MILL ON COLERIDGE

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Abstract

This paper deals with the deep and lasting legacy that came from J.S. Mill's involvement with Coleridge's ideas. Many commentators on Mill's *Utilitarianism*, *On Liberty* and others works have acknowledged Coleridge's importance in a very minor way, or reduced his influence mainly to the decade from 1830 to 1840. There are three coleridgeans points of influence in Mill's philosophy: (a) Mill's long use of the device of identifying polarities and using them to state and develop his own position; (b) the way Mill saw the issue of freedom of expression; and (c) the idea that truth could not be apprehended by the intellect alone and could only be kept alive in connection with deep feelings.

Keywords: Coleridge, Bentham, Radicalism, Method, Feelings, Liberty.

Resumen

Este artículo se ocupa del profundo y duradero legado resultante de la preocupación de J.S. Mill por las ideas de Coleridge. Muchos estudiosos del *Utilitarismo* de Mill, de *Sobre la libertad*, y de otras obras, han reconocido la importancia de Coleridge pero de un modo muy menor, o reducido su influencia principalmente al período de la década que va de 1830 a 1840. Hay tres elementos de influencia coleridgeana en la filosofía de Mill: (a) el persistente uso del artificio de identificar polaridades y usarlas para establecer y desarrollar su propia posición; (b) el modo en el que Mill veía el problema de la libertad de expresión y (c) la idea de que la verdad no podría ser aprehendida por el intelecto solo y podría únicamente mantenerse viva en contacto con sentimientos profundos.

Palabras clave: Coleridge, Bentham, Radicalismo, Método, Sentimientos, Libertad.

I have set to work upon an article on Coleridge, partly in consequence of the encouragement you gave me. It will not be a popular article; & perhaps not one person who reads it will like it; probably few will

derive much benefit from it; but if I do what I have a thought of doing, viz. to collect a few things I have printed which are worth preserving & republish them in a volume, I shall be glad to have this among them because some of the others, without this, would give a false view of my general mode of thinking – & besides I sometimes think that if there is anything which I am under a special obligation to preach, it is the meaning & necessity of a catholic spirit in philosophy, & I have a better opportunity of shewing what this is, in writing about Coleridge, than I have ever had before[1].

As some of you know, I am in the process of writing a book on John Stuart Mill, and one of the earliest problems with which I have had to deal has been how Mill accepted and rejected the legacy he received from Jeremy Bentham and his father, James Mill. In recent writings I have developed several theses. First, Mill's rejection of Benthamite utilitarianism, if it took place at all, was short-lived and confined largely to the 1830s. By the 1850s, as clearly evident in the essay on Whewell (1852), he was firmly back in the utilitarian camp. Second, I have argued that Mill remained loyal to what might be called the Epicurean tradition in philosophy with its emphasis on pleasure, pain, and utility, which continued throughout his life and was particularly emphasized in *Utilitarianism*. Hence, *Utilitarianism* does not represent a rejection of Bentham, but a reaffirmation of Mill's acceptance of his inheritance[2]. Third, I have recently traced in another essay, not yet published, Mill's development of Philosophic Radicalism in the 1830s and the significance of three essays, 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy', 'Bentham', and 'Coleridge' to the development of his philosophy and his radical politics. Here I have noted considerable confusion regarding Mill's inheritance from his father and Bentham, and at the end concluded that he tended, with some important exceptions, to abandon his new approach to philosophical politics, developed in the 1830s, and turned at that point to concentrate on philosophical method, as developed in the *System of Logic Ratiocinative and Inductive*[3].

In all of this work I have been aware of a failure to answer some simple questions about Coleridge. What did Mill's encounter with Coleridge's ideas amount to? Why Coleridge? This is my topic in this paper, and I hope to show what deep and lasting legacy came from his involvement with Coleridge's ideas.

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1 Mill to Sterling, 4 November 1839, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 33 vols., ed. J.M. Robson et al, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963-1991, vol. xiii, p. 411 (henceforth cited as *CWM*, xiii. 411.

