The term 'liberty' invokes such universal respect that most modern political economists and moralists endeavour to find a conspicuous place for it somewhere in their systems or prescriptions. But in view of the innumerable senses of this term an insistence on some kind of definition prior to any discussion seems to be justified. For our present purposes attention to two particularly conflicting interpretations will be sufficient. These are sometimes called the 'negative' and the 'positive' notions of Liberty. According to the 'negative' notion, my own liberty implies the reduction to a minimum of the deliberate interference of other human beings within the area in which I wish to act. Conversely the absence of liberty, or coercion, is regarded as undesirable because it amounts to the prevention by other persons of my doing what I want. On the other hand, the 'positive' sense of the word 'liberty' consists in the attainment of self-mastery, or, in other words, the release from the domination of 'adverse' influences. This 'slavery' from which men 'liberate' themselves is variously described to include slavery to 'nature', to 'unbridled passions', to 'irrational impulses', or simply slavery to one's 'lower nature'. 'Positive' liberty is then identified with 'self-realisation' or an awakening into a conscious state of rationality. The fact that it is contended that such a state can often be attained only by the interference of other 'rational' persons who 'liberate' their fellow beings from their 'irrationality', brings this interpretation of liberty into open and striking conflict with liberty in the 'negative' sense.

---

1 c.f. Isaiah Berlin: The Two Concepts of Liberty (Oxford 1958), to which this analysis is much indebted.
This conflict will be illustrated with reference to the historical struggle for improvement in the provision of education in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It must be observed first, however, that the already ambiguous notions of liberty became further complicated in this field by their unavoidable connection with another chameleonic term: 'educational reform'. In turn both concepts were found to be inextricably involved in policy proposals which raised questions of the desirability or otherwise of parliamentary legislation. The kind of liberty which was usually in most men's minds in the context of eighteenth-century education was that which we have described as 'negative' liberty. Accordingly, 'educational reform' usually meant agitation to negate previous legislation which had given the predominant control to the Church and state, rather than to make fresh legislation to supplement or replace private initiative. On the other hand, in the century which followed, it was liberty in the 'positive' sense which began to dominate the educational scene. 'Educational reform' now called for positive legislation as part of the conscious and deliberate architecture of a new society. Such legislation was designed to set up new and 'necessary' institutions which, allegedly, a more individualistic world had so far failed to produce. Utilitarianism was the main inspiration of this outlook, and by its novel apparatus of 'social engineering' via 'scientific legislation' a prominent place was reserved for the 'liberation' of the masses through specially designed state educational institutions. It was characteristic of these revolutionary blueprints for the new school systems that they typically revealed Bentham's penchant for centralised administration and the economics of large scale buildings. But the main point to notice is that the 'liberty' of the Benthamites in this sphere was quite different from and indeed opposed to the 'liberty' of the educational radicals such as J. Priestley and W. Godwin in the late eighteenth century.

Before analysing John Stuart Mill's attempt to synthesise these different concepts it will be helpful to examine representative opinions in the works of two of his acquaintances. William Godwin, who was a member of the circle of friends of J. S. Mill's
father, James Mill, and frequent visitor to his home, was perhaps the most vehement
upholder of the concept of 'negative' liberty in education which was typical of the late
eighteenth century. On the other hand, J. A. Roebuck, who was a member of the younger
generation of Utilitarians, and personal friend of J. S. Mill, seems to have made the first
striking claim for the 'positive' concept of educational liberty to be found among the
parliamentary speeches in the early nineteenth century.

