

PHENOMENALISM AND THE SELF**Andy Hamilton****1. The origins of Mill's phenomenalism: Berkeley, Hamilton and the relativity of knowledge**

"Matter, then, may be defined as the Permanent Possibility of Sensation". With this famous phrase, Mill put phenomenalism firmly on the philosophical map. The origins of phenomenalism - the standpoint which regards sensations as the basic constituents of reality, and attempts to construct the external world from sensations and the possibilities of sensation - can be traced back to Berkeley. But the analysis of matter as the "permanent possibility of sensation", and the attempted application of that analysis to mind, which comprise the most well-known chapters of Mill's An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy, is the first developed presentation of the doctrine.¹ After Mill, a commitment to phenomenalism became standard among scientific philosophers, until superseded by physicalism in the 1930's. Figures associated with the doctrine included Mach, Russell, Carnap, C.I. Lewis and A.J. Ayer, and with these it took an increasingly "linguistic" or "semantic" form.²

Mill's phenomenalism is a direct descendent of Berkeley's idealist immaterialism. Mill indeed characterised himself as an "idealist", a follower of Berkeley who rejected the reality of matter. In his review of "Berkeley's Life and Writings", Mill expresses his boundless admiration for the earlier writer: "...of all who, from the earliest times, have applied the powers of their minds to metaphysical enquiries, he is the one of greatest philosophic genius", Mill writes, of a list that goes on to include Plato, Descartes and Kant. He explains how his own position nonetheless improves on Berkeley's. The "common notion of matter" says that material objects are "not mental, or such as can only exist in a mind...It was competent to Berkeley to maintain that this part of the common notion is an illusion; and he did maintain this, in our opinion successfully".³ Where he was less successful, Mill claims, was in explaining how this illusion is produced; here Berkeley should have employed the psychological methods of his own Theory of Vision, subsequently exploited by the associationist psychology of Hartley's Observations on Man.⁴

This was the method Mill himself employed; so in brief, Berkeley + Hartley = Mill. For Mill, the process of association of ideas generates our belief in the "permanent possibilities of sensation", and these possibilities are really what we refer to when we talk of an external world. The introduction of the possibilities of sensation marks the crucial difference between Mill and Berkeley, and indeed defines the phenomenalist as opposed to idealist variety of immaterialism. For Berkeley, objects are essentially groups of actual ideas, whether had by human subjects or, in some sense, by a divine subject. As Mill correctly notes, Berkeley "had not thoroughly realised the fact, that the permanent element in our perceptions is only a potentiality of sensations not actually felt". He had, however, seen that "to us the external object is nothing but such a potentiality", and Mill quotes one of the passages where Berkeley came close to phenomenalism:

The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed - meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it.⁵

But "in itself the object was, in his theory, not merely a present potentiality, but a present actual existence...in the Divine Mind" (p. 461).

This, for Mill, is the "illogical side of Berkeley's theory" (p. 465). The possibilities of sensation are intended as an insubstantial replacement for Berkeley's God. They "are not a positive entity...they did not exist as sensations, but as a guaranteed belief, implying constancy in the phenomena, but not a spiritual substance for the phenomena to dwell in when not present to my own mind" (p. 464). (It is notable that in the review, Mill says nothing of any difference between himself and Berkeley concerning Minds or Selves.) Phenomenalism, then, seems to assume an ontology purely of sensations, but unlike Berkeleyan idealism, it maintains that what we mean by an external world involves appeal not just to actual, but also to possible, sensations. But spelling out just what this definition involves will be a major concern of the present article.

If Berkeley is central, the absence of Hume as an influence on Mill's phenomenalism is striking, since he is sometimes regarded as a phenomenalist.⁶ But Hume did not assume his current eminence in the philosophical canon until T.H. Green's edition of his works appeared after Mill's death. Moreover, the Philosophic Radicals - Bentham, the Mills and their circle - distrusted the philosopher whose scepticism seemed to be a pretext for his Toryism. Mill refers to Hume as "the most extreme of Phenomenists" (p. 165n), but he was by no means a phenomenalist in the modern sense. His view is that belief in an external world has no rational basis, but is nonetheless compelled by "natural instinct": "We may well ask, What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?, but it is in vain to ask, Whether there be body or not? That is a point which we must take for granted in all our reasonings".⁷ Hume and Mill both wanted to explain this belief as acquired through experience by the association of ideas, but Humean scepticism does not imply that external objects do not exist; consequently, it has no use for "possible perceptions". For Hume, matter could not be defined as the permanent possibility of sensation.⁸

Mill's discussion of Berkeley shows that there are both ontological and psychological strands to phenomenalism - concerning what the belief in an external world amounts to, and how it arises. In the Examination these are intertwined. But Mill's explicit target is the psychological theory of the "school of intuition" - principally Thomas Reid and his successor Sir William Hamilton. Reid (1710-96), critic of Hume and founder of the Scottish "common sense" school is, after Hamilton, the writer most extensively referred to in the Examination.

In important respects, Reid's work sets the agenda for Mill's discussion. Reid maintained that belief in an external world is - as Mill puts it - "intuitive" (we feel compelled to believe it) and "original" (innate); it is therefore legitimate. Thus, "that those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be", is taken by Reid as one of the self-evident principles of "common sense".⁹ Mill denies that there is any such body of self-evident principles. He follows Hume in using association to analyse apparently "intuitive" beliefs - in an external world, or cause and effect, or the self - as an acquired product of sensations. But he opposes Hume in apparently accepting Reid's argument from "intuitive" and "original" to "legitimate" (on Mill's affinity with Reid see the "Introduction" to this volume).

Although Mill's "school of experience" is certainly empiricist, the "original beliefs" of the "school of intuition" are not rationalist. For the "intuitionists", such beliefs are "principles of common sense" and not products of the "inward light" of reason. (Though it is not clear Mill recognised this; as when he denies that there is "knowledge a priori; [i.e.] truths cognisable by the mind's inward light, and grounded on intuitive evidence".) Reid, Hume and Mill are all committed to naturalism; Hamilton, as we will see, seems to be simply confused.¹⁰

Mill had long felt there ought to be a "hand to hand fight" between the "two schools of philosophy, that of Intuition, and that of Experience and Association". In 1854 he expressed the intention of developing a philosophy which would succeed in "placing metaphysics and moral science on a basis of analysed experience, in opposition to the theory of innate principles".¹¹ Mill saw such innate principles as a

bastion of conservative social thought, as his Autobiography makes clear. His alternative philosophy received its fullest expression in An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy, which appeared in 1865.

Sir William Hamilton (1788-1856) was eminent, in Mill's eyes, as "the great fortress of the intuitional philosophy in this country". Given the subsequent sharp decline in his reputation, it is important to recognise that in the first half of the nineteenth century, Hamilton and Mill were the two most celebrated philosophical thinkers in Britain. It was the Examination, as its author correctly noted, that "reduced [Hamilton's] too great philosophical reputation within more moderate bounds".¹² In fact, as an early reviewer declared:

The whole fabric of the Hamiltonian philosophy is not only demolished, but its very stones are ground to powder. Where once stood Sebastopol bidding proud defiance to rival systems now
a coast barren and blue
Sandheaps behind and sandhills before.¹³

Though the "great fortress" of intuitionism turns out to be a rambling edifice, cobbled together in a patchwork of earlier styles, its most obvious structural defect lies in the treatment of the "relativity of human knowledge". Hamilton's philosophy may have been, as Mill says, "the latest form of the Reidian theory" (p. 110 - in fact it was the last). But Scottish common-sense left Hamilton when he hit upon the quixotic enterprise of combining Reid's direct realism with Kant's critical philosophy. Hamilton's "Philosophy of the Conditioned" declared the "great axiom that all human knowledge...is only of the relative or phaenomenal", and that "we know nothing absolutely" - that our knowledge of mind and of matter is properly of phenomena, not substances.¹⁴ As Mill recognised, this principle could hardly be reconciled with direct realism, and thus Hamilton's "synthesis" of Reid and Kant is quite unstable. It was the burden of Mill's criticism in the Examination that, despite his protestations, Hamilton never properly supported the "great axiom" at all.¹⁵

Mill himself holds to the relativity of knowledge unequivocally. He is totally antipathetic to direct realism. This position clearly goes together with his rejection of belief in the external world as "intuitive". The relativity of knowledge rules out the possibility that we could be directly, non-inferentially aware of external objects:

We know no more of what they are, than the senses tell us, nor does nature afford us any means of knowing more...our knowledge of objects...consist[s] of nothing but the sensations which they excite, or which we imagine them exciting, in ourselves (pp. 5-6).

