Chapter One:

Mill’s Aesthetic Model of Deliberative Democracy

**Introduction**

Since its emergence between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, modern democracy has been commonly associated with the problems of mass conformity and political apathy, which are sometimes collectively referred to as “docility.” (Zakaras 2009) To address these concerns, many contemporary political theorists have revisited the idea of citizenship. While communitarians and participatory democrats in general try to combat the apathy and egoism of liberal citizens by promoting an ideal of citizenship where civic engagement is given a greater meaning and value than the pursuit of private material interest, others including George Kateb and Dana Villa problematize such an emphasis on political participation as such by highlighting the need for a specifically reflective, nonconformist citizenship. (Kateb 1992, Villa 2001) Meanwhile, yet another group of political theorists like Nadia Urbinati and Alex Zakaras either explicitly or implicitly offer a conception of citizenship which neither denigrates regular politics altogether nor stops short of providing a theoretically coherent content to the idea of active – and often associative – political life that is simultaneously nonconformist. (Urbinati 2002, Zakaras 2009)

The contemporary debate on democratic citizenship, however, largely glosses over the crucial question of motivation. Given the strenuousness and risks of living a life of nonconformist political engagement – strikingly exemplified by the agonistic deliberative life of Socrates which serves as a source of theoretical inspiration for much of the literature – how might ordinary liberal citizens be induced to slough off docility without the infringement of their personal liberties? Unlike most contemporary theorists on citizenship, Mill gave serious attention to this question and was therefore able to establish and articulate the significance of the citizen’s imaginative faculty and the aesthetic perception of the beautiful enabled by it in overcoming docility in liberal democracy.

This also highlights the fact that the deliberative reading of Mill currently hegemonic in political theory represents a highly one-sided appropriation of Mill. Focused solely on deriving a modern version of deliberative citizenship and democracy from his works, deliberative theorists who comment on Mill fail to consider the implications of his conclusion that a life of deliberative rationality cannot in fact be motivated by reason itself but must be perceived as an aesthetic phenomenon to be actually lived. Thus recognizing the aesthetic as a necessary condition for the deliberative, Mill constructed what may be referred to as an “aesthetic model of deliberative democracy.”

The argument of this chapter unfolds in three sections. The first establishes Mill as a political thinker who was primarily concerned about the problem of docility in modern democracy and tried to promote political nonconformity as the new virtue of the democratic age. In the second section, I briefly illustrate that Mill’s particular conception of life of nonconformist political participation can be articulated through the notion of deliberative agonsim. The final section introduces Mill’s aesthetic model of deliberative democracy, which reflects his conclusion – based on his distinctive reading of Plato’s *Gorgias* – that his deliberative ideal of citizenship depends upon the aesthetic force of beauty for its realization and implies a degree of politicization of art as well as aestheticization of political philosophy. I end this section by explaining Mill’s democratic conception of heroism as part of his own political intervention in the domain of art for the purpose of addressing the problem of docility.

**I. Docility in the Age of Liberal Democracy**

In *Liberalism with Honor*, Sharon Krause says, “Behind every book of political theory stands a *summum malum*, the one thing in political life its author most fears or despises.” (Krause 2002, ix) The aim of this section is to demonstrate that Mill’s *summum malum* in this sense was docility in modern mass, commercial, and bureaucratic democracy which, in the nineteenth century, was for the most part already recognizable in England and America.

Docility, in the sense used here, partly refers to political apathy, or “withdrawal from politics and into private life.” (Zakaras 2009, 10) For Mill, apathy was one of the most worrisome features of the modern pecuniary spirit that became predominant in society due to rapid expansion in the size and sociopolitical power of the commercial middle class. Mill’s acute awareness of the reigning commercial culture and its negative consequences is manifest throughout his career in many different writings. In “Civilization” (1836), Mill observes that modern structural changes in economy and politics had a direct impact on the average individual’s character; in a civilized person, one observes simultaneously an overall “relaxation of individual energy” and “the concentration of it within the narrow sphere of the individual’s money-getting pursuits.” (Civ, 134) Four years later, in his second review of Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, Mill also echoes Tocqueville by opposing the ascendant commercial spirit to that of politics, though, unlike the French author, Mill associates the malaise with industrial economic development rather than democratic social equality.

The other aspect of docility which Mill despised and feared throughout his career was conformity. Although he does not provide any explicit definition of the term, its meaning can be gathered from several of his writings and especially from *On Liberty* (1859) where the notion is opposed to the idea of individuality. Conformity can be broadly understood as unreflective deference to collective beliefs and norms (often referred to as “customs” in *On Liberty*). To be in a conformist relationship with custom is to follow it “merely *as* custom” without examining its grounds – without inner deliberation. (OL, 67) Hence conformity implies a mind that is passive and dormant. While conformity as such has always existed in society, it assumes a new and more universal form in mass democracy where everyone’s personal success in both economy and politics depends upon aligning with the majority. In “Civilization,” for instance, Mill laments how, because of the modern market imperative, even literature “becomes more and more a mere reflection of the current sentiments” of the masses. (Civ, 138)

In addition to the mass and commercial natures of modern democracy, another political development in the modern period – administrative centralization and expansion in bureaucracy – was seen by Mill to be closely associated with docility in both of its aspects. Tocqueville was again an important early influence on Mill in this regard. In the second volume of *Democracy in America* (1840), Tocqueville issues a warning about democracy’s vulnerability to “administrative despotism” where much of ordinary citizens’ public and private agency is replaced by mindless adherence to bureaucratic regulations. (DIA/cw, 105) Motivated by a similar concern, in the final chapter of *On Liberty*, Mill attempts to delimit the sphere of bureaucratic governance in order to prevent individuals from becoming “docile instruments” of the state. (OL, 129)

Mill’s objection to docility (apathy and conformity) is ultimately grounded in his distinctive conception of utility, or happiness, the *summum bonum* of utilitarianism. In *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), Mill defends his highly participatory model of democracy with both “protective” and “educative” arguments. (Thompson 1976, 14) The first relies on the idea that participation protects the interests of citizens and implies that apathy leads to either political community’s total disregard of nonparticipants’ interests or lack of necessary knowledge and perspectives in public deliberations where such interests are at stake. In addition, the protective argument suggests that greater participation will increase society’s general level of material prosperity. Meanwhile, the educative argument holds that participation produces mentally and morally developed “active” individuals who improve the world by “[struggling] against evils” as well as have better lives for themselves. (CRG, 248) By not only tending to the existing interests of citizens but also fundamentally transforming their preferences by developing their mental and moral capacities, participation promotes Mill’s innovative and broader notion of utility “grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being.” (OL, 17) Apathy, in contrast, traps individuals in an unhappy condition of underdevelopment.

Mill’s critique of conformity is likewise premised on his novel account of happiness. As illustrated most clearly by *Utilitarianism* (1861), Mill thinks human happiness requires the exercise of the higher faculties such as intellect and imagination that uniquely belong to human beings and are essential to their nature as progressive beings. The higher faculties, which have “moral, intellectual, and aesthetic aspects,” (Zakaras 2009, 157) enhance happiness by generating the experience of what Mill refers to as the “higher pleasures.” (U, 624) Whereas the lower pleasures are derived from “mere sensation,” the higher pleasures “of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments” (U, 263) take certain abstractions, or ideas, as their source.[[1]](#footnote-1)\* Marking a departure from Jeremy Bentham’s classical utilitarianism, Mill establishes so-called “qualitative hedonism” by claiming that higher pleasures are qualitatively superior to lower ones.[[2]](#footnote-2)\* Mill elaborates on the meaning of this superiority through the notion of “competent judges” (U, 265) who are “equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying,” both kinds of pleasures. (U, 264) The higher pleasures are precisely those pleasures to which almost every such competent judge gives a decided preference separate from any sense of moral obligation to prefer them. (U, 263) Based on his theory of higher pleasures, Mill memorably concludes: “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.” (U, 264)

How is life of conformity to be judged by Mill’s standard of happiness discussed above? Conformist individuals constituted by ordinary citizens in liberal democracy obviously are not beasts in the literal sense and do use their higher human faculties in their daily lives; they, too, deliberate (at least as economic agents) and take pleasure in certain popular forms of cultural activity. In fact, even in the most disadvantaged social class, one would be hard-pressed to find anyone whose happiness consists solely in the pleasures of the senses. But although conformists are not deprived of the higher pleasure as such, Mill’s qualitative hedonism seems to imply that they are still less happy than Socrates, an exemplary figure of heroic nonconformity for Mill. What distinguishes Socrates from conformists in commercial mass democracy is that his intense commitment to an examined life led him to extend the use of his deliberative capacities to evaluating the fundamental moral/political beliefs of his society as well. Mill might argue that, given his much more complete exercise of his higher faculties, Socrates experiences more varied higher pleasures than those whose minds’ activities involve fewer aspects of life.