William Godwin and the case for Negative Liberty in Education

According to Godwin the only true education was self-education. He maintained that
men would only begin to fulfil themselves when they saw that there were no obstacles
which they could not break down by their own efforts. Education was needed not to
instruct mankind, as one of his opponents, T. R. Malthus, wanted to do, but to 'unfold
his stores'. But since men had to discover their potentialities by themselves it was a
grave hindrance to their development to make the Government responsible for their
education. Furthermore, Godwin believed that governments were corrupt anyway and
provided only too easy a channel for thinkers who were arrogant enough to believe that
they had the monopoly of the truth and that their doctrines alone were worthy of forced
consumption through the agency of the state. Godwin accused the Benthamites of such
arrogance, for instance, in their claim that they could reduce crime by educating the
people in the recognition of legal rules, an education which was to be given in special
Benthamite schools. Such rules, argued Godwin, should not be manufactured by one
section of society such as the Utilitarians and then 'heralded' to the world. The laws were
meaningless if they were not equally discoverable by the whole of the people. As
another example Godwin would have contended that the population theory of Malthus
was not such a profound revelation as to require, as Malthus advocated, a stale initiated
education to make universal announcement of it: 'There is no proposition, at present
apprehended to be true, so valuable as to justify the introduction of an establishment for
the purpose of inculcating it on mankind. Indeed, Godwin would probably have accused all the contemporary classical economists of hypocrisy in their insistence for the minimum amount of government interference with the freedom of individuals on the ground that each individual knew his own interests best. For, like the physiocrats who preceded them, each classical economist seemed to have in reserve his own private plan of manufacturing the characters of the same individuals in the first place, through the exceptional provision of a state educational system, in which his own ideas were to mould individuals to his liking from the start. Godwin would have imposed this indictment more severely upon the Malthusians and Utilitarians than upon Adam Smith, who displayed more hesitation in this whole matter because of his much greater distrust of government. Adam Smith, despite his own prediction for some exceptional measures in education, would have gone a long way with the following three general criticisms of governmental power in the sphere of instruction.

First, objected Godwin: 'All public establishments include in them the idea of permanence. They endeavour, it may be, to secure and diffuse whatever of advantage to society is already known, but forget that more remains to be known.' In time this inertia meant that even obsolete knowledge would continue to be purveyed. But then the public establishments do something far worse: 'They actively restrain the flights of the mind, and fix it in the belief of exploded errors'. Only some 'violent concussion' would oblige the authorities to substitute a new system of philosophy for an old one: ‘...and then they are as pertinaciously attached to this second doctrine as they were to the first.’ Public education always supported prejudice: ‘...it teaches its pupils not the fortitude that shall bring every proposition to the test of examination, but the art of vindicating such levels as may chance to be previously established.

---

2 Enquiry concerning Political Justice 1796, Ch. VIII, 'Of National Education', p. 296.
3 'This just transfers the problem of limiting governmental or social interference from one plane to another.' Jack Lively: The Social and Political Thought of De Toqueville. 1962.
4 op. cit., p.293.
5 op. cit., p.294.
6 op. cit., p. 295.
Godwin’s second criticism stemmed from his conviction that man’s activity in doing things for himself was of supreme value in giving him the only sure springs of progress. Whatever others did for him was not done so well: ‘It is in our wisdom to incite men to act for themselves, not to retain them in a state of perpetual pupillage. . . . This whole proposition of a national education is founded upon a supposition which has been repeatedly refuted in this work, but which has recurred upon us in a thousand forms, that unpatronified truth is inadequate to the purpose of enlightening mankind.’

Godwin’s third objection was based on what he thought would be education’s ‘obvious alliance’ with the prevailing national government: ‘Before we put so powerful a machine under the direction of so unambiguous an agent, it behoves us to consider well what it is that we do. Government will not fail to employ it to strengthen its hands and perpetuate its institutions. It was not true, he argued, that youth should be instructed to venerate the virtues of the British Constitution. If anything, they should be taught to venerate truth. Godwin was here posing a problem which had its contemporary example in Napoleonic France and which has since been demonstrated in a particularly conspicuous way in the powers of indoctrination wielded by Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and apparently by leaders in certain parts of Africa today. It was a problem which deeply concerned John Stuart Mill, as we shall see. Godwin contended that if schemes of national education were established at the height of a despotic power, whilst it could not perhaps stifle truth for ever, yet it would be: ‘...the most formidable and profound contrivance for that purpose that imagination can suggest’. Furthermore it was no use arguing that in countries in which more liberty prevailed this sort of injury would not take place. At any one time even under the best government it was reasonable to assume that there were important errors: ‘. . . and a national education has the most direct tendency, to perpetuate those errors, and to form all minds upon one model.’