The relativity of knowledge is an epistemological doctrine. But it comes in two forms, Mill writes; and here he attaches distinct ontological claims to the epistemological doctrine. According to the first, preferred by philosophers of an "Idealist" persuasion - among whom it becomes apparent Mill numbers himself - an object is "but a complex conception made up by the laws of association...There is nothing real...but these sensations". Sensations occur in fixed groups, but we have no evidence of any "substratum or hidden cause of sensations". This view virtually amounts to phenomenalism. According to the second, Kantian version of the doctrine, "there is a real universe of 'Things in Themselves'...but all we know [them] to be is merely relative to us, consisting in the power of affecting us in certain ways" (pp. 6-7). The term "phenomenalism" was not used by Mill or his contemporaries, but when it first appeared in the philosophical literature, it was, confusingly, to this latter view that it referred.¹⁶

Mill criticised Hamilton for conflating the weak sense of the doctrine, with which both "Idealists" and Kantians could agree, with the idealist interpretation Mill himself preferred. As regards its weak sense,

Hamilton was indeed correct in regarding the "great axiom" as one that almost all philosophers accepted, at least "in modern times".¹⁷ The philosophical situation as Mill found it was largely hostile not only to direct realism but also to what is now termed "scientific realism": the view that science can provide a route to the absolute nature of things. However, Mill was distinctive among his contemporaries in making the further commitment to phenomenalism.

The relativity of knowledge lies behind Mill's commitment to an ontology purely of sensations. His view is that since we can know nothing beyond our sensations, our knowledge of the external world cannot be knowledge of something "intrinsically distinct" from sensation. But although epistemological and ontological assumptions motivate Mill's attack on Hamilton's "intuitionism", his ontology and epistemology were always kept largely implicit, and the connection is a veiled one. With the principle of the relativity of knowledge held in the background, we return to the foreground, Mill's detailed critique of Hamilton's intuitive "introspective method", where the debate is at least overtly on a psychological level, concerning how our beliefs in an external world arise. It is in the course of this critique that full-fledged phenomenalism makes its undramatic first appearance.

2. The "psychological" versus the "introspective" theory concerning belief in an external world

The terms of the Mill-Hamilton debate may seem arcane, but they have important echoes in current discussion of the a priori, for instance by Christopher Peacocke.¹⁸ Hamilton's "introspective" theory scrutinised our beliefs to arrive at the ones which are "irresistible", hence "innate", and therefore "intuitive" or legitimate. Belief in matter or in an external world is one such belief. Mill rejects the move from irresistible to innate, as we will see. But he seems not to question the subsequent move from irresistible and innate to legitimate - this was Reid's line of argument as given above. Certainly some of what he says indicates that he accepts this argument:

Could we try the experiment of the first consciousness in any infant - its first reception of the impressions which we call external; whatever was present in that first consciousness would be the genuine testimony of consciousness, and...there would be as little possibility of discrediting it, as our sensations themselves (p. 140).

Furthermore, Mill does argue from the unavoidability and inexplicability of certain basic principles directly to their legitimacy, notably in the case of memory, as we will see. Against this, however, are passages where Mill insists that "a conviction might be really innate...and yet not be true".¹⁹ Nor does Mill ever explain why the "testimony of consciousness" concerning our original convictions, should bestow legitimacy on them - a question that will surely strike the modern reader. (Compare Peacocke: "Even though a transition is primitively compelling, we can still raise the philosophical question of whether what we find primitively compelling can also be justified".²⁰)

Mill wants to argue that, though apparently "irresistible", belief in an external world is not "intuitive" or legitimate. His use of the term "intuitive" will not be clear to modern readers either, and is in itself rather obscure (as becomes evident when Mill moves on to the self). "Intuitive knowledge" for Mill is immediate knowledge - what seems "unavoidable" or "necessary" - and he regards immediate knowledge derived from sensory-experience, or from memory, as "intuitive". But "we certainly do not know by intuition" - "by mere introspection of ourselves" - "what knowledge is intuitive" (pp. 136, 138). We must first exclude the possibility that the belief in question is an "acquired product".²¹ For this reason, Mill may conflate "original" or innate with "intuitive"; though the two kinds of expression may be co-extensional, the first is meant to be a psychological notion and the second an epistemic one. "Intuitive"

for Mill should properly be paraphrased "compelling and not explicable as an acquired belief" - in Peacocke's terminology, "primitively compelling". (For more on Mill's epistemology, see the "Introduction" to this volume.)

So although epistemology is "the interpretation of Consciousness" (p. 110), Mill's objection to Hamilton's "school of intuition" is that it takes a too simple view of this interpretation. The kernel of the dispute is that, according to Mill, beliefs that appear intuitive - i.e. that are "irresistible" - are mistakenly regarded as intuitive, because the possibility that they are an "acquired product" is not considered. Mill's own "psychological" theory, in contrast, shows how a belief, though possessing "the character of necessity", could have been acquired through experience. Thus in Ch. IX of the Examination Mill outlines the view that "the laws of association...are capable of creating, out of those data of consciousness which are uncontested [viz. sensations], purely mental conceptions, which become so identified in thought with all our states of consciousness, that we seem, and cannot but seem, to receive them by direct intuition". The belief in Matter may be one such "mental conception":

Idealists, and Sceptics, contend that the belief in Matter is not an original fact of consciousness, as our sensations are, and is therefore wanting in the requisite which, in...Sir W. Hamilton's opinion, gives to our subjective convictions objective authority (p. 140).

If the belief in matter is not innate, then by Hamilton's lights it cannot be "objective", i.e. imply an external world over and above sensations. This is precisely what Mill the Idealist goes on to argue.

Mill focuses on matter and mind in Ch X of the Examination which, in line with the generally negative tone of the work, is an attack on "Sir William Hamilton's View of the Different Theories Respecting the Belief in an External World". Mill painstakingly surveys these archaically-named theories, from Reid's "natural realism" to "absolute idealism" via "cosmothetic idealism". (The latter is really indirect or representative realism, so maybe Mill should have termed it "cosmetic idealism".) It is hard not to become impatient when Mill criticises Hamilton's criticism of Brown's interpretation of Reid; the "stones" of the Hamiltonian philosophy are certainly being "ground to powder" here.²²

The upshot of the famous chapter that follows, Chapter XI, "The Psychological Theory of the Belief in an External World", is that, contrary to Hamilton, the belief is "not intuitive, but an acquired product" (p. 177). The formation of our perceptual judgments is explicable, Mill argues, without assuming that we perceive anything but sensations; this is what leads him to phenomenalism. His "psychological theory" will show how, "supposing no intuition of an external world to have existed in consciousness", the belief in one would inevitably be generated, and would mistakenly be regarded as "intuitive" (p. 178).

But what do we mean when we say "the objects we perceive are external to us, and not a part of our own thoughts?"

We mean, that there is concerned in our perceptions something which exists when we are not thinking of it; which existed before we had ever thought of it, and would exist if we were annihilated; and further, that there exist things which we never saw, touched, or otherwise perceived, and things which never have been perceived by man. This idea of something which is...fixed and the same, while our impressions vary...and which is always square (or of some other given figure) whether it appears to us square or round - constitutes altogether our idea of external substance (pp. 178-9).

Mill then turns to the question of acquisition, and develops his "Psychological Theory". It is based on the premisses of "Expectation" - that "after having had actual sensations, we are capable of forming the

conception of Possible sensations" - and "Association of Ideas" (pp. 177-8). Mill's story is that processes of association operate on the notion of Contingent or Possible Sensations, to generate the "complex conception" of external objects or substance just outlined. The essence of association, as Mill understands it, is this: "When two phaenomena have been very often experienced in conjunction...it is impossible to think the one thing disjoined from the other"; as a result "the facts...answering to those ideas come at last to seem inseparable in existence", and "the belief we have in their coexistence, though really a product of experience, seems intuitive" (pp. 177-8).

Possible sensations are sensations which are not and individually never were in our consciousness, "but which...we know that we should have felt under given supposable circumstances, and under these same circumstances, might still feel" (p. 179). It is features of the concept of possible sensations which, Mill argues, lead by association to the generation of the concept of permanent, external objects. Firstly, the possibilities are "conditional certainties", not "vague possibilities" (p. 180). Mill has in mind the following: I confidently expect, on the basis of past experience, that if I were to experience certain sequences of sensation associated with approaching a strong flame, I would then experience a sensation of burning pain. While the conditional could never be a certainty, Mill's point is that it is more than a mere epistemic possibility. "Guaranteed or certified" is a better description than "permanent", since there is change in the possibilities whenever there is change in the external world. (Mill seems to think there is no circularity in this formulation.)

Furthermore, these "certified or guaranteed possibilities" refer to groups of actual and possible sensations, between which there is a fixed "Order of succession" which gives rise to the ideas of cause and effect. Therefore it is the possible sensations which become most important to me: "My present sensations are generally of little importance, and are moreover fugitive: the possibilities, on the contrary, are permanent, which is the character that mainly distinguishes our idea of Substance or Matter from our notion of sensation" (p. 180).