Meanwhile, as Zakaras points out, Mill suggests that conformists, while unhappy themselves, can further create unhappiness for others by suppressing dissent and difference (i.e. imposing conformity) through political mobilization. Psychologically speaking, this is because to a thorough conformist what is customary is so “self-evident and self-justifying” that anyone who does not conform to it seems either wicked or insane. (OL, 11) In the age of mass democracy, conformist politics emerges as an expression of “the tyranny of the majority” which describes the tendency of the majority, “the most numerous or the most active *part* of the people,” to compel the rest of society to adhere to its beliefs and norms by means of legal or social sanction. (OL, 10)

**II. Mill’s Deliberative Agonism**

The foregoing discussion of Mill’s concern about docility implies that Mill wanted to induce the individual to live a life of nonconformist political engagement, which was the new virtuous life that he wished to promote as a moralist of the democratic age. Mill’s particular conception of this non-docile way of living can be articulated through the notion of “deliberative agonism.”

Mill’s ideal of citizenship has an agonistic aspect in that it valorizes the individual’s act of dissent and self-assertion against a reigning social consensus. Mill considers two great individuals of ancient Athens – Pericles and Socrates – as exemplars of such courageous dissent. Pericles, who in *On Liberty* is presented as embodying “pagan self-assertion” in addition to obedience to duty, (OL, 71) is renowned for displaying a strong independence of mind in both public and private matters; the relevant examples include his disagreements with the Athenian demos during the Peloponnesian War and his controversial intimate relationship with Aspasia. Similarly, Socrates is for Mill a model of heroic nonconformity who is described in *On Liberty* as having been in “a memorable collision” with “the legal authorities and public opinion of his time.” (OL, 31) Although, unlike Pericles, Socrates was not a statesman, the latter’s nonconformity had a highly public quality because he played the role of a “gadfly” to Athenian citizens with great zeal, constantly annoying and provoking them through free dialogical deliberations performed in the city’s agora.

While agonistic dissent against public opinion is often fueled by a sense of conviction, Mill also typically imagines it to be embedded in the ongoing practice of inner and public deliberations.[[3]](#footnote-3)\* Deliberation, understood broadly as examination of grounds of different beliefs, presupposes willingness to listen to others and be open to the influence of their arguments. This deliberative ethos is very much pronounced in many of Mill’s own works including *On Liberty*, which gives credence to his title as “a British Socrates” occasionally given by his commentators.[[4]](#footnote-4)\* Mill’s explicit commitment to “government by discussion” as well as “examined life” led political theorists to typically identify him with deliberative politics which, broadly speaking, takes rational argumentation as a normatively privileged and motivationally efficacious mode of influencing behaviors of other citizens (and oneself – in the form of inner dialogue). Terence Ball, for instance, compares Mill to Jurgen Habermas for having strong faith in “the forceless force of the better argument.” (Ball 2010, 54) Also, in *Why Deliberative Democracy*, Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson mention that Mill is “rightly considered one of the sources of deliberative democracy,” though they see him as less committed to democracy than contemporary deliberative theorists on account of his emphasis on the leadership of the better educated in public discussions. (Gutmann & Thompson 2004, 9) Meanwhile, by stressing the influence of the ancient Athenian democracy on Mill, Urbinati goes to some length to highlight the egalitarian as well as agonistic dimensions of Mill’s political thought but for the most part she, too, strengthens the conventional association of Mill with deliberative politics characterized by exchange of reasons in various formal and informal settings. (Urbinati 2002)

However, the deliberative reading of Mill currently dominant in political theory is radically and misleadingly incomplete because it fails to reflect Mill’s conclusion that the deliberative dimension of his ideal citizenship and democracy depends upon the aesthetic force of the beautiful for its realization due to the limitation of the power of reason to generate the love of virtue. Unlike most contemporary theorists of deliberative politics who see the aesthetic as either irrelevant or threatening to the deliberative, Mill did not suffer from this limitation of theoretical imagination. Rather, he conceived the citizen’s aesthetic susceptibility to the beautiful as the very source of agonistic deliberative citizenship. Hence the faculty of imagination and other aesthetic categories have a central place in Mill’s political thought in a way that still needs to be reckoned with among political theorists. In fact, his commitment to the aestheticization of deliberative politics was such that one may speak of his “aesthetic model of deliberative democracy.”

**III. Mill’s Aesthetic Model of Deliberative Democracy**

*a. Imagination and the Power of Beauty: Plato’s Gorgias*

The basic theoretical premises of Mill’s aesthetic politics are most clearly illustrated by his deep engagement with Plato. Although Mill explicitly rejected most of Platonic metaphysics, in his review (1866) of George Grote’s *Plato and the Other Companions of Socrates*, he emphasizes that there is “ample justification for the homage which all cultivated ages have rendered to Plato simply as a moralist,” as “one of the most powerful masters of virtue who have appeared among mankind.” (GP, 415) He also adds, “Others can instruct, but Plato is of those who *form* great men, by the combination of moral enthusiasm and logical discipline [emphasis added].” (GP, 415)

That reading Plato’s dialogues is a deeply formative experience with respect to one’s character and as much a matter of feeling as that of intellect was something to which Mill could attest with his own personal experience. In his autobiography, Mill mentions how he gained the most valuable kind of cultivation of feelings “by means of reverential admiration for the lives and characters of heroic persons,” “especially the heroes of philosophy.” (A, 115) The moral uplift which so many great individuals attributed to “Plutarch’s *Lives*”Mill would experience from “Plato’s pictures of Socrates.” (A, 115)

An important clue for understanding Mill’s highest esteem for Plato as a moralist is his deep appreciation of Plato’s skill as an *artist*. In the review of Grote’s work on Plato, Mill praises Platonic dialogues as “[affording] an example, once in all literature, of the union between an eminent genius for philosophy and the most consummate skill and feeling of the artist.” (GP, 410) Also, in “Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews,” (1867) Mill says, “We may imbibe exalted feelings from Plato, or Demosthenes, or Tacitus, but it is in so far as those great men are not solely philosophers or orators or historians, but poets and artists.” (IA, 254)

Among Plato’s dialogues, the one that allowed Mill to explain in greatest detail the aesthetic source of Plato’s transformative power as well as moral transformation in general is the *Gorgias*. Indeed, Mill describes the dialogue as one of the best examples of Plato’s “extraordinary dramatic talent.” (Go, 97) For this reason, according to Mill, a close reading of the *Gorgia*s is “well fitted to suggest many reflections on the nature of ethical writings in general, and on the principles by which our estimation of a moralist ought to be guided.” (Go, 97)

Having first read the *Gorgias* at the age of twelve in 1817, Mill composed an abridged English translation and commentary on the dialogue sometime between 1826 and 1834. (Whedbee 2006) In 1834, he published this work in the *Monthly Repository*, a literary magazine that was “a leading forum for radical politics and religion and for romantic philosophy and literature.” (Whedbee 2006; 21) After a brief introduction explaining the significance of the *Gorgias* in the aforementioned terms, Mill provides an abstract of the dialogue which is “fuller than usual” (that is, compared with the previously published ones on the *Protagoras* and the *Phaedrus*) on account of its excellent dramatic quality. (Go, 97) He then ends with his own reflection on the generation of “the love of virtue” and “every other noble feeling” which he finds are so amply possessed by Socrates. (Go, 150)

In the context of Mill’s commentary on the *Gorgias*, “the love of virtue” refers to an intense passion for the good, healthy, or virtuous life that demands, among other things, refraining from committing injustice against others (or, in Mill’s more specifically utilitarian language, promoting “the *general* happiness” by respecting “the [moral] rights of other people” [GP, 419]). Indeed, in the dialogue, Socrates famously says committing injustice is “the greatest of evils” for oneself worse than death. (Go, 146)