2 See F. Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 166ff.

3 See F. Rosen, 'From Jeremy Bentham's Radical Philosophy to J.S. Mill's Philosophic Radicalism', *Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. G. Stedman Jones and G. Claeys, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.

Like many of you here, I have used and have been profoundly affected by the new edition of the *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill,* edited by John Robson. It is fair to say that no current or future research on Mill can possibly succeed without careful attention to this edition. One effect of the Robson edition is to draw the scholar away from simplistic studies of *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism* and to lead him or her into the textual and historical detail surrounding these great works and other less regarded ones. Much material, some of which was previously unknown, has been brought together and made accessible to scholars for the first time. Robson provides important insights into textual development and its significance for Mill's work, which cannot be ignored.

If you have become familiar with these volumes (and I can only claim to have begun this process) you will not be surprised that I begin this study in an unusual way. I might have begun by considering the essay, 'Coleridge', as one scholar has written, as 'the best introduction to Coleridge's political writings'[4] or perhaps as Leavis thought, as an important work providing insights into Victorian intellectual history[5]. I could follow Morrow in seeing Mill's essay as leading on to the liberal political philosophy accompanying the rise of English Idealism in writers like T.H. Green and J.H. Muirhead[6] or examine Raymond Williams's Marxist interpretation of the significance of Mill's essays on Bentham and Coleridge as forming 'a prologue' to much subsequent 'English thinking about society and culture'[7]. My interest, however, is more with what the essay on Coleridge meant for Mill than its subsequent use by various writers. Can one understand Mill's philosophy, and, indeed, Mill's conception of himself as a philosopher without appreciating the importance of Coleridge? In attempting to answer this question, I found that nearly all Mill's references to Coleridge in his correspondence either occurred in letters to John Sterling or in letters in which Sterling was discussed.

John Sterling (an exact contemporary of Mill) may not be well-known to Spanish audiences, and perhaps even less so to English ones, but his relationship to Mill until his early death in 1844 had a profound impact on Mill's life (perhaps overshadowed only by his relationships with his father and Harriet Taylor whom he subsequently married. Just prior to Sterling's death Mill wrote to him: 'I shall never think of you but as one of the noblest, & quite the most lovable of all men I have known or ever look to know' and earlier in the same letter, he wrote, 'the remembrance

4 J. Barrell, 'Introduction' to S.T. Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1972, p. xxvi.

5 F.R. Leavis, 'Introduction', *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980 [first published in 1950], pp. 12-13.

6 See J. Morrow, *Coleridge's Political Thought, Property, Morality, and the Limits of Traditional Discourse*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990, p. 164.

7 R. Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1958, p. 49.

of your friendship will be a precious possession to me as long as I remain here...'.[8] What we know of their friendship comes mainly from Mill. In the *Autobiography* Mill depicted the arrival of the two Coleridgeans, Sterling and F. D. Maurice, in the London Debating Society as presenting the view of 'a second Liberal and even Radical party, on totally different grounds from Benthamism and vehemently opposed to it'[9]. They developed within the Society the doctrines associated with what Mill called the European reaction of the nineteenth century against the thought that predominated in the eighteenth century. The debates of the Society were unusual in being based at the same time on philosophical principles and intense, direct confrontation between the debating parties. At the outset Mill considered himself a poor performer, but in time and with considerable preparation he seems to have become a formidable opponent[10]. These debates, however, clearly meant more to Mill than intellectual victory or defeat, as he began to develop his feelings as well as his intellect in these very personal confrontations. Even though Sterling did not possess the intellectual stature of Maurice and, indeed, of Mill, himself, Mill, as we have seen, was strongly attracted by his warmth as a person and his capacity for friendship.

