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"The Way of Good Men"
Thoughts from John Stuart Mill

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in English

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Contents

Title page 1
Table of contents ii
Abstract iii
Introduction 1
"When there is no guidance, a people falls" 3
"Train up a child" 10
"Incline your ear" 14
"By wisdom a house is built" 22
"Yes, if you cry out for insight" 29
"But in thinking be mature" 32
"For by wise guidance you can wage your war" 42
List of Works Cited 52
Biblical Passages Cited 54
Abstract

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One of the seminal minds of the nineteenth century was the great English philosopher John Stuart Mill. Perhaps better than any other man of his age, Mill understood that the democratic form of government was fragile.

He wrote at length on the value of the individual to government, as the repository for fresh thinking and progressive ideas. Mill found that repression of free thought by government, or by interest-based groups in society, held the seeds of destruction for democracy. His ideas are discussed here, with reference to the role that the interrelationships between society and government play in the viability of a twentieth century democracy.

In addition, Mill was the subject of an unusual and concentrated form of education. His ideas about curriculum and motivations for
teaching are discussed in a way which permits us to apply them to
the development of people differently equipped to deal with modern
society.
Introduction

"Let not any one pacify his conscience by the delusion that he can do no harm if he takes no part, forms no opinion. Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing."¹ Thus spoke John Stuart Mill in his inaugural address at St. Andrews College over one hundred years ago.

Today, as then, his statement raises many questions. Who are the "good men" in society: what are their values? How can those who would participate determine the correct moral, social and educational direction for their society? And how do we educate people to fit them to do other than "look on" in the hopeless paralysis of inaction?

It would seem reasonable to turn to the works of Mill himself in an attempt to answer these questions. John Stuart Mill was one of the seminal minds of the nineteenth century, and his radical philosophy contributed greatly to restructuring the government of Victorian England. Our purpose here is to examine his philosophy in the hope of shedding some light on the problems of our own twentieth century democratic society.

However, before we accept any man's thoughts as a basis for our own, we should look with interest on those factors which qualify him to offer advice, the education he has, the temper of his times and the other influences which honed his mind. We begin with a look at the era in which he lived.
"When there is no guidance, a people falls"

John Mill was born in 1806, during a time of ferment in England. Three of the factors which have the ability to effect changes in society had coalesced: the movement of money, the development of machinery, and the strength of religious faith.

Early in the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution had reached adolescence, and had done what no other institution could do: it had created, in a short space of time, two entirely new classes in English society.

The first was the upper middle class; enterprising, industrious and intelligent men from every walk of life. Vast quantities of money had shifted into the hands of this class, and with the shift of money, came the potential for a shift in power. The second class created by the industrial revolution, with the aid of the manufacturers, was the urban poor. There had always been poor people in England, as elsewhere, but most were little-noticed agricultural workers, cared for by their local Church parish and the aristocracy whose lands they worked. The urban poor were a more difficult problem. For the most part they lived under execrable conditions, tightly packed into inadequate hovels close to the factories. The large population caused a strain on already inadequate water supplies, almost
nonexistent sewage systems and irregular food supplies. Disease ran rampant, but the death rate was more than balanced by the rapidly rising birth rate. Between 1800 and 1851 the population of Great Britain doubled. The urban poor, however, complained little, so long as they and their children were employed.

The problems lay in the uneven technology of the industrial revolution, and the still uncertain state of the science of economics. While irregular progress in industrial technology was tolerable because individual industries could manage the blending of machine and craft labor from within, a more serious problem for all industries was that of transportation of agricultural products, raw materials and finished goods. A system of canals built in the last decades of the eighteenth century were an improvement over the old and uncertain roads. Nonetheless, they were slow, and nonexistent when frozen. The building of railways depended upon persuading Parliament to pass a private Act for the purpose, finding private capital, overriding the opposition of canal and coaching companies, and persuading the populace that they would neither be killed nor have their


morals destroyed by the noisy beasts. It was not until after 1830 that much progress was made in solving both the technological and social problems related to railway building. 4

Clearly, then, the problems of supply and demand were beyond the power of either manufacturers or economists in the first third of the century. The result was alternate cycles of market glut and scarcity: problems exacerbated by the world economic situation and the close restrictions of the mercantile system. If manufacturers suffered under this system, the urban poor were the first recipients of the results of manufacturing distress. During periods of market glut they were simply fired. Unable to turn elsewhere to make a living, made mock of by inadequate Poor Laws, permitted no bargaining power or other recourse to group action by the repressive Combination Laws of 1799 and 1800, 5 these people became restive. The predictable result was a frustration which found outlet in the machine-breaking riots, at their peak between 1811 and 1813. 6

These sad victims of industrialization did not remain without a voice for long. The name applied to various protest groups was Chartism, so called from the original Charter drawn up in 1838 by


6 Webb, p. 146.
two respectable, self-educated, serious-minded radical workingmen, William Lovett and Francis Place. Their institutional source of support was the London Working Men's Association, founded in 1836.

"The People's Charter" was a bill for reform and demanded:

1. universal manhood suffrage, 2. annual elections, 3. the secret ballot, 4. equal electoral districts, 5. abolition of the property qualification for membership in the House of Commons, 6. payment of members of Parliament. The Charter had great appeal for intelligent and influential workingmen. But it also had great appeal for less respectable malcontents who were easily mobilized by those who thought that physical violence was the answer to industrial problems, among them, Feargus O'Connor. By himself, O'Connor did much to weld diverse currents of provincial working-class discontent into a movement. But he had no real attainable end, and his rhetoric was cloudy and dangerous. Moreover, when times became a bit better, the excited crowds soon reverted to apathy. The real goals of the Charter, which seem so reasonable today, and so radical then, would wait until the last quarter of the century to be entirely accomplished.\(^7\)

If a movement can be judged by the amount of thought or rhetoric it provokes, Chartism was a success. For almost forty years, the goals of the Charter were part of the discussion of reform.

in England, and such famous men as Carlyle took the goals of the movement and the need of the people seriously enough to write at length about them.

