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James Mill’s life falls into four fairly easily defined stages. He was born in Scotland in 1773 and stayed there until 1802. From 1802 to 1808 is his first period in London: he was conventional, rather right-wing, and earned his living as a journalist. The third stage, 1808–1819, is marked by a close friendship with Jeremy Bentham. From 1819 to 1836 Mill had financial independence and security from his post as a civil servant in the East India Company.

His first twenty-nine years in Scotland are important. His father was a shoemaker: his mother was socially ambitious for her son, who was able and rapidly attracted first the friendship and later the patronage of wealthier people. As a result of the kindness of the greatest of these benefactors, Sir John Stuart, James Mill spent seven years at the University of Edinburgh and emerged licensed as a preacher. His course of study covered most of the subjects of the day, including natural science, but its emphasis was on philosophy, especially Greek philosophy, for which the classical language courses were a preliminary. The later training in theology also included philosophy. In this period of Mill’s life the important points to notice are that he had a highly conventional and rather strict upbringing of the kind which in a later age was characterised as Victorian respectability. Second, there is the stress in his university education on Greek philosophy. There is abundant evidence in Mill’s Commonplace Book of the debt which he felt he owed to the Greek philosophers. And his education of his son placed a knowledge of the classical languages and of Greek philosophy as the
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basis of a sound education. Third, it should be noted that Mill’s first, albeit brief, career was as a preacher. He was not at this time the agnostic he was later to become.

During his first six years in London there is no evidence of radical opinion or of unconventional beliefs. He joined a corps of defence volunteers to defend the country against Napoleon’s projected invasion. He contributed to the Literary Journal and edited the St. James Chronicle. He married Harriet Burrow in 1805, and in 1806 the first of nine children was born and christened John Stuart Mill after his father’s Scottish benefactor. Mill then gave up a good income from journalism in order to embark on a life of scholarship, and write the History of British India. This task, which he thought would take three years, in fact took eleven, and made these eleven years of his life a period of financial penury.

The year 1808 is therefore important for this reason, and even more important for the development of Mill’s thought, for it is in this year that he met Jeremy Bentham. Their friendship rapidly became close and Mill and his growing family spent several months of each summer with Bentham in the country—during the four years 1814–18 at Ford Abbey in Somerset. Mill also became a tenant and next-door neighbour of Bentham’s in Queen’s Square Place (now Queen Anne’s Gate), Westminster. Early in their friendship Mill became an uncompromising advocate of political utilitarianism, demanding that all governments should be judged by the test of ‘utility’—whether they promoted the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people, and a succession of articles in the Edinburgh Review between 1808 and 1813 bore witness to his
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conversion. All this time, however, he was working on his *History of British India*: this was completed in 1817, published, and by the reputation he thus gained, and by the assiduous efforts of his friends, he was appointed an examiner in the East India Office, in 1819, at a salary of £800 a year. His financial anxieties were over.

From 1819 to the end of his life in 1836, Mill rose progressively in the East India Office, becoming its head in 1830. The work was not very onerous, and it is in this period that Mill wrote his major works—the *Analysis of the Human Mind* commenced in 1822 and published in 1828, and the *Fragment on Mackintosh*, a book of some 400 pages defending his moral philosophy, published in 1835. He also published articles throughout this period on such subjects as the state of the nation, the ballot, reform of the church, and the aristocracy—all these indicate his continuing interest in the current political scene. The two major works are philosophical but his interest in the philosophy of utilitarianism really started earlier, in 1815, when he was engaged in writing the article *Education* for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. This and other articles for the *Encyclopedia* were subsequently published as a collection of essays on different aspects of utilitarian thought, and became the basis of much earnest discussion among radically minded people. The article on education is the first of the two essays reprinted in this volume.

During his life Mill showed a practical interest in education at three major points. First, he was an early advocate of the monitorial system of teaching by which a master taught the older boys and they in turn taught the rest in small and homogeneous groups of ten or so.
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Second, following his wide definition of ‘education’ as meaning total environmental influence, he took sole charge of the education of his eldest son John Stuart Mill and controlled his whole environment and curriculum of study. James Mill’s belief in the educational value of the monitorial system is illustrated by the fact that he used it progressively for the education of his own children. Third, he was concerned in the founding of University College, London, and as a member of its council was active in its affairs during its early years. Of all these activities the one which involved most public controversy was the first. Mill advocated non-sectarian schools: the Church of England retaliated by demanding church control of education. Mill set forth his views in characteristically pungent language in an article in the Philanthropist in 1812. This article was subsequently published as a pamphlet entitled Schools for All, in preference to Schools for Churchmen only, and this is the second work reprinted in this volume.

