

John Stuart Mill, the *Autobiography*, and the Paradox of Happiness

Linda Austin

John Stuart Mill's posthumously published *Autobiography* (1873) is a notoriously guarded document, particularly for those who have read it in the *Collected Works*, which juxtaposes the final version with the draft of 1853-54. The comparison reveals that Mill cancelled passages and words that added emotional coloring to his account of his relationship with his father. Following his revisions reveals, as his editors have observed, an increasing detachment, particularly from his early life.¹ And yet the structure of the *Autobiography* hinges on the discovery of emotion, which occurs in Chapter Five, "A Crisis in My Mental History. One Stage Onward." In it, Mill stages the beginning of his famous personal crisis with a question that he asked himself sometime in 1826, when he was 20 years old. "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?" (1:139).² His negative response marks the point at which he turns from the analytical habits developed under the tutelage of his father, James Mill, to the development of his own emotions. Mill's question suggests that happiness or joy (a telling equation I will pursue) has a newly privileged place in his thoughts, even though happiness—specifically the greatest happiness for the greatest number—was the operating motive and principle of the Utilitarian philosophy from which his question marks a break.

Indeed happiness occupies an ambivalent position not only in Mill's work, but among the primary emotions (anger, sorrow, surprise, shame). It belongs both to the internal and to the external: it can indicate either a self-aware "feeling" (as either idealist or materialist psychologists of Mill's era would have defined this word) or the subject's unacknowledged and uncontrollable situation—the happiness of fortune or misfortune. One can be self-consciously happy, or one can inhabit the ontological state of happiness without being particularly aware of doing so. The alternatives are antithetical, for happiness is the only one of the main emotions in which self-consciousness threatens the duration and intensity of the feeling, as well as the unreflective ease of good fortune. Mill would have known this from reading Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34), which he acknowledged "as one of the channels through which I received the influences which enlarged my early narrow creed" (1:181). In the chapter entitled "Everlasting No," Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, Carlyle's Wertherian hero, comes to view happiness as self-sabotaging emotion because it is self-conscious. "If what thou namest Happiness be our true aim, then are we all astray."³ His "Everlasting No," although a rejection of despair, is not an embrace of the concept of happiness but rather, an affirmation of an ancient prohibition against the emotion of happiness.⁴ It goes back at least to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, which ends with the chorus admonishing, "Count no moral happy till/ He has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain" (1529-30) and reappears in Mill's time in Thomas Hardy's early poem "Hap" (wr.1866), where it represents cosmic randomness and human powerlessness.⁵ The idea of "happiness" as a conscious emotion thus tempts "hap": in *Oedipus*, one cannot speak safely of his or her own happiness—without undermining it—until one is dead.

Mill understands this virtual prohibition of happiness when he refers to the "anti-selfconsciousness theory" of Carlyle (1:145). Like Teufelsdröckh's, Mill's "No!" suggests a discomfort with the self-reflection required to ponder one's own emotional state, for the negative response in the *Autobiography* comes, oddly, from an "irrepressible self-consciousness"

(1:139), an abstract formulation that instantly nullifies self-conscious happiness and in doing so re-enacts the old prohibition. In the context of the *Autobiography*, moreover, the question-and-answer presents a converse of Carlyle's attitude. Whereas in *Sartor Resartus*, Teufelsdröckh is unhappy—heartbroken—until he realizes that he has no right to happiness, Mill in the *Autobiography* realizes he is unhappy by asking a question that assumes his right to happiness. Unlike Teufelsdröckh, Mill never denies the importance of happiness, even though he declares that he accepts the “anti-selfconsciousness” theory that effectively erases it as an emotion. Happiness remains a conceptual problem for us, then, and an acute paradox for Mill. It belongs to antagonistic philosophies: it was a preoccupation of both the Utilitarian creed from which he distanced himself in Chapter Five and the Romantic values to which he turned—through the same question and answer. And although it carries an ancient curse, happiness is an emotion he will not abandon despite the prohibition Carlyle had renewed, for in the *Autobiography*, a text notorious for its lack of feeling, it is the one emotion that depends on self-consciousness and that carries, therefore, the code of humanness.