A society which embodied so many elements of tension was due for change. Fortunately, for Britain, her people were, by nature, amenable to compromise, and there was much that could be done without violence. The upper middle classes saw clearly that money was the key to power. They bought country estates, as land was the criterion for representation in the House of Commons, educated their sons at the best public (i.e. private) schools, and gave their daughters dowries large enough to permit them to marry aristocrats. The result was that many manufacturers could enter the House of Commons and have at least indirect influence on the legislation affecting their business lives, and their sons could enter the political arena as often influential civil servants. This was especially important, as Parliamentary representation was grossly uneven, apportionment into boroughs having been made years before industrial development.

While it is a fact that neither the interests of the upper middle class nor the urban poor had adequate representation, it is also true that Parliament still represented interests and ideas, not individuals. Moreover, it was also necessary to win the favor of the House of Commons if funds were needed for a public Bill, since
Commons then, as now, controlled the nation's purse. There were many who felt the serious need for change, but unless a majority in Parliament saw the need for change, none would occur.

However, moral suasion is probably one of the strongest forces in the world to make us see a need for anything. In England, it was religious sentiment which produced the bulwark of moral force, and it came from two directions. The first, and most influential, was the Evangelical movement within the Church of England. It was a movement that had begun in the mid-eighteenth century, and its emphasis was on "the sense of sin, the weakness of man without God, the experience of conversion, and dedication to service." For our purposes, the last is most important, because Evangelical churchmen were both wealthy and active in social reform.8

Unlike the Evangelical sects which remained a part of both Church and State, the Dissenting congregations—primarily Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists—were prevented by law from attending the universities, holding municipal office or holding office under the Crown. While Dissenters provided educational academies of their own, and often found ways to circumvent the other restrictions,9 the prejudice, along with the laws, remained until late

in the nineteenth century. However, their belief in education, hard work, and personal responsibility made them respected members of the middle and working classes.

The final ingredient giving impetus to change in England came from abroad. It was the catalyst of fear. The revolutions in France were entirely too close to ignore, as were the French expatriates living in England. The guillotine in France forced Parliament to remember that the middle and lower classes could form a force strong enough to cause the loss of both heads and government. Until the revolution in France, English memories seemed conveniently short, as Charles I had been beheaded in the mid-seventeenth century. The government of Britain sometimes fell prey to temptation by passing repressive laws, especially against the press, but it was equally true that, as men of expedience and experience, they were willing to compromise.

To the credit of the British Parliament, many of its members were willing to listen to new ideas. Since there were nearly as many men with solutions to the problems besetting Britain, as there were problems, the respectable newspapers and journals became influential instruments for the presentation and criticism of ideas.

It was the development of ideas that interested John Stuart Mill throughout his lifetime. To understand why this is so, we must turn back to his early years and education.
"Train up a child"

Young John Mill's education was entirely a product of his father's beliefs and ideals. James Mill, John's father, was well-educated, but not a wealthy man. Moreover, he had grand plans for his son's future, and enough faith in his own theories of education so that he felt only he could secure the mind of his eldest son. In his biography of John Stuart Mill, Packe outlines James Mill's theory thus:

"... all minds started as much alike as all stomachs or all hands or any other physical organs. They were all blank sheets, forced to record every experience which the senses introduced to them; and, in the event of a repeated sequence of experiences, to recall the order in which they came about, so that the last events in the sequence could be predicted from the first with such certainty that they could be said to have been caused by them. Thus, minds differed only in so far as they recorded different chains of experiences, and from them formed different habits of association... Whoever had the power to regulate the sequence and the strength of the experiences which flowed in upon a young mind, decided the habits of association it would form, and to that extent determined both the character and the ability of the later man." 10

Along with his friend and closet philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, (a man whom he and John were to make famous in later years) James

Mill believed that the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain ruled men's actions. Therefore, it was necessary to insist in education that consequences were as they would be generally throughout life. "Painful or restrictive punishments were to be avoided whenever they would attribute to an action consequences which did not prove to be inevitably connected with it." Finally, and of equal importance, he believed "it was necessary on the intellectual side to prevent a child from cluttering its youthful brain with idle emotions, dreams or recreations. It should be tied down to the strict development of its faculties: anything which did not assist the main course of character and reason would only cloud the vision and dissipate the clarity of mind." 11

James Mill was as good as his word. His son records in his Autobiography that he had "no remembrance of the time when I began to learn Greek. I have been told that it was when I was three years old" 12 In addition, he was taught arithmetic. But his memory that he read history books on his own and discussed what he had read with his father during long daily walks is more important. It was then that James Mill used, "as opportunity offered, to give me explanations and ideas respecting civilization, government, morality, mental

11 Packe, pp. 15-16.

cultivation, which he required me afterwards to restate to him in my own words."\textsuperscript{13} Clearly, his father was shaping the boy's mind as he had promised.

By the age of eight, John Mill began the study of Latin in conjunction with a younger sister. John was required to teach his sister and the other youngsters of the family what he had learned and he notes: ... "a considerable part of my day's work consisted of this preparatory teaching. It was a part which I greatly disliked; the more so, as I was held responsible for the lessons of my pupils, in almost as full a sense as for my own: I however derived from this discipline the great advantage of learning more thoroughly and retaining more lastingly the things which I was set to teach..."\textsuperscript{14}

Packe, in his biography, takes John Mill to task for failing to appreciate that the teaching of younger children was an effective means of leadership training, and the only means the elder Mill had of imparting a decent education to his burgeoning brood. What Packe fails to perceive is that the sense of being "responsible for" the lessons of others, not simply teaching, is a tremendous burden to any child. Under a man who was a perfectionist, noted for punishment by use of a sharp tongue, it must have been an almost insur-

\textsuperscript{13} Mill, \textit{Autobiography}, pp. 6-7.

\textsuperscript{14} Mill, \textit{Autobiography}, p. 8.
mountable task.\(^{15}\)

By the time John Mill was sixteen years of age he had learned the Greek language and literature, Latin, Euclid, Aristotle, algebra, Scholastic logic, and political economy. Throughout, he was required to "understand the feel and utility of them," and to dissect bad arguments, "finding in what part the fallacy lay."\(^{16}\) In short, the young Mill's father taught him every possible intellectual skill including those of argumentation and oration before an age when most young people even begin to consider their intellectual capacities.