The Socratic life implies that avoiding injustice requires bringing reflective self-restraint into one’s living.[[5]](#footnote-5)\* Hence one crucial corollary of his “love of virtue” is his strong commitment to examining existing beliefs and practices through the activity of *thinking*. But inner deliberation becomes a means for safeguarding one’s moral integrity only when it is combined with the intellectual integrity of “self-consistency,” (Villa 2001, 40) which Socrates in the *Gorgias* also strikingly manifests: “I should think it better that my lyre should be discordant, or that the choral dance led by me should be out of time, or that all mankind should be out of harmony with me, rather than that I myself should be out of tune, and not consonant with myself.” (Go, 120) As Villa puts it, what Socrates considers important is “not whether he contradicts the *demos* but whether he contradicts *himself* – his own reason and his own principles.” (Villa 2001, 40) In his commentary, Mill refers to this kind of non-self-contradiction as “higher honesty.” (Go, 149) But because “to be more honest than the many, is nearly as prejudicial, in a worldly sense, as to be a greater rogue,” the honest individual often finds oneself in an agonistic tension with the rest of society. (Go, 149) For Mill, it is precisely this higher honesty – the one entailing the risk of social punishment – that establishes Socrates as an agonistic deliberative “moral hero.” (Go, 149)

But what can be said about Socrates’s relationship to politics – especially to deliberative one – based on the *Gorgias*? In the dialogue, Socrates emerges as a citizen who prioritizes formative politics and is not averse to public deliberation as such. The reason why Socrates considers himself to be “a politician in the true sense of the word” (Go, 145) is because he is among the few Athenians who hold a deeply formative conception of politics; for him “the business of a good citizen” consists solely in “exhorting and impelling the nation to those courses by which the citizens might become better men.” (Go, 142) This view of politics serves as a basis for Socrates’s criticism of not only common majority-pleasers like Callicles but also more eminent statesmen like Pericles. Unlike Socrates in the *Gorgias*, Mill held a conception of politics where promotion of society’s “general prosperity” – its material welfare – is not given a second place and had a more favorable opinion of Pericles. (RG, 245) But at the same time, Mill was similarly a practitioner of formative politics who intervened in public debates and affairs with a view to creating “a better and higher form of national character” as a way of maximizing happiness in society. (RG, 245) Meanwhile, Socrates in the *Gorgias* does not limit his deliberative activity to inner or semi-public dialogues. This can be seen in the final paragraph where Socrates says: “And having thus practiced it [virtue] in common, we will then, if we see fit, apply ourselves to public life, or adopt any course to which our deliberations may lead us, being then fitter for deliberation than we are now.” (Go,148) This illustrates that, contra Villa, Socrates is himself willing to participate in public deliberations that lead to collective decisions after certain demands of self-cultivation are met.

Given this representation of Socrates in the dialogue, a crucial question that Mill implicitly asks in his commentary is: If it is ultimately Socrates’s intense love of virtue that undergirds his deliberative agonism – which is also characterized by other noble feelings such as those associated with intellectual honesty – what can create such a strong desire for virtuous life in the first place? His reputation as “the saint of rationalism” (Varouxakis & Kelly ed. 2010) notwithstanding, Mill stresses the limitation of the force of reason in the domain of moral transformation:

Argument may show what general regulation of the desires, or what particular course of conduct, virtue requires: *How* to live virtuously, is a question the solution of which belongs to the understanding: but the understanding has no inducements which it can bring to the aid of one who has not yet determined whether he will endeavour to live virtuously or no. (Go, 149)

By demonstrating the specific requirements of virtuous life, rational argumentation can facilitate the moral progress of an individual who already intensely desires to live virtuously. But appeal to reason cannot generate the love of virtue itself.

Certain arguments on behalf of virtue, Mill suggests, fail to do so simply because they are not valid:

It is impossible, by any arguments, to prove that a life of obedience to duty is preferable, so far as respects the agent himself, to a life of circumspect and cautious selfishness. It will be answered, perhaps, that virtue is the road to happiness, and that “honesty is the best policy.” Of this celebrated maxim, may we not venture to say, once for all, without hesitation or reserve, that it is not true? The whole experience of mankind runs counter to it. The life of a good man or woman is full of unpraised and unrequited sacrifices . . . To be more honest than the many, is nearly as prejudicial, in a worldly sense, as to be a greater rogue . . . how is he indemnified, who scruples to do that which his neighbours do without scruple? Where is the reward, in any worldly sense, for heroism? (Go, 149)

In short, a life resembling that of Socrates cannot be justified with reference to any material or psychological compensation from society, for virtue demands nonconformity that does not hide from the world. In addition, Mill thinks most of Socrates’ arguments for virtuous life in the dialogue can be easily countered by anyone equally trained in dialectics.

Then what are *valid* arguments for pursuing virtue, and why is Mill skeptical about their efficacy as well? In this regard, he writes:

All valid arguments in favour of virtue, presuppose that we already desire virtue, or desire some of its ends and objects. You may prove to us that virtue tends to the happiness of mankind, or of our country; but that supposes that we already care for mankind or for our country. You may tell us that virtue will gain us the approbation of the wise and good; but this supposes that the wise and good are already more to us than other people are. (Go, 150)

According to Mill, the impotence of even valid arguments for virtue can be explained by the fact that the unvirtuous are not (or only very weakly) interested in the ends that can be actually obtained by virtue such as “the happiness of mankind” and “the approbation of the wise and good” (Go, 150) and unwilling to make personal sacrifices in terms of material well-being and worldly reputation in achieving such goals. Not desiring the special ends promoted by virtue, the unvirtuous cannot be made to desire it as a means to them.[[6]](#footnote-6)\*

Mill’s reference to “the approbation of the wise and good” in the previous passage arguably anticipates his competent-judge doctrine in *Utilitarianism* (1861). But because there, as already discussed, Mill justifies the Socratic life through the development of a new notion of higher pleasures, it is legitimate to ask whether he changed his view on the radical limitation of reason in moral transformation so forcefully expressed in his commentary on the *Gorgias* published decades earlier. The answer seems to be negative, however, when one considers Mill’s revisit of the dialoguein his review (1866) of Grote’s book on Plato. In this late writing, published nearly five years after *Utilitarianism* first appeared, it is striking that, despite his development of qualitative hedonism, Mill still describes one’s initial conversion to the Socratic life as “an affair of feeling” rather than hearing philosophical arguments in recommendation of virtue.[[7]](#footnote-7)\* (GP, 416)

In fact, in discussing Plato’s *Gorgias*, Mill was not merely trying to temper a rationalist faith in the power of reason[[8]](#footnote-8)\* but was also seeking to highlight the necessary role of imagination and the aesthetic feeling of beauty in generating the agonistic deliberative life. According to Mill, the *Gorgias* illustrates that the love of virtue is never “to be effected through the intellect [but] through the imagination and the affections.” (Go, 150) In the dialogue, Socrates “inspires heroism, because he *shows* himself a hero [emphasis added].” (GP, 416)

Mill’s commentary on the dialogue contains a passage that can serve as a useful basis for reconstructing his theory of aesthetic generation of virtue and is therefore worth quoting in full:

The love of virtue, and every other noble feeling, is not communicated by reasoning, but caught by inspiration or sympathy from those who already have it; and its nurse and foster-mother is *Admiration*. We acquire it from those whom we love and reverence, especially from those whom we earliest love and reverence; from our ideal of those, whether in past or in present times, whose lives and characters have been the mirror of all noble qualities; and lastly, from those who, *as poets or artists*, can clothe those feelings in *the most beautiful forms*, and breathe them into us through our imagination and our sensations [emphasis added]. (Go, 150)

When one encounters (whether in person or via some cultural/artistic medium) a figure of noble, or heroic, qualities (including the love of virtue and “every other noble feeling”) like Socrates, one may conceive in imagination “an example of ideal moral perfection,” a mental process which may be also named as “idealization.” (Sharpless 1967, 207-8) Crucially, this is also a moment of aesthetic perception or judgment[[9]](#footnote-9)\* when beauty is felt, which inspires “admiration” (or “love and reverence”) toward the heroic figure. In Mill’s lexicon, “admiration” is usually associated with the human faculty of imagination and specifically indicates one’s response toward the beautiful. In “Bentham” (1838), for instance, Mill describes human conduct’s “*aesthetic* aspect,” or “that of its *beauty*,” as involving “our imagination” and determining whether “we admire or despise” the conduct. (B, 112) To admire a hero is to enter into a kind of mimetic relationship with him or her; the admirer experiences an elevation of character by being in a state of “sympathy” with the hero’s love of virtue and other noble feelings.

