

Mill's 'Ethology' Revisited

Like his father James Mill, J.S. Mill made the formation of character a cornerstone of his political philosophy. The younger Mill called the study of character formation 'ethology', and it took a very different -- indeed, diametrically opposed -- form from that of his father and Robert Owen. Doubtless due to filial piety, the younger Mill made Owen his target and stalking-horse. My aim is to show that Mill's 'ethology', far from having been abandoned -- as the scholarly consensus has long held -- actually serves as background and connective thread in several of Mill's most important works: his Autobiography tells a tale of character deformation and reformation of a single individual, viz. himself; The Subjection of Women is about the deformation and possible reformation of female character; Considerations on Representative Government is concerned with the conditions conducive to the formation of civic character; and, not least, On Liberty is about the conditions conducive to the formation of vigorous and varied individual characters.

Terence **Ball**