The possibilities are therefore regarded by us as grounding a common, public world - they "present the character of objectivity" (p. 184). Mill evidently believes his account avoids the multiple private worlds implicit in Berkeley's idealism:

The permanent possibilities are common to us and to our fellow-creatures; the actual sensations are not...The world of Possible Sensations succeeding one another according to laws, is as much in other beings as it is in me; it has therefore an existence outside me; it is an External World (pp. 181-2).

What is important for our everyday beliefs is the converse of what is ontologically basic: "The sensations, though the original foundation of the whole, come to be looked upon as a sort of accident depending on us, and the possibilities as much more real than the actual sensations..." (p. 181). Thus it is that any sensation experienced is regarded as belonging to a group of actual and possible sensations, which is itself mistaken for, or regarded as, a permanent, external object.

Mill believes he has now refuted Hamilton's introspective account, since on the latter's principle of "Parcimony", "Where there is a known cause adequate to account for a phenomenon, there is not justification for ascribing it to an unknown one" (p. 183). (Mill's theory is extended in Ch. XIII, "The Psychological Theory of the Primary Qualities of Matter".) The psychological theory accounts for our belief in an external world, so there is no reason to regard that belief as innate. Thus the idea of permanent possibilities of sensation starts out, for Mill, as part of an explanation of our belief in an external world; it is part of the cause of our belief. To reiterate, Mill is explaining how possibilities of sensations come to be mistaken for or, more neutrally, regarded as, permanently existing external objects.

The more neutral formulation seems advisable because of the rather different use to which Mill subsequently puts the concept of possibilities of sensation. This concept comes to figure in the definition of the belief in external objects: "Matter, then, may be defined as the Permanent Possibility of Sensation" (p. 183). Only at this point does Mill's account become genuinely phenomenalist, offering a semantic rather than a psychological analysis. Mill's subjunctive conditionals now come to constitute what may be regarded as the first developed statement of the modern phenomenalist analysis of "material object statements". According to this analysis, statements such as "There is a table in the next room" are equivalent in meaning to "If X were in such-and-such circumstances (in the next room), then he or she would have so-and-so (table-like) perceptual experiences". (Further analysis, including elimination of the subject, is required. As Ayer notes, phenomenologists tend not to be very specific here, preferring "more or less vague descriptions of how such translations might run".²³) This analysis is a semantic implementation of the defining ontology of phenomenism - that all that exists are sensations and the possibilities thereof.

3. Competing strands in Mill's account: "error theory", phenomenism and ontological neutrality

Before exploring further this semantic turn in Mill's treatment, it will be useful to explore the options open to him. "The inference required from pure sensings to mind-independent physical objects cannot possibly be recognised in Mill's inductivist logic of truth. So Mill must either accept that we have no grounds at all for any beliefs about external objects, or must reject the assumption that physical objects are mind-independent". Skorupski's succinct analysis points up the alternatives that Mill should have recognised.²⁴ (Direct realists, in contrast, will question the starting point in "pure sensings", perhaps denying that there is any such category.) Certainly Mill rejects the initial inference from "pure sensings" to "mind-independent physical objects". He is clear that his psychological theory does not constitute a legitimation of our belief in an external world - construed as a belief in the supposed hidden causes of sensations. Concerning that belief he writes, "I am only accounting for it; and to do so I assume only the tendency, but not the legitimacy of the tendency, to extend all the laws of our own experience to a sphere beyond our experience" (p. 187n). Such a legitimation would run counter to Mill's account of inductive inference.

But which of the ensuing alternatives indicated by Skorupski does he espouse? I will argue that, depending on the sense in which "external object" is taken, Mill may be seen as pursuing both alternatives - though I will also argue that this is not an explicit strategy on his part. In one sense - that in which "external object" denotes a "hidden cause of our sensations" - he holds that we have no grounds for our beliefs. To that extent he advocates what is nowadays termed an "error theory" - a theory explaining how our mistaken beliefs arise. This is the account suggested by Mill's psychological theory as just outlined. But in another sense, in which "external objects" are not in "a sphere beyond our experience", he holds that talk of them is not erroneous. It simply amounts to, i.e. is perhaps to be reduced to, talk of mind-dependent entities, viz. possibilities of sensation - though as we will see in the next section, Mill is ambivalent on how "mind-dependent" the possibilities actually are.

But what do we believe? In claiming that all that exists are sensations and, perhaps, possibilities of sensation, phenomenism, like idealism, seems to conflict with common-sense. Berkeley, however, saw himself as a friend to commonsense, outraged by the allegedly sceptical consequences that can be drawn from Locke's realist philosophy (and were, by Hume). Mill, though less explicit on this question, took the same position. It is a sentiment common among phenomenologists that there is a conflict with common-sense only insofar as ordinary people are seduced by the views of realist philosophers. Mill's view seems

to be that there is an error in what people say they think, rather than in what they actually do think; but he is far from clear on the matter.

This equivocation reinforces the feeling that there are two competing tendencies in Mill's account, those of 18th century psychological analysis, and what would become 20th century semantic analysis. The latter tendency - what is sometimes called "linguistic" phenomenalism - treats Mill's subjunctive conditionals as "meaning-equivalences", and may therefore be viewed as an attempted "vindication", or perhaps a reduction, of ordinary discourse. Russell, for instance, taking "sense-data" as certain, tried to justify common-sense beliefs in material objects by showing that they involve "logical constructions" from such data.²⁵ Thus modern phenomenologists, assuming the falsity of direct realism, try to bridge the logical gap between a subjective "given" and an external world. On their view, the question of whether external objects exist does not arise. In contrast, psychological analyses have a tendency towards "error theory", explaining away the ordinary conception of external objects as "imaginary" or mistaken. (Whether the semantic analysis of "linguistic" phenomenalism involves a "reduction" depends on one's understanding of that dubious concept, of which there are as many varieties as Heinz tinned foods; if "reduction" implies elimination there may be a tendency towards an error theory.)

Returning now to Mill's discussion, we see how it exhibits tendencies both of "error theory" and semantic analysis. As outlined so far, his account has largely invited an "error theory". Mill has argued that belief in an external world is acquired and so has no "objective authority". The permanent possibilities of sensation are "what leads us to say" that there are external objects; a psychological, not a semantic analysis. However, Mill has also claimed that the possibilities of sensation constitute "an External World", and what he now says suggests that he does believe that the Possibilities are "what we mean" when we talk of external objects. Mill seems to think he is stating a conclusion when he gives his famous definition:

Matter, then, may be defined as the Permanent Possibility of Sensation. If I am asked, whether I believe in matter, I ask whether the questioner accepts this definition of it. If he does, I believe in matter; and so do all Berkeleians. In any other sense than this, I do not. But I affirm with confidence, that this conception of Matter includes the whole meaning attached to it by the common world, apart from philosophical, and sometimes from theological, theories. The reliance of mankind on the real existence of visible and tangible objects, means reliance on the reality and permanence of Possibilities of visual and tactual sensations, when no such sensations are actually experienced (p. 183, my underlining).

But the conclusion doesn't follow. The psychological theory doesn't show that matter may be defined as the Permanent Possibility of Sensation. It may, however, granting Mill's further inductivist assumptions, show that matter does not exist. When he writes "If I am asked, whether I believe in matter...", Mill clearly assumes such ontological implications will be drawn. He makes the same assumption in a further defence of his new, phenomenalist definition of "matter":

I believe that Calcutta exists, though I do not perceive it, and that it would still exist if every percipient inhabitant were suddenly to leave the place, or be struck dead. But when I analyse the belief, all I find in it is, that were these events to take place, the Permanent Possibility of Sensation which I call Calcutta would still remain; that if I were suddenly transported to the banks of the Hoogly, I should still have the sensations which, if now present, would lead me to affirm that Calcutta exists here and now. We may infer, therefore, that both philosophers and the world at large, when they think of matter, conceive it really as a Permanent Possibility of Sensation (p. 184).

However, "the majority of philosophers fancy it is something more; and the world at large, though they have really, as I conceive, nothing in their minds but a Permanent Possibility of Sensation, would, if asked the question, undoubtedly agree with the philosophers". So Mill now makes explicit his "error theory", whereby the association of ideas explains away the belief in a strictly fictional Matter:

There is...no psychological obstacle to our forming the notion of a something which is neither a sensation nor a possibility of sensation [i.e. the notion of substance], even if our consciousness does not testify to it; and nothing is more likely than that the Permanent Possibilities of sensation, to which our consciousness does testify, should be confounded in our minds with this imaginary conception (p. 185).

