of right action and at the same time claim to be an ethical subjectivist. To do so would be inconsistent. It would be inconsistent because the ethical subjectivist believes that, in the last analysis, it is up to the individual which moral principles he accepts.

(b) Mill thought that utilitarianism could be <u>proven</u>. In fact he attempted such a proof in chapter IV of <u>Utilitarianism</u>, the chapter entitled 'Of What Sort of Proof the Principle of Utility is Susceptible'. But according to the ethical subjectivist it is ultimately up to the individual which moral principles he accepts; so he is committed to the view that no such principles can be proven.

Let me now attempt to reply to those objections. My reply will take the following form: that the former of these two objections stems from ignorance of the relationship between normative ethics and meta-ethics; while the latter objection is simply the product of shoddy scholarship.

(a) The charge of inconsistency: the objection states that Mill could not have been an ethical subjectivist; for he was certainly a utilitarian, and it is not possible for

a utilitarian to be an ethical subjectivist. The reply to this is that acceptance of utilitarianism in no way commits one to ethical objectivism. Utilitarianism is a normative ethical system. A normative ethical system is a code of moral principles or norms which prescribe the way in which we ought to live. Among the tasks which the philosopher advocating any such system may be required to perform are the following: to define the principles of his system; to clarify which of these principles depend upon others in the system (i.e. to state the principle or principles from which the others can be derived); to show that the basic principles of his system are consistent with one another; and to offer reasons why his system is preferable to alternative ethical systems. When the moral philosopher engages in any of these tasks, he is working on the level of "normative ethics".

Another task which any philosopher who proposes an ethical system may be called on to perform is to state what sort of reasons the reasons he uses to justify his system are: he has to decide whether these reasons are reasons for the truth of his system, or merely reasons for the acceptability of the system. When he engages in this task, the moral philosopher is doing meta-ethics. If he holds that his reasons are sufficient to determine the truth of his system, he will be a member of that class of philosophers we have labelled "ethical objectivists". But he need not take this line. He may argue instead that while his

principles are not true there are reasons why we should choose to live by them. It is important to note that the fact that a philosopher does not believe that the truth of moral principles can ever be established does not preclude him from offering reasons why we should live by certain moral principles rather than others. Even those ethical subjectivists who analyse ethical sentences as expressions of feeling allow that a man can attempt to justify the moral feelings he has.

Thus it is open to the utilitarian either to be an ethical subjectivist or to accept one or other of the three species of ethical objectivism, viz. ethical naturalism, intuitionism, and moral sense theory. For, given a certain version of the utility principle, say:

> 'an action is right if and only if it produces better consequences than those of any alternative course of action',

this could be held to be:

	(i)	a definition of 'right'
or	(ii)	a judgment made by intuition
or	(iii)	a judgment made by the moral sense
or	(iv)	the expression of an attitude or principle which the speaker has chosen to accept.

So a decision for or against utilitarianism does not commit one to any meta-ethical position. Similarly, a decision in favour of any meta-ethical position is not coercive against utilitarianism. In short, utilitarianism is meta-ethically neutral.

It is interesting to note that the contemporary

ethicist J.J.C. Smart defends a subjectivist utilitarian ethics in his Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics. Smart writes:

> 'It will be my object in the present study to state a system of ethics which is free from traditional and theological associations. This is that type of utilitarianism which R.B. Brandt in his recent book calls 'act utilitarianism', and which I, in an earlier article, called, less happily, 'extreme utilitarianism'. The best sustained exposition of utilitarianism is, I think, that in Sidgwick's Methods of Ethics, but Sidgwick stated it within the framework of a cognitivist meta-ethics which supposed that the ultimate act utilitarian principles could be known to be true by some sort of intellectual intuition. I reject Sidgwick's meta-ethics for familiar reasons, and will assume for the purposes of this study the truth of some such meta-ethical analysis as that of Hare's Language of Morals. In adopting a non-cognitivist meta-ethics I do, of course, renounce the attempt to prove the act utilitarian system'. 19

The object of this thesis is to show that Mill adopted a similar meta-ethical basis for his utilitarianism one hundred years earlier than Smart.[20]

(b) Mill's 'Proof': the second objection, it will be remembered, states that since Mill thought that the principle of utility could be proven, he must have been an ethical objectivist. This objection is certainly true in so far as ethical subjectivists are committed to the belief that no moral principles can be proved to be true.

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19 Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics, p. 1-2.

20 I do not wish to claim here that Mill was the first subjectivist utilitarian. This distinction might plausibly be claimed for Hume.

That is why Smart, in the previous quotation, notes that his acceptance of ethical subjectivism commits him to renouncing any attempt to prove utilitarianism. Thus if Mill thought that he could provide a deductive proof of the principle of utility, then certainly he could not have been an ethical subjectivist.

But there is good reason to believe that Mill did not think this. For as early as chapter I Mill disowns any attempt to provide a deductive proof of utilitarianism, and pronounces his aim as being to explain rather than to demonstrate his theory:

> 'On the present occasion I shall, without further discussion of the other theories, attempt to contribute something towards the understanding and appreciation of the Utilitarian or Happiness theory, and towards such proof as it is susceptible of. It is evident that this cannot be proof in the ordinary and popular meaning of the term.' 21

The reason that what we ordinarily take to be a proof (i.e. a deductive proof) is not available, he goes on to say, that:

> 'Questions of ultimate ends are not amenable to direct proof. Whatever can be proved to be good must be so by being shown to be a means to something admitted to be good without proof'. 22

Mill's position can be illustrated by the following example: if health is a means to happiness, and happiness is admitted to be good as an end, then it follows that

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21 Utilitarianism (Everyman edition), p. 4, (my underlining).

22 Ibid.

health is good (i.e. good as a means). But it is impossible to prove that happiness, or for that matter anything else, is good as an end. What we can do, Mill says, is to offer reasons why we should choose to accept utilitarianism --- reasons which he describes as:

> 'Considerations...capable of determining the intellect either to give or withhold its assent to the doctrine'. 23

These reasons or 'considerations' why we should accept the utilitarian standard are, then, not logically conclusive reasons; but Mill holds that they are the most we can hope to provide.

At the begining of the crucial chapter IV, the chapter entitled 'Of What Sort of Proof the Principle of Utility is Susceptible', Mill reaffirms his chapter I position; thus there is no question of his adopting two different and inconsistent stands re the provability of the principle. His restatement comes in the opening lines of the chapter:

> 'It has already been remarked, that questions of ultimate ends do not admit of proof, in the ordinary acceptation of that term. To be incapable of proof by reasoning is common to all first principles; to the first premises of our knowledge, as well as to those of our conduct'. 24

Here again is a disclaimer to the effect that the argument in chapter IV is not intended as a deductive proof. What

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23 Ibid.

24 Utilitarianism, p. 32.

Mill proposes to do instead is to 'make good' the claim of his doctrine to be believed; he cannot provide a fully rigorous proof, so he will make do with the only 'proof' that it is possible to give. Just what the structure of Mill's argument is will be discussed in section (3) of Chapter II of this thesis.

In view of the unambiguous nature of Mill's disclaimers, there is no easy way to explain the prevalence among Mill's critics of the belief that there is a deductive proof of the utility principle to be found in chapter IV of Utilitarianism. Indeed, there is something quite distasteful about the tendency of Mill's commentators to fabricate a deductive argument out of this chapter for the sole purpose of exposing this argument to ridicule. Of course, since there is no deductive argument to be found, their criticism falls very wide of the mark.

CHAPTER II

THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE REINTERPRETATION

(1) Introduction.

It has already been remarked that there is no other way to discredit the orthodox interpretation, which has it that Mill was an ethical objectivist, than by a careful examination of the texts of Mill's ethical writings. Accordingly, most of the remainder of this paper will be devoted to textual exegesis. But not all of the rest of this thesis will be taken up with exegesis. A short concluding section, Chapter III, will assess the significance of the reinterpretation. Here it will be argued that it is possible, in the light of the reinterpretation, to extract from Mill's ethical writings a theory which is much more plausible than the one generally attributed to him by his critics.

The textual exegesis which forms the subject matter of the present Chapter will be divided into two parts. The first part will take the form of an appraisal of Mill's ethical writings *other* than *Utilitarianism*. For these writings furnish the most direct evidence that Mill was not an ethical objectivist. Evidence damaging to the orthodox interpretation will be solicited from Mill's essay *On Liberty*, his *System of Logic*, his *Autobiography*,

the short essay Whewell on Moral Philosophy, and the Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy. This evidence, taken collectively, constitutes the main or 'primary' evidence for the reinterpretation.

The remainder of the exegesis will be concerned with Utilitarianism. My major aim in this section will not be to find more evidence damaging to the orthodox interpretation; enough evidence will, I trust, already have been provided. Rather it will be to analyse the structure of Mill's argument in chapter IV of Utilitarianism, where Mill offers the considerations which he thinks will determine our intellect to give its assent to utilitarianism. The purpose of this analysis will be to show that there is nothing in Utilitarianism which is inconsistent with Mill's meta-ethical position as it emerges from his other works.

There is not sufficient relevant material in Utilitarianism for us to be able to determine the exact nature of Mill's meta-ethical position from that essay alone. The reason for this is that Mill's main aim in writing this essay was to defend his system of normative ethics against certain objections which had been urged against it; and in the course of this defence he did not feel called on to restate his meta-ethical position. Moreover, Mill did provide a tolerably clear statement of his meta-ethical position in works other than Utilitarianism. Since the

publication of all these works (except the Autobiography, which was not published until after Mill's death) preceded that of Utilitarianism, he can be forgiven for assuming that there was no need for a full restatement of his meta-ethics in that essay.

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(2) The primary evidence for the reinterpretation.

An ethical objectivist is one who holds that

(1) certain ethical sentences are properly describable as true, and others as false.

His reason for holding (1) is his belief that

(2) there exists a method by which we can establish the truth of certain ethical sentences.

My aim in this section of the thesis is to show, by quoting from the texts, that Mill did not in fact accept either proposition (1) or proposition (2); that on the contrary, he frequently denied both these propositions. I wish first to demonstrate Mill's rejection of proposition (2), then to consider his position on proposition (1).

(a) Mill the ethical non-cognitivist.

Mill's rejection of the proposition that we can know certain ethical sentences to be true can be demonstrated by taking the theory of knowledge he propounded in the System of Logic in conjunction with certain of his remarks in the essay Whewell on Moral Philosophy and in his

Autobiography.

In the introduction to his System of Logic Mill provided the following concise statement of his theory of knowledge:

> "Truths are known to us in two ways: some are known directly, and of themselves; some through the medium of other truths. The former are the subject of Intuition, or Consciousness; the latter, of Inference. The truths known by intuition are the original premises from which all others are inferred. Our assent to the conclusion being grounded on the truth of premises, we could never arrive at any knowledge by reasoning, unless something could be known antecedently to all reasoning". 1

As examples of truths known to us by 'intuition' Mill gave sentences which report our own bodily sensations (e.g.'I am hungry today') and those which report our own mental states (e.g.'I was angry yesterday'). As examples of truths known to us only by inference he gave the theorems of mathematics, the events of recorded history, and events which took place while we were absent. He concluded from this analysis that:

> "Whatever we are capable of knowing must belong to the one class or to the other; must be in the number of the primitive data, or in the conclusions which can be drawn from these". 2

Mill went on to state[3] that by far the greatest portion of our knowledge (both of particular facts and of general

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1 System of Logic (hereafter called the Logic), p. 3.

2 Logic, p. 3-4.

3 Logic, p. 5.

truths) derives from inference rather than from intuition.

Mill's spistemological position, as it emerges from the introduction to the Logic, is that all our knowledge of truths derives either from intuition or from inference. Thus to show that Mill did not believe that we can know any ethical sentences to be true it is necessary to show that he denied both that we can know the truth of ethical sentences by intuition, and that we can know the truth of such sentences by inference. This I will now attempt to do.

Let me begin by discussing whether or not Mill held that there is such a thing as intuitive moral knowledge. Now Mill did not make it clear in the Logic just what sort of truths we can know by intuition. He held that it was not within the scope of a book on logic to do so:

> "With the original data, or ultimate premises of our knowledge; with their number or nature, the mode in which they are obtained, or the tests by which they may be distinguished, logic, in a direct way at least, has in the sense in which I conceive the science, nothing to do. These questions are partly not a subject of science at all, partly that of a very different science". 4

In particular, he did not say whether he thought that intuition informs us of the truth of any ethical sentences. He left it an open question

> "Whether God, and duty, are realities, the existence of which is manifest to us a priori by the

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4 Logic, p. 4.

