

The Utilitarian Imagination

**An Inquiry into the Relationship between Character Formation, Moral
Freedom and Social Reform in John Stuart Mill's Moral Science**

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Of all the difficulties which impede the progress of thought, and the formation of well-grounded opinions on life and social arrangements, the greatest is now the unspeakable ignorance and inattention of mankind in respect to the influences which form human character.

J.S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, 1869.

[A]most all the projects of social reformers in these days are really *liberticide*....

J.S. Mill –To Harriet Mill,” 15 January, 1855.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines John Stuart Mill's conception of moral character and his views on the possibility and importance of moral self-development. The purpose and substance of Mill's project were conceived and developed within a dense intellectual nexus of romantic, liberal, utilitarian, naturalist and Kantian insights. These must be disentangled if we are to comprehend his paradigm of moral character. Mill's attempts to incorporate these ideas into a systematic Moral Science—including psychology, ethics and sociology—required a trenchant critique of certain types of social and political reform. The evolution of Mill's critique is contextualised by an analysis of his engagement with four thinkers he came to consider inimical to his moral and political goals: Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, Robert Owen and Auguste Comte.

This thesis offers detailed analyses of Mill's critique of religion and his doctrine of international non-intervention, two themes that remain controversial and misunderstood in scholarly literature. An examination of these themes illuminates Mill's thinking in two important ways. First, it demonstrates that Mill's ideas of freedom and character formation utilise moralised ideas about the importance of moral and emotional development to political philosophy. Second, it reveals that although he defined freedom in explicitly moralised terms, Mill's final position is that it is not permissible to force people to live in the conditions that maximise moral freedom and are most conducive to the development of moral character.

DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library catalogue, the Australasian Digital Theses Program (ADTP) and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time. The author acknowledges that copyright of published works contained within this thesis (as listed below*) resides with the copyright holder(s) of those works.

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Goldstone, Alan, "J.S. Mill on International Legitimacy," refereed paper, *Proceedings of the Oceanic Conference on International Studies*, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, 2–4 July, 2008

NOTE ON SOURCES

With two exceptions, all citations to Mill's works refer to John M. Robson (ed.), *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963–1991, 33 volumes). A full list of *Collected Works* texts cited in this thesis is included in the Bibliography. The two other sources are: Hugh Elliott (ed.), *Letters of John Stuart Mill* (London: Longmans, 1910, 2 volumes); and Jack Stillinger (ed.), *The Early Draft of John Stuart Mill's Autobiography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961).

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