So there is an error in what people say, and also in some sense in what they think, Mill maintains. This stance is echoed elsewhere. In the essay on Berkeley discussed above, Mill agrees with his hero that "the common notion of matter" is an "illusion". And in a letter to Herbert Spencer, he writes that "sensations, memories of sensations, and expectations of sensation...I maintain...are the only substratum I need to postulate; and that when anything else seems postulated, it is only because of the erroneous theory on which all our language is constructed". Instead, Mill suggests, "the concrete words used [should be] interpreted as meaning our expectations of sensations".²⁶

The "psychological theory", to reiterate, seems to specify three processes: (i) expectation generates the idea of possibilities of sensation; (ii) through the association of ideas, the possibilities of sensation come to be regarded as "permanent"; (iii) the pernicious idea of a "hidden cause" or "mysterious substratum" is developed. The last of these, it seems, does surely imply an "error theory". However, in the "Appendix" that Mill added in the 3rd and 4th editions (1867 and 1872), even this becomes unclear:

[My opponents] forget that to go into a room, to be asleep or awake, are expressions which have a meaning in the Psychological Theory as well as in theirs; that every assertion that can be made about the external world, which means anything on the Realistic theory, has a parallel meaning on the Psychological. [The latter] forms as vast and variegated a picture of the universe as can be had on the other theory; indeed, as I maintain, the very same picture...(p. 197; this claim is reiterated on p. 198).

Note how the "Psychological Theory" is now being contrasted with the "Realist" rather than the "introspective" theory, indicating a new direction of interest. The Realist theory - that which postulates Substance "as a support for phaenomena, or as a bond of connexion to hold a group...of otherwise unconnected phaenomena together" - is not declared erroneous, but is held to offer "the same picture" as the Psychological theory. These comments introduce a novel and sophisticated form of reduction, if it is reduction at all - the ontological neutrality later advocated by Mach, Carnap and Schlick.

On the most developed statement of this view, the conflict between phenomenalism and other metaphysical positions, and between these and commonsense, is empty of content. As Carnap wrote: "the realistic and the [phenomenalist or physicalist] constructional languages have actually the same meaning...[Once they are] recognized as nothing but two different languages which express the same state of affairs, several, perhaps even most, epistemological disputes become pointless". Schlick, in the course of defining the "problem of the external world" as a pseudo-problem, argued that Mill, like Berkeley, "was not wanting to deny the reality of physical objects, but rather to explain it, when he declared them to be 'permanent possibilities of sensation'" - though he did think Mill's mode of expression to be "unsuitably chosen".²⁷ Mill, like Carnap in this respect, was an irenic philosopher, seeking to harmonise apparently rival metaphysical positions, drawing the line at the objectionable "school of intuition"; hence his tendency to write like a "self-appointed Royal Commission".²⁸ The irenic attitude is

one of the roots of ontological neutralism; it also generates many of the ambiguities we are trying to elucidate.

Ontological neutrality is only adumbrated in Mill, and required verificationism to bring it into sharper focus. It is apparent not only in the remarks on the "two pictures", but also in Mill's claim that the "practical consequences" of his and the realist accounts are the same (see e.g. p. 183). This claim has led Skorupski to argue, in his portrayal of what appears to be a "Thoroughly Modern Mill", that the ambivalences in Mill's account result from a coherent distinction between the "literal meaning" of statements about the external world and their "practical content".²⁹ Skorupski maintains that Mill does, contrary to my earlier claim, explicitly implement a two-pronged strategy - the possibilities of sensation capture the "practical content" of the idea of substance, while the psychological account explains away the strictly literal but pernicious notion of the "external cause" or "propertyless substratum". Hence Mill intends both meaning-equivalence and an error theory.

The "two pictures" account would not, on this view, imply meaning-equivalence between the ostensibly rival "theories". Rather, it would imply that the idea of an external cause of sensation is "functionally redundant" in our thinking.³⁰ That is, when Mill asserts that the concepts of the possibilities and of external objects are equivalent, he is thinking of their "practical content" - as when he says that Hamilton "knew that the belief on which all the practical consequences depend, is the belief in the Permanent Possibilities of Sensation" (p. 183). In the System of Logic, in contrast, so this story goes, Mill is concerned with literal meaning, and claims that the names which make up propositions about the external world denote the external causes of our sensations, and connote the attributes of those causes. Hence: "A body, according to the received doctrine of modern metaphysicians, may be defined, the external cause to which we ascribe our sensations".³¹ Mill is concerned in the Logic to demarcate logic from metaphysics, and claims that "every essential doctrine [there] could stand equally well" with rival metaphysical positions (p. 62n) (though the Logic would have to be made consistent with the relativity of knowledge).

No doubt there is some such distinction between "practical" and "literal" content in Mill's mind in Ch. XI. But it cannot be maintained that Mill has a clear grip on the two-pronged strategy. (What one makes of Mill's alleged use of the distinction partly depends on whether one believes there is one, of course - denied by Wittgenstein in the Philosophical Investigations.) Mill refers to a variety of objects of belief without clearly separating them into pernicious and anodyne: "non-ego", "matter", "body", "external substance", "a kind of permanent substratum", "that the objects we perceive are external to us, and not part of our thoughts", "an existence transcending all possibilities of sensation" (p. 185), "the supposed hidden causes of our sensations", "a mysterious substratum" (p. 192). (Similarly with Mach; see below.) There is one crucial conflation, to be pursued below, between "external substance" - which includes Other Minds - and "matter". For instance, Mill writes in the review of Berkeley quoted above that Berkeley saw how "to us the external object is nothing but such a potentiality" - when he should have said "material object".

So it remains preferable to talk of competing tendencies in Mill's account, rather than an explicit strategy of combining them. Mill's position is transitional between 18th century psychological explanation and 20th century semantic analysis. His avowed intention in the Examination is psychological: the rejection of "intuition". But it is possible that he had developed his views in the period between the Logic and the Examination, so that the second, reductive strategy increasingly comes to the fore.³² Though he seems very pleased with his "psychological theory", Mill's account of the process of acquisition of belief is in fact very sketchy. Perhaps, at this late stage in his career, he was losing interest in his 18th century associationist heritage; if the "possibilities of sensation" themselves constitute an objective world, there is less need for an associationist theory.³³

The ambiguous status of the possibilities is another reason for denying that Mill clearly implements

Skorupski's two-pronged strategy. "Mind-dependent" possibilities are not the clear practical import of our beliefs about the external world; for Mill wants the possibilities both to be "mind-dependent" and (somehow) to constitute an "objective world". His attempts to vindicate this requirement are the topic of the next section.

4. Mill's ontology and the possibilities of sensation

Mill does have an "ontology of sensations" - he could hardly be a phenomenalist if he didn't. But in contrast to Berkeley's ontology of ideas and spirits, it is surprisingly uninfluential in his philosophy. A central justification for his ontology, the relativity of knowledge, is not mentioned in Chs. XI and XII. His irenic attitude in any case leads him to circumspection in stating it, most notably in the System of Logic. Mill writes that "it was soon acknowledged by all who reflected on the subject, that the existence of matter cannot be proved by extrinsic evidence. The answer, therefore, now usually made to Berkeley and his followers, is that the belief is intuitive..." (this is Hamilton's answer):

But although the extreme doctrine of the Idealist metaphysicians, that objects are nothing but our sensations and the laws which connect them, has not been generally adopted...the point of most real importance is one on which those metaphysicians are now very generally considered to have made out their case: viz. that all we know of objects is the sensations they give us, and the order of the occurrence of those sensations.³⁴

Here, the relativity of knowledge - "all we know of objects is the sensations they give us" - is regarded as more important than claims about what objects are. In contrast to this reticence, the ontological implications of the psychological theory are most clearly spelled out in the "Appendix" to Chs. XI and XII of the Examination, where Mill writes that he has "shown that in order to account for the belief in Matter, or, in other words, in a non-ego supposed to be presented in or along with sensation, it is not necessary to suppose anything but sensations and possibilities of sensation connected in groups" (p. 204).

But what is it to "suppose...possibilities of sensation connected in groups"? Surely is it only actual, not possible, sensations that can be said to exist. There is in Mill's discussion a pervasive ambiguity on this question. It may be that the only coherent account of the possibilities of sensation will regard them as objects of belief had by minds (themselves analysable as groups of actual and possible sensations). But many commentators have recognised an obscure pull in Mill's account towards "reifying" the possibilities. This tendency perhaps goes with Mill's declining interest in associationism and hence in an error theory. It is expressed in his claim that the possibilities are objective and "independent of our will, our presence, and everything which belongs to us":

...the Permanent Possibilities are external to us in the only sense we need care about; they are not constructed by the mind itself, but merely recognised by it; in Kantian language, they are given to us, and to other beings in common with us (p. 187n).