> constitution of our rational faculty; or whether our ideas of them are acquired notions, the origin of which we are able to trace and explain". 5

But while Mill did not say much about the content of intuited truths in the Logic, he did tell us something about their nature. These truths, he says (in a passage quoted on p. 33), are known to us directly, and they are known independently of reasoning. He further tells us that we do not require evidence for these truths:

> "With the claims which any proposition has to belief on the evidence of consciousness, that is, without evidence in the proper sense of the word, logic has nothing to do". 6

Moreover, they are indubitable. That is, they bear the stamp of certain knowledge:

> "Whatever is known to us by consciousness, is known beyond possibility of question. What one sees or feels, whether bodily or mentally, one cannot but be sure that one sees or feels. No science is required for the purpose of establishing such truths; no rules of art can render our knowledge of them more certain than it is in itself". 7

We now have some idea what Mill meant by "intuitive knowledge". It is precisely that sort of knowledge which the ethical intuitionists and moral sense theorists claim we have about moral matters, viz. direct, indubitable knowledge which requires no evidence to confirm its truth. Thus we can begin our inquiry into whether or not he believed that intuitive moral knowledge was possible.

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5 Logic, p. 5. (my underlining).

6 Logic, p. 5. (my underlining).

Certain of his arguments in the essay Whewell on Moral Philosophy reveal that he did not.

Mill opens this essay with a vigorous attack on the method of teaching at Oxford and Cambridge. These universities, he states, are ecclesiastical institutions. And it is Mill's opinion that churchmen make poor philosophers:

> "...it is nearly inevitable, that when persons bound by the vows and placed in the circumstances of an established clergy, enter into the paths of higher speculation, and endeavour to make a philosophy, either purpose or instinct will direct them to the kind of philosophy best fitted to prop up the doctrines to which they are pledged". 8

Having made his general prejudice against Oxbridge philosophy clear, Mill opens his attack against the then Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge, Dr. Whewell. In Mill's view, Whewell's book Elements of Morality is

> "...nothing better than a classification and systematizing of the opinions which he found prevailing among those who had been educated according to the approved methods of his own country; or, let us rather say, an apparatus for converting those prevailing opinions, on matters of morality, into reasons for themselves". 9

That Whewell should turn out to be an ethical intuitionist does not surprise Mill, who was familiar with Whewell's

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7 Logic, p. 4.

8 Whewell on Moral Philosophy (hereafter known as Whewell), p. 168.

9 Whewell, p. 169.

scientific intuitionism:

> "A writer who has gone beyond all his predecessors in the manufacture of necessary truths, that is, of propositions which, according to him, may be known to be true independently of proof; who ascribes this self-evidence to the larger generalities of all sciences (however little obvious at first) as soon as they have become familiar - was still more certain to regard all moral propositions familiar to him from his early years as self-evident truths". 10

After spending several pages criticising Whewell's interpretation of Bentham, Mill launches a general attack against those philosophers

> "...who, like whewell, consider the moral feelings as their own justification". 11

Of course, the ethical intuitionist claims that the moral feelings which are the right ones are not merely his own moral feelings, but feelings common to all mankind. But this claim hardly provides the basis for an adequate ethical theory. In the first place, those moral feelings which the ethical intuitionist holds to be the right ones are not in fact universal. And when moral disagreements occur, the only way the intuitionists can manufacture agreement is to

> "...assume the utmost latitude of arbitrarily determining whose votes deserve to be counted. They either ignore the existence of dissentients, or leave them out of the account, on the pretext that they have the feeling which they deny having, or if not, they ought to have it. This

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10 Whewell, p. 168-9.

11 Whewell, p. 178.

> falsification of the universal suffrage which is ostensibly appealed to, is not confined, as is often asserted, to cases in which the only dissidents are barbarous tribes. The same measure is dealt out to whole ages and nations, the most conspicuous for the cultivation and development of their mental faculties; and the individuals among the best and wisest of their respective countries". 12

Secondly, even if certain moral feelings were universal, this would not prove them to be the right moral feelings:

> "A feeling is not proved to right, and exempted from the necessity of justifying itself, because the writer or speaker is not only conscious of it in himself, but expects to find it in other people; because instead of saying 'I' he says 'you and I'...Things which were really believed by all mankind, and for which all were convinced that they had the unequivocal evidence of their senses, have been proved to be false: as that the sun rises or sets. Can immunity from similar error be claimed for the moral feelings? when all experience shows that those feelings are eminently artificial, and the product of culture". 13

According to Mill, the raison d'être of ethical intuitionism is some people's incurable bias in favour of their own moral opinions. Because certain moral attitudes have been inculcated in them ever since their birth, they are unable even to conceive that these attitudes might be misguided or incorrect. Mill concludes by stating his agreement with Bentham that one cannot be too severe on

> "...a kind of ethics whereby any implanted sentiment

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12 Whewell, p. 179.

13 Ibid.

> which is tolerably general may be erected into a moral law, binding, under penalties, on all mankind...The doctrine that the existing order of things is the natural order, and that, being natural, all innovation upon it is criminal, is as vicious in morals, as it is now at last admitted to be in physics, and in society and government". 14

What emerges from Mill's arguments in the essay on Whewell is that not only did Mill deny that it is possible to have direct, indubitable knowledge of the truth of ethical sentences; he also held that the view that such knowledge is possible is "vicious" and constitutes a barrier to moral progress.

The fact that Mill did not believe that we can know the truth of any ethical sentence by intuition is also clear from a passage in his Autobiography. This passage occurs in the context of a discussion of the theory of knowledge propounded in the Logic, which Mill characterises as the theory that all knowledge derives from experience. He notes that he put this theory forward in direct opposition to the prevailing 'a priori' epistemology of the German meta-physicians and Whewell, and then proceeds to attack the prevailing view:

> "The notion that truths external to the mind may be known by intuition or consciousness, independently of observation and experience, is, I am persuaded, in these times the great intellectual support of

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14 Ibid.

> false doctrines and bad institutions. By the aid of this theory, every inveterate belief and every intense feeling, of which the origin is not remembered, is enabled to dispense with the obligation of justifying itself by reason, and is erected into its own all-sufficient voucher and justification. There never was such an instrument devised for consecrating all deep-seated prejudice". 15

This line of attack on ethical intuitionism is already familiar: Mill said much the same thing in his essay on Whewell. What is novel about the above passage is that Mill therein defines his position on the limits of intuitive knowledge. He commits himself to the view that the truths we know by intuition are all acquired through "observation and experience"[16]; that is, to the view that all intuitive knowledge is empirical.

It remains to be established that Mill did not believe that we can know the truth of certain ethical sentences by inference. Now it is Mill's position that all those truths which we infer follow from those which we intuit:

> "The truths known by intuition are the original premises from which all others are inferred". 17

But if the truth of an <u>ethical</u> sentence is inferential, what is it inferred from? There are two possibilities:

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15 <u>Autobiography</u>, p. 134.

16 It may well be doubted that the axioms of geometry, which Mill gives as examples of intuited truths (<u>Logic</u>, p. 3.), are known to be true by observation and experience. But Mill defended the view that they are "experimental truths, generalisations from observation" in Bk. 2 ch. V of the <u>Logic</u>.

(a) it is inferred from the intuited truth of some other ethical sentence: it was established in section (3) of Chapter I of this thesis that both act- and rule-utilitarians are committed to the view that all binding ethical judgments are derivable from the principle of utility. And Mill frequently endorsed this view. Now the principle of utility, whatever else it may be, is certainly a moral principle. But it has just been shown that Mill did not believe that the truth of <u>any</u> ethical sentences, and a fortiori of any sentences expressing moral principles, can be known by intuition. Hence he was committed to the view that we cannot intuit the truth of the utility principle.

(b) it is inferred from the intuited truth of some non-ethical sentence: it might be claimed that Mill's view was that the truth of the utility principle (from which all other binding ethical principles are derivable) can be inferred from some non-ethical sentence or sentences which we intuit to be true. That this was not Mill's view can be seen from certain statements he makes in the concluding chapter of the <u>Logic</u> - the one section of that book where he devotes any attention to the principle of utility. Here Mill provides an important argument to show why the principle of utility (like certain other first principles) cannot be

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17 <u>Logic</u>, p. 3.

derived from science. The argument may be summarised as follows:

> Morality is an art. Like all other arts it has
>
> "...one first principle, or general major premise, not borrowed from science", 18

viz. the principle of utility. The reason why first principles of art, such as the utility principle, cannot be inferred from the propositions of science is that they are generically different from these propositions:

> "Propositions of science assert a matter of fact: an existence, a co-existence, a succession, or a resemblance. The propositions now spoken of do not assert that anything is, but enjoin or recommend that something should be. They are a class by themselves. A proposition of which the predicate is expressed by the words ought or should be is generically different from one which is expressed by is or will be". 19

Just how the principle of utility differs from the propositions of science is something that will be discussed at length later in this thesis. For the moment let it suffice to say that Mill's claim that they are of different type ("generically different") precludes the possibility that the utility principle can be inferred from propositions of science.

Now as Mill uses the term, a "proposition of science", is any proposition which asserts a matter of fact, i.e. any empirical proposition. But it was earlier established

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18 Logic, p. 619.

19 Logic, p. 619-20.

that in Mill's view all our intuitive knowledge is empirical (see the quote from the Autobiography on p. 39). So if the truth of the utility principle cannot be inferred from the truth of any empirical proposition, it follows that the truth of this principle cannot be inferred from any sentence which we can intuit to be true.

Certain of Mill's arguments in his essay On Liberty also reveal that he did not believe that

(2) there exists a method by which we can establish the truth of certain ethical sentences.

These arguments are worth discussing. For it was not until I came across them that I had any suspicions about the accuracy of the orthodox interpretation of Mill as an ethical objectivist. To these arguments I now turn.

On p. 72 of the Everyman edition of On Liberty Mill states that the purpose of this essay is to assert "one very simple principle". He holds that this principle constitutes an acceptable criterion of whether or not interference with the liberty of conduct of any one man by any other man or group of men is justified; whether the interference be in the form of legal action or social pressure. On p. 73 he formulates this principle of liberty as follows:

> "...the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good,

> either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right...Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign".

Two pages later,Mill elaborates on this view. He argues that there is a sphere of action in which society has "only an indirect interest", and that this sphere includes

> "...all that portion of a person's life which affects only himself, or if it affects others, only with their free, voluntary and undeceived consent and participation...This, then, is the appropriate region of human liberty". 20

Now Mill holds that one important part of the appropriate region of human liberty is "the inward domain of consciousness", and lists as the demands of this domain

> "...liberty of conscience in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral or theological". 21

The important thing to note here is Mill's claim that <u>no restrictions whatsoever</u> should be placed on each individual's freedom of opinion and opinion on all moral and non-moral subjects. As Mill goes on to say:

> "No society in which these liberties are not, on the whole, respected, is free, whatever be its form of government; and none is completely free in which they do not exist <u>absolute and unqualified</u>". 22

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20 <u>On Liberty</u>, p. 75

21 Ibid.

It should be noted nothing that Mill has said so far is damaging to the orthodox interpretation. For all that Mill has argued so far is that every man should be free to hold and express any opinions whatsoever, whether moral or non-moral matters. And there is no logical incompatibility between the view that certain ethical sentences are true and the view that the individual should be free to hold and express any ethical opinions he wishes (even false ones). That is, a philosopher could consistently hold that while certain ethical opinions were quite false, more harm would be done by forbidding and punishing the expression of such opinions than by permitting them to be discussed openly.[23]

It is when Mill comes to defend his strong stand in favour of freedom of thought and expression in chapter II of his essay that it becomes clear that he did not accept proposition (2), viz. the proposition that there exists a method by which the truth of ethical sentences can be established. He begins this chapter by restating his chapter I position on the freedom of expression:

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22 On Liberty, p. 75. (my underlining).

23 Mill himself argues that even if we could be sure that a given (ethical or non-ethical) opinion were false, we would be wrong to suppress it. (On Liberty, p. 95-6). But this argument is not relevant to my concern in this paper.

