

John Stuart Mill as existentialist: does Mill see the role of government as propagating a Sartrean, existentially authentic moral character?

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For Mum

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore whether or not the goal of John Stuart Mill's political philosophy could be described as existentialist. To do this, I will demonstrate that Mill's philosophy was centred around the cultivation of an ideal individual moral character in the populace, and then I shall show that this moral character is a form of existential authenticity. It will first draw upon the interpretation by Jones of Mill's philosophy that states that his political project was centred around an ideal of the individual's life consisting in Victorian moral norms and the perfection of individual rationality. I will devote the first half of this essay to presenting, developing and defending Jones' interpretation according to this moral character thesis. The second half of the paper will then examine whether or not this moral character could be described as an existentially authentic one. I will use Sartre's account of authenticity as a framework against which to compare Mill's moral character. I will then show that this account of authenticity is near identical to Mill's moral character, despite the two authors working from different ontological frameworks of human action. I will demonstrate this not only by pointing out how the characteristics of each author's ideal characters are the same, but also by noting that they respond to the same societal problems of alienation and custom and resolving them through the cultivation of free-thinking individuals who respect the freedom of others. Finally, I shall conclude that while Mill does have as the basis for his political project a distinctly existentialist notion of authentic existence, one could not describe him as an existentialist philosopher in the same manner as writers such as Sartre due to the presence in Mill's philosophy of an abstract, objective normative ethics that existentialism inherently rejects.

Introduction

“As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so is it that there should be different experiments of living.”¹

(John Stuart Mill, ‘Of Individuality as one of the Elements of Well-Being’)

This essay will explore the question of whether or not one could describe the political philosophy of John Stuart Mill as proto-existentialist. This question will be answered through an analysis of the extent to which Mill’s political ideas all tended towards a single, definable goal, and whether that goal could be read as existentialist. I intend to demonstrate that Mill’s politics had as its grounding basis an idea of cultivating in the minds of a populace a distinctly existentialist, authentic character, and that this demonstrates that Mill’s philosophy had distinctly existentialist elements in it. In order to prove this, this essay will be split into two parts: I will first establish that Mill’s political beliefs all tended towards a specific goal that consisted in a particular conception of the ideal human life (Chapters 1-3), and, second, demonstrate that this life is an authentic one (Chapters 4-7). This will show that Mill’s political philosophy was grounded on the distinctly existentialist concept of the authentic life.

Turning to the first part of this essay, I will be analysing and evaluating an interpretation of Mill provided by H. S. Jones in his 1992 paper ‘John Stuart Mill as Moralism.’² In brief, this paper puts forward a strong claim that Mill’s political theory had as its basis the single goal of instilling in the minds of the populace a specific moral character, consisting in an ideal of rationality and Victorian moral attributes. What Jones demonstrates is that each of Mill’s suggested policies across his texts including his analysis of education, the franchise, and freedom of speech all tend towards the same goal of cultivating this moral character. I intend not only to present this interpretation in the strongest light, but also develop on it and defend it

¹ J. S. Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism and Other Essays* [1859, 1861, 1863, 1869], M. Philip and F. Rosen (eds.), 4th edn., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 56.

² H. S. Jones, ‘John Stuart Mill as Moralism’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 53, no. 2, 1992, pp. 287-308.

against potential counter-arguments. Jones refers to a number of texts that point towards this interpretation including *On Liberty*, *Representative Government* and the *Logic*. I intend to develop on his interpretation by showing how additional passages from *Utilitarianism* support Jones' thesis. Furthermore, I will show how Jones' thesis also explains Mill's comments on colonial rule in both *On Liberty* and *Representative Government*. In order to further demonstrate the strength of Jones' interpretation, in Chapter 2, I intend to explore some potential counter-arguments to Jones' interpretation. The first section of this chapter will examine a tension put forward by Joseph Hamburger in the first chapter of his 1999 book *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control*,³ where he argues that a number of elements of Mill's political philosophy do not point towards the cultivation of the free, individualistic populace that Jones sees, but instead quite the opposite. In this section, not only do I intend to demonstrate that some of Hamburger's reasoning is poor on his interpretation of Mill, but also that Jones' account provides a strong defence against this tension that Hamburger notes. In the second section of this chapter, I intend to address another possible counter-argument to Jones' interpretation that states that in attempting to instil in the populace a single moral character, Mill's political philosophy is not, in fact, one of allowing for free expression and "experiments of living," but one of totalitarian brainwashing. I will show that despite the desire to cultivate a specific mindset in individuals, this is not a symptom of a form of society from an Aldous Huxley novel due to the fact that the key feature of this moral character is that it is a means to living a life tailored around the interests of the individual, not one tailored around the interest of totalitarian order.

The purpose of devoting a great deal of time to developing this interpretation of Jones' is that I do not intend to conclude at the end of this essay that on *one specific* interpretation of Mill there might be some similarities to be drawn between that specific interpretation and existentialism. Instead, I intend to come to the stronger conclusion that Jones' interpretation is the most accurate and defensible interpretation of Mill's political philosophy, and then use this account of Mill as a basis for comparison with the existential accounts of moral character. This will later

³ J. Hamburger, *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999.

demonstrate that Mill's philosophy was an existentialist one, or, at least, operates with a distinctly existentialist goal in mind. This would not be achieved unless I explore as many developments and counter-arguments to Jones' interpretation as is feasible before moving to discuss the how this account of Mill could be described as existentialist. To that avail, my third chapter will devote itself to parsing out exactly that in which Jones' moral character consists. To do this, I will explore the rational and moral components of this moral character separately, such that they may later be compared to the rational and moral components of existential authenticity in the second half of the essay. Not only will this make for a strong basis of comparison later on, but it will also enable me to examine what grounding principles lie behind the rational and moral elements of Mill's moral character.

Moving to the second half of the essay, having presented, defended and developed Jones' interpretation of Mill, I will be using Jean-Paul Sartre's account of existential authenticity as the framework against which I will compare Mill's moral character. I choose Sartre due to the fact that not only can his philosophy be unequivocally be described as existentialist, but also because his works provide the most clear and comprehensive account of the grounding principles behind authenticity. It ought to be noted that the intention of this essay is not to demonstrate that Mill and Sartre, specifically, are comparable in their accounts, but instead to show how Mill's ideas have within them a number of existential elements, using Sartre as an archetypal example of existentialist philosophy. Sartre's account of authenticity that I shall spell out will serve only as a means to explore whether or not Mill himself operated from an existentially authentic framework as well. In Chapter 4, therefore, I intend to present Sartre's theory of human consciousness and action as it grounds his account of the authentic character. This chapter will only examine the rational elements of Sartre's account of authenticity, such that in the subsequent chapter it may be compared with the rational component of Mill's moral character.

Chapter 5 will thus compare the rational bases of each author's ideal characters. Here, I will examine how both authors are, in effect, responding to the same societal issue of alienation from individual rational capacities, and, for this reason, come up

with similar conclusions on what sort of character is best suited to combatting these problems, despite the differences in their conception of human reason and action. This will be demonstrated through the examination of Sartre's definition of authenticity presented in *Anti-Semite and Jew* as consisting in "a true and lucid consciousness of the situation [and] in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves,"⁴ and consequently demonstrating that Mill adheres to a similar conception of an ideal rational character in his exploration of individuality. To use a more concrete example, I will also explore both authors' criticisms of the Christian tradition, and conclude that while both offer distinct critiques that target different aspects of Christianity (Mill targets the means by which the institution spreads the word of the Lord, whereas Sartre targets the specific beliefs of Christian faith themselves), both authors would come to the same conclusions on each matter as each other. Finally, this chapter shall examine how best to compare the rational grounding for each of their ideals of rationality, seeing as – as I will have concluded in Chapter 3 – Mill's grounding for his ideal of rationality is actually a basic conception of how the rational brain functions, as opposed to Sartre's complex account of motives, causes, the in-itself and the for-itself. I will conclude from this that seeing as the rational component of Mill's moral character bears a strong resemblance both in nature and in justification to Sartre's account of authenticity, Mill's ideal of rationality could be described as existentialist, and the rational character of his ideal individual as existentially authentic.

Chapter 6 will subsequently explore the moral aspects of Sartre's account of authenticity. This is an ambitious task, seeing as in Sartre scholarship one of the greatest interpretive concerns is how one can tie Sartre's existential authenticity to any sort of normative ethical framework, seeing as the existentialist is the first to reject any sort of abstract, all-encompassing normative ethics that applies impartially to any situation, regardless of the subjective lives of those involved. I will not be spending a great deal of time going into depth on the expansive literature surrounding this subject, for this would detract from the subject of this essay.

⁴ J. P. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* [*Réflexions sur la Question Juive*: 1944], trans. G. J. Becker, New York, Schocken Books, 1995, p. 65.

Instead, I shall present some of the answers to this question, and then exploring one of the ideas put forward by T. Storm Heter in his 2006 article ‘Authenticity and Others: Sartre’s Ethics of Recognition.’⁵ I would stress that my goal is not to present the most accurate interpretation of how Sartre, specifically, incorporates morality into his account of authenticity, but instead I intend to present a coherent account of existential authenticity and the norms contained within it that can be used as a point of comparison with Mill’s moral character. While Heter’s interpretation is a strong one in my opinion, it is not the concern of this essay as to how well it fares in comparison to other interpretations of Sartre. Heter’s interpretation is one by which existential authenticity incorporates within it ethical norms on the basis of understanding the social roles one plays and that others are as existentially free as oneself. Having presented Heter’s interpretation and thereby presented the sort of norms that could be incorporated into existential authenticity, I shall, in Chapter 7, move to compare the “authentic” moral characteristics with those that Jones notes in his interpretation of Mill. The first two sections of this chapter will explore the similarities between the moral characteristics of each author and explore how these characteristics are not only superficially similar, but the norms that they impose are justified by the same principles for each author.

Finally, the third section of this chapter will examine the important question of how one could describe the moral elements of each author’s ideal characters as similar when one author presents a separate, universal normative ethical theory that is used to measure the moral value of actions, while the other rejects the notion that such a normative theory could ever exist as abstracted from the subjective lives of individuals. In exploring this question, I will demonstrate that while Mill’s utilitarian ethics can be separated from his moral character (for he does not believe that individuals should constantly think of their actions along a utilitarian manner), and so it has no bearing on how existentially authentic an individual ought to be. However, the fact that Mill believes in the presence of such a morality-calculator is enough to demonstrate that one could not describe Mill as an existentialist in the

⁵ T. S. Heter, ‘Authenticity and Others: Sartre’s Ethics of Recognition’, *Sartre Studies International*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2006, pp. 17-43.

same way as the continental authors of the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century. Nonetheless, I shall conclude the paper with the claim that while Mill may not be “as” existentialist as an author such as Sartre, there is a great deal of proto-existentialist thought in Mill’s writing, particularly seeing how I will have demonstrated that his entire political philosophy is centred around the cultivation of existential authenticity in individuals, and that this is sufficient to demonstrate that the notion of authenticity is not one exclusive to the writings of authors like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger or even Sartre.

1. The Goal of Mill’s Politics

“[T]he most important point of excellence which any form of government can possess is to promote the virtue and intelligence of the people themselves.”⁶

(John Stuart Mill, ‘The Criterion of a Good Form of Government’)

Turning to the first step in this proof of Mill’s existentialist views, it must be established that his political philosophy had as its goal the cultivation of a single ethical mindset in each of the citizens of a particular nation. This will be the focus of the first half of this essay. In this chapter, I intend to present and develop on an interpretation of Mill by H. S. Jones that states exactly this. His article ‘John Stuart Mill as Moralism’ describes how each of Mill’s substantive philosophical works point towards this cultivation of a single ethical mindset. My goal in this chapter is, therefore, to establish how Jones demonstrates this, and then to present two other key passages that also demonstrate that Mill had the propagation of a moral and rational character in mind when presenting his political philosophy throughout many of his texts. At this stage, I do not intend to go into detail as to the specifics of in what this particular ethical character consists – this will be the goal of Chapter 3 – as I see it as more primary to demonstrate that Mill’s political philosophy was pointing towards the promotion of *some* moral character, particularly as this view opposes a great many interpretations on Mill.

⁶ Mill, *Representative Government*, p. 199.

It is without question that scholars have debated over what the single ethical goal that unifies all of Mill's political philosophy from *On Liberty* to *Representative Government* is, with many concluding that such a unifying factor does not exist. Some have argued that it is grounded on a purely utilitarian basis such that liberty, for instance, is just one of many means towards the sake of maximising utility (albeit a reliable one). Others such as Kurer⁷ have opted for the belief that Mill's advocacy of liberty has, in fact, two goals, viz. the improvement of mankind and the promotion of justice. Abramson, among others, suggests that, to Mill, liberty has purely intrinsic, rather than extrinsic value.⁸ Jones' interpretation, however, does take liberty as having extrinsic value, although it is not present for the sole purpose of maximising utility. Instead, it sees the aim of liberty as fostering in citizens a certain moral character. It must therefore be demonstrated what textual evidence supports this theory of Jones, and goes against the canon of Mill scholarship detailed above.

I. The Moral Character Thesis

Jones' thesis was specifically to move away from the other interpretations of what, to Mill, the endgame of governmental intervention (or lack thereof) was. He states,

“[I]f Mill had a single fundamental commitment that permeated all his major works, it was neither to utilitarianism nor to liberty as such but to what might be termed... a conception of virtue or the good life, and that the basic constituent of that conception was an ideal of rationality.”⁹

Jones would go on to examine each of *Representative Government*, the *Logic* and *On Liberty* (alongside some mentions of *The Subjection of Women*) and demonstrate that all these works demonstrate that the best reading of Mill would be as grounding his theory of government intervention on fostering a rational, moral

⁷ O. Kurer, 'John Stuart Mill on Government Intervention', *History of Political Thought*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1989, pp. 462-467.

⁸ J. Abramson, 'John Stuart Mill and the Demands of Individuality', in *Minerva's Owl: The Tradition of Western Political Thought*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 281-282.

⁹ Jones, 'John Stuart Mill as Moralism', p. 288.

way of living that citizens would choose to adopt. This “good life” that Jones mentions consists in enabling a certain virtuous character to develop in each of the citizens that would, in turn, enable them to be free. For the sake of concision, I will examine how Jones explores this notion of virtuous character in both *Representative Government* and *On Liberty*, and set aside his comments on the *Logic* and *The Subjection of Women*.

Jones argues that scholars have operated from the belief that there were only two means of interpreting Mill (and other Victorian writers): either according to rights (whereby liberty is intrinsically valuable) and according to utility (whereby liberty has extrinsic value). Jones argues that this neglects a third discourse on character and virtue which, if adopted with respect to Mill, would unify his treatises under a single banner. He felt that the best grounds for seeing why this reading of Mill is most appropriate was in *Representative Government*.¹⁰ In particular, Jones puts Mill’s account of the franchise into the spotlight to demonstrate that Mill’s arguments were more closely grounded on the cultivation of a strong virtuous character than on a utilitarian or rights-based account. In favour of this, Jones notes that Mill was decidedly opposed to the idea that the vote was a natural right given to all people in the same way that the prohibition of torture. Mill did believe that all people should have a vote, however he also famously advocates both open and plural voting as well. Jones states,

“Mill’s arguments for open voting and for plural voting were both rooted to a large extent in a perception of the need to create the right sort of ethos in the electoral body... The [secret] ballot, in Mill’s view, was ethically wrong because it would give the voter the impression that the vote is a private concern, a right to be used in such a way as will best promote his own interests.”¹¹

This means that Mill’s advocacy of plural and open voting was not only not grounded on a rights-based account, but also not purely for the sake of improving the happiness of each individual citizen, as a utilitarian account would hold. Jones

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 290.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 293.

therefore reads Mill's account of government intervention as one based not on the idea that each individual should be left entirely to their own devices with no guidance or interference (unless there is the threat of harm), however that the purpose of a governing body is to foster within each citizen a level of independence and responsibility that would enable them to make informed decisions with respect to both how they live their lives and also how they cast their vote. This is the virtue, or moral character, that Jones believes is behind Mill's theory. This is evidenced in the following quotation Jones cites, the second sentence of which I have added for emphasis:

“[T]he *spirit* of an institution, the impression it makes on the mind of the citizen, is one of the most important parts of its operation. The spirit of vote by [secret] ballot – the interpretation likely to be put on it in the mind of an elector – is that suffrage is given to him for himself; for his particular use and benefit, and not as a trust for the public.”¹²

This claim backs up Jones' idea that the system of voting imposed by government that Mill had in mind was not one there for the sake of promoting individual interests, but rather there for the sake of promoting a certain mindset in every citizen. The quotation I cited earlier also adds to this point: Mill does not see the purpose of government to be solely for the sake of preventing harm between citizens, but also, and more importantly, to educate them enough to be able to create in each individual this virtuous character. A system of open voting would enable this as it would force the electorate to justify their votes to those around them, whereas the secret ballot system would allow the electorate to vote without having to do so.¹³

The fact that Mill favours plural voting also adds to this. Jones notes that Mill did not believe that more votes should be granted according to arbitrary features of individuals' lives such as their wealth and property.¹⁴ Mill does, however, justify the

¹² Mill, *Representative Government*, p. 307 (Mill's italics).

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 313; Jones notes this on p. 296.

¹⁴ Jones, 'John Stuart Mill as Moralizer', p. 295.

idea that some members of the electorate should be granted more votes than others based on the empirical fact that some people, even in a society that has undergone a strict education system will be more wise and more prepared to make an informed decision about their vote than others, and, for this reason, Jones quotes Mill saying,

“It is not useful, but hurtful that the constitution of the country should declare ignorance to be entitled to as much power as knowledge.”¹⁵

This means, once again, that Mill’s account of the franchise favours those who have the virtuous moral character consisting in the ability to make informed decisions. Those who are less educated and less likely to vote according to the interests of the state, while still entitled to the vote, will receive fewer votes than those who do not. From this, Jones concludes with respect to *Representative Government*,

“For if Mill had a lifelong commitment, so I would suggest, it was not so much to liberty or to utilitarianism as to an ideal of rationality as constitutive of the good life. The virtuous man just is one who has thought out and can defend his beliefs, his actions, his way of life.”¹⁶

Moving to Jones’ analysis of *On Liberty*, he notes that while Mill is traditionally read as promoting a great deal of political and social tolerance, there are areas where this does come into question. While many authors such as Cowling and Letwin have argued that Mill was indeed very *intolerant* of certain ways of life, Jones notes that interpreting Mill according to moral character would lead to a more nuanced explanation of Mill’s supposed intolerance. While Mill advocated tolerance between government and citizen on ways of life, there is one particular practice that is unacceptable. This is to live one’s life following the customs and practices of tradition without question. This is the point Cowling et al. have made, yet to conclude that this is an advocacy of a society of intolerance is, to Jones, inaccurate.

¹⁵ Mill, *Representative Government*, p. 296, cited by Jones on p. 295.

¹⁶ Jones, ‘John Stuart Mill as Moralist’, p. 296.

Reading Mill as promoting virtue and good character more aptly explains away this possible tension. As with *Representative Government*, Mill sees the purpose of government to promote independent and educated thought, rather than to leave it entirely to the decision of the people. This is also shown in *On Liberty* in a number of sections, and, as Jones notes, one area where this is most evident is in his criticism of Christian morality. Jones cites the following passage from *On Liberty* with respect to this:

“Christian morality (so called) has all the characteristics of a reaction; it is, in great part, a protest against Paganism. Its ideal is negative rather than positive; passive rather than active; Innocence rather than Nobleness; Abstinence from Evil, rather than energetic Pursuit of Good; in its precepts (as has been well said) ‘thou shalt not’ predominates unduly over ‘thou shall.’”¹⁷

From this it is evident that Mill was displeased with a doctrine that merely advocates nothing more than a straightforward rejection of certain ways of life for no reason beyond reacting to a previous order. The fact that this doctrine has later become a basis for people to behave unquestionably to a selection of guidelines that merely prohibit certain forms of behaviour is, to Mill, even more disappointing. While this has primarily been seen as an argument elucidating the benefits of freedom of speech and expression, this quotation also demonstrates that it is an indictment against a certain form of expression, namely, that of living one’s life for no reason beyond the ease of following what others have done before them. From this, Jones argues, it is clear that rather than reading *On Liberty* as a defence of toleration of all ways of life, it is more accurate to read it as grounded on a promotion of individual sincerity about their lives and beliefs, and an attack on any form of government that would promote individuals to follow dead dogma.¹⁸ This means that the freedom of expression that Mill advocates in *On Liberty* serves the purpose of enabling individuals to be granted an appropriate level of variety in their lives such that they have a number of different beliefs and lifestyles from which to

¹⁷ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 49, cited in Jones, pp. 302-303.

¹⁸ Jones, ‘John Stuart Mill as Moralist’, p. 305.

choose. On the other hand, those elements of Mill that appear stricter than some many modern-day societies, such as his policies on the franchise are in place specifically to avoid individuals falling into a state of blindly following the despotism of custom. To Jones, therefore, the pervasiveness of Mill's interest in virtue and character should not be ignored, and indeed serves to illustrate how this emphasis allows for a more coherent reading of Mill's *Representative Government* and *On Liberty*.

II. In Favour of Jones' Account: *Utilitarianism*

Jones thesis is a strong one, and the evidence he provides does support his account of Mill. It would be therefore worth examining another of Mill's texts, and how Jones' interpretation of Mill according to virtuous character would be applied to it. Jones makes no mention of *Utilitarianism* in his article, yet a great deal can be said of how it, too, supports his moral character thesis. While *Utilitarianism* is an elucidation of Mill's normative ethical theory and makes little mention of how government intervention should be effected, one could accurately read Mill's most famous contribution to utilitarian theory as equally supporting Jones' thesis.

The distinction Mill makes between higher and lower pleasures in *Utilitarianism* does add to Jones' interpretation of Mill as a propagator of a certain moral character, both in his advocacy of the indulgence in higher pleasures, and also in how he defines higher pleasures. Addressing the latter first, most who are familiar with Mill's famous distinction have in their mind a clear idea of that to which Mill refers when it comes to higher and lower pleasures: Mill sees intellectual activities such as enjoying fine art or engaging in stimulated debate as higher pleasures, whereas activities such as push-pin are unstimulating, lower pleasures (the equivalent in the twenty-first century would presumably be along the lines of the distinction between going to museums or reading intellectually stimulating novels and watching reality television or engaging in excessive consumption of narcotics). While it would be difficult to argue that this is not what Mill had in mind, little is said about how Mill actually spells out the distinction. He states,

“Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure.”¹⁹

The distinction itself, therefore, is not explicitly grounded on any form of elitist preference to fine art or intellectual stimulating activities, but rather to the straightforward fact that if one has the opportunity to experience both activities, they will discover that one is more engaging than the other. This is how Mill marks the qualitative difference between various kinds of pleasures.