It may be that on close inspection, some passages which suggest a "reifying" interpretation turn out to be part of Mill's psychological story of how we acquire belief in an external world. But at least one early critic, Hugh O'Hanlon, was led to pose a dilemma for Mill between "Pure Idealism" and mind-independence of the possibilities; Mill patronises his "young antagonist", but his response is obscure and inadequate (p. 203n).

Among proponents of the reifying interpretation was H.H. Price, who felt Mill must maintain that the possibilities are "real in some sense", that they "subsist". In this he agreed with one of the most eminent

19th century critics of Mill's phenomenalism, Josiah Royce. But as Royce asked, in common with many after him, "What kind of unreal reality is this potential actuality?" (Royce's Absolute Idealist response was that "all the conceived 'possible experiences' are actual in a Consciousness of which we suppose nothing but that it knows these experiences...") In response to such doubts, McCloskey very sensibly comments: "One cannot have possibilities of mental sensations existing in the absence of all else; the apparent sense of the statement rests on the unspoken assumption that the possibilities are some sort of dispositional property of the mind".³⁵

Hence the second interpretation, assumed by Skorupski and others: the possibilities are "certified beliefs" had by Minds, and it is we who "reify" them, as the "psychological theory" shows. This interpretation is supported by Mill's assertion in his review of Berkeley, that the possibilities "are not a positive entity...they did not exist as sensations, but as a guaranteed belief".³⁶ But what is the status of Minds, and the implications for the ontological commitment of phenomenalism? There are two possible positions to take here. On the first, Minds are a category distinct from, and perhaps more fundamental than, sensations; on the second, Minds are constructions from sensations.

The first view implies that there is a question "in virtue of what are the conditional statements which express the possibilities true"? And the answer suggested is: in virtue of the categorical properties of minds. It is notable, however, that the question "In virtue of what...?" is not one that Mill shows any signs of addressing. Should he have addressed it? I think not, since the question suggests an appeal to a category more ontologically basic than sensations. The true phenomenalist ought to reject any grounding for the subjunctive conditionals.

This is not an interpretation that is universally accepted. Winkler, for instance, writes of Berkeley's "phenomenalism": "if Berkeley is a phenomenalist he is a theocentric one, who grounds the existence of perceptions, actual and possible, in the will of God...The difference between the perception and phenomenalist interpretations of Berkeley's views on unperceived objects...is not that the former assigns a role to God while the latter does not, but that the former emphasizes God's role as perceiver, and the latter his role as agent".³⁷ But talk of "grounding" the existence of possibilities of perception has the effect of collapsing phenomenalism into idealism. If Mill is serious about his ontology, the subjunctive conditionals should be ontologically ungrounded, and "barely" true. This is not to say that particular subjunctive conditionals have no inductively-based evidential support, though formulating this support is problematic in itself. (Compare the claim that statements about mental states are true in virtue of statements about brain-states - mind-brain identity - and the distinct claim that the evidence for the former is behavioural. But the issue is far from straightforward.)

The phenomenalist viewpoint is strange but distinctive. It expresses a curiously insubstantial, indeed "magical" solution to the problem of the external world which arises on an assumption of the relativity of knowledge. Since phenomenalists must regard regularities in sensations simply as "brute" facts, the most fundamental laws of nature will concern mental entities (sensations). Intractable problems of generating an objective world, and understanding our scientific knowledge of it, result from this picture. For instance, if the conditionals are ungrounded and barely true, it seems inexplicable how one conditional may be inferred from another - that if it is true that "If I go into the next room, I will have an experience as of a table" then it seems to follow, other things being equal, that it is also true that "If you go into the next room, you will have an experience as of a table". More fundamentally, the phenomenalist understanding of a world in which there happen to be no minds appears sophistical.³⁸ Given such difficulties, it is no surprise that many have sought to find a basis for the subjunctive conditionals - at the cost, I claim, of the disappearance of phenomenalism.

Hence the phenomenalist is compelled to adopt the position that Minds are constructions from sensations, and thus has to attempt a dual construction of both matter and mind. Only if there is this dual

construction, can the phenomenalist avoid sliding into a non-phenomenalist idealism. Mill's extension of the psychological theory from matter to mind in Ch. XII constitutes such an attempt, as is suggested when he says that he is entitled to imply an Ego in the notion of Expectation, since "up to this stage it is not Self, but Body, that I have been endeavouring to trace to its origin as an acquired notion" (p. 203). This aim, however, and with it the ontology of sensations, is impeded, and in the end fatally undermined, by understandable Berkeleian tendencies, as I will now argue.

5. The "psychological theory" as applied to Mind

The points of comparison in Mill's account of Mind or the Self are Berkeley and Hume. Mill's tendency to conflate Mind and Self results from his precursors' neglect of the subject's embodiment, though he himself is less guilty here. If embodiment is not recognised as an essential feature of the subject's situation, the analysis of Self and Mind seems to converge. At first sight Mill's account echoes Hume's - the rejection of minds as substances, an explanation of how we mistake a bundle (or in Mill's case, series) of perceptions for a substantial self, and a final perplexity about the status of the rejection.

But on further inspection, there are affinities with Berkeley's view of the mind as substantial. These are implicit from the outset in Mill's postulation of Other Minds, for reasons that will become apparent. He writes that "the real externality to us of anything, except other minds, is capable of proof" (p. 187n - my underlining), and goes on to offer a proof, lacking in Berkeley, of the existence of Other Minds. Indeed, Mill was probably the first philosopher properly to recognise the Problem of Other Minds that arises from a "relativity of knowledge" or Cartesian starting-point. His "argument from analogy" is rightly regarded as the classic statement of a "Cartesian solution" - one which addresses the problem on its own, Cartesian, terms rather than attempting to "dissolve" it, as Ryle and Wittgenstein were to do. Together with the definition of matter as "the permanent possibility of sensation", it is the most well-known passage in the Examination.

Mill seems to see no inconsistency between the series account and the postulation of Other Minds; why they are inconsistent will be explored below. These conflicting aspects will be apparent as his account is outlined. It certainly begins like Hume's. Mill asks whether "we already have in our consciousness the conception of Self as a permanent existence; or whether it is formed subsequently" (not quite Hume's question, admittedly, but the answer is Humean):

...our knowledge of mind, like that of matter, is entirely relative...We have no conception of Mind itself, as distinguished from its conscious manifestations. We neither know nor can imagine it, except as represented by the succession of manifold feelings which metaphysicians call by the name of States or Modifications of Mind (pp. 188-9).

(Note that it is "metaphysicians", not Mill himself, who view sensations as "States of Mind" rather than as ontologically basic.) However, our notion of mind, like that of matter, is that of

...a permanent something, contrasted with the perpetual flux of the sensations and other feelings or mental states which we refer to...The belief I entertain that my mind exists when it is not feeling, nor thinking, nor conscious of its own existence, resolves itself into the belief of a Permanent Possibility of these states (p. 189)

Mind itself, however, is

nothing but the series of our sensations...as they actually occur, with the addition of infinite possibilities of feeling requiring for their actual realization conditions which may or may not take place, but which as possibilities are always in existence, and many of them present (p. 189).

The terms of this account, and its unclarity, are familiar from Mill's treatment of matter. He goes on to note disanalogies between the notions of self, and that of matter. In contrast to matter, interestingly, "My notion of Myself...includes all possibilities of sensation...certified by experience or not, which I may imagine inserted in the series of my actual and conscious states"; and most importantly, this series is "confined to myself", and is not shared with others (p. 189). This last claim leads into the most significant difference between the two accounts, in that Mill holds that inferences to Other Minds are justified, while those to matter are not. This is brought out in his response to Reid's objection that if Hume's theory were correct, I would have no evidence "of the existence of my fellow-creatures". Mill responds that "All that I am compelled to admit...is that other people's Selves also are but series of feelings, like my own" (p. 190).

So how do I know that there are Other Minds? Even "the most strenuous Intuitionist" must recognise that it is not by "direct intuition". (Reid would dispute this claim.) Mill now states his famous argument from analogy to the existence of Other Minds. It marks an important advance on Hume's discussion in its recognition of the different grounds of 1st- and 3rd-person judgments, and of the importance of embodiment:

I conclude that other human beings have feelings like me, because, first, they have bodies like me, which I know, in my own case, to be the antecedent condition of feelings; and because, secondly, they exhibit the acts, and other outward signs, which in my own case I know by experience to be caused by feelings. I am conscious in myself of a series of facts connected by an uniform sequence, of which the beginning is modifications of my body, the middle is feelings, the end is outward demeanour. In the case of other human beings I have the evidence of my senses for the first and last links of the series, but not for the intermediate link. I find, however, that the sequence between the first and last is as regular and constant in these other cases as it is in mine (p. 191).

