

# On an Interpretation of Mill's Qualitative Utilitarianism

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ABSTRACT: This paper is a reply to Jonathan Riley's criticism of my reading of Mill (both published in the *Philosophical Quarterly* 2003). I show that Riley's interpretation has no textual support in Mill's writing by putting the supposedly supporting quotations in their proper context. Secondly it is demonstrated how my reading is not incompatible with hedonism. Mill's use of the concepts of 'quality', 'quantity', and 'pleasure' are explained and illustrated. I conclude by considering whether the possible redundancy of Mill's quality/quantity discussion would be problematic.

KEYWORDS: Mill, utilitarianism, quantity, quality, qualitative utilitarianism, incommensurability, pleasure, hedonism, higher and lower pleasures.

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## 1. Introduction

1.1. In a paper published in the *Philosophical Quarterly*<sup>1</sup> I presented an argument concerning the reading of the passage in *Utilitarianism* in which Mill centrally discusses the quality/quantity distinction. Subsequently, Jonathan Riley, who I criticize in that paper by citing his articles as instances of a mistaken approach, published a paper in the *Philosophical Quarterly* criticizing myself. This paper is a reply to his objections, and a further clarification of the view I attribute to Mill. I restate my arguments, outline Riley's criticisms, and argue that they are mistaken. I also show, using comprehensive quotations from Mill's writings, that the textual evidence Riley uses to support his claims is, charitably speaking, very weak.

1.2. The bone of contention is the following passage from chapter II of *Utilitarianism*:

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<sup>1</sup> Schmidt-Petri (2003).

[P] If one of the two [pleasures] is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, [then] we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far out-weighting quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account (X, p. 211).

I called the view that people normally hold of the quality/quantity distinction, as it is exhibited in this passage, the ‘standard view’. The standard view, as I used the name, holds that

[SV] a higher pleasure always will be or ought to be chosen over a lower one even when the latter is available in a larger quantity.<sup>2</sup>

The claim that Mill endorsed SV, I suggested, gains plausibility from a misreading of [P]. I think proponents of SV read P as:

[PSV] if some pleasure is of higher quality, then it will/ought to be chosen over the pleasure of lower quality regardless of their ‘respective quantities’,

whereas in my opinion it should be read as:

[PME] if some pleasure will be chosen over another available in larger quantities, then we are justified in saying that the pleasure so chosen is of higher quality than the other.

The major difference between PSV and PME is straightforward yet crucial: PSV is the converse of PME. My essential claim, then, was that supporters of SV misread the conditional in P.

1.3. As I pointed out (2003, p. 104), this textual analysis by itself leaves open the sense in which Mill used the word ‘quality’ in P. However, I argued that an entirely natural way of understanding it is what I shall now call the ‘usual’ way. The ‘usual’ way is the way we use the word ‘quality’ most of the time. We use ‘quality’ in this way whenever we assess things with respect to their quality. For instance, if you think that Toyotas are of higher quality than Hyundais, you are using ‘quality’ in this sense. The same point could be made by saying that Toyotas are *better than* Hyundais, given the standards used to evaluate cars.

By contrast, proponents of SV typically read ‘quality’ in what I shall label the ‘essentialist’ way. ‘Quality’ is used in the essentialist way whenever it is used in roughly the same sense as ‘essence’ is normally used.

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<sup>2</sup> A large number of people hold this view. For instance, David Brink (1992, p. 92) says that “Mill thinks that the higher activities have value that is infinitely or lexically greater than that of mere pleasures, because he claims that their value cannot be outweighed by any quantity of lower pleasures.” Riley (1993, p. 293) claims that “[for Mill] one unit of a higher kind is preferable to any finite number of a lower kind.” Also Riley (1999, p. 351). Similarly see Cohen (1980, p. 157), Kelly (1990, p. 24) and many others.

For instance, if you think that espresso is qualitatively different from filter coffee – that is, that they are entirely, or essentially, different sorts of things – you are using ‘quality’ in the essentialist way. An equivalent way of putting this would be to say that espresso is, in its essence, *different from* filter coffee. Of course both uses of ‘quality’ are entirely legitimate in their own contexts.

So there are two independent issues here. The first is how to read P (options: PSV or PME), the second is how to understand Mill’s ‘quality’ (options: the usual or the essentialist way). My secondary claim was that once we realise that P *must* be read as PME, the *usual* way of reading ‘quality’ looks like a very natural way of reading it. It does so primarily because P precisely describes the kind of scenario under which we would normally ascribe higher quality, in this usual sense, to some object, comparing it with some other. I illustrated this with the example of the choice between types of wine. This is an everyday scenario in which we routinely manage to weigh quality against quantity in just the way Mill describes.<sup>3</sup> Independent support for the ‘usual’ reading is given by Mill’s assertion that “it would be absurd that while, *in estimating all other things*, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone” (X, p. 211, italics added).

The essentialist reading, on the other hand, while compatible with PME, is not supported by it (nor, I think, would it be supported by PSV, though it is certainly more plausible on PSV than on PME). As far as I can see, we do not normally determine the essences of things on the basis of any procedure remotely resembling the one Mill describes here.

Mill, I concluded, is not talking about the *essences* of pleasures, he is talking about how we can conclusively *determine* when one pleasure is qualitatively superior to another. The passage P, in other words, is about epistemology, and not about the metaphysics, of pleasures.

## 2. Riley’s Criticisms

2.1. Jonathan Riley<sup>4</sup> objects to my paper on two related grounds. First, he sees his interpretation of Mill’s qualitative hedonism better supported

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<sup>3</sup> For any given budget constraint, one typically has the choice of buying some number of bottles of high-quality wine, or a larger number of bottles of (cheaper) low-quality wine. Clearly, quality as well as quantity of wine are considered when making the best decision in any such context.

As a result, if an expert, having the free choice, chooses a bottle of wine X over a bottle of wine Y, this is most plausibly due to a perceived superiority of quality of wine X. However, that does not entail that there isn’t some, possibly very large, quantity of wine Y that would be preferred over just one bottle of wine X. In the special case in which there is no such quantity, wine X may be called so superior than wine Y that quantity is of no account. This is the special case Mill addresses.

<sup>4</sup> Riley (2003). All references are to this paper.

by P as well as other writings of Mill which I did not but should have considered. Secondly, he also argues that if my reading were accurate, then, given that my reading is incompatible with “any coherent version” of hedonism (p. 415), I would be claiming that Mill was not a hedonist. But Mill explicitly says he is. Hence my reading must be mistaken.

Even if the first objection were sound it would not damage my argument. My aim was not to refute Riley’s theory specifically but to highlight a common mistake which may or may not have led to the development of it and relevantly similar interpretations of Mill. Nonetheless the objection needs to be addressed, for if Riley could present passages in Mill that directly contradict PME my account would certainly be problematic. However, Riley does not try to do this. Instead he follows a more indirect strategy by arguing for his own view, which I shall now briefly describe.<sup>5</sup>

Riley calls ‘standard’ a view which differs slightly from what I initially labelled thus but seems very similar or even identical to his own interpretation of Mill. He describes this view:

[RSV] one pleasure *x* is of a higher kind or quality than a second pleasure *y* *if and only if* most human beings who have competently experienced both always prefer *x* to *y* regardless of the quantity (or finite number of units) of *x* offered relative to the quantity of *y* (p. 410).

and adds that

[RSV] the standard view sees qualitative superiority in all-or-nothing terms, as a difference in the intrinsic nature of the higher pleasures, a difference of infinite or unlimited extent rather than of finite or limited degree in relation to lower pleasures (p. 417).

Niceties aside, the biconditional RSV is the conjunction of the two conditionals PSV and PME, using the essentialist reading of ‘quality’. Riley describes me as rejecting RSV. Since I do endorse PME – as apparently now does Riley (cf. p. 415) – Riley needs to show that Mill also subscribed to both PSV and the essentialist reading of ‘quality’.

Although I do think the essentialist view is mistaken, I neither did nor will argue against it as such. As I believe that PME is a very plausible claim on the usual reading of ‘quality’ – and Riley does not really try to refute this claim – I will just try to show that Riley’s *evidence* in favour of PSV and the essentialist reading is anything but compelling.

Riley endorses PSV: he believes that the choice between higher and lower pleasures is an “all or nothing” decision (p. 417), elsewhere he confirms that his aim is to “explain ... why higher pleasures always trump lower ones”, and he also uses terminology such as the “lexical priority”

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<sup>5</sup> See also Riley (1993, 1998, 1999).

of higher pleasures.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Riley's endorsement of PSV seems to be based on his essentialist understanding of 'quality'. He says that this view

avoids incoherence [with hedonism] by holding that a higher kind of pleasure is of a higher intrinsic nature than a lower pleasure, that is, units of the higher kind are of a higher dimension altogether than units of the lower... any unit of the qualitatively superior pleasure is infinitely larger, or indefinitely more intense, than a unit or any finite sum of units of the inferior pleasure ... (pp. 415f).

I think Riley's appeal to the "higher intrinsic nature" of the higher pleasures, their being of a "higher dimension altogether", "infinitely larger, or indefinitely more intense", and their being felt to be "infinitely or intrinsically more valuable" (p. 414) displays a confusion about the evaluative and essentialist senses of 'quality' noted above. Not unrelatedly, it also muddles a number of issues such as the metaphysics of pleasures, their relative moral worth, the intensity of feeling of their relative moral worth as well as the intensity of one's experience when performing pleasurable actions. In fact Riley mostly argues for the psychological readings while Mill's issue clearly seems to be one of relative moral worthiness when he talks about pleasures being 'more desirable' or 'more valuable'.

Riley thinks he can make the psychological and moral issue coincide with the following metaphysical claim:

[INF] a difference of quality *is* an infinite difference of quantity.<sup>7</sup>

He explains that

[INF] Fewer units of a higher-quality pleasure still amount to more pleasure than any finite number of units of lower-quality pleasure because units of the higher pleasure are intrinsically or infinitely greater than units of the lower (p. 416).

INF is meant to be the missing link between quality and quantity. Its truth would establish PSV, being based on an essentialist reading of 'quality'. The idea of INF, if I understand it correctly, is that the difference of essence (or quality) between, say, espresso and filter coffee just *is* the 'fact' that the one is giving 'indefinitely more' quantity of pleasure.<sup>8</sup> The one giving infinitely more pleasure than the other is in fact what *makes* espresso and filter coffee what they are – their difference of quality con-

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<sup>6</sup> Riley (1993, pp. 293, 296; and 1988, p. 175).

<sup>7</sup> Riley (1993, p. 294), my italics.

<sup>8</sup> This example assumes that INF is true for any two kinds of things, but the argument also works if INF had been restricted to pleasures only.

sists in an infinite difference of quantity of pleasure. If so, the pleasure of ‘higher quality’ is *ipso facto* the pleasure of (indefinitely) more quantity of pleasure; this then provides a conclusive reason for its lexical preferability, both psychological and, provided moral agents grasp these relations, also moral (p. 415).

### 3. Riley’s Criticism Assessed

Rather than discussing the intuitive plausibility of the metaphysical, psychological, or moral aspects of this theory<sup>9</sup> I will only attempt to demonstrate that this view derives no support from the writings of Mill Riley appeals to. I think that in a number of cases Riley’s “solid textual evidence” (p. 410) solidly misrepresents Mill. For reasons of space I can only discuss some of these here.

3.1. I can’t resist simply pointing out that Riley reaffirms that “it is difficult to see how Mill could have given a clearer statement [of RSV] than that in II 5” (p. 413). But Riley does not provide *any* positive argument that P *does* state or support PSV or the essentialist reading of quality. Riley nowhere addresses my quite specific worry that to read P as PSV is just a mistake in propositional logic.

3.2. To gather support for INF, and thus for RSV, Riley often associates excerpts from Mill’s writings with concepts like ‘infinity’ or ‘indefinite preferability’ when Mill himself practically never uses this language, and not in the passages quoted. For instance, Riley appeals to some of Mill’s comments to his father’s *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* and says that

Mill confirms that, in addition to the qualitative distinction drawn in II 4 of *Utilitarianism* between ‘mental’ pleasures ... and ‘bodily’ pleasures ... there is a hierarchy of different kinds of pleasures nested within the ‘mental’ kind. In particular, certain pleasures of the aesthetic feelings and of the moral sentiments are higher in quality... (p. 413).

This might (be intended to) give the impression that Mill refers to, or indeed explicitly elaborates on, *U* II 4, or even that he was using phrases like ‘higher in quality’ in these passages; none of which Mill actually does.

Mill in fact discusses a claim in aesthetics, not ethics. In *Modern Painters* John Ruskin had argued that

every thing which gives us the emotion of the Beautiful, is expressive and emblematic of [some of the] lofty or lovely ideas [of] Infinity, Unity, Repose, Symmetry, Purity, Moderation, and Adaptation to Ends.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See Scarre (1997).

<sup>10</sup> “Editorial Notes” to James Mill’s *Analysis of the Human Mind*, in *Miscellaneous Writings* (XXXI, p. 224).

Mill comments that despite appearances and Ruskin's conviction to the contrary, his father's associationist psychology is able to explain the origin of our ideas of beauty and sublimity. The idea of infinity is a peculiar case, though – Mill explains that since we never in fact experience any actual infinity, the idea of it will have a different impressiveness, by engaging our mental faculty of imagination, than ideas of things which we do habitually experience. Nonetheless it is equally based on experience.<sup>11</sup> Mill's aim is to explain away the apparent plausibility of Ruskin's aesthetic theory. There is no reason to believe that Ruskin or Mill talk about ethics here.

In fact, Mill only refers to *Utilitarianism* at all in a note two chapters later.<sup>12</sup> Again he defends his father's psychological theory and points out that he has given an associationist analysis of our feeling of justice in ch. V of that work. All of Mill's efforts, both in his comments and in *U V*, are unambiguously intended to *discount* the perceived peculiarity of those feelings. There is not a single reference to *U II*, let alone *P*, in Mill's comments to his father's book.<sup>13</sup> Riley's assertion hence seems entirely unwarranted.

### 3.3. Riley also claims that

Mill *explicitly* connects the higher pleasures of beauty and sublimity as well as the higher pleasure of justice to the idea of infinity in order to explain why people ... feel them to be qualitatively superior (p. 414, my italics).

Mill does nothing like it. The best evidence Riley himself presents for this claim is that

[RIL] speaking of the highly complex aesthetic pleasures, for example, [Mill] says that they are "excited" by things "which have a natural association with certain highly impressive and affecting ideas" such as "the idea of infinity", and "it is no mystery ... why anything which suggests vividly the idea of infinity, that is, of magnitude or power without limit, acquires an otherwise strange impressiveness to the feelings and imagination" (p. 414).<sup>14</sup>

It is hard to see how this could be considered evidence for RSV at all, since none of the expressions 'qualitative superiority', 'justice', 'infinitely

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<sup>11</sup> As Riley even remarks (fn. 6), Mill's account is equally intended to apply to all other concepts on Ruskin's list besides infinity.

<sup>12</sup> That is, seventeen pages later in the *CW* edition which only contains J. S. Mill's editorial comments, *op. cit.*, p. 241; about fifty pages later in the original.

<sup>13</sup> In any case, editorial comments on and in someone else's posthumously reissued book on a very different topic, and specifically replying to an arguably unconcerned third party (Ruskin), seem a most unsuitable place to expound or clarify one's position; to me it appears highly unlikely that Mill would have attempted to do so.

<sup>14</sup> The quotations are from (XXXI, pp. 224, 226).

or intrinsically more valuable' even figure here or anywhere near it. I urge the readers to check for themselves how this rather daring 'quotation' has been assembled from pages 224 and 226 (for one, in the original, 'the idea of infinity' only occurs once, on p. 226, and there is no argumentative chain). It is impossible to reprint these pages in entirety to see how the quotation originates from very different contexts, but I take the liberty of quoting first a few sentences from p. 224, then from p. 226, italicising the parts also appearing in [RIL].

Mill says on p. 224:

Mr. Ruskin, it is true, never thinks of inferring that our feelings of Beauty are the actual consequences of our having those elevating or cheering ideas recalled to us through manifold channels of association. He deems the emotion to be arbitrarily attached to these ideas by pre-established harmony. But the evidence which he adduces goes far to prove the other point. If he succeeds, as I think he does, in showing 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), we need no other mode of accounting for the peculiar character of the emotions, than by the actual, though vague and confused, recall of the ideas.

Two pages on, Mill says, on pp. 226f:

Supposing that all Beauty had been successfully analysed into a lively suggestion of one or more of the ideas to which it is referred by Mr. Ruskin, the question would still remain for psychologists, why the suggestion of those ideas is so impressive and so delightful. But this question may, in general, be answered with little difficulty. *It is no mystery*, for example, *why anything which suggests vividly the idea of infinity, that is, of magnitude or power without limit, acquired an otherwise strange impressiveness to the feelings and imagination*. The remaining ideas in Mr. Ruskin's list (at least if we except those which, like Moderation, are chiefly ancillary to the others, by excluding what would jar with their effect) all represent to us some valuable or delightful attribute, in a completeness and perfection of which our experience presents us with no example and which therefore stimulates the active power of the imagination to rise above known reality ...

Even if one did want to grant that there is *some* relation between the *idea of infinity* and the aesthetic pleasures of the imagination on the basis of these passages on aesthetic impressions, as has been sketched above, this certainly is not the relation Riley claims it to be. There is no evidence, I think, for the very specific claims of moral philosophy of INF or PSV. I therefore conclude that Riley has not produced any evidence suggesting that Mill endorsed RSV.

#### 4. What is Mill's 'Qualitative Hedonism'?

4.1. It was not my intention to present a complete interpretation of Mill's so-called 'qualitative hedonism'. But compatibility with hedonism will be a minimal requirement for even the most modest attempts at one, so I should also address Riley's second objection.

In short, my reading of P is compatible with hedonism because 'quality' may be explicable in hedonistic terms. Contrary to what Riley claims, INF is not the only way of doing this, it is just the only way of doing it *if one accepts* PSV. But Riley himself provides an example which shows that neither INF nor any other crucial elements of RSV are really needed to make sense of what Mill says.

Riley claims that, on my view, a "rational hedonist can and should prefer less pleasure to more pleasure" (p. 415).<sup>15</sup> This is incompatible with both ethical and psychological hedonism, the views that people morally should, or actually do, respectively, prefer more pleasure to less. Riley thinks my reading is beset by this problem since it says that just one unit of pleasure  $x$  may be preferable over, say, ten units of pleasure  $y$  (p. 416). Riley argues that to explain this fact, as indeed I would want to, by saying that, if other things are equal,  $x$  must be of higher quality than  $y$ , is to appeal to 'quality' as a non-hedonistic notion; unless, that is, one adopts INF. Adopting INF the choice of  $x$  is explicable because  $x$ 's being of higher quality than  $y$  consists in its being *indefinitely* more intense, and so the choice is really one of 'quantity', as the hedonist requires.

Riley asserts that it is not open to me to claim, with INF, that "fewer units of  $x$  still amount to more pleasure than *any finite number* of units of  $y$  since [I] reject the standard view" (p. 416, my italics). This is entirely correct. But while INF would indeed provide such 'explanation', I don't see why we should saddle Mill with the extravagant INF when a much weaker and moreover intuitively correct principle, which *is* available to me, does the job required. This principle is the following:

[MOR] A pleasure  $x$  is of higher quality than a pleasure  $y$  iff one unit of pleasure  $x$  gives more pleasure than one unit of pleasure  $y$ .

The difference between MOR and INF which is immediately relevant here is that INF requires the difference in pleasure between  $x$  and  $y$  to be infinite (or indefinite – though this surely is not equivalent), whereas MOR is satisfied if that difference is finite. In the particular example Riley uses, MOR suggests that the preferability of one unit of  $x$  over ten units of  $y$  is explained by the fact that one unit of  $x$  simply gives more pleasure

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<sup>15</sup> On my interpretation this should in fact read: 'a rational hedonist can and should prefer fewer pleasures to more pleasures.'

than ten units of  $y$ . That is analogous to a case in which one bottle of some wine  $x$  gives more pleasure than ten bottles of wine  $y$ .<sup>16</sup>

It is important to realise that the word ‘pleasure’ gets used in two senses in MOR (as well as by Mill) to fully understand Mill’s quality/quantity distinction. As Riley also points out, ‘a pleasure’ in Mill’s usage is not the same as ‘pleasure’ (the pleasurable feeling, or the feeling of pleasure), but a pleasurable activity; accordingly choices between *pleasures* are in fact choices between pleasurable “objects or activities” (p. 417). Even in ordinary English, what one calls ‘a pleasure’, such as the ‘pleasure of reading a good book’ is not itself the pleasure experienced *when* reading a good book, it is the activity *of* reading a good book. Of course it is only because this activity *gives* pleasure that it is called ‘a pleasure’.<sup>17</sup>

That Mill uses these two senses is also illustrated clearly in the first part of the following passage:

According to the Greatest Happiness Principle, ... the ultimate end ... is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality; the test of quality, and the rule for measuring it against quantity, being the preference felt by those who, in their opportunities of experience, to which must be added their habits of self-consciousness and self-observation, are best furnished with the means of comparison (X, p. 214).

‘Enjoyments’ is here used synonymously with the more awkward sounding ‘pleasures’. Mill explicates what it means to say that one’s existence should be ‘as *rich* as possible in enjoyments’:<sup>18</sup> one should have *many*, and one should have *good ones*; in other words, one should have a large quantity of enjoyments, and each of them should be of the highest quality possible. And if in practice one can’t have it all – the largest quantity *and* the highest quality – quantity and quality will have to be traded off against each other, ideally with the help of a competent guide. ‘Quantity’, then, measures the number of pleasures (how many there are), ‘quality’ measures the pleasurable-ness of any one pleasure (how much pleasure each of them yields). MOR captures this sense of quality.

This, I think, also coheres well with the ‘usual’ sense of quality which I had previously claimed P displays – arguably a Toyota is only considered

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<sup>16</sup> In fact, Riley describes – supposedly “without loss of generality” (p. 416) – precisely such an analysis as an exemplary solution in the following paragraph, apparently believing that this supports RSV in some way. But this solution does not support RSV, at least not in its characteristic elements, as it neither support PSV nor INF. It uses ‘quality’ in the usual way and is fully accounted for with MOR.

<sup>17</sup> See Hoag (1992).

<sup>18</sup> To use ‘enjoyment’ instead would not normally be misunderstood, but the subsequent clause would appear out of place.

to be of higher quality if in some way it gives more (but not necessarily infinitely or indefinitely more) pleasure than a Hyundai.<sup>19</sup> For instance, it might have a better driving experience, fewer breakdowns, lower overall repair costs or similar pleasant features.

MOR is clearly inconsistent with the 'essentialist' reading of 'quality', and this is the other, more significant, and in this context decisive, difference between MOR and INF. Once one gives up PSV there is no need to first claim that *x* produces indefinitely more pleasure, and then to 'explain' this empirically at best dubious claim by adding an even stranger metaphysics.

MOR is also compatible with hedonism: the only variable a Millian hedonist targets is still pleasure. But to get any pleasure physical reality has it that one needs to engage *pleasures*, such as, for instance, reading books and drinking wine. Given limited opportunities of experience, one can't read all the books and drink all the wine one would wish to. Moreover, granting that books as well as wine are very variable in how much pleasure they yield, but also require very different sacrifice of other pleasures (good books may take more time or effort to read than bad ones, good wines may take more money to buy than bad ones, etc.) the quality of pleasures tends to be inversely related to the quantity of them one has the capacities to enjoy. Put simply, quality and quantity of achievable pleasures tend to come into conflict with each other. It is rather easy to obtain many low-quality pleasures, but it is rather hard to obtain any high-quality pleasures. The hedonistically optimal choice, however, is simply the one that combines quantity of both books and wine as well as quality of both books and wine in a way which yields the highest achievable amount of pleasure overall. Mill merely emphasises the fact that the pleasures of our higher faculties need to be cultivated to achieve this optimum, and that there is good evidence that people who can be expected to be competent judges actually do so.

## 5. Is 'Quality' Redundant?

5.1. But then, isn't Mill's quality/quantity distinction redundant after all? First, it is analogously arguable whether our well-entrenched usual notion of 'quality' might not ultimately be 'redundant'. This needn't be problematic – maybe it is often rather desirable to have several ways of saying the same thing. So even if it might seem that, in the abstract, any assertion about 'quality' should always be analysable into an assertion about a list of factors determining this quality, in practice this might be impossible or

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<sup>19</sup> Or *would* give more pleasure in the ideal scenario in which you could afford it.

too tedious.<sup>20</sup> The claim that Toyotas are, *as a kind*, that is, generically, of higher quality than Hyundais is as helpful and informative in ordinary evaluative discourse, and can be tested in roughly the same way, as is the claim that mental pleasures are of higher quality than bodily ones. Not every higher pleasure need be superior to every quantity of lower ones everywhere and anytime, but by and large they are.

5.2. Secondly it should be noted that such a redundancy would be a less severe problem for Mill than is often thought, if a problem at all. Mill puts much less weight on the concept of ‘quality’ than is typically made out. He talks about ‘quality’ nowhere but in a few paragraphs in *Utilitarianism* (and in one completely isolated sentence in his voluminous diaries) and repeatedly labels the allegedly deeply revisionist *Utilitarianism* a “little work”.<sup>21</sup> There is no evidence *at all* in Mill’s writings that Mill pursued some grand project with this distinction.<sup>22</sup> There is no need for it either – everything he says anywhere about ‘higher pleasures’ is explicable in terms of his entirely uncontroversial empirical ‘theory of life’ that the pleasures of our ‘higher faculties’ are a very important ingredient of human happiness.

5.3. Finally it is worth mentioning that even if ‘quality’ was ultimately redundant, it would nonetheless not be reducible to ‘quantity’ in the sense discussed here – how much pleasure an object produces is obviously not reducible to how many such objects there are. However, the quality of a pleasure *is* determined by how much pleasure it produces, and so the ultimate choice between pleasures available in different quantities and qualities is a choice between the pleasure each of the set of pleasures yields. But this is as it should be, if Mill was a consistent hedonist.

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<sup>20</sup> Just imagine the salesman telling you that, *ceteris paribus*, Toyotas are of higher quality than Hyundais because they are built more solidly, from aluminium not steel, hence have a better protection against corrosion, also a more intelligent injection, anyway lower fuel consumption, moreover a better suspension...

The language of ‘quality’ is obviously not as prevalent in talk about pleasures. But the analogy is straightforward. For instance, your parents might want to argue that to play basketball is a more valuable pleasure than to play Nintendo games because it improves physical fitness, teaches you how to behave in a social setting of strict rules, encourages a spirit of social cooperation, while Nintendo, though fun, merely enhances hand-eye coordination.

<sup>21</sup> (I, p. 226), and entry of March 23, 1854 (XXVII, p. 663). Similarly elsewhere.

<sup>22</sup> I discuss how Mill’s utilitarianism relates to Bentham’s in my doctoral dissertation (Schmidt-Petri [2005]).

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