\(^{15}\) Packe, p. 24.

"Incline your ear"

Small wonder then, that John Mill noted in his address at St. Andrews:

I am amazed at the limited conception which many educational reformers have formed to themselves of a human being's power of acquisition .... I should prefer to see these reformers pointing their attacks against the shameful inefficiency of the schools, public and private .... I should like to hear them denounce the wretched methods of teaching, and the criminal idleness and supineness, which waste the entire boyhood of the pupils without really giving to most of them more than a smattering, if even that, of the only kind of knowledge which is even pretended to be cared for. Let us try what conscientious and intelligent teaching can do, before we presume to decide what cannot be done." 17

If Mill's words sound familiar to today's ears, it is not surprising. The battle raging in the nineteenth century differs only a little from that which rages in our own day. The argument, in the nineteenth century, was complicated by the religious point of view. If the Evangelical and Dissenting Sects can be said to have done any harm to England, it was surely in the area of education. By early in the nineteenth century both groups had recognized the real need to educate even the children of the poor in the rudiments of reading and writing. Two voluntary bodies -- the National Society for Promoting

the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, and the British and Foreign School Society (largely Dissenters) emerged early in the century. Both groups used the monitorial system, so effective in the Mill home, but hardly so in a situation where children worked, and attended school only sporadically. More important, the mutual suspicion of the Anglicans and Dissenters was to hamper educational reform for the rest of the century. 18

At higher than elementary levels, thoughtful men questioned the value of science versus belles lettres. As with so many arguments today, serious men like Matthew Arnold and Thomas Huxley agreed, when we read them carefully, in principle, but disagreed on the details. 19

When we look at the overview that comes from men with great foresight, we find very similar views in both centuries on the purpose of education. Moreover, Mill defines education before he defines its purposes saying:

Education ... is one of the subjects which most essentially require to be considered by various minds, and from a variety of points of view. For, of all many-sided subjects, it is the one which has the greatest number of sides. Not only does it include whatever we do for the express pur-


pose of bringing us somewhat nearer to the perfection of our nature; it does more: in its largest acceptation, it comprehends even the indirect effects produced on character and on the human faculties, by things of which the direct purposes are quite different; by forms of government, by the industrial arts, by modes of social life; nay, even by physical facts not dependent on human will: by climate, soil, and local position. Whatever helps to shape the human being—to make the individual what he is or hinder him from being what he is not—is part of his education. 20

Today we would say that Mill includes social environment as part of education, but the subject is far from dismissed. The paralysis of being unwilling, or unable to do anything about social factors as part of total education leads to a heart-clutching violence which many intelligent people are going to be forced to face in the near future. Georgie Anne Geyer, speaking in the Los Angeles Times, addresses herself to the problem of neighborhoods where black ghetto-youth gangs deliberately, and with malice, systematically rob and beat and kill elderly members of any race forced to remain in the deteriorating neighborhood. Unable to escape, the elderly sometimes commit suicide, rather than to submit to certain brutalization.

Ms. Geyer comments:

What is eerie is that, once apprehended, the boys are utterly without feeling—of right or wrong, of guilt or innocence. Almost without exception, they say "Take me to jail and quit the bullshit." .... At the moment, there still hangs over the country a mood of paralysis regarding these growing pockets of horror in our nat-

20 Mill, "Inaugural Address," pp. 311-12.
But more important is the long run. The country can develop some coherent social policies, which every other civilized country in the world has done, with intensive, state-supported child care to provide the missing moral training for children in these situations.

Most important, as a base for this, we might also come to a more realistic appraisal of human nature, realizing that human character is always formed, whether deliberately or accidentally, by external forces, and that every society has not only the right but the duty to see that it is formed in humanly and socially desirable ways. 21

The moral education of which Ms. Geyer speaks is a subject Mill touches upon often in his writing. He addresses himself to the problem of adults whose behavior causes mischief, but little actual harm to society—far simpler than the violence aforementioned—and has this to say:

I cannot consent to argue the point as if society had no means of bringing its weaker members up to its ordinary standard of rational conduct, except waiting till they do something irrational, and then punishing them legally or morally, for it. Society has had absolute power over them during all the early portion of their existence; it has had the whole period of childhood and nonage in which to try whether it could make them capable of rational conduct in life. The existing generation is master both of the training and the entire circumstances of the generation to come; it cannot indeed make them perfectly wise and good, because it is itself so lamentably deficient in goodness and wisdom; and its best efforts are not always, in individual cases, its most successful ones; but it is perfectly well able to make the rising generation, as a whole, as good as, and a little better than, itself. If society lets any considerable number of its members grow up mere children, incapable of being acted on by

rational consideration of distant motives, society has itself to blame for the consequences. 22

And in separating out what is harmful, not just inconvenient, to society Mill comments tartly: "The only things it is sought to prevent are things which have been tried and condemned from the beginning of the world until now; things which experience has shown not to be useful or suitable to any person's individuality. There must be some length of time and amount of experience, after which a moral or prudential truth may be regarded as established: and it is merely desired to prevent generation after generation from falling over the same precipice which has been fatal to their predecessors."23

In his deep concern for individual liberty, Mill never loses sight of the fact that individuals have duties as sacred as their personal liberties. In speaking of family obligations he says: "It still remains unrecognized, that to bring a child into existence without a fair prospect of being able, not only to provide food for its body, but instruction and training for its mind, is a moral crime, both against the unfortunate offspring and against society; and that if the parent does not fulfill this obligation, the State ought to see it fulfilled at the charge, as far as possible, of the parent." And in the same discus-


sion: "It is in the case of children, that misapplied notions of liberty are a real obstacle to the fulfillment by the State of its duties. One would think that a man's children were supposed to be literally, and not metaphorically, a part of himself, so jealous is opinion of the smallest interference of law with his absolute and exclusive control over them ..."\(^\text{24}\)

While it is perfectly true today that the State requires that children receive a minimal education, it is also true that much of middle-class America does not care to recognize the fact that many children from poverty-level homes arrive at school age already emotionally or physically brutalized. Except in cases of near death, we have the same problem of public and legal opinion against interference.