Any discussion of Mill and happiness entails two other subjects: one is the fear of the machine or the automatic; the other is, of course, happiness's opposite—unhappiness or, in Mill's case, depression. They are entwined: depression is represented as automatic behavior. Mill uses the word “automaton” in his draft of *On Liberty* (1859): those who react from “custom,” or “habit” are not organisms, but “machinery,” “automatons in human form” (18:263). The paradox of the “human automaton” also informs Mill's depiction of the first phase of his depression in the early draft of the *Autobiography*, during which he describes himself as operating like a machine. “I went on [with my usual occupations] mechanically, by the mere force of habit. I had been so drilled in a certain sort of mental exercise, that I could still carry it on when all the spirit had gone out of it” (1:143). In this light, the deep motive of his question occurs suddenly in the early draft, lies in a long-standing suspicion that he lacks emotive capacity.⁶ Following the associationists and empirical philosophers of the period, Mill equated emotion with sensation: in *An Examination of William Hamilton's Philosophy* (1865), he defined emotion as a “series of feelings” (9:194). This equation is apparent in a sentence from the early draft of the *Autobiography*, in which he comments that his father regarded him as “a person who had not the organs of sense” (1:609). Mill later deleted this remark, but he embedded it in his description of depression as a state without feeling. In depicting himself without one faculty, Mill forfeits his capacity for the other; his slide into an affectless state seems not just plausible, but consistent with his father's judgment. Overlooking the obvious fact that to feel depressed involves feeling, Mill depicts his state as a lapse into the automatic: it is characterized by emotional numbness based on the absence of neuro-muscular vitality. Without sensation and physical expression, Mill had no emotion. Although he expresses this obliquely in the first few chapters, the most acute version of the notion comes to him from a friend, John Sterling, who remarked that he seemed to acquaintances “a ‘made’ or manufactured man, having had a *certain* impress stamped” upon him that he could “*only* reproduce[my emphasis]” (1:163). Sterling's words “certain” and “only” imply that Mill lacks a sufficiently developed “discursive faculty,” and that his “impress” is tied to a specific source or stimulus. Significantly, Sterling does not call Mill a machine, but Mill himself uses this word in relation to the Benthamites (1: 111]) and, by extension, to his own education: described in the first chapter of his *Autobiography*, it centered on memorizing and reproducing arguments, then analyzing and redacting them. In the gravest period of his breakdown, then, Mill conflates these exercises with his later mechanical actions during his depression. In the latter instances, he functions without the impetus of immediate reward or punishment. His actions have dwindled into those of an automaton, a being driven not by

drilling but by habit, habit marking the most efficient functioning of artificial memory. Thus Mill's characterization of the first phase of his crisis as a state of automatism, of memory so ingrained it has become physiological, suggests the extent to which Sterling's comment had framed his later understanding not only of his breakdown, but of his training, temperament, and customary self.

In treating the concept of happiness, Mill had no exclusively eudaemonist philosophies from which to choose. Like many of his contemporaries writing on the operations of the mind, he reduced the emotion happiness to pleasure or enjoyment: he generally treated it not as an idea or a prolonged condition of ease and freedom from pain (following its ancient meaning), but as a local response to specific stimuli that diminished with repetition. "I am conscious in myself of a series of facts connected by an [sic] uniform sequence," he writes in *An Examination*, "of which the beginning is modifications of my body, the middle is feelings, the end is outward demeanour." Although there is no direct sensory evidence of the middle, or "Intermediate link," he declares:

In my own case I know that the first link produces the last through the intermediate link, and could not produce it without. Experience, therefore, obliges me to conclude that there must be an intermediate link, which must either be the same in others as in myself. . . . I must either believe them to be alive, or to be automatons . . . (9:191)

Only the connection between neuro-muscular excitement and outward demeanor—between the physiological and the physical—verifies the existence of emotions. Calling the feelings "passive susceptibilities," as he does in *Autobiography* (1:147) shifts Mill's understanding closer to an idealist theory. Compare both passages with William James's overtly materialist explanation: emotion occurs as a result of expression. We "feel sorry *because* we cry, angry because we strike . . . and not *that* we cry strike, or tremble [my emphases]." ⁷ James's theory of causality effectively eliminates the "intermediate link," the ideational limbo between the neurological and the mental in which Mill and contemporaries such as William Hamilton had placed "feelings." Emotions become a neurological *affect* of the physical.

