

**"As for my meditations, they are most often devoted to questions of biology". An Historical and Philosophical Appraisal of John Stuart Mill's Biological Culture**

S.F. Cannon's assertion in *Science in Culture* (1978), according to which John Stuart Mill "knew little" about the science of his time, has received little attention from Millian scholars. To be sure, Mill's explicit acknowledgement of his debt to Herschel, Whewell, and Bain in the *Autobiography* severely qualifies the nature and scope of his scientific culture. Yet, I argue that a minute textual analysis of some of Mill's writings reveals a more intimate knowledge of some areas of scientific inquiry than usually assumed.

As the quote serving as title for this paper indicates, biology is a case in point. Firstly, I intend to show how Mill's knowledge of recent developments in biology informs certain parts of the *System of Logic* (especially the chapters dealing with the "philosophy of classification"). Secondly, a survey of his correspondence with Auguste Comte, from which this quotation is drawn, will shed further light on the extent of Mill's acquaintance with pre-1850 brain-science, a topic that has not been yet covered in the secondary literature.

My main thesis is that his belief in sexual equality prompted him to confront phrenology, which asserted the intellectual and moral superiority of men and hence legitimated women's subjection, and enabled him to devise an anti-naturalistic argument that would surface years later in his *Subjection of Women* (1869). Furthermore, from a methodological point of view, his critique of phrenology was also a key element in his - eventually unsuccessful - attempt to devise a social science of his own, which would crucially depend on "Ethology" or the consideration of environmental factors on the formation and development of human characters.

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