Lest we doubt the reality of that statement it would be well to turn to a recent article in the Los Angeles Times. Titled "Facing Horror of Child Abuse With Action," it is an interview with psychologist Dr. Kerby Alvy, who founded a Center for the Improvement of Child Caring in Los Angeles. The statistics alone are sad enough: "Somewhere between one and four million children under age eighteen are physically abused, neglected or sexually molested each year in the United States; according to the Los Angeles Coroner's Office, 

death due to abuse and neglect of children up to ten increased 100% in 1973; another 50% in 1974." But these are only part of the point. Dr. Alvy comments at length on the problem, and at the heart of his argument is the price society pays for neglect.

And the kids who are abused pay us back in some way. We pay dearly. People don't think about that. Children suffer brain damage and become mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed. Our tax money has to take care of them.

Or they become delinquents, drug users, criminals, alcoholics. Almost all of our assassins have a history of being abused as kids. As we learn more about the characteristics of rapists, there are indications a good number of them were sexually abused as children.

And the cycle continues; there is a pretty good likelihood that if a child was abused, when he becomes a parent, he will abuse his children.

We make a terrible mistake. We think children are the property of their parents. They are not. They are in the care of their parents at this time. But how they are reared concerns us all.

We are, at least, willing to look at the need in the twentieth century. As Dr. Alvy says: "We are a reactive society. We react to problems when they come to our attention. We don't focus on prevention." 25

It is, however, public education which is most visible, and therefore is the sphere of greatest concern for society. Precisely what function the educational institution can or cannot fill with regard to moral education Mill makes clear:

Moral and religious education consists in training the feelings and the daily habits; and these are, in the main, beyond the sphere and inaccessible to the control of public education. It is the home, the family, which gives us the moral or religious education we really receive; and that is completed, and modified, sometimes for the better, often for the worse, by society, and the opinions and feelings with which we are there surrounded. The moral or religious influence which a University can exercise, consists less in any express teaching; than in the pervading tone of the place. Whatever it teaches, it should teach as penetrated by a sense of duty; it should present all knowledge as chiefly a means to worthiness of life, given for the double purpose of making each of us practically useful to his fellow-creature, and of elevating the character of the species itself; exalting and dignifying our nature. There is nothing which spreads more contagiously from teacher to pupil than elevation of sentiment: often and often have students caught from the living influence of a professor a contempt for mean and selfish objects, and a noble ambition to leave the world better than they found it, which they have carried with them throughout life."

"By wisdom a house is built"

Aside from basic beliefs and ideals which would seem to be imparted early in life and derive from sources other than formal educational institutions, we have still the question of what to teach. One might suppose that, having decided it is desirable to teach both letters and sciences in the twentieth century, we would not argue so fiercely over curriculum. The reverse seems to be the case.

As our fund of technical and sociological information increases, the number of arguments about how to arrive at the goal of fitting students to participate in life increases in proportion. From the State School Superintendent to the student in elementary school, we find as many opinions as peer groups. In the resulting confusion, we seem to have tried a few experiments, observed a proliferation of administrators, spent a great deal of tax money and, so far, have produced students no more capable of coping with society than their predecessors. It is not for lack of caring. As a society, our goals are so diverse that we have difficulty arriving at a common opinion of the value and function of education. A reader need only look at the morning paper, or listen to a news broadcast for a few weeks, to see the extent to which our society anguishes over education.
In an article entitled "What Decline in Education?" Nancy Reeves expounds at length on the value of technical education for today's world saying: ... "erudition as we once knew it can no longer be the real object of education in the university. Rather the production of experts for the knowledge industry and of specialized technicians for other industries has become its main function. Yet our educational system, in the main, denies all this ..." 27 And on the same page, Philip Holmes asks, "Anyway, Why English Proficiency in a Non-English Land?" He points out that "two-thirds of the white population came from homes where English either was not the mother tongue or had not been so for more than two generations," and goes on to contend that unless we recognize that we do not have, as a nation, a linguistic tradition, we shall not be able to put "pressure on political and educational leaders to institute bold programs to improve student writing." 28

Only days later there is a lengthy article about Howard Miller who, sporting a liberal debating image, obtained an appointment to fill a vacancy on the School Board. Once there, however, he became a radical (in the sense of getting back to root values) and has


asked how and why about everything, insisting on more than vague answers. Worse, he had the effrontery to say: "The irony today is the public has a better understanding of what education should be than the people who are running the system."29

Three days later there is another article saying that the School Board will, under Mr. Miller's relentless probing, conduct a study to determine why there is "evidence of declining academic achievement in public and private schools" ... It was noted that Miller sought to have "mathematics, science and social studies courses" restored to the curriculum, as well as some English classes.30 And, finally, within the space of that same week, the aggrieved voice of a Dr. Martin came across the airwaves telling us, as chairman of a U.S. Office of Education study on High School reform, that our schools are overloaded with courses of social pathology which take the place of intellectual education. Our resources, he said are diluted by courses in social education. 31

Again, there is no consensus among these people, because they have not seriously looked at the purpose and principles of edu-


31 KNX Radio, Nov. 8, 1976.
cating people. We can not know what the means to an end should be, if we do not know what end it is we seek.

Perhaps it would help to turn to the principles of the past, to help us understand how we should teach the subjects we do choose to teach. In doing so, this reader is going to assume, along with Mill, that it is necessary to stimulate the mind to accurate reasoning, as well as expression and communication, in order to produce capable people. With this in mind we can think carefully on words which are probably startling in this generation, so far have we come from classical education.

Human invention has never produced anything so valuable, in the way both of stimulation and of discipline to the inquiring intellect, as the Dialectics of the ancients, of which many of the works of Aristotle illustrate the theory, and those of Plato exhibit the practice. No modern writings come near to these, in teaching, both by precept and example, the way to investigate truth, on those subjects, so vastly important to us, which remain matters of controversy, from the difficulty or impossibility of bringing them to a directly experimental test. To question all things; never to turn away from any difficulty; to accept no doctrine either from ourselves or from other people without a rigid scrutiny by negative criticism, letting no fallacy, or incoherence, or confusion of thought, slip by unperceived; above all, to insist upon having the meaning of a word clearly understood before using it, and the meaning of a proposition before assenting to it; these are the lessons we learn from the ancient dialecticians. 32

In pursuit of those mental skills needed to develop the intellect to a state of clear reasoning, Mill defends the teaching of classical

literature as a means of developing the "art of expression," physical sciences for the "art of thinking," mathematics, along with is applied sciences, as the "most complete example of the discovery of truths by reasoning," and "experimental science for the discovery of "truth by direct observation."