For Mill, this also marks the beginning of cultivation of oneself as a work of art, which is a theme most pronounced in “Inaugural Address.” There, Mill says, “He who has learnt what beauty is, if he be of a virtuous character [i.e. the love of virtue is inspired in him], will desire to realize it in his own life – will keep before himself a type of perfect beauty in human character, to light his attempts at self-culture.” (IA, 255) Art is to be defined as “the endeavour after perfection in execution,” and to cultivate ourselves as a work of art is “to idealize, as much as possible, every work we do, and most of all, our own characters and lives” with “an ideal Beauty” in mind. (IA, 256)

In so far as it involves the influence of an exemplar, or “a type of perfect beauty in human character,” this process of self-cultivation has an imitative element, though it is a kind of imitation that paradoxically grounds individuality. By holding “an ideal Beauty” of Socrates in one’s consciousness, for instance, one enters into a state of sympathy with the *feelings* associated with his deliberative agonism; this mimesis in fact provides an affective ground for using one’s deliberative capacities more fully and courageously in life. In order for a deliberative, examined life of individuality to spread in society, it must itself be imitated, which requires the perception of individuality as an aesthetic phenomenon – “a noble and beautiful object of contemplation” as Mill describes it in *On Liberty*.

An important point little explored even in the specific literature on the aesthetic dimension of Mill’s political thought is that there is in his thinking a distinction between two different kinds of beauty by their moral/political significance. First, there is the beauty of nature. Wendy Donner establishes Mill’s relevance to contemporary debates in environmental theory by indicating that he associated “encounters with natural beauty” with the cultivation of “empathy and compassion,” though her discussion is not clear on the related psychological mechanism. (Donner 2011, 157) Also, in *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), Mill writes somewhat vaguely that “solitude in the presence of natural beauty and grandeur” is “the cradle of thoughts and aspirations” that are good for the individual as well as society. (PPE, 756) But for Mill, effects of natural beauty broadly conceived are ultimately morally ambiguous, for nature itself is amoral and should not be blindly imitated. In “Nature” (1874), on the topic of feeling awe toward a great natural phenomenon, Mill says that “those in whom awe produces admiration may be aesthetically developed, but they are morally uncultivated” because “we are quite equally capable of experiencing this feeling towards maleficent power.” (N, 384)

According to Mill’s taxonomy of the beautiful, cultivated individuals rather than nature have claim to the beauty of a moral exemplar, or what may be in Mill’s case aptly called “heroic beauty.”[[10]](#footnote-10)\* This is the beauty of human feelings characterizing the heroic life of pursuing a noble aim with courage and energy despite pain and struggle. For Mill, Socrates is a paradigmatic “moral hero” who radiates this sort of beauty despite his physical ugliness, for Socrates manifests the love of virtue and truth as well as the courage to challenge a reigning social consensus. As the earlier discussion of the *Gorgias* illustrates, compared with the beauty of nature, heroic beauty has a clearer connection to the transcendence of docility through deliberative agonism in Mill’s political philosophy.

*b. Toward Aestheticized Philosophy and Politicized Art*

From Mill’s perspective, an important implication of the theoretical conclusions drawn from Plato’s *Gorgias* regarding the transformative power of imagination and beauty is the need for an aestheticization of moral and political philosophy as well as a politicization of art in liberal democracy. At various points in his career, Mill envisioned artists, philosophers, philosopher-poets, or artist-philosophers to play a crucial role in either of these processes. This is illustrated by not only his discussions of Plato and poetry but also Mill’s own performative acts as a writer on a wide range of topics.

As indicated earlier, in the commentary on the *Gorgias*, Mill notes that “poets or artists” can significantly facilitate the generation of love of virtue and other noble feelings by “[clothing] those feelings in the most beautiful forms” and “[breathing] them into us through our imagination and our sensations.” This point can be understood more clearly in light of Mill’s aesthetic theory.

The deeply associational aspect of his views on aesthetics is most evident in the 1869 re-release of James Mill’s *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* where Mill provides in the form of note a commentary on his father’s thoughts on the experience of beauty. In the note, unlike his father who relied on Archibald Alison for aesthetics, Mill endorses some of the basic views of John Ruskin as presented in the second volume of *Modern Painters* (1846). According to Mill, Ruskin serves as “an unconscious witness to the truth of the Association theory” by illustrating that “the things which excite the emotions of beauty or sublimity are always things which have a natural association with certain highly impressive and affecting ideas” “whether the catalogue which he has made of those ideas is correct and complete or not.” (APHM, 252-3) Mill adds that once this point is admitted, “we need no other mode of accounting for the peculiar character of the emotions, than by the actual, though vague and confused, recal of the ideas.” (APHM, 253)

Extending the above analysis, we can say that, as a work of art, a literary description of a heroic figure induces us to “recal” certain “highly impressive and affecting ideas” with which we conceive in imagination an ideal of moral perfection, or “a type of perfect beauty in human character.” It is this process which, for Mill, makes poetic or artistic skill such a decisive asset for a moralist *qua* moralist and establishes the exemplary status of some of Plato’s dialogues.

Also, as an artist-philosopher, Plato can be said to have aestheticized philosophy through inventing a form of moral philosophical writing that, while making rational argumentation in favor of virtue, simultaneously engages with the reader’s aesthetic register by drawing a heroic portrait of a virtuous individual like Socrates. Meanwhile, in *The Literary Criticism of John Stuart Mill*, Parvin Sharpless includes not only Plato but also Mill in the latter’s own category of “the philosopher-poet.” (Sharpless 1967, 10) Sharpless does this on account of the fact that “the appeal which Mill found in the disinterested love of virtue and heroic spirit of the *Gorgias* is the same inspiration that Mill’s life and many of his works produce on his readers.” (Sharpless 1967, 231) Sharpless also adds that it would not be “inappropriate to apply to our reaction to Mill as revealed in *On Liberty*, *Utilitarianism*, and the *Three Essays*, the description he gives to the Socrates of the *Gorgias*.” (Sharpless 1967, 231) In short, Mill was an artist-philosopher whose several major philosophical writings inspire the love of virtue and other elevated feelings in the reader through the implicit poetic representation of Mill himself as a moral hero.

While I agree with Sharpless on “the poetic qualities of Mill’s character” which seep through his writings and “catch the imagination and move the feelings,” Sharpless misapplies Mill’s notion of “the philosopher-poet” because, strictly speaking, neither Plato nor Mill wrote “poetry” by Mill’s definition in “Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties.” For Mill, although poetry, as “thoughts coloured by the feelings,” (TPV, 348) can be conveyed by a wide range of artistic genres (and not just by verse), it is to be sharply distinguished from eloquence, for “[all] poetry is of the nature of soliloquy.” (TPV, 349) In other words, for us to be able to claim that we have produced poetry, “no trace of consciousness that any eyes are upon us must be visible in the work itself.” (TPV, 349) Since neither Plato’s dialogues nor Mill’s major writings in moral/political philosophy such as *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism* fit this description,[[11]](#footnote-11)\* I suggest that the two thinkers are more aptly described as “artist-philosophers” than philosopher-poets.

Mill’s notion of “the philosopher-poet” is in fact indicative of his attempt to promote the politicization of art by advancing an ideal of the poet who has sufficient intellectual power to discern and artistically represent the best moral and political insights of philosophy up to that time. In “Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties,” Mill describes “the philosopher-poet” as being formed by the union of “a poetic nature” and “logical and scientific culture” and hence better positioned to arrive at “truth” than “the mere poet.” (TPV, 364) In “Tennyson’s Poems” (1835), Mill also suggests that this philosopher-poet must pursue “the noblest end of poetry” which is to elevate “the desires and characters of mankind through emotions,” thereby reiterating the theme of the artist’s moral/political mission present in his commentary on the *Gorgias* published a year earlier.