> "If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind". 24

Mill then proceeds to defend this claim with the following argument:

> (3) if we are not sure that an opinion is false, it is wrong to suppress that opinion.
> (4) we can never be sure that any opinion is false.
> Therefore
> (5) the suppression of any opinion is always wrong.[25]

It is not within the scope of this paper to consider the soundness of Mill's argument. It is only the second premise of this argument - proposition (4) - which I will discuss. For this premise entails a proposition which is crucial to my claim that Mill was not an ethical objectivist. The reason why it is crucial is this: if it is true that

> (4) we can never be sure that <u>any</u> opinion is false

then, a fortiori, it is true that

> (6) we can never be sure that any <u>moral</u> opinion is false.

But (6) entails

> (7) there is no method by which we can establish the falsity of any ethical sentences.

Now for every ethical sentence there exists a contradictory

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24 <u>On Liberty</u>, p. 79.

25 This argument is to be found on p. 79.

ethical sentence (Jones is a good man/Jones is evil; one ought to tell the truth; one ought not to tell the truth). To establish the truth of an ethical sentence would, ipso facto, be to establish the falsity of its contradictory. Thus if it is impossible to establish the falsity of any ethical sentences, then it must be impossible to establish the truth of any also. That is, it follows from (7) that

(8) there is no method by which we can establish the truth of any ethical sentences.

Thus if Mill accepts (6), he is committed to the denial of

(2) there exists a method by which we can establish the truth of certain ethical sentences.

For (6) entails (8), and (8) is the contradictory of (2).

But before I proceed to show that Mill accepted proposition (6), a short digression is necessary. For to the observant reader it will appear that Mill's claim in the essay On Liberty (proposition (4) above) is not consistent with the theory of knowledge he propounds in the Logic. That is, proposition (4) is inconsistent with the proposition that there are some things which we can know to be true.

It will be remembered that in the Logic Mill argued that there are two ways in which we can acquire knowledge, viz. intuition and inference. He gave examples of both these types of knowledge. And he made the claim that the

truths we know by intuition are certain,

> "...known beyond possibility of question. What one sees or feels, whether bodily or mentally, one cannot but be sure that one sees or feels". 26

How are these statements in the Logic to be squared with Mill's On Liberty claim that we can never be sure that any opinion is false? Can this apparent inconsistency be resolved? I think that it can. For there is reason to believe that Mill did not intend his thesis in On Liberty to contradict the epistemology of the Logic.

Mill's main concern in On Liberty was to advocate

> "...absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral or theological". 27

These words convey the impression that the spheres in which Mill was most determined to defend freedom of opinion are the spheres of ethics, religion and scientific theory - the areas in which complete freedom of opinion had been most frequently denied. This impression is confirmed by the fact that, when he came to discuss freedom of thought and expression in chapter II of the essay, virtually all the opinions he mentions fall within one or other of these spheres. Thus when Mill justified his view that there should be absolute freedom of opinion with the argument that we can never be sure that any opinion

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26 Logic, p. 4.

27 On Liberty, p. 75.

is false, it is likely that the opinions he has in mind are religious and ethical beliefs, and scientific theories.

That he did not really mean to commit himself to the extreme sceptic's position that we can never know anything to be true is indicated by his short discussion of mathematical truths, against which he states that nothing can be said:

> "There are no objections, and no answers to objections". 28

It is noteworthy that in the Logic Mill lists the theorems of geometry among the truths which we know through inference; the theorems of geometry, he tells us, are derived from the axioms, which we presumably know to be true by intuition. Perhaps we can take this to signify that Mill did not mean to deny in On Liberty that our intuitive knowledge, and the inferential knowledge we derive from it, is certain.

For these reasons it seems to me that any inconsistency between the theory of knowledge Mill propounds in the Logic and his thesis in On Liberty is more apparent than real. But even if the inconsistency were admitted to be real, my case would not be greatly damaged. For the case against the orthodox interpretation which I wish to derive from On Liberty does not rest on whether or not Mill accepted proposition (4); it rests upon whether or not he accepted

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28 On Liberty, p. 96

proposition (6) - which, it has been pointed out, is entailed by proposition (4).

Let me now attempt to show, by quoting from the text, that Mill did in fact accept that

(6) we can never be sure that any moral opinion is false.

On p. 79 of On Liberty he states:

> "We can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavouring to stifle is a false opinion... Those who desire to suppress it, of course deny its truth; but they are not infallible. They have no authority to decide the question for all mankind". 29

he goes on:

> "To refuse a hearing to an opinion, because they are sure that it is false, is to assume that their certainty is the same thing as absolute certainty. All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility". 30

Next Mill argues that the individual who, readily acknowledging his own fallibility, places his faith in the infallibility of his church or sect, is only a little better off than the man who deems himself infallible. Mill states his surprise that the person who places faith in the collective authority of institutions is not at all dismayed by the fact that the doctrines of these institutions are directly opposed to doctrines which churches, sects and parties other than his own have taught, and are still teaching. Such a person

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29 On Liberty, p. 79. (my underlining).

30 Ibid.

> "...devolves upon his own world the responsibility of being in the right against the dissident worlds of other people; and it never troubles him that mere accident has decided which of these numerous worlds is the object of his reliance, and that the same causes which make him a Churchman in London, would have made him a Buddhist or a Confucian in Pekin". 31

Some pages further on, Mill provides an important argument to the effect that what he has said about the fallibility of opinions applies to ethical as well as to non-ethical opinions:

> "In order more fully to illustrate the mischief of denying a hearing to opinions because we, in our own judgment, have condemned them, it will be desirable to fix down the discussion to a concrete case...Let the opinions impugned be the belief in a God and in a future state, or any of the commonly received doctrines of morality". 32

Mill argues that to undertake to decide for others that any moral or religious principle is true, without allowing them to hear what can be said against these principles, is to assume infallibility; no less so because one's opinion that the principle is true is shared by the great majority of one's countrymen or contemporaries. He points out that more evils are done by men who believe in the truth of their moral and religious convictions than by those who believe in the truth of other sorts of opinion they hold:

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31 On Liberty, p. 80.

32 On Liberty, p. 85. (my underlining).

> "...so far from the assumption (of infallibility) being less objectionable or less dangerous because the opinion is called immoral or impious, this is the case of all others which is most fatal. These are exactly the occasions on which men of one generation commit those dreadful mistakes which excite the astonishment and horror of posterity. It is among such that we find the instances memorable in history, when the arm of the law has been employed to root out the best men and the noblest doctrines". 33

Here Mill has in mind Socrates, who was condemned to death for impiety and immorality, and Christ, who was put to death for blaspheming. He notes that there is every reason to believe that the judges of Socrates and the denouncers of Christ did what they sincerely believed to be right. But, according to Mill, it is no justification for requiring others to live by certain principles (and punishing them for failure to do so) that one is sure that these principles are true:

> "Strange that (men) should imagine that they are not assuming infallibility, when they acknowledge that there should be free discussion on all subjects which can possibly be doubtful, but think that some particular principle or doctrine should be forbidden to be questioned because it is so <u>certain</u>, that is, because <u>they are</u> certain that it is certain". 34

Thus Mill's position, as it emerges from chapter II of <u>On Liberty</u>, is that we can never be sure that any ethical opinion is true, or that it is false. It follows that Mill rejected the proposition that we can ever establish

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33 Ibid.

34 <u>On Liberty</u>, p. 83.

the truth of ethical sentences.

It is important to note that none of the evidence which has been presented so far is logically conclusive evidence that Mill was not an ethical objectivist. For so far it has been demonstrated only that he did not hold that

> (2) there exists a method by which we can establish the truth of certain ethical sentences.

But ethical objectivism, it will be remembered, was defined as the theory that

> (1) certain ethical sentences are properly describable as true, and others as false.

And it is certainly possible (though hardly plausible) for a philosopher to adopt the position that while (2) is false, (1) is true. That is, it would not be inconsistent for a philosopher to hold that, while certain ethical sentences are true, we have no means to establish their truth.

Now in practice no reputable moral philosopher has ever claimed that some ethical sentences are true without being prepared to offer a method for determining their truth. Similarly, no reputable philosopher who has denied that there exists a method for determining the truth of ethical sentences has had any qualms about proceeding to the further denial that ethical sentences are properly called true. But this, Mill's critic might reply, is merely

evidence that Mill is not a moral philosopher deserving of repute; what has to be shown to validate the claim that Mill was an ethical subjectivist is not merely that he rejected (2), but also that he rejected (1). Accordingly, while I think that Mill's denial of (2) is sufficient grounds for regarding him as an ethical subjectivist, I shall now attempt to demonstrate that he denied (1) as well.

(b) Mill and the imperative model of ethical judgment.

To show that Mill rejected (1) is to show that he did not think it proper to ascribe truth-values to ethical sentences. In this section of the thesis I hope to demonstrate that, both in the Logic and in the Essays On Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy, Mill made it clear that in his view morality is not concerned with the discovery of truths; and that his reason for holding this is his belief that ethical sentences are properly construed on an imperative model.

A necessary preliminary to the justification of these claims about Mill's meta-ethical position is to explicate the distinction he draws between an 'art' and a 'science'. This distinction is explained by Mill in two places: in the fifth of the Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy (hereafter known as the Essays), and in Bk. 6, chapter XII of the Logic. In the fifth of the Essays, entitled 'On the Definition of Political Economy',

Mill states the difference between science and art to be that

> "The one deals in facts, the other in precepts. Science is a collection of truths; art a body of rules or directions for conduct. The language of science is, This is, or, This is not; This does, or does not, happen. The language of art is, Do This, Avoid That". 35

Similar claims are made in the Logic:

> "Whatever speaks in rules or precepts, not in assertions respecting matters of fact, is art". 36

> "Every art has one first principle, or general major premise, not borrowed from science... These (first principles) are not propositions of science. Propositions of science assert a matter of fact: an existence, a co-existence, a succession or a resemblance. The propositions now spoken of do not assert that anything is, but enjoin or recommend that something should be. They are a class by themselves". 37

Mill sees the relationship between science and art as a means-end relation. The role of art (and this is its only role) is to decide which ends, out of all the possible ends of conduct, are desirable. The outcome of this decision is a set of principles asserting the desirability of the chosen ends. The role of science is to determine the means - if any there be - by which ends chosen by art

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35 Essays, p. 312.

36 Logic, p. 616.

37 Logic, p. 619.

can be produced. If science can find no means to produce the end, art declares the end to be unattainable:

> "The relation in which rules of art stand to doctrines of science may be thus characterised. The art proposes to itself an end to be attained, defines the end, and hands it over to the science. The science receives it, considers it as a phenomenon or effect to be studied, and having investigated its causes and conditions, sends it back to art with a theorem of the combination of circumstances by which it could be produced. Art then examines these combinations of circumstances, and according as any of them are or are not in human power, pronounces the end attainable or not". 38

> "...though the reasonings which connect the end or purpose of every art with its means belong to the domain of Science, the definition of the end belongs exclusively to Art, and forms its peculiar province". 39

Now according to Mill "morality itself is not a science, but an art".[40] Moreover, it is one of the three branches of the 'Art of Life':

> "For the purposes of practice, every one must be required to justify his approbation (of a given end); and for this there is need of general premises, determining what are the proper objects of approbation...These general premises, together with the principal conclusions which may be deduced from them form (or rather might form) a body of doctrine which is properly the Art of Life in its three departments, Morality, Prudence or Policy, and Aesthetics; the Right, the Expedient, and the Beautiful, in human conduct and works". 41

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38 Logic, p. 616-7.

39 Logic, p. 617.

40 Essays, p. 319.

41 Logic, p. 620.

It is the Art of Life which is the most important art, since its rules constitute the test of the (moral, prudential and aesthetic) value of every other conceivable art:

> "To this art (which, in the main, is unfortunately still to be created) all other arts are subordinate; since its principles are those which must determine whether the special aim of any particular art is worthy and desirable, and what is its place in the scale of desirable things". 42

For example, the art of medicine proposes as its end the curing of disease; it thus assumes that it is desirable that people be rid of their diseases. But suppose someone challenges the desirability of this end - suppose he argues that, since illness is nothing but the wages of sin, it is not desirable that we take any steps to cure illness. The only reply to this sort of challenge is to invoke higher-level principles - principles so general that they provide a test for determining the goodness of ends of conduct. Such a principle might be: ends are desirable in proportion as they are conducive to human happiness. It is these higher-level principles which would constitute the Art of Life.

