

Mary Bentham's influence on J S Mill

It is generally accepted that the education of John Stuart Mill, supervised by his father James, bore the imprint of the ideas of Jeremy Bentham. What I would like to explore is the extent to which John Stuart Mill's education was influenced in addition by Mary Bentham, wife of Jeremy's brother Samuel, during the year (1820) which he spent with the Samuel Benthams in France. Mary Bentham was a woman of exceptional and formidable intelligence, who planned and supervised the education of her own children, and while John Stuart Mill was living with the family he too followed a programme of study which she devised. Furthermore, there is evidence that the time spent in France with the Benthams was an experience which contributed to the emotional, as well as to the intellectual, development of John Stuart Mill.

I have long held the view that Mary Bentham made a significant contribution to John Stuart Mill's education during that year, and a recently-discovered letter to her from James Mill corroborates that view.

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