So although Mill in practice conflated emotions with sensations, his reasons for clinging to an idealist understanding of emotion, at least in theory, become clear in the *Autobiography*. If affects were sensational or, more precisely, neuro-muscular, no emotion could be sustained. This bothered Mill in his vulnerable condition; and in this passage about music, he treats enjoyment as a sensation that diminishes with each successive exercise of the activity that first stimulated it:

The good [of music] . . . was much impaired by the thought that the pleasure of music (as is quite true of such pleasure as this was, that of mere tune) fades with familiarity, and requires either to be revived by intermittence, or fed by continual novelty. And it is very characteristic both of my then state and of the general tone of my mind at this period of my life, that I was seriously tormented by the thought of the exhaustibility of musical combinations. The octave consists only of five tones and two semi-tones, which can be put together in only a limited number of ways, of which but a small proportion are beautiful: most of these, it seemed to me, must have been already

discovered, and there could not be room for a long succession of Mozarts and Webers, to strike out, as these had done, entirely new and surpassingly rich veins of musical beauty. (1:149)

In the tradition of Associationism, Mill correlates pleasure with novelty and in doing so confronts the contravening effect of repetition and the physiological impossibility of sustaining pleasure over time. Here his thinking resembles that of other materialists working later in the century. Theodore Ribot also acknowledged the inverse relationship between habit and pleasure. And William James, summarizing decades of work on psychology in 1890, noted that emotions “*blunt themselves by repetition more rapidly than any other sort of feeling*” (his emphasis).⁸ As human beings become older and accumulate more memories, brain-paths become more organized, and established associations and their attendant sensations, much diminished, replace the freshness of emotions. At this point, the person experiences no pleasurable *affect*. In this state, Mill feared, Sterling’s view of him threatened to prevail.

Notwithstanding hints of idealism, Mill’s breakthrough in the *Autobiography* occurs as a neuro-physiological event: reading of Jean François Marmontel’s *Mémoires d’un père* (1804) causes Mill to sob. When he reveals that he weeps over Marmontel’s memoirs, he offers his readers physical evidence of the link between neuro-muscular sensation and the invisible world of feelings. Mill cries *and* discovers that he feels sad. To alter this statement to a materialist version after James, Mill proves he feels sad by representing himself crying. His demonstrative weeping in the *Autobiography* is a performance of his unhappiness that provides evidence of his humanness.

The episode could not completely slough the hint of the mechanical that haunted Mill in writing the *Autobiography*, however, simply because it illustrated the reflexive behavior of materialist psychology that was so repellent to idealists. Worse, the *catharsis* over Marmontel might also have displayed the taut emotional economy of the “economic man,” the Hobbesian-Benthamite figure that served as the model of behavior for nineteenth-century political economy. Happiness or enjoyment was the economic man’s chief motive for accumulating wealth, a premise reiterated by Nassau William Senior in his Introductory Lecture on Political Economy in 1826. In charting his own discovery of emotion, Mill had to show his separation from utilitarianism’s notorious conception of “the greatest happiness for the greatest number” as a statistical derivative of a mechanical human psychology based in responses of pleasure. For these reasons, Mill announced the end of his depression twice—once with the gush of tears over Marmontel, after which, he declares, “I never again was as miserable as I had been” (1:145), and once after reading the poems of Wordsworth in the two-volume edition of 1815. Three years separate the events, and during this time Mill relapsed into dejection several times, according to the “Early Draft” of the *Autobiography* (1:144).⁹ In the interim, the idea of pleasure as a physiological response disappears, and in its place rises an idealist version with more durability and cerebral involvement. This is the emotion he has in mind, I propose, when he poses his ostensibly Utilitarian question about happiness.

Mill uses Wordsworth to authorize these new emotions, which differ from the sensory-based “feelings” linked to reading Marmontel. Altruistic, reflective, and profound, they belong to an idealist picture of the emotions that Mill professes in *An Examination*, as well as in “What is Poetry?” published anonymously in the *Monthly Repository* in 1833. In this early essay, published just a few years after his breakdown, Mill locates them in the “human heart,” which

has “deeper and more secret workings” than the physiological and physical feelings of the histrionic orator (1:345). Whereas the orator’s emotions are always embodied in gesture and voice, those of the poet can be invisible. Moreover, the emotions of the heart, he asserts, are “genuine,” unlike those of his father who, like most Englishmen (Mill writes in an early passage for the *Autobiography*, later omitted) did not cultivate feeling beyond that “of mere habit, like that to inanimate objects” (1:612). At the moment he questions whether the achievement of all his goals would make him happy, Mill regards happiness as such a “genuine” emotion: a highly self-conscious one, the resounding “No!” coming, as I have mentioned, from “an irrepressible self-consciousness” (1:139). Indeed a few pages later, he vows to dedicate himself to the “cultivation of the feelings.” The resolution, he understands, undoubtedly would require continual self-consciousness, for such cultivation, Mill writes, thereafter “became one of the cardinal points in my ethical and philosophical creed” (1:147). At this point, then, he has embraced an idealistic, Romantic, and intentional view of emotions that valorizes them through the subject’s awareness of them.