Where this fits into Jones’ interpretation of Mill is that if it is the case that Mill sees the qualitative difference to be grounded on the idea that people can experience both higher and lower pleasures, then Mill’s account of government intervention will be at least in part centred around granting to its citizens the opportunity to experience both kinds. Mill’s abhorrence of custom can be explained with reference to this distinction: custom is a tool used to ensure that those following it will engage in a limited number of activities that tradition has dictated for them. As a result, those who, by following custom, engage in exclusively lower pleasures because they either they do not know better or they have never been granted the opportunity to engage in higher pleasures will be missing out on a great deal of fulfilment in their lives. On the other hand, if by custom’s hand one is engaging exclusively in objectively higher pleasures (whatever those may be), then this would still result in the adverse effect that they would not be aware of why it is those pleasures are better. The second argument in favour of free speech in *On Liberty* can be applied here: like those living in a society where the right beliefs are forced into citizens’ minds, those living under the despotism of custom where they are forcibly living exclusively according to higher pleasures will not appreciate the value of those pleasures, and subsequently lose out on a substantial portion of pleasure they could gain by awareness of the other options of pleasure-fulfilment.

¹⁹ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 122.

As a result of this, one of the duties of government is to grant the opportunity to each of its citizens to engage in a variety of pleasures such that they can discover why it is that intellectually stimulating activity is more pleasurable than push-pin. Once the opportunity is granted to the citizens to experience all kinds of pleasures – nowhere does Mill advocate outlawing lower pleasures – then it is the choice of the citizen as to in which pleasures they engage. From the quotation above, Mill is aware that there will be those that decide that push-pin grants them a greater level of pleasure than a Verdi opera, and, while undoubtedly Mill would find this disappointing, the citizen’s right takes precedence. The role of government is not, therefore to dictate what pleasures are better than others, but to grant the opportunity to citizens to experience both kinds of pleasure such that they can choose between them. Jones’ account of building moral character now fits into this account more clearly: Mill had in mind the idea of cultivating in citizens a moral character which would enable them to make an informed decision about (among other things) what sort of pleasures in which they would want to engage. To Mill, a government that fails to grant this opportunity to its citizens is, therefore, a more totalitarian one (at least institutionally) than Mill’s own, seeing as it is, in effect, making it all too easy for citizens to follow custom and therefore not decide through a mind of their own what is best for them.

I have alluded to the fact that Mill believes that it is obvious that intellectually stimulating activities will constitute, according to his earlier definition, higher pleasures. He states the following in favour of this,

“Now it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying, both [kinds of pleasure], do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties.”²⁰

Setting aside the possible debate that might ensue over whether this is as much of “an unquestionable fact” as Mill describes, the fact that he sees the use of higher

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 123.

faculties (by which he refers to our use of reason) is another point that favours Jones' virtuous character interpretation. A key component of Jones' reading of Mill was that the virtuous character that Mill advocates consists in great part in the exercise of reason, or, in other words, in one's "higher faculties." Recall that Jones opens his article by stating that "the basic constituent of [Mill's] conception [of a virtuous character] was *an ideal of rationality*."²¹ Indeed, Jones' comments on Mill's account of the franchise added to the idea that what was most important to Mill was finding a means of making citizens exercise their reason. As he notes, Mill favoured open voting because it gave an incentive for voters to justify their decisions, and this meant that voters would have to exercise their reason in deciding how their government should be run, rather than simply follow custom. Mill's reading of higher pleasures as intellectually stimulating ones, therefore, fits neatly into Jones' interpretation. Mill conceives of the "good life," as Jones puts it, as one where individuals are intellectually stimulated, and so when Mill claims that those pleasures that bring greater happiness to individuals are intellectual ones, this is a clear indication that Jones' account is accurate in stating that Mill's treatises were all centred around a belief that individuals should engage in a life filled with rational stimulation such that they can make decisions absent from the meaningless value attributed to custom about how they should live their lives. From this, Jones' discussion of *On Liberty* and *Representative Government* follow suit: the role of the government is to enable this good life to be lived by its citizens, because without any institutions in place to perform this function, the populace would most likely fall back into following custom and not engaging their higher faculties at all. From this it is clear that despite the absence of *Utilitarianism* in Jones' article, Mill's treatise does support Jones' interpretation of Mill's works.

III. In Favour of Jones' Account: Mill & Colonialism

There is another element of Mill that scholars often overlook, and it does raise a great many questions about Mill's overall project. Charles Mills' 2015 article 'Decolonizing Western Political Philosophy' discusses how best to address the

²¹ Jones, 'John Stuart Mill as Moralist', p. 288 (italics added for emphasis).

elephant in the room that is the inherently racist and colonialist beliefs under which the great figures of the Western political-philosophical traditions were operating, including, naturally, John Stuart Mill. As C. Mills notes, most scholars are undoubtedly aware of the fact that, for instance, Kant was working under a system of racial hierarchies in his political philosophy or that Hegel had in his mind a distinctly white idea of the World Spirit.²² However, the issue is that they also make the mistake of setting aside these concerns in favour of reading such philosophers as if they had never held these beliefs. I shall not go into depth on how objectionable such beliefs may be as we read them in the twenty-first century. Instead, what I intend to explore in this section is how this applies to Mill's own distinctly colonialist beliefs, and how reading Mill – as Jones does – as setting the goal of his political philosophy as promoting a certain moral character helps to explain his own problematic beliefs concerning rule over foreign nations. I intend to explore how colonialism is a part of Mill's political system and how Jones' reading can be invoked to solve a potential contradiction between Mill's advocacy of tolerance and individuality and his advocacy of despotic rule over 'barbarian nations.'

Before moving further, it would be worth first explaining what issue C. Mills takes with scholars who implicitly ignore these racist beliefs that political philosophers once worked on, including Mill. With respect to Mill himself (among others) he states the following,

“...Mill's exclusion of 'barbarians' from the scope of his anti-paternalist 'harm principle,' and recommendation of 'despotism' for them – the philosophical implications of these assumptions and conceptual framings about humanity are not highlighted and elaborated as they should be.”²³

C. Mills' issue is therefore that by not acknowledging the beliefs that writers such as Mill had concerning race and colonialism, our modern-day philosophy runs the risk of developing on previous political theories that have a substantially racist

²² Mills, *Decolonizing Western Political Philosophy*, p. 13.

²³ *ibid.*

component to them. He notes that racism has the habit of being “psychologized, [and] turned into a personal moral failing” of prominent Western political thinkers like Mill.²⁴ This has the adverse effect of contemporary scholars failing to recognise the fact that racism and colonialism were actually significant components of the political theories that these writers put forward. What this means for contemporary scholars, in turn, is that they will, in effect, glorify the political theories that writers such as Mill put forward and find means of incorporating them into modern discourse on global political philosophy with no mention of the fact that not only were these theories operating from a decidedly racist framework, but thus were actually political theories designed for a white Euro-centric vision of the world.²⁵

Before moving to discuss how Mill’s racist beliefs are incorporated into Jones’ moral character thesis, it must first be elaborated what those beliefs are and how Mill justifies them theoretically. Let us begin, therefore, with the now infamous qualification that Mill makes at the beginning of *On Liberty* that sets out his scope for his harm principle:

“Those who are still in a state to require being taken care of by others, must be protected against their own actions as well as against external injury. For the same reason [as with children], we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage... Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end. Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion.”²⁶

From this it is evident that Mill believes that there are certain peoples or races that are *de facto* less developed than Western Europeans and that, for this reason, they are not in a position to take advantage of the benefits that free speech would grant

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 13.

them. This is justified along the grounds that such peoples need to be saved from themselves, and that by being so cognitively deficient due to their status as non-white Westerners they require a very strict, paternalistic form of government as opposed to the relatively liberal one that Mill proposes in the treatise. It is worth noting that the implication is not that these races should be under the rule of despotism for eternity: his emphasis on such people being in their “nonage” or that they are “anterior” to the state of being able to get a maximal amount of improvement from the incorporation of the principle of liberty demonstrates that he may not have intended for such races to be subjected to foreign rule for as long as possible.

While this passage is the most well-known elaboration of Mill’s beliefs concerning foreign peoples, he does go into more depth on this in *Representative Government*, in his chapter, ‘Under What Social Conditions Representative Government is Inapplicable.’²⁷ While his focus in this text is far more on how to apply a structure of government than elucidating the importance of free speech, the claims he makes here are also applicable to how he justifies excluding certain people from the harm principle.

In this chapter, Mill outlines to what sort of people and nations the imposition of a representative form of government would not be applicable. There are, to Mill, certain states that lack some fundamental component either in government or in the minds of the citizens that would enable the successful imposition of a representative government on them. He explores several reasons for this: one of those most pertinent to our current discussion is in the case “in which a small but leading portion of the population, from difference of race, more civilized origin, or other peculiarities of circumstance, are markedly superior in civilization and general character to the remainder.”²⁸ Here, while his analysis is more intranationally oriented, Mill once again is stating that there are certain peoples who are more advanced and capable of ruling than others, and that, for this reason,

²⁷ Mill, *Representative Government*, pp. 225-234.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 232.

“The best prospect of improvement for a people thus composed lies in the existence of a *constitutionally unlimited*, or at least a practically preponderant, authority in the chief ruler of the dominant class.”²⁹

As with his remarks in *On Liberty*, Mill is advocating a scenario where if the masses of a nation are somehow deficient in their ability to be ruled by a representative government then the only alternative is some despotic rule from the superior class of people. From his discussion it is evident that a superior class means a class of people most similar to those found in Western European nations. This ruling class may be found from within the nation as in the case just discussed, or, indeed, elsewhere as per the quotation with which I opened this chapter. It would be entirely permissible, according to Mill, for there to be a ruling class of ‘civilised’ foreigners put in government for the interests of the populace. This is because the masses themselves are not in a position to be represented by one another in government due to some deficiency, predominantly associated with race.

Before moving to discuss the internal problem of whether this is decidedly in conflict with Mill’s anti-paternalism and upholding individuality, it is worth noting once more that Mill’s aim is not necessarily to have these ruling classes, whether foreign or not, in position for good. He notes when discusses the case of the ruling class within a nation that once in this despotic position of power, the ruler would use that power to educate those lower classes such that they would later be in a position to grant representatives from their ranks in government.³⁰ This is linked to Mill’s overarching idea that it is the duty to elevate and educate people to a position of improved faculties, and this includes the case where people need to be educated out of the bad cognitive habits (whatever those may be) that come with their being of a ‘lower’ race than others. In any case, it is clear that from the texts themselves there is little room for interpreting one’s way out of conceiving of Mill as fervently in favour of colonialism and that a large part of that is based on some racist biases he

²⁹ *ibid.* (italics added for emphasis)

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 230.

holds against people of non-Western backgrounds. The question now is whether these political beliefs of his are in conflict with the rest of his political philosophy, a question I will now address.

Setting aside the objectionable nature of Mill's remarks, the pressing question for the sake of this essay is whether Jones' moral character thesis can solve the potentially glaring contradiction between Mill's denunciation of people of 'lower' races and the fact that they require despotic rule over them such that they can become civilised nations and his desire to promote individuality and tolerance of people's ways of life. Immediately, it appears that his claims in the beginning of *On Liberty* and in chapter four of *Representative Government* give rise to a tension between his claim that "neither one person, nor any number of persons is warranted in saying to another human creature of ripe years, that he shall not do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it."³¹ This is because if it is not the place of anyone to denounce an adult's way of life, then it is questionable to advocate "constitutionally unlimited" rule over people by virtue of a certain race by another superior one, as it would include a great deal of intervention into the livelihoods of those involved, seeing as liberty is not applicable to such peoples. More generally, there is a difficulty in representing Mill as a fervent advocate of tolerance of almost all ways of life while from these texts he is demonstrably intolerant of the way of life of certain people such that their lives must have a more 'civilised' form of government imposed upon them.

I contend that as offensive as his claims concerning race and colonialism are, they are internally consistent with his wider political project if we are to follow from Jones' reading of Mill. It is evident from the above passages that Mill was operating from the belief that there were certain races and types of national character that were straightforwardly less civilised than those found in the Western world. This view would hopefully be considered at best misguided by most twenty-first century scholars, however once it is accepted that this was the basis of Mill's consideration

³¹ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 74.

of foreign peoples, then the rest of his claims surrounding how one should address them do fit with his overall theory of government intervention.

The reason that his suggested policies are consistent with the rest of his theory primarily revolves around Mill's idea of the central role of government with respect to the people it's governing. As mentioned above, Mill does not see the subjection of such peoples to despotic rule as a permanent system of government for them. Rather, he believes that given the racially-driven back foot from which such people begin, the immediate imposition of both representative government and the policies deriving from the harm principle will not lead to the benefits that would be reaped if they were imposed upon civilisations that were several steps further in the process of understanding how the rule of government functioned.

As noted by Jones, Mill did not favour the notion that unlimited freedom over one's own behaviour would be of great advantage to any nation if taken on its own. This is because, as noted earlier, Mill believed that without policies in place to sufficiently educate people into the mindset that they should decide what works for them best rather than follow others without question, then they will not benefit from being granted sovereignty over their lives.³² There must instead be a system of government policy in place that can instil in the minds of the population the idea that they can decide for themselves what is best for them and be able to justify themselves in their decisions. An integral part of this system would be a rigorous programme of state education to grant the population the cognitive capacity required to have the greatest opportunities available to them once reaching maturity. It is for this reason that Mill's advocacy of foreign rule over 'barbarian' nations is consistent with his desire to foster a specific kind of moral character as elucidated by Jones: Mill notes that it is the role of the governing body of 'superior races' to educate the 'lower' masses to the extent that they will be able to one day be a part of a representative government themselves and thereby gain all its advantages, including liberty. While a state is in its immaturity (by which Mill includes the fact that it is populated by 'lower' races), it requires a system in place

³² Mill, *Representative Government*, p. 194.

to bring about in the masses this moral character that will enable them to benefit from being granted both individual sovereignty over their lives and representative sovereignty over the nation itself.

Recall that Mill specifically states that his justification for the denial of the right to liberty to children is identical to that of his denying it to barbarian nations.³³ This is because, like in the case of children, ‘lower’ races require some form of education before forming a civilised society with a representative government and free speech. He alludes to this when he claims that there are some societies that have not yet understood the concept of obedience to the law, and so takes it as granted that imposing on them a representative system of government with all its trimmings will not be beneficial to them. Furthermore, Mill explicitly states that there are certain cognitive characteristics required to be a part of the ruling body of a nation, and if the masses lack this, then the rulers should not be drawn from their ranks.³⁴ Yet, again, this is not to say that, to Mill, once the rulers (whether foreign or from a superior race within the nation) are granted power they should then retain that power for the remainder of the nation’s existence. On the contrary, seeing as Mill in the same text notes the significance of a government’s duty (regardless of the form of that government) to educate its populace as per the quotation with which I opened this chapter,³⁵ it is evident that the ruling class or race should use their power to bring the masses to their level of cognitive prowess such that not only may they later form part of the government themselves, but equally the benefits of a liberal society including sovereignty over their lives according to the harm principle.

From this it is clear that despite the error in Mill’s assumption that there are distinctly lower races than others who by virtue of their ‘barbarian’ status are deficient in certain cognitive capabilities, the fact that Mill justifies his policies on the same grounds as those concerning children demonstrates that his advocacy of colonialism is consistent with his wider philosophy under Jones’ moral character thesis. While this line of justification would undoubtedly be read today as distinctly

³³ *ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁴ Mill, *Representative Government*, p. 231.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 199.

patronising, Mill's aim to cultivate a certain moral character in the populace of nations is seen just as well in his colonialist foreign policy as with his policies on state education.

In sum, from the passages that Jones' cites from *On Liberty* and *Representative Government*, as well as the passages from *Utilitarianism* and those passages that highlight Mill's colonialist beliefs that I have cited, that there is strong backing for the claim that Mill had in mind the promotion of a certain moral character for his overarching political project. From what can be gathered so far, Mill's policies on the franchise, on freedom of expression and privacy, on education and on the subjugation of "barbarian" peoples, as well as his distinction between higher and lower pleasures in *Utilitarianism* are present for the sake of propagating reason and virtue in the populace of a nation. Before going into the specifics of that in which this reason and this virtue consists, it would be worth addressing some potential counter-arguments to Mill's theory that would, if sound, threaten Jones' thesis and the overall idea that Mill saw government as having the duty of cultivating a moral character in its citizens. This will be the subject of the following chapter.

2. Tensions & Counter-Arguments

"[N]either one person, nor any number of persons, is warranted in saying to another human creature of ripe years, that he shall not do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it."³⁶

(John Stuart Mill, 'Of the Limits to the Authority of Society over the Individual')

This chapter will explore two different counter-arguments to Jones' account that Mill's primary philosophical-political project was to set out an ideal of society whereby individuals therein could cultivate a particular moral character. Jones and I contend that it is to this end that Mill's suggested policies as outlined in *On Liberty* and *Representative Government* are aimed, yet central to this is the idea that a state must leave the individual to be free to choose their own life, otherwise this moral

³⁶ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 74.

character will never come about in the populace. The first counter-argument I intend to explore, therefore, is one that states straightforwardly that the policies that Mill suggests do not point towards a free society that would cultivate such a moral character, but instead a censorious society whereby an individual living there would live in fear of the opinions of others and would never act or form opinions in the way that someone with Jones' moral character would.

This objection comes from the first chapter of Joseph Hamburger's *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control*, simply entitled 'Liberty and Control', stating that Mill suggests quite the opposite of a society where individuals are free to flourish in a manner appropriate to the ideal moral character, but instead that individuals should have their self-regarding actions monitored and punished by fellow citizens if they do not conform to the ideal of tasteful self-regarding behaviour. This would mean that Mill's ideal society would not be one of varied "experiments of living" with each individual having the right character to choose for themselves what life best suits them, as Jones would argue, but instead a society where the choices of individuals are governed by the fear of the strict punishment that they will receive for not acting in the most appropriate manner.

It is worth noting that this objection is not one that Hamburger levels at Jones' account in particular, but rather it is presented as an alternate reading of Mill by taking into consideration some of the lesser-cited passages from Mill's *On Liberty* and elsewhere. The reason I raise it here is that, should Hamburger's interpretation of these passages be accurate, then it would present a great threat to Jones' account of Mill as fostering a free society such that individuals can be virtuous enough to help one another and rational enough to work out what society is best for them. If, as Hamburger argues in his first chapter, the policies that Mill suggests point towards a censorious society with its citizens living in fear of the consequences of their self-regarding actions, then this would contradict Jones' account in its entirety. Such interpretations of Mill as Hamburger's are not uncommon, as many other scholars have argued along the lines that Mill's society is not nearly as free and liberal as he is often read. It is for this reason that I take

these interpretations seriously, because to discount them when they provide strong arguments against Jones' interpretation would be irresponsible.

IV. Distasteful Self-Regarding Actions

Hamburger begins his analysis with the following quotation from the end of *On Liberty*:

“Liberty is often granted where it should be withheld, as well as withheld where it should be granted.”³⁷

Hamburger's aim in his first chapter is therefore to elucidate the overlooked first half of this quotation, and in doing so note areas of *On Liberty* that advocate control over actions that most interpreters would regard as self-regarding. One part of *On Liberty* that Hamburger points to that scholars ostensibly ignore is a section in chapter four where Mill discusses how it may be the case that self-regarding actions may warrant expressions of distaste from other members of society, despite the fact that those actions do not directly harm others. In response to C. L. Ten, who interprets Mill as claiming “that individual liberty in the area of self-regarding actions should be absolute,”³⁸ Hamburger makes the following claim:

“Yet these interpretations of Mill's position are not compatible with the following statement in chapter four of *On Liberty*: ‘*A person may suffer very severe penalties at the hands of others for faults which directly concern only himself.*’ (*On Liberty*, p. 76)”³⁹

Hamburger goes on to discuss how this statement is emblematic of exactly the sort of control that Mill advocates in the quotation with which Hamburger opened the chapter. He notes that Mill describes how certain character traits would be

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 96.

³⁸ C. L. Ten, *Mill on Liberty*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 40, cited in Hamburger *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control*, p. 8.

³⁹ Hamburger, *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control*, p. 8 (Hamburger's italics).

considered as “inferior” and would therefore warrant such people with these character traits to be “necessarily and properly a subject of distaste.” From this, Hamburger goes on to make the following claims:

“Distaste and contempt are *instruments of control*, and the persons exposed to them would find their liberty *threatened* and reduced...”

Mill tells us that low and depraved conduct will and should elicit distaste and contempt, which *surely are ways of interfering*...

Since those exposed to distaste and contempt are likely to regard such judgments as *censorious* and as attempts to direct social pressure against them, it is necessary to consider whether Mill’s advocacy of distaste and contempt is an example of the kind of control mentioned in his conversation with Grote.”⁴⁰

These statements all tend towards Hamburger’s overall point that following on from Mill’s earlier quotation about possible “severe penalties,” it would appear that an area where society needs to control its citizens is in the baseness of its citizens’ self-regarding behaviour. This control would come in the form of fellow citizens treating individuals who display poor behaviour with distaste and contempt, which would, to Hamburger, “surely” lead to those citizens who behave distastefully to feel like they are being censored and like their liberties are being infringed upon by the attitudes of others. If this is the sort of control that Mill is advocating, then this threatens Jones’s theory that Mill’s objection to paternalism is present for the sake of cultivating a virtuous and rational moral character in the citizens, seeing as Hamburger is implying that Mill is more in favour of a society in which individuals control each other’s behaviour in order to maintain conformity to the status quo.