Since morality is an art, everything which is true of the arts in general must also be true of morality in

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42 Ibid.

particular. It follows that morality is a body of rules for the direction of conduct; that these rules state precepts, not facts; that they are not propositions of science; and that there must be one first principle of morality, or general major premise, from which all other moral principles can be derived. But the consequence of most significance for this thesis is that moral rules are not truths. This consequence was fully accepted by Mill:

> "...morality itself is not a science, but an art; not truths, but rules". 43

Here we have the most direct single piece of evidence in all of Mill's writings that he was not an ethical objectivist. For his claim that morality is not a body of truths is surely equivalent to the claim that ethical sentences are not properly describable as true. But ethical objectivism is precisely the theory that certain ethical sentences are properly describable as true. Now it has been mentioned earlier in this thesis (p. 46) that for every ethical sentence there exists some other ethical sentence which contradicts it; and that to establish the truth of one of these contradictory sentences is to establish the falsity of the other. Thus Mill's view that no ethical sentences are true entails that no ethical sentences are false.

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43 Essays, p. 319-20. (my underlining).

That is, what follows from Mill's view is that it is improper to ascribe truth-values to ethical sentences.

Mill's reason for denying that it is proper to ascribe truth-values to ethical sentences is his belief that the grammatical mood of these sentences is imperative rather than indicative. That is, in his view ethical sentences do not tell us _that_ something is the case; they tell us _to make_ something the case.

The first indication that this is Mill's position is in the passage in the _Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy_ where he discusses the distinction between science and art:

> "These two ideas differ from one another as the understanding differs from the will, or as the indicative mood in grammer differs from the imperative. The one deals in facts, the other in precepts". 44

It is presumably the fact that Mill does not, in this passage, go on to state his view that morality is an art, which explains the general failure of his critics to realise that Mill here commits himself to analysing ethical sentences in terms of imperatives (the passage where he defines morality as an art does not occur until several pages after the one above). But this failure becomes quite inexplicable when it is pointed out that in the last chapter of the _Logic_ Mill placed these two

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44 _Essays_, p. 312.

claims side by side:

> "Now, the imperative mood is the characteristic of art, as distinguished from science. Whatever speaks in rules or precepts, not in assertions respecting matters of fact, is art; and ethics or morality is properly a portion of the art corresponding to the sciences of human nature and society. The Method, therefore, of Ethics, can be none other than that of Art, or Practice, in general:" 45

Why does it follow from the claim that ethical sentences are properly analysable in terms of imperatives that these sentences are not properly describable as true or false? The answer is that questions of truth and falsity are inappropriate in the case of ordinary imperatives. That is, there is something logically odd about the ascription of truth, or of falsity, to such imperatives. Take the following example:

> "If the sergeant-major says to me, 'Stand to attention!', I do not stop to argue, but stand to attention at once. And if I ask him for 'a good reason for accepting what he says as true', he will put me on a charge, or send me to the Medical Officer for a psychological inspection. In such a case, no questions of truth, falsity or verification arise...If, when the sergeant-major has bellowed his order, I go up to a private and say to him 'D' you know, the R.S.M. wasn't telling the truth', he may stare at me or laugh, but he certainly will not understand". 46

But if ethical sentences are to be assimilated to ordinary imperatives, and questions of truth or falsity

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45 Logic, p. 616.

46 S. Toulmin, The place of Reason in Ethics, p. 52-3.

are inappropriate in the case of such imperatives, it follows that questions of truth and falsity must also be inappropriate in the case of ethical sentences. For instance, if the sentence 'happiness is the only thing which is desirable as an end' is analysable into the command 'seek happiness and only happiness!', it follows that the sentence is not properly describable as true or false.

It was argued earlier in this Chapter (p.p. 41-42) that Mill did not believe that the truth of the utility principle can be inferred from the intuited truth of any empirical principle. An argument was presented in which he claimed that the first principles of art, including the utility principle, are "generically different" from the propositions of science, and "in a class by themselves". We can now see <u>why</u> he claimed these things: in his opinion, the mood of the principle of utility is imperative; but that of factual propositions is indicative. It is clear on a moment's reflection that no conclusion which is in the imperative mood can be drawn from a set of premises all of which are in the indicative mood.[47]

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47 This is known to logicians as Poincaré's rule. "Si les prémisses d' un syllogisme sont tous les deux à l'indicatif, la conclusion sera également à l'indicatif. Pour que la conclusion pût être mise à l'imperatif, il faudrait que l'une des prémisses au moins fût elle-même à l'imperatif ('La Morale et la Science', <u>Dernières Pensées</u>, Paris 1919, p. 225).

It is also true that no sentence in the imperative mood can mean the same as an indicative sentence. Sentences in the imperative mood order us to do something; and no sentence which tells us to do something can be equivalent in meaning to a sentence (or set of sentences) which tell us that something is the case. Now in section (2) of Chapter I of this thesis, it was noted that ethical naturalists hold that (since basic ethical expressions are definable in terms of purely factual ones) ethical sentences are identical in meaning to certain factual ones. Thus Mill's claim that ethical sentences are disguised imperative sentences commits him to rejecting ethical naturalism.

(c) Conclusions.

The argument so far in Chapter II may be summarised as follows: Mill held that the principle of utility is really an imperative. This committed him to the view that the grammatical mood of ethical sentences derivable from the principle of utility is also imperative. But it follows from the claim that ethical sentences are disguised imperatives that they are not properly describable as true or false; for it is only those sentences which tell us something (viz. indicative sentences) that have truth-values. Mill accepted this consequence:

"morality itself is...not truths, but rules".

Now if ethical sentences have no truth value, it follows that there is no possible way in which we can establish their truth. Mill accepted this conclusion also: in the essay on Whewell he conducted a heated attack on the "vicious" notion that we can establish the truth of certain ethical sentences by some mysterious faculty of intellectual intuition or moral sense. And the view that ethical sentences are imperatives, which he argued for in the Logic and in the essay 'On the Definition of Political Economy', committed him to denying that ethical language can be reduced to factual language, and hence verified in the same manner as we verify factual sentences. Thus ample evidence has been produced to discredit the orthodox interpretation of Mill as an ethical objectivist. Indeed, this evidence is so conclusive that it is hard to believe that anyone who bothered to read Mill's works could ever have adopted this interpretation.

Mill's position that ethical sentences are properly regarded as imperatives rather than indicatives entitles him to recognition as the father of the imperative model of ethical judgment. Different variations of this model have recently been popularised by A.J. Ayer and R.M. Hare. It is worth considering how far Mill is in agreement with these contemporary philosophers, and how far his ethical views differ from theirs.

Ayer and Mill are agreed on the fact that ethical sentences are not informative - that they do not describe any state of affairs, as empirical sentences do. They are further agreed that no ethical sentences can be proved to be true. As Ayer puts it:

> "We can now see why it is impossible to find a criterion for determining the validity of ethical judgments. It is not because they have an 'absolute' validity which is mysteriously independent of ordinary sense-experience, but because they have no objective validity whatsoever. If a sentence makes no statement at all, there is obviously no sense in asking whether what it says is true or false". 48

But Ayer and Mill do not agree on just what the function of ethical sentences is. On Mill's account, ethical sentences are disguised imperatives: they tell someone (perhaps ourselves) to <u>make</u> something the case. According to Ayer, on the other hand, the central function of ethical sentences is to express the feelings of the person speaking (or writing) them; their imperative function is only secondary.

> "It is worth mentioning that ethical terms do not serve only to express feeling. They are calculated also to arouse feeling, and so to stimulate action...Thus the sentence 'It is your duty to tell the truth' may be regarded both as the expression of a certain sort of ethical feeling about truthfulness and as the expression of the command 'Tell the truth'. The sentence 'You ought to tell the truth' also involves the command 'Tell the truth', but here the tone of the command is less emphatic. In the sentence 'It is good to tell the truth' the command has become little more than a suggestion". 49

Another difference is that Mill was much more optimistic than Ayer about the possibility of success in ethical reasoning. As we have seen, Mill held that he could provide considerations which would determine the intellect to give its assent to utilitarianism. The considerations which he presents are (purportedly) empirical facts. (Just what these facts are is the subject of the following section of this Chapter). But in Ayer's opinion it is quite possible that a person who has had a different moral conditioning from ourselves may be in complete agreement with us on questions of fact yet have a quite different set of ethical attitudes. And since we are agreed on all the facts, we have no argument to produce to persuade him to adopt our values:

> "We feel that our own system of values is superior and therefore speak in such derogatory terms of his. But we cannot bring forward any arguments to show that our system is superior". 50

Whether or not a person can agree with Mill on the nature of the facts, yet refuse to accept his principle of utility, is something which will be considered later in this Chapter.

Mill has more in common with the prescriptivism of

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48 Language, Truth and Logic, p. 108.

49 Ibid.

50 Language, Truth and Logic, p. 111.

R.M. Hare than with Ayer's emotive theory of ethics. In the first place everything that is common to Mill and Ayer is also common to Mill and Hare: the belief that ethical sentences are not informative; that they are neither self-evident nor disguised factual ("descriptive") statements; that they are not properly describable as true. But Mill and Hare also have further beliefs in common. The most important of these is the belief that ethical sentences are essentially action-guiding. In Hare's view, the central function of ethical sentences is to provide an answer to the question 'What shall I do?'. Since Hare also holds that

> "A statement, however loosely it is bound to the facts, cannot answer a question of the form 'What shall I do?'; only a command can do this", 51

he is committed to analysing ethical discourse on an imperative model. Ayer, on the other hand, held that the central function of ethical sentences is to express the moral feelings of the person speaking or writing them. In this debate, Mill is clearly on the side of Hare:

> "The language of art is: Do this; Avoid that". 52

> "The (first principles of art) do not assert that anything is, but enjoin or recommend that something should be". 53

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51 Language of Morals, p. 46.

52 Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy, p. 312.

There are also several points of disagreement between Hare and Mill; some of these differences are minor, others fairly important. One minor difference is this: Mill, as we have seen, treated ethical sentences as disguised imperatives. But Hare, who pointed to certain dissimilarities between ordinary imperatives and ethical sentences (notably that the latter are universalizable whereas the former are not[54]), made the more guarded claim that ethical sentences entail imperatives.

A more important distinction between their ethical theories concerns the question of a first principle of conduct. Mill's view was that there must be a first principle from which all other acceptable moral principles can be derived,

> "...some rule or standard, with which all other rules of conduct were required to be consistent, and from which by ultimate consequences they could all be deduced". 55

Hare agreed only that there are some entailment relations between imperative sentences: that particular imperatives, telling me what to do now, can be deduced from general moral principles (in conjunction with certain factual premises specifying e.g. the nature of the situation I am in).

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53 Logic, p. 621.

54 cf. Language of Morals, p. 177-8. Freedom and Reason, p. 36-7.

55 Logic, p. 621.

Hare did not agree that there must be some ultimate moral principle from which the others can be derived. On his account, we have to choose a set of principles by which we are prepared to live; not just one.

In fact, however, Hare's thesis that moral judgments are universalizable[56] commits him to a theory which is decidedly utilitarian in spirit: for it follows from this thesis that if a man is not prepared to prescribe that other people should disregard his interests, he is committed to accepting that he should not disregard their interests.[57] This is very like utilitarianism; though Hare claims that universalizability is a purely logical principle[58], and not a moral one like the principle of utility.

It is important to note that Mill had established his meta-ethical position long before the first publication of Utilitarianism in 1861. Equally important is the fact that he never felt it necessary to alter this position.

The Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy were first published together in 1844 (though the crucial fifth essay had been published in the London and Westminster Review in 1836). But these essays had all been written several years prior to these dates. There is some confusion as to the exact period when they were

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56 For an explanation of this thesis, see Freedom and Reason, p. 7-50.

written. In his preface to the Essays, Mill states that they were written in 1829 and 1830.[59] But in the Autobiography he claims that they were written in 1830 and 1831

> "...almost as they now stand, except that in 1833 I partially rewrote the fifth Essay". 60

The fifth essay - the one entitled 'On the Definition of Political Economy' - is the important one for the purposes of this thesis. Mill had high hopes for this essay. He said of it, in a letter to a friend (dated January 1834),

> "I am ambitious that the essay, even if for that end it should remain unpublished for twenty years, should become classical and of authority". 61

And because he wished the essay to be authoritative he asked his correspondent

> "...to suggest all manner of further developments, clearer explanations and apter illustrations". 62

In view of Mill's expressed ambitions for this essay, it is significant that he never felt obliged to make any alterations at all to the text of 1844. The second edition of the Essays, published in 1874 shortly after

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57 cf. Freedom and Reason, p. 113.