At the same time, however, (within the same pages of the *Autobiography*, that is) he has resolved on a seemingly opposite course. Reading Marmontel has led him to “adopt a theory of life, very unlike that on which I had before acted, and having much in common with what at that time I certainly had never heard of, the anti-self-consciousness theory of Carlyle” (1:145). Happiness and enjoyment, he decides, “will not bear a scrutinizing examination. Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so.” Pleasure must be taken “*en passant*, without being made a principal object” (1:147). Although Mill does not treat these conclusions as either different or successive, their occurrence within two pages of the text reveals his confusion, for how does one cultivate unspecified feelings that he or she has just decided cannot bear reflection? It seems that Mill has reverted to the very model of physiological pleasure from which the reading of Wordsworth had distanced him.

Perhaps happiness is exempt from this cultivation. I have already mentioned its difference from the other emotions. Generally, it is not clear whether in the *Autobiography* Mill conceived of happiness as an emotion in a new psychological order, with no taint of its mechanical version, pleasure. If he could, what kind of emotion would that be? Mill’s question and answer imagine happiness as a reflective state of pleasure prolonged into a circumstantial condition—the classic negative definition of happiness as freedom from pain. Yet it was difficult for Mill to represent this deeper, reflective, condition without using the physiological language he associated with materialist psychology and Benthamite mechanism. Accordingly, the terms often slip into each other in his writing, as in his homage to his wife, Harriet Taylor, “a character preeminently of feeling” (1:623) whose heart “identified itself with the feelings of others” and whose “pleasures and pains [were] tenfold more intense than those of common persons.”¹⁰ The conflation of words compatible with both idealist thought (“heart”) and physiology is unavoidable, but it contributes to the difficulty of Mill’s attempt to transform a term for localized sensation to one for a deeper or more reflective condition. Significantly, this slippage indicates that the connection between the reaction to Marmontel and the reaction to Wordsworth—between the first phase of the crisis in 1826 and the second part in 1829—is not a “progress,” as Mill conceived, in writing of the crisis and of his entire life, but a dialectical shift.¹¹ That is, Mill’s sudden, sensational response to the French writer dramatizes a discovery of emotion through neuro-muscular excitation. It is a reaction to the numbness of the automaton, but it soon leads to another correction. Whereas Mill reacts to Marmontel as a creature of sensibility (in the *larmoyant* fashion of the late eighteenth-century, remarks Geoffrey Hartman) he reads

Wordsworth reacting to this reaction.¹² Accordingly, his response is marked by reflection and sympathy—far less demonstrable, more mental, emotions. In this light, the momentous question of his own happiness, which Mill recorded when writing the early draft in 1853-54, anticipates the sequence that it initiates in the *Autobiography*. When Mill records asking himself if attaining all his goals will make him happy, the word “happy” preserves the sensational Benthamite terminology (“happiness” based in feelings of “pleasure” and the “the enjoyments of life” [1:147]) and simultaneously resonates with the Romantic *ecstasis* that he had come to privilege. The question embeds a reflection and a prolepsis.

Just as Mill’s understanding of “happiness” emerges through the dialectical relation between the Marmontel phase of the crisis and the Wordsworth phase, “happiness,” as Mill eventually comes to terms with the emotion, embeds its own sequence. It covers, that is, a succession of mental and physiological activities. Because, as a protracted condition, it implies—even requires—an *unconsciousness*, an ease and comfort that the gods attributed to fortune, as an emotion it entails first a privileging, then a rejection, of consciousness. The move and countermove occur so quickly and repeatedly in the narrative that they seem either unremarkable or bewildering, as the adoption of the anti-selfconsciousness theory becomes the cultivation of feeling, and this very cultivation suggests a displacement of mental attention to lived, physiological experience. This portrayal of happiness as a dynamic state comprising self-conscious emotion and physiological activity in succession is anticipated by “What is Poetry?” which, as I have noted, appeared shortly after Mill’s breakdown actually occurred. In the essay, Mill makes it clear that prolonged consciousness cannot remain a virtue for the poet because the poetical mood is a phase of involuntary inattention in which all perception of the outside is suppressed. His famous declaration, “All poetry is of the nature of a soliloquy” (1:349) captures this idea; the poet must be unconscious of the audience, whereas the orator is always aware of one.