---

7 op. cit., p.296.
8 op. cit., p.297.
9 op. cit., p.298.
10 op. cit., p.298.
Among John Stuart Mill’s personal friends who represented Benthamism in the new House of Commons immediately after the Reform Act of 1832, one of the most active was J. A. Roebuck. In his *Autobiography*, J. S. Mill wrote of him: ‘it is his title to permanent remembrance, that in the very first year during which he sat in Parliament, he originated (or re-originated after the unsuccessful attempt of Mr Brougham) the parliamentary movement for National Education’. Roebuck devoted his crucial speech to Parliament in 1833 to the three following subjects: ‘I would first solicit the attention of the House to the more prominent benefits to be obtained by a general education of the people. Secondly, I would endeavour to show why the Government should itself supply this education; and lastly, I shall attempt to trace a rude outline of a plan by which every inhabitant of this empire might receive the instruction requisite for the well-being of society.’ With regard to the first of these subjects, Roebuck argued that the most prominent benefit from state education would be that it would teach people how to be happy and therefore would reduce violence, mischief and political unrest. This, of course, was the orthodox Utilitarian doctrine. Unhappiness existed because people were ignorant of the proper understanding of the circumstances on which their happiness depended: ‘let them once understand thoroughly their social condition, and we shall have no more unmeaning discontents-no wild and futile schemes of Reform; we shall not have a stack-burning peasantry-a sturdy pauper population-a monopoly-seeking manufacturing class’.

With regard to his second subject, the reasons why the Government should itself supply the education, Roebuck first argued from the authority of the ‘most enlightened’ countries in Europe, i.e. France and Prussia, which had already accepted the principle. But his main argument was simply based on precedent. Because it was generally accepted, he argued, that the Government did some things, it should therefore do others.

---

12 *Hansard* 1833, Vol. XX, cols. 139-166.
To maintain the peace of society the Government administered justice, for the furtherance of intercourse it superintended the roads and indeed to regulate public morality it passed laws thus involving itself with the business of training the 'public mind'. Roebuck therefore concluded: 'Inasmuch, then, as this training is among the chief means of regulating public morality as it is one of the chief means of furthering generally the well-being, the happiness of society-insomuch, we may say, without fear of refutation, that the business of education ought to be deemed one of its chief concerns.'

It is at this point that the contrast with Godwin is the most striking. For the latter, happiness could only be the product of self discovery. The Utilitarians on the other hand genuinely believed that they alone could instruct people how to be happy. In the words of Roebuck: 'The people at present are far too ignorant to render themselves happy, . . .'

It is not surprising that the clash between the two freedoms became fully exposed later in Roebuck's speech. Answering the charge that the state was robbing people of their freedom Roebuck protested: 'I ask, Sir, in the first place, if it rob the people of rational freedom? We every day coerce the people by laws, and rob them of freedom. . . . Freedom in itself is not a good thing-it is only good when it leads to good - if it leads to evil, it must be, it is every day, restrained by the most stringent and coercing bonds.'

Freedom for Roebuck was thus indissolubly linked with goodness and the arbiter of goodness should be the Government. If the Government were a bad one, asserted Roebuck, then this was an argument for replacing it with a good one. Now in Roebuck's mind there can be no doubt that a good or 'reformed' government was one that consisted largely of Utilitarian philosophers like himself. The charge of intellectual despotism was side-stepped by the persuasiveness of the word 'good'. In this way,

---

13 Ibid
14 Ibid
15 Ibid
16 Ibid
therefore, Roebuck demonstrated his version of liberty in education. His was a 'positive' notion of liberty, one which had to be translated and authorised by 'a good Government', that 'deus ex machina' of the whole Utilitarian programme. The liberty of W. Godwin, in contrast, preferred full reference to the individual's own choice because there was usually no better criterion and it was certainly preferable to reliance on 'good government' which was to him no more than a disembodied abstraction.

So much for the representatives of the two opposing notions of liberty in the first half of nineteenth-century England. It remains now to examine John Stuart Mill's attempt at reconciliation.