Hamburger’s interpretation here leaves a lot to be desired, however. The fundamental issue with Hamburger’s argument is that there are two conspicuous

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 8-9 (italics added for emphasis). The conversation with Grote to which Hamburger alludes concerns a letter sent by Mill to Grote before the publication of *On Liberty* where Mill describes the aim of his text as pointing out both how there are areas of society that have too great a presence of control and others that require more control.

elements of Mill's argument in chapter four of *On Liberty* of which Hamburger makes no mention at all in his analysis. First and foremost, the quotation from *On Liberty* upon which Hamburger basis his argument is, in fact, incomplete, and Hamburger makes no mention of the caveat attached to it. The actual quotation from chapter four reads as follows:

“[A] person may suffer very severe penalties at the hands of others, for faults which directly concern only himself; but he suffers these penalties only in so far as they are *natural*, and, as it were, the spontaneous consequences of the faults themselves, *not because they are purposely inflicted on him for the sake of punishment.*”⁴¹

It is unclear as to why there is no mention of this in Hamburger's argument. From this caveat, it is evident that Mill is stating that any reprimand that a citizen may receive for distasteful behaviour would *not* be one that is imposed on them because a group of fellow citizens decide to punish them. While this does not negate Mill's claim that people may be punished for poor self-regarding behaviour, there is an important distinction to be drawn between Mill advocating “directed social pressure,” “censorious” expressions of distaste or the creation of new “instruments of control” and his noting the basic sociological fact that there will always be behaviour that fellow citizens find distasteful. From the rest of the quotation it is evident that Mill is stating the latter.

Hamburger could argue that this distinction is ultimately vacuous, seeing as control through social pressure occurs regardless of whether it arises from a desire to punish or from natural consequences. It is true from this quotation that social pressures on self-regarding behaviour will be present, and the caveat Mill attaches does not negate that. Where Hamburger errs, however, is in believing that because Mill points out that it will never be the case that people's self-regarding behaviour will be met with total indifference this means that he is advocating a society where one's self-regarding behaviour is controlled by society.

⁴¹ *ibid.* (italics added for emphasis).

This is a poor inference, seeing as all Mill is stating by this claim is that by being legally free to be sovereign over one's own self-regarding behaviour, one should not then expect that distasteful behaviour will be met by warmth or even indifference from their fellow citizen, even if that behaviour does not directly affect the fellow citizens in question. Hamburger's claim that distaste is an "instrument of control" has little grounding in either *On Liberty* or anywhere else. It is difficult to imagine any sort of society where there would be people acting in distasteful ways while their neighbours reacted with a total lack of concern. For Mill to claim that when people behave in a distasteful manner they will be met with contempt is therefore not, as Hamburger claims, an argument in favour of controlling people's self-regarding behaviour, particularly given that Mill unequivocally states that any penalties received for distasteful behaviour are not to be specifically inflicted as willed-for punishments by fellow citizens.

Setting aside Hamburger's inaccuracy with respect to Mill's account of penalties for self-regarding behaviour, there is another aspect to Mill's argument in chapter four that Hamburger does not sufficiently address. This is the distinction that I have already alluded to that Mill makes between the following:

"[T]he loss of consideration which a person may rightly incur by defect of prudence or of personal dignity, and the reprobation which is due to him for an offence against the rights of others."⁴²

The problem with Hamburger's account in this section is that Hamburger ignores the significance of this distinction entirely. As a result, he goes on to argue that Mill's vehement account of how a government's intervention on an individual's behaviour should occur only when they harm others is a comparable form of control to the contemptuous attitudes citizens may have to an individual's self-regarding behaviour.

⁴² Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 77.

This argument fails because Mill explicitly states that these two concepts are not the same. This is evidenced in the caveat that Mill attaches to penalties that may be incurred for self-regarding behaviour, whose conspicuous absence from Hamburger's analysis once again proves to be its downfall. The legal punishment that is imposed for a violation of the harm principle by an individual is demonstrably distinct in nature from the penalties that an individual may find for 'low' self-regarding behaviour, because, once again, the latter type of penalty is not imposed directly as a form of punishment, and only occurs if it is a "spontaneous consequence of the faults themselves." This penalty may be righteous by virtue of the fact that there is always self-regarding behaviour that would not be desirable in a society. Yet, to describe the natural consequence of undesirable self-regarding behaviour as a form of "control" comparable with a legal sanction for causing harm to others is misguided. Equally underappreciated in Hamburger's interpretation is the fact that individual freedom, as Jones notes, is a right that is of greater importance than all others, and that thereby trumps any form of possible control that may be deliberately imposed as punishment for undesirable self-regarding behaviour. Mill states, for instance,

"But with regard to the merely contingent, or, as it may be called, constructive injury which a person causes to society, by conduct which neither violates any specific duty to the public, nor occasions perceptible hurt to any assignable individual except himself; *the inconvenience is one which society can afford to bear*, for the sake of the greater good of human freedom."⁴³

From this it is evident that it is far more important for the sake of the "permanent interests of man as a progressive being" that individuals be free from externally-imposed control on their self-regarding behaviour. This applies even in cases where that behaviour may be considered harmful to the individuals themselves, and / or when that behaviour may cause offense to others while not directly harming them. This is what Jones stated with regard to the moral character: it is impossible for a moral character consisting in rational thought for one's own life and future to

⁴³ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 80 (italics added for emphasis).

flourish in a society where one's actions are being monitored by either the state or one's neighbours, and this quotation proves that Mill operated from the same belief. Therefore, Hamburger's claim that Mill is an advocate of censorious control on the basis of his claim that individuals may suffer penalties for self-regarding behaviour is an inaccurate representation of Mill's theory of individual freedom, and one that Jones' moral character thesis can explain away with ease.

V. A More Fundamental Contradiction

Now that the threat posed by Hamburger's account has been set aside, there is a distinct objection that may be raised against Jones' moral character thesis. This is, that it portrays Mill's project as being inherently contradictory. It may be argued that a strong contradiction exists between Mill's desire to simultaneously promote citizens to live diverse, individual lives and his desire to create a society based on a singular ethical goal and foster within its citizens one single moral character for the sake of fulfilling this goal. It is this tension that I intend to overcome in this section. In brief, the question that needs to be answered is as follows: Is it possible to have a free state fostering individual "experiments of living" that simultaneously has as its goal the cultivation of a single, specific moral character in each member of its populace?

At first glance, it may appear as if there is a gross contradiction between these two elements of individuality and single moral character, seeing as it could be argued that in effectively forcing this moral character onto citizens Mill would be creating a society with a distinctly homogenous populace. Furthermore, this tension is not one present in the interpretation of those scholars such as Kurer who argue that, to Mill, liberty has purely intrinsic value, and is not, like Jones' argues, present for any other purpose. This is because if liberty is not there for the sake of some external goal, then this would mean, for Mill, that the variety of experiments of living exist for their own sake, and that there is no single moral goal that could contradict his advocacy of liberty. In any case, my concern is not with the interpretations of authors such as Kurer, but instead with that presented by Jones, for – as I hope to have

demonstrated up until now – not only is this the strongest interpretation for explaining how to tie all the elements of Mill together, but it also holds up to the objections that Hamburger (and others, in effect) raise against Mill’s ultimate goal.

Moving to the current concern, scholars have taken Mill’s focus on what might be read today as strict regulations on education as a sign that he desires to create a single moral belief system in every citizen. McCloskey, for instance, states the following:

“Mill is less evidently committed to moral legislation in the sense of legislation directed at making immoral people more inclined to be moral *qua* moral. However, his stress on education, which it would seem would include inculcating social virtues, suggests that he is not committed to complete opposition to such legislation... and his general view of the state and his case for and qualifications of liberty suggest that he cannot, in principle, rule it out as always illegitimate.”⁴⁴

McCloskey’s concern appears to be that by pushing a virtuous form of life onto children while they are educated, Mill is not denying the possibility that his legislative system could include laws that, in effect, prevent citizens from following a moral code of their own and that, instead, forces them to follow Mill’s moral life. McCloskey is therefore concerned with the idea that Mill might be confused in promoting individuality and tolerance while simultaneously allowing for the indoctrination of a specific moral code in the citizens’ minds.

This reading of Mill is, however, misguided. McCloskey’s idea that Mill’s qualifications of liberty, such as those in education, demonstrate that he cannot rule out laws that force people to follow a specific moral code is demonstrably false. What scholars such as McCloskey fail to appreciate in Mill’s advocacy of a specific moral character is in what that moral character actually consists. This is where Jones’ account of Mill shines: Jones grants a complete account of what kind of

⁴⁴ H. J. McCloskey, ‘Mill’s Liberalism – A Rejoinder to Mr. Ryan’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 62, 1996, pp. 65-66.

moral character that Mill wants citizens to adopt. It consists in the ability to make decisions for oneself concerning how to live one's life (among other things) based on reason. Mill's stringent state education system, for instance, is in place to enable this character to be a part of all citizens' mindsets. McCloskey et al. see this as in conflict with individuality because it is, in effect, an advocacy of intolerance towards other moral characters, however they overestimate how all-dominating this moral character would be in the minds of citizens. As Jones notes, this would lead to an intolerance of those who would live their lives according to arbitrary customs without exercising their own reason. However, the crucial point here is that this is the *only* intolerance of which Mill is in favour. To encourage citizens to make decisions according to what they conceive of as best for them is not to encourage them to live a specific kind of life beyond one according to what they desire.

A helpful means of illustrating this would be to distinguish between what I will term moral *character* and moral *personality*. Jones does not explicitly make such a distinction, however his article alludes to it and spelling it out aids in demonstrating how Jones' account can explain away this tension on which authors such as McCloskey place emphasis. Advocating a specific mindset in such a manner that forced citizens to live very similar lives would be an advocacy of a specific moral *personality*, as opposed to a moral *character*. The concerns McCloskey have with Mill's account all work under the assumption that Mill is advocating a specific moral *personality*, which would, were it the case for Mill, lead to a distinctly homogenous society. This is because all citizens would work under an identical belief system and would, as a result, end up living similar lives. However, this is not what Mill advocates: he encourages citizens to decide what is best for them on their own, and part of enabling this would be making them aware of the options available to them, of the different pleasures in which they might engage and the different options of government for which they may vote. This is advocating a moral *character*, which is distinct from forcing them down a single belief-system or way of living their life, that is, forcing them into a single moral personality.

Kurer's 1989 article *John Stuart Mill on Government Intervention* also aids in illustrating this point. While offering a different account of Mill's grounding principle than Jones', he notes that if Mill is to advocate individuality in lifestyle, then he must advocate a theory of government intervention that enables liberty. As Kurer succinctly puts it, "variety presupposes liberty."⁴⁵ There need to be systems in place that enable this liberty, and part of that system is encouraging citizens to decide for themselves how they may best live their lives. This is where the moral character plays its vital role: as Jones notes, Mill does not believe that this variety in individuals would be achieved by simply allowing citizens to behave as they please with the government playing no role whatsoever. This is because of Mill's fear of the despotism of custom: left to their own devices and with no awareness of the different options available to them, citizens would most likely fall back on what tradition has dictated in the past. In order to achieve a maximal amount of variety in experiments of living, first and foremost citizens need to be inculcated with the mindset that they ought to decide for themselves what is best for their own lives. Mill's advocacy of moral character is therefore not one that encourages citizens to adopt a singular mindset or personality, but instead a part of his desire to enable the greatest amount of variety possible in society. It is naturally not the only part: Mill's rigorous education system, his advocacy of open voting and, as Kurer notes,⁴⁶ his desire for equality and an end to poverty are all there to enable this variety in lives.

To return to McCloskey's point, it would be consistent with Mill to deem illegitimate those laws that push for citizens to follow a single moral code, that is, to have a single moral personality. This is because those laws are in conflict with his desire for variety, whereas his laws on education and his advocacy of a single moral character are not. Therefore, Jones' account of Mill according to moral character does explain away any possible tension between Mill's philosophical project and his advocacy of individuality.

⁴⁵ Kurer, *John Stuart Mill on Government Intervention*, p. 463.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 464-465.

3. The Specifics of the Moral Character

“A person whose desire and impulses are his own – are the expression of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own culture – is said to have character. One whose desires and impulses are not his own, has no character, no more than a steam-engine has a character.”⁴⁷

(John Stuart Mill, ‘Of Individuality, as one of the Elements of Well-Being’)

Up until this point, I hope to have demonstrated that Jones’ reading of Mill according to the idea that the role of government is to promote in the minds of its citizens a certain moral character is a very accurate means of reconciling all of his texts under one synthesis. I have demonstrated that it unifies not only the texts to which Jones refers, but also Mill’s account of utilitarianism as elucidated in his eponymous treatise. In addition, this account is the best tool available to overcome the tensions that have arisen between, firstly, Mill’s advocacy of tolerance of lifestyles and his advocacy of despotic rule over nations whose populace consists in ‘barbarian’ peoples, secondly, Mill’s desire for minimal governmental intervention and his desire for stringent policies for education and child-rearing, and, thirdly, Mill’s goal of fostering individuality and his desire to promote this very specific moral character. As such, I consider the first step of my argument complete, inasmuch as I have shown that Mill’s practical philosophy alongside elements of his theoretical philosophy is centred around a single ideal mindset in individuals.

My goal, now, is to elaborate more on that in which this ideal mindset or moral character consists. So far, I have only discussed the specifics of this moral character with respect to the potential inconsistencies for which it has been deployed. However, it would be worth spelling out exactly in what this now infamous ‘moral character’ consists, such that it may be accurately and completely compared with an existentialist account of moral character like Sartre’s. From both Jones’ analysis and Mill’s own writing, I surmise that it consists in two primary facets, from each of which all of the suggested governmental policies that Mill

⁴⁷ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 59.

recommends in *On Liberty and Representative Government* stem. These are, firstly, the rational component, and, secondly, the virtuous component. There are connections between these two components, which I shall address, however for the sake of future comparison with Sartre, I shall presently discuss these aspects separately.

VI. The Rational Component

As previously mentioned the key component of Mill's desired moral character, to Jones, is some "ideal of rationality," however this requires further discussion in order to tease out what exactly he meant by this, seeing as Jones does not go into depth on that in which this ideal consists as abstracted from the various aspects of Mill's writing to which Jones applies it. What Jones has hoped to demonstrate that there are a number of elements of Mill's work that all point towards fostering *some kind of* "rational" mindset in the populace, and what I have hoped to demonstrate is that not only is this backed up by other parts of Mill's politics, but also that this conclusion of Jones' is a strong means of addressing many of the proposed inconsistencies in Mill's writing. In sum, these are the main elements of Mill's writing that point to this:

1. Mill's advocacy of freedom of expression, the right to privacy and criticism of paternalism supports the notion that it is up to the individual to make the rational choice for themselves as to which life would best suit them.⁴⁸ In creating a society that protects these rights, the variety of "experiments of living" that would be present in Mill's ideal free society would enable the individuals therein to be aware of more and more options available to them in their decisions surrounding those choices.

⁴⁸ When I refer to an individual's choice of "life," I refer, as did Mill, to any and all choices within that individual's power, including, but not limited to, their choice of lifestyle, profession, pastimes, political beliefs, religion or lack thereof, and the people around whom they are surrounded.

2. Linked to the above point, Mill's denunciation of the "despotism of custom" as elaborated in *On Liberty* is present due to the problems he associates with "dead dogma," that is, the condition whereby beliefs are ingrained into the mind of the individual without simultaneously granting them any reason as to why these beliefs are – or ought to be believed as – true. This problem this causes, to Mill, is one of diminishing the rational component of the individual's mind, as their beliefs and opinions are held in a manner not conducive to their reason and understanding. He states,

"If the intellect and judgment of mankind ought to be cultivated... [and] if the cultivation of the understanding consists in one thing more than another, it is surely in learning the grounds of one's opinions.

[...] Even in natural philosophy, there is always some other explanation possible of the same facts... and it has to be shown why that other theory cannot be the true one: and until this is shown, and until we know how it is shown, we do not understand the grounds of our opinion."⁴⁹

From this it is evident that failing to foster in the mind of the individual this level of understanding goes against the government's role of cultivating this "ideal of rationality."

3. The stringent educational system that Mill advocates is present for (among other reasons) the sake of making individuals aware of the options available to them concerning all aspects of their life. The aim is to make individuals capable of rationally choosing what best suits their interests and prospects through critically evaluating those options available to them. Furthermore, with a strong education system available to all members of a nation will come greater life opportunities from which to choose, particularly with respect to choices of employment and living situation.

⁴⁹ Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 36-37.

4. Mill's distinction between higher and lower pleasures as elucidated in *Utilitarianism* is grounded on distinguishing between those pleasures that engage the individual's higher faculty of reason and those that do not. Thus, pleasures that encourage critical thinking such as engaging in stimulating debate or exposing themselves to radical art forms are more preferable in Mill's eyes. One could surmise that what Mill means by encouraging critical thinking would be in a manner linked to point 2, viz. in a manner that would avoid abiding by the "despotism of custom."

5. Linked to the above two points, Mill's desire for all individuals within a society to live in what he terms "comfortable subsistence"⁵⁰ as an economic goal (with respect to both taxes and wages), is also a means to the end of cultivating an ideal of rationality. Kurer notes this link when he states that Mill is well aware of the fact that poverty and other associated difficulties (for instance, a subsequent lack of access to good healthcare) are great obstructions in the path of the cultivation of an ideally rational populace.⁵¹ This point may appear obvious, but it is worth noting, as Kurer has done, that evils such as poverty and disease are the first problems in society that should (and, crucially, *can*) be eliminated before any cultivation of rational capabilities is to occur.⁵²

This is not to say that the elimination of poverty and the granting access to basic survival requirements should be implemented solely for the eventual purpose of propagating this "ideal of rationality," as there are obviously a number of other reasons as to why Mill might wish for poverty to be eliminated. However, it is still worth observing the link between eliminating sweeping evils such as poverty and enabling the reason of the individual to flourish. If the individual is incapacitated by one or more of these evils, then not only the ability for them to indulge in higher pleasures, but even to have a choice as to what they might do with their lives is naturally going to be impossible. One can very well educate an individual

⁵⁰ J. S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy and Chapters on Socialism* [1848], J. Riley (ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 196.

⁵¹ Kurer, *Mill on Government Intervention*, p. 465.

⁵² Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 128.

to the extent that they learn of all the religious beliefs, professions and pastimes in which they might indulge, but this would be of little interest if the individual in question was suffering from such a lack of basic survival needs that the prospect of engaging their reason in some higher manner is not so much unappealing, but straightforwardly irrelevant, or, worse, their rational capabilities were hindered by malnutrition. For this reason, allowing all members of society live in some form of “comfortable subsistence” will undoubtedly aid in their ability to rationally choose that which would best suit their lives.

From the above five points, one can grasp a clearer overall picture of that in which this “ideal of rationality” consists. What he was pointing towards begins from a basic conception of what it means to be a rational being, that is, the ability for an individual to conceive of a scenario that would suit their interests, and then take the necessary steps towards effecting that scenario. In its most basic sense, an example of this would be that a rational being might have the sensation of hunger, recognise it as a need for sustenance, and subsequently eat something to relieve themselves of this sensation. An irrational being, on the other hand, would have the sensation of hunger and, regardless of their recognition of its significance, decide that because of this they ought to bathe themselves. Where Mill builds on this conception to the point of grounding government policy on it is in the idea of enabling this basic conception of rationality to spread to all elements of an individual’s life – beyond their basic animalistic requirements – and eliminating all external influences that might hinder the effecting of whatever scenario an individual may have decided would suit their interests (within some constraints, which I shall discuss in the following section).

This means that all decisions concerning an individual’s life should follow the pattern of “I desire that x because I have decided that x would suit my best interests, and I recognise that in order to attain x , I require y , and so I shall acquire y in order to effect x ,” such that y is attainable under the possibilities granted by the conditions within which the individual lives, and x is a realistic scenario under those same conditions. The rest of Mill’s arguments concerning the fostering of rationality

operate in a manner conducive to this pattern of thought of the individual. First of all, and crucial in Mill's eyes to his "ideal of rationality" is the fact that for the individual themselves to decide for themselves what x is. This is where his arguments against the problems associated with paternalistic policies and societal norms that have people's decisions made for them play into his ideal, seeing as Mill is a strong believer in the idea that it is the individual who is in the best position to decide for themselves what best suits their own interests. He states in *On Liberty*,

"He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision."⁵³

From this one can see which elements Mill has in mind for his "ideal of rationality." As such, government policy should primarily be based upon the cultivation of these abilities, and secondarily upon the elimination of those forces that would hinder them. To Mill, one of the greatest hindrances to these faculties is the overreliance on tradition, and, therefore, eliminating this must be placed as a high priority in government policy. To this avail, policies such as those discussed earlier on education would be of primary importance to the cultivation of these faculties. Beyond this, those materials (y) that an individual requires in order to achieve their ideal scenario (x) in whichever field of their life this scenario concerns must be, to the greatest possible extent, made available to them. This is where the importance of granting the widest possible set of opportunities to each individual fits into Mill's "ideal of rationality," for it may be that there is a society devoid of prejudice and the "despotism of custom," however if this society is still plagued with problems such as severe wealth inequality, then those on the worse end of that inequality will struggle to make their lives their own when they cannot afford to acquire the means to achieve the scenarios that would best suit their interests.

⁵³ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 58.

In sum, with respect to the rational component of this “moral character” that Mill advocates, this component consists in the ability of the individual to decide for themselves what endeavours best suit them in all aspects of their life, the ability to work out what they require to pursue those endeavours, and the ability to stand by and justify their decisions to themselves, such that they would not go back on them on a whim or be swayed by the actions of others. Mill’s policies that target the elimination of the mindset that would follow custom, the actions of everyone else around them, or what society would deem suitable for someone of their social station, as well as those policies on stringent public education are those that would enable this rational mindset to flourish to the greatest possible extent.