Concerning the project of cultivating virtue through art, Mill took interest in artistic forms other than poetry as well. In 1838, Mill published a review of William Ware’s *Letters from Palmyra*, an American epistolary novel historically based on the fall of the ancient city of Palmyra under Queen Zenobia’s rule by the Roman imperial army. In the review, Mill compliments Ware primarily for being “one of the few” among contemporary fiction writers who “can conceive, with sufficient strength and reality to be able to represent, genuine unforced nobleness of character.” (WLP, 459) Mill worries that, whereas the old romances and chivalrous literature used to “[fill] the youthful imagination with pictures of heroic men, and of what are at least as much wanted, heroic women,” “for the first time perhaps in history, the youth of both sexes of the educated classes are universally growing up unromantic.” (WLP, 460) In this age of “the huckstering virtues,” Ware’s novel is commendable for “keeping alive the chivalrous spirit.” (WLP, 460)

A point that merits emphasis here is that what underlies much of Mill’s wide-ranging literary criticisms is his concern about the *political* utility of art. This is illustrated to some extent by his distinction between heroic beauty and “abstract beauty,” a concept which Sharpless discusses in *The Literary Criticism of John Stuart Mill*. Holding that “critical standards are relative to the needs of the time,” Mill also concluded that “the particular needs of [his] age [required] more significant qualities of art than abstract beauty,” which refers to classical beauty based on formal perfections such as symmetry and harmony. (Sharpless 1967, 188) Although Mill did not “absolutely condemn abstract Beauty as an objective of art,” he had less regard for it because he thought it was “politically useless” for his age. (Sharpless 1967, 189) In contrast, he had strong appreciation of heroic beauty – especially the one belonging to Socrates in the *Gorgias* – because it most clearly addressed his deepest political concern about docility in modern liberal democracy where the agonistic deliberative citizenship is replaced by “the huckstering virtues” of the commercial middle class.

As illustrated earlier, being essentially a philosopher, Mill chose to promote the politicization of art for democratic purposes indirectly by making literary criticisms rather than writing poetry or fiction himself. But I argue that he also made an important intervention in the aesthetic sphere as a political philosopher by developing a democratic conception of heroism which conceives life of deliberative agon as a form of heroism specifically necessary and suitable for the modern era.

*c. Mill’s Democratic Heroism*

In “Civilization,” Mill claims that the heroic as such “essentially consists in being ready, for a worthy object, to do and suffer, but especially to do, what is painful or disagreeable.” (Civ, 136) But the commercial middle class in England has in it “much more of the amiable and humane” and “much less of the heroic,” for it suffers from “a moral effeminacy, an ineptitude for every kind of struggle.” (Civ, 135-6) Most citizens cannot “brook ridicule” and “brave evil tongues,” and this “torpidity and cowardice,” Mill predicts, “will continue until met by a system of cultivation adapted to counteract it.” (Civ, 136)

As Mill’s definition of the heroic suggests, nearly all conceptions of heroism and greatness share at least several broad themes such as courage and noble aim. But their specific contents have varied greatly across time and region and are arguably as indicative of the nature of their particular societies as these societies’ conceptions of justice. In fact, in Mill’s aforementioned discussion of the heroic one can also discern his attempt to develop a new conception of heroism appropriate for modern society.

It is my contention that, by promoting this new notion of heroism (subsequently referred to as Mill’s “democratic heroism”), Mill was trying to provide political guidance for the domain of art and literature for the purpose of mitigating the problem of docility in liberal democracy. His democratic heroism is, in short, best understood as an aesthetic intervention with a political purpose.

In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that concepts belonging to the heroic are seen as essentially aesthetic categories by Mill.[[12]](#footnote-12)\* In his review of Grote’s work on ancient Greek history, for instance, Mill writes that Greek history, when “considered aesthetically,” is “an epic, of which Athens, as a collective personality, may be called the hero.” (GHG, 316) The hero, for Mill, is an aesthetic phenomenon that evinces heroic beauty and a fit object of artistic representation. Crucially, as it has been illustrated so far in this paper, Mill saw great political significance in such heroic depiction by art.

But the specific form of artistic representation of heroism varies widely according to the artist’s sense of what is heroic. There is, for instance, a great difference between Achilles in Homer’s *Iliad* and Socrates in Plato’s *Gorgias*; whereas the former is a warrior hero associated with physical courage in a battlefield, the latter exemplifies intellectual courage, which consists in willingness to question established truths and persist in one’s own belief at the risk of social disapproval.[[13]](#footnote-13)\* Although Mill had appreciation for the morally elevating effects of heroic art in general, his specific concern for the agonistic deliberative citizenship motivated him to seek ways to make artists recognize heroism first and foremost in figures like Socrates. Hence Mill’s rather unique employment of heroic language and references across his different works.

Mill’s democratic heroism essentially consists in deliberative agonism, which is most clearly illustrated by his depiction of Socrates. As suggested earlier, for Mill, Socrates’s heroic image is inseparable from the picture of him as a nonconformist individual who was persecuted by the majority in Athens. In the commentary on the *Gorgias*, Socrates is portrayed as an intellectually honest and courageous philosopher who ended up personally exemplifying the dialogue’s conclusion that “the world loves its like [and] refuses its favour to its unlike,” (Go, 149) and according to Mill, “[it] is precisely this picture of the moral hero, still *tenax propositi* [firm of purpose] against the hostility and contempt of the world, which makes the splendour and power of the *Gorgias*.” (GP, 416)

Meanwhile, one of Mill’s contemporary examples of democratic heroism is Jeremy Bentham. Although Bentham had many short-fallings in Mill’s eyes, the former’s intellectual self-reliance invited the latter to describe him in heroic terms. In “Bentham,” for instance, Mill pays tribute to Bentham’s intellectual ability and courage by saying, “We are now to show the greatness of the man; the grasp which his intellect took of the subjects with which it was fitted to deal; the giant’s task which was before him, and the hero’s courage and strength with which he achieved it.” (B, 100) In fact, in this essay, Mill even compares Bentham to Hercules, a paradigmatic Greek hero:

Glory to Bentham that he has dealt to this superstition [an absurd but dominant belief about the English Law] its deathblow – that he has been the Hercules of this hydra, the St. George of this pestilent dragon! The honour is all his – nothing but his peculiar qualities could have done it . . . his firm self-reliance . . . (B, 103)

While Bentham neither wielded a bludgeon nor confronted a hydra, Mill saw him as a modern hero who tested his courage against many of the received opinions of his time.

Mill’s reference to the figure of Hercules in the above passage illustrates his literary strategy of highlighting the heroic qualities of the agonistic deliberative life by utilizing the traditional heroic materials.[[14]](#footnote-14)\* Mill’s frequent use of martial references and imageries despite his deliberative commitments[[15]](#footnote-15)\* can be also understood in this light. Political battle is a key notion in Mill’s democratic heroism. In “Inaugural Address,” for instance, Mill conceives fulfilling “the duties of citizenship” (IA, 245) by fighting for sociopolitical progress as “a great *epic* or dramatic action [emphasis added].” (IA, 244) “The ultimate end” of students’ studies is none other than making them “more effective combatants” in this heroic struggle for the good of society. (IA, 256).

One may wonder, however, what makes Mill’s conception of heroism particularly democratic. Does not heroism necessarily imply authoritarian politics where ordinary citizens passively defer to the hero? On this issue, a useful comparison can be made between Mill and Thomas Carlyle whose thoughts on heroism had significant influence on Mill. In *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, Carlyle promotes a kind of hero-worship that assumes an essentially paternalistic relationship between the hero and ordinary people; the hero rules for the good of all, and the rest blindly obey with firm trust in the former’s superiority in character and judgment. This authoritarian aspect of Carlyle’s conception of heroism is especially evident in the last chapter, “The Hero as King,” where he expresses a total rejection of basic democratic institutions and practices: “Find in any country the Ablest Man that exists there; raise him to the supreme place, and loyally reverence him . . . no ballot box, parliamentary eloquence, voting, constitution-building, or other machinery whatsoever can improve it a whit.” (Carlyle, 162) In this “perfect” and “ideal” country, an ordinary person’s appropriate attitude consists of “loyal thankfulness” and total absence of “doubting.” (Carlyle, 162)

For Mill, however, this sort of abdication of self-reliant judgment and political passivity is exactly what the hero, as an exemplar, is supposed to lift others from. Rather than requiring passive deference to the hero, Mill’s democratic heroism is based on the notion of “exemplarity.” (Zakaras, 195) As Zakaras points out, Mill repudiated the kind of hero-worship which “involves renunciation of our own understanding and judgment” and “contains no aspiration to achieve exemplary authority for ourselves.”[[16]](#footnote-16)\* (Zakaras, 195)