**J. S. Mill’s Special Treatment of Education**

After much serious thought J. S. Mill argued for very special treatment for education and accordingly made the following proposals: first, education was to be made compulsory by law; secondly, the State was to see that this law was respected not by providing state schools (except in exceptional circumstances) but by instituting a system of examinations. Should a child fail to attain a certain minimum standard then his parents were to be taxed and the proceeds devoted to his continued education. Cases of exceptional poverty were to be met by special financial dispensations from the state earmarked for the payment of subsidies or fees. In the light of our discussion of liberty, it will be interesting to trace the course of Mill's reasoning which led to these conclusions. It will be argued that his deliberations point to an uneasy compromise between the two notions of liberty as represented in Godwin and Roebuck, a compromise which, on the whole, leaned in favour of the Utilitarian doctrine of the latter.

John Stuart Mill is probably the most celebrated champion of what is known as the liberal point of view. This view carries with it in the popular mind the fullest expression of 'negative' liberty as we have defined it above. Deeply embedded in this concept, as we have seen, is the belief that coercion is bad as such, even though it may have to be chosen sometimes as the lesser of evils. The conviction is that there are certain parts of
an individual's life where he is entitled to freedom from interference since it, is no business of p government at all.\[17\]

This is the view which is commonly associated with Mill's essay *On Liberty*. The following is a key quotation:

‘The object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties, or tile moral coercion of public opinion. That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is, self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be -rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right.’\[18\]

Once stated, however, this belief in freedom as a value in itself is not repeated by Mill as much as one would expect. One explanation of this is that he had a second, but quite independent notion of liberty and one which increasingly occupied him. Liberty was desirable, he thought, because it had a special utility. This took the shape of certain presumed consequences of which Mill approved, such as variety of effort and experiment and the pursuit of self perfection. Such 'desirable' development, thought Mill, could only arise from dispersed free choice and healthy, spontaneity. Again, Mill buttressed his case for liberty with another subordinate argument, the contention that 'each is the best judge and guardian of his own interests'. This proposition, which was widely supported by his

\[17\] Mill's championship of this view has been recently demonstrated by I. Berlin, op. cit. See also H. L. A. Hart, 'Immorality and Treason', Listener, Vol. 62, No, 1583, pp. 162-3. This is a contribution to the debate which was provoked by the report of the Wolfenden Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution.
fellow classical economists, is again an argument which is independent of the idea of liberty for its own sake for it is conceivable that if people were not good judges, then liberty could be dispensed with.

However, when we examine Mill's basic case for intervention, that is 'to prevent harm to others', we discover that he moved away considerably, from the purely negative concept of liberty. For to be strictly consistent with this notion, the only kind of 'harm to others' which would be relevant is the harm of impeding another's freedom. The only, acceptable formula in other words would be 'coercion to prevent coercion.' In fact Mill's idea of 'harm to others' is so wide that he fails to conceal his profound and complementary theory of the state with regard to which liberty has only a subordinate role to play. Thus by 'harming' others, Mill sometimes implied physical injury but at others, as with his opinion on offences against decency, lie included injury to good manners. Again, harmful treatment to animals was yet another extension of the idea. Apart from this, 'harm' consisted of failing to perform what Mill considered to be 'assignable duties'. One of the most important or these was the 'correct' treatment of dependants and accordingly the proper education of children was the appropriate duty 'assigned' to the parent.

Mill took it to be the main duty of the state, to protect all individuals regardless of age. He agreed with Roebuck that the power of the parent over his child was delegated by the state. The state could intervene the moment it was established that the parent was abusing this power, i.e. on the grounds of doing harm to others. Such propositions, however, become less clear when subjected to the 'ordeal of definition'. Even charges of extreme physical cruelty are not always easy to establish. But Mill extended the ideas of harm and cruelty to include the act of neglecting to develop the child's mental faculties. This implied the belief that each child had a right to a minimum of education: 'Education also, the best which circumstances admit of their receiving, is not a thing which parents

---

18 On Liberty, 1962 edition (Fontana), p. 135. This edition will be implied henceforth.
or relatives, from indifference, jealousy or avarice, should have it in their power to withhold'.  