According to Mill, in 1829 Sterling made a 'violent and unfair attack' on Mill's mainly Benthamite political philosophy to which Mill delivered a sharp response leading to Sterling's resignation, and, subsequently, to his own[11]. Although the proceedings of the society were never published (and probably were never compiled), the manuscript draft of Mill's speech has survived and now appears in the new edition of the *Collected Works*[12]. Apparently, the debate was over the status of Montesquieu as a political philosopher. Sterling had apparently defended Montesquieu by attacking another way of philosophizing about law and politics, that of Bentham. Mill felt that he had to respond to this attack, despite the fact that he was in the process of freeing himself from some aspects of Bentham's doctrines. But Mill was careful not to dissent directly from any of Bentham's views. He noted that he had spoken on numerous occasions in the Society to criticize various vulgar views of Bentham's doctrines. But Sterling's speech was different, as Mill asserted:

> In those opinions of Mr. Bentham, however, which have been the object of the honourable gentleman's [Sterling's] invective as in most of the opinions really professed by that great man [Bentham], I have the misfortune to agree; and I consequently feel myself a party concerned

8 Mill to Sterling, 16 August 1844, *CWM*, xiii. 635.
9 *CWM*, i. 133.
10 *Ibid.*
11 *Ibid.*, p. 162 (Early Draft).
12 See *CWM*, xxvi. 443-53.

in the honourable gentleman's denunciations, and as such, I do not feel disposed to sit down quietly under them[13].

Mill was aware of the fact that his defense of Bentham employed Sterling's method against him and took the debate even further away from the original question regarding Montesquieu. But Mill went even further to mount a direct personal attack on Sterling's judgment, accusing him of a lack of calmness, a failure to be impartial, and general inaccuracy[14].

Although it is not possible to reconstruct Sterling's attack on Bentham, we can obtain some hints from Mill's reply. Sterling seems to have accused Bentham of advocating immorality or, at least, of advancing a doctrine that would have the effect of increasing immorality generally in society, presumably by being concerned with the external consequences of actions rather than with the internal cultivation of virtue. Mill responded by arguing that an emphasis on the internal cultivation of virtue alone would only serve as a cover for the vilest selfishness and a failure to concern oneself with the welfare of others. In his attack on Bentham Mill thought that Sterling had made two errors. First, he failed to see that most philosophers, including Stoics and Epicureans, those who followed Kant and those who followed Locke, possessed moral virtue 'very considerably above the average of ordinary men'[15]. Second, Sterling had changed his position regarding reform. Where previously his view had been compatible with that of Bentham (in pursuing the same ends but for different reasons), he now seemed to oppose reform generally and particularly that connected with the ballot.

Mill wrote in his *Autobiography* that at the time he stood with the Coleridgeans rather than with Bentham on issues of 'poetry and general culture', but was opposed to them in numerous fields, such as 'religion, political philosophy, ethics, and metaphysics'[16]. Thus, there would be little agreement with the Coleridgeans in debate.

At this time Mill was also suffering from his mental crisis, which had begun in 1826 when he was occupied with the arduous and near-heroic task of editing Bentham's manuscripts on evidence, which were published in a five-volume edition in 1827[17]. At that time he posed the question concerning the happiness that the fulfillment of all his ambitions should

13 *Ibid.*, p. 444.
14 *Ibid.*, pp. 444-5.
15 *Ibid.*, p. 445n.
16 *CWM*, i. 162 (Early Draft).
17 J.M. Robson, 'John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, with Some Observations on James Mill', *Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age*, eds. M. MacLure and F.W. Watt, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964, p. 258.

bring him, and his response to this was that he would not be happy[18]. Given this conclusion, he felt that he must look outside the intellectual framework, formed for him by his father and, to a lesser extent, by Bentham. This exploration was as much emotional as intellectual, and Mill found a good deal of satisfaction in the friendships developed at the various meetings of the Society. But in 1829 his emotional state was fragile. He was attempting to discover and experience new aspects of life, but at the same time he remained a prisoner of a system that could not make him happy. This promise of a different and perhaps more satisfying emotional life was placed in jeopardy by this clash with Sterling and his resignation. Mill's letter to Sterling, written on 15 April 1829, is surely one of the most remarkable letters Mill wrote[19]. The anguish at the breach and strong appeal for a resumption of Sterling's friendship can still move the reader nearly two centuries later. The letter also contains the only explicit reference to the 1826 crisis that appears in Mill's surviving correspondence[20]. Mill clearly desired to bare his feelings to the man who, at the time, threatened to end their relationship.