When Mill designated Socrates as a hero, he was not thereby asking citizens to slavishly believe and follow what Socrates had said. In fact, one’s proper relationship to a hero is illustrated by Mill’s own engagement with Socrates. Despite his great admiration for Socrates that lasted throughout his lifetime, the very spirit of critical self-reliance which he imbibed from this “hero of philosophy” was turned against the hero himself; for instance, Mill explicitly repudiated most of Platonic metaphysics that was spoken through Socrates’s mouth. In doing so, Mill was also exemplifying the proper attitude toward the great that he suggested in “On Genius” (1832). In this essay, after praising the education of early ancient Greece for producing human beings with an active mind rather than “mere knowledge-boxes,” Mill observes how the emergence of Plato and Aristotle – “two vast intellects” – turned out to be a mixed blessing for many subsequent generations in that they and their great disciples and critics provided enough intellectual materials to make others fall into a habit of mere memorization and regurgitation. (OG, 336) Mill writes: “Even the reverence which mankind had for those great men became a hindrance to following their example . . . The attempt to think for oneself fell into disuse; and, by ceasing to exercise the power, mankind ceased to possess it.” (OG, 336-7) In sum, for Mill, a heroic example is appropriately followed only when what is admired and aspired to is the hero’s nonconformist ethos, which actually enables a critique of the original hero as well. The uniquely democratic character of Mill’s notion of exemplarity is established by the fact that it involves, as I pointed out earlier, an affective mimesis that paradoxically grounds deliberative individuality. “Hero worship” as conceived in Mill’s democratic heroism is something that leads ordinary citizens to become heroes themselves by becoming *more* self-reliant in judgment and politically engaged than before; heroes should be useful for improving democracy, not for ending it.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, broadly speaking, I focused on the aesthetic dimension of Mill’s political thought and its significance for contemporary democratic theory. Although some commentators on Mill have written on this aesthetic aspect,[[17]](#footnote-17)\* none of them specifically interpreted it as a resource for rethinking the extant theories about deliberative citizenship and democracy. Against this backdrop, I tried to demonstrate the unique relevance of Mill’s political thinking by reconstructing his aesthetic model of deliberative democracy. This model is based on the belief that, given the radical insufficiency of reason in generating the agonistic deliberative life, a citizen’s aesthetic perception of heroic beauty holds the key for overcoming the problem of docility in liberal democracy. The faculty of imagination, which allows for the awareness and cultivation of the beautiful, hence has a central place in the model. Crucially, for Mill, imagination is not merely useful for creating a vivid representation of a deliberative menu (as a tool for an already established deliberative self); it is in fact essential for aesthetically representing the deliberative life itself and does its work of moral transformation at this meta-ontological level through the force of beauty and not reason. Based on these theoretical premises, Mill furthermore implies the need for a mutual interpenetration of art and philosophy. While aestheticizing moral and political philosophy to some extent after the footsteps of Plato, Mill also tried to promote a politicization of art in liberal democracy through various writings. His frequent invocation of heroic language – which may seem rather odd and dangerous to many contemporary theorists – seems to gain meaning and validity as part of this effort.

In addition, the discussion of Mill’s aesthetic model of democracy sheds a new light on his appropriation of ancient Greece. As Loizides points out in *John Stuart Mill’s Platonic Heritage*,[[18]](#footnote-18)\* “The appropriation of Athens in his writings on representative government is perhaps the most studied aspects of his political thought as far as his Greek influences are concerned.” (Loizides 2013, 72) A prominent work in this regard is Urbinati’s *Mill on Democracy* where she writes, “Mill’s model of democracy was indeed Athens.” (Urbinati 2002, 202) But most scholars on this topic, including Urbinati, provide little or no theoretical reflection on Mill’s appropriation of Plato as an artist and Socrates as an aesthetic phenomenon. Mill’s strong appreciation of ancient Greeks’ aesthetic susceptibilities is likewise understudied as a topic for political theory. Yet it is precisely these aesthetic aspects of his “Greek intoxication” that seem to establish his status as a political theorist of unique contemporary significance and not just a mere proto-deliberative thinker with weaker democratic credentials than current theorists of deliberative democracy.

(Source list)

1. Primary Texts:

* **Crisis (1826-1830)**
* **The Discovery of Romance and Romanticism (1830-1840)**
  + “On Genius” (1832) [rn/misc]
  + “Remarks on Bentham’s Philosophy” (1833) [rn/misc]
  + “What is Poetry?” (1833) [rn/nt]
  + “The Two Kinds of Poetry” (1833) [rn/nt; combined w/ the above]
  + “Writing of Junius Redivivus” (1833)
    - “even supposing perfect knowledge to be attained, no good will come of it, unless the ends, to which the means have been pointed out, are first *desired*.” (Robson, 126)
  + “The Monthly Repository for December 1833”
    - On the Louvres as a “school” of sentiment education (CW, 23:655)
  + \*“The Gorgias” (1834) [rn/misc/nt]
  + “Tocqueville [I]” (1835) [rn, rn/nt]
  + “Tennyson’s Poems” (1835)
    - “the noblest end of poetry as an intellectual pursuit, that of acting upon the desires and characters of mankind through their emotions, to raise them towards the perfection of their nature”
    - CW, 1:413-14
  + “Civilization” (1836) [rn/nt]
  + “Carlyle’s French Revolution” (1837)
    - Praise of Carlyle as a poet-historian
  + “Bentham” (1838) [rn/misc]
  + “Ware’s Letters from Palmyra” (1838) [rn/nt]
  + “Writings of Alfred de Vigny” (1838) [rn/nt]
  + “Tocqueville [II]” (1840) [rn/nt]
  + “Coleridge” (1840) [rn/nt]
* **Intellectual Success (1840-1845)**
  + *A System of Logic* (1843) [rn/misc]
    - “Of the Logic of Practice, or Art; Including Morality and Policy”
    - CW, VII, 14
      * Ball: “Mill, like Jurgen Habermas in our day, really did believe in ‘the forceless force of the better argument.” (54)
    - CW, VIII, 837-8 [on the doctrine of philosophical necessity], 840-1 \*[on the wish to form one’s own character], 869 [definition of ethology]
    - CW, VIII, 949.
      * 3 different types of higher pleasures (including the aesthetic) [prudence is associated with a higher pleasure?]
  + “Guizot’s Essays and Lectures on History” (1845)
    - On history’s having a destination (CW, 20:260-1) [cf. “Coleridge,” CW, 10:39]
    - Contrast btwn the English and Continental literatures
* **Worldly Success (1846-1850)**
  + “Grote’s History of Greece [I]” (1846) [rn/nt]
  + *Principles of Political Economy* (1848)
    - On the importance of solitary “mediation” (CW, 3:756)
* **Private Years (1850-1859)**
  + “Grote’s History of Greece [II]” (1853) [rn/nt]
  + “Bain’s Psychology” (1859), XI. 341-73.
    - Brief discussion on sympathy
* **Public Intellectual (1859-1869)**
  + *\*On Liberty* (1859/ conceived: 1854-6) [rn]
  + *\*Utilitarianism* (1861 [Fraser’s Magazine], 1863 [reprinted as a separate work] / conceived: 1854-6) [rn]
    - It “is natural to man to speak, to reason, to build cities, to cultivate the ground, though these are acquired faculties.” (40-5)
    - “a feeling of unity with all the rest” (48-9)
  + *\*Representative Government* (1861) [rn]
  + “Auguste Comte and Positivism” (1865)
    - On common and uncommon virtue, “the most exalted heroism”
    - CW, 10:337-38 ; 10: 339
  + “The Westminster Election of 1865 [2]”
    - On opening the British Museum to the public (CW, 28:27)
    - “He was in favour of the opening of the British Museum and similar institutions on Sundays, under proper regulations.”
  + “Grote’s Plato” (1866) [rn/nt]
  + *The Subjection of Women* (published: 1869/ written: 1861) [rn]
  + \*“Inaugural Address, University of St. Andrews” (1867) [rn/misc]
* **Last Years (1869-1873)**
  + Notes to James Mill’s APHM (1869)
    - originally published in 1829; reissued in 1869 w/ JS Mill as an editor and note-contributor
  + *Autobiography* ((1873 / written: 1853-6) [rn/misc/nt]
    - Analysis worked on Mill as “a perpetual worm at the root both of the passions and of the virtues . . .” (97)
    - Also, on “interest in the common good” as a motive (163)
* **Posthumous (d. 1873 [5/8])** 
  + \*Three Essays on Religion (1874)
    - “Utility of Religion” [rn/misc]
    - “Nature” [rn]
      * “Those in whom awe produces admiration may be aesthetically developed, but they are morally uncultivated . . . we are quite equally capable of experiencing this feeling towards maleficent power” (CW, 10:384) [on the sublime]
    - “Theism” [rn]