(In his "Appendix", Mill gives a better account of this process, properly relativised to his conditional analysis (p. 204n).) So Mill believes that in the case of mind, unlike that of matter, an account of how we infer to Other Minds, does legitimate that "inference". By Mill's own canons of inductivist logic, however, this is no more a "good...inductive process" than is the inference to matter. He overlooks this problem because, for reasons that will become apparent, it is essential for him to legitimate the belief in Other Minds.

To reiterate, Mill seems to think that the postulation of Other Minds is quite consistent with a series account. But from this point on, for reasons that are obscure, he backtracks over the psychological theory of Mind. He now sees "intrinsic difficulties" which seem "beyond the power of metaphysical analysis to resolve":

The thread of consciousness which composes the mind's phenomenal life, consists not only of present sensations, but likewise, in part, of memories and expectations...In themselves, [these] are present feelings...But they are attended with the peculiarity, that each of them involves a belief in more than its own present existence...[a belief] that I myself formerly had, or that I myself, and no other, shall hereafter have, the sensations remembered or expected (pp. 193-4).

Hence if the mind is a series of feelings, it is one which "is aware of itself as past and future". This

involves the "paradox" that "something which...is but a series of feelings, can be aware of itself as a series".

The result, Mill believes, is fatal for his theory:

...we are here face to face with that final inexplicability, at which, as Sir W. Hamilton observes, we inevitably arrive when we reach ultimate facts...The real stumbling block is perhaps not in any theory of the fact, but in the fact itself. The true incomprehensibility perhaps is, that something which has ceased, or is not yet in existence, can still be, in a manner, present: that a series of feelings, the infinitely greater part of which is past or future, can be gathered up, as it were, into a single present conception, accompanied by a belief of reality. I think, by far the wisest thing we can do, is to accept the inexplicable fact, without any theory of how it takes place... (p. 194).

This was not wise enough for many commentators. F.H. Bradley sneered that when Mill had "the same fact before him, which gave the lie to his whole psychological theory, he could not ignore it, he could not recognize it, he would not call it a fiction; so he put it aside as a 'final inexplicability', and thought, I suppose, that by covering it with a phrase he got rid of its existence". William James referred to "the definitive bankruptcy of the associationist description of the consciousness of self", commenting that "Mr. Mill's habitual method of philosophizing was to affirm boldly some general doctrine derived from his father, and then make so many concessions of detail to its enemies as practically to abandon it altogether".³⁹

Contemporary protests, no doubt less eloquently expressed, led Mill to expand on his apparent non-conclusion in the "Appendix" added to the 3rd and 4th editions. Here he argues that, despite his retractions, he is still not compelled to accept the Ego as "an original presentation of consciousness" (p. 207). He may be correct to say that he has not accepted "the common theory of Mind, as a so-called Substance" (p. 206), but he is certainly close to doing so, and clearly advocates a non-reductive account. That is, the Self is not merely a series of sensations tied together by processes of association; there is a "real tie" between the present memory-impression and the original sensation of which it is a "copy or representation":

the inexplicable tie...which connects the present consciousness with the past one, of which it reminds me, is as near as I think we can get to a positive conception of Self. That there is something real in this tie, real as the sensations themselves, and not a mere product of the laws of thought without any fact corresponding to it, I hold to be indubitable (p. 207).

I ascribe a reality to the Ego - to my own Mind - different from that real existence as a Permanent Possibility, which is the only reality I acknowledge in Matter: and by fair experiential inference from that one Ego, I ascribe the same reality to other Egoes, or Minds.

This wonderfully equivocating passage illustrates Mill's ambivalent treatment of the possibilities. Matter has a "real existence" as Permanent Possibility; but as this is the "only reality" Mill acknowledges in Matter, it is clearly an inferior kind of "real existence" to that which he now postulates for Mind! Nonetheless, Mill is confident he has "more clearly defined my position in regard to the Ego, considered as a question of Ontology", though he insists, very dubiously given his concessions, that "the Mind is only known to itself phaenomenally, as the series of its feelings of consciousness" (p. 208).

Mill is agnostic over what form a non-reductive account should take - whether we are "directly conscious of [a self] in the act of remembrance", or whether "according to the opinion of Kant, we...are [merely] compelled to assume it as a necessary condition of Memory" (p. 207). But although he cannot

countenance "Transcendentalism", his final view does have affinities with Kant's "unity of consciousness" account, as will become apparent. (The nature of the "real tie" will also be further explored below.) Whatever form it takes, a non-reductive account cannot admit sensations as ontologically basic, and so is incompatible with phenomenalism as I have defined it - indeed there is a question whether it can admit sensations as objects at all, rather than as "states of mind". (The problem of the relation of mind and sensations has been much-discussed in connection with Berkeley, and will not be pursued here.⁴⁰)

Mill's "final inexplicability" echoes Hume's confession of failure in his own "Appendix" to the Treatise, even if the tone appears unduly complacent, rather than troubled. Hume was forced to concede that either a "real connexion" between perceptions, or an ego in which they inhere, is required; but "plead[s] the privilege of a sceptic", confessing "this difficulty is too hard for my understanding".⁴¹ His reasons for abandoning the bundle theory are notoriously obscure; Mill's recantation is almost as compressed and obscure as Hume's. Both writers, perhaps, suspect that a yawning chasm is opening up around their philosophical viewpoint, and would prefer not to peer into it.

But the parallels should not be overstated. Although the series account may resemble Hume's as commonly understood, it is a "re-invention" of it, for reasons noted above. (Maybe it is association of ideas that causes us to confuse the two associationist theories, and regard them as one object with a "feign'd" permanence.) Moreover, Hume is probably no more a "phenomenalist" with regard to mind than he is with regard to matter. As in the case of body, Hume's view may simply be that we have no conception of a permanent self. As Edward Craig argues, "If there is no conception, no idea, then there is no rational argument, one way or the other", and Hume's stance on the self is that of an "ontological agnostic".⁴² This is not Mill's view; again there is the contrast between his circumspection in making ontological claims, and Hume's scepticism. Mill's philosophy is not driven by a theory of ideas; what motivates the series account is the relativity of knowledge.

Despite his retraction, the series account is an inevitable consequence of Mill's ontology and probably also his epistemology. The psychological theory of mind is no more a misapplication of the relativity of knowledge, than is the theory of matter, contrary to Skorupski's claims. The appeal of a series account for idealists is shown by the fact that Berkeley considered eliminating the self, though his "official view" was that it is a substance.⁴³ But though Mill had to attempt a series account, his retraction has revealed internal pressures in the contrary direction. I will now explore these pressures further, hoping to clarify the reasons Mill gives for that retraction.

6. Why Mill retracted the "psychological theory" as applied to Mind: memory and Other Minds

The reasons for Mill's retraction are not at all clear. Much of what he says in fact appears quite consistent with a series account. His concern over how "a series of feelings, can be aware of itself as a series", or "as past and future" (p. 194), has rightly been considered a bad reason for rejecting such an account. Though I have to believe that "I myself" had the sensations remembered, why can't such beliefs be explained in Humean terms as involving a "feign'd" permanence? (The fact that a series refers to itself as "I" does not of itself mean that Hume's account is question-begging.)

The immediate reason why Mill has to abandon a series account arises from his admission that memory constitutes "intuitive knowledge". This admission is the first of two sources of a non-reductive account in the Examination; the second, to which I will return in due course, is the postulation of Other Minds. Concerning the distinction between memory and other kinds of knowledge which he does not admit as intuitive, Mill writes:

The distinction is, that as all the explanations of mental phenomena presuppose Memory, Memory itself cannot admit of being explained. Whenever this is shown to be true of any other part of our knowledge, I shall admit that part to be intuitive (p. 165n).

Mill believes that the formation of our perceptual judgments can be explained without assuming we perceive external objects; what he cannot then do, is explain our perceptual judgments, or our memory judgments, without assuming we really do remember things. Associative processes require the remembering of past conscious states; otherwise, there would be no mechanism whereby habits of mind are generated. This, for associationism, has to be a primitive and unexplained tendency. Mill thus regards memory as a second source of "intuitive knowledge", in addition to "present consciousness" (*ibid.*). Memory-judgments must be regarded as reliable.

However, the claim that memory is intuitive proves ambiguous, and deeply problematic for Mill's psychological theory; indeed, it seems that if the reality of past conscious states can be justified, so should the reality of external objects.⁴⁴ The intuitive status of memory is implicit in Mill's claim that "the fact which alone necessitates the belief in an Ego, the one fact which the Psychological theory cannot explain, is the fact of Memory..." (p. 206). But how does "the fact of Memory... [necessitate] the belief in an Ego"? Is it the "intuitive status" of memory as just outlined that forces Mill's recantation?