58 Freedom and Reason, p. 30-1.

59 Toronto edition, p. 231.

60 Autobiography, p. 108.

61 Letter to J.P. Nichol in Collected Works, Vol. XII, p. 211.

Mill's death, contained some alterations, but the fifth essay remained unchanged.[63] It is therefore fair to regard this essay as embodying Mill's considered opinion.

A similar story can be told about the Logic. This work, which Mill began early in the 1830's[64], was completed in 1841[65]. Its first publication, in 1843, preceded that of Utilitarianism by eighteen years. The Logic went through eight editions in Mill's lifetime, the eighth edition being published in 1872. As his prefaces to the new editions testify, Mill made many revisions to the text:

> "...the attempt to improve the work by additions and corrections, suggested by criticism or by thought, has been continued". 66

Yet in spite of Mill's eagerness to improve the work, the crucial passage where Mill commits himself to the imperative model of ethical judgment (quoted on p.60 above) appears in all eight editions of the Logic. And every passage cited from Bk.6 ch. XII against the orthodox interpretation appears in the eighth and final edition.

The other main sources which I have used to discredit the orthodox interpretation are the essays Whewell on Moral Philosophy and On Liberty. The essay on Whewell was

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62 Ibid.

63 Except for a few typographical errors introduced in the latter edition, which are noted on p. 309 of the Toronto edition of the Essays (Collected Works, Vol. IV).

64 Autobiography, p. 102 and p. 124.

65 Autobiography, p. 133.

first published in the Westminster Review in 1852, and was subsequently included in volume II of Dissertations and Discussions. It is noteworthy that the text of the essay as it appeared in the first and the second edition of the Dissertations (1859 and 1867 respectively) never varies in substance from the original text of 1852, though it does occasionally vary in tone. Mill makes no mention whatsoever of the essay in his Autobiography; this omission indicates that he did not think it to be a work of any great importance. But the fact that he did not doubt the truth of what he had written emerges from the preface to the first edition of the Dissertations (which remained the same in the second edition of 1867). Here he states, with obvious reference to his essays on Whewell and Sedgwick, that he wrote them to defend

> "...maligned doctrines or individuals, against unmerited onslaughts by persons who, on the evidence afforded by themselves, were in no respect entitled to sit in judgment upon them: and the same misrepresentations have been and still are so incessantly reiterated by a crowd of writers, that emphatic protests against them are as needful now as when the papers in question were first written". 67

The essay On Liberty was published two years earlier than Utilitarianism, though it was written during the same period of Mill's life. This we learn from Helen Taylor's

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66 Preface to the eighth edition of the Logic, p. vi.

67 Collected Works (Toronto edition), Vol. X, p. 494.

introduction to Mill's Three Essays on Religion. She states that, in addition to the first two of the Essays on Religion, Mill wrote three essays between 1850 and 1858,

> "...on Justice, on Utility and on Liberty...That on Liberty was expanded into the now well-known work bearing the same title. Those on Justice and Utility were afterwards incorporated, with some alterations and additions, into one, and published under the name of Utilitarianism". 68

In the Autobiography, Mill is more specific about the development of On Liberty. This essay, he tells us, was originally planned and written as a short essay in 1854.[69] It was expanded into "a volume" between 1855-8, and published in 1859.

Mill was particularly proud of the essay On Liberty, which his wife had helped him to write (though just how much of a help she was is a matter of some dispute). He said of it:

> "None of my writings have been either so carefully composed, or so sedulously corrected, as this. After it had been written as usual twice over, we (i.e. he and his wife) kept it by us, bringing it out from time to time and going over it de novo, reading, weighing and criticising every sentence". 70

And again:

> "The Liberty is likely to survive anything else that I have written (with the possible exception of the Logic)". 71

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68 Op. cit., p. 371.

69 Autobiography, p. 144.

70 Ibid.

The first draft of Utilitarianism, Mill tells us, was written "during the last years of our married life"[72] (his wife died in 1858). But Alexander Bain, one of Mill's close friends, tells us that the essay underwent extensive revision in 1860.[73] It was first published in Fraser's Magazine in 1861. Now we have seen that long before this date, in works which clearly embody his considered opinion, he had developed a subjectivist meta-ethics of a curiously prophetic nature. The question we are left with is this: is there anything in Utilitarianism which is inconsistent with the meta-ethical position which Mill adopted in his earlier works? To this question I now turn.

(3) Utilitarianism.

What has been established so far is that Mill, in several authoritative works, committed himself to rejecting ethical objectivism. That is, he committed himself to the view that ethical sentences are not properly describable as true or false. It has also been noted that, since Mill never felt it requisite to make any important amendment to the meta-ethical view he defends in those works, this view must be regarded as embodying his considered opinion. Had Mill not bothered to write anything on moral

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71 Autobiography, p. 150.

72 Autobiography, p. 158.

73 John Stuart Mill, p. 112.

philosophy other than what he said in the writings discussed thus far in this Chapter, there is every likelihood that he would be interpreted universally as one of the earliest (if not the earliest) exponents of the imperative model of moral judgment.

But of course these works do not exhaust Mill's ethical writings. For he also wrote Utilitarianism - an essay devoted solely to ethics. And this essay, presumably because it is Mill's only work taken up wholly with ethics, is frequently held to contain all that he had to say on the subject. Thus when undergraduates take a course in the ethics of John Stuart Mill, which they frequently do as part of their first moral philosophy course, they are rarely referred to anything Mill wrote other than Utilitarianism. This state of affairs is made all the more incredible by the fact that Mill himself seemed to place no great weight on the essay. In the Autobiography he spent several pages discussing the development of works such as the System of Logic, the essay On Liberty, and his Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy, making it clear that he thought these to have lasting value.[74] But the writing and publication of Utilitarianism is dismissed in a single sentence[75]; comment on the value of this essay is conspicuously absent.

Be this as it may, it is certainly true that Mill's meta-ethical position can only be determined when

Utilitarianism is taken in conjunction with Mill's other works related to ethics; there is simply not enough relevant material in Utilitarianism for us to deduce his position from that essay alone. That the bulk of the evidence relevant to Mill's meta-ethical position is to be found in works other than Utilitarianism should hardly be surprising. In the first place, Mill had every reason to believe that he had already made his position quite clear, in the concluding chapter of the Logic, and the last of the Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy. True, he would have left himself less open to misinterpretation had he reiterated the view he adopted in these works when he came to write Utilitarianism. Why he did not do so remains a mystery. Perhaps he felt that the average reader of Fraser's Magazine, while interested in the utilitarian creed, did not want to be bored with meta-ethics.

Secondly, Mill's primary aims in Utilitarianism were to define his theory of normative ethics ("distinguishing

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74 "The Liberty is likely to survive longer than anything else that I have written (with the possible exception of the Logic), because the conjunction of (my wife's) mind has rendered it a kind of philosophic text-book of a single truth". (p. 150) i.e. the "truth" that more harm is always done by prohibiting the expression of an opinion than by allowing it.

75 p. 158.

it from what it is not"[76]); and to defend this theory against the objections commonly urged against it, i.e. to reject arguments that we should not accept it. These tasks take up the lengthly chapters II and V. Given that chapter I is purely introductory, and that chapter III is concerned with the motive which might lead us to adopt utilitarianism, this leaves only chapter IV as a place where Mill presents positive arguments why we should accept the theory.

Now it is not clear just what Mill is arguing in chapter IV of Utilitarianism - the chapter entitled 'Of What Sort of Proof the Principle of Utility is Susceptible'. The structure of his argument in this chapter has recently become the subject of considerable philosophical controversy. What is clear is that it is precisely the fact that Mill devoted a section of Utilitarianism to providing a justification for the utility principle which has led his critics to conclude that he believed the principle of utility to be true. That is, this attempt at justification is the root cause of the orthodox interpretation of Mill as an ethical objectivist. Thus it is incumbent upon me to establish that there is nothing in chapter IV of Utilitarianism which is inconsistent with the meta-ethical position which we have found Mill to adopt in other of his works. Unless I can establish this, my thesis is

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76 Utilitarianism, p. 6.

always open to the objection that at different times he adopted different and inconsistent meta-ethical positions.

Before I attempt to show that Mill's belief that he could justify the principle of utility is quite compatible with the belief that this principle is not properly describable as true, it is desirable to establish just what Mill took the principle of utility to be. This is not an easy task. For, as will emerge, Mill oscillated between several distinct formulations of the principle. And while he presumably took these to be formulations of the same principle, we shall see that they are not.

The popular view is that Mill's principle of utility is the principle that

> (a) actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to promote unhappiness.

Commentators who take this view justify their position by pointing to Mill's famous remark that

> "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness". 77

But it is not clear from the passage that Mill's utility principle is the principle formulated in (a). What Mill says here is quite compatible with the view that this passage,

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77 Utilitarianism, p. 6.

far from constituting a definition of the utility principle, merely expresses one of the consequences which this principle entails. That is, since Mill does not explicitly state that (a) is the utility principle, he can be interpreted as saying in the passage that one who accepts the principle also holds, and presumably is committed to holding, (a).

Moreover, shortly after the remark above Mill goes on to claim that the theory of morality it contains is grounded on a theory of life, namely the theory that

> "...pleasure, and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends". 78

And there is considerable textual support for the view that Mill regarded the utility principle as a principle asserting the desirability of certain ends. (Principle (a), it is interesting to note, does not assert anything about the desirability of ends, only something about the rightness and wrongness of actions). For example, in chapter I of Utilitarianism he states:

> "If, then, it is asserted that there is a comprehensive formula, including all things which are in themselves good, and that whatever else is good is not so as an end but as a mean, the formula may be accepted or rejected, but is not a subject of what is commonly understood by proof". 79

He goes on to claim that, while questions of ultimate ends are not open to proof, he can provide considerations which

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78 Ibid.

79 Utilitarianism, p. 4. (my underlining).

will lead us to accept the utilitarian formula:

> "We shall examine presently of what nature are these considerations; in what manner they apply to the case, and what rational grounds, therefore, can be given for accepting or rejecting the utilitarian formula". 80

The drift of these passages is that the principle of utility is a formula which specifies all the things that are desirable (or good) as ends.

Mill's claim that the criterion of right action contained in (a) follows from the theory that pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only desirable ends, suggests the following formula:

> (b.1) pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things which are desirable as ends.

But on p.6 of Utilitarianism, Mill defines 'happiness' as 'pleasure, and absence of pain'. So (b.1) is equivalent to

> (b.2) happiness is the only thing which is desirable as an end.

It is noteworthy that in chapter IV, where Mill provides his grounds for assenting to the utility principle, the principle which he sets out to justify is none other than (b.2):

> "The utilitarian doctrine is, that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable as means to that end". 81

The claim of (b.1) and (b.2) to be regarded as

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80 Utilitarianism, p.4.

81 Utilitarianism, p. 32.

equivalent formulations of Mill's principle of utility is supported by certain of his remarks in works other than Utilitarianism. In the concluding chapter of the Logic, Mill said:

> "Every art has one first principle, or general major premise, not borrowed from science; that which enunciates the object aimed at, and affirms it to be a desirable object". 82

But we have seen that in Mill's view, "morality itself is not a science, but an art;". If we can assume that the first principle of morality is none other than the principle of utility, it follows that the principle of utility must affirm certain objects to be desirable.

But there is also important textual support for the view that the utility principle is the principle that

> (c) the promotion of happiness is the test by which all conduct should be judged.

The main piece of evidence for this view is the following emphatic statement in the Logic:

> "Without attempting at this time to justify my opinion, or even to define the kind of justification which it admits of, I merely declare my conviction, that the general principle to which all rules of practice ought to conform, and the test by which they should be tried, is that of conduciveness to = the happiness of mankind, or rather, of all sentient beings: in other words, that the promotion of happiness is the ultimate principle of Teleology". 83

Now it seems that the 'principle of Teleology' referred to

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82 Logic, p. 619.