Sterling's friendship meant more to Mill than that of any other man not only because of the affection he felt towards him, but also because of the differences between them. For Mill, the friendship 'appears to me peculiarly adapted to the wants of my own mind; since I know no person who possesses more, of what I have not, than yourself, nor is this inconsistent with my believing you to be deficient in some of the very few things which I have'[21]. What did Mill believe that Sterling possessed that he lacked? Mill was probably referring to Sterling's unique position to help to remedy Mill's intense feelings of loneliness and isolation by virtue of the fact that Sterling did not belong to the political circle inhabited by his father and Bentham (both of whom were still alive at this time).

In his letter to Sterling Mill dwelled on the question of whether or not friendship required the sharing of similar objects in life. Mill's interest in this question was not only an intellectual one. He could not at this time find friendship and happiness with those with whom he shared a common background. He had begun to find considerable personal growth and even happiness in debates with those with whom he disagreed. If Sterling broke off his friendship at this point, he would deprive Mill of this opportunity for happiness. Furthermore, if it were impossible to

18 *CWM*, i. 139.
19 *CWM*, xii. 28-30.
20 See ibid., p. 29n. See also a general reference to his 'gloom and morbid despondency' four years later in a letter to Carlyle, *CWM*, xii. 149.
21 *CWM*, xii. 29.

develop deep friendships with those with whom he debated and with whom he disagreed, then there was no point for him to carry on with the debates. He followed Sterling in resigning from the society, though he was relieved by the prospect of the renewal of their friendship.

In the *Autobiography* Mill wrote:

> He and I started from intellectual points almost as wide apart as the poles, but the distance between us was always diminishing: if I made steps towards some of his opinions, he, during his short life, was constantly approximating more and more to several of mine: and if he had lived, and had health and vigour to prosecute his ever assiduous self-culture, there is no knowing how much further this spontaneous assimilation might have proceeded[22].

There is no clear evidence of distinct changes in Sterling's views. Mill describes Sterling's ordination as a Deacon in the Church of England in 1834 and his service for eight months as Curate simply as a 'mistake' without considering whether or not there was more to Sterling's decision[23]. Nor did Mill, however much he adopted the Coleridgean idea of the clerisy, ever adhere to a religious creed. Nor was progress in their relationship dependant on their knowing more and more about their deepest thoughts and feelings. In 1844, for example, Mill could write to Sterling (though perhaps only to Sterling): 'And even now I am very far from appearing to you as I am – for though there is nothing that I do not desire to shew, there is much that I never do shew, & much that I think you cannot even guess'[24].

In addition to Mill's emphasis on his friendship with Sterling starting at opposite poles, a distinctive feature of the essays on 'Bentham' and 'Coleridge' was Mill's employment of the image of polar opposites, and in a letter to Sterling Mill wrote that the article on Coleridge served 'as a counter-pole to the one on Bentham'[25]. These opposing poles of thought could be moved or overcome in at least two ways. At one point he wrote to Sterling:

> I once heard Maurice say... that almost all differences of opinion when analysed, were differences of method. But if so, he who can throw most light upon the subject of method, will do most to forward that alliance among the most advanced intellects & characters of the age, which is the only definite object I ever have in literature or philosophy so far as I have

22 *CWM*, i. 163. In the Early Draft (ibid., p. 162), Mill wrote that 'I have little doubt that his mental emancipation on all the leading points of opinion would have become complete'. Mill clearly had second thoughts about the extent of Sterling's emancipation.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

24 Mill to Sterling, 22 April 1840, *CWM*, xiii. 429.

any *general* object at all. *Argal*, I have put down upon paper a great many of my ideas on logic, & shall in time bring forth a treatise...'[26].