VII. The Virtuous Component

While Jones states that the “basic constituent”⁵⁴ of Mill’s ideal character is this rational mindset, it must be stressed that he is putting forward a thesis grounded on the idea that Mill’s work was committed to fostering some form of *moral* character in a society’s populace. It would be remiss to disregard this element, given that, after all, the paper to which I have been referring is entitled “John Stuart Mill as *Moralist*.” But the question remains as to not only in what this “morality” consists, but also how this morality is derived from the basic constituent that is the “ideal of rationality” as elucidated above. In this case, Jones does aid in this discussion by giving a clearer account of what is meant by the virtuous element of the moral character, seeing as his thesis centres more closely around Mill’s ethics than his account of human reason. To take one example, Jones states the following:

“[T]he more quintessentially Victorian language of character comes into its own. But the vigorous vocabulary of the republican tradition runs through the whole [of Representative Government]: ‘*energy*,’ to take the most obvious example, but also ‘*activity*,’ ‘*self-reliance*,’ and ‘*public spirit*’ are recurrent terms of commendation. And the invocation of the active virtues serves the same purpose in Mill’s argument as it characteristically served in the republican tradition: the

⁵⁴ Jones, ‘John Stuart Mill as Moralist’, p. 288.

point of those virtues was to combat a natural tendency to decay and degeneration and corruption in human affairs.”⁵⁵

What Jones is stating here is that there are a number of qualities that Mill considers valuable and that ought to be cultivated within the mind of the populace for the purposes of what would best be described in Mill’s own words as “the permanent interests of man as a progressive being.”⁵⁶ Taking these qualities individually, one might draw a comparison between these and some of those qualities I cited earlier from *On Liberty* of “observation,” “reasoning and judgment,” “activity,” “discrimination,” “firmness and self-control.”⁵⁷ “Activity” appears in both statements and “energy” may be seen as an amalgam of “firmness and self-control,” among other qualities that would be seen as virtuous according to Mill, such as the inherent drive towards finding and effecting more suitable scenarios for one’s life. This “energy” is not only useful for the sake of the rational mindset, but also for the virtuous, seeing as this would be required in order for society to progress at all. This is evident if one considers both Jones’ observations above, as well as Jones’ other observation that Mill has little faith in society developing of its own accord. As Jones notes, Mill straightforwardly states that “Things left to take care of themselves inevitably decay,”⁵⁸ and for this reason there must be a significant shift in public perspective and character in order for there to be significant progress in society. Meanwhile, “observation,” “reasoning and judgment” would fall exclusively under the rational component of this moral character, while “self-reliance” and “public spirit” would fall under the virtuous component, which I shall now discuss further.

The notion of “self-reliance” can be thought of as Mill pointing towards some form of individualistic perspective of one’s relation to society. I have not yet referred to such a tendency, however a number of elements of his writing I have drawn on that would point towards this tendency. His idea that it is up to the individual to decide

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 292 (italics added for emphasis).

⁵⁶ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 14.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵⁸ Mill, *Representative Government*, p. 194.

for themselves which life suits themselves, and his disdain at the lack of progression of society that has resulted from people exclusively following the advice or the paths of those around them would indicate that Mill's moral character is one who thinks for themselves. Indeed, the notion that the progression of society should result from exposure to a variety of "experiments of living" would be at odds with a communitarian⁵⁹ society in which people have their lives drawn for them exclusively for the good of their community and those around them. For there to be variety in lifestyle, there must be the individual freedom and opportunity for said individual to choose a unique lifestyle for themselves. In sum, it would be accurate to say that, according to Mill, aligning one's life and identity to the will of those that surround them would inevitably lead to stagnation and homogeneity, which are the absolute banes of progression. For this reason, instilling in the minds of individuals the notion that they should be self-reliant would be a useful means of avoiding too much alignment with those around them, as in becoming over-reliant on others, one would be giving up the freedom to flourish in their own right.

With all this being said, one might find the notion of Mill as an individualist as at odds with his advocacy of individuals having within them some form of "public spirit." This tension comes to light particularly when taken into consideration with Jones' first example of how Mill applies his governmental strategy for instilling public spirit into the populace, namely, his account of the franchise. As I discussed in §I, Mill did not see an individual as having a "right" to vote, but instead felt that the vote is a responsibility granted by the state to each individual as a means of having a say in how their society should be run in a manner conducive to the benefits of everyone in it. It should *not*, to Mill, be seen as a means of exerting some power over the government of society in order to benefit oneself. Yet, now, the obvious question remains as to why it is that if a member of society is to be individualistic and self-reliant, they could not try and alter the circumstances of their society in order to benefit their lives. In short, why are the individualistic desires of a

⁵⁹ I use the term "communitarian" in the broadest possible sense here, referring to any form of society whereby an individual's identity, lifestyle and development ought to, in some manner, be determined according to the will of the society in which they live, whether that society be an entire nation or a tightly-knit community within a nation. Consequently, my use of the term "individualism" is aligned with any opposing view to communitarianism.

person limited such that they do not include the only way (for most) in which they can alter the laws that constrain them?

The answer to this question is best found by exploring, once again, the means by which Mill constrains individual freedom in *On Liberty*. Rather than go through the details of the harm principle, it need only be said at this stage that an individual is free to do anything to the extent that it does not harm others in a manner that is not within their rights. With respect to the franchise, the most apt analogy that Mill uses is that of the policeman being drunk on duty. Specifically, Mill states, “No person ought to be punished simply for being drunk; but a soldier or a policeman should be punished for being drunk on duty.”⁶⁰ The harm here is problematic due to the fact that, to use a timeless expression, with the policeman’s (or soldier’s) power comes a great deal of responsibility over those around them, and by putting themselves in a position that would hinder their ability to aid those around them, one is harming the community. Similarly, when someone is granted the ability to vote, they have the power to change the way in which their entire society is governed. With the granting of such a power comes the responsibility over all those who would be affected by the vote, and, as such, it is the duty of the ballot-holder to exercise that power in a manner that they would see as beneficial to those around them. As mentioned before, this also requires of the individual to educate themselves on the current political situation such that they would be able to make an informed decision, as, otherwise, their power would be taken from them through Mill’s plural voting system. Therefore, if one is to say that the harm principle as elucidated in *On Liberty* is consistent with an individualist reading of Mill, then, seeing as Mill’s account of the franchise is consistent with the harm principle and his account of the franchise is derived from the cultivation of “public spirit” in the populace, then the idea that “public spiritedness” ought to be cultivated is equally consistent with an individualist ethical reading of Mill’s moral character.

One other key aspect of Mill’s moral character, or at least the propagation thereof, that Jones notes and that warrants further exploration is diversity. When discussing

⁶⁰ Mill, *On Liberty*, pp. 79-80.

the rational component, I concluded that the promotion of diversity is required in order for individuals to be able to hold their opinions up to scrutiny, as it would strengthen their rational capabilities and make them hold their opinions more actively, rather than hold them as “dead dogma.” It must be noted, however, that the propagation of diversity has moral consequences as well. Not only must diversity be promoted and protected through government intervention,⁶¹ but it must also be promoted within the minds of those individuals in the populace. For this reason, in order to achieve the greatest possible amount of diversity that would be beneficial to the critical-thinking abilities of the populace, the populace themselves – *as well as* the state – must be willing and able to tolerate the unique, individual lives of those around them.

This links to my earlier discussion of the idea that Mill’s ideal society was a distinctly intolerant one: Mill does show some form of intolerance towards those who would not do what they truly desire, and would instead live their lives according to tradition and prejudice, but it would be difficult to describe this sort of intolerance as endemic of an “intolerant society,” in the same way that one would struggle to describe a person who does not enjoy the company of anti-Semites and homophobes as a truly “intolerant” person. Furthermore, while it may be the case that there are distinctly Victorian notions of character that modern-day readers of Mill might find superfluous or constraining such as “dignity,” these are not nearly as important as the ability to tolerate other people’s beliefs when forming a picture of Mill’s moral character. This can be seen in the fact that Mill is willing to admit that by granting high levels of individual liberty to the populace, some people may abuse this by giving up on their “dignity,” but this supposed sacrifice is one that is affordable for the sake of the betterment of the minds of the individuals within a society that comes from enabling the greatest diversity possible.

⁶¹ When I refer to government intervention that would ensure the protection of diversity, I mean that this must be achieved through the protection of everyone’s natural right to liberty and privacy. I do not do this in order to avoid the mistake that Onora O’Neill notes in perceiving so-called “negative” rights such as those of freedom of expression and privacy as requiring no more action than the minding of one’s own business, but also require “second-order obligations” that consist in policies of the state that protect those rights. cf. O. O’Neill, ‘The Dark Side of Human Rights’, *International Affairs*, vol. 81, no. 2, 2005, p. 432.

In sum, a clearer picture of Mill's moral character can be drawn overall, taking into consideration both the rational and virtuous components thereof. Mill operates from the idea that an individual is in the best place to judge their situation and, consequently, what will better their lives. A government must therefore allow the individual the greatest opportunity not only to observe their situation clearly, but enable a variety of possible scenarios from which they can choose to enjoy their lives. Such a government must also enable individuals to have the strength of character to stand by their opinions. In doing so, given that each individual will have unique interests within a society that does not operate under the "despotism of custom," a diverse range of ways of living will be seen in the populace, with each individual capable of defending their ways of life to any other. In addition, each individual ought to be tolerant of the lives of others, so that the greatest opportunity can be granted for individuals to flourish in their own private lives the way that they desire. If a society's populace is living in "comfortable subsistence," then this will enable individuals to be self-reliant enough that one individual's life is not imposing on another's in a manner that would be detrimental to either or both flourishing.

Individuals' private lives are limited legally only insofar as they do not unnecessarily impose upon the lives of others in a harmful manner. For instance, if one individual were to decide that their best course of life would be a life of anti-Semitism, then, while their opinion ought to be tolerated, any subsequent action that would cause harm to those of the Jewish faith would not. This legal limitation according to the harm principle applies to all areas of one's life where one is responsible over others, both in profession and in politics. Consequently, where an individual must take their eyes off their own interests is when they are granted the power to affect the lives of others (in manners such as voting, or when one's profession consists in having a duty of care over those around them). In such a case, that individual's character must be "public-spirited" (as well as rational) enough to see and decide on what is best for those for whom they are responsible (such as in the case of voting).

It is this account that I will hereafter take to be the basis of my comparison with Jean-Paul Sartre's account of the existentially authentic life.

4. Sartre & The Free Individual

"[I]t is freedom which is the foundation of all essences since man reveals intramundane essences by surpassing the world toward his own possibilities."⁶²

(Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Being and Doing: Freedom')

Now I have established the intricacies of Mill's moral character as the foundation of his philosophical project, as well as what he perceives as the ideal role of government, it is finally time to turn to the work of Sartre, and, first and foremost, it is within this chapter and Chapter 6 that I shall elaborate on what I meant in the title of this essay as a "Sartrean, existentially authentic moral character." Were it enough to establish straightforwardly what Sartre means by the term "authentic" then this would be sufficient as a basis of comparison with Mill, however given the inordinate amount of literature discussing the exact nature and implications of this concept, as well as the different manners in which Sartre uses this concept across his various texts, more time will have to be devoted to establishing a coherent account of it in the same manner that I did in Chapter 3 with Mill's moral character. There are a number of questions beyond the obvious "what is it to live an authentic existence?" that need to be answered in order to establish a fruitful basis for comparison. The two main questions that will need to be answered before embarking on any detailed comparison are as follows:

- (a) Does Sartre base his notion of authentic existence on a rational basis in the same manner as Mill, or is there something else grounding this notion of authenticity?
- (b) Can Sartre's account of authenticity be regarded at all as establishing a distinctly "moral" character, given Sartre's opposition to the way in which individuals place

⁶² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 460.

excessive weight on socially-constructed values – in other words, can Sartre’s authentic character be said to have any virtuous component to it?

I intend to address these questions separately, granting each its own chapter, with (a) being answered in this chapter and (b) in Chapter 6. Not only will this allow for more concise analysis, but it will also enable me to split my close reading of Sartre in a manner similar to the manner in which I split my concluding thoughts on Mill, which will enable me to better examine the similarities between the two authors later on. I will, in Chapter 5, examine the similarities between the rational component of each author’s ideal character, and, in Chapter 7, examine the moral aspects of each ideal character. This means that I will be beginning with the “rational” basis for Sartre’s authentic character, and then examining how this element is similar to Mill’s rational component (which will be the subject of Chapter 5). Once this is established, I will then move separately to discussing how the free, rational component of Sartre’s authentic character can lead to a moral, virtuous or “other-regarding” element of it, if there is any such element to be considered at all. For self-evident reasons, this will make for an easier comparison with Mill further down the line.

VIII. Detmer & Two Kinds of Freedom

Before moving onto my discussion of the subject of this chapter, it would be worth establishing on what basis I will be distinguishing this chapter’s topic of Sartre to the later one. Sartre’s account of human consciousness and how it produces actions is fundamentally based on the notion of freedom, and, fundamentally, what makes his ideal character either ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’ is on the basis of how an individual understands their own state of being unlimitedly ‘free.’ In brief, an individual who accepts their natural condition as being truly free is an authentic one, whereas those who deny their freedom and see their lifestyles, situations and actions as causally determined by factors out of their control are inauthentic. However, there has been much debate in Sartre scholarship over what exactly he means by ‘freedom,’ and this debate has led to many authors criticising Sartre for

being either inconsistent or equivocal in his analysis of the human condition. A good starting point, therefore, for my discussion of Sartre can be found in David Detmer's seminal 1986 book, *Freedom as a Value*.⁶³ In this text, Detmer goes through a number of potential concerns with respect to the work of Sartre, and the concern that interests me for the purpose of establishing Sartre's account of authenticity is what he terms "The Inconsistency Objection," which he defines as follows:

"On the one hand, we have seen just that... Sartre repeatedly insists upon the fact that my freedom is limited by my facticity, by the coefficient of adversity in things, by the practico-inert, etc. On the other hand... we have seen that Sartre also insists upon the 'absolute' nature of my freedom – that I am 'totally free,' 'condemned to be free,' free 'in any circumstances, in any period, and at any place,' etc. If we are to hold that... it will not do simply to ignore one or another of the major strands of Sartre's theory of freedom – we are left with the following problem: How are we to reconcile the two major strands of that theory – how are we to reconcile Sartre's theory of absolute freedom with his theory of restricted freedom?"⁶⁴

In short, Detmer's (among that of others that he cites) argument is that Sartre regularly makes two conflicting claims: firstly, that individuals are unconditionally free no matter what position in which they place themselves (and it is in the acceptance or denial of this freedom that we shall later see determines how authentic an individual may be), and, secondly, that the freedom that individuals hold is limited by external elements, and these, were we to take his definition of freedom univocally, are straightforwardly inconsistent. In order to overcome this tension, Detmer makes an observation that would appear trivial were it not for the fact that many of Sartre's critics seem to ignore it and subsequently use this ignorance as ammunition against Sartre's overall theory. This observation is that Sartre does not use the term "freedom" univocally, but instead uses this word to refer to two different concepts at different times throughout his work. Detmer briefly

⁶³ D. Detmer, *Freedom As A Value: A Critique of the Ethical Theory of Jean-Paul Sartre*, La Salle, Open Court, 1986.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

discusses whether this interpretation is in the spirit of Sartre's writing, and concludes straightforwardly that it is, given that this distinction between two different kinds of freedom is one that Sartre himself makes on innumerable occasions throughout all of his major works.⁶⁵ The clearest example of this is in the latter sections of *Being and Nothingness*, when Sartre distinguishes between "freedom of choice" and "freedom of obtaining" Sartre states the following when making the distinction:

"The discussion which opposes common sense to philosophers stems here from a misunderstanding: the empirical and popular concept of 'freedom' which has been produced by historical, political, and moral circumstances is equivalent to '*the ability to obtain the ends chosen [by an individual].*' The technical and philosophical concept of freedom, the only which we are considering here, means only *the autonomy of choice*. [...]

This essential distinction between the freedom of choice and the freedom of obtaining was certainly perceived by Descartes, following Stoicism. It puts an end to all arguments based on the distinction between 'willing' and 'being able,' which are put forth today by the partisans and the opponents of freedom."⁶⁶

From this it is clear, as Detmer notices, that there is no such inconsistency between Sartre's discussion of absolute and limited freedom, seeing as he makes the explicit distinction between a kind of freedom that is absolute – namely, "freedom of choice" – and a kind of freedom that is limited – namely, "freedom of obtaining." Freedom of choice is the natural human condition of being in any scenario free to deliberate over and act upon a given situation. Freedom of obtaining, on the other hand, is the kind of freedom that concerns how a given scenario affects an individual's capacity to act in a certain manner. For instance, if I am wealthy and would like to dine out, then I am more free than an individual who is less wealthy

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 59-60 (Detmer notes that the distinctions that Sartre makes are not necessarily all identical, however they can be brought under one umbrella distinction).

⁶⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 505-506 (Detmer uses the terms "ontological freedom" and "practical freedom," respectively, to describe these terms, however for the sake of consistency, I will continue to use the terms that Sartre himself uses).

than me due to the fact that I can afford more expensive restaurants than the other individual. Here, I am more free in the sense of having more ‘freedom of obtaining’ than the other individual. This, however, does not make me less free in the sense of having freedom of choice than the other individual, as both of us, by virtue of being human, have the same amount of freedom of choice. While one’s freedom of obtaining may be limited by concerns of wealth, for instance, their ability to deliberate over their options is not limited in such a manner. For instance, the individual who cannot afford to dine at a luxurious restaurant is just as free to deliberate over this possibility as the individual who could afford to do so. The former individual could deliberate over finding some means to obtain the money, for instance through theft, but they would most likely conclude that the risk outweighs the reward in this instance. For this reason, while the concerns within the deliberation would be different depending on the freedom of obtaining that the individual has, the ability to deliberate is not, and it is this ability that consists in the individual’s freedom of choice.

This potential tension between Sartre’s use of the term ‘freedom’ is, as Detmer notes, one that has plagued a number of critics of Sartre, and therefore it is one that I shall take as resolved from the outset of my discussion of authenticity, seeing as it is difficult to interpret one’s way out of a distinction that Sartre makes so clearly, both in *Being and Nothingness* and elsewhere.⁶⁷ Furthermore, this distinction neatly opens up the distinction that I intend to make now between the following questions, seeing as “freedom of choice” and “freedom of obtaining” make for useful starting points in order to answer questions (a) and (b), respectively. For now, I take this distinction to be a coherent means of parsing the discussion on Sartre’s account of authenticity, however I shall return to the potential concerns with such a distinction later on in this essay. With this digression out of the way, let us now begin with what Sartre means exactly by “freedom of choice.”

⁶⁷ cf. Detmer, *Freedom As A Value*, p. 59 for other iterations of this distinction.

IX. Freedom of Choice

Sartre devotes a great deal of *Being and Nothingness* to his theory of action that would go on to eventually ground his theory of the authentic self. As a starting point, he asserts the importance of identifying freedom with the individual. An act on the part of the individual requires a number of elements – which I shall presently detail – all of which must presume freedom of choice.⁶⁸ What is critical to Sartre’s account is the idea that freedom of choice is not a condition that individuals have, or, by extension, something that can be lost or gained depending on any given scenario, whether pertaining to influence of the outside world or to the rational capabilities of the individual in question (for this limitation is to be found only in freedom of obtaining). Instead, freedom *is* the human condition, that is, it is to be *identified* with the individual, not ascribed or granted to them. Sartre argues that the confusion over the nature of individual freedom of choice is one brought on by one of two factors: either, firstly, that it is used equivocally with freedom of obtaining, and, secondly, that it is confused with the way in which individuals *learn* of their natural, ingrained freedom. He states,

“[Freedom of choice is] a pure factual necessity... one which I am not able not to experience. I am indeed an existent who learns his freedom through his acts, but I am also an existent whose individual and unique existence temporalizes itself as freedom.”⁶⁹

From this it can be established that human experience is one of experiencing this freedom of choice. It is for this reason that Sartre can make a great deal of sweeping claims concerning the nature of this freedom of choice, such as the infamous claim that “the slave in chains is as free as his master.”⁷⁰ What is being

⁶⁸ When I discuss the presumption of freedom of choice, I shall not go into depth on Sartre’s critique of determinism that discusses how it is possible that an individual consciousness might be free, as this would deter from the overall topic of the essay. For the sake of argument, I shall be discounting the threat of determinism to either Sartre or Mill’s theories, seeing as not doing so would require a great deal of metaphysical analysis not appropriate to the essay.

⁶⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 461 (Sartre’s italics).

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 570.

asserted in such claims is not, as many critics have argued, some ethical claim about the nature of freedom of obtaining, but instead the basic ontological fact that by virtue of both the slave and the master's minds consisting in human consciousnesses, they *are* both their respective freedoms of choice, no one individual more than another, regardless of the influence of external factors.

Yet the question still remains as to in what this freedom of choice consists, or, in other words, one may very well claim that the human condition is one of having such freedom, but what exactly does this mean for any given individual? The clearest answer to this can be found when Sartre asserts that "freedom can be nothing other than this nihilation."⁷¹ To Sartre, the crucial ability that all free existents such as humans have by definition is the ability to perceive their current situation, and, from there, to perceive themselves as part of a situation that has not yet been realised beyond themselves. In more other words, this is the ability to conceive of a situation that would suit the individual better than the current one in which they reside. This rests on the distinction that Sartre makes between two aspects of the individual: the "in-itself" and the "for-itself." In its most basic sense, the former is that aspect of the individual that is present in the situation in which it finds itself. My "in-myself" currently, for instance, consists in a white, fair-haired man sitting at a desk writing on his laptop in his living room. This is the aspect that all others would perceive of me. However, by my nature as a human being, there is also a secondary aspect to my conscious existence that is the "for-myself." This is the aspect of my psyche that is inherently capable of perceiving the "in-myself" and subsequently "nihilating" it, that is, to take myself from my current scenario and conceive of a different one that is not currently realised and that may better suit my interests. In this ability to nihilate the "in-myself," I can perceive a separate scenario and thereby effect it. For instance, I might at a given moment feel hungry from having not recently eaten or claustrophobic from having spent too much time in the same room: this is all still a part of the "in-myself," however the ability of my consciousness to nihilate or negate the "in-myself" and conceive of a separate scenario wherein I might pause for a brief moment in order to leave my room and go

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 461.

outside to indulge myself in some chips in tartar sauce *is* the “for-myself.” Thus, the condition of the “for-itself” is one of nihilating the “in-itself,” and it is the nihilating of the “in-itself” that constitutes freedom of choice.⁷²

It is for this reason that “the slave in chains is as free as his master:” the slave is as capable of nihilating their “in-themselves” (they might conceive of a scenario where they are liberated) as the master (who might conceive of a scenario whereby the slave is more obedient). Both have freedom of choice by virtue of having a “for-themselves” that can conceive of new scenarios by nihilating the “in-themselves.” From this, it can be said that freedom of choice has not to do with the *actual capabilities* that each individual has to *effect* these scenarios, as this ability falls within the realms of freedom of obtaining. It would be a great deal more straightforward for the master to effect the scenario whereby their slave is more obedient through either torture or promises of greater comfort than it would be for the slave to liberate themselves. These concerns fall within the factual scenarios within which the slave and master find themselves, and not within the ontological nature of their respective “for-themselves-es.”