83 Logic, p. 621.

here is the principle of utility itself. For in a footnote to the above passage, Mill adds:

> "For an express discussion and vindication of this principle, see the little volume entitled 'Utilitarianism'." 84

And the principle which he discusses and attempts to vindicate in Utilitarianism is, of course, the principle of utility.

Now the claim that happiness is the only thing desirable as an end is not equivalent to the claim that the promotion of happiness is the test by which conduct should be judged, though the former claim might plausibly be held to entail the latter. That is, (c) is not equivalent to (b.1) or (b.2). Nor is (c) equivalent to (a). For (a) purports to provide a test only of the rightness and wrongness of actions. But Mill held that (c) constitutes a test not merely of the rightness and wrongness of actions, but also of their prudential and aesthetic value;[85] he stated that the ultimate principle of Teleology -- principle (c) --

> ..."will be found, I apprehend, to serve quite as well for the ultimate principle of Morality, as for that of Prudence, Policy or Taste". 86

There is, then, some confusion in Mill's account of the principle of utility. He argues as if (b.1), (b.2) and (c), and perhaps even (a), are merely different formulations

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84 Ibid. (my underlining).

85 I assume that for Mill, an action has aesthetic value if it goes above and beyond the requirements of duty; that is, if it is not merely right, but supererogatory.

86 Logic, p. 621.

of the same principle. But clearly they are not.

It is therefore impossible to isolate and identify any one principle as the utility principle which Mill is out to persuade us to accept. Accordingly, I will abandon talk of 'the utility principle' in favour of talk of 'utilitarianism'.

It was noted in section (4) of Chapter I of this thesis that, while Mill did not think it possible to prove the truth of the Utilitarian or Happiness theory, he promised to provide

> "Considerations...capable of determining the intellect either to give or withhold its assent to the doctrine". 87

It is now time to examine the "considerations" which he provides -- considerations which are, of course, intended to make us give rather than withhold our assent.

Early in chapter IV Mill states:

> "The utilitarian doctrine is, that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being desirable only as means to that end". 88

It would seem that to justify this theory what is necessary is to justify the following two claims: first, that happiness is one desirable end; secondly, that happiness is the only desirable end. Thus Mill attempts to establish these claims

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87 Utilitarianism, p. 4.

88 Utilitarianism, p. 32.

one by one.

For the claim that happiness is one thing which is desirable as an end, he has the following argument:

> ..."the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people do actually desire it. If the end which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself were not, in theory and in practice, acknowledged to be an end, nothing could ever convince any person that it was so. No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness. This, however, being a fact, we have not only all the proof which the case admits of, but all which it is possible to require, that happiness is a good": 89

Having established to his own satisfaction that happiness is one thing desired (and therefore desirable) as an end, Mill next attempts to show that it is the only thing desired (and therefore desirable) as an end. He argues as follows: We do desire many things which, in ordinary language, are distinguished from happiness -- we desire, for example, virtue, power, fame, money. Moreover, we may even desire these things as <u>ends</u>. But to admit this is not to admit anything which is inconsistent with the view that happiness is the only thing we desire as an end. For to desire these things as ends is to desire them as ingredients or <u>parts</u> of happiness:

> "In these cases the means have become a part of the end...What was once desired as an instrument for the attainment of happiness, has come to be desired for

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89 <u>Utilitarianism</u>, p. 32-3.

> its own sake. In being desired for its own sake it is, however, desired as a part of happiness. The person is made, or thinks he would be made, happy by its mere possession". 90

Mill concludes from this analysis that

> ..."if human nature is so constituted as to desire nothing which is not either a part of happiness or a means of happiness, we can have no other proof, and require no other, that these are the only things desirable". 91

What has so far been established is that Mill argued in chapter IV of Utilitarianism that since the sole evidence it is possible to produce that something is desirable is that it is actually desired, and since people actually desire only happiness, happiness is the only thing desirable as an end. But there is another argument in chapter IV which is much more important than this; for it purports to show that the promotion of happiness is the sole criterion of morality. It is this latter argument which constitutes the central argument in chapter IV. Since I believe that nothing essential is left out of this argument when the mysterious language of 'desirability' and 'desirable ends' is eliminated from it, I shall eliminate this language in presenting the argument.

First I will state what I take Mill's central argument to be; then I will proceed to show that this is indeed Mill's argument by quoting from the text. What Mill argues is this:

(1) if and only if something is desired as an end of conduct, the promotion of that thing is a criterion by which all human conduct should be judged.

Now

(2) happiness is one thing which is desired as an end.

Therefore

(3) the promotion of happiness is one criterion by which all human conduct should be judged.

But

(4) happiness is the only thing which is desired as an end.

Taking (1) and (4) together we get

(5) the promotion of happiness is the only criterion by which all human conduct should be judged.

It is trivially true that

(6) moral conduct is one branch of human conduct.

From (5) and (6) it follows that

(7) the promotion of happiness is the only test by which moral conduct should be judged.

It is this that I take to constitute Mill's central argument in chapter IV.

Mill's argument, as I have analysed it, contains one premise with which the casual reader of chapter IV will

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90 Utilitarianism, p. 34-5.

91 Utilitarianism, p. 36.

be quite unfamiliar. He will recognise both (2) and (4); Mill's arguments in favour of these propositions have just been discussed. But where in the chapter does Mill state his acceptance of (1)? The simple answer is that he does not explicitly assert this proposition anywhere in that chapter. He does, it is true, assert proposition (1) -- or rather something very like proposition (1) -- early in the opening chapter of Utilitarianism :

> "All action is for the sake of some end, and rules of action, it seems natural to suppose, must take their whole character and colour from the end to which they are subservient". 92

But not in chapter IV.

However, while it might not be stated explicitly in chapter IV, there is compelling textual support in that chapter for the view that Mill is operating with proposition (1) as a suppressed premise. For example, at the end of his argument that happiness is one of the things which people desire as an end, Mill says:

> "Happiness has made out its title as one of the ends of conduct, and consequently one of the criteria of morality". 93

It is obvious from the "consequently" in this passage that there is a suppressed premise to be found. Now it only follows from the fact that happiness is desired as an end that it is a criterion of morality given that

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92 Utilitarianism, p. 2.

93 Utilitarianism, p. 33.

(1a) if something is desired as an end of conduct, it is a criterion by which moral conduct should be judged.

The suppressed premise (1a) is not identical to proposition (1), but it is closely connected to it.

Mill goes on to note that in order to prove that happiness is the sole criterion of morality it is not sufficient to show that it is one of the ends of conduct. To prove this,

> ..."it would seem, by the same rule, necessary to show not only that people desire happiness, but that they never desire anything else". 94

Here the suppressed premise is again closely connected to proposition (1); it is that

(1b) if and only if something is the only thing desired as an end of conduct, the promotion of that thing constitutes the sole criterion by which moral conduct should be judged.

That the structure of Mill's argument in chapter IV is what I take it to be becomes clear in the paragraph where Mill summarises his argument in the chapter:

> "We have now, then, an answer to the question, of what sort of proof the principle of utility is susceptible. If the opinion which I have now stated is psychologically true -- if human nature is so constituted as to desire nothing which is not either a part of happiness or a means of happiness ... happiness is the sole end of human action, and the promotion of it the test by which to judge all human conduct; from which it necessarily follows that it must be the criterion of morality, since a part is included in the whole". 95

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94 Ibid.
95 Utilitarianism, p. 36.

The suppressed premise here is proposition (1) itself. For it does not follow from the "psychological truth" that happiness is the only thing desired as an end that the promotion of happiness is the test by which to judge all human conduct unless it is true that

> (1) if and only if something is desired as an end of conduct, the promotion of that thing is a criterion by which all human conduct should be judged.

Now the argument which I have extracted from the text of chapter IV is deductively valid. Why, then does Mill not consider it a proof of the utilitarian theory? The answer is that for any argument to constitute proof, two conditions must obtain:

> (i) the argument must be formally valid.
> (ii) its premises must all be true.

While condition (i) is certainly satisfied by Mill's argument, condition (ii) is not. The argument has four premises: propositions (1), (2), (4) and (6) above. Proposition (6) is trivially true. And Mill argued that propositions (2) and (4) state empirical (psychological) facts. But even if he is right, proposition (1) remains unjustified. Mill did not so much as attempt to prove its truth. Of course, if he had believed that proposition (1) was open to proof, he would presumably have tried to prove it.[96]

It should now be obvious that even if we agreed with Mill on all the facts of the case, -- that men desire

happiness as an end, and that happiness is the only thing that men desire as an end -- we would not be logically committed to accepting utilitarianism. We are only committed to utilitarianism given that we also accept proposition (1). Thus the only people whose intellects Mill could determine to assent to utilitarianism with his argument in chapter IV are those who concur with him in accepting proposition (1) but did not (until they read his argument) agree with one or other of the factual propositions (2) and (4). For such people, Mill's argument would indeed constitute a 'proof' of utilitarianism; to them the theory would indeed seem reasonable. But Mill's argument would do nothing to convince those who already accepted (2) and (4), but refuse to accept (1).

It has been established earlier in Chapter II of this thesis that Mill, in authoritative works other than Utilitarianism, denied that it is possible to establish the truth of any ethical sentences. It was also demonstrated that he did not accept that ethical sentences are properly

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96 For those who wonder where proposition (1) came from, there is every reason to believe that Mill imported it straight from the Nicomachean Ethics. For this proposition bears close resemblance to Aristotle's principle of teleology. D.P. Dryer' has pointed out (Collected Works, vol.X, 'Mill's Utilitarianism', p.lxxvi - lxxviii) that many of Mill's claims in chapter IV are similar to remarks which Aristotle makes in his Ethics.

describable as true; and that his refusal to allow truth-values to ethical sentences was the consequence of his belief that ethical sentences are really disguised imperatives. It has now been shown that nothing in Utilitarianism is inconsistent with the meta-ethical position which we have found Mill to adopt elsewhere. In particular, it has been shown that the supposed 'proof' of the utility principle to be found in chapter IV of that essay -- which Mill himself denied constitutes a rigorous proof -- rests on a teleological principle which, far from being proved, is barely explicitly stated.

The conclusion to be drawn from these arguments is that, contrary to popular superstition -- a superstition which continues to prevail among most, if not all, of Mill's critics -- he was neither an ethical cognitivist nor an ethical objectivist.

CHAPTER III

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE REINTERPRETATION

It may be remembered that in Chapter I of this thesis some space was devoted to providing an outline of the types of ethical objectivism and subjectivism to which moral philosophers have at some time or other subscribed. The three forms of ethical objectivism were said to be moral sense theory, intuitionism and naturalism; the forms of ethical subjectivism discussed were emotivism and prescriptivism. These meta-ethical theories were described at some length. But nothing was said about the plausibility of any of these theories. So far it has been left an open question whether the reinterpretation of Mill as an ethical subjectivist renders his theory more, or less, adequate than it is generally taken to be. The purpose of the present Chapter is to answer this question. It will be argued that since the familiar criticisms of ethical objectivism are coercive against that theory, reinterpretation of Mill as an ethical subjectivist makes his version of utilitarianism much more plausible than it would otherwise be.

Let me begin by considering, in turn, the various objectivist meta-ethical theories:

(a) intuitionism: only one objection to intuitionism will be discussed here, since this objection is, I think,

insurmountable. The objection is that there exist deep-rooted differences between people in their estimation of actions and principles of action; but if every man possessed a faculty of moral intuition which enabled him to know what is right, as the intuitionist holds, then there would not be such fundamental moral disagreements.

The intuitionist might attempt to reply to this criticism in either of two ways. Firstly, he might argue that those disagreements which <u>seem</u> at first sight to be moral turn out on closer inspection to be factual. Take, for example, the following debate:

> A: Jones did wrong last night to sit in that hotel drinking.
> B: Not at all.
> A: What! You think that it is morally permissible for him to sit there and drink when he has made a solemn pledge to his wife never to touch alcohol again?
> B: But he was only drinking lemonade.
> A: Oh, I didn't know that. I thought it was gin.

Here A and B are in complete moral agreement (promise-breaking is wrong). The disagreement between them was about whether Jones was drinking gin or lemonade -- a question of fact.