Thus, one way of overcoming these dividing polarities was to explore them philosophically with the emphasis on method, and one might look to Mill's work on logic to see how Benthamite radicals and progressive Coleridgeans might come closer together. The second way of moving or even overcoming these opposing poles lay in seeing the task of intellect or philosophy as exploring 'the pros and cons of every question' – a position Mill ascribed to Wordsworth, and which he contrasted with that of the radicals and utilitarians[27].

The connection between philosophical method and very deep feelings may seem unique to Mill, but it may not be too remote from the psychological foundations in pleasure and pain in the Epicurean tradition within which he worked[28]. Where Mill was distinctive was in his accepting, indeed, relishing deep differences of opinion as the condition for intellectual progress and personal liberation. His renewed relationship with Sterling brought home to his fragile psyche that he would never be happy without this exploration of opposites. This theme even entered his early relationship with Harriet Taylor, where he expressed some relief that he had convinced Harriet that the differences in feelings between them need not make them unhappy, and he had accepted that these differences existed 'consisting chiefly in the want of some feelings in me which you have'[29]. Not only did Mill look for a personal creed that united knowledge and understanding with feelings, but he also found in the deep divisions of the intellect, based on deeper feelings, a way forward for the philosophic mind.

II

Many commentators on Mill's *Utilitarianism*, *On Liberty*, and other works have acknowledged Coleridge's importance in a very minor way and have given it a respectful footnote[30]. Others, such as Robson, appreciate Coleridge's relevance and importance for Mill, but argue that his influence was confined mainly to the decade from 1830 to 1840. According to this view, the essays on Bentham and Coleridge are 'less a criticism of Coleridge, or a reassessment of Bentham, than a declaration of assured

26 Mill to Sterling, 2-22 October 1831, *CWM*, xii. 79.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 81.
28 See Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism*, pp. 15-28, 166 ff.
29 Mill to Taylor, Summer 1834?, *CWM*, xii. 228.
30 See J. Riley, *Mill on Liberty*, London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 13, 20, 86; R. Crisp, *Mill on Utilitarianism*, London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 3, 25; J.C. Rees, *John Stuart Mill's On Liberty*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, pp. 6, 20, 63; W. Donner, *The Liberal Self. John Stuart Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991, pp. 98, 101, 105, 109; C.L. Ten, *Mill on Liberty*,

and well-founded independence'[31]. It is possible, of course, to trace the development of particular ideas that Mill adopted from Coleridge. These might include the idea of the clerisy, the emphasis on permanence and progression, the ideas of nationalty, national identity, and related notions, and the concern with civilization, culture, and cultivation. I shall not attempt to trace in detail the fate of these ideas in Mill's thought. My concern is more with the question: was Mill's *philosophy* affected in a fundamental and lasting way by his encounter with Coleridge?

We might begin to explore this issue by considering Mill's remarks in 'Bentham' about Bentham's philosophical method. Here, Mill made the distinction between philosophical method and philosophical opinions, the former of which was new and valuable 'beyond all price', even if the latter were mainly abandoned. Mill depicted Bentham's method in the following way:

> Bentham's method may be shortly described as the method of detail; of treating wholes by separating them into their parts, abstractions by resolving them into Things,-- classes and generalities by distinguishing them into the individuals of which they are made up; and breaking every question into pieces before attempting to solve it.

It was this method that enabled Mill to assert that Bentham had introduced for the first time into ethics and politics 'the modes of investigation, which are essential to the idea of science'[32].

Mill clearly adopted this conception of Bentham's method, as he stated in 'Coleridge' and as he developed it in relation to evidence and science in the *Logic*. But there is one clear and important exception, which appears in Book VI of the *Logic*. When Mill considered the methods of social science, he rejected what he called 'the Geometrical or Abstract Method'[33].