2. Secondary Literature: (those that were read are underlined)

* Alexander, Edward.
  + *Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965) [ch 5; rn]
* Ball, Terence
  + “Competing theories of character formation: James vs. John Stuart Mill” in *John Stuart Mill – Thought and Influence: The saint of rationalism*, eds. G. Varouxakis, Paul Kelly (New York: Routledge, 2010) [rn]
* Capaldi, Nicholas
  + *John Stuart Mill: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) [rn/nt]
* \*Donner, Wendy
  + “Morality, Virtue, and Aesthetics in Mill’s Art of Life” in *John Stuart Mill and The Art of Life*, eds. B. Eggleston, D.E. Miller, D. Weinstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) [rn]
  + “John Stuart Mill and virtue ethics” in *John Stuart Mill – Thought and Influence: The saint of rationalism*, eds. G. Varouxakis, Paul Kelly (New York: Routledge, 2010) [rn]
  + “John Stuart Mill on Education and Democracy” in *J.S. Mill’s Political Thought*, eds. N. Urbinati, A. Zakaras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
  + “Mill’s Utilitarianism” in *The Cambridge Companion to Mill* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
  + *The Liberal Self* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991) [esp. ch 5]
    - On internal culture
* \*Feagin, Susan
  + “Mill and Edward on the Higher Pleasures” in *Philosophy*, Vol. 58, No. 224 (Apr., 1983), pp. 244-252.
    - Heydt: “one of the only serious attempts to incorporate Mill’s aesthetics and the passages in the Analysis into a reading of higher and lower pleasures” (286)
* \*Ferrera, Alessandro
  + *The Force of the Example. Explorations in the Paradigm of Judgment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) [ch. 1, 2, 3, 5]
* Habibi, Don A.
  + *John Stuart Mill and the Ethic of Human Growth* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001) [ch. 1, 2]
* \*Heydt, Colin
  + “Mill, Life as Art, and Problems of Self-Description in an Industrial Age” in *John Stuart Mill and The Art of Life*, eds. B. Eggleston, D.E. Miller, D. Weinstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) [rn]
  + “Mill, Bentham, and ‘Internal Culture’” in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 14(2) 2006: 275-301
  + *Rethinking Mill’s Ethics: Character and Aesthetic Education* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006) [rn/nt]
* Irwin, T. H.
  + “Mill and the Classical World” in *The Cambridge Companion to Mill* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
* Kateb, George
  + *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) [ch. 3 & 9]
* \*Loizides, Antis
  + *John Stuart Mill’s Platonic Heritage: Happiness Through Character* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013) [Intro, Part 2 & 3, conclusion; rn/nt]
* Mandelbaum, Maurice
  + *History, Man, & Reason* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971) [194-7, 213-4]
    - On internal culture
* Mill, Anna J.
  + “John Stuart Mill and the Picturesque”, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1970), pp. 151-163.
  + “John Stuart Mill’s visit to Wordsworth, 1831”, *Modern Language Review*, XLIV (1949), PP. 341-50.
* Packe, Michael St. John
  + *The Life of John Stuart Mill* (London, 1954) pp. 107-108
    - Mill: “Vagueness is of the essence of the sublime . . .” (tour journal, 1832)
* Rawls, John
  + *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007)
* Riley, Jonathan
  + “Optimal Moral Rules and Supererogatory Acts” in *John Stuart Mill and The Art of Life*, eds. B. Eggleston, D.E. Miller, D. Weinstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)
  + “Mill’s Neo-Athenian Model of Liberal Democracy” in *J.S. Mill’s Political Thought*, eds. N. Urbinati, A. Zakaras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
  + *Mill on Liberty* (London: Routledge) [1998a,82-90, 169, 175]
    - On “noble kind of individuality”; a “Periclean” character-ideal
  + “On Liberty and the Periclean Ideal” Qwerty 6: 241-9 [1996b]
* Robson, John M.
  + *The Improvement of Mankind: The Social and Political Thought of John Stuart Mill*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968. [ch 5; rn]
  + “J.S. Mill’s Theory of Poetry” in *Mill: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by J.B. Schneewind (London: MacMillan, 1968)
    - On internal culture
* Ryan, Alan
  + “Bureaucracy, Democracy, Liberty: Some Unanswered Questions in Mill’s Politics” in *J.S. Mill’s Political Thought*, eds. N. Urbinati, A. Zakaras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
  + “John Stuart Mill’s Art of Living” in *J.S. Mill on Liberty in Focus*, eds. J. Gray, G.W. Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1991)
  + *J.S. Mill* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974) [33 and 55] (checked out)
    - On internal culture
* Semmel, Bernard
  + *John Stuart Mill and the Pursuit of Virtue* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984) [Prologue: The Choice of Hercules]
* \*Sharpless, Parvin
  + *The Literary Criticism of John Stuart Mill* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967) [Part 3, 4, 5; rn/nt]
* Ten, C. L.
  + “Democracy, socialism, and the working classes” in *The Cambridge Companion to Mill* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
* Thompson, Dennis
  + *John Stuart Mill and Representative Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) [Intro, “Influence of the Competent”, “Mill and Modern Democratic Theory”]
* \*Urbinati, Nadia
  + “Mazzini and the Making of the Republican Ideology”, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 17:2, 183-204 (2012)
  + “An Alternative Modernity: Mill on Capitalism and the Quality of Life” in *John Stuart Mill and The Art of Life*, eds. B. Eggleston, D.E. Miller, D. Weinstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) [rn]
  + *Mill on Democracy: From the Athenian Polis to Representative Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) [rn]
* \*Villa, Dana
  + *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) [rn]
* Vogler, Candace
  + *John Stuart Mill’s Deliberative Landscape* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001)
    - On Mill’s associationism using his texts on poetry
* Winch, Donald
  + “Wild natural beauty and the religion of humanity: Mill’s ‘green’ credentials” in *John Stuart Mill – Thought and Influence: The saint of rationalism*, eds. G. Varouxakis, Paul Kelly (New York: Routledge, 2010) [rn]
* Whedbee, Karen E.
  + “An English Plato: J.S. Mill’s Gorgias” (2006), *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 37:1, 19-41.
* \*Zakaras, Alex
  + *Individuality and Mass Democracy: Mill, Emerson, and the Burdens of Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) [rn]

3. Others:

* Primary texts:
  + Mill, James
    - *The Analysis of the Phenomenon of the Human Mind* (originally published in 1829; reissued in 1869 w/ JS Mill as an editor and note-contributor) [Mill’s aesthetic notes; rn]
  + Plato
    - *The Gorgias*, in *Plato Complete Works*, edited by Ohn M. Cooper, Hackett, 1997 [rn/nt]
    - *The Symposium*, in *Plato Complete Works*, edited by Ohn M. Cooper, Hackett, 1997 [rn/nt]
  + Xenophon
    - *Memorabilia* (Translated & annotated by Amy L. Bonnette / Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) [The Choice of Hercules; rn/nt]

1. \* In describing the source of the higher pleasures as ideas (as opposed to mere impressions of the senses), I follow Susan Feagin’s interpretation of Mill’s distinction between the two pleasures (Feagin 1983). But whereas Feagin attributes the generation of the higher pleasures exclusively to “ideas of improvement,” it is not clear what warrants this delimitation. Also, although Feagin acknowledges that, aside from aesthetic pleasure, there are higher pleasures associated with the ethical and the prudential, she gives no reason to think they are any different from one another except in terms of their names. It is crucial, however, that Mill considers the feeling of beauty to be grounded in ideas of *perfection*, something that can be approximated but never fully realized. It seems that the other two types of higher pleasures, especially the prudential one, do not have to involve this sort of idealization; an improved state does not necessarily mean a state of ideal perfection. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. \* Contra David Brink, I agree with Wendy Donner that Mill’s doctrine of the higher pleasures is consistent with hedonism and a subjective conception of happiness; Mill’s insistence that quality be included in the measurement of the overall value of pleasure does not logically require him to give up an internal mental state account of pleasure (Donner 1998). Brink, however, because he interprets the higher pleasures as *activities* and *pursuits* that are constituted by our exercise of the higher faculties rather than *mental states* produced by such exercise, concludes that Mill holds a non-hedonistic deliberative conception of happiness (Brink, 1992). But I think it is more accurate to say that Mill justifies the deliberative life based on qualitative hedonism. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. \* cf. Nadia Urbinati: “Democratic deliberation demands that participants both hold convictions and have nonprejudicial attachments to their convictions.” (Urbinati 2002, 83) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. \* For instance, there is *John Stuart Mill: A British Socrates* (2013) whose contributors, among others, include Antis Loizides and Nadia Urbinati. In addition, in *Socratic Citizenship* (2001), Dana Villa says: “[Compared with Nietzsche, Weber, Arendt, and Strauss] It is only in Mill . . . that we find a real commitment to the Socratic ideal in anything like its original fullness.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. \* The theme of commitment of injustice grounded in thoughtlessness is very much present in Mill’s political thought as well. As suggested previously, conformist political mobilization can be understood as active perpetration of injustice. (Zakaras 2009) But in “Inaugural Address,” Mill also links thoughtlessness to passive complicity in injustice:

   Let not any one pacify his conscience by the delusion that he can do no harm if he takes no part, and *forms no opinion*. Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing. He is not a good man who, without a protest, allows wrong to be committed in his name, and with the means which he helps to supply, because *he will not trouble himself to use his mind on the subject*. [emphasis added]

   Implicit in the above passage is Mill’s criticism of the moral irresponsibility of citizens who, while not being part of unjust conformist politics themselves, are not resisting such politics, either, by failing to form and act on a definite stance against it. It seems that, from Mill’s perspective, any life that falls short of the agonistic deliberative citizenship is not, strictly speaking, just; merely not belonging to the unjust demos is insufficient – one needs to be a Socrates who thinks and speaks on society’s fundamental issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. \* In *Utilitarianism*, Mill does acknowledge that virtue can be desired by a person as an end itself as “*part* of happiness.” (U, 284) But he also implies that this elevated state of mind comes about only after virtue has been repeatedly desired as a means to some kind of happiness: “What was once desired as an instrument for the attainment of happiness, has come to be desired for its own sake.” (U, 283) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. \* As to why Mill might have been doubtful about the efficacy of even his own arguments in *Utilitarianism*, Susan Feagin’s discussion of the higher pleasures seems to provide some insight:

   I shall give one reason which is elaborated on to some extent by Mill himself why higher pleasures *should* feel different in some important way. But the one thing Mill does *not* attempt to do is to give a description of the difference between how the higher and lower pleasures feel. Mill, I am convinced, believed that what was essential to the higher pleasures could not be described but could only be felt . . . The only hope of one’s understanding the depth and fulfillment of one of these ‘higher pleasures’ is to experience it oneself. This is the basis, I believe, for Mill’s claim that one cannot be argued or rationally convinced into being virtuous. The character of the pleasure one will feel as a result of being virtuous cannot be described, and hence it cannot figure in an argument. (Feagin 1983, 250)

   Since, as I previously pointed out, unvirtuous persons are not literally lower animals, the dichotomy between the higher and lower pleasures does not perfectly map onto the one between the virtuous and unvirtuous, though Feagin does not seem to be sensitive to this fact. But the passage usefully suggests an idea that there might be higher pleasures unique to virtuous life which cannot serve as sufficiently powerful motivating reasons prior to being personally experienced. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. \* Although this point about reason’s failure to motivate virtue is occasionally mentioned by Mill’s commentators including Urbinati, they all stop short of articulating the point’s full theoretical import for deliberative democracy. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. \* Mill sometimes refers to this activity as “contemplation.” In *On Liberty*, for instance, he describes a person with individuality as “a noble and beautiful object of contemplation.” (OL, 72) Also, in “Inaugural Address,” he says, “[The] mere contemplation of beauty of a high order produces in no small degree [an] elevating effect on the character.” (IA, 255) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. \* Since the kind of beauty in question belongs to a moral exemplar, it might be suggested that “moral beauty” is a more appropriate label than “heroic beauty.” But the alternative label can be confusing because in Mill’s writings “moral” and “morality” have unaesthetic connotations as well. As Wendy Donner points out, whereas Mill sometimes “uses the phrase ‘moral arts and sciences’ to refer to the entire span of the practical arts of living,” he also uses the term “morality” to indicate only one compartment of this comprehensive scheme of the Art of Life in contradistinction to the domain of “aesthetics.” (Donner 2010, 86) In contrast, words associated with the heroic are seen as essentially aesthetic categories by Mill. In his review of Grote’s work on ancient Greek history, for instance, Mill writes that Greek history, when “considered aesthetically,” is “an epic, of which Athens, as a collective personality, may be called the hero.” (GHG, 316) Also, the exceptional affective personal qualities that give rise to heroic beauty fit well into Mill’s conception of the heroic explicitly developed in “Civilization.” According to him, the heroic “essentially consists in being ready, for a worthy object, to do and suffer, but especially to do, what is painful or disagreeable.” (Civ, 136) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. \* In fact, Sharpless goes so far as to say that these writings “are, in no invidious sense of the word, propaganda.” (Sharpless 1967, 223) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. \* Mill is clearly not alone in making such association. Among contemporary political theorists, Dana Villa can be cited as another example. In *Socratic Citizenship*, referring to Pericles’s funeral oration, Villa describes “the terms in which Pericles casts his final appeal” as “heroic/aesthetic.” (Villa 2001; 10) Villa also says that “greatness” is “a fundamentally aesthetic category.” (Villa 2001; 11) But the important difference between Mill and Villa on political aesthetics is that, whereas Villa considers aestheticization simply a threat to deliberative citizenship and democracy (e.g. his discussion of Pericles’s “aesthetic monumentalism”), Mill emphasizes the need for aestheticizing deliberative politics itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. \* Plato, too, sometimes depicts Socrates as a hero in war. See, for instance, Alcibiades’s high praise of Socrates in the *Symposium*. It seems quite telling that Mill describes Socrates as a hero primarily with reference to the *Gorgias* without ever mentioning the *Symposium* in this regard. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. \* In this respect, it is also notable that Mill makes a strong association between Hercules and Socrates. According to his autobiography, Mill encountered Hercules early in his childhood when he read Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* with his father who through this text “impressed upon” him “the lesson of the ‘Choice of Hercules.’” (A, 49) In the *Memorabilia*, the “Choice of Hercules” is told in the words of Socrates who attributes the story to Prodicus, “a sophist and older companion of Socrates.” (Bonnette, 159) In the story, one day young Hercules meets both the goddess of virtue and that of vice. Whereas the former exhorts him to become a “good worker of what is noble and august” through “labors and sweat,” the latter seduces him to pursue a life of material comfort and pleasure. (Bonnette, 40) Hercules decides to follow the goddess of virtue, which marks the beginning of his legendary heroic career. Later in his life, in “Grote’s Plato,” (1866) Mill refers to this story as “one of the most impressive exhortations in ancient literature to a life of labour and self-denial in preference to one of ease and pleasure” which “bears a nearer resemblance than anything in Plato to the moral teachings ascribed by Xenophon to the real Sokrates.” (GP, 391-2) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. \* Mill’s tendency to depict history as a site of Manichean epic battles should be interpreted in light of his clear disapproval of any actual military society or culture. In his second review of Tocqueville’s book, for instance, Mill describes the modern commercial age as one “when, happily for mankind, the military spirit is gone by” and emphasizes his commitment to the idea that public opinion should be “the ruling power” in society. (DIA 2, 175) Hence his employment of martial language is best understood as a literary strategy of bringing into sharp relief the heroic qualities of life of nonconformist political participation which does not as such involve inflicting violence on others. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. \* But because Zakaras does not discuss the aesthetic and affective processes underlying Mill’s notion of exemplarity, he fails to provide a clear explanation of Mill’s apparently paradoxical idea of achieving individuality through imitation. It is the imitation at the *affective* level – the sympathetic mimesis of the *feelings* grounding the agonistic deliberative life – that is the key to understanding Mill in this regard. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. \* Among others, Parvin Sharpless, John Robson, Colin Heydt, and Wendy Donner. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. \* Loizides’s book offers a fairly comprehensive discussion on Mill’s Greek influences and is especially illuminating about Mill’s appropriation of Plato. But the book does not specifically relate its findings to the contemporary study of deliberative politics. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)