But this reply will not do. Certainly the intuitionist is right to claim that many, perhaps most, so-called ethical disagreements are merely disguised factual disagreements but he cannot plausibly explain away <u>all</u> ethical disagreements in this way. It is only in cases where two disputants <u>concur</u> in accepting the principle that all actions of type t_1 are

morally obligatory (or reprehensible) that one may get the other to praise a particular action P by showing him that it is of type t_1. But if the disputants are committed to different and conflicting moral principles then one may accept all the facts which the other accepts about P and yet disagree with him about the morality of the action. For example, A and B may be in agreement on all the facts related to cigarette-smoking (e.g. that excessive smoking is injurious to health, that smoking produces odours which many find noxious, etc.) yet fail to agree whether or not smoking is morally permissible. This disagreement, which is certainly a moral one, might well be the result of a higher-level moral difference: A might hold that it is wrong for anyone to do deliberate unnecessary harm to his own body; B that the individual is quite free to decide what to do when no harm other than his own is at stake. It is disagreements of this sort, and not the disguised factual disagreements, which constitute the objection to intuitionism.

The intuitionist has a second reply to offer at this point. It is this: even genuine moral disagreements -- those which arise when one man is committed to a certain principle which another does not accept -- are explicable consistently with intuitionism. For such disagreements are attributable either to the lack of sufficient mental maturity, or to insufficient thought about the matter, on the part of one of the disputants. If someone feels no commitment

to the principle 'promises ought to be kept', the intuitionist argues, he just has to await maturity, or else to give the principle more careful consideration, and he will be able to see the truth it expresses. To show that even reputable philosophers have put forward this sort of reply to the problem of moral disagreement (for it may well be doubted) let me quote from a famous article by H.A. Prichard:

> "...The appreciation of an obligation is, of course, only possible for a developed moral being...the view put forward (i.e. intuitionism) is consistent with the admission that, owing to a lack of thoughtfulness, even the best men are blind to many of their obligations". 1

Prichard's reply is hardly satisfactory. For there are several obvious cases where two people, both intelligent, sincere and informed, try their best to arrive at the 'truth' of a moral issue, yet end up by disagreeing. For example, the conscientious objector and his opponent might both claim to know by intuition that the principle they are upholding ('one ought not to kill another under any circumstances', 'one has a moral duty to fight for one's country') is true. Were they both to claim this, an impasse would be reached. For there is no means at hand to enable them to discover which of their intuitions is correct. For either one to <u>insist</u> that he was right, without being able

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1 <u>Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake</u>?, reprinted in <u>Readings in Ethical Theory</u>, edited by Wilfred Sellars and John Hospers, p. 92 (footnote).

to show why, would be, in Mill's terminology, to assume infallibility.[2]

(b) moral sense theory: the major objection to moral sense theory is much the same as that to intuitionism: if every man possesses a moral sense which enables him to know what is right, as the moral sense theorist holds, then why do people's moral beliefs differ so widely? The moral sense theorist tries to meet this objection in a different way to that in which the intuitionist tries to meet it: disagreements in moral principle, he argues, are explicable in terms of moral blindness.

Hutcheson devoted a few paragraphs to considering the possibility that genuine moral disagreements do occur.[3] He asked: is it possible that our moral sense might misrepresent its objects? Certainly, he noted, our other senses sometimes misrepresent <u>their</u> objects: a man who is sick may well dislike the taste of food he usually enjoys: and someone with defective eyesight may see a red post-box where everyone else sees a green one. Hutcheson concluded that just as no one is led to believe by these latter examples that it is

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2 Other examples of debates which have sincere and informed people on both sides are those between the man who holds that abortion (or suicide, or divorce, or mercy-killing) is always wrong, and his opponent who holds that it is sometimes right.

3 <u>Illustrations Upon the Moral Sense</u>, Selby-Bigge edition, sections 465-6.

reason and not sense from which we derive our knowledge of colours and tastes, so misrepresentations by the moral faculty - if they occur - should not lead us to suppose that this faculty is not a sense, and one which provides us with moral knowledge.

Hutcheson was not really sure that our moral faculty ever did misrepresent its objects:

> "...Whether our moral Sense is subject to such a Disorder, as to have different Perceptions, from the same apprehended Affections is an Agent, at different times, as the Eye may have of the Colours of an unaltered Object, it is not easy to determine: Perhaps it will be hard to find any Instances of such a Change". 4

But he implied that if our moral perceptions misrepresent their objects we can correct them in exactly the same way as the colour-blind man must correct his perceptions: by reference to either "our ordinary Perceptions, or those of others in good Health".[5]

This reply, however, will not do. In the first place, genuine moral disagreements <u>do</u> occur, and occur frequently; this was shown in the critique of intuitionism. Secondly, such disagreements are not to be explained away in terms of disordered perceptions and moral blindness. The analogy between moral blindness and colour blindness is an improper one. There are agreed tests which enable us to decide whether or not a man's eyesight is defective: he fails to see what

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4 <u>Illustrations Upon the Moral Sense</u>, section 466.

5 Op. Cit., section 465.

most people - those with normal eyesight - can see; and usually this failure can be traced to a fault in the perceptual organ. The so-called moral sense, on the other hand, has no identifiable organ or bodily location. Moreover, there is no set of ethical feelings which nearly everyone has towards abortion, or divorce, or mercy-killing, as there is a set of colour experiences which nearly everyone has on looking at grass, or at daffodils. It is true that people belonging to a certain sect, or church, or political party, or to a particular country at a certain stage in its development, may take a united stand on ethical questions; the normal Catholic today, for example, holds that abortion, and divorce, and mercy-killing are morally wrong. But this agreement on a set of principles dwindles rapidly once the views of people belonging to other creeds, or to different countries in other ages, are polled. Whereas the consensus on the colour of grass does not diminish when the votes of other ages and distant lands are cast, that on ethical issues quite disintegrates. In the absence of a single set of ethical convictions common to nearly all mankind, the moral sense theorist has no test to offer to enable us to decide whether any given man's ethical perceptions are disordered.

Hutcheson, it will be remembered, argued as if those whose moral sense is disordered can correct their perceptions in the same way as the colour-blind man can correct his. The implication was that morally healthy perceptions are

those of the overwhelming majority of mankind; for this is how the colour-blind person corrects his perceptions. In fact, however, there is no such thing as a normal set of ethical convictions. And, what is more important, even if there did exist virtual unanimity among men on ethical questions, this would not suffice to establish the truth of moral sense theory. For we do not take it for granted that when a man's moral beliefs place him in a minority- even a minority of one - his moral faculty must be distorted. In fact, we may later come to adopt the view that it is he, and not the majority, who is correct.

(c) naturalism: the naturalist position, as it emerged from Chapter I of this thesis, is that moral knowledge can be attained through the analysis of basic ethical terms; for, since the basic ethical terms are definable, according to the naturalist, in purely factual terms, we can show ethical statements to be true in exactly the same way in which we can show statements about empirical or 'natural' fact to be true. The existence of genuine moral disagreements is not coercive against the ethical naturalist, as it has been found to be against the moral sense theorist and the intuitionist. For the naturalist may hold that people who are unaware of the correct meaning of ethical terms may well misuse them; and since the correct meaning of these terms only emerges, he may say, through conceptual analysis,

those incapable of such analysis, or unfamiliar with its results, are quite liable to misuse them.

But there is, I think, one criticism which is coercive against ethical naturalism. This criticism has been levelled, in some form or other, since the turn of the century. But its clearest statement occurs in chapter V of R.M. Hare's book, The Language of Morals (1952).[6] Hare sets out to explain just why it is that moral language is not reducible to non-moral language. The reason is, he argues, that ethical terms have a characteristic type of meaning, which he calls 'evaluative' meaning. Words like 'good' and 'right', Hare says, are used evaluatively when they are used to commend, i.e. to guide action. With evaluative meaning Hare contrasts 'descriptive' meaning. For a word to be 'descriptive' there must be definite criteria for its application which do not involve the making of a value-judgment. The word 'good', for example, may possess both descriptive and evaluative meaning: for example, in its ordinary use the phrase 'he is a good man' serves both to commend the person in question and to imply that certain descriptions apply to him - that he is generous, honest, fair, industrious, or at least some of these. But in Hare's terminology the word is used descriptively only when there is no evaluative element.

Now naturalistic theories, such as that of R.B. Perry which defines 'good' in terms of objects of interest,

restrict the function of ethical terms to that of mere description. Thus the price of naturalism is the loss of the commendatory or action-guiding force of ethical terms. This is plainly too great a price to pay for the simplicity of the naturalist's definitions, and even for his reduction of ethics to an empirical science.

Neo-naturalism: it will be remembered from section (2) of Chapter I of this thesis that according to R.M. Hare it is ultimately up to the individual to choose which principles he wants to live by. Hare's position, then, is not merely that there are two sorts of meaning, descriptive meaning and evaluative meaning. It is that there is no logical relationship between these two sorts of meaning. That is, it is up to us to decide which features of a thing we will

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6 The earliest version of this criticism is the so-called 'Open Question Argument' of G.E. Moore, to be found in Principia Ethica, p. 15-16. Moore's argument runs as follows: if 'good' means 'x' (where 'x' stands for some natural property), then to say 'x is good' is simply to say 'good is good' - a vacuous tautology. But for any x we want to allow that the question: is x good? is significant. The question 'is x good?' is not significant if it is identical to the question 'is good good?'; it is merely silly.
There are important differences between Moore's version of the criticism and the Hare version:

(a) Moore's intention was to prove only that 'good' is indefinable in natural terms; whereas Hare wants to prove that all evaluative expressions are indefinable in terms of non-evaluative expressions.

(b) Moore's 'Open Question Argument' was specifically directed against naturalism. But Hare's version of the criticism is intended to work against all attempts to define ethical expressions in terms of non-ethical ones - whether the proposed definiens is natural or not.

call 'good', which features of an action will lead up to describe it as 'right', and so on. The fact that a particular description, or set of descriptions, is true does not commit us (logically) to accepting any particular evaluative sentence.

Now if my critique of ethical objectivism, which forms the substance of the present Chapter, is to be fair, it must be noted that Hare's claim that there is no logical connection between any evaluation and a description or set of descriptions has not been accepted uncritically by the assembled host of repentant naturalists. On the contrary, it has provoked a strong counter-attack from a group of philosophers who argue that only certain types of descriptions can properly be regarded as good reasons for choosing to live by certain principles of conduct rather than others. These philosophers include Toulmin[7], Brandt[8], Kurt Baier[9], M. Zimmerman[10], Mrs. Foot[11], and G.J. Warnock[12].

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7 The Place of Reason in Ethics.

8 'The Justification of Ethical Beliefs', Ethical Theory, Chapter 10.

9 From the Moral Point of View.

10 'The is-ought: An Unnecessary Dualism', Mind for 1962.

11 'Moral Beliefs', Proc. Arist. Soc. for 1958.

12 Contemporary Moral Philosophy, Chapter 6.

They have been labelled the 'neo-naturalists', for reasons which should soon become apparent.

G.J. Warnock, for example, rejects the view that evaluative expressions are not definable in terms of descriptive ones on the basis that "there do not exist the two distinct classes of expressions ostensibly referred to".[13] Warnock holds that descriptive expressions and evaluative expressions form a 'seamless garment' - the very same expression being now descriptive, now evaluative. He admits that there is an indisputable difference between the activities of describing something and evaluating it, e.g. he notes that in legal proceedings the business of presenting a case is clearly distinguishable from the business of giving a verdict. He is even prepared to allow, for the purposes of his argument, the more ambitious anti-naturalist claim that no description ever commits us to a particular evaluation. But, he argues, to admit that no one is logically obliged to admit any given description as a criterion of merit is not to say that absolutely any description can function as a criterion of merit:

> "That no one is obliged to eat any particular kind of substance as food does not imply that absolutely any kind of substance might be eaten as food". 14

Warnock's thesis is that there are limits to the features which can properly be counted as criteria of merit.

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13 Ibid, p. 63.

For to adopt some feature as a criterion of merit is to imply a preference for things which have that feature over those which do not i.e. to want certain things <u>because</u> they possess that feature. And Warnock claims that while there are perhaps no logical limits to what a person can be said to want, there are limits to what a person can be said <u>reasonably</u> to want. These limits he sets

> "...somewhere within the general area of concern with the welfare of human beings".[15]

Thus Warnock effectively defines 'moral reasons' in terms of human welfare; hence the label 'neo-naturalist'.