Using this method it was believed that one could deduce important truths in the art of politics from simple premises, like the original contract. Mill gave the example of Hobbes whose whole political theory, he believed, was deduced from two maxims: that government was founded on fear and that this was effected through the original contract. For Mill, Hobbes's theory contained 'a double sophism'[34]. He first adopted as a principle a foundation (the importance of fear) that was factually

Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, pp. 57, 95, 155; J. Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill,* London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 1, 17, 78, 250, 321-2, 354.

31 J.M. Robson, *The Improvement of Mankind, The Social and Political Thought of John Stuart Mill*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968, p. 76.

32 *CWM*, x. 83.

33 *CWM*, viii. 887-94.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 889.

false, as there were other aspects of human personality equally relevant to politics. Second, the deduction of the obligation to keep promises from the premise of the original contract was also fallacious in that the doctrine of the original contract might equally have to be derived from the obligation to keep promises, and neither actually provided any factual support for the other.

Mill then examined what he considered to be one of the most remarkable and important examples of this method in politics, that of 'the interest-philosophy of the Bentham school'. This philosophy was based on the premise that human actions are always determined by self-interest. Although Mill was aware of some ambiguities in Bentham's account of interest and, particularly, self-interest, and although he failed to distinguish James Mill's theory of government from that of Bentham, his meaning was clear – the proposition that the actions of rulers were based on self-interest was not universally true. Few rulers in fact seemed to exhibit these selfish interests. Furthermore, the focus by this 'school' on establishing accountability by rulers to the ruled followed properly from the premises regarding self-interest, as this became the main problem within a theory of government based on simple self-interest. But such a view of accountability, Mill thought, leading to a theory of representation, was only true if the original premise concerned with self-interest was true. In ringing Coleridgean tones, Mill declared:

> But I insist only on what is true of all rulers, viz., that the character and course of their actions is largely influenced (independently of personal calculation) by the habitual sentiments and feelings, the general modes of thinking and acting, which prevail throughout the community of which they are members; as well as by the feelings, habits, and modes of thought which characterize the particular class in that community to which they themselves belong. And no one will understand or be able to decipher their system of conduct, who does not take all these things into account[35].

Much of this rejection of the self-interest principle can be found in the earlier 'Bentham' and 'Coleridge'. What is important here is Mill's argument that the 'interest-philosophy of the Bentham school' was mistaken due to its 'unscientific' method in attempting to apply the model of geometry to politics. While he granted that the theory had a good deal to recommend it in the political struggle for parliamentary reform, in focusing attention on representation, it possessed no claim to truth beyond this historical moment in practical politics.

Mill did not reject the deductive approach to politics, as it was used by Bentham and others. He insisted, however, that such deductions must proceed not from one or a few causes, but 'considering each effect as

35 *Ibid.*, p. 891.

(what it really is) an aggregate result of many causes, operating sometimes through the same, sometimes through different mental agencies, or laws of human nature'[36].

Mill then proceeded to develop an idea of social science that owed more to August Comte than to Coleridge. But I want to suggest that Mill's argument against the Benthamite self-interest theory required what might be considered a Coleridgean move in insisting that there was an opposing point of view that saw human agency as part of historical tradition and that the truth could not be obtained without considering this other view. For Mill, this other view led him to consign Bentham's scientific method to an analogy with geometry that was not intended to be flattering.

Mill might have realized that, for Bentham, all actions were not based on self-interest. Bentham argued that we must assume that a society consisted of individuals who were mainly concerned with looking after themselves, in avoiding pain to themselves and others and pursuing happiness. This was in part a matter of method, of breaking down the whole of society into its units and seeing these discrete units (self-interested individuals) as the basic elements of society. Bentham also acknowledged that most rulers *appeared* to act as if they were ruling in the interests of the ruled, and most of the ruled seemed devoted to their rulers, even to the point of ignoring self-interest, e.g. in cheerfully going to war (placing their lives at risk) in support of their rulers' plans and personal ambitions. But he ascribed such actions to what in modern times we might call 'false consciousness'. A good deal of his theory of government was devoted to an explanation of how this false consciousness originated and persisted in societies, affecting politics, religion, language, and even feelings, and is crucial to an understanding of the scientific character of Bentham's method. Mill ignored this aspect of Bentham's theory and thereby simplified it. What he actually wrote about the Bentham school really applied mainly to his father's *Essay on Government*, which was a highly polemical essay masquerading as a scientific one.