Now even if 'the best education which circumstances allowed' is capable of easy definition, many strict upholders of negative liberty would still question whether it is relevant to a legitimate case of doing harm to others. They may well concede that the state's duty of protection is clearly called on when any of its members is physically obstructed or injured so that his faculties are in some way impaired. But if a parent neglects the education of a child it is not clear that its faculties have been impaired or injured. They may well remain potentially intact and free to be developed by the child at a later stage.

In any case, a 'minimum education' appropriate to circumstances cannot be rigorously defined in any way that would satisfy, all opinion. Education, for instance, is a wider term than formal schooling. J. S. Mill himself expressed the point thus: 'Even if the government could comprehend within itself, in each department, all the most eminent intellectual capacity and active talent of the nation, it would not be the less desirable that the conduct of a large portion of the affairs of the society should be left in the hands of the persons immediately interested in them. The business of life is an essential part of the practical education of a people; without which, book and school instruction, though most necessary and salutary, does not suffice to qualify them for conduct, and for the adaptation of means to ends. Instruction is only one of the desiderata of mental improvement; another almost as indispensable, is a vigorous exercise of the active energies; labour, contrivance, judgement, self-control: and the natural stimulus to these is the difficulties of life.'

It seems to follow from this that the person most in contact with the 'difficulties of life' in a child's family environment would be the parent and that he would at least be an appropriate person to consult. To take one example, if in mid-nineteenth century

---

19 The analysis at this point owes much to H. J. McCloskey: Mill's Liberalism in The Philosophical Quarterly, April, 1963.

20 Principles of Political Economy, Ashley edition 1915, p. 958. All subsequent references will be to this edition.
England (when that country was relatively under-developed) a parent had decided that his child leaving school at the age of twelve would have contributed best to his own and to his family's interest, whereas a state official had contended that thirteen years was a more suitable leaving age, it seems that there would have been a case here of honest difference in opinion. Now the plea for the proper ventilation of honest opinion was another important feature in the Essays on Liberty. Mill maintained that we should indulge ‘false’ opinions because of the possibility that they were right. In the case of education, however, Mill himself in several parts of his writings reveals a predilection for overruling parental opinion by state decree in order that his own view, or that of a group of educated, ‘rational’ or cultivated superiors should predominate. It certainly seems that strong elements of the positive concept of liberty appeared in Mill’s work in the context of state protection of infants. For here he does give the impression of having found a wedge to drive between the parent and child so that ultimately the latter could be ‘liberated’ from the uncultivated influences of the former.

We are given this impression most forcefully when we discover that on the subject of education he throws away completely his subordinate argument for liberty, the argument that ‘each is best judge of his own interests’. Ultimately it seems that his main anxiety was not so much that infants could not judge for themselves. His more serious assertion was that most adults could not judge properly either and that therefore freedom must after all be taken away from them at least in this sphere. For this is the first of Mill’s major exceptions to the laissez-faire principle which he discussed in The Principles of Political Economy:

‘The uncultivated cannot be competent judges of cultivation. Those who most need to be made wiser and better, usually desire it least, and, if they desired it, would be incapable of finding the way to it by their own lights. It will continually happen, on the voluntary system, that, the ends not being desired, the means will not be provided at all, or that, the persons requiring improvement having an

\(^{21}\) Principles of Political Economy, p. 948.
imperfect or altogether erroneous conception of what they want, the supply called forth by the demand of the market will be anything but what is really required. Now any well-intentioned and tolerably civilised government may think, without presumption, that it does or ought to possess a degree of cultivation above the average of the community which it rules, and that it should therefore be capable of offering better education and better instruction to the people, than the greater number of them would spontaneously demand. Education, therefore, is one of those things which it is admissible in principle that a government should provide for the people.

These seem to be the words of a philosopher wishing to 'liberate' his fellows into his state of rationality. One certainly does not associate such views with negative liberty. It is a position in which many 'wise men' find themselves. They are persuaded that this is not really a case of coercion, or if it is, excusable because in the words of Fichte 'you will later recognise the reasons for what I am doing now'.