He goes on to point out that the study of "Logic is the great dispenser of hazy and confused thinking: it clears up the fogs which hide from us our own ignorance, and make us believe that we understand a subject when we do not."

Because we are not isolated in this world Mill points out the advantages of studying other cultivated languages and adds:

... there is a further consideration equally important. Without knowing the language of a people, we never really know their thoughts, their feelings, and their type of character: and unless we do possess this knowledge, of some other people than ourselves, we remain, to the hour of our death, with our intellects only half expanded .... Improvement consists in bringing our opinions into nearer agreement with facts; and we shall not be likely to do this while we look at facts only through glasses colored by those very opinions. But since we cannot divest ourselves of preconceived notions, there is no known means of eliminating their influence but by frequently using the differently colored glasses of other people: and those of other nations, as the most different, are the best.

In addition, Mill defends the teaching of Psychology saying:

"If there is anything that deserves to be studied by man, it is his own nature and that of his fellow-men; and if it is worth studying at all,

33 Mill, "Inaugural Address," p. 333.
it is worth studying scientifically, so as to reach the fundamental laws which underlie and govern all the rest."35

And to aid people as citizens in the field of ethics and politics, recognizing that historical institutions and civilizations are a part of the continuing chain of cause and effect, he recommends International Law, Political Economy and Jurisprudence, to better prepare all citizens to participate in government and to afford "a wide scope for the energies of any duly prepared mind, ambitious of contributing toward the better conditions of the human race."36

Mill upholds the fine arts as that which will train us "never to be completely satisfied with imperfection in what we ourselves do and are; to idealize, as much as possible, every work we do, and most of all, our own characters and lives."37 Finally, Mill speaks of teaching the controversial discipline of Metaphysics because "a system of education is not intended solely for the many, it has to kindle aspirations and aid the efforts of those who are destined to stand forth as thinkers above the multitude..."38

It should be of interest that Mill does not advise the teaching

38 Mill, "Inaugural Address," p. 344.
of history and geography beyond the elementary grades (except as the Philosophy of History and historical criticism) remarking: "Who ever really learned history and geography except by private reading? and what an utter failure a system of education must be, if it has not given a pupil a sufficient taste for reading to seek for himself those most attractive and easily intelligible of all kinds of knowledge!

Besides, such history and geography as can be taught in school exercise none of the faculties of the intelligence except the memory."

"Yes, if you cry out for insight"

With the last sentence Mill has given us our educational direction for this century, and it would be well to recapitulate, point by point. It should be clear by now that the habits of thought which lead to intelligent, reasoned opinion are necessarily developed over a period of years. If we are going to produce capable, participating citizens, it is not possible to wait until they reach the age of majority before permitting them to think independently. Moreover, to produce citizens with moral sensibility and an inquiring disciplined intellect, certain conditions must be met.

First, we must admit that the pre-school environment of a child is as important to his total potential development as the years of formal education. In those cases where parents do not care to provide a healthy, stimulating environment for their child (or in cases of physical or emotional abuse), we must be willing to provide alternative arrangements for the child. In itself, this problem may require sterner minds and more inventive solutions than we have demonstrated up until now.

Second, we must begin training children to believe that the things they do in this world do matter, and will continue to matter if this world is to be a better place. The naive idea that it is
unimportant whether or not we are personally responsible for our behavior leads to succeeding generations of public irresponsibility.

Third, we must recognize the fact that the public school system as it is presently constituted, at the primary and secondary levels (and often beyond) does not encourage reasoned thinking. As Mill aptly put it, the system "exercises none of the faculties of the intelligence except the memory." Almost universally, questioning and scrutiny of received ideas along with reasoned argumentation is discouraged. Our educators have indulged in the luxury of flinching with fear over hard questions and arguments. The result has been that students who can not cope with memorizing strings of facts, drop out early. They meet only humiliation, and find no one to encourage those capabilities they have. And on the other end of the scale, the very intelligent students become alienated. They know that a "put up or shut up" system of education is only making mock of their intelligence.

Those students remaining with the system become part of an increasingly computerized world, where their mathematical reasoning is done by pushing buttons, and the television commentator at home tells them what their social and political opinions ought to be. If all that has a faintly Orwellian 1984 sound to it, it should.

In our day as in Mill's, the necessity for serious social and political change remains. It is not a situation which is likely to
disappear. It should be abundantly clear that we owe the next generation something more than baby-sitting institutions if we are to produce people capable of both caring for themselves and offering to their society, not just emotional decisions, but those based on intelligent reason.
"But in thinking be mature"

One of the truly great gifts which comes with the ability to reason clearly, is that of being able, if we are willing, to see every facet of an issue or idea clearly, and to be able to glean those thoughts which are valuable to us, even if we disagree with the rest of a proposition. Mill knew this well. He discarded many ideas in his lifetime, as experience or extended knowledge caused him to re-examine his thoughts; for he understood that weakness lay in clinging to outworn and possible harmful ideas, rather than in having taken a position based on partial truths in the first place.

A superb example of this kind of thinking can be seen in Mill's examination of the philosophies of Bentham and Coleridge. These influential men were contemporaries whose approach to the governing of society appeared to be diametrically opposed, as Mill explains:

... to Bentham it was given to discern more particularly those truths with which existing doctrines and institutions were at variance; to Coleridge, the neglected truths which lay in them. 40

In every respect, the two men are each others "comple-

ing counterpart;" the strong points of each correspond to the weak points of the other. Whoever could master the premises and combine the methods of both would possess the entire English philosophy of his age. 41

The truths and values in the philosophies of both men which Mill brings to our attention, are amazingly current today. He brings up the principle conditions on which Coleridge observed that any stable government was founded.