‘An article in an Encyclopedia’ wrote Mill to his friend Ricardo, ‘should be to a certain degree didactic, and also elementary—as being to be consulted by the ignorant as well as the knowing; but the matter that has been often explained, may be passed over very shortly, to leave more space for that which is less commonly known. As for space, you should take much or little, just as the matter requires.’¹ As we read through the essay Education, our first reflection might be that very long passages are devoted to factors affecting physical health, and that these would hardly be thought to require that degree of emphasis and length of treatment

¹ Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo, ed. P. Sraffa (Cambridge, 1955), no. 325, Mill to Ricardo, 11 September 1819.
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today. Their significance is not so much what they say, as that it was thought necessary to say it as ‘that which is less commonly known’. They are a commentary on the poverty and neglect of the age.

The modern reader will concentrate on the philosophical aspects of the essay, and he will find here a model of what a theory of education should be, whether or not he agrees with Mill’s particular conclusions. For any theory should make explicit two main problems. First it should state an aim or purpose and perhaps say why that aim should be preferable to alternatives. Second it has to concern itself with the nature of the pupil and his abilities, and with the learning process. The first of these is a problem of moral philosophy, since it is concerned with what ought to be, or what is desirable. The second is a problem of psychology—of examining the nature of the pupil or, as Mill put it, the ‘phenomena of the human mind’. Mill’s essay deals with both these matters clearly and incisively, but he adds a new field of enquiry with his very wide definition of education as ‘everything which affects those qualities of mind on which happiness depends, from the first germ of existence to the final extinction of life’. He thus regarded education as much more than formal schooling, and on this basis developed his concepts of social and political education, or the educative influence of society and the state respectively on the individual members of the community.

Mill’s statement of the aims of education is in the very first sentence of the essay: it is to ‘render the individual, as much as possible, an instrument of happiness, first to himself, and next to other beings’. Later, in section II, he lists the qualities of mind on which happiness depends as intelligence, temperance, justice
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and generosity. Here we have the familiar utilitarian aim and criterion of conduct—that actions are right in so far as they promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. This is the moral ideal and it therefore follows that education should equip people to attain it.

If we look carefully at the sentence in which Mill defines the aim of education, we shall find not one but two aims: the individual must first be educated to find his own happiness, as well as to bring happiness to others. This statement we may find in itself unexceptionable, until we reflect on its major implication which is that neither pursuit comes naturally and education is needed for both. And this is particularly important when we put the first aim—education for personal happiness—alongside James Mill's strong belief in psychological hedonism—that man always and inevitably seeks his own pleasure. 'Pleasure,' he wrote, 'is the end, and generally speaking, the only end'\(^1\) of all human behaviour. If this is so, why does man need education to achieve it? An obvious answer to this, that Mill meant by 'happiness' something different from 'pleasure' can hardly be supported by the evidence. Although in section III of the essay Mill argues that we do not yet know 'wherein human happiness consists', and although he repeats this assertion in the Fragment on Mackintosh\(^2\), he often uses the two terms synonymously, and the weight of the evidence, in all his public and private writing, is certainly that he regarded them as interchangeable. Certainly if 'happiness' had a special meaning, distinct from 'pleasure', it would be essential to the utilitarian doctrine to define and expound it.

\(^{1}\) Fragment on Mackintosh (1870 edn.), p. 360.
\(^{2}\) Ibid. Appendix A, p. 394.
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This being so, it is important to look closely, when examining Mill’s doctrine of education for personal happiness, at what he has to say about ‘pleasure’. Pleasure is defined as the ‘object of desire’ and desire is defined as ‘the idea of a pleasure’.¹ It is therefore not possible to sustain the obvious objection that we sometimes desire things for other reasons than pleasure, for on Mill’s definition this is impossible—‘pleasure’ is a generic term. In our language ‘satisfaction’ of desire would perhaps be a better equivalent. If this is accepted, we can explain a central point in Mill’s argument, namely that we should not merely seek personal pleasure, but that it is our duty to maximise it. As it stands this seems absurd, for I can hardly be held to be failing in my duty if I do not attain the greatest personal pleasure. But Mill’s comments in Education (p. 63, below) are quite clear: ‘If [a man] has any appetite in his nature which leads him to pursue certain things with which the most effectual pursuit of happiness is inconsistent . . . evil is incurred. A perfect command, then, over a man’s appetites and desires . . . which . . . enables him to pursue constantly what he deliberately approves, is indispensably requisite to enable him to produce the greatest possible quantity of happiness.’ And there is other evidence to the same effect. To Francis Place, concerned about the education of his daughter, he wrote: ‘Above all think of her happiness solely, without one jot of passion being allowed to step into the scale.² This is a curious adjuration to a fond parent: it can only be explained, as can the passage in Education, on the basis that not merely pleasure, of any kind, should be pursued, or