III

If Mill as a philosopher stands in part on Coleridgean foundations, what are these foundations? Consider, for example, Mill's discussion of polarities, particularly in the essays on 'Bentham' and 'Coleridge'. Coleridge, himself, though using a slightly different terminology, employed the idea of opposites to explain a number of his ideas. In expounding the ideas of 'permanence' and 'progression', as opposites, he referred to

36 *Ibid.*, p. 894.

them as being like the positive and negative poles of a magnet – 'opposite powers are always of the same kind, and tend to union, either by equipoise or by a common product' and they 'suppose and require each other'[37]. Elsewhere, he referred to the opposition between 'Property' and 'Nationalty' as opposites: 'correspondent and reciprocally supporting, counterweights... the existence of the one being the condition, and the perfecting, of the rightfulness of the other'[38]. Similarly, in expounding the idea of the Christian church in relation to its opposite, Coleridge used the metaphor of opposite banks of the same stream and words like 'counter-balance' and 'contra-position'[39].

Mill developed this striking imagery and mode of argument at the beginning of 'Coleridge', as he brought Bentham and Coleridge together as 'completing counterparts'. They were in Mill's terminology 'contraries' – 'the things which are farthest from one another in the same kind'. The two men contributed to awaken the spirit of philosophy, and while they never interacted, their work, when seen together, defined English philosophy at this time[40]. One could not approximate the truth simply by adding Bentham's and Coleridge's philosophies together, but their combination required, in Robson's view, 'careful analysis and comparison, with the aim of revealing limitations of experience and errors of generalization'[41]. This method is not very obvious in these essays, but we have seen in the discussion of the Bentham school of interest in the *Logic* how Mill turned to Coleridgean issues to remedy defects in what he took to be Bentham's approach. This approach to method was clearly indebted to Mill's encounter with Coleridge.

Furthermore, when Mill attempted to develop a philosophy of government in *Considerations on Representative Government* he employed the metaphor of opposites in considering Coleridge's distinction between permanence and progression, but in this case he seemed to reject it. In his view permanence and progression were not opposites but the same thing. Without order (which he preferred to permanence), no progress was possible so that the two had to be seen as one rather than two opposing ideas[42]. Furthermore, the progress that tended to emerge from this synthesis of order and progress was more one concerned with not falling back rather than with moving forward. Mill chose as his starting point for progress first the 'virtue and intelligence of the human beings

37 Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, p. 16n.
38 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
39 *Ibid.*, p. 100.
40 *CWM*, x. 120-1.
41 Robson, *The Improvement of Mankind*, p. 192.
42 *CWM*, xix. 384-9.

composing the community' and, second, the quality of the machinery of government[43].

From this discussion Mill may be interpreted as abandoning not only Coleridge's emphasis on permanence and progression as the keys to understanding good government but also his use of polarities as a way of grasping the essence of an argument. Similarly, although Mill praised Coleridge's idea of an endowed class for the cultivation of learning, i.e. the clerisy in 'Coleridge'[44], and he continued to emphasize the role of education and an educated elite in government and society, he never developed further Coleridge's specific idea in his later writings.

These considerations may tempt us to accept fully Robson's conclusion that once Mill secured philosophical independence from Bentham and his father, he no longer needed Coleridge, as he developed his own voice. I agree in part with this conclusion, and would also emphasize (as Robson did) that after 1840, Mill increasingly rejected Coleridge's specific ideas and moved back to his original Benthamite home. But these views are fully compatible with three further suggestions concerning the lasting philosophical influence of Coleridge.