If memory is intuitive knowledge then, it seems, the Self must be more than just a "feign'd" permanence. Memory-beliefs are reliable; so much of what I seem to remember must have happened, so I must be a genuinely persisting self. But is this the whole story? First, one may ask why it is memory that requires the postulation of a self, and not simply sensation as such. After all, it has often been argued against Hume that "unowned perceptions" are inconceivable. But this would imply that "the Ego is an original presentation of consciousness", which Mill tries to resist (p. 207). More importantly, there is a further connection between memory and the self which he seems to recognise, and which does not simply involve its intuitive status.

Returning to the passages in which Mill retracts the series account, there is an ambiguity in his claims. He first says that "a remembrance of sensation...involves the suggestion and belief that a sensation, of which it is a copy or representation, actually existed in the past". This seems to be the point arising from the intuitive status of memory. However, he goes on to say that the phenomenon of memory "[cannot be] adequately expressed, without saying that the belief [it includes] is, that I myself formerly had...the sensations remembered" (p. 194, my underlining). This is a different point - that the past sensation, assumed to have existed, belongs to myself.

It is the latter point, I think, that Mill insists on in the "Appendix", though the same ambiguity is implicit. He claims that the Self involves a "real tie...which connects the present consciousness with the past one, of which it reminds me...and not a mere product of the laws of thought without any fact corresponding to it". But what is the "fact" which this "real tie" guarantees? That there really was a past sensation, whose copy I am now having? Or that given there was such a sensation, it belonged to me? I would argue the latter. The series account itself, in postulating a series of sensations - that is, sensations extended in time - already assumes that the individual sensations actually exist or existed. The intuitive status of memory is not required to guarantee that. Moreover, it is the tie that Mill holds to be real, not just the past sensation. So the question Mill is addressing is not whether the past sensations existed, but rather, whose sensations are they? What is lacking, without a "real tie", is that the sensations do not necessarily belong to the same subject.

Mill is therefore looking for some principle of unity of consciousness. There is such a principle, but it is, I think, a product less of the general trustworthiness of memory-judgments, than of a certain kind of

immunity to error which they exhibit. If I seem to remember going on a childhood holiday to Bournemouth, then I cannot be mistaken about who went on holiday; if anyone went, it was myself. Though it may turn out that the apparent memory is a delusion, what I cannot coherently begin to wonder is "Maybe someone went to Bournemouth, but was it myself?". This feature may be expressed, though I think misleadingly, by the claim that "I" is part of the content of memory-judgments; better, that "I" involves an identification which spans past and present, which in memory-judgments guarantees an immunity to error through misidentification. In making a memory-claim, I do not identify two distinct subjects - the remembering subject and the subject who experienced or witnessed the remembered events - who are conceivably not identical, though they normally are. There is, rather, a guaranteed identity here. It is the specific immunity to error that results, which Mill is groping for in his postulation of a "real tie".

This line of thought connects with an interesting discussion in Mill's only other treatment of these questions, his Notes to The Analysis of the Human Mind by his father, James Mill, written in 1867-8. There he writes that "the notion of Self is...a consequence of Memory"; "a being, gifted with sensation but devoid of memory", would not have it. More important, the notion is more than just a consequence of memory:

The phenomenon of Self and that of Memory are merely two sides of the same fact...We may, as psychologists, set out from either of them, and refer the other to it...But it is hardly allowable to do both. At least it must be said, that by doing so we explain neither.⁴⁵

There is here an implicit rejection of the complaint Butler and Reid made against Locke's account - a complaint of which Mill would have been aware - viz. that memory presupposes personal identity and so cannot be the criterion for it.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, Mill's discussion is clouded by an unresolved tension between first- and third-person criteria for personal identity. He criticises Locke and the "psychologists" for ignoring third-person (bodily) criteria, but endorses Locke's analysis of first-person (psychological) criteria: "My personal identity consists in my being the same Ego who did, or who felt, some specific fact recalled to me by memory". Mill doesn't really explain why the different sets of criteria should come up with the same answer to questions of personal identity - or maybe he doesn't really believe it is the same question that they address. Nonetheless, what he says suggests a novel response to Butler and Reid's "circularity objection". It marks the beginnings of a neglected and, I believe, correct account, which specifies a benign circularity between the concepts of memory (and expectation) and personal identity. Despite deficiencies in his formulation, Mill is correct in pointing to a circularity whilst, unusually, not finding it vicious.

The benign circularity of the memory criterion is, I would argue, demonstrated by the status of memory-judgements as immune to error through misidentification. Self-conscious ways of knowing such as memory constitute, and do not - as Reid and Butler assumed - merely furnish evidence for, personal identity. These claims suggest a Kantian "unity of consciousness" account of personal identity: the self is not an object definable independently of one's self-conception, notably through memory. Thus there is an interesting connection between a Kantian account, and Mill's claim that "The phenomenon of Self and that of Memory are merely two sides of the same fact". It is less the general reliability of memory-judgments that is implicated in generating the self, rather their immunity to error through misidentification.⁴⁷

As noted above, Mill tries to salvage something of the "psychological theory" by arguing that although the notion of an Ego is not acquired simply in accord with the laws of association, but requires memory as a mode of intuitive knowledge, it is nonetheless acquired and not innate. He "[sees] no reason to think that there is any cognizance of an Ego until Memory commences" (p. 207). Now the whole point of

showing that an idea is acquired, is to cast doubt on its legitimacy. Mill's demonstration that we can acquire the idea of matter without acquaintance with anything genuinely permanent, constituted an undermining of the latter notion. The case is quite different with the self, where Mill has conceded that there is something genuinely permanent. On Mill's "interpretation of consciousness", there ought to be no philosophical point in arguing that an idea is acquired, if one has already conceded its legitimacy. Indeed, the fact that it is acquired ought to undermine its legitimacy. That he goes on to insist that the idea of the self may nonetheless be acquired, reveals some confusion in his epistemology.

Leaving direct consideration of memory, the second source of a non-reductive account of the self lies in Mill's treatment of Other Minds. Mill's phenomenalism aims to be "pluralistic", not solipsistic; on his view there are, irreducibly, experiences other than my experiences. But he cannot simply assume the existence of Other Minds, he has to prove it. This is because of his starting-point in the relativity of knowledge. Without such a proof the putative sensations of others would remain unacceptable "hidden causes of sensations" - causes of the sensations I experience when I observe others. It remains the case that Other Minds are, or are made up from, objects external to me which are not mere "possible sensations" (to me), but which have a real existence independent of any possibility of being perceived (by me). So in a pluralistic phenomenalism the permanent possibilities could only constitute matter, not "external substance". (This is to assume, as Mill seems to, a subjective starting-point. But the issue is a clouded one.)

The "proof" is inadequate, as has been noted above. But the problem is more fundamental. Mill asks how I know there are Other Minds. But does his account have the resources to make the distinction between self and others in the first place - can it yield criteria of personal identity and individuation? In contrast to Hume, Mill is at least aware of the problem of Other Minds, yet he makes no attempt to "tie" the perceptions with the "string" of causality or resemblance. Such an attempt would have failed nonetheless, since to admit that there are, irreducibly, Other Minds, is to admit a "real tie" between sensations - and so the demise of the psychological theory as applied to Mind follows. "Pluralistic phenomenalism" implies a non-reductive account of the self, and is therefore not phenomenalism on the strict definition I have been defending. Phenomenalism is necessarily solipsistic. It follows that Mill was wrong to distinguish between the allegedly baseless "extrinsic objections" of Reid - which provoked his argument from analogy - and the insoluble "intrinsic difficulties" of memory (p. 193). They are intimately connected, and Reid's objection, rejected by Mill, was correct: on the series account, "the proposition that...that there are any Selves except mine, is but words without a meaning" (p. 190). (Even "mine" would be a word without a meaning, of course.)