Warnock's position is certainly correct to the extent that there is a logical connection (however nebulous this connection may be) between one's thinking that something is good and one's preferring that thing to certain other things. It is analytic that to adopt some feature as a criterion of merit is to evince a preference for things which possess that feature over those which do not. I am even prepared to allow, for the purposes of this argument, that there is a logical connection between preferences and wants: that is, I am prepared to allow that to prefer things which possess a certain feature to those which do not is to want those things because they possess that feature.[16] But this is

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14 Ibid, p. 64.

15 Ibid, p. 67.

only to grant that there is a logical connection between my belief that certain things are good and my wanting those things; such that those things (call them X's) which I want rather than other things of type x are the X's which I will call good. So far nothing which has been said goes to show that the class of objects which we can properly call good is restricted in any way. Nor can this be shown. For there is no logical absurdity in man's liking, or disliking, any mentionable object; similarly there is no logical absurdity in his approving, or disapproving, any proposed course of action. Shakespeare realised this; for he made Shylock reply, when asked why he wanted to bring about the death of Antonio:

> "Some men there are love not a gaping pig;
> Some, that are mad if they behold a cat;
> And others, when the bag-pipe sings i' th'nose,
> Cannot contain their urine; for affection,
> Mistress of passion, sways it to the mood
> Of what it likes or loaths". 17

Moreover, that there are no logical limits to what we can be attracted to, or repelled by, is something which Warnock himself appears to realise (though this is not true of all neo-naturalists).

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16 In fact, I do not accept that there is a logical relationship between preferences and wants; I am prepared to argue for this point elsewhere.

17 Merchant of Venice, Act IV, scene i.

Thus any conclusion about what can (logically) be said to be good which is based on a premise about what can (logically be wanted is bound to fail. But Warnock argues that while there are perhaps no logical limits to what we can be said to want, there are limits to what we can be said reasonably to want: according to him, one cannot reasonably want anything which is not conducive to the welfare of men.

Now it is not at all clear just which wants Warnock's vague criterion for a reasonable want excludes from being reasonable, if indeed it excludes any at all. But let us assume for the moment that it does exclude certain wants, such as the wish to die. What is it that makes the statement 'I want to die' unreasonable? It is not the case that no one can have reasons for making this statement: most people who commit suicide consider that they have excellent reasons for doing so. Even people who do not actually commit suicide may have reason to do so. Hamlet did; he was sick and tired of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Nor is there anything logically absurd about the statement 'I want to die'. This has just been shown.

The only real justification we have for calling the statement 'unreasonable' is that it expresses a want which

is highly unusual. Few of us have ever had any reason to want to kill ourselves; so we have not wanted to kill ourselves. Consequently, we might be inclined to call any statement which expresses a wish to die 'unreasonable'. Here the word 'unreasonable' serves partly to voice our conviction that things are never so bad that a man should kill himself, and partly to express our disapproval of the statement.

Because they believe that the word 'good' is logically connected to the word 'wants', some philosophers have been misled into thinking that there must also be a logical relationship between 'good' and certain things which are generally wanted. Since we generally want things because of their relevance to the promotion of happiness (including our own) among human beings, it is easy to assume that there must be a logical connection between the word 'good' and the promotion of human happiness. In fact, however, people sometimes want things (e.g. to die, to get revenge, to exterminate the Jews) which, far from promoting human happiness, militate against it. Such wants are certainly irregular; moreover, most people strongly disapprove of them. But there is nothing logically odd, or in any other way unreasonable, about these wants.

It has been argued in Chapter III of this thesis that the varieties of ethical objectivism - intuitionism, moral

sense theory, and ethical naturalism - are demonstrably inadequate. But to say that all varieties of ethical objectivism are inadequate is to say that:

(a) ethical sentences are not properly describable as true or false.

It follows from (a) that:

(b) there is no method by which we can determine the truth or falsity of ethical sentences.

It was shown in Chapter II of this thesis that Mill accepted both (a) and (b); that he held the principle of utility to be reasonable rather than true. Since no theory which rejects either (a) or (b) is, I claim, an adequate ethical theory, I feel justified in concluding that the reinterpretation of Mill as an ethical subjectivist renders his ethical theory much more plausible than it is generally taken to be.

APPENDIX A

THE EXPONENTS OF THE ORTHODOX INTERPRETATION

In Chapter I of this thesis, I labelled the view that Mill was an ethical objectivist 'the orthodox interpretation'. Some space will now be devoted to demonstrating that this interpretation is indeed the standard view of Mill.

I have defined ethical objectivism as the view that at least some ethical statements are properly describable as true, and some as false. Thus, when for example, J.P. Day writes that:

> "Mill's main aim in Utilitarianism, which is to prove the truth of the utility principle, is misconceived",[1]

he is interpreting Mill as an ethical objectivist, as I am using that expression. The view that Mill was an ethical objectivist has a long and respectable philosophical history. Prior to Moore's characterisation of Mill as an ethical naturalist, philosophers were prone to treat Mill's argument in chapter IV of Utilitarianism as an abortive attempt to deduce the truth of the utility principle. The distinction of being the first to find a deductive argument in chapter IV probably belongs to F.H. Bradley, who presented a scathing attack

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1 A Critical History of Western Philosophy, ed. D.J. O'Connor, p. 364.

on Mill in his Ethical Studies (1876):

> "The Utilitarian believes on psychological grounds that pleasure is the sole desirable: he believes on the strength of his natural and moral instincts that he must live for others: he puts the two together, and concludes that the pleasure of others is what he has to live for. This is not a good theoretical deduction, but it is the generation of the Utilitarian monster.[2]"

Bradley added in a footnote that Mill's argument here is 'monstrous', and that he is ashamed to have to examine such reasoning. It did not strike him that Mill's reasoning might appear less monstrous were it not to be regarded as a deductive argument. Be that as it may, Bradley's polemic was persuasive. And it may well be as a result of this polemic that Sidgwick, when he came to defend utilitarianism, put the theory on an intuitionistic basis:

> "The Utilitarianism of Mill and Bentham seemed to me to want a basis: that basis could only be supplied by a fundamental intuition". 3

Even today, those few commentators who do not interpret Mill as defining ethical expressions in terms of non-ethical ones tend to treat him as deducing ethical conclusions from purely factual premises.

The ascription of naturalism: It was explained in section (2) of Chapter I that there are three types of ethical objectivism:

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2 Ethical Studies, p.114-5 (my underlining).

3 Preface to the sixth edition of Methods of Ethics, p.xx-xxi.

(i) moral sense theory
(ii) intuitionism
(iii) ethical naturalism

Now no one has ever read Mill as being either a moral sense theorist or an intuitionist. His attack on these views, which he treated as different versions of the same view, is to be found in so many of his works,[4] and is so vehement in tone, that the attempt to attribute either of them to Mill would be utterly implausible. On the other hand, ever since the view known as ethical naturalism was first distinguished, it has generally been assumed by philosophers that Mill was an ethical naturalist. G.E. Moore first coined the term 'naturalism' in Principia Ethica (1903). In chapter II of this book, Moore explains that 'naturalistic' theories of ethics are those theories:

> "which owe their prevalence to the supposition that good can be defined by reference to a natural object".[5]

It is evident that Moore uses the expression 'natural object' in much the same way that a contemporary philosopher would use the expression 'empirical object', viz. to refer to those objects which are the subject matter of the natural sciences:

> "By 'nature', then, I do mean and have meant that which is the subject-matter of the natural sciences and also of psychology. It may be said to include all that has existed, does exist, or will exist in time. If we consider whether any object is of such a nature that it may be said to exist now, to have existed, or to be about to exist, then we may know that

> object is a natural object, and that nothing, of which this is not true, is a natural object". 6

Moore gives many examples of naturalistic theories:

> "Whether good be defined as yellow or green or blue, as loud or soft, as round or square, as sweet or bitter, as productive of life or productive of pleasure, as willed or desired or felt: whichever of these or of any other object in the world, good may be held to mean, the theory which holds it to mean them, will be a naturalistic theory. I have called such theories naturalistic because all of these terms denote properties, simple or complex, of some simple or complex natural object". 7

If the naturalist defines 'good' in terms of pleasure he is a 'hedonistic' naturalist; if he defines it in terms of some other natural object he is a non-hedonistic naturalist. Moore contends that to define 'good' in terms of any natural object is to commit a fallacy, which he labels 'the naturalistic fallacy'.

Thus equipped, Moore proceeds in chapter III of his book to launch a full-scale attack on Mill, whom he takes to be the prime example of a hedonistic naturalist. He begins by establishing that Mill is a hedonist. This argument has two parts. First he quotes Mill's statement

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4 See, for example, Mill's essay on Sedgwick (1835) and that on Whewell's Moral Philosophy (1852), both of which are to be found in the Collected Works (Toronto edition), Vol.X.

5 Principia Ethica, p. 39.

6 Principia Ethica, p. 40.

7 Ibid.

that:

> "...pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends". 8

Then he shows, convincingly, that Mill uses 'desirable' as being equivalent in meaning to the word 'good'.[9] Once Moore has shown that Mill was a hedonist, he then attempts to show that Mill was a naturalist also. He does so by quoting what he takes to be Mill's proof of hedonism in chapter IV of Utilitarianism. In this chapter, he notes, Mill describes the view he wishes to defend as the theory:

> "...that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end". 10

Mill then provides the following argument for this view:

> "...the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people do actually desire it. If the end which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself were not, in theory and practice, acknowledge to be an end, nothing could ever convince any person that it was so". 11

It is this argument to which Moore takes exception. For

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8 Utilitarianism, p. 6.

9 The comparison of two of Mill's remarks is quite sufficient for this purpose:
"Questions of ultimate ends are not amenable to direct proof. Whatever can be proved to be good, must be so by being shown to be a means to something admitted to be good without proof". (Utilitarianism, p. 6.).
"It has already been remarked (i.e. in the p. 6 passage quoted above) that questions of ultimate ends do not admit of proof...Questions about ends are, in other words, questions about what things are desirable". (Utilitarianism, p. 32.).

10 Utilitarianism, p. 32.

it seemed to him that Mill, having first equated 'desirable' with 'good', then proceeds to define 'desirability' in terms of people's actual desires. This argument, in Moore's opinion, is fallacious. For desires, in his terminology, are 'natural objects' - whether or not people actually desire nothing other than pleasure is a question of psychological fact. But desirability, which is identical with goodness, is not a natural object. Thus Moore concludes:

> "Mill has made as naive and artless a use of the naturalistic fallacy as anybody could desire... The fallacy in this step (i.e. the step which pretends to show that 'good' means 'desired') is so obvious, that it is quite wonderful how Mill failed to see it". 12

Whether the structure of Mill's argument in chapter IV of Utilitarianism is as Moore takes it to be is something which is discussed in Chapter II of this thesis. The important thing to notice here is that Moore's characterisation of Mill as a naturalist has been extremely persuasive. Ever since the publication of Moore's book, it has been the usual interpretation adopted by commentators on Mill. Thus we find Karl Britton saying:

> "We may take it that (Mill's) first aim was to give an account of right and wrong, good and bad, duty and obligation, in naturalistic terms". 13

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11 Ibid.

12 Principia Ethica, p. 66-7.

and John Plamenatz:

> "There is not much left of Benthamite utilitarianism when John Stuart Mill has completed his defence of it. What is left is, strictly speaking, not utilitarianism at all, but a kind of naturalistic ethics that it would be misleading to call a variety of hedonism". 14

C.D. Broad does not agree with Plamenatz that Mill was not a hedonist, but agrees with him that Mill was a naturalist:

> "Mill presumably meant to be a naturalistic hedonist". 15

Other comments which sound very like Moore are made by Brand Blanshard:

> "John Stuart Mill, you will recall, concluded that goodness meant pleasure", 16

and Oliver A. Johnson:

> "It is hardly necessary to remind anyone of Mill's famous equation of the 'desirable' with the 'desired'". 17

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13 John Stuart Mill, p. 74.

14 The English Utilitarians, p. 144.

15 Five Types of Ethical Theory, p. 258.

16 'The Impasse in Ethics and a Way Out', reprinted in Readings in Ethical Theory, ed. W. Sellars and J. Hospers, p. 298.

17 Moral Knowledge, p. 31.

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