Mill’s notion of unconsciousness cannot be taken in the post-Freudian sense, as utter obliviousness. The sort of “unconsciousness” of which Mill writes means, more accurately, “unself-consciousness,” as Geoffrey Hartman has argued. And as Timothy Gould has specified, Mill means the “successful *suppression* of a piece of knowledge (namely, that there is an audience present)” and by its opposite, eloquence, a theatricality, in Michael Fried’s sense.¹³ For Mill, the poet has an “inevitable awareness of an actual audience,” Gould says, “the effects of which must then be suppressed in order to achieve the ‘unconsciousness’ of the successful poem.”¹⁴ Of course, in “What is Poetry?” the poet is aware of himself through his effect on listeners, whereas in the anti-self-consciousness theory to which Mill alludes in the *Autobiography*, the outside listener or viewer is the self. The versions are homologous, however (indeed Gould has connected them); if the emotions of the poet cannot “[suppose] an audience,” as the eloquence of the orator can (1:348), neither can they embed an awareness or representation of the self.¹⁵ In this light, a prolonged awareness of and attention to “happiness” violates the poetical mood in which one ceases, for a time, to become aware of one’s audience (even if that audience is one’s self).

Mill’s reasoning in “What Is Poetry?” and its obvious connection with the remarks on self-consciousness in the *Autobiography* lead to one surprising conclusion about the function of the crisis in the later text. Because in both “What Is Poetry?” and the *Autobiography*, Mill regards self-consciousness as necessarily ephemeral, and because the account of his life before 1826 contains few signs of self-consciousness about his emotional state—shows, rather, a life verging

on the mechanical—it is only in the depression, as well as in the first breakthrough—the reading of *Mémoires d'un père*—that the *Autobiography* exhibits signs of its subject's self-consciousness. Mill's immediate focus on happiness in the famous question and answer thus precipitates the crisis in the *Autobiography*. Clearly it is not the vain pursuit of happiness or the realization that he has no pleasure in life which causes the crisis in the *Autobiography*, but the sudden fear of its loss *induced by attention*. The remedy Mill eventually finds for his crisis must involve *inattention*, then. Henceforth the young Mill, having acknowledged these particular emotions, will marginalize happiness and joy, the narrator of the *Autobiography* implies; he will make them peripheral to attention. The question about happiness, therefore, is an anomalous and almost instantly self-nullifying moment.

I have just proposed that Mill's major bout of depression in 1826 was precipitated by abstracting sensation into emotion and making it the focus of attention. By converting a Benthamite economy to a Romantic one, Mill brought on his own predicament. When he abandons the quest for happiness in the *Autobiography* and vows to accept it as a transient emotion barely registering in the mind—“*en passant*”—he seems to revert to his original conflation of happiness with physiological pleasure. Yet although Mill seems to have come almost full circle by repudiating the grounds of his original question, in actuality he has traced a dialectical movement from attention to, to suppression and then displacement of, feeling. The sequence in the *Autobiography* thus overcomes the limitations of the emotions, materialist or idealist, by themselves, as Mill understood them. To be sure, the psychic mechanism of the displacement is not clearly described in the *Autobiography*, and the process or province of nonreflective “cultivation” is left ambiguous. The choice of models available to him, pleasure as a physiological emotion or happiness as a self-conscious ideation, formed at the time the psychological continuum on which he could plot his humanness. They would wait a century for elaboration.