First, Mill continued to employ the device of identifying polarities and using them to state and develop his own position. One might think that he was employing the methods of the Socratic dialogues, but, more probably, he was drawing on Coleridge's ideas. For example, Mill's concern with so-called 'higher pleasures' in *Utilitarianism* might be seen as an attempt to combine opposing doctrines (Stoic and Epicurean) and then to devise a way of seeing their integration in his own position[45]. Mill's striking phrase that it is 'better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied'[46], is not strictly speaking a call for higher pleasures (for Socrates is dissatisfied rather than satisfied), but a way of bringing two opposing views into focus. This move rests on Coleridgean foundations.

In a more practical way Mill dealt with opposing poles in politics between cosmopolitanism and nationalism by arguing for a principle of cohesion within society which did not embrace a hatred of foreigners, an indifference to humanity, or the preference of national interest over the interest of the human race in general. Mill thus attempted to draw from the polarities a new perspective – what has been called 'universalist cosmopolitan patriotism' which was uniquely his and possibly closer to the truth than other doctrines[47]. This use of opposing points of view

43 *Ibid.*, p. 390.
44 See *CWM*, x. 146-51.
45 See Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill*, pp. 166-84.
46 *CWM*, x. 212.
47 G. Varouxakis, *Mill on Nationality*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 126.

enabled Mill to advance what he called in the letter to Sterling (quoted at the beginning of this paper) 'a catholic spirit in philosophy' which he was under 'a special obligation to preach'. One might be puzzled as to how this focus on polarities could generate catholicity or universality in philosophy, but Mill probably meant simply that by appreciating opposing sides of issues, one approaches more closely to a universal perspective than if one sees the world simply from one perspective.

Second, according to Kevin O'Rourke, Coleridge had an important influence on the way Mill saw the issue of freedom of expression, as, for example, in chapter II of *On Liberty*[48]. O'Rourke points out that in the 1820s under the influence of Bentham and James Mill his arguments concerning freedom of expression were conceived mainly politically in terms of using publicity to restrict corruption in government and limiting the scope of libel laws so as to facilitate criticism of the government. Following his encounter with Coleridge, a new dimension entered into his writing in this field, one concerned with truth, individual development, and the toleration of diverse opinions. This shift to a concern for truth connected decisively with Mill's intellectual elitism, which may have developed from Coleridge's idea of the clerisy[49].

Third, Mill developed the idea in *On Liberty* that truth could not be apprehended by the intellect alone and could only be kept alive in connection with deep feelings. Of particular importance was the way that truths ceased to be living truths and could become dead dogmas. Received truths were particularly dangerous. They lulled the mind into a passive acceptance and almost a vacancy of understanding where truth was forgotten and never reconsidered. In some cases, he argued, accepted doctrines remained 'outside the mind, incrusting and petrifying it against all other influences addressed to the higher parts of our nature...'[50]. However true these accepted doctrines might be, they became at best truths passively held and at worst truths which became half-truths, because other considerations were ignored. For these truths to become living truths, it was not sufficient for one's teacher simply to present both sides of an argument. For Mill, the individual:

> ... must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them; who defend them in earnest, and do their very utmost for them. He must know them in their most plausible and persuasive form; he must *feel* the whole force of the difficulty which the true view of the subject has to

48 K.C. O'Rourke, *John Stuart Mill and Freedom of Expression, The genesis of a theory*, London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 42-58.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

50 *CWM*, xviii. 248.

> encounter and dispose of; else he will never really possess himself of the portion of truth which meets and removes that difficulty[51].

In part, Mill was insisting on Epicurean foundations in pleasure and pain and the feelings associated with them. But in part he was referring in this late work to what might be called his Coleridgean foundation, forged in the encounter with Sterling and others in the London Debating Society and developed within his intense friendship with Sterling. It was here that he was able to grasp truths and mature as an individual and philosopher. On many occasions Mill referred to feelings in conjunction with understanding and individuality, and one cannot but recall the significance of his confrontation with this leader of the Coleridgeans and its lasting influence on Mill's philosophy[52].

51 *Ibid.*, p. 245 (italics added).

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