In spite of all this, however, J. S. Mill, the popular champion of liberty shows, in this field, anguished mental struggle over the whole question of state education. The scepticism of a writer like Godwin emerges now and then with so much compulsion as to amount to apparent contradiction with the statements so far examined. Now the ordinary upholder of negative liberty protests against coercion and the word despotism is one of the strongest terms in the language which is used to convey his dislike of it. Similarly in his moments of doubt Mill feared that even the educational powers of government could lead to despotism and that they needed the same cautious vigilance, if not more, as other powers. Consider this striking 'Godwinian' passage in the essay On Liberty:

22 *Principles of Political Economy*, p. 953. Notice that Mill’s complaint concerns the quality, not the quantity, of education. From the evidence of the 1851 Commission on Popular Education, England, which was about the only remaining European country without a national system of education, was still abreast of its neighbours in quantity. The average working class parent was paying fees for his children's education and this covered one-third of the cost. The question was whether the state should subsidise this vast voluntary system, in which the parent's voice was respected, or supersede it with state schools.
'A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another: and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation; in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body.'

Such statements, seem to make meaningless the assertion of the previous quotation that a 'well intentioned' government should be capable 'of offering better education and better instruction to the people' than they would themselves demand. For if governments in reality turn out to be a current predominant power such as a majority or a priesthood then the 'well intentioned' government either does not exist or becomes despotically suspect if it does.

To construct practical proposals out of such a dilemma was no easy task for Mill. His final prescriptions show much greater reflection and caution than those of his friend, Roebuck, with whose reasoning nevertheless Mill seems to have gone a considerable way. In his parliamentary speech Roebuck had openly faced the problem with these words: 'It is dangerous, they say, to put such an instrument as education into the hands of Government; lest thereby the public mind be debauched, and slavish ideas and habits alone be propagated'. Like Mill, Roebuck took the point seriously. But he thought his particular plan avoided this danger:

‘... because, though I propose to make the education of the people a matter of national and not merely individual concern, I should propose that the persons to determine, in the last resort, on the subject matter of instruction, and on whom the

---

23 On Liberty, p.239
24 Hansard, 1833, Vol. XX, Cols. 139-166.
actual task of instruction shall fall, should be the people themselves; the people acting, however, in a public, and not in a private capacity'.

This solution on the face of it seemed like a conjuring trick. The danger of despotism is magically spirited away if the people after all are to exercise the power. But this scheme, in effect, was the device of shifting the activity of education from the market and the voluntary system to political organisation. Only such a newly enfranchised audience of his day could, however, have accepted the abstract assertion that a political system, even a democratic one, could be interpreted as the rule of the people. A study of Roebuck's subsequent 'machinery' for education shows clearly that his attempt to answer the charge of possible despotism was only superficial. For the supervision of the national schools in the kingdom was to be the duty of a minister of public instruction with cabinet rank. He would apportion the sum of money to be given to each district, for masters, for books, and repairs and a hundred other things. Besides this, the Normal Schools [i.e. the Teacher Training Schools] would be wholly under his control, and he would select for himself, and on his own responsibility, the masters and governors of each . . . also, it would be a very important part of his duty to watch over the composition of books of instruction'. Indeed the general public, even though it paid the requisite taxes, was subsequently told that its guidance was not really important:

'The great object, however, in any plan of general education would be to make "the most instructed classes" the guides. . . . Do what you will, say what we will, this class must guide and govern.' (Italics supplied.)

It is clear therefore that in wanting to give the power to 'the people' Roebuck really meant only one section of them and a section that constituted the 'proper' governing class.

---

25 Ibid
26 Ibid
27 Ibid
J. S. Mill was much more apprehensive: 'Though a government, therefore, may, and in many cases ought to, establish schools and colleges, it must neither compel nor bribe any person to come to them'.

He advocated that a state school should exist: 'if it exist at all, as one among many competing experiments, carried on for the purpose of example and stimulus, to keep the others up to a certain standard of excellence'. But even here it is interesting that Mill still could not conceal the presumption that the state schools would always be the superior pace-makers. Mill however recognised what Roebuck was not so willing to acknowledge, that if the country contained a sufficient number of qualified persons to provide 'government' instruction, as Roebuck's proposed national system implied, then the same resources would be available under the market or voluntary principle 'under the assurance of remuneration afforded by the law rendering education compulsory, combined with State aid to those unable to defray the expense'.