First: a system of education for all citizens — except those slaves held down by brute force — with a main ingredient being a restraining force. The objective of such an education would be to train people to subordinate their will and impulses to the greater good of society.

This first principle is no less valid today than in Coleridge's day. A democratic society which is unable to persuade its citizens that they owe allegiance to it for the greater good, will forever be on the edge of anarchy, simply through lack of intelligent support.

Second: the existence of a feeling of allegiance or loyalty based on one of many varied things, but necessarily something settled, permanent and unquestioned such as a common God; a certain person; ancient liberties; principles of individual freedom and social and political equality. In every political society which has had a

durable existence, "there has been some fixed point; something which men agreed in holding sacred ... which, in short ... was, in the common estimation placed beyond discussion." Mill points out that while a State is never free from internal dissention, it is the unquestioned underlying internal principle of social union which enables a State to weather the storms of dissention. Moreover, when the underlying principle comes under continuous attack, the State approaches a position of Civil war.

If we give this second principle some thought, it goes a long way toward explaining why the multi-cultural, polyglot society of the United States shows such obvious dissension in recent years. As minority cultures feel less pressure to drop their native languages and become totally integrated into the old white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, there is a far greater tendency to retain old and conflicting values and beliefs.

In fact, among those minority persons who have felt themselves to be deliberately ill-treated, there has been a tendency to teach the younger generation an attitude of contempt for what many have felt to be unquestioned beliefs. Under most serious attack are the principles of loyalty to a government which, for many, seems unresponsive at best, and repressive at worst, and the long-cherished belief in equal opportunity which appears to have broken down at the points of national origin, gender and age.
While we have little open anarchy as yet, the time draws closer when we either will make good on those principles of government to which we give lip-service—responsiveness in all three branches—executive, legislative and judicial—and true equal opportunity for equal application of education and work, or we shall find ourselves faced with real anarchy. We may then find ourselves in a position of having to restructure a government based, at least in part, on principles which hold no sacred, unquestioned quality for a majority of our citizens.

Third: "a strong and active principle of cohesion among the members of the same community or State ..., a principle of sympathy, not of hostility; of union, not of separation. ... A feeling of common interest among those who live under the same government, and are contained within the same natural or historical boundaries... That one part of the community do not feel themselves as foreigners with regard to another part ..." 42

Unfortunately, it is true today that our minorities do not have a great feeling of cohesion with this society. It is a matter of some importance; for no amount of early socialization and humanistic training in the sacred precepts of a society will do any good, if, in the end, we deny people full participation in it. The reverse would

seem to be true, as intelligent people denied their value will form a backlash movement with which to lead others of a cultural minority away from the falsely professed principles of our State.

Mill goes on to discuss Coleridge's theory of constitution, quoting from his essay on "Church and State": "...the two antagonist powers or opposite interests of the State, under which all other State interests are comprised, are those of permanence and progression."43

The statement is, of course, so true that it contains elements of humor. Our basic conflicts in any democratic society are those of permanence and progression. Since Coleridge was a great conservative, it is especially interesting to look through Mill's eyes at his view of those things a government of permanence should do for the progress of its people. Mill begins by discussing the fact that Coleridge "is at issue with the let alone doctrine, or the theory that governments can do no better than to do nothing." He continues: "A State ought to be considered as a great benefit-society, or mutual-insurance company, for helping (under the necessary regulations for preventing abuse) that large proportion of its members who cannot help themselves." And quoting the "Second Lay Sermon" of Coleridge directly:

Let us suppose the negative ends of a State already attained —
namely, its own safety by means of its own strength, and the
protection of person and property for all its members; there
will remain positive ends —
1. To make the means of subsistence more easy to each
individual.
2. To secure to each of its members the hope of bettering
his own condition, or that of his children.
3. The development of those faculties which are essential to
his humanity; that is, to his rational and moral being.

Mill interprets Coleridge, with care, as follows:

In regard to the two former ends, he of course does not mean
that they can be accomplished merely by making laws to that
effect; or that, according to the wild doctrines now afloat, it
is the fault of government if every one has not enough to eat
and drink. But he means that government can do something
directly, and very much indirectly, to promote even the phys­
cical comfort of the people; and that, if, besides making a
proper use of its own powers, it would exert itself to teach the
people what is in theirs, indigence would soon disappear from
the face of the earth. 44

In modern times it has been customary to depict Coleridge as
espousing a very conservative, paternalistic, repressive, class­
structured State. Mill's careful reading of his works show this to
be far from the truth. In his application of intelligent perception to
Coleridge's philosophy, Mill shows us what we lose when we allow
others to do our thinking for us and tell us what our opinions of
another should be.

Mill applied the same method of critical perception to the
works of his friend and mentor, Jeremy Bentham, and came away with

equal parts of praise and blame. He is careful to show us Bentham's shortcomings as a philosopher, so that we understand the restrictions on the works, noting:

Human nature and human life are wide subjects and whoever would embark in an enterprise requiring a thorough knowledge of them has need both of large stores of his own, and of all aids and appliances from elsewhere. His qualifications for success will be proportional to two things, - the degree in which his own nature and circumstances furnish him with a correct and complete picture of man's nature and circumstances, and his capacity of deriving light from other minds.

Bentham failed in deriving light from other minds. His writings contain few traces of the accurate knowledge of any schools of thinking but his own; and many proofs of his conviction, that they could teach him nothing worth knowing. For some of the most illustrious of previous thinkers, his contempt was unmeasured. 45

Mill also cautions us that Bentham erred in "treating the moral view of actions and characters, which is unquestionably the first and most important mode of looking at them, as if it were the sole one; whereas it is only one of three." He adds: "Every human action has three aspects, - its moral aspect, or that of right and wrong; its aesthetic aspect, or that of its beauty; its sympathetic aspect, or that of its lovableness. The first addresses itself to our reason and conscience; the second, to our imagination; the third, to our human fellow - feeling." 46


Despite the shortcomings of Bentham's philosophy, Mill is able to pay tribute specifically to the power of a single individual, who, believing in the validity and need of his work, is able to change society for the better:

... The changes which have been made, and the greater changes which will be made, in our institutions, are not the work of philosophers, but of the interests and instincts of large portions of society recently grown into strength. But Bentham gave voice to those interests and instincts; until he spoke out, those who found our institutions unsuited to them did not dare to say so, did not dare consciously to think so; they had never heard the excellence of those institutions questioned by cultivated men, by men of acknowledged intellect; and it is not in the nature of uninstructed minds to resist the united authority of the instructed. Bentham broke the spell. 47

But Mill recognized the fear we all have of giving up the familiar, if unsatisfactory, institution for that which is new and untried, when he says: "All movements, except directly revolutionary ones, are headed, not by those who originate them, but by those who know best how to compromise between the old opinions and the new." 48

Beyond his capacity to question all received opinions, Mill found Bentham eminently fitted for his greatest work, reform of the legal system. He records that Bentham spent his entire lifetime in the attempt to reform the legal system, working against the super-


Mill comments that the English law had evolved into a mess, since it has been changed only in pieces and tatters since the days of the Roman Empire, adding that the philosophy of law allowed definition "in which every absurdity, every lucrative abuse, had a reason found for it, — a reason which only now and then even pretended to be drawn from expediency; most commonly a technical reason, one of mere form, derived from the old barbarous system—... The whole progress of a suit at law seemed like a series of contrivances for lawyers' profit, in which the suitors were regarded as the prey... 49

Mill says of Bentham: "He found the philosophy of law a chaos: he left it a science. He found the practice of law an Augean stable: he turned the river into it which is mining and sweeping away mound after mound of rubbish." 50

We may well read Mill's comments about the English law with a shudder. Since our legal system has descended from the same source, its customs of interpretation and landmark rulings lead us to the same cumbersome heap of rubbish in which the innocent often feel that they are the accused. We will, before many years, have to turn our own river of clear thinking to legal reform, and when we


do we would do well to observe Mill's caution that the developmental state of a civilization, along with the natural temperament and culture of a people need to be the determining factor with regard to the legal system under which they will live. 51

In speaking of the value and purpose of established institutions with regard to reform, Mill gives us a well-thought-out guideline:

... And reformers ought to hail the man as a brother-reformer who points out what this good is; what it is which we have a right to expect from things established; so that they may be recalled to it, and compelled to do it, or the impossibility of their any longer doing it may be conclusively manifested. What is any case of reform good for, until it has passed this test? What mode is there of determining whether a thing is fit to exist, without first considering what purposes it exists for, and whether it be still capable of fulfilling them? 52

"For by wise guidance you can wage your war"

Of all of our established institutions, government and its relationship to the governed probably held the deepest interest for Mill. He praised Bentham for "promoting one of the ideal qualities of a perfect government, — identity of interest between the trustees and the community for whom they hold their power in trust." Mill goes on to explain a useful phrase which Bentham apparently added to the vocabulary — 'interest begotten prejudice,' — as the common tendency of man to make a duty and a virtue of following his self-interest: "...It is selfish interest in the form of class-interest, and class-morality founded therein ... — the manner in which any set of persons who mix much together, and have a common interest, are apt to make that common interest their standard of virtue, and the social feelings of the members of the class are made to play into the hands of their selfish one; whence the union, so often exemplified in history, between the most heroic personal disinterestedness and the most odious class-selfishness."53

Years later, Mill was to tackle the thought again, in greatly expanded form, in his essay "On Liberty." If we value truth and creativity as aids to improving our society, we could keep in mind

some of the things Mill has to say about democratic society. He observes:

"There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence: and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs, as protection against political despotism."\(^{54}\)

Mill found the strictures of the collective majority to be both useful and repressive. He says:

'The tyranny of the majority' is now generally included among the evils against which society requires to be on its guard . . . Society is itself the tyrant--society collectively, over the separate individuals who compose it--its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries. Society can and does execute its own mandates: and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, thought not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself.

However, before going further, it should be noted that Mill found some of society's opinions and restraints necessary. He speaks at length on those obligations an individual has to the society in which he lives, and says in part: "The acts of an individual may be hurtful to others, or wanting in due consideration for their welfare, without going the length of violating any of their constituted

rights. The offender may then be justly punished by opinion, though not by law. As soon as any part of a person's conduct affects prejudicially the interests of others, society has jurisdiction over it, and the question whether the general welfare will or will not be promoted by interfering with it, becomes open to discussion. 55

In general, it is fair to say that Mill found society, collectively, more than able to care for itself, and its restrictions more than a little detrimental to development. He recognized early the threat to individual liberty when the people and the government are conjoined in opinion saying:

If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind. . . . But the particular evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error. 56

Mill reminds us that truth is far more vulnerable than is commonly believed remarking: "Men are not more zealous for truth than they often are for error, and a sufficient application of legal or


56 Mill, "On Liberty" pp. 204-5.
even of social penalties will generally succeed in stopping the propagation of either."

There are many who do not find the expression of opinion or the pursuit of truth as important as Mill. It may even be beside the point to remind such people that in past centuries mankind has silenced the opinions of men like Jesus Christ and Socrates by the penalty of death, and has had cause to regret the act. Beyond that, Mill reminds us: "Our merely social intolerance kills no one, roots out no opinions, but induces men to disguise them, or to abstain from any active effort for their diffusion. . . [It may be] A convenient plan for having peace in the intellectual world. . . But the price paid for this sort of intellectual pacification is the sacrifice of the entire moral courage of the human mind." He adds: "Freedom of thought is necessary to enable average human beings to attain the mental stature which they are capable of."  

There are many who would ask why it is necessary to be so concerned with developing the greatest mental abilities of all our citizens. The answer is that our government is formed in our own image, and responds as we demand in a democratic Republic. If we

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have no personal high standard of thought, moral and social behavior, we will have none in our government. Moreover, there is a problem which worried Mill and many other illustrious men in history, which is the tendency to develop a self-defeating mediocrity, because government by the many has a tendency to crush the thoughts of the individual. Mill states it succinctly:

No government by a democracy or a numerous aristocracy, either in its political acts or in the opinions, qualities, and the tone of mind which it fosters, ever did or could rise above mediocrity, except in so far as the sovereign. Many have let themselves be guided (which in their best times they always have done) by the counsels and influence of a more highly gifted and instructed One or Few. The initiation of all wise and noble things, comes or must come from individuals; generally at first from some one individual. The honor and glory of the average man is that he is capable of following that initiative; that he can respond internally to wise and noble things, and be led to them with his eyes open....