Therefore, the grounding existence of human consciousness has been established in freedom of choice as the capacity of the “for-itself” to nihilate the “in-itself.” Yet there is more to be said of Sartre’s theory of action, seeing as I alluded to a number of elements that are brought on by this freedom of choice that constitute an act. The three elements of Sartre’s theory of action that I shall discuss here are the “intention,” the “motive” and the “cause.”

Turning firstly to the “intention,” Sartre uses this term to describe that which is derived from some form of what he terms “*négatié*” (or, literally, “negation,” although Barnes chooses not to translate this term). An intention, as Sartre uses the term, is something that comes before the act itself, and requires “the apprehension

⁷² Sartre’s theory as elaborated here can be found summarised in *Being and Nothingness*, Part IV, Chapter 1: “Being and Doing: Freedom”, cf. pp. 461-2.

of an objective lack.”⁷³ This is an active element of the act itself, best described by Sartre himself as follows:

“This means that from the moment of the first conception of the act, consciousness has been able to withdraw itself from the full world of which it is consciousness and to leave the level of being in order frankly to approach that of non-being.”⁷⁴

This may sound identical with the nihilation that I have just discussed, and yet it is worth noting that this act of “intending,” as it were, requires more than the innate capacity to nihilate the “in-itself.” Sartre is quick to note that a given situation, whatever it may be, is not a sufficient condition for there to be an intention. He uses various historical, political situations to illustrate his overall point that, in the case of the political as with other scenarios, it is entirely possible that a man may become so embroiled in a situation that “he apprehends it in its plenitude of being and... he does not even imagine that things can be otherwise.”⁷⁵ This can be the case regardless of how great a suffering a given scenario may impose upon him, for “he adapts himself to [the sufferings] not through resignation but because he lacks the education and reflection necessary for him to conceive of a social state in which these sufferings would not exist.”⁷⁶ From this it can be seen that in order for there to be an intention towards a greater state of affairs, there must be some capacity – distinct from the innate capacity individuals have by virtue of being freedom of choice – to reflect upon a given scenario and engage with it such that they can delve into the realm of “non-being” in conceiving of a state of affairs that is distinct from the scenario that is granted to them at a given moment.

This intention is therefore brought on by the second of the elements of Sartre’s theory of action, namely, that of what Barnes translates as the “motive” (*mobile*). The issue brought on by the lack of education that would cause someone to fail to

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 456.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 456-457.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 457.

reflect upon their scenario sufficiently to form a *négatié* is that a poor state of affairs is not sufficient to bring about a motive. Sartre states the following to this effect:

“[[I]t is by a pure wrenching away from himself and the world that the worker can posit his suffering as unbearable suffering and consequently can make of it the motive for his revolutionary action. This implies for consciousness the permanent possibility of effecting a rupture with its own past... so as to be able to confer on it the meaning which it has in terms of the project of a meaning which it does not have.”⁷⁷

The motive is therefore the sentiment brought on by this “wrenching away” from a given state of affairs: in the case of Sartre’s example, this is when the worker realises that his working conditions are not only poor, but also that there is another realistic scenario that would enable the worker to operate under more comfortable conditions. In sum, the motive is, as Sartre describes it, “the ensemble of the desires, emotions, and passions which urge me to accomplish a certain act.”⁷⁸

It is worth noting that while discussing the debate over causal determinism, Sartre uses the term “motive” alongside the term “cause” (*motif*) in a number of situations, however a distinction must be made between the two, which Sartre does later on. By contrast to the above description of a motive, Sartre states,

“We shall therefore use the term cause for the objective apprehension of a determined situation as this situation is revealed in the light of a certain end as being able to serve as the means for attaining this end.”⁷⁹

The link with the motive is clear from this quotation, however what is unique to the cause is that it consists exclusively in the objective state of affairs in which, for instance, the worker finds themselves, but can only be deemed a cause once an intention has been effected. This is to overcome the difficulty with claiming that all

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 459.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 468.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

states of affairs are causes when they do not produce from them any sort of act from any individual.

Thus, the pattern of action can now be better ascertained, and an answer to (a) can be elucidated. All acts require that the human consciousness is freedom of choice, such that consciousness consists in the innate capacity to nihilate the “in-itself.” Subsequently, there must be an intention to act brought on by, firstly, a state of affairs that is in some way poor for the individual consciousness in question (this can consist in anything from my hunger while working to the poor working conditions of low-level employees in factories) and, secondly, the reflection by the consciousness leading to a *négatié* of itself in the current situation. The intention to act is brought about according to a certain end (satiating my hunger; working in more comfortable conditions, etc.). Once the intention towards a certain end has been established, the current state of affairs that is in some manner dissatisfactory becomes the cause of the act. Meanwhile, those subjective “desires, emotions and passions” that play into the intentional act comprise the motive, which, alongside the cause, bring about the effecting (or attempt thereto) of the scenario that has been established by consciousness intending towards the “non-being.”

Before continuing, it might be worth noting that in my above description of Sartre’s theory of action, the “motive” element may have appeared as tacked-on to the way in which individuals act. There is a reason for this, and that is that it is the motive, according to Sartre, that is the impediment of rationality. He states the following,

“The ideal rational act would therefore be the one for which the motives would be practically nil and which would be uniquely inspired by an objective appreciation of the situation. The irrational or passionate act will be characterized by the reverse proportions.”⁸⁰

Throughout his elucidation of his theory of action in Part IV of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre refrains from using the term “rational” in the sense of

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 469.

discussing what constitutes a rational act or person. The usage in this context is probably best explained by his praise of Stoicism throughout the text.

To better explain this, he goes on to discuss how what is faced during every act is a “choice of deliberation,”⁸¹ whereby one has the choice to be a slave to one’s passions (at least to some extent) and follow one’s motives – for causes and motives may point towards different acts in any given situation – or to deliberate over the situation in a reflective manner and judge the best course of action based on that in which the current scenario consists. The end, whether driven predominantly by the cause(s) or by the motive(s), is the same, whereas the “choice of deliberation” will affect the *methods* by which one attains this end. This “choice of deliberation” is, to Sartre, therefore the “will,” and must not be confused with freedom of choice or the for-itself, as it is “a psychic event of a peculiar structure which is constituted on the same plane as other psychic events and which is supported, neither more nor less than the others, by an original, ontological freedom.”⁸² How the will manifests itself is, therefore, the measure of what constitutes an “ideally rational (or irrational) act.”

It may be a valid question to ask wherein all of this discussion of freedom of choice and Sartre’s theory of action the concept of actual existential authenticity fits, seeing as this is the fundamental topic of discussion for this essay. The reason that the term has yet to appear in this discussion is because one can be either authentic or inauthentic, whereas, as has been established, one *cannot* not be freedom of choice. What I hope to have established so far in my discussion of freedom of choice is the basic human condition, such that I may now discuss how an individual, given their natural condition of being freedom of choice and given how their acts manifest themselves, can and should be authentic (in the same manner that I established, first, what concept of rationality Mill is basing his writing on before moving to discuss how this grounds his moral character).

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 473.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 474.

Yet, before drawing a link between Sartre's theory of action and his account of authenticity, it must first be established – at least on a basic level – what Sartre means when he uses the term “authentic.” Needless to say, there is a great deal of debate over even this basic concept – debate with which it would not be worth engaging at this stage of this essay – and so to avoid this debate, I shall begin with what has been described as the “canonical Sartrean definition of authenticity”⁸³ from *Anti-Semite and Jew*, which goes as follows:

“Authenticity, it is almost needless to say, consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that is involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate.”⁸⁴

What is seen in this account are three conditions for being authentic: one must, firstly, be conscious (in the common usage of the term) of one's situation at a given moment to the extent that one perceives all aspects thereof. The “true and lucid” aspects of this consciousness would refer to the opposite of being aware of a situation through an influenced perspective, such as through rose-tinted glasses or in a state of enragement. Secondly, one must accept that they are responsible for what they do with this given situation, that is, they cannot fall back upon the decisions of others or on what they believe society ought to tell them to do and thereby deny that their actions are their own, and that something else forced their hand. Thirdly, the authentic individual must accept that those acts that are their own may be met with a number of different ways from those around them. It is worth noting that while Sartre spells it out in three ways, most of the literature surrounding this definition of Sartre's that the third aspect can be taken as a subset of the second, inasmuch that in accepting that one is exclusively responsible for one's actions and how one deals with a given scenario, one must simultaneously accept

⁸³ Heter, ‘Authenticity and Others: Sartre's Ethics of Recognition’, p. 22.

⁸⁴ J. P. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* [*Réflexions sur la Question Juive*: 1944], trans. G. J. Becker, New York, Schocken Books, 1995, p. 65.

the consequences of those actions with respect to the opinions of others. For the purposes of my discussion, I shall follow this trend in common discourse.⁸⁵

I have already alluded to the notion of this “lucid consciousness” when I discussed the significance of how a poor state of affairs is not a sufficient condition for a *négatié*, as well as when I discussed the distinction between motives and causes with respect to the “ideal rational act.” Turning to the former, in *Being and Nothingness*, the fact that Sartre notes how there must be a level of comprehension on the part of the individual in order to perceive their situation in a manner that would enable them to actively form a *négatié* to the point that they can conceive of a scenario of “non-being” that would better suit their interests, is a strong allusion to the significance to authenticity of this “lucid consciousness.” In brief, if one lacks this, then there will be no means by which they could conceivably act in a manner to better themselves, which is, in part, a denial of their freedom of choice. One must ask the question, therefore, of what would cause an individual to be inauthentic to the degree that they lack this lucid consciousness of their scenario. In Part IV of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre mentions one potential hindrance to this, namely, over-immersion in the current socio-political situation brought on by a lack of education and reflection necessary in order to conceive of a state of affairs in which one’s interests might be better met, such that “to suffer and to *be* are one and the same.”⁸⁶

This lack of education – and the subsequent lack of a capacity to reflect appropriately on a given scenario – may be read very broadly. For instance, Sartre uses the example of the underpaid worker, yet the same principle might apply to, for instance, an orthodox Christian who finds themselves having homosexual desires. Such a person might find themselves in a state of suffering due to the cognitive dissonance brought on by their simultaneous conflicting beliefs in the word of Moses in the Old Testament and in their natural inclination towards having

⁸⁵ As I have previously stated, there is a great deal of discussion surrounding Sartre’s notion of authenticity, discussion that I intend to address at least in part throughout this essay. I use this basic “canonical” definition here only as a starting point for future discussion.

⁸⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 456-457 (Sartre’s italics).

homosexual encounters, yet this suffering need not by itself be the cause for any act on the part of the individual to alleviate this suffering. A more educated individual might not only be more aware of what it is that is causing this conflict, but they might also attempt to read around the subject of Christianity and find that it need not necessarily be the case that Christian beliefs and homosexuality are conflicting, or, alternatively, they might try and better understand their homosexual desires and discover that others have similar desires and that it is not sinful and so on and so forth. A great hindrance to the ability to invoke their freedom of choice – by virtue of not having sufficient awareness of their situation to deliberate over it in a useful manner – would be an upbringing that instils in the mind of the individual the notion that the word of this orthodox Christian tradition is a *priori* fact. What is meant by this is that education for the purposes of reflective prowess is not confined, conceptually, to whether or not someone has been to a good school and has become knowledgeable on a range of subjects from chemistry to French. Tradition, therefore, and overindulgence in constructed values can become as great a hindrance to the reflective capabilities of the individual as lack of access to basic education. In turn, such an individual might become inauthentic through failure to be “truly and lucidly conscious of their situation.”

The second manner in one might be considered by Sartre to fail to be authentic on the grounds of lacking “true and lucid consciousness of the situation” can be found in his discussion of cause and motive. As stated, Sartre sees the ideal rational act as one consisting in a strong consideration of the cause and with as few motives (as he defines them) interfering in the act. This, like Sartre’s comments on education, alludes to the requirement of the consciousness of a situation that is as objective (Sartre does use the terms objective and subjective to refer to causes and motives, respectively) as possible. While he notes that upon the formation of a *négatié*, “the chips are down”⁸⁷ as to what the end of the subsequent act is, however, the will must still make the “choice of deliberation,” and whether it follows the objective consideration of the cause of the act, or the subjective passions brought about by the motives of the action is what will determine both its status as either ideally

⁸⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 473.

rational or irrational, as well as the authentic character of the individual performing the act. This is because to follow one's motives too strongly is to lack "true and lucid consciousness of a situation," and to therefore be inauthentic.

From this, the second tenet of Sartre's definition (in *Anti-Semite and Jew*) of accepting responsibility for one's actions follows neatly. If someone is to be so "truly and lucidly conscious" of their situation such that their understanding of it is not informed by biases brought on by values and traditions that are purely socially-constructed, then they must similarly be aware of the fact that whatever action they take following the process of nihilating their current situation will be their action alone, and, therefore, not brought on by any other factor or influence. To not take responsibility for your action and claim that you were in some way "forced into" performing it by influences beyond your control is to deny that you have freedom of choice, and to therefore deny a fact concerning your basic ontological wiring. To commit such an error would be to contradict oneself, seeing as in performing an act towards an end one engages the processes of enacting one's freedom of choice, and yet in claiming that this performance towards a specified end was influenced by anything beyond one's own will is to deny that it was one's freedom of choice that led to it.

Such failures either in having a true and lucid consciousness of one's situation, or in avoiding responsibility (and any subsequent reprimand from others) for one's actions despite having such a consciousness of one's situation is to have "bad faith." If someone were to claim, therefore, that any of their actions are predetermined in any way – either through an ambitious attempt to appeal to causal determinism, or, more commonly, to appeal to some factor in one's life or some quality within oneself that somehow inevitably caused the act – is to deceive oneself to the point of having bad faith. Inaction may, similarly, be classified as bad faith, because if someone were to perceive a given state of affairs as inescapable to the point where they truly believed that there is literally "nothing they can do" to alter it, then they would have bad faith. This is because the belief that there is *de facto* no possible act that they could perform that would change such a state of affairs is a

failure to nihilate the in-itself and thus have a true and lucid consciousness of one's situation. In brief, to fail to conceive of a possible state of affairs in which one might be better off, or to freely perform an act and then claim that the act was necessary by virtue of the agent's internal or external condition – often accompanied with expressions such as “I couldn't have done otherwise,” “I'm just like that,” “I had no other choice,” “I was following the advice or orders of someone else” etc. – is to have bad faith because it is to deny the innate ability that human consciousness has of being the transcendence of their current scenario. It is for this reason that Sartre states that to come to him for advice is to come be told one thing only: “You are free, therefore choose, that is to say, invent.”⁸⁸

In sum, one can now see where and how these aspects as defined in *Anti-Semite and Jew* of the notion of authenticity are derived from Sartre's ontological concept of “freedom of choice.” Much still remains to be discussed concerning this notion of authenticity, including whether or not one can appropriately ascribe a “moral” aspect to Sartre's concept of authenticity from what has been said so far. However, before moving to the discussion of these elements, let us return to Mill and examine how this idea of “freedom of choice,” and the rational norm it produces in the authentic character compares to Mill's “ideal of rationality.”

⁸⁸ J. P. Sartre, ‘Existentialism is a Humanism’ [‘L'Existentialisme et un humanisme’: 1946], trans. P. Mairet, in W. Kaufman (ed.), *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, New York, Meridian Publishing Company, 1989, p. 7.

5. Mill & Sartre: The Rational

“[T]o be free does not mean ‘to obtain what one has wished’ but rather ‘by oneself to determine oneself to wish’ (in the broad sense of choosing).”⁸⁹

(Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Being and Doing: Freedom’)

At this stage, a great many similarities could be drawn between that in which the rational component of the ideal individual according to Mill’s moral character and that according to Sartre’s account of authenticity consist. However before discussing such similarities in more depth, the first and most important point to be made about both theories is that while Sartre is operating from a very specific ontology that describes the nature of the human consciousness, the basis for the rational component of Mill’s moral character consists in a rather basic account of human reason (in the literal, rather than pejorative sense of the term ‘basic’). As such, the ‘true and lucid consciousness’ along with the ‘assuming responsibilities and risks’ elements of Sartre’s account of authenticity are derived from what I have shown to be a very complex networks of motives, intentions, causes and motives that comprise the ontologically free individual, and this network is not present in any truly similar form in Mill’s writing.

In this sense, Sartre’s writing (as well as the manner in which I have presented it) began with the establishment of the nature of the ontologically free consciousness, and then worked to derive therefrom a rational norm for the authentic individual. On the other hand, such a discussion of ontology is not as clearly expressed in Mill’s writing, and Jones has, in effect, had to work backwards from Mill’s political views to his views on the rational norm of his moral character, and then I, in Chapter 3, have worked to discover from this rational norm the basis of rationality that Mill uses to ground it. This rational basis of Mill’s consists exclusively in the idea that a rational individual is one who recognises a need that they have, and then proceeds to take actions to satisfy that need. In this there is no mention of how ontologically

⁸⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 505.

free such an individual is, or what psychological events and processes engage and how these processes and events interact with one another to produce an action from the individual.⁹⁰ Indeed, in Mill we do not even see a distinction between the notions of ‘freedom of choice’ and ‘freedom of obtaining,’ let alone an examination of that in which the nature of ‘freedom of choice.’

As to whether Mill would agree with such an analysis as Sartre’s (such that it could be incorporated into Mill’s moral character thesis) this is a possibility, although not one I shall entertain in great depth here. This sort of analysis would require a great deal of extrapolation from Mill’s moral and political writing that would detract from the subject of this essay. Furthermore, I intend to demonstrate that the difference between the bases of each authors’ ideal characters (as I have elucidated them thus far) does not lessen the significance of the similarities between them. With this point made, let us now turn to the first point of comparison between the two authors’ accounts.

X. Human Nature, Tradition & Alienation

The first means by which the two moral characters can be seen as similar with respect to the rational component of each is in the two authors’ expressed abhorrence of the means by which traditions, customs, political systems and socially-constructed value systems impede upon the individual’s ability to think for themselves. While Sartre derives his account of the authentic individual from his ontological theory of freedom, what, throughout his works, has always been the driving force behind his existential theory has been his disdain for the behaviour of those around him that appears to demonstrate a distinct misunderstanding of the nature of the human condition. The central element of Sartre’s doctrine of authenticity and existentialism – from which the network of intentions, causes,

⁹⁰ Mill does, in *Utilitarianism*, make a distinction between what he terms “motives” and “intentions” (by which he means different things from Sartre’s motives and intentions), however this is not examined as part of an exploration into the nature of the psyche of the human consciousness, but instead as a means of overcoming an objection to utilitarian theory. I shall return to this distinction later on in the essay to address a point of comparison between the moral component of the two authors’ ideal characters.

motives etc. is derived – is that it is the choices that individuals make that determine their lives and futures. He states as much in ‘Existentialism is a Humanism:’

“For at bottom, what is alarming in the doctrine that I am about to try and explain to you is – is it not? – that it confronts man with a possibility of choice.”⁹¹

It is the confrontation with the fact that it is predominantly up to the individual to decide on their own fate that most people, according to Sartre, have found to be distressing. The reason for this is that humanity has grown into the irrational habit of ascribing their actions a cause beyond their own control that does not exist, whether it be their practical situation or some form of human nature that has a notorious habit of granting a convenient excuse for an individual’s antisocial behaviour. Therefore, the institutions and belief-systems that propagate such a belief in forces ‘beyond one’s own control’ are systems that alienate an individual from their own human condition that consists in freedom of choice.

It is worth noting at this stage that while Sartre is adamant on the fact that he believes that there is no such thing as a human nature that could be seen as a grounding cause for human action,⁹² Mill’s comments on human nature are not only few and far-between, but also vague. Sartre unequivocally sees human nature as exactly the sort of theory that enables self-deceiving, inauthentic beliefs in one’s own inescapable condition alongside some religious and political institutions.⁹³ On the other hand, Mill uses the term “human nature” in different manners in different texts. In *On Liberty*, Mill appears to use the term to describe the condition that humans have of being blank slates that are capable of learning and growing in a manner best suited to their own interests. He states, for instance,

“Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on

⁹¹ Sartre, ‘Existentialism is a Humanism’, p. 2.

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 8

⁹³ *ibid.*

all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing.”⁹⁴

This would imply that Mill does not use the term to describe an action-determining force within the individual that Sartre would find objectionable, but instead “human nature,” as Mill uses the term, is more of a latent potential found within individuals. While using a different term, Sartre might agree on a basic level with this idea of human nature, particularly when Mill makes claims like, “the danger which threatens human nature is not the excess, but the deficiency, of personal impulses and preferences,”⁹⁵ seeing as this implies that by virtue of society’s threat on individuality, people are no longer growing in a manner that is determined by their desires, but that is determined by forces around them. This is also evidenced when Mill refers to “the ideal perfection of human nature,” when discussing how an individual might be worth admiring due to being “eminent in any of the qualities which conduce to his own good,”⁹⁶ seeing as this would imply that human nature is an ideal to be reached, rather than a primordial force in individuals causing actions beyond their own control.

Yet this idea of human nature as a potential for growth, as opposed to a cause for certain kinds human actions, is not seen in other references Mill makes to it. In *Utilitarianism*, for instance, Mill appeals to human nature as a means of grounding his utilitarian theory of morals. He states,

“[T]he conscientious feelings of mankind... exist, a fact in human nature, the reality of which, and the great power with which they are capable of acting on those in whom they have been duly cultivated, are proved by experience.”⁹⁷

From this quotation, it would appear that Mill has some form of action-guiding force in mind when he refers to human nature, one to which an existentialist account of the human condition would vehemently reject. The rejection of human nature being

⁹⁴ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 58.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 60.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 75.

⁹⁷ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 142.

a key principle in many accounts of existentialism including Sartre as per the principle that ‘existence precedes essence,’ the presence of some action-guiding force as the one that Mill describes above in *Utilitarianism* would go against the idea that his moral character was a form of existential authenticity.