Mill agreed with Roebuck that education should be made compulsory. Beyond that, however, he was not so enthusiastic for the type of direct Benthamite apparatus of centralised control which Roebuck had outlined. Mill preferred to support the compulsion of education with the system of enforcement of public examinations to which children from an early age were to be submitted:

'Once in every year the examination should be renewed, with a gradually extending range of subjects, so as to make the universal acquisition and what is more, retention, of a certain minimum of general knowledge virtually compulsory. Beyond that minimum there should be voluntary examinations on all subjects, at which all who came up a certain standard of proficiency might claim a certificate.'

Bentham's system of examinations as the price to be paid for the right to vote had been included by Brougham in his educational proposals to Parliament in 1837. J.S. Mill also advocated this idea.

---

28 *Principles of Political Economy*, p. 956.
Strictly speaking this solution did not remove the power of the state over education, it only narrowed it down to the power of those, officials who were to be appointed on behalf of the state to set the examinations. Mill thought that this would not matter so long as the examinations were confined to the 'instrumental parts of knowledge' and to the examination of objective facts only. Where higher classes of examinations were concerned:

'The examinations on religion, politics, or other disputed topics, should not turn on the truth or falsehood of opinions, but on the matter of fact that such and such an opinion is held, on such grounds, by such authors, or schools, or churches'.

But the fact that Mill did not enter into further details as to what was to constitute 'a certain minimum of general knowledge', leaving his proposal in the form of a few generalisations, enabled him to escape many of the serious difficulties which lay beneath the surface of his plan. For instance, who was to determine the subjects to be taught? How would one choose between, say, elementary political economy and geography? Could powers of censorship be easily exercised? Suppose that certain individuals had aversions to certain subjects, who would be the arbiter? J. S. Mill himself, for instance, had a particularly strong objection to the teaching of theology and was insistent that national education should be purely secular. Once again we have here the authoritarian overtones of the intellectual paternalist. Certainly such treatment of other people's opinions seemed to contradict the spirit of On Liberty as it is popularly conceived.

Altogether, therefore, in the hands of J.S Mill, the relationship between education and liberty was a complicated and unsettled one largely because of his difficulty in determining how far education was a means towards liberty and how far it was one of the ends for which liberty existed. Whilst he shared a substantial part of Godwin’s

---

29 On Liberty, p.240.
reasoning and the latter’s dislike of ‘patronified truth’ yet there was an inner conflict arising partly no doubt from Mill’s Platonic and almost religious reverence towards knowledge and learning that his father had struggled so hard, in his supreme pedagogic experiment, to build into the person of J. S. Mill himself.

The emergence from this conflict of such pronouncements by J. S. Mill as: ‘Those who must need to be made wiser and better usually desire it least . . .’, obscures his eloquent plea for the freedom of the individual in the Essay on Liberty. Such inconsistency is not to be found in Godwin nor in Kant who observed: ‘Nobody may compel me to be happy in his own way’. Kant really did treat the individual as an end in himself, as the ultimate author of values who needed no prior conditioning by ‘superior’ people. J.S Mill’s individual in the end therefore is not perfectly free but to some extend manipulated by the Victorian intellectual paternalism of J.S. Mill himself and his own educated middle class. In the end, the negative liberty which Mill strived to establish becomes difficult to distinguish from an intellectual’s special brand of positive liberty, i.e. the idea that what truly liberates is knowledge, rationality or culture.

---

30 Mill would make no compromise on this point. If the education was to include religion then he would have opposed any Bill for national education. Letter to C. Dilke, 1870. See also his Letter to T. H. Huxley, 1865, in: The Letters of John Stuart Mill edited by H. S. R. Elliott, 1910.
31 J. S. Mill was educated entirely by his father, who thus shared Godwin’s ardour for private initiative instruction. See I. Cummins: A Manufactured Man. 1960.
32 Principles of Political Economy, p.953