¹ Analysis of the Human Mind (2nd edn., 1878), II, 192.
² B. M. Addn. MSS. 35,152, Mill to Place, 22 September 1816.
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that every ‘desire and appetite’ should be gratified, but that maximum pleasure should be sought. And his son, writing of his father, confirms this: ‘Temperance, in the large sense intended by the Greek philosophers, was with him . . . almost the central point of educational precept.’¹ This again is a counsel against seeking every pleasure—most pleasures, his son wrote, he thought were ‘overvalued’: what was needed was to maximise pleasure. It is clear that we have to take this point seriously.

It is much more arguable, and much more reasonable if we look at the problem from the point of view of desires and satisfactions. What Mill is then advocating is that we should cultivate the highest kind of desires because we should find in the end that these yield the greatest satisfaction or pleasure. To do this we need the quality of temperance or self-control over our appetites and various fleeting desires, so that we pursue only what we ‘deliberately approve’. So far the argument is at least plausible but it raises another difficulty. As Mill himself pointed out, in an unpublished dialogue in his Commonplace Book,² if we talk of higher forms of pleasure, of different qualities of desire, we are ‘taking a different ground for our approbation’ than merely pleasure, simple and unqualified. Does not this invalidate the utilitarian ideal that pleasure or happiness, simple and unqualified, is the only test of goodness?

What Mill concluded was that the cultivation of the highest desires would yield the greatest satisfaction—in his language, the greatest quantity of pleasure: therefore there was no need for any other criterion of the good

² Dialogue on Drama, in Commonplace Book, vol. IV.
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than pleasure, providing it was maximised. His first aim in education thus was not merely personal pleasure, but maximum personal pleasure, an aim to be achieved by cultivating the power of self-denial, so that pursuit of passing pleasures should not deflect us from the more satisfying long-term pleasures. It is a self-realisation theory of ethics: we cultivate the highest parts of our nature, because, in the end, they are the most satisfying. A remark in the Essay on Government shows the true line of Mill’s thought, when he speaks of ‘the middling rank’ exemplifying ‘all that has most exalted and refined human nature’.¹

We may now turn to the second more familiar part of the utilitarian ideal—the promotion of the general happiness—in the light of this discussion. Since Mill identifies his aim in education with his general moral ideal for conduct, there are one or two points which need to be noticed about it as a statement of an ideal. The first is, does he mean by ‘pleasure’ the same thing when he speaks of our giving it to others, as he meant when speaking of our personal pleasure. Should we give to others the higher forms of pleasure (which he would call the greatest quantity of pleasure) or should we give them what they want, which might not be what was best for them? On the other hand, there is little doubt that Mill was an individualist, and as such would hold that each person must be the final judge of where his or her own happiness lay. He seems to have resolved the conflict in his own mind by his faith that the example of the ‘middling ranks’ would be followed—a faith which might strike us as far-fetched, but it was not unjustified in the England of his time. G. M. Young has written: ‘The Evangelicals gave the island

a creed which was at once the basis of its morality and the justification of its wealth and power . . . By about 1830 their work was done . . . They had established a certain level of behaviour for all who wished to stand well with their fellows. In moralizing society, they had made social disapproval a force which the boldest sinner might fear.\textsuperscript{1} James Mill was not an Evangelical, but his early upbringing and his ascetic tastes had made him fit well into the cult of Victorian respectability. And his faith in the educative power of the ‘middling ranks’ was more a shrewd observation of what happened in his own day, than a faith.

A second question to ask about the utilitarian ideal concerns the principle of equality which it apparently includes. The test of good conduct is not merely that it should promote the general happiness, but that such happiness should be equally distributed, ‘everyone to count for one and none for more than one’. It is difficult to maintain that this is not an additional principle: one can imagine situations in which the total general happiness was not increased if equal distribution of pleasure is insisted upon. Yet if it is conceded that equality is an extraneous principle, the utilitarians cannot claim, as they do, that the greatest happiness is the sole test of goodness.

Finally there is the question whether the motives from which we act are important or relevant in assessing the moral quality of our actions. Since utilitarianism maintains that actions are right if they produce the greatest happiness, it appears to follow that it is the \textit{results} or consequences of actions which are important: so long as these consequences are beneficial the motive which prompts the action is irrelevant. Mill does not

\textsuperscript{1} \textit{Early Victorian England}, ed. G. M. Young, II, p. 416.