Mill's positivist and logical positivist successors - from Mach and Carnap to Ayer - tried to avoid the dilemma of pluralistic idealism versus solipsistic phenomenalism. They sought to transcend a "subjectivist" starting point, and to make their doctrine in some elusive sense ontologically "neutral". (We have seen how Mill's discussion of the "two pictures" of the Realist and Psychological theories anticipates their position.) In Mach's "neutral monism", unlike Mill's phenomenalism, sensations are in themselves neither mental nor physical, neither subjective nor objective. Though Mach talks of a "functional dependence" between sensations, there is no analysis of matter in terms of "possibilities of sensation". This position is echoed in later positivist viewpoints, and for Mach and Russell, though not Ayer, a lack of interest in possibilities of sensation means that their "neutral monism" is, strictly, not phenomenalism. Despite Mach's neutralist aspirations, however, Schlick argued convincingly that "a real world common to all individuals is out of the question" on his account.⁴⁸

In this crucial respect Mach's actualism and Mill's possibilism are equally unsatisfactory. The general failure of empiricist standpoints to allow "a real world common to all individuals" was diagnosed by Mill's acute critic Henry Sidgwick, in his sustained attack on the empiricist notion of "experience". In the article "Incoherence of Empirical Philosophy", a lively defence of (implicitly Scottish) "commonsense"

that was anachronistic in the late 19th century, Sidgwick asks "who are the 'we' who have this knowledge" that is necessarily relative or immediate:

Each one of us can only have experience of a very small portion of this world; and if we abstract what is known through memory, and therefore mediately, the portion becomes very small indeed. In order to get to what "we" conceive "ourselves" to know as "matter of fact" respecting the world, as extended in space and time - to such merely historical knowledge as we commonly regard not as "resting" on experience, but as constituting the experience on which science rests - we must assume the general trustworthiness of memory, and the general trustworthiness of testimony under proper limitations and conditions...I do not see how we can prove that we have such a right, from what we immediately know.⁴⁹

Though he was forced to accept memory as "intuitive knowledge", with a resulting incoherence, Mill could never have included testimony.

More plausible, non-phenomenalist, varieties of anti-realism would have satisfied the doctrine of the relativity of knowledge. But there was never a chance in a Millian of that doctrine itself being questioned; and it is in Mill's starting-point of "pure sensation" that his fundamental errors originate. An even longer article would have had more to say about this question. But I hope that Hamilton's examination of Mill's examination of Hamilton has at least shown what an intriguing, elusive and puzzling doctrine phenomenalism is.⁵⁰

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Notes

1. 1st edition 1865. All unqualified page references are to the Examination in Collected Works of John Stuart Mill Volume IX. The phrase "possibilities of sensation" first appears in his System of Logic from 1843, in Collected Works Volume VII, p. 58.

2. On Mill's relative lack of influence on scientific philosophers, see Mandelbaum (1971), pp. 13-14.

3. Collected Works Volume XI, 1871 review of "Berkeley's Life and Writings" ed. A. Fraser, pp. 459-60.

4. See Collected Works Volume I, "Autobiography", p. 71. On associationism, see next section.

5. Berkeley (1962), Part 1 Sec 3, p. 66. There are other passages where Berkeley inclines to phenomenalism. See Bennett (1971), sections 29, 31-2; Winkler (1989), Chs. 6, 7.

6. See for instance Fogelin (1985), p. 68. Pears argues against this interpretation in his (1990), Ch. 10.

7. Hume (1973), 1.4.2, p. 187.

8. Hume interpretation is a fraught business, but it is not even clear that he subscribes to the doctrine of the relativity of knowledge; see below. Fogelin writes: "The central difference between Hume's position and twentieth-century phenomenalism is that Hume is attempting to explain the origin of the plain man's belief in the continued existence of what he sees, whereas twentieth-century phenomenologists are attempting to vindicate it" (Fogelin (1985), p. 68n3). Mill, as I will explain, is attempting to do both; but the latter project, involving a definition of the plain person's belief in terms of permanent possibilities of sensation, is essential to what I am calling phenomenalism.

9. Reid (1872), p. 445.

10. Mill quotation: Collected Works Volume X, "Coleridge", p. 125. On the status of Reid's "principles", and the surprising extent of agreement between Hume and Reid, see Skorupski (1993), pp. 11-14. That Reid borrowed from Descartes as well as the "British empiricists" points up the deficiencies of the modern classification of philosophers as empiricist or rationalist.

11. Collected Works Volume I, "Autobiography", p. 270; letter to Gomperz in Collected Works Volume XIV, p. 239.

12. Mill quotations: Collected Works Volume I, p. 270 and p. 271.

13. M. Pattison (1865), p. 562. On the other hand, one recent commentator has found Hamilton a superior philosopher to Mill; see H. Mounce (1994).

14. W. Hamilton (1865), pp. 136-7.

15. On Hamilton's philosophy, and these criticisms, see A. Ryan's "Introduction" in Collected Works Volume IX, especially pp. xxiff.

16. See for instance Schlick (1974), first published 1918, pp. 235-44. As we have seen, Mill referred to Hume as a "Phenomenist", a term which Royce and W.G. Ward both applied to Mill (as he noted on p. 165n; comments on his critics were added to later editions of the Examination). Royce seems to be referring simply to Mill's allegiance to the relativity of knowledge; Royce (1882), p. 50, and see section 4 below. The different interpretations of the relativity of knowledge are characterised as two forms of phenomenalism, "strong" and "weak", in Skorupski (1993), p. 56. But I am reserving the term "phenomenalism" for Mill's own "Idealist" interpretation.

17. W. Hamilton (1866), pp. 639-40.

18. See the discussion of a "primitively compelling transition" in Peacocke (1992).

19. Collected Works Volume VII, p. 276. See Skorupski (1989), pp. 226-9 and pp. 158-9; and below.

20. Peacocke (1992), p. 134.

21. Henry Sidgwick, in his important critique "Incoherence of Empirical Philosophy" (1882), explores these assumptions. Taking Empiricism to be based on the trustworthiness of "immediate [i.e. non-inferred] cognitions", he argues that it is "practically of no avail to say that immediate cognition is infallible, unless we have a no less infallible criterion for ascertaining what cognitions are immediate" - and that this is deeply problematic (p. 539). Sidgwick's article - further discussed below - is useful as a clear account of the context and assumptions of Mill's discussion by a writer of the following generation.

22. On this chapter, see Skorupski (1989), pp. 223-5.
23. Ayer (1954), p. 134.
24. Skorupski (1989) p. 225; see also p. 233. On Mill's inductivism, see pp. 206ff.
25. See Russell (1972) and (1963). Examples of "linguistic phenomenalism" are found in Carnap (1967) and Ayer (1940).
26. Collected Works Volume XVI, p. 1090; discussed in Skorupski (1989), p. 234.
27. Carnap (1967), p. 87; Schlick (1981), "Positivism and Realism" first published 1932-33, p. 99. On ontological neutrality, see A. Hamilton (1992).
28. Skorupski (1989), p. xii.
29. See his (1989), pp. 232-5.
30. See Skorupski (1989), p. 235; it becomes "meaning-equivalence" only with verificationism.
31. Collected Works Volume VII, p. 56.
32. Packe claims that in the latter Mill was forced to abandon his earlier "professional" neutrality, though he must be wrong to see the Logic as "following faithfully from Hume"; see his (1954), pp. 440-1.
33. I owe this suggestion to Geoffrey Scarre. His (1989), pp. 172-6, teases out many of the obscurities and confusions in Mill's account.
34. Collected Works Volume VII, pp. 58-9.
35. Royce (1882), p. 53; Price (1926-7); McCloskey (1971), p. 158. Price holds that Mill is an "idealist" but not a "phenomenalist", on the grounds that the latter view denies any reality to the possibilities; a curious inversion of present nomenclature.
36. Collected Works Volume XI, p. 464.
37. Winkler (1989), p. 206.
38. On the fundamental problems facing phenomenalism, and the

conflicts with naturalism that result, see Skorupski (1989) pp. 240-47.

39. Bradley (1962), pp. 39n and 40n, first published 1876; James (1950), pp. 359 and 357, first published 1890.

40. See Winkler (1989), pp. 290-300.

41. Hume (1973), pp. 635-6.

42. Craig (1987), p. 114.

43. Skorupski reference: (1989), p. 237. On Berkeley, see Pitcher (1977), Ch. X; Winkler (1989), Ch. 9. In the Philosophical Commentaries Berkeley entertained the view of the mind as "a congeries of Perceptions" (entry 580). But Berkeley's "official view" is expounded by Philonous when he rejects Hylas's claim that "in consequence of your own principles, it should follow that you are only a system of floating ideas, without any substance to support them" (Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous in Berkeley (1962), pp. 223-4). At Principles 139, Berkeley writes that "That which I denote by the term 'I' is the same with what is meant by soul or spiritual substance".

44. See Skorupski (1989), pp. 228-9.

45. Collected Works Volume XXXI, p. 138; pp. 212-13.

46. On their "circularity" objection, see Noonan (1989), Ch. 3.

47. These rather compressed claims about immunity to error through misidentification are developed in A. Hamilton (1995), which criticises Parfit's denial, through "q-memory", of the guaranteed identity of remembering and remembered subject, and further argues that the dichotomy between Lockean "psychological" criteria and "bodily" criteria is a false one.

48. Mach (1959); Schlick (1974), pp. 225-7. On these questions see A. Hamilton (1990) and (1992).

49. Sidgwick (1882), pp. 542-3.

50. I am grateful for comments from C.V. Borst, Chris Hookway, E.J. Lowe, Alan Millar, Alan Richardson, Geoffrey Scarre, and John Skorupski.