This being said, while an existentialist such as Sartre might take issue with the fact that such feelings unquestionably exist in all individuals, Mill does equally note that it takes cultivation of such feelings to make them action-guiding. What this means is that, unlike in the manner with which many people are prone to claim that their antisocial actions are just a deterministic result of human nature being definitively antisocial, Mill is stating that all humans have the potential to act according to some feelings of conscientiousness, but they may not, depending on whether they have grown up in an environment that would cultivate them. This means that, practically, Mill’s idea of human nature is not one that would impede upon the ability of an individual to choose what is best for themselves in a manner similar to Sartre.

Setting Mill’s comments on human nature aside, the fear surrounding the alienation of individuals from their ability to choose what is best for themselves is one that drives opening of Mill’s *On Liberty*. While Mill had a very specific kind of alienating belief-system in mind in the introduction – that of the ‘tyranny of the majority’ – it is later that he discusses how such alienating systems impede upon the rational processes of the individual. In Mill’s discussion of the difference between a “living truth” and “dead dogma,”⁹⁸ he asserts that no matter the truth-value of a claim, its being held as unquestionably true with no room for discussion will have an adverse effect on the individual. Taking into consideration Jones’ and my discussion on Mill’s moral character thesis, this means that “dead dogma” will impede upon the individual’s ability to determine for themselves what is best for them, because they have never had to ask why it is that a given political situation, for instance, is the best one: they believe that it is the best simply for lack of an alternative. As such, this is an imposition on what Sartre terms a “true and lucid consciousness of the situation,” because such a consciousness would naturally consist in the awareness

⁹⁸ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 35.

of why a given situation is the best one available compared to others. While Mill, in *On Liberty*, had in mind a political situation, this would apply equally to any situation in which an individual finds themselves, whether social, financial, religious or political. Therefore, any system of beliefs or institution that promotes dogmatically dead belief is one that causes in individuals the sort of self-deception concerning their own condition as free, rational consciousnesses that Sartre describes as “bad faith.”

Indeed, it is clear that Sartre is expressing this very point in his discussion of the worker who is over-immersed in their political situation. The worker lacks the ability to behave in the naturally human manner, that is, with their freedom of choice as their driving force, because they are incapable of coming to be aware of the fact that their situation is not an ideal one.⁹⁹ The understanding of their situation as underpaid and poorly treated is an understanding of the dead dogma that a lack of true and lucid consciousness brought on by a lack of education has imposed upon them. For this reason, Mill would fully agree with the following claim that Sartre makes:

“For it is necessary here to reverse common opinion and to admit that the harshness of a situation or the suffering which it imposes, are not sufficient motives for conceiving of another state of affairs in which things would be better for everybody.”¹⁰⁰

While the rational component of Mill’s moral character may not have as its focus as particularly harsh a situation as the one Sartre describes – this example of Sartre is undoubtedly a result of Sartre’s Marxist responses to the political era during which he was writing – this lack of motivation and subsequent alienation from the worker’s understanding of the human condition as one consisting in the ability to choose the best life for themselves is exactly the sort of alienation that results from all of those systems that Mill describes as any of “dead dogma,” the “tyranny of the majority” or the “despotism of custom.” All such political problems are ones that bring about a

⁹⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 457

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

deficit in a true and lucid consciousness on the part of the individual as to their own situation.

While Mill had in mind a political situation such as choosing for whom one ought to vote in a democratic state, the situation Sartre had in mind concerned a more radical choice, such as the choice between continual suffering under the oppressive hand of the ruling class, or revolution. Despite the difference in focus, it can be seen that both authors begin their projects from their awareness of how belief-systems and institutions have imposed a mindset of blind following onto the individual, whether this has come from a ruling class (in the case of Sartre) or from the most massive class (in the case of Mill). All those traditions and customs that are imposed by whatever class have the effect of numbing the individual into a blind belief that their current situation is either the best one available, or, worse, the only one available. While the vocabulary of alienation was not available to Mill, his concern was distinctly with a form of alienation from the “ideal of rationality” (or one might even term it “human nature” from his comments in *On Liberty*) that any individual can reach with the proper cultivation and political situation. This ideal of humanity for Mill is the ideal of authenticity to Sartre, among other existentialist writers. The ability for an individual to transcend the “despotism of custom” and acquire an awareness of all the options available to an individual in terms of their lives is therefore Mill’s version of the *übermensch*.¹⁰¹

It is for this reason that both authors perceive education as an important means of cultivating their ideal characters. I have already discussed the importance of education to Mill as a means of explaining to individuals from an early age that there is a vast array of belief-systems and life choices available to them (and, subsequently, providing within that society the opportunity to enact those choices) and that, for this reason, his belief in access to strict, universal, state-funded education supports the moral character thesis presented by Jones. This is because

¹⁰¹ cf. F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra [Also sprach Zarathustra: 1883]*, trans. A. del Caro, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

it demonstrates that, at the heart of Mill's politics is the need to cultivate in individuals this "ideal of rationality."

Meanwhile, Sartre's comments specifically on education are less clearly elucidated in his works. Nonetheless, Sartre does make various references to education and its influence over the authenticity of the individual, two of which I shall present here. First, as I quoted in §IX, in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre directly ties education to the ability for an individual to reflect sufficiently upon their situation,¹⁰² and, therefore, acquire what he would later term a true and lucid consciousness of their situation. This would imply that any society that had as its goal the cultivation of authenticity within individuals – in other words, a truly existentialist society – would have to ensure that education would be not only sufficient to ensure the cultivation of authenticity, but also available to all. This latter point is evidenced in Sartre's use of the worker in 1830 as the prime example of the negative effects on the rational capacity of the individual that a lack of access to education brings. Second, outside of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre ties education to authenticity in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, where he states,

"What we have just said does not apply to all inauthentic Jews; above all, it varies in importance with the general attitude of the Jew, depending on his education, his origin, and especially the general pattern of his behaviour."¹⁰³

What is implied here is that the level of education (in this case, with respect to the specifics of a Jewish education) is directly tied to the level of authenticity of the Jew in question. The implication, here, is that with a broader religious education – even if that education is within the Jewish faith, the individual might have a more true and lucid consciousness of their situation within the confines of how to understand their individual relationship with their faith. As such, both Mill and Sartre perceive education as an important feature in having an individual understand their situation, its alternatives, and the various means by which they can act upon it.

¹⁰² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 457.

¹⁰³ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, p. 89.

XI. Christianity

Let us now turn to a more concrete topic of discussion within both authors, namely, that of Christianity. As I have noted, Jones discussed how Mill's understanding of Christian morality was one that provided evidence for his case that a reactionary doctrine that provides nought but negative norms without providing any reason for why those norms are the right ones is a prime example of "dead dogma" inasmuch as there is no question to the Christian minister that the norms he preaches are the most appropriate ones, and, consequently, no concern in the eyes of those to whom they preach as to whether these norms are morally righteous, or even practically helpful to the individual's own life. This, to Mill, is dead dogma *par excellence*, as evidenced in the following claim in *On Liberty*:

"To what an extent doctrines intrinsically fitted to make the deepest impression upon the mind may remain in it as dead beliefs, without being ever realized in the imagination, the feelings, or the understanding, is exemplified by the manner in which the majority of believers hold the doctrines of Christianity."¹⁰⁴

Such a belief in these doctrines inhibits the individual's ability to judge for themselves what sort of life would best suit them. Instead, it forces individuals into a mindset that they ought to believe in these beliefs due to some respect for the authority with which they are preached. Mill notes, however, that, "Whenever conduct is concerned, they look around for Mr. A and B to direct them how far to go in obeying Christ."¹⁰⁵

Without even examining Sartre's comments directed specifically at Christian belief, he would certainly ascribe to the behaviour Mill describes here the term inauthentic. To avoid certain acts – acts that range from homosexual behaviour to theft to eating shellfish – for the sole reason that it is prescribed by an institution who has

¹⁰⁴ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 41.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p. 42.

interpreted a certain text on ethics in a particular manner is to be grossly inauthentic, because it involves a denial of one's own responsibility for their actions. To claim that "I do not steal because it is not the will of God" is to ascribe the reason for one's action (or inaction, in this case) not to one's conscious choice, but instead to the advice they have been given by a pastor or a religious text. In claiming that one could not do otherwise by virtue of the other option not being prescribed by a religious institution is to fail to form a *néga-tié* and to understand that there are other courses of action available to them. As such, to unquestionably follow such advice is to both fail to have a true and lucid consciousness of one's own situation *and* to fail to be responsible for one's own decision not to steal, as one ascribes responsibility to the will of another, whether it is a member of the Christian institution or God Himself. Sartre makes this point, in effect, in 'Existentialism is a Humanism:'

"No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do: no signs are vouchsafed in this world. The Catholics will reply, 'Oh but they are!' Very well: still, it is I myself in every case, who have to interpret the signs."¹⁰⁶

From this it is clear that denying one's own position in the decision to act in a certain manner by consulting advice and claiming that it is solely the advice that guides you is to be inauthentic. For this reason, Sartre would agree with Mill on how this form of belief-holding is detrimental to one's ideal character, because both Sartre's account of authenticity and Mill's moral character involve a rational component that excludes unquestionable belief in advice granted by others.

With this being said, however, Sartre's own specific criticisms of Christianity are not as pragmatic as those of Mill. Mill openly objects to the manner in which people hold their beliefs, whereas Sartre, on the other hand, takes a great many issues with the content of the beliefs themselves. Sartre talks at length on the problems of the myth of creation or the nature of God as an existent, however these arguments are centred more around ontology than the individual's relationship with their faith, and

¹⁰⁶ Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism', p. 7.

so shall not be discussed here. The arguments that Sartre makes against Christianity that specifically concern how it cultivates inauthenticity and bad faith are those I shall examine here. In his 2009 article 'Jean-Paul Sartre: The Mystical Atheist', Jerome Gellman succinctly encapsulates the issue that Sartre takes with what he terms "Christian mysticism," that is, the individual's belief-system as it relates to their spiritual understanding of the Christian metaphysics. He states,

"Christian mystics exemplify bad faith at its worst – pretending to have discovered that they belong to the substance of God sufficiently so as to receive for themselves a substantive, in-itself form of being... Christian mysticism, Sartre believes, is motivated by the profound bad faith of asserting oneself as the in-itself, indeed as the ultimate in-itself."¹⁰⁷

The reason that taking oneself as the "ultimate in-itself" is bad faith, Gellman explains, is that it denies the presence of the for-itself in the individual, that is, the aspect of human consciousness that consists in freedom of choice. For an individual to believe that they are part of the substance of God is to ascribe their freedom of choice to another entity, which, by extension, is to perceive oneself as entirely determined, which is the antithesis of living authentically. As I have established that Sartre's account of authenticity would, just as in the case of Mill's moral character, rule out the sort of belief-holding with which Mill takes issue, it remains to be shown that Mill's own moral character would equally exclude the sort of belief-content with which Sartre takes issue.

The first thing to note about Sartre's criticism of Christianity is that it targets only the specific mystic of the Christian who believes that they (or their rational consciousness) are substantially a part of God, as opposed to those that conceive of God as separate entity that governs the universe and its inhabitants. This is not to say that Sartre would agree wholeheartedly with the latter: Sartre's numerous arguments against the ontology of the Christian theism are evidence that, on a rational level, Sartre would disagree with such an idea of God as an existing,

¹⁰⁷ J. Gellman, 'Jean-Paul Sartre: The Mystical Atheist', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2009, pp. 129-130.

governing body. Setting this point aside, however, it is clear that Sartre's focus is not on how the ethics and institutions of Christianity impede upon the cultivation of the ideal character through forcing an inauthentic form of belief-holding, but instead on how the ontological belief that one is a part of God impede upon the ideal (authentic) character. In brief, it is, to Sartre, the belief itself that is inauthentic, not how the belief is held (as in the case of Mill).

What is key to Sartre's criticism of the Christian mysticism is the fact that it inherently implies a denial of one's own freedom of choice. To accept the mystical belief that one is a substantive part of God is to believe that one's consciousness wholeheartedly consists in the part of humanity that is determined, and is to consequently ascribe any choice one makes to the for-itself that is God. Therefore, to Sartre, an individual either entirely accepts that they are independent of God (or any other theistic entity) in order to recognise their for-themselves, or they believe that the only for-itself that exists is that of God and that it is this that determines the choices they make. Setting aside whether or not this is an accurate portrayal of the Christian mysticism, if it were the case that being a Christian involved removing oneself from the idea that they are responsible for their actions by revoking their freedom of choice, this would be an issue upon which Mill would agree, and, furthermore, it would not fit his moral character, just as it does not fit Sartre's, and I shall now explain why this is the case.

Not writing in depth on theology or religion, Mill does not make many substantive claims about the content of the Christian belief system with respect to politics, and one would not argue that Mill is an atheist in the same manner as Sartre. That being said, the absence of Christian influence in Mill's political writing is evidence that, he feels – whatever his own religious beliefs – that it should not sway the moral character that is the goal of his philosophical project. Nonetheless, the issue that Sartre takes with Christianity is one that is heavily influenced by his own ontological take on the human consciousness: indeed, the issue is that the content of Christian mysticism (as Sartre interprets it) leads inevitably to one denying the duality of consciousness (i.e. the in-itself / for-itself distinction) that forms the lynchpin of

Sartre's account of the human psyche, and it is this denial that is the reason that Christian belief is inauthentic. Seeing as the rational component of Mill's moral character is not derived from such an ontology, it remains to be seen whether there is a different reason that Mill's ideal of rationality would oppose such a belief. This, however, is not difficult to find. The inauthenticity and bad faith that Sartre describes – as abstracted from his ontology – consists ultimately in the fact that it involves the individual denying responsibility for their actions and ascribing it to the will of God. Any sort of denial of responsibility for one's actions, whether those actions are morally righteous, vicious or neutral, would not fit into Mill's ideal of rationality due to the fact that it impedes upon the individual's understanding that their actions are the results of their own decisions, and it is for the individual to choose for themselves how best to act upon a given situation. For this reason, a Christian belief that one's actions are the result of the will of a deity – and that it is for said deity to decide what is best for them – would not be conducive to the ideal of rationality that Mill's political project has in mind. As a result, while both authors criticise different aspects of the Christian belief system, both ideal characters would for the same reasons exclude each of these poor forms of belief. What is ultimately inconducive to attaining the ideal rational characters of Mill and Sartre is in unquestionably following the advice of others and excluding from deliberation the role of the individual in determining what best suits their interests. From their discussions of Christianity, as well as those on the problems of tradition and alienation, one can see that Mill's moral character is, on the level of its rational component, very similar to Sartre's authenticity.

XII. Mill & Freedom of Choice

Before moving on to discuss the moral component of Sartre's account of authenticity, it would be worth addressing the importance of his account of the human consciousness with respect to Mill's moral character. As I stated earlier, the two philosophers derive the rational component of their ideal characters from very different standpoints. It would therefore be irresponsible not to discuss the possibility that Mill's moral character could not be seen as existentially authentic

due to the fact that it is not derived from the same grounding as Sartre's, despite the fact that I have shown that the two ideal characters respond to the world in the same manner and have the same means of avoiding unhealthy belief systems.

From my analysis in the previous two sections, I have shown that Sartre's account of the authentic individual (or the rational component thereof) tackles the same problems as Mill's moral character, specifically, how an individual's rational capacities will be limited by being too immersed in the mindset of those around them as they are formed by traditions. From this, the individual becomes alienated from their rational potential to form an objective understanding of the world around them and subsequently act based on what would best suit their lives. In the case of Sartre, this is linked to his ontological account of the human consciousness inasmuch as to alienate oneself in such a manner is to deceive oneself in believing that their human consciousness does not consist in *both* the in-themselves *and* the for-themselves (in the above cases, by denying the presence of the for-themselves). As discussed in the previous chapter, denying the presence of the for-itself is to deny one's own freedom of choice and thus deny the fact that one is free to deliberate over and act upon a given scenario in any number of different manners.

This in-itself / for-itself distinction is one that is not explicitly present in Mill's moral character, however this element that determines the authenticity of an individual's character and that confronts the same issues of tradition and alienation as Mill *is* present, albeit not overtly. The first way in which Mill's writing shows a concern for individuals' inability to accept their own freedom of choice is in his individualism. Setting aside the more obvious point that Mill entitles a chapter of *On Liberty* as 'Of Individuality, as One of the Elements of Well-Being,' Mill's individualism is apparent through the rational component of his moral character. In all rational deliberations based on the account of individual reason that drives his moral character, the individual is placed at the centre. Mill's aversion to societies in which an individual must derive their identity through the social roles they are forced into is evidence of this: to Mill, the individual must comprehend their own situation as abstracted from the "despotism of custom" and the "tyranny of the majority." Both of these issues

cause alienation through the belief that the opinions of others should in some form determine the choices that one makes as an individual. For this reason, when an individual becomes too immersed in their socio-political situation, they, like Sartre's 19th Century worker, are alienated from the belief that they can choose *for themselves* what best suits their own life. The "experiments of living" that Mill celebrates are only present when the individuals in a society truly embrace their individuality and learn to live in a society where norms and traditions are constantly questioned and reformed for the betterment of the individuals therein, not rigidly adhered to in a manner that suppresses the individual's capacity for a rational understanding of their own lives and situations.

Based on this, the concerns that Mill has with society's problems, and the means by which the rational individual would overcome them, are in line with Sartre's ontological analysis of the human condition. This is because it is the individual's denial of their ability to understand their condition as free agents who are capable of objectively comprehending their situation and the choices available to them that leads to all of the problems brought on by paternalistic governments and societies. For this reason, the means by which Mill's ideal moral character addresses and overcomes the problems of society are the same as the means by which Sartre's authentic character does so. As a result, while Mill does operate on a different theory of human action from Sartre, the guiding principle between what makes an individual either of the moral character that Mill takes as ideal is the same as the way in which one distinguishes between an authentic and an inauthentic character. It is for this reason that one can describe the rational component of Mill's moral character as an existentially authentic one. The ideal traits of "observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide"¹⁰⁸ and so on are those that Sartre aims at when he describes the need for a "true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 58

¹⁰⁹ Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, p. 65.

6. Sartre & The Ethical Individual

“Dostoevsky once wrote: ‘If God did not exist, then everything would be permitted’: and that, for existentialism, is the starting point.”¹¹⁰

(Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Existentialism is a Humanism’)

Having established Sartre’s theory of the ontologically free individual and examined its similarities to the rational component of Mill’s moral character, it must now be discussed how Sartre’s authentic character could have within it a moral component to be compared further to Mill’s character. Much as there are compelling similarities between Mill’s moral character and Sartre’s authenticity when discussing the rational elements of each, the moral component of Mill’s character is a crucial element to it. This means that were it the case that an account of authenticity such as Sartre’s could not hold within it a similar moral component – or, worse, *any* moral component – then it would be fallacious to state that Mill’s moral character was an authentic one. In order to give a fuller investigation, therefore, I will now go into more depth on the potential for morality within Sartre’s account of authenticity.

XIII. The Debate Surrounding Sartre’s Ethics

One question pervading throughout a great deal of literature surrounding Sartre’s notion of authenticity is how, given Sartre’s claims about the ontological nature of human freedom and his subsequent disdain for socially-constructed and institutionalised values and value-systems, he can ever ascribe moral attributes such as “good” or “bad,” or even “beneficial” or “detrimental” to human behaviours or viewpoints. It is worth noting that the question is not one of whether or there is any room in Sartrean literature for normative moral claims, seeing as there are a number of such claims that Sartre himself makes, mostly found in his later works such as *What is Literature?* and *Anti-Semite and Jew*. The question is of whether it is possible to tie these normative claims that Sartre makes to his theory of action and of the ontology of human consciousness.

¹¹⁰ Sartre, ‘Existentialism is a Humanism’, p. 6.

This tension in Sartre's theory is best elaborated by David Pellauer in the introduction to his translation of *Notebooks for an Ethics*. He frames the three themes of Sartre's works that lead to difficulties when trying to interpret Sartre's "ethics:"

"First, there is the issue of freedom as a primary characteristic of human existence; second, there is the claim that since there is no God, there are no a priori values that can serve as the basis for ethical decisions (and even if there were a God, it would make no difference in this regard, since values too are ultimately dependent on free choice); and, third, there is the claim that my freedom necessarily is linked to others' freedom – indeed, I am not free unless others are as well."¹¹¹

From this, Pellauer notes, many critics have taken from these three elements of Sartre the following issue:

"Their worry seems to be that a Sartrean ethic really cannot maintain that some actions are immoral, hence there can be no way to judge one's own or others' actions as right or wrong."¹¹²

This issue would not sound so threatening, therefore, were it not for the number of occasions where Sartre does appear to make normative judgments on certain acts, or claim that it is in some manner "better" to behave in a particular fashion, or to even have one particular outlook or mindset– over another. This is where Pellauer makes a subtle point about the "debate" on ethics and Sartre, namely, that a great deal of it boils down to answering two distinct questions, a distinction that, like that between freedom of choice and freedom of obtaining, Sartre blurs in his own writing:

¹¹¹ D. Pellauer in J. P. Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, [*Cahiers pour une morale*: 1983], trans. D. Pellauer, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992. (Translator's Introduction), p. x.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. xi.

“First, there is the ontological question of the very possibility of an ethics. More specifically, for Sartre the task is initially to show that ethics is possible on the basis of the ontology presented in *Being and Nothingness*. Second, assuming that this possibility has been demonstrated, there remains the question of the content of this ethics, its normative principles and their concrete application, if you will.”¹¹³

He goes on to note that it is the former question that more primarily concerned Sartre, whereas it is on the latter that we find most of the modern literature on Sartre’s work. His reason for this assertion is simple:

“Sartre was more than willing in any situation to say what he considered right and wrong – his subsequent political and social commentary more than demonstrates this – what he had to struggle with was why he could invoke the authority of ethics as a justification for what he said.”¹¹⁴

For future reference, I shall refer to the former of these questions as the “how ethics?” question, and the latter as the “which ethics?” question. For the purposes of this essay, it will be the “which ethics?” question that concerns me the most. While it may be more philosophically prudent to discuss the possibility of an ethics tied to Sartre before working out its content, this essay is concerned not with the intricacies of the metaethics surrounding Sartrean existentialism, but whether or not Mill’s version of a moral character can serve as a means of proving that he had a fundamentally existentialist agenda. In using Sartre as a basis of comparison, I intend to offer an interpretation of Sartre that remains coherent with his prior claims on authenticity, and that, for this reason, does not stray away from Sartre’s existentialism, that is, his idea of taking individual freedom as the primordial point from which all other philosophy should be derived. To this avail, I will be exploring one of the answers to “which ethics?” question in order, ultimately, to answer the question of whether or not existential authenticity can incorporate within it norms

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p. xiii.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

that guide individuals' behaviour towards others, in the same way that Mill's moral character does.

The importance of this question lies in the fact that if I were to end my elaboration of Sartrean, existentialist authenticity with what I concluded in Chapter 4, then the answer to this question would be a resounding "no it can't." It could be said with little difficulty that it is possible to be existentially authentic by acting upon a "true and lucid consciousness of the situation" and by accepting responsibility for the actions taken thereupon while still behaving in a manner that many would consider truly antisocial and abhorrent, and many critics have, indeed, raised this point.¹¹⁵ For example, an anti-Semite could be truly conscious of their situation such that they have consciously come to the belief that those of Jewish ancestry are lesser human beings, and therefore act upon this by treating Jews with less respect than others and accept responsibility for their actions whether "in pride or humiliation" or "in horror and hate." Therefore, if there is no moral element to Sartre's account of authenticity, then he would theoretically take no issue with an authentic anti-Semite, just as he would see no issue with the actions of any "authentic" antisocial behaviour, because there is no value system against which one could judge the anti-Semite's behaviour as in some way worse than the behaviour of, for instance, a Jewish rights activist, for instance. Therefore, if my elaboration on Sartre's account of authenticity were to end with what was stated in Chapter 4, it would be difficult to go on to argue that it bears any significant resemblance to Mill's moral character, seeing as Mill would undoubtedly find this "ideal" of an existentialist character lacking if it were to implicitly allow for all behaviours, however antisocial, to be equal in moral value.

Evidently, therefore, I shall not end my discussion there, but instead I intend to briefly examine the debate surrounding the "which ethics?" question and offer up one of the answers as a basis for comparison with Mill's moral character later on. To put the debate in as concise a manner possible while doing justice to the

¹¹⁵ Anderson, for instance, raises a similar point to this one, using Jeffrey Dahmer as an example of a potentially existentially authentic being. cf. T. C. Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity*, Chicago, Open Court, 1993, p. 55.

literature, there are three interpretations of Sartre through which one could conceivably answer this “which ethics?” question. Put briefly, they are as follows:

1. One can read Sartre as an ethical subjectivist, whereby there is no means to reconcile his account of human freedom with any sort of normative, action-guiding value system. With respect to authenticity, this means that there is no single additional value that can be added to the qualities that are considered existentially authentic such that it could be said that an authentic person is one who would perform action x in a particular moral scenario because it is the “right thing to do,” and who would avoid performing action y no matter what the scenario because “it is always wrong to y .” Alisdair MacIntyre, among many others (including Pellauer), have considered this to be the best ethical outlook on authenticity seeing as the authentic agent who follows a particular ethical code is, in effect, as rational as any other, seeing as, under Sartrean existentialism, “All faiths and all evaluations are equally non-rational; all are subjective directions.”¹¹⁶
2. One could potentially read Sartre as operating from some version of a Kantian ethics that places universalisation as the key factor in normative judgment. Such an interpretation would be made on the basis of the claim Sartre makes in ‘Existentialism as a Humanism,’ where he states, “For in effect, of all the actions a man may take in order to create himself as he wills to be, there is not one which is not creative, at the same time, of an image of man such as he believes he ought to be.” As Pellauer notes, in combination with a statement he makes in the *Notebooks* where he states “nothing can be good for us without being good for all,” this statement does imply that in order to work out the normative worth of an act, one must universalise it in a Kantian manner such that once it established that this act would be best for all, it is secure in its status as the “right” one of those acts in that given situation. In terms of authenticity, this would mean that the individual that (in addition to acting with lucid consciousness etc.) acts in a manner that is considered “right” or “good” according to some version of

¹¹⁶ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, p. 13, cited in Heter, ‘Authenticity and Others’, p. 19.

Kantianism. It is worth noting that this interpretation is not very popular, seeing as even in 'Existentialism as a Humanism,' Sartre goes on to express distaste for ethical theories that judge actions as right or wrong according to the conditions of some abstraction from reality. Furthermore, Sartre had expressed regret for the fact that most people interpret his existentialism according to the lecture in which he made this supposedly Kantian claims. For these reasons, I shall not go into any more depth on this position.

3. The third position, and the one I shall investigate within this essay, is one according to which Sartre is operating from an ethics grounded in the Hegelian master / slave dialectic according to some form of "social interdependency,"¹¹⁷ as T. Storm Heter puts it. What this means for authenticity, according to Heter – whose account of this interpretation of Sartre I shall be primarily examining – is that there is an aspect of authenticity that must be considered in addition to the two previously mentioned, namely, the condition that the authentic individual "respects and recognizes the freedom of others," which entails "a basic obligation to others."¹¹⁸ This "ethics of recognition," as he describes it, is the one I shall presently use as my basis for comparison with Mill. Before this, however, more must be said of this interpretation and how it can form a coherent account of existentialist with the inclusion of normative values in authenticity.

XIV. Heter & Intersubjective Recognition

In his 2006 article 'Authenticity and Others: Sartre's Ethics of Recognition,' Heter opens with a discussion of the issues with ascribing some form of normative obligations to the concept of existential authenticity, raising the familiar concerns of ethical subjectivism resulting from the ontological hole that Sartre had dug himself in *Being and Nothingness* that seemingly excludes values and obligations towards others. In addition to this, however, Heter notes a number of additional areas in Sartre's writing that he alludes to social obligations to others. He admits that he was

¹¹⁷ Heter, 'Authenticity and Others', p. 21.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 22.

not the first to notice such normative dimensions to Sartre's writing, as T. C. Anderson clocks these dimensions as well. Heter states,

"To his credit Anderson highlights three important and interconnected social dimensions. First, Sartre attempts to explain an alternative to the conflict-ridden looking/looked at relationship described in *Being and Nothingness*. Second, Sartre attempts to justify a human 'obligation to will the freedom of others.' [Sartre's *Two Ethics*, p. 156] Third, Sartre attempts to defend existential authenticity as consisting in more than rational consistency, but also generosity and assisting others."¹¹⁹

This third dimension to Sartre's writing is the most crucial, here, as it demonstrates that Sartre himself did not see his account of existential authenticity as exclusively comprised of those elements I discussed in Chapter 4. Unlike Anderson, however, Heter's thesis is to take these elements more seriously, seeing as, to Heter's dismay, Anderson concludes his interpretation of Sartre in a similar manner to MacIntyre and Pellauer, despite pointing out these social dimensions, which the other authors do not.¹²⁰ Heter therefore wrote his article with the intention of tying together these social dimensions with some unifying normative ethics to explain how Sartre could make such normative claims in conjunction with his ontological ones. He offers two ethics that could solve this tension, the first being the Kantian reading mentioned above, which, like many other scholars, he is quick to dismiss as not only inconsistent, but wholly unrepresentative of the sort of philosophical project with which Sartre is concerned.¹²¹ Instead, Heter wishes to offer a thesis that is best explained in his own words:

"I wish to establish Sartre's deep affinity with Hegelian ethics, and not merely for scholarly reasons. Hegel provides for Sartrean ethics what Kant cannot: a satisfactory way to justify obligations to others. A Hegel-inspired Sartrean ethics would ground obligations to others on *intersubjective recognition*."¹²²

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 20.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

¹²² *ibid.*, p. 23 (italics added for emphasis).

From this it is clear that the goal of Heter's argument is to simultaneously answer both of the questions that Pellauer puts forward, with the affinity with Hegel answering the "which ethics?" question and if, in doing so, this proves to be a "satisfactory way" to tie together Sartre's ontology with his normative claims, then it would also provide an answer to the "how ethics?" question. The means by which Heter intends to achieve this is through adding an additional condition to the definition of authenticity given in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, one whereby "existential authenticity entails a basic obligation to others," and which states "that *one respects and recognizes the freedom of others.*"¹²³

When Heter refers to "recognition," he sees this as the core element to Hegelian ethics, as he draws upon the work of Robert R. Williams who noted that, to Hegel, in order to form any sort of ethics, one must recognise other people not as mere "others," but instead as a "self-determining end in itself."¹²⁴ There is therefore a moral spectrum of recognition, where one can rightly or wrongly recognise another, with, for instance, the way a master recognises his slave (to use, as Heter does, the famous dialectic presented by Hegel) being ethically worse than the way a son recognises the strong, caring figure of his mother. The means by which an individual recognises another will vary according to the social occasion or role in which two or more people find themselves at a given moment, and on any social occasion, the moral spectrum of right and wrong means of recognition play into it. Furthermore, it is important that people recognise that they occupy more than one social role, and that they understand how all of the roles they 'play' can work with their own sense of abstract identity, as Heter describes it. These "basics" of Hegelian ethics serve as Heter's basis for comparison with Sartre's own claims.¹²⁵

In a similar manner to H. S. Jones and his interpretation of Mill, Heter goes on to a number of different pieces of Sartre's writing – specifically, 'Existentialism as a

¹²³ *ibid.*, p. 22 (Heter's italics).

¹²⁴ R. R. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997, p. 2, cited in Heter, 'Authenticity and Others', p. 23.

¹²⁵ Heter, 'Authenticity and Others', pp. 23-24.

Humanism', *Anti-Semite and Jew*, *What is Literature?* and the *Notebooks* – and discusses how each of them points towards an ethics similar to the Hegelian one spelled out above. Like with Jones, I shall not examine all of his textual analysis here, and shall primarily explore the remarks he makes on *Anti-Semite and Jew*, and will note some other remarks of his that back up his reading of this particular text. I choose this text because it is worth examining how it points towards this additional feature of authenticity, when it is within this exact text that Sartre's aforementioned 'canonical' definition of authenticity appears with the notable absence of any moral condition to it. Furthermore, I find that Heter's analysis of this text is the best moment in which he elaborates on the particularities of the Hegelian ethical influence.

In his analysis of *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Heter notes that most scholars have read this text as consisting primarily in both the aforementioned elucidation of authenticity and, by extension, in an exploration of bad faith, with oppression defined as one means by which one could have bad faith. Heter, however, feels that "the inter-subjective and group dimensions of oppression *cannot* be adequately captured by an analysis of bad faith,"¹²⁶ and, instead, offers a Hegelian reading of the text that would offer a better explanation of the problems with oppression. In brief, Heter wishes to demonstrate that the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed is one akin to Hegel's master / slave dialectic, whereby the wrongness in such a relationship is found to be in the failure of the oppressor (like the failure of all Hegelian masters) to recognise the freedom of the oppressed. Such a failure is not so much a manifestation of bad faith – inasmuch bad faith, as Heter reads it, is a matter of failing to sufficiently understand one's own freedom – but instead a manifestation of the failure to meet Heter's third condition of authenticity which is in sufficiently understanding the freedom of others.

So far, this view is coherent so long as we accept that this third condition of authenticity is present in Sartre's writing, and so it must be examined how Heter extrapolates this condition from the texts. In *Anti-Semite and Jew*, for instance,

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 27 (italics added for emphasis).

Sartre explicitly describes two conditions for authenticity and makes no explicit mention of a third, so Heter would have to not only demonstrate how this third condition is present in the text, but also why it is that Sartre omits it from the definition of authenticity he presented earlier. He answers the first question by stating that the third condition of respecting others is one that is derived from the other two. To this avail, he argues that it is inaccurate for people such as Anderson to argue that authenticity is a distinctly amoral outlook if limited to the two conditions presented in Sartre's definition in *Anti-Semite and Jew*. This is because Sartre's first condition states that to be authentic, one must have a lucid consciousness of one's *situation*, as opposed to merely the acts that one commits. To Heter, this situation includes the social roles one occupies, and an individual is responsible for meeting the expectations of that role. He states,

“Since no individual can define a social role alone, role awareness requires understanding the institutional dimension of the role, for example the common social expectations regarding the rights and responsibilities of the role.”¹²⁷

By this, Heter is stating that the conditions of authenticity involve a level of understanding that goes beyond the individual's own situation due to the fact that understanding your social role involves understanding the part others play in that role. If an individual has voluntarily placed themselves in a particular social role – for the placement of oneself in a social role, or the failure to remove oneself from it will always be voluntary, as it is an act performed through one's freedom of choice – then they must accept *all of* the responsibilities that are brought with it, because if they pick and choose which parts of a social role they want to adopt and which they want to leave behind, then they are guilty of lying to themselves about their situation and are therefore guilty of bad faith.¹²⁸ For this reason, the second condition of responsibility, to Heter, is too simplistically read if one were to limit it to accepting

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ I realise that, at this stage, such role awareness can still allow for the adoption of a distinctly anti-social social role, such as that of a Stasi executioner, inasmuch as one can be lucidly conscious of all of the aspects of their role as a member of a political party that executes those who do not believe in the cause. The reason that Sartre would take issue with such an anti-social role will come later on in Heter's analysis.

liability for an act (as Anderson does), as it also involves accepting the responsibilities brought on by the social role one occupies.¹²⁹ Because of this, there are social elements to both the first and second conditions of authenticity spelled out in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, and it is from these social elements that the third condition of authenticity – that of respecting others – finds itself.

Heter invokes the writing of Hegel to explain wherefrom the ethical objectionability of a poor recognition of others is derived. Hegel, as Heter notes, states that one's self-identity is necessarily intersubjective, seeing as the social roles that I adopt are not roles until others recognise them in me. If I form the attitude of a master over others, then I am establishing my self-identity in a "poor and ultimately self-defeating" manner, seeing as "self-identity can be established only through the recognition of others," and when I dominate others, they no longer recognise me.¹³⁰ Heter goes on to state that Sartre invokes this theory of mutual recognition in two places in *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Firstly, Heter states the following:

"The oppressor thus depends upon the other who he hates. The anti-Semite 'finds the existence of the Jew absolutely necessary. Otherwise to whom would he be superior?' [*Anti-Semite and Jew*, p. 19.] The Jew is in the position of the slave: dominated politically, but with the subversive power over his dominator."¹³¹

From this, it is clear that Sartre is invoking the Hegelian master / slave dialectic, or at least some form of it, because he recognises the importance of mutual recognition in the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. In addition to this, Heter notes that Sartre expresses the importance of mutual recognition – as opposed to one-sided recognition – when he agrees with Hegel that this sort of mastery found in oppression is paradoxical. This is because the master needs to recognise in some manner the human nature of the slave before

¹²⁹ Heter, 'Authenticity and Others', pp. 27-28.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 29.

¹³¹ *ibid.*

labelling them as a slave and denying it, for otherwise there would be less satisfaction for the master.¹³²

From this, one can see the importance of mutual recognition not only in the ethics of oppression, but in Sartre's idea of authenticity overall. Not only do the two conditions Sartre gives in *Anti-Semite and Jew* have greater social elements to them than most scholars have allowed, but, also, they naturally lead to a third condition whereby, to be authentic, one must respect and recognise others' freedom. Therefore, vices such as oppression or cruelty or the belief that others are lesser than oneself are not only rational errors of bad faith (because it is a failure to be truly conscious of one's situation etc.), but also errors in being truly authentic, seeing as such individuals who perform these vices fail to respect the fact that other human consciousnesses are as ontologically free as themselves.

At this stage, it ought to be said that Heter's terminology is needlessly confusing here in the manner in which he distinguishes bad faith – which consists in being inauthentic through failing in one of the first two conditions of authenticity – and “not being authentic” by failing in the third condition. Seeing as the third condition is derived from the other two, I see no issue in describing such a failure to meet the third condition of authenticity as bad faith as well, despite it being for a different reason. Heter would have made this distinction in order to enforce his thesis that reading *Anti-Semite and Jew* according exclusively to bad faith (of failing to meet the first two conditions) is not a sufficiently strong or accurate reading of the text, and so he would not want to use the same term to describe the failure in oppression that he describes, however for the purposes of this essay I see no issue in using the same term while qualifying for what reason a particular act or mindset is bad faith.

Setting aside the confusing terminology, it might be argued of Heter that he is performing the same error that I noted in my analysis of Hamburger, namely, that he is reading excessively closely into certain particular passages of Sartre and

¹³² *ibid.* (Heter refers to a comment made in the *Critique of Dialectic Reason* stating that the master must “treat man as a dog, by first recognising him as man” to back up this claim).

extrapolating some exaggerated claims about Sartre's beliefs, despite them not appearing elsewhere and fundamentally contradicting other passages. It is worth noting that, in the case of Sartre, a lack of explicit mention of an element of his existential theory is not evidence of it not existing. This is because it is not only well-known but also established in my exploration of Detmer's distinction of freedoms that Sartre can often leave some elements of his theory unexplained, or, at the very least, leave an element unexplained at a moment when it directly applies to his subject matter. For this reason, it would not be against Heter's argument that his conclusions would come from a need to read closely into certain passages from Sartre, so long as the interpretation fits with Sartre's philosophical project. Furthermore, as Pellauer notes, most of Sartre's texts written following *Being and Nothingness* were written with the goal of reaching the widest possible audience, instead of only writing with an academic audience in mind.¹³³ For this reason, it would be understandable if Sartre left out certain more technical elements to his writing, such as his affinity with Hegelian ethics, seeing as this would make the text less accessible to French audiences.

Setting aside Sartre's often-confusing writing style, this Hegelian interpretation of Sartre is backed up, as Heter notes, in other texts of his. For instance, Heter notes that in *What is Literature?* Sartre makes a great deal of claims concerning the importance of writers' responsibility towards their readers, a responsibility derived from their social role, no less, which backs up the claims concerning the importance of roles in authenticity.¹³⁴ In the *Notebooks*, Heter notes that Sartre often invokes the master / slave dialectic and appeals to the "demands" brought on by such relations, and also explicitly makes further comments against Kantian universalisation.¹³⁵ This is not to say of how, as Heter notes, Sartre says in uncharacteristically clear terms in 'Existentialism is a Humanism' the following:

"When I recognise, as entirely authentic, that man is a being whose existence precedes his essence, and that he is a free being who cannot, in any

¹³³ Pellauer, 'Translator's Introduction', *Notebooks for an Ethics*, p. xi.

¹³⁴ cf. Heter, 'Authenticity and Others', p. 31.

¹³⁵ cf. *ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

circumstances, but will his freedom, at the same time *I realise that I cannot not will the freedom of others.*"¹³⁶

Here, Sartre all but draws a diagram explaining that recognising and respecting the freedom of others is a crucial part of the authentic character. What Heter offers is an explanation as to wherefrom this duty is derived, for some have argued that it might not necessarily follow that my recognising my own freedom means that I must do the same for that of other people. To Heter, this duty is derived from the social roles that one voluntarily adopts, and in adopting those roles, one must recognise their place in the sphere of the roles of others. By adopting a certain role, an individual is voluntarily limiting their freedom of obtaining, because that role is part of an intersubjective web of roles in which all individuals find themselves.¹³⁷ It is important to note that while Sartre criticises the idea of taking socially-constructed values as unconditional *a priori* facts (because they are not), he has always recognised the importance of the social roles one adopts. He may be critical of those who cherry-pick the obligations and values of a certain role such as a devoted Christian or who take it as a deterministic fact that they are a part of such a role, but he does not criticise those who voluntarily choose to follow the Christian faith with a true and lucid consciousness of what that entails and what responsibilities will follow. To fail to understand this, and to fail to understand that this is the case for others, is to have bad faith, and to act immorally.

I take this account of Sartre's ethics to be a coherent understanding of how existentialist authenticity can bring with it normative duties towards others. There may be a great deal more to be said about whether or not this is the most accurate portrayal of Sartre's account of authenticity, however, as I stated earlier, my intention is not necessarily to portray Sartre in the most accurate manner possible, seeing as this would require a great deal more textual analysis of all of his works and the interpretations of other scholars than this essay would allow. More importantly, I now take this chapter as a coherent understanding of what it is for an

¹³⁶ Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism', p. 14 (italics added for emphasis). Heter cites the last statement, although slightly differently due to his operating from a different translation than me.

¹³⁷ Heter, 'Authenticity and Others', p. 31.

individual to be existentially authentic. It is this that I shall now use as a basis for comparison will Mill's own moral character.

7. Mill & Sartre: The Moral

“[Those] who try to show that their existence is necessary, when it is merely an accident of the appearance of the human race on earth – I shall call scum.”¹³⁸

(Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Existentialism Is a Humanism')

At this stage, I have established the moral components of each authors' ideal characters. To Mill, the key moral characteristics of an individual with his ideal moral character include “energy,” which consists in the ability and commitment to progress the individual's own life and stick to plans that benefit them and those around them, “self-reliance,” consisting in the individual's ability to help themselves without putting excessive detrimental burden on those around them, and “public spirit,” consisting in the individual's understanding that their own individual flourishing is as important as the flourishing of any other individual, and, therefore, help individuals around them to flourish as well as understand the responsibilities that come with social roles including professional positions (cf. the drunk policeman example) and political powers (cf. the franchise). From these characteristics also comes the characteristic of tolerance: individuals of Mill's moral character in understanding that the interests of others are as significant as their own and in having the characteristic of “self-reliance,” must understand that it is not the business of any individual to interfere with the self-regarding choices of any other individual.

In Sartre – or on Heter's interpretation of Sartre – we have seen not only that those two conditions of authenticity as elaborated in *Anti-Semite and Jew* contain within them social elements, but also that there is a third, distinctly moral condition for authenticity that grounds those normative claims that Sartre makes in later works.

¹³⁸ Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism', p. 14.

Turning to the first two conditions, the condition of a “true and lucid consciousness of the situation” includes within it the understanding not only of the social roles in which one has voluntarily placed oneself (for, on the existential ontology, the authentic individual either finds themselves in a social role and voluntarily chooses to remain within it, or voluntarily chooses to adopt a social role), but also that other individuals are free consciousnesses and that they have their social roles to play that are intertwined with one’s own. Secondly, in “assuming the responsibilities and risks that [the situation] involves,” an authentic individual is one who understands that this assumption of responsibility is not only limited to one’s own personal situation in life, but also consists in the acceptance of those responsibilities tied to those social roles of which one is voluntarily a part. Derived from the social elements of these two conditions is the third condition of authenticity that consists in accepting and respecting the freedom of all other individuals, for a true understanding of a situation and an acceptance of its responsibilities brings with it the acceptance that those individuals around you consist in just as much freedom of choice as you do, and that to not respect that freedom is deceive oneself in the belief that one’s own freedom is of greater importance than those of other individuals. Having established the moral characteristics of both authors’ ideal characters, let us now analyse the various manners by which one could compare Mill to Sartre.

XV. The Inauthentic Policeman

The first and, perhaps, most obvious point of comparison between the two authors can be found in the means by which they both perceive responsibilities to others as deriving from social roles. Mill’s example of the drunk policeman on duty is a clear example of how responsibilities (from the perspective of the individual of Mill’s moral character) are derived from the social roles one plays: to drink to excess by myself or in the company of friends or family remains within the realm of self-regarding actions, whereas the point at which the action becomes other-regarding (and, in this case, requiring government intervention according to the harm principle) is the point at which it hinders my ability to successfully perform a social –

or, in this case, professional – role in which I have placed myself. This is because this social role involves a newfound power to help others, where, in this case, the newfound power is derived from the rule of law being placed in my hands. Because I have voluntarily taken up the responsibility to help others with my power, it would be immoral for me to abandon that responsibility by putting myself in a position whereby I can no longer successfully help others when it is my duty to do so. To shirk my duties in such a manner would be to violate the “public spirit” condition of Mill’s moral character.

This example of Mill’s is a key point of comparison with Sartre, because not only does it demonstrate that one of the characteristics of Mill’s moral character is almost identical to one of Sartre’s – in this case, the social element of the second condition of authenticity – but it is also justified in the same manner by both ideal characters. Sartre’s inauthentic individual (in this case) is one who voluntarily puts themselves in a social role and then cherry picks the aspects of the role that suits them. To Sartre, in accepting a social role, one must accept the role in its entirety, because to not do so is to fail to understand the responsibilities tied with that role. In choosing the role of policeman – for it is a conscious choice – the individual has entered into the role of one who, when on duty, helps those around them. For them to get drunk on duty is to deceive themselves in the belief that the role that they chose does not entail such a responsibility. Just as with Mill, the role involves acquiring a great deal of power, and to believe that such a power does not entail the responsibility is to be inauthentic by the social aspects of both of the first two conditions of authenticity: it demonstrates a poor understanding of the situation and they also fail to accept the responsibilities associated with it.

In addition, part of the acceptance of such a responsibility is the acceptance that those around the policeman are worth helping in times of need. A policeman who accepts the duty to serve and protect, as it were, and yet who believes that those around them are not worth serving and protecting when they feel like getting drunk is one who severely lacks a true understanding of their situation. This is because they are accepting a role that involves a momentary sacrifice of the ability to indulge

in base pleasures for the sake of helping other individuals, and yet then indulging in those base pleasures and thereby putting the immediate needs of those individuals at risk. In doing so, this shirking of duties also violates Heter's third condition of authenticity, namely, that of understanding and accepting the freedom of others. In believing that the needs of others are less important than their ability to consume excessive amounts of alcohol, the policeman believes that his own free ability to do what they like is more important than the role they have taken on to protect the freedom of others. Indeed, Sartre is quick to call those who believe that their existence is *a priori* of greater importance than anyone as "scum" (*salauds*), as per the quotation with which I opened this chapter.¹³⁹

What this means in terms of the comparison with Mill is the fact that both authors perceive the drunk policeman as failing in each of their moral characters not only because both denounce the policeman's failure to honour their responsibilities that come with the social role within which they have voluntarily placed themselves, but also because the policeman displays a poor understanding of the fact that their own free life is just as important as those they have chosen to serve and protect. To Mill, this misconception is a clear failure to be "public spirited," and, to Sartre, this is a failure to accept and respect the freedom of others (for human consciousnesses consist in freedom, so to fail to respect the freedom of others is to fail to respect their status as fellow human beings), particularly when the role that they have taken is to protect that freedom. From this, it can be seen that both authors derive the social responsibility aspect of their moral characters' from both an understanding of the social roles that an individual plays, and that individual's understanding that the freedom of others is as important as their own. Mill's utilitarian ideal of each individual's life being as morally significant as every other life is therefore seen in his moral character here, inasmuch an acceptance of such a fact is not only rational, but also required in order to achieve his ideal moral character, just as how, to Sartre, an understanding that one is free has, as a consequence, the understanding that every other individual is as free as oneself. Sartre's moral account of authenticity invokes both a form of egalitarianism as well as the idea that

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

responsibilities to others are derived from social roles in order to determine the authenticity of an individual, and Mill does the same with respect to his own moral character. This demonstrates that these moral components of Mill's moral character can be described as authentic ones, for they are justified in the same manner as Sartre's own authentic moral norms.

XVI. The Tolerant Existentialist

Linked to the above section, the second point of comparison that can be made between the two authors is on how Mill places tolerance as a key feature of his moral character, and how, on Heter's interpretation, Sartre places the respect for the freedom of others as a key moral condition for an individual to be authentic. Turning firstly to Mill, the justification for tolerance consists in the fact that a society rife with tolerant individuals would lead to greater prospects for the populace to flourish due to it aiding with the cultivation of the moral character. Because of this, the moral characteristic of tolerance is one that, in effect, acts as a perpetuity tool to ensure that individuals in society are constantly cultivating each other's moral characters. In other words, were tolerance not a feature of Mill's moral character, the individuals of the moral character would not last over time. This is because one may very well accept social responsibilities and powers, as well as understand what is best for oneself and what options are best available to you to achieve your goals, but this does not necessarily entail the fact that one will respect the privacy of other individuals and their decisions to live lives different from your own. As a result, one individual with Mill's moral character minus the tolerance could swiftly deem their own way of life as the best for everyone, and try and interfere with the lives of others in a manner detrimental to the lives of others, and that might lead others to lead lives following the "dead dogma" that Mill so despises. For this reason, tolerance is the key feature of Mill's moral character that enables the moral characters of every individual in a society to spread and be cultivated.

Why this makes for an important comparison with Sartre's third condition of authenticity is firstly because of the fact that Sartre was, himself, an advocate of

tolerance, and, secondly, this third condition of respecting the freedoms of others is demonstrative of how tolerance ought to be, to Sartre, a part of authenticity. As I mentioned in the previous section, due to the fact that Sartre sees the human condition as one consisting literally in freedom, and that, by definition, a human consciousness could not lack freedom of choice, or be less free in this manner than another. Therefore, in respecting the freedom of other individuals, one is respecting the status that other individuals have as consisting in the same kind of consciousness as oneself. In other words, to respect the freedom of another individual, to Sartre, is to respect that that individual is as much a human being as oneself. For this reason, part of respecting the lives of other individuals is to respect that they are free to make their own choices in whatever situation within which they find themselves. As a point of comparison with Mill, this form of respect is straightforwardly tolerance. On the condition that the choices of other individuals do not display a disregard for one's own freedom, one must respect those individuals' choices and not interfere. This condition of authenticity is therefore Mill's harm principle of non-interference in a twentieth-century colour.

As such, not only is Sartre's third condition of authenticity the same in nature to Mill's ideal moral characteristic of tolerance, but it also acts as a cultivator of authenticity in the same way that Mill's characteristic of tolerance acts as a cultivator of his own moral character. For individuals to cultivate their authenticity, they must be reminded of their freedom of choice, and it is societies that fail to do this that lead to the worker in 1830 being inauthentic by virtue of his inability to comprehend his own freedom of choice. As a result of this, it is not only for a society's government to respect the freedom of choice of an individual – and, by extension, do everything within its power to protect its citizens awareness of it – but it is also for the individuals within that society to allow for the authenticity of others to be cultivated as much as possible through the respecting their freedom. One can see how this is derived from his first condition of authenticity as well: if one does not respect that other human consciousnesses are as free (of choice) as yourself, then one has a severe misunderstanding of the human condition. Such a misunderstanding would place oneself among the “scum” that consider their

existence as a necessary point in the universe's history that Sartre denounces. In this case, unlike in the comparison I made in the previous section, this condition is not only present for the sake of the individual's own authenticity, but for the sake of maintaining authenticity in all individuals in a society. If a substantial proportion of members of a society adhere to the third condition of authenticity, then this, in itself, will promote authenticity in all other individuals and ensure its maintenance.

Sartre's criticisms of institutions that promote inauthentic beliefs like Christianity is based on the fact that these are inhibiting the authenticity of others by not respecting the freedoms of others. In propagating a belief system that denies one's freedom of choice, one is not respecting the freedom of choice of other individuals. An authentic individual is one who gives minimal advice to others in order to ensure that the individual understands that any decision is theirs over which to deliberate and theirs upon which to act. Such can be seen when Sartre (who, one might assume, considered himself as authentic) describes the advice that he would grant to others consisting simply in the statement that it is up to the individual asking advice to decide for themselves.¹⁴⁰ Mill might not have approved of such radically stark advice as a part of his moral character, however his condition of tolerance is the same as Sartre's third condition of authenticity, both in practice and in its justification. Both authors specify within their ideal characters a trait that contributes to the maintenance and cultivation of those characters in others. Both of these moral character traits are also the same in nature, albeit Mill's is less radical than Sartre's when it comes to the practice of granting advice to others. That being said, Mill's abhorrence of "dead dogma," his belief that individuals are the best judges of what is best for themselves, and his anti-paternalism demonstrate that Mill would not be one to advocate an overreliance on the advice of others, even if he would not advocate every piece of advice granted by an individual to be "decide for yourself." As a result of this, Mill's moral character can be seen to be authentic inasmuch as it advocates an authentic moral trait that centres around the respect and cultivation of individuals' freedom to choose their best lives for themselves.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 7.

XVII. The Utilitarian Elephant in the Room

Having established that there are moral aspects shared by the two ideal characters and that those shared characteristics are justified according to the same principles as each other, I have shown that the norms that Mill advocates as being a part of his moral character demonstrate a strong degree of advocacy for authenticity. However, despite this, there still remains a possible point of contention between the ideal characters of both authors. This is that, while the norms of Mill's moral character are almost identical to those that feature in Sartre's account of authenticity (or, at least, on Heter's interpretation of Sartre), Sartre's existentialist account does not incorporate within it any separate account of normative ethics. To Sartre, the only norms that are present are those that follow on from the conditions of authenticity, whereas, to Mill, there is a clear, objective means of determining the moral value of an action abstracted from the specific scenarios of individuals, namely, utilitarianism.

It would not be worth examining in great detail the intricacies of Mill's specific version of the "utility calculator," as it were, for there is a great deal of debate over whether Mill was a rule utilitarian, an act utilitarian, a sophisticated utilitarian and so on. However, suffice to say at this stage that Mill, contrary to Sartre, believed that there existed a demonstrable means of calculating the moral value of any given action on the basis of the net welfare or pleasure of the act when compared with other possible actions. At its most basic level, Mill believes that an act is morally righteous if and only if it is an act that produces a net benefit to all the individuals affected by it, where benefit is measured according to the pleasures and pains of those individuals affected. The specifics of this normative ethical theory are not as important here as the question of how Mill could ever be read as any form of existentialist, given that he believes in an abstracted form of normative moral judgment according to which acts could be measured as objectively virtuous or vicious. Furthermore, if the moral elements of Mill's ideal character are measured as morally right or wrong according to an abstract form of righteousness-calculator that can be used in any given scenario (regardless of how complex those

calculations can be depending on the scenario and those involved), then how can those with Mill's moral character be described as existentially authentic when the morality of their actions depends on something so distinctly un-existentialist?

I shall address the second of these two questions first. The important thing to note with respect to Mill's moral character is that none of its features involve the ability to calculate the moral worth of each individual action. That is to say that Mill does not expect of individuals with his ideal moral character to be consistently aware of the calculated ramifications of each and every one of their actions, such that they only act after they have performed the appropriate pleasure / pain calculations and ascertained the ideal moral act. This, to Mill, would actually go against the other attributes of his moral character. He makes a key distinction between motives, intentions and duties – a distinction separate from the distinction Sartre makes between motives and intentions. In a footnote in *Utilitarianism* in response to an objection posed by J. Llewellyn Davies, Mill states the following:

“Mr. Davies, by an oversight too common not to be quite venial, has in this case confounded the very different ideas of Motive and Intention... The morality of an action depends entirely on upon the intention – that is, upon the what the agent *wills to do*. But the motive, that is the feeling which makes him will so to do, when it makes no difference in the act, makes none in the morality...”¹⁴¹

The motive, Mill says elsewhere, is only an indicator of the agent's disposition to act morally or immorally, and yet has no bearing on the actual moral value of the action. The intention, on the other hand, merely consists in the actual proceeds of the act itself, that is, not how emotionally or coldheartedly one proceeds to act, but instead the actual, empirical facts and results of the act itself. This means that the morality of the act as calculated by Mill's normative ethical theory is entirely independent of the character of the agent who performs it. Mill expresses as much when he states,

¹⁴¹ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 132 (Mill's italics).

“He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty, or the hope of being paid for his trouble.”¹⁴²

The duty is the norm that the agent ought to follow according to the ethics of utilitarianism, and yet Mill states that whether or not an individual acts from duty, from an emotional investment or, indeed, from the hope of some reward, the morality of the act is the same. Motives reside within the realm of the individual's character, a realm, which, therefore, is separate from the normative ethics of Mill's version of utilitarianism. For this reason, an individual with Mill's moral character is not one who must act out of duty, or, in other words, out of considerations of the utility of their act. Mill even states that it would be detrimental to do so, for in acting solely for the purposes of achieving maximal utility would be to alienate oneself from one's social relations, for one's motive to save one's spouse would no longer be the love of their spouse, but instead a cold, calculated desire to achieve maximal utility. Mill notes that it would not be immoral for someone to act in such a purely calculated fashion (for motives bear no weight on the morality of an act), but that it would not be an ideal character trait, for “Utilitarians are quite aware that there are other desirable possessions and qualities besides virtue.”¹⁴³ This means that it would not be of the ideal moral character of an individual to act in such a way.

This is all to demonstrate that Mill's normative ethics make no interference with the actual character traits of his moral character. For this reason, an individual with Mill's moral character can still be described as existentially authentic. This is because, while Mill himself measures the moral value of an action according to an abstract function of pleasure and pain, the individual is not only *not* required to be aware of such a normative ethics and calculate their actions based on it, but it would also be detrimental to the individual's moral character if they did. As a result of this, there is nothing to demonstrate that the individual's ideal character itself is any less authentic than Sartre's as a result of Mill separately configuring a utilitarian function for moral worth. Having demonstrated that both the rational and moral

¹⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 134.

components of the two authors' moral characters consist in fundamentally the same attributes justified for the same reasons, and given that Mill's measure of moral worth is separate from his moral character, it can still be stated that Mill is an advocate of existential authenticity.

With all this said, I must turn to the other question that must be addressed with respect to Mill's theory and existentialism. This question is: Even if Mill builds his politics around the propagation of an existentially authentic character in a society's populace, can it be argued that Mill was himself an existentialist, when he puts forward an account of morality that existentialism by its nature would reject on the basis that existentialism always rejects the idea of morality being derived from any sort of abstract normative ethics? In other words, is it enough that Mill bases his political theory on the cultivation of authenticity to truly describe him as an existentialist? With respect to the morality in Sartre's existentialism, a morally good action is only deemed as such on the basis of the conditions of authenticity, and to be inauthentic or to have bad faith in some respects is to be immoral (not all cases, however, seeing as one might be inauthentic on the basis of a rational failing, such as in the case of the worker). To Mill, however, one might be more or less authentic – whether morally or rationally – based on whether one lives up to the standard of his moral character, however the determining factor in the morality of an individual or their acts is measured according to a separate, objective standard to the standard by which one is or is not of Mill's moral character. This objective standard stands in the way of the way Sartre describes existentialism in 'Existentialism is a Humanism,' for instance:

“[E]xistentialism, in our sense of the word, is a doctrine that does render human life possible; a doctrine, also, which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environmental and a human subjectivity.”¹⁴⁴

This “human subjectivity” is directly at odds with Mill's normative ethics, seeing as, to Sartre, the defining feature of existentialism, and all claims it makes as a result, is

¹⁴⁴ Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism,' pp. 1-2.

that it is grounded on the subjective lives of free human consciousnesses. This means that any prescribed moral duties to others are to be found not according to any abstract normative theory such as Mill's utilitarianism, but instead in the actual relations that an individual has to those other individuals around them. This does not mean that there are no trends: the relation between a slave and their master can, for instance, be seen as an inauthentically immoral one in almost every case, but the grounding behind this will always be found in the subjective relationship between the particular slave and their particular master, not in an abstract objective account of morality. Mill, on the other hand, believes that the subjective life of the individual is of a great deal of importance in their relations to other people, how they choose to progress their own life, and, as a result, how a society should be governed (inasmuch as it should be governed in a manner that respects the subjective lives of individuals). Yet, while subjective elements may play into the utilitarian calculator making it more complex, there is still an objective means of calculating morality whose fundamental procedure of weighing up pleasure over pain is unchanged regardless of the subjective elements of individual cases of human interaction.

With this in mind, one could not conclude that Mill is an existentialist in the same manner as an author like Sartre. This is not to say that the comparison does not bring up a great deal of notable elements of both authors that demonstrate *some* level of existentialism in Mill. What I hope to have demonstrated is that while Mill may not be an existentialist *par excellence* due to the presence of his distinctly un-existentialist objective normative moral theory, there are a number of non-superficial elements of Mill that demonstrate *some form of* existentialism in this nineteenth century philosopher. Indeed, those philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche who saw the beginning of the existential movement as it is known in scholarship today came after Mill's death, and this means that how Mill would have responded to the movement itself cannot be seen directly in his writing. And yet, despite this, Mill's building of a political system for the purpose of cultivating a distinctly authentic character – both rationally and morally – cannot be ignored, and can be described as a project with strong proto-existentialist contents. Even with

respect to the normative elements of his moral character, I have shown that these follow a distinctly existentially authentic pattern, despite the fact that Mill does not ground moral value in the subjective lives of individuals. And given that this moral character is Mill's "single fundamental commitment that permeated all his major works,"¹⁴⁵ to use Jones' words, the existentialist elements of this commitment demonstrate that notions of authenticity and bad faith, while in different terminology, preceded the continental existentialists of the late nineteenth century.

Conclusion

"Persons, even of considerable mental endowments, often have themselves so little trouble to understand the bearings of any opinion against which they entertain a prejudice."¹⁴⁶

(John Stuart Mill, 'What Utilitarianism Is')

To conclude, through developing and defending Jones' moral character thesis, I have demonstrated that all of Mill's political philosophy had as its basis the single goal of cultivating in individuals a particular moral character. Through my comparison with Sartre, I have demonstrated that this moral character is one that would now be described as existentially authentic. Using Sartre's philosophy as a framework of existential authenticity, I have shown that not only are the characteristics of Mill's moral character and Sartre's authentic character superficially similar, but that they also are justified in similar manners. Both authors ground their ideal characters on the need for individuals to carve out their own paths in life and understand that it is their choices that will achieve this. For this reason, both authors are quick to criticise the antitheses of their ideal characters by providing thorough accounts of the detrimental effects that societies governed by tradition have on individuals. To Mill, this comes from the creation of a "tyranny of the majority" that forms a society where individuals are incapable of critically evaluating the governing powers that affect their lives. To Sartre, this comes from

¹⁴⁵ Jones, 'John Stuart Mill as Moralist', p. 288.

¹⁴⁶ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 135.

the way in which many forms of government try to convince individuals that they are not free to deliberate over and choose the lives that would best suit them, and so they become alienated from their rational capabilities. Both of these observations ultimately point to the same basis for advocating the idea that individuals must not only understand but also act upon their ability to freely choose what sort of life would best suit them. The fact that Sartre uses this same basis for his advocacy of authenticity as Mill does for his advocacy of his own moral character, as well as the fact that the two ideal characters are remarkably similar in nature, demonstrates that one could describe Mill as operating from an existentially authentic basis for his moral character.

I have also shown that this similarity extends to the moral aspects of the ideal characters. I have, through Heter's interpretation of Sartre, demonstrated that if any sort of moral norm is to be ascribed to an existentially authentic individual, then this would arise from the individual's understanding of their social situation as well as their understanding that other individuals are as free as they are. To the individual with Mill's moral character, this would be the same: an individual with Mill's moral character helps those around them and lets others live their own lives as part of an understanding that other individuals' lives are just as unique as their own. However, I have also noted that despite this, one cannot ignore the fact that while Sartre, like all existentialists, rejects the notion of abstract, objective normative ethics applying equally to every scenario, Mill operates from exactly this sort of normative ethics. While Mill's utilitarianism could incorporate a number of subjective intricacies into the way in which it calculates the moral value of an act, it still applies exactly the same framework of calculating moral worth to every single scenario just by its nature as a universal ethics. This sort of universal moral application is something that existentialist philosophers such as Sartre could not accept by virtue of their belief that there is no possible means of universally calculating moral value that could possibly apply to any scenario. For this reason, it would be inaccurate to conclude that Mill is an existentialist philosopher in the same manner as those continental existentialists like Sartre. With that being said, what I hope to have demonstrated is that the existential concept of authenticity is not one exclusive to

those continental philosophers like Sartre, Heidegger and Kierkegaard. On the contrary, I have shown that Mill bases his entire political framework around this exact concept and on cultivating it in a society's populace.

A point of further discussion for which there is unfortunately no space in this essay would be to ask the question of why it is that Mill and Sartre, despite operating from the same ideal of the authentic life, come to radically different conclusions in each of their ideal forms of government, with Mill as a free-market republican and Sartre as an advocate of Marxism. Seeing as Marxism is not a foundational feature of existentialism, I did not incorporate this discussion into this paper, for my primary question concerned Mill and whether or not his philosophy was existentialist, and it would be inaccurate to say that seeing as Mill and Sartre come to differing political conclusions, Mill could not possibly be an existentialist. This is because if one thing can be learned from the rift between Sartre and Camus in the mid-nineteenth century, it is that to be an existentialist does not mean to align oneself with one particular form of political government. What I have shown in this paper is that on matters concerning authenticity – both in its rational and moral aspects – Mill's politics shows a clearly existentially authentic groundwork, even if one could not describe Mill as an archetypal existentialist. The focus on individuality, the criticism of traditions like Christianity, the understanding that human freedom is the key requirement for individual flourishing and the idea that an individual must understand the freedom of others and act in a way that reflects that understanding are all key shared features between Mill and Sartre that are enough to show that Mill had as his single, uniting political goal the idea of propagating an existentially authentic ideal of the good life in individuals.

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