

On Liberty  
John Stuart Mill

---

edited by  
Edward Alexander





# On Liberty

*John Stuart Mill*

This One



ZHS7-AQP-2X33 copyrighted material



# On Liberty

*John Stuart Mill*

Edited by

**Edward Alexander**



broadview literary texts

©1999 E. Alexander

All rights reserved. The use of any part of this publication reproduced, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, or stored in a retrieval system, without prior written consent of the publisher—or in the case of photocopying, a licence from CANCOPY (Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency) 6 Adelaide Street East, Suite 900, Toronto, Ontario M5C 1H6—is an infringement of the copyright law.

### Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Mill, John Stuart, 1806–1873.

On liberty

(Broadview literary texts)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-55111-199-3

1. Liberty. I. Alexander, Edward, 1936– II. Title. III. Series.  
JC585.M6 1999                      323.44                      C99-910132-3

Broadview Press

Post Office Box 1243, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada K9J 7H5

in the United States of America:

3576 California Road, Orchard Park, NY 14127

in the United Kingdom:

B.R.A.D. Book Representation & Distribution Ltd.,  
244A, London Road, Hadleigh, Essex SS7 2DE

Broadview Press gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Ministry of Canadian Heritage.

Pre-Press Production:

Jeremy Drought, Last Impression Publishing Service, Calgary, Alberta

Cover:

*Shad fishing in the Jesus Rapids, Back River (Rivière des Prairies), Montreal, c1865.*  
William Notman.

PRINTED IN CANADA

# Contents

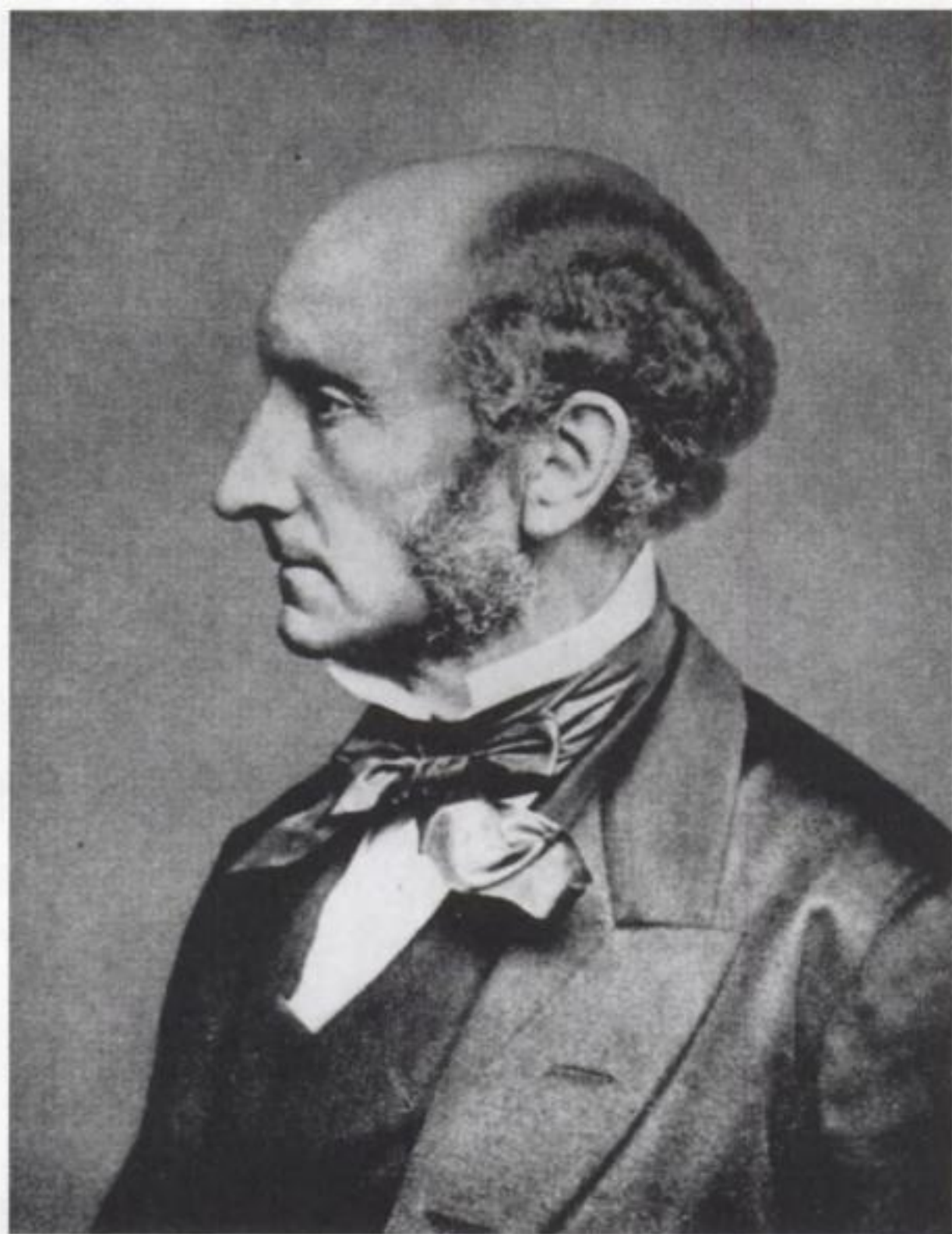
<u>Acknowledgements .....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>John Stuart Mill: A Brief Chronology .....</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>Introduction .....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>A Note on the Text .....</u>	<u>39</u>
<u><i>On Liberty</i> .....</u>	<u>41</u>
<b><u>Appendix A:</u></b>	
<u>Preludes to <i>On Liberty</i></u>	
<u>1. Alexis de Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> .....</u>	<u>167</u>
<u>2. Early Essays and Letters by Mill .....</u>	<u>170</u>
<b><u>Appendix B:</u></b>	
<u>Comments by Mill about <i>On Liberty</i> .....</u>	<u>177</u>
<b><u>Appendix C:</u></b>	
<u>Comments by Contemporaries about <i>On Liberty</i> and Mill</u>	
<u>1. Caroline Fox .....</u>	<u>183</u>
<u>2. Thomas Carlyle .....</u>	<u>184</u>
<u>3. Thomas Hardy .....</u>	<u>184</u>
<u>4. John Ruskin .....</u>	<u>185</u>
<u>5. Matthew Arnold .....</u>	<u>186</u>
<u>6. George Eliot .....</u>	<u>188</u>
<b><u>Appendix D:</u></b>	
<u>Contemporary Reviews and Critiques</u>	
<u>1. <i>Athenaeum</i> .....</u>	<u>189</u>
<u>2. <i>Saturday Review</i> .....</u>	<u>191</u>
<u>3. Thomas Arnold, Jr., <i>The Rambler</i> .....</u>	<u>194</u>
<u>4. <i>British Quarterly Review</i> .....</u>	<u>204</u>

5. R. W. Church, <i>Bentley's Quarterly Review</i> .....	220
6. James Fitzjames Stephen, <i>Liberty, Equality, Fraternity</i> .....	239
7. John Morley, <i>Fortnightly Review</i> .....	260
8. Charles de Rémusat, <i>Revue des Deux Mondes</i> .....	279
9. Alexander Herzen, <i>My Past and Thoughts</i> .....	283
10. Constantine N. Leontyev, "The Average European ... " .....	288
11. [A. T. Bledsoe] <i>Southern Review</i> .....	290
Select Bibliography .....	292



# Acknowledgements

I AM GRATEFUL to the University of Toronto Press, holder of the copyright, for permission to reproduce the text of *On Liberty* edited by the late Professor John M. Robson, and for permission to reproduce some of his notes. I would also like to thank Professor Jack Stillinger for permission to use some of the notes in his Riverside edition (1969) of *On Liberty*, published by Houghton Mifflin. For help and suggestions of various kinds, I am indebted to the following: Leon Bensadon, Courtney Chessner, Jennifer Holberg, Raymond Jonas, Hillel J. Kieval, Willis Konick, Kathy Mork, Bernard Saffran, Rob Weller, Helene Williams, and Ruth R. Wisse.



*John Stuart Mill*

# John Stuart Mill:

## A Brief Chronology

- 1806 Born 20 May in London, the eldest son of James and Harriet Mill. Eight sisters and brothers born between 1808 and 1825.
- 1809 Beginning of intensive education at home, which continues until his visit to France in 1820.
- 1820–21 Year in France, in the household of Sir Samuel Bentham.
- 1821 Studies the work of Bentham; the principle of utility becomes his “religion.”
- 1822 Studies law with John Austin. First publication: two letters in a newspaper.
- 1823 Forms Utilitarian Society, lasting until 1826. Begins career with East India Company as a clerk in the office of the Examiner of India Correspondence. Arrested for distributing birth-control tracts.
- 1824 Founding of *Westminster Review*, for which he wrote until 1828.
- 1825 Begins editing Jeremy Bentham’s *Rationale of Judicial Evidence*, published 1827. Helps found London Debating Society.

- 1826 Mental crisis.
- 1830 Meets and soon falls in love with Harriet Hardy Taylor, wife of John Taylor. Visits Paris during the Revolution, and starts to write extensively on French political affairs.
- 1831 Publishes a series of articles on "The Spirit of the Age" in the *Examiner*. Meets Carlyle.
- 1832 Death of Jeremy Bentham. Passage of first Reform Bill.
- 1835 Finds and edits the *London Review*, which continues (after first year) as *London and Westminster Review* until 1840. Accidentally destroys first volume of Carlyle's *French Revolution*.
- 1836 Death of father, James Mill. Several months of severe illness.
- 1838 Publishes "Bentham" in *London and Westminster Review*.
- 1840 Publishes "Coleridge" in *London and Westminster Review*.
- 1843 Publishes *A System of Logic* (eight editions in his lifetime).
- 1844 Publishes *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*.
- 1848 Publishes *Principles of Political Economy* (seven editions in his lifetime).
- 1851 Marries Harriet Taylor, whose husband John had died in 1849. Begins to sever links with his own family.

- 1854 From December until June 1855, on extended holiday for reasons of health in Italy and Greece.
- 1856 Becomes Chief Examiner of India Correspondence in East India Company, as his father had once been.
- 1858 Retires from East India Company when it is taken over by the Crown. Harriet Taylor Mill dies in Avignon, where Mill will subsequently spend half of each year.
- 1859 Publishes *On Liberty, Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform, and Dissertations and Discussions*, volumes I and II.
- 1861 Publishes *Considerations on Representative Government and Utilitarianism* (in *Fraser's Magazine*, and then as a book in 1863).
- 1862 Visits Greece with Helen Taylor.
- 1865 Elected as Member of Parliament for Westminster, and serves until defeat in 1868. Publishes *Auguste Comte and Positivism* and *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*.
- 1866 Secures freedom of speech in Hyde Park.
- 1867 Publishes *Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrew's* (Scotland), of which he had been elected Rector in 1866, and *Dissertations and Discussions*, volume III. Passage of second Reform Bill, which Mill had tried to amend to allow for women's suffrage and proportional representation. Tries to prosecute Governor Eyre of Jamaica for murder.
- 1868 Publishes *England and Ireland*.

- 1869 Publishes *The Subjection of Women* and a new edition of James Mill's *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*.
- 1870 Publishes *Chapters and Speeches on the Irish Land Question* (reprinted from *Principles of Political Economy* and *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*).
- 1873 Dies on 7 May in Avignon.

Posthumous publications, all edited by his stepdaughter, Helen Taylor:

- 1873 *Autobiography*.
- 1874 *Three Essays on Religion*.
- 1875 *Dissertations and Discussions*, volume IV.
- 1879 *Chapters on Socialism*.

# Introduction

“How the sweet, ingenuous nature of the man has lived and thriven out of his father’s cold and stringent atheism is wonderful to think, and most so to me, who during fifteen years have seen his gradual growth and ripening.”

John Sterling (letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 7 October 1843)<sup>1</sup>

**J**OHN STUART MILL was one of the most ardent feminists of the Victorian era. Yet one searches his autobiography in vain for a single mention of his mother, Harriet Mill. She did appear in Mill’s early draft of the book, but Mill—ever deferential to the instructions of his wife (also, as Freudians have noted with glee, Harriet Mill)—deleted all references to her. Among the cancelled passages, perhaps the one most revealing of the emotional tone that prevailed in the Mill family, of the predominance of fear over love, is the following: “I believe there is less personal affection in England than in any other country of which I know anything, & I give my father’s family not as peculiar in this respect but only as a too faithful exemplification of the ordinary fact. That rarity in England, a really warm hearted mother, would in the first place have made the children grow up loving & being loved. But my mother with the very best intentions, only knew how to pass her life in drudging for them...but to make herself loved, looked up to, or even obeyed, required qualities which she unfortunately did not possess. I thus grew up in the absence of love & in the presence of fear: & many & indelible are the effects of this bringing-up, in the stunting of my moral growth.”<sup>2</sup>

The dominant figure in Mill’s childhood and early education was his father, James Mill, radical political reformer, historian of British India, associationist psychologist, theorist of education. The elder Mill presented

his theory of education in an article that appeared in the supplement to the fifth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In it he argued that education is essentially the skillful manipulation of sequences of thoughts or impressions. Since all differences between individuals and classes of men result from differences of education, education is the sovereign remedy for individual or class inferiority, and the means for raising the whole human race to the level of its noblest individuals. "What a field for exertion!" exclaimed Mill. "What a prize to be won!" To apply the science of education to the perfection of human life, one must decide what are the objects of human desire, select the morally best means of attaining them, and "accustom the mind to fill up the intermediate space between the present sensation and the ultimate object, with nothing but the idea of those beneficent means." Since sequences of impressions begin to occur as soon as a child is born, it becomes extremely important to begin the child's education while he is still in the cradle.<sup>3</sup>

James Mill decided to practice what he preached in the education of his first son, John Stuart, who was born on May 20, 1806, in London. He assumed exclusive charge of John's education from the beginning, and brought him up in isolation from other children and from adults who were not certified radicals, for sound education had to be in conflict with custom and communal traditions. Little John Stuart was also kept out of schools, which, his father believed, tended generally to reenforce the influence of a vicious and ignorant society. When opportunities arose in 1821 and 1823 for John to go to Cambridge, James Mill told the interested parties that his son already knew more than he could ever be taught at Cambridge. When John went abroad to France in 1820, he was put in custody of the brother of Jeremy Bentham, chief theorist of the radical movement; during the year there he became fluent in French.

It is no exaggeration to say that John Stuart Mill was brought up as the secret weapon (or, in Carlyle's jaundiced view, the "son of a demonstration") of the radical movement in England, a carefully nurtured prodigy from whom great things were expected (and from whom, after all, some great things did come). Just how closely the Benthamites guarded their special



prodigy is suggested by a letter from Bentham to James Mill in 1812, when John was six. Hearing that James Mill was ill, Bentham, fearing the worst, offered his services in the education of the budding social reformer in case Mill did not live to complete the task:

If you will appoint me guardian to Mr. John Stuart Mill, I will, in the event of his father's being disposed of elsewhere...by whipping or otherwise, do whatsoever may seem most necessary and proper, for teaching him to make all proper distinctions, as between the Devil and the Holy Ghost, and how to make Codes and Encyclopedias, and whatsoever else may be proper to be made, so long as I remain an inhabitant of this vale of tears.<sup>4</sup>

Mill claimed that he wrote his autobiography primarily to provide a record of "an education which was unusual and remarkable and which...has proved how much more than is commonly supposed may be taught, and well taught, in those early years which, in the common modes of what is called instruction, are little better than wasted." Although prior to 1819 (when he obtained an appointment in the India House) James Mill had no means of support except writing, he would always find time—perhaps more than any parent ever has—for the instruction of his son. "I have no remembrance of the time when I began to learn Greek. I have been told that it was when I was three years old. My earliest recollection on the subject, is that of committing to memory what my father termed *Vocables*, being lists of common Greek words, with their signification in English, which he wrote out for me on cards...I learnt no Latin until my eighth year. At that time I had read, under my father's tuition, a number of Greek prose authors, among whom I remember the whole of Herodotus, and of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and *Memorials of Socrates*; some of the lives of the philosophers by Diogenes Laertius; part of Lucian, and Isocrates ad *Demonicum* and ad *Nicoclem*. I also read, in 1813, the first six dialogues...of Plato, from the *Euthyphron* to the *Theaetetus* inclusive: which last dialogue, I venture to think, would have been better omitted,

as it was totally impossible I should understand it." To this (somewhat humorless) recollection, Mill adds the highly revealing detail that since in those days Greek-English lexicons did not exist and, not having yet learned Latin, he could not make use of a Greek-Latin lexicon, he had to pester his father for the meaning of every single word he did not know. "This incessant interruption he, one of the most impatient of men, submitted to, and wrote under that interruption several volumes of his History and all else that he had to write during those years."<sup>5</sup>

Mill had no toys or children's books, apart from an occasional gift from a naive relative or acquaintance. Although his father did not consciously exclude such things from his son's childhood, it never occurred to him that they had any utility. This may explain why this highly unusual education has sometimes been thought the real-life model for Thomas Gradgrind's regimen of "fact" in Dickens' *Hard Times*, and for its disastrous effect on Gradgrind's daughter Louisa especially. Since *Hard Times* was published in 1854, Dickens could not have read Mill's autobiographical recollections before writing his novel, but he might have heard something of the extraordinary tale from Carlyle, the formidable gossip and onetime friend of Mill's to whom *Hard Times* is dedicated. In any case, the rigorous intellectual instruction that John Stuart received from his father was, whatever its shortcomings, very far from the anti-literary education of "fact" and cramming that Dickens contrives in his novel. Indeed, James Mill greatly preferred theory to fact; and his son read a great deal of poetry.

One aspect of Mill's unusual education worth keeping in mind when reading *On Liberty* is what his father taught him about religion. Although he had begun adult life as a Presbyterian clergyman, James Mill had long since rejected the doctrines of not only the Scottish, but of all churches. Indeed, he considered it his duty to inculcate in his son the conviction that Christianity was not merely false but was the epitome of wickedness. "Think (he used to say) of a being who would make a Hell—who would create the human race with the infallible foreknowledge, and therefore with the intention, that the great majority of them were to be consigned to horrible and everlasting torment." As a result of this training in anti-

religion, John Mill became one of the very few Victorians who did not have the experience of losing, or of throwing off, religious belief because he never had it and was brought up in a wholly negative state with regard to it.

In 1823, when he was seventeen, Mill began his career with the East India Company as a clerk in the office of the Examiner of India Correspondence, where he wrote dispatches and made policy for the Princely States. When his father was promoted to second place in the Examiner's office of India House, his vacated post was conferred by the court of directors upon his son, "on a footing," wrote James Mill, "on which he will in all probability be in the receipt of a larger income at an early age than he would be in any profession."<sup>6</sup> The young Mill did not in fact receive a great deal of money (an annual gratuity of thirty pounds), but he had material security for life at a remarkably early age. True, he had to work under the eye and order of his father, but only for six hours a day, not very much by Millite standards of diligence and application.

In 1824 James Mill, having decided that England needed a third political party, a radical one, founded the *Westminster Review* to promote the radical program, and his son became an eager and prolific contributor. For the first eighteen numbers of the new quarterly, John Stuart supplied thirteen articles, more than any other contributor. He was a most able expounder of the principles of Benthamism, which was for him the secular substitute for the religious belief his father had denounced. Indeed, religious language permeates his account of how, after his first reading of Bentham's *magnum opus*, the *Traité de Législation*, the great principle of utility had unified all he had formerly thought and known, and given him "a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; in one among the best senses of the word, a religion; the inculcation and diffusion of which could be made the principal outward purpose of a life."<sup>7</sup> (Later, when he departed from Benthamite orthodoxy, Mill had a strong sense of having apostatized. David Masson recalls how, in 1843, Mill, while discussing Bentham's remaining disciples, suddenly remarked: "And I am Peter, who denied his master."<sup>8</sup>)

But Benthamism, like many another Victorian attempt to find a secular substitute for values that the religious tradition could no longer sustain,

failed Mill in his time of crisis. This came in the autumn of 1826, when Mill, at age twenty, in “a dull state of nerves...one of those moods when what is pleasure at other times, becomes insipid or indifferent,” awoke from the dream that dedication to the Benthamite goal of the greatest happiness for the greatest number would also make *him* happy. This crisis in his mental history was the defining moment of Mill’s life; and his account of it in the fifth chapter of his autobiography affords a rare Victorian instance of a radical telling the truth about the personal failure of his political system:

...[I]t occurred to me to put the question directly to myself, “Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?” And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, “No!” At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for.<sup>9</sup>

Mill goes on to affix blame for his crisis on the associationist psychology of his father’s educational regimen: “My education, which was wholly his work, had been conducted without any regard to the possibility of its ending in this result.” The rescue from suicidal despair came from Mill’s accidental reading of Marmontel’s *Memoirs*, in which the French writer relates his father’s death, the distressed position of his family, “and the sudden inspiration by which he, then a mere boy, felt and made them feel that he would be everything to them—would supply the place of all that they had lost.”<sup>10</sup> Mill was moved to tears by Marmontel’s account; and from that moment forward his burden grew lighter. Mill does not comment on what nowadays would be called the “Freudian” implication of this episode, the