The debates waged between materialism and idealism in which psychologist/ philosophers like Mill, Hamilton, and William James often floundered always occurred within the mind and body dichotomy. Not until post-Freudian and post-behaviorist theories would this frame be jettisoned. The category of emotion could then be opened and *drives* be separated from *affects*. Silvan Tomkins, in particular, not only profiled individual emotions, but emphasized the behavioral individuation of affects, a quality that has special relevance to Mill's representation of his feelings. Whereas the drives, according to Tomkins, constitute “a motivational system of little freedom,” the affects compose “a motivational system of great freedom.”¹⁶ Whereas drives occur in a tight causality of stimulus and response, affects can vary for the same stimulus. In contrast to the drives, the course of affects is not toward consummation. Affects vary in intensity; they are connected to a wider if still limited range of objects. Most importantly, Tomkins states, “The capacity of the individual to feel strongly or weakly, for a moment, or for all his life, about any-thing under the sun and to govern himself by such motives constitutes his essential freedom.”¹⁷ Freedom of affect makes human progress possible. It effectively separates human beings from automata, the lowest of which function through reflex action.

Tomkins's emphasis on the freedom of the affects over the drives both illuminates and solves the dilemma Mill created in broaching and resolving the question of happiness. If his reaction to Marmontel's *Mémoires*, a discovery of emotion through physiological sensation, represents only an intermediate stage in his “conversion” to a feeling human being because it does not differ enough from the stimulus and response mechanism of the drives and the mechanical, his

later apparent reversion to pleasure or happiness “*en passant*” is not just a reversion, as it appears to be. It is, rather, a move toward complexity, for it suggests the potential for affects that are neither wholly conscious nor habitual. Thus happiness may be either liminal—nascent, at the threshold of consciousness—or marginal—peripheral, somatic, on the verge of the habitual. Liminality or marginality allows it to co-exist with other, very different emotions and to arise from a variety of acts or ideas. In addition, because the very contemplation of happiness threatens its survival, the liminality of “happiness” increases its durability and its abstraction into the abiding condition linked with good fortune and ease. Once Mill recognizes this province of happiness, if only for a moment—the moment initiated by the question about happiness—he can portray himself as someone who recognizes and exploits emotional responses.

Arguably, emotional freedom and complexity have existed in the *Autobiography* from its earliest chapters, chapters in which Mill, in his account of his infamous education, has unwittingly established a correlation between inattention and happiness or pleasure. On the surface, this correlation looks counterintuitive. The list of prescribed reading, the picture of the boy writing at his father’s desk constantly under surveillance, of being forced to read aloud (I:8, 26), of suffering under “severe admonitions” (I:39) have stood for many contemporary and modern readers as extracts from a philosophy of education that robbed pupils of that precious Victorian construction, childhood. Certainly, the mnemonic component of this method—its emphasis on repetition, memorizing, and redacting—seems so monotonous, so torturous, that one reader has even wondered why the adult Mill felt compelled to review his education at all.¹⁸ Rote was as disparaged as much as it was used as a learning method in the nineteenth century, and Hegel’s concept of recollection is applicable to the kind of mnemonics forced on Mill, even when it was supplemented with analysis: “Memory *qua* memory is itself the merely *external* mode, or merely *existential* aspect of thought, and thus needs a complementary element.”¹⁹ Despite the remarks in the *Autobiography* on the pains of the drills he underwent, however, and despite the charge (which he refuted [1:35]) that James Mill had “crammed” him, happiness was a marginal but nonetheless memorable component of his earliest tutorials. Why else would he have read Pope’s translation of the *Iliad* from 20 to 30 times (*Autobiography* 1:13)? The early chapters of the *Autobiography* abound with instances of Mill reading texts over and over, not simply to commit them to memory, but to relive their delights through repetition. Indeed, he characterizes reporting the daily digest of his reading as “[t]o the best of my remembrance . . . a voluntary rather than a prescribed exercise” (1:11). Pope’s translation of the *Iliad* was “one of the books in which for many years I most delighted” (1:12); “Roman history, both in my old favorite, Hooke, and in Ferguson, continued to delight me” (1:15), as did *Robinson Crusoe* (“through all my boyhood” [1:13]). He “took great pleasure,” he reveals, in a volume he calls *Ancient Universal History* (an anonymous multivolume work of 1736 [1:17]), and writing histories was “a voluntary exercise to which throughout my boyhood I was much addicted” (1:17). The instances of repetition for the sake of repetition indicate that recollecting, which Mill demonstrated by reproducing information before his father, was simultaneously a means toward understanding and a stimulus of pleasure in itself. Recollection *qua* recollection had *affect*, but it was always peripheral in his experience.

It would be wrong to infer, then, in light of his decision in Chapter Five to abandon the quest for happiness, that the earlier phases of Mill’s life (those recounted in the first four chapters) were not happy just because his father neglected to expose his son to those arts devoted to feeling. As happiness is both the ideational and unconscious (i.e., situational) version of

physiological pleasure, surely Mill was often unself-consciously “happy” as his father’s pupil. That is, he experienced—sometimes at the margins of consciousness—pleasure as a result of a mnemonic activity that he also described as painful and coerced. In addition to being impermanent and unself-conscious, then, happiness was, in Mill’s experience, not extrudable.

If happiness is a truly parasitical emotion, not just for Mill but, I propose, in all psychic economies, it requires more than a stimulating activity, such as memory. It needs a host-affect. If Mill could never again ponder, much less pronounce, his own happiness, he needed—in addition to conduits for peripheral pleasure—an emotion to occupy his mental attention, his sensation, and his memory. By 1858, four years after completing the early draft of the *Autobiography*, the death of Harriet Taylor offered him one—cultivated and repetitive mourning. It combined the comparative unconsciousness of happiness as an external condition with the intensity of more transitory and conscious sensations like pleasure or, in this case, its opposite. In this sense, it exemplified the mixed affects that marked a complex response of a human being, not the relatively simple reaction of an animal or automaton.

Mill had married Taylor, his longtime friend and companion, in 1851 shortly after the death of her husband. He had submitted the early draft of his *Autobiography* to her editing. In it (as well as in the final version) he stresses her unusual “gifts of feeling and imagination” (*Autobiography* 1:195). Through the relationship with Taylor, the narrative assumes an allegorical character, in which automaton abandons the master engineer, discovers emotion through Wordsworth, and finally meets moral sympathy personified. Taylor functions in the *Autobiography*, not simply as a substitution for the authority of the father, but as a replacement for Sterling in supplying the overt emotions Mill felt were missing in himself. As a result, her death creates a vacuum in his life, and in the revisions of 1861 and 1869 he nurtures the overwhelming affect of sorrow through sedulous and fetishistic mourning.²⁰ “My objects in life are solely those which were hers; my pursuits and occupations those in which she shared, or sympathized, and which are indissolubly associated with her. Her memory is to me a religion, and her approbation the standard by which, summing up as it does all worthiness, endeavour to regulate my life” (1:251). These commemorative acts replace the exercises of the schoolboy. He even employs the spatial and material jogs used in artificial memory, buying a cottage “as close as possible to the place where she [has been] buried.” *On Liberty*, their “joint production,” is “consecrated to her memory. I have made no alteration or addition to it, nor shall I ever.” The text becomes his fetish. “Though it wants the last touch of her hand, no substitute for that touch shall ever be attempted by mine” (1:257, 261). Mill’s constative statements of mourning are also performances carrying more than a modicum of pleasure. Such pleasure represents a significant complication of the emotions, for it shows that one object can evoke two simultaneous feelings, one on the periphery of his concerted and volitional performances of grief.

Mill’s emotional trajectory in the *Autobiography* encapsulates the discursive history of happiness and shows just how elusive and perverse it is. The idea of happiness embedded in the Utilitarian understanding of it as freedom from misery haunts its new status as a reflective emotion in the *Autobiography*. Nonetheless, for a time under the spell of Romanticism, Mill needs to believe in his capacity for happiness to lift his depression and to acquit himself completely from Sterling’s charge that he has been a manufactured man. Consequently, he assumes, inadvertently perhaps, a much more ambitious psychological project than he or many of his readers have understood, one that valorizes happiness—views it as the most important emotion for a human being to pursue—yet all the while questions its existence as a conscious

psychological state. To prove his humanness, he has to display emotions beyond the predictable reflexes of stimuli and responses. Therefore, he has to produce signs of an affect system that reveal psychic distances between the conditions that instigate an affective response and those that maintain it: these include an awareness of such conditions and further emotional responses to his awareness. This is precisely what Mill's narration of his crisis as a dialectical sequence illustrates in Chapter Five of the *Autobiography*. In the text's final pages, dedicated to the mourning of Harriet Taylor, Mill evinces a degree of emotional complexity beyond the simple shift from a psychic economy of drives to one of reflection and its affects. Whereas self-conscious happiness never lasts more than a moment in a sequence of attention and suppression that the contradictory question-and-answer encapsulates, unreflective happiness—not quite conscious and not yet habitual—emerges and remains on the margins of consciousness, eventually at the expense of a carefully nurtured grief.

I began by repeating the general impression of the *Autobiography* as a detached and affectless narrative, but in fact Mill ends his life-story extravagantly unhappy. Bereft, remaindered (the last chapter is called "General View of the Remainder of My Life"), he produces happiness, nonetheless, through the very repetition he once feared would diminish pleasure. Because sorrow is in theory just as vulnerable to dissipation as pleasure, just as apt to become habitual, cultivating sorrow (Mill's conscious objective) guarantees a proportional increase in pleasure with a lessening of pain. Happiness emerges as a concomitant of sorrow. Over time, then, protracted mourning not only lessens, it induces marginal feelings of pleasure that, outside the full measure of attention, are neither site-specific nor episodic. In Mill's by no means atypical experience, this is the final feeling that approximates the Romantic idea of happiness while honoring its much older, still vital prohibition.

Linda M. Austin's books are The Practical Ruskin (Johns Hopkins, 1991) and Nostalgia in Transition (Virginia, 2007). She has written on the economics, aesthetics, poetry, and prose of the long nineteenth century in Britain and is currently working on a study of automata and automatisms during the period.

Notes

¹ See John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger, Introduction, *Autobiography and Literary Essays*, in *Collected Works*, 33 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), vii-xxx.

² All quotations from Mill's work come from the *Collected Works* and are cited by volume and page number.

³ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, ed. Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 125.

⁴ II.7. of *Sartor Resartus*, 123-29.

⁵ *Oedipus the King*, trans. David Grene, *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 76.

⁶ Or perhaps not so suddenly: Mill may have read Nassau William, Sr.'s *Introductory Lecture on Political Economy delivered before the University of Oxford, on the 6th of December, 1826* (London, 1827) or he may have read of it in Discourse IV of John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University*, which was published in pamphlet form shortly after the Dublin lectures of 1852. Newman quotes Nassau, Sr., defending political economy and in the process equating happiness

with enjoyment. Either text suggests an impetus for Mill question: the original lecture if the question actually occurred sometime in 1826, Newman's Discourse if the question occurred while Mill was writing the early draft in 1853-54.

⁷ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 2:1094.

⁸ James, 2: 1089; Theodore Ribot, *Diseases of Memory: an Essay in the Positive Psychology*, trans. William Huntington Smith (New York: Appleton, 1882).

⁹ On Mill's inconsistent reports of depressive periods, see Jonathan Loesberg, *Fictions of Consciousness: Mill, Newman and the Reading of Victorian Prose* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 54. As Mill confessed in 1829 in a letter to Sterling, he suffered acutely during this period. The revision of 1861 leaves the dates of these subsequent episodes even vaguer; some may have occurred after 1830.

¹⁰ "Rejected Leaves" of *Autobiography*, 1:618.

¹¹ Mill's frequent use of "progress" and its synonyms in the *Autobiography* indicates that the narrative was intended to be meliorative to show the development that he connected with individuality in Chapter Three of *On Liberty* (1859). See for example, his plan to note "the successive phases of any mind which [is] always pressing forward" (1:5); the effects on his "mental development" [sic] (1: 73), and the reference to the latest "period of [his] mental progress" at the opening of Chapter Six (1:193).

¹² Geoffrey Hartman, *Beyond Formalism* (New haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 302-03.

¹³ Hartman, 309. Timothy Gould, "Utterance and Theatricality: A Problem for Modern Aesthetics in Mill's Account of Poetry," *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer and Hilary Putnam (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 140, 139; Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

¹⁴ Gould, 140.

¹⁵ Gould 144-145.

¹⁶ Silvan S. Tomkins, *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 34. For Tomkins' complete discussion of the affect and drive motivational systems, see vol. 1 of *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, 2 vols. (New York: Springer Publishing, 1962), 28-87.

¹⁷ Tomkins in Sedgwick et al, 45-46. Tomkins treats pain and pleasure as an intermediate system between the drives and the affects, because they often have "site specificity" (47).

¹⁸ See Jerome Buckley, "John Stuart Mill's 'True' Autobiography," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 23 (1990): 223-31.

¹⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, 223. Hegel is a particularly illuminating source for explanations of Mill's memory because he dismissed the pictographic dimension of the ancient mnemonic and the visual component that was central to Aristotle's concept of recollection.

²⁰ For a chronology of the stages of composition and revision, see A.W. Levi, "The Writing of Mill's Autobiography," *International Journal of Ethics* (July, 1951): 284-296.