In this age the mere example of non-conformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric. Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigor, and moral courage which it contained. 60

If we doubt that collective mediocrity can lead to destructive forms of collective power, a recent note in Science should dispel those doubts. It concerns a speech given by Ralph Nader to the American Psychological Association (APA); and curiously enough was an idea that developed when a Nader investigative team found some unex-

pected things while doing a study on the Educational Testing Service in Princeton. Science says:

The initial aim of the study was to look at test bias and discern ways in which educational tests penalized or overlooked qualities such as drive, idealism, altruism, and creativity. But what they ended up being struck by was ETS's power to stigmatize students, give them warped or bloated self-images, determine who goes to college and, in effect, to allocate "millions of careers."

The study of institutions is the study of power, said Nader, and social scientists are afraid to get into such politically charged areas. Sociologists will study a small town or a mass movement, but they won't study institutions such as Exxon or the Pentagon. Anthropologists investigate tribal societies, but not the U.S. court system.

The failure of social scientists to apply their methodological approaches to institutional structures and pathologies, noted Nader, means that these structures continue to be taken for granted and society is expending enormous energies in palliating the destruction they wreak—environmental poisons, auto accidents, and so forth—instead of attacking the problem at its roots.

The article goes on to state that the problems we encounter with large organizations are in part technical, in part economic, but also and perhaps more basically a psychological problem of power. 61

Power, of course, has different values to various groups of human beings in any society. In an editorial by Philip H. Abelson, entitled "Communicating with the Publics," Science speaks of the difficulties encountered when scientists attempt to help the various "publics" understand and support the concept of basic research for

long-term help to all humanity. After pointing out that scientists "tend to be introverted and idealistic," and that they "are among the few members of society who engage in efforts they believe will have an enduring effect," the article continues:

Many of the publics which scientists would like to influence have quite different value systems. For example, consider the politicians. Most of the individuals drawn to politics are attracted to it because they are extroverts who interact easily with other people. Almost all the upper echelon politicians are intelligent, well-informed people. When they wish to, and that is most of the time, they can be completely charming. . . .

Necessarily, they devote much effort in striving to maintain and increase their power, and the quest for and exercise of power can come to dominate their actions. As do other humans, they value truth and understanding. However, in comparison to the quest for power, the search for truth is an also-ran. Moreover, politics usually leaves little time for long-term considerations. The future is limited to what happens in the next election. The scientist who wishes to be influential in Washington must understand the value system that prevails there. 62

Indeed, all of us must understand the value system which prevails among our politicians. If we want decisions made for the long-term benefit of the nation, we shall have to let our politicians know that those are the things we expect. This, of course, requires vigilance and intelligent communication, since our representatives are elected or rejected by those of us whose interests they represent. If we do not care to bother, our politicians will represent the interests

of whoever pays them most, in whatever currency is most valuable to them, power or legal tender.

In a later editorial Philip Abelson reviews the performance of the United States Congress with regard to the matter of future energy needs in the United States and abroad. His words, supported by a plethora of facts, are sharp:

All in all, the performance of the United States has been mediocre and its credibility in energy matters questionable. The highest government officials have made great promises to the world that have proved repeatedly to be only idle words. A conspicuous example was "Project Independence." In addition, there was talk of the impending collapse of the OPEC cartel, statements about the enormous amounts of oil to be discovered and produced by 1985, a goal of reducing oil imports by 1 million barrels per day (in the past year they have increased by more than that). Instead of working for conservation, Congress has encouraged consumption by rolling back the price of oil. 63

Clearly, we are going to have to give intelligent, informed interest along with carefully conceived opinions to the public forum. These times are no less fearsome than nineteenth century England, and it will require moral certitude and a real belief in our own constitution to hold out against the power of those who feel that government and big business can do no wrong. In the 1950's we had the frightening spectacle of the Senate committee and Senator McCarthy. "McCarthyism," with its hysterical sideshow atmosphere, wreaked

destruction on the careers of hundreds of innocent people: someone
testifying to the committee only needed to hint that a prominent per-
son had been seen at a Communist rally during his lifetime, to set in
motion the forces of social destruction. Today, we have secret sur-
veillance lists from the CIA and the FBI, and harrassment from the
Internal Revenue Service if we speak too sharply, or join the wrong
"liberal" organization.

We are being asked to pay an intelligent price if we value the
freedoms we have, and believe that all of our citizens are entitled to
them. On the other hand, we need only read Aleksander Solzhenitsyn's
The Gulag Archipelago to realize that there is a higher price to be
paid for apathy and indifference.

Perhaps we can find our direction for the future in these final
words from "On Liberty:"

A government cannot have too much of the kind of activity
which does not impede, but aids and stimulates, individual
exertion and development. The mischief begins when,
instead of calling forth the activity and powers of individuals
and bodies, it substitutes its own activity for theirs: when,
instead of informing, advising, and, upon occasion, de-
nouncing, it makes them work in fetters or bids them stand
aside and does their work instead of them. The worth of a
State, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals com-
posing it; and a State which postpones the interests of their
mental expansion and elevation, to a little more of admin-
istrative skill, or that semblance of it which practice gives,
in the details of business; a State which dwarfs its men, in
order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands
even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men
no great thing can really be accomplished; and that the per-
fection of machinery to which it has sacrificed everything,
will in the end avail it nothing, for want of the vital power
which, in order that the machine might work more smoothly,
it has preferred to banish. 64

List of Works Cited


Biblical Passages Cited: Revised Standard Version

Proverbs 2:3 Yes, if you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding

Proverbs 3:20 And you shall walk in the way of good men

Proverbs 11:14 Where there is no guidance, a people falls; but in abundance of counselors there is safety

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it

Proverbs 22:17 Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge

Proverbs 24:3 By wisdom a house is built and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches

Proverbs 24:6 For by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory

I Corinthians 14:20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature