MILL'S PHENOMENALISM AND WHY HE PREFERRED IT

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Abstract: *My aim in this paper is to argue that the depreciative historical image on Mill's empiricism is unjustified and biased, and that at least some of his theories and insights were still fresh and available as solutions to some philosophical problems in spite of the opposite public image claimed by his critics. I think that the strong rejection of a priori knowledge and his preference for a radical empiricism were turned into a straw man which is ready for an easy criticism. Mill's aim was to develop a radical empiricist theory regarding the sources of new knowledge following the so-called "new psychological way" based on the associationists principles. In the same time he balanced this woking hypothesis with the relativity of knowledge principle. As a result, he tried to solve this philosophical puzzle and to find a sort of empiricst theory able to avoid some historical weaknesses, such as idealism and skepticism. He developed a phenomenalist theory based on the odea of permanent possibilities of sensation which seem to be the most wanted form of empiricism.*

Keywords: *John Stuart Mill, radical empiricism, a priori knowledge, relativity of knowledge, permanent possibilities of sensation, phenomenalism.*

A happy introduction

Some of Mill's contemporaries attacked him conclusively, claiming that his philosophical theories could not be supported. The relations between him and Early Analytic Philosophy were bad from the beginning and Gottlob Frege, through the critique developed in *The Foundations of arithmetics*[2], seemed to put him definitively in a shadow cone. Other philosophers who criticized him, especially F. H. Bradley and James Ward, claimed that his entire philosophy, including his views on some epistemological and ontological issues, was dependent on his associationist psychology, a

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[2] See Frege, 1974. The titles of two paragraphs are suggestive for the content of Frege's strong delimitation from Mill: paragraph 7 states that "Mill's view that the definitions of the individual numbers assert observed facts, from which the calculations follow, is without foundation" and the paragraph 9 mentions the error that "In calling arithmetical truths laws of nature, Mill is confusing them with their applications".

theory which was already exceeded and outdated. Moreover, his theory of scientific inductive method is based on Bacon's framework of canons, an idea that leads to a systematization of science into a collection of inductions. Other philosophers thought that Mill's traditional education, given to him by his father, turned him into the previous century and modelled his mind to look backward. (Passmore, 1966, p. 13)

Moreover, in a letter of 1834 Mill recognized himself that he was extremely superficial, even an ignorant, in the domain of mathematical and experimental science, but, paradoxically, he admitted that his knowledge was sufficient to enabled him "to lay hold of the methods" and appropriate to himself "fully as much as any metaphysician has ever done, the logic of physical science." (Mill, 1963, p. 211) By comparison, his arch-rival Whewell had a more comprehensive knowledge of the sciences of his time and of the methods used by scientists in their research[3].

Russell's harsh judgement was that Mill's misfortune was to be born at the wrong time because he wasn't able to see the philosophical significance of symbolic logic: "Everything that Mill has to say in his *Logic* about matters other than inductive inference is perfunctory and conventional" (Russell, 1951, p. 2). It is without any doubt that Mill identified formal logic with the logic of syllogism. In his *History of Western Philosophy* Russell discusses about Mill in the chapter on utilitarianism, and only mentions him as a follower unable to comprehend the inherent difficulties of baconian view on the inductive method [4]. Russell was angry that Mill didn't used the techniques of formal logic, but, as I will argue in

[3] The controversy between Mill and Whewell on the method of science was rediscovered by E. W. Strong since the year 1955 and become a classical topic of the debates about induction as method and science as a source of new knowledge. See Strong, 1955.

[4] Russell's commentary is an explanatory one: "John Stuart Mill framed four canons of inductive method, which can be usefully employed so long as the law of causality is assumed; but this law itself, he had to confess, is to be accepted solely on the basis of induction by simple enumeration. The thing that is achieved by the theoretical organization of science is the collection of all subordinate inductions into a few that are very comprehensive – perhaps only one. Such comprehensive inductions are confirmed by so many instances that it is thought legitimate to accept, as regards them, an induction by simple enumeration. This situation is profoundly unsatisfactory, but neither Bacon nor any of his succesors have found a way out of it." (Russell, 1996, p. 500).

this paper, Mill didn't have this aim. Mill considers that Whately "rehabilitated the name of Logic, and the study of the forms, rules and fallacies of Ratiocination" (Mill, 1981, p. 231) and that Whately's book *Elements of Logic* was enough as a good description of that domain. Mill explicitly mentions at the beginning of his *Logic* that logic as a science of formal laws of truth is limited (Mill, 1974, p. 15) and he relates it with the pursuit of truth, with belief and disbelief.

My aim in this paper is to argue that this depreciative historical image is unjustified, based on preconceptions and that at least some of his thesis, theories and insights were real contributions to philosophical debates, and that they remained still fresh and available as solutions to some philosophical problems in spite of the opposite public image claimed by his critics. I think that it is possible to change the perspective and I agree with an appreciative historical approach following the one proposed by Scarre: "Mill possessed the ability to transcend the limitations of false or inadequate theories he had inherited from his predecessors, and to penetrate through them to major new insights." (Scarre, 1989, p. 3)

First of all, it is true that Mill's empiricism is an old fashioned one, inspired from Locke's and Berkeley's theories, but he developed the empiricist theory to its limits, taking it farther than any other philosopher. Second, it is also true that Mill used an associationist psychology but he put this old theory into a new theoretical framework and he related it with some new theoretical principles as it would be the relativity of knowledge principle and the very idea of phenomenalism as permanent possibilities of experience.

Mill's research programme started from the problem of new knowledge production and he developed in his *Logic* an answer to it based on a detailed analysis of induction. Thus we can understand how Mill develops a critique of a priori knowledge and propose a robust empiricist theory regarding the sources of knowledge. But an empiricist theory has its own vulnerabilities and Mill tried to avoid them. He also has taken into account the relativity of knowledge and he found in the phenomenalistic approach a way to escape from the metaphysical idealistic temptations. A *laudatio* for Mill's philosophy becomes necessary: "The truth is that J. S. Mill is the greatest philosopher to have attempted to develop an empiricist view of knowledge and reality to the point at which all rival conceptions are completely excluded from the field" (Scarre, 1989, p. 3)

Radical empiricism and the strong critique of *a priori* knowledge

Mill clearly express his philosophical option for a radical empiricist research programme in a letter to Theodor Gomperz written in the year 1854, where he mentions his goal to develop a theory which is able to place metaphysics and moral science "on a basis of analysed experience, in opposition to the theory of innate experience" (Mill, 1972, p. 239). In his *Autobiography* (Mill, 1981, p. 233) Mill mentions his fight with the defenders of *a priori* knowledge and asserts that he offered an explanation based on experience and association. Being a consistent and radical empiricist, going all the way, Mill breaks away from Locke in terms of evaluating the sources of mathematical knowledge. After Locke, mathematical knowledge is certain because it has as its source the infallible contemplation of mental archetypes, a theory which leads back to Plato and Descartes[5]. Mill dissolves Locke's ambiguity and develop a radical empiricism extended to all the forms of knowledge[6].

Mill's goal is a strong critique of the so called School of intuition, where the term "intuition" is synonymous with "a priori knowledge". He doesn't offer a conclusive rejection of *a priorism* as a whole, but, in his view, empiricism is an alternative more credible regarding at least the problem of sources of knowledge. Therefore, we could say that, on the one hand, empiricism is more credible than *a priorism*, and, on the other hand, that *a priorism* remains strange and mysterious. Moreover, *a priorism* cannot reject empiricism with the same force with empiricism is able to find an alternative. Mill's pure empiricism doesn't leave any room for intuition or something else: "We see no ground for believing that anything can be the object of our knowledge except our experience, and what can be inferred from experience by the analogies of experience itself; nor that there is any

[5] See Locke, Book IV, Chap. II, § 9: "It has been generally taken for granted, that Mathematicks alone are capable of demonstrative certainty; But to have such an agreement, as may intuitively be perceived, being, as I imagine, not the privilege of the Ideas of Number, Extension, and Figure alone, it may possibly be the want of due method, and application in us; and not of sufficient evidence in things, that Demonstration has been thought to have so little to do in other parts of Knowledge, and been scarce so much as aim'd at by any but Mathematicians". (Locke, 1975, p. 534).

[6] Some contemporary philosophers, such as Philip Kitcher (Kitcher, 1998) and Crispin Wright (Wright, 2004), developed millian thesis that logical laws and basic arithmetic aren't a priori but part of our empirical knowledge.

idea, feeling, or power in the human mind, which, in order to account for it, requires that its origin should be referred to any other source." (Mill, 1969, pp. 128-129)

In his essay about Coleridge Mill described himself as a follower of empiricist tradition in theory of knowledge, from Aristotle to Locke, claiming that "all knowledge consists of generalizations from experience. Of nature, or anything whatever external to ourselves, we know, according to this theory, nothing, except the facts which present themselves to our senses, and such other facts as may, by analogy, be inferred from these. There is no knowledge a priori, no truths cognizable by the mind's inward light, and grounded on intuitive evidence. Sensation, and the mind's consciousness of its own acts, are not only the exclusive sources, but the sole materials of our knowledge." (Mill, 1969, p. 125). In the same essay on Coleridge is described the domain of *a priori* knowledge as it was postulated by some philosophers: "the fundamental doctrines of religion and morals, the principles of mathematics, and the ultimate laws even of physical nature." (Mill, 1969, p. 125).

Mill's divergence from *a priorism* is contained in his thesis about the two modes in which knowledge is attained. In *A System of Logic* Mill expressed his idea that "Truths are known to us in two ways: some are known directly, and on themselves; some through the medium of other truths. The former are the subject of Intuition, or Consciousness; the latter, of Inference" (Mill, 1974, p. 6). "Intuition" means here, in Mill's vocabulary, nothing that sensation and not an a priori faculty or apprehension. The *a priori* knowledge isn't possible as an activity of pure consciousness because without sensations the goal of knowledge isn't attained.

Mill claimed that *a priorism* is untenable in Metaphysics, which is focused on to identifies "what part of the furniture of the mind belongs to it originally, and what part is constructed out of materials furnished to it from without" (Mill, 1974, p. 8) and also in Logic, which deals with the conditions of valid inference Logic has nothing to do with the so called "evidence of consciousness" (Mill, 1974, p. 8). The knowledge of our sensations is the only our immediate knowledge. All the other forms of propositional knowledge are derived by inference from sensorial basic knowledge. Mill develop a strong version of empiricism, a radical foundationalist theory of justification, and he thinks that empiricism is able to explain the production of new knowledge.

But is there any place for Mill's *Logic* in this debate which guided him towards a radical empiricism? As surprising as it may seem we could say that Mill's theoretical aim which was explicitly assumed in his *Logic* was to develop a theory about how new knowledge is possible by experience, and not just an epistemological explanation about how empirical data are acquired, selected, processed and used by mind. Mill continues his critique of *a priorism* in Book II of his *Logic* about the experiential basis of mathematical propositions and later in his book about Hamilton who, in Mill's view, accepted that we may know the properties of a thing by *a priori* demonstration[7].

In his *Logic*, Chapter V of Book II, entitled "Of Demonstration, and Necessary Truths", contains an analysis of the idea that some of the principles of geometry that are axioms are not hypothetical, but experimental truth: "What is the ground of our belief in axioms – what is the evidence on which they rest? I answer, they are experimental truths; generalizations from observation. The proposition, Two straight lines cannot inclose a space – or in other words, Two straight lines which have one met, do not meet again, but continue to diverge – is an induction from the evidence of our senses." (Mill, 1974, p. 231). This topic is also a good opportunity to continue his anxious controversy with Whewell, the representative of the opposite perspective, who claims that experience isn't able to prove the axiom, "but that its truth is perceived *a priori*, by the constitution of mind itself, from the first moment when the meaning of the proposition is apprehended." (Mill, 1974, p. 231).

But this doesn't mean that conditions of validity and soundness differ from an empiricist to an *a priorist* theory of valid deductive and inductive arguments. He wrote in Introduction to *Logic*: "Logic is common ground on which the partisans of Hartley and of Reid, of Locke and of Kant, may meet and join hands." (Mill, 1974, p. 14) Later, in his *Autobiography*, Mill mentions that his aim was to offer a book opposed to *a priori* views and that he preferred the empiricist view that all knowledge derives from experience. Mill's justifies why he has taken a combative position: "The notion that truths external to the mind may be known by

[7] "Not only, in Sir W. Hamilton's opinion, do we know, by direct consciousness or perception, certain properties of Things as they exist in the Thing themselves, but we may also know those properties as in the Things, by demonstration a priori." (Mill, 1979, p. 14).

intuition or consciousness, independently of observation and experience, is, I am persuaded, in these times, the great intellectual support for false doctrines and institutions." (Mill, 1981, p. 233). And in a letter to Comte he will claim that his *Logic* had also a polemical goal and that his philosophical option is a positivistic one, following Hobbes and Locke. (Mill, 1963, p. 531)

Therefore, I agree with Scarre that Mill's goal in *Logic* was an epistemological one, namely, "to investigate how in principle deductive and inductive modes of inference could produce new knowledge." (Scarre, 1989, p. 7) If we take seriously into account this goal them it will be easy to understand why Mill wasn't interested in a survey of deductive logic but he is very devoted to the problem of producing new knowledge by deduction so that to avoid the *petition principia* fallacy. The same theoretical goal of new knowledge production explains why Mill is more interested in a research of inductive methods and their inferential validity.

The relativity of knowledge

The radical empiricism proposed by Mill has to be understood in relation with the principle of knowledge relativity. It is obvious that in Mill's view an acceptable empiricism, *id est*, the best theory regarding the production of new knowledge, must be balanced by taking into account this principle.

The idea of knowledge relativity is used by Reid in same assertions about body and matter in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. In chapter XVII, "Of the Objects of Perception", Reid refers to Locke and his theory of qualities, then, to Berkeley and Hume. His conclusion, exposed in chapter XIX, "Of Matter and of Space", is very clear: "It seems, therefore, to be a judgement of nature, that the things immediately perceived are qualities, which must belong to a subject; and all the information that our senses give us about this subject, is, that it is that to which such qualities belong. From this it is evident, that our notion of body or matter, as distinguished from its qualities, is a relative notion; and I am afraid it must always be obscure until men have other faculties. The philosopher, in this, seem to have no advantage to the vulgar." (Reid, 1865, pp. 322-323)

Hamilton was the editor of Reid's book and in a footnote he makes a commentary: "That is, our notion of *absolute* body is *relative*. This is incorrectly expressed. We can know, we can conceive, only what is relative. Our knowledge of *qualities* or *phenomena* is necessarily relative; for these exists only as they exist *in relation to our faculties*. The knowledge, or even the conception, of a substance in itself, and apart from any qualities in

relation to, and therefore cognisable or conceivable by our minds involve a contradiction." (Reid, 1865, pp. 322-323)

It seems that Mill used for the first time this principle in his essay on Coleridge, in the form cited above, that we can know only sensations. (Mill, 1969, p. 125) A similar formula is repeated in his *Logic* when he mentions that of the external world "we know and can know absolutely nothing, except the sensations which we experience from it." (Mill, 1974, p. 62)

The principle of knowledge relativity is connected with the principle of empiricism. According to these two principles taken together, Mill rejects three kinds of knowledge: of external things, of mind (inner world), and of a priori truths. First, our knowledge of external world is knowledge of sensations, we can't know the things in themselves. Therefore, our knowledge is reducible to the phenomenal presentations of senses. Moreover, this principle is also applicable to inner experience, an analysis developed in Chapter XII of his book about Hamilton. The mind or the self are reducible to our own conscious states. Third, as I have already explained, this principle also excludes the *a priori* knowledge about mathematics, science, religion and morality, as it is asserted by the "school of intuition". Consequently, the only knowledge is that of sensorial experience.

But if we aren't able to know the external world, if we can't have a knowledge of physical objects as such, then we are in danger to accept an idealist position. Mill admired Berkeley's philosophy, but he tried to find a solution and to avoid the idealist standpoint. In the same time, it is important to mention that Mill believed in the possibility of knowledge and he avoided the sceptical thesis proposed by Hume. Accordingly, we are justified to claim that Mill tried to improve the empiricist theory so that to avoid the traditional empiricist vulnerabilities, the idealist temptation[8] and the falling into scepticism.

In "Berkeley's Life and Writings" Mill agrees Berkeley's critique of the common notion of matter[9], but he thinks that Berkeley and Hamilton didn't explain correctly how this illusion is produced and he tried to

[8] Andy Hamilton suggests that Mill's goal was to improve Berkeley's idealism. See Andy Hamilton, 1998.

[9] "It was competent to Berkeley to maintain that this part of the common notion is an illusion, and he did maintain this, in our opinion successfully." (Mill, 1978, p. 460).

restore this deficiency by applying the associationist psychological method. Of course, it is easy to remember that Mill's method was outlined by Berkeley himself in his *Theory of Vision*.

Moreover, a careful scrutiny reveals that the relativity principle is related with Mill's associationist psychology. All we can do with our mind is to combine our ideas according to the laws of association. Mill mentions in his book about Hamilton the postulates which support the so called psychological way of research, opposed to the traditional school of intuition. These are the law of expectation and the fourth laws of association: similarity, contiguity, repetition and inseparability. The basic epistemological claim is that even those beliefs which seem to be intuitive are in fact a product of experience. The first postulate is that "the human mind is capable of Expectation". (Mill, 1979, p. 177) If we have some actual sensations then we are able to form after this real experience the concept of possible sensations, namely, the concept of "sensations which are not feeling at the present moment, but which we might feel, and should feel if certain conditions were present". (Mill, 1979, p. 177) We suppose that the nature of these conditions was already learned from the previous experience.

Secondly, the psychological way is based on the laws of the association of ideas. The law of similarity postulates that "similar phenomena tend to be thought of together". (Mill, 1979, p. 177) The law of contiguity claims that "phenomena which have either been experienced or conceived in close contiguity to one another, tend to be thought of together", (Mill, 1979, p. 177) simultaneously or in immediate succession. The law of repetition assures the certainty of associations: "When two phaenomena have been very often experienced in conjunction, and have not, in any single instance, occurred separately either in experience or in thought, there is produced between them what has been called Inseparable, or less correctly, Indissoluble Association" (Mill, 1979, pp. 177-178). The effect of these associationist mechanisms is that "it is impossible for us to think the one thing disjoined from the other." (Mill, 1979, p. 178). Finally, the fourth law: "When an association has acquired this character of inseparability – when the bond between the two ideas has been thus firmly riveted, not only does the idea called up by association become, in our consciousness, inseparable from the idea which suggested it, but the facts or phaenomena answering to those ideas come at last to seem inseparable in existence: things which we are unable to conceive apart, appear

incapable of existing apart; and the belief we have in their coexistence, though really a product of experience, seems intuitive" (Mill, 1979, p. 178).

Regarding this last law, Mill offer an example about our acquired perceptions of sight, taken from Bailey's review about Berkeley's *Theory of Vision*. (Bailey, 1842, pp. 105-117) For example, the perception of the distance to a mountain or the perception of size of the moon by the eye seem to be intuitive and not acquired. But what we see is in fact what we think to see, is the result of an inference. Mill claims that our intuitions are apparent perceptions which are deceptive. We have to make an inference in order to match our deceptive perceptions with real objects which are perceived. There is an inference in any perception, there isn't an intuitive or direct or unmediated level of knowledge. In this commentary Mill combines empiricism with the relativity of knowledge and his associationist psychology.

Another example that this combination works is a commentary from his essay about Bain where he states that the relativity principle helps us to dispense from direct proof because we can use associationism as a general evidence (Mill, "Bain's Psychology", 1978, p. 343).

In terms of a metaphysical approach this means that there isn't a substance which have to be known and that all we can know is only the phenomenal world. Historically, there were two forms of this principle, the idealist one, proposed by Berkeley, and the phenomenalist one, proposed by Kant. The difference between the two is given by the acceptance or not of a *substratum* as a hidden cause of sensations. The principle of the relativity of knowledge means nothing but all we know is relative to us, according to the powers which affect us.

It's time for a short summary. After the strong rejection of the possibility of an *a priori* knowledge Mill develops a radical empiricist theory regarding the sources of new knowledge following the so called new psychological way based on the associationists principles. But our capacity to produce new knowledge is limited so that we have to accept the relativity of knowledge. If this is the case, how should look a good empiricist theory? Mill thinks that phenomenalism is the best solution to all these problems.

Towards phenomenalism

Mill's extreme empiricism leads him to a reductionist metaphysics related with subjective idealism and phenomenalism. Scarre's view is that "Mill is

saying not just that all knowledge comes through sensation and reflection on sensation, but also that all knowledge is knowledge of sensation and reflection on sensation." (Scarre, 1989, p. 4) But Mill, tempted sometimes by a moderate form of scientific realism, compatible with empiricism, tries to find a way between Berkeley's eliminative phenomenalism and Kant's reductive phenomenalism.

The core of Mill's phenomenalistic theory is exposed in his book about Hamilton, especially in chapter XI, "The Psychological Theory of the Belief in an External World", where he takes into account the perceptual knowledge of the external world, and then in the chapter XII, "The Psychological Theory of the Belief in Matter, How Far Applicable to Mind", where he applies his theory to our mind and its introspective capacity. In the previous chapters Mill investigated the question of the reality of matter with the help of the "introspective method" used by Hamilton and he concluded that there were no results gained. His alternative is to follow the psychological way and to agree that "the belief in an external world is not intuitive, but an acquired product." (Mill, 1979, p. 177. This passage became in the meantime the starting point for the standard historical interpretation of Mill's theory exposed in his book about Hamilton. Another Hamilton, Andy, wrote about Mill's project: "The kernel of the dispute is that, according to Mill, beliefs that appear intuitive - i.e. that are 'irresistible – are mistakenly regarded as intuitive, because the possibility that they are an 'acquired product' is not considered. Mill's own 'psychological' theory, in contrast, shows how a belief, though possessing 'the character of necessity', could have been acquired through experience." (Andy Hamilton, 1998, p. 146).

Mill's theory is based on the idea that the order of our sensations and of our reminiscences of them naturally and necessarily generates associations without any intuitive support. The traditional philosophers made the mistake to think that the belief which is formed in our consciousness is an intuitive one. Our belief in the existence of the external world is explained by Mill in Kantian terms. When we think that we perceive objects which are external to us this means that "there 'is concerned' in our perceptions something which exists when we are not thinking of it, which existed before we had ever thought of it, and would exist if we were annihilated; and further that there exist things which we never saw, touched, or otherwise perceived, and things which never have been perceived by man. This idea of something which is distinguished

from our fleeting impression by what, in Kantian language, is called Perdurability." (Mill, 1979, pp. 178-179).

In Mill's view the idea of an external world is a result of a combination based on the laws of association and on the experience of contingent sensations, namely, sensations which can't be in our consciousness without an external object as their cause. The millian turning point is based on the new concept of "possibilities of experience". A common example may help us to understand better Mill's idea about phenomenalism. If I am seeing now a piece of white paper in this room and I shall go immediately outside will this mean that the piece of paper ceased to exist? Of course, the answer is "no". If I will return into the room, I will see the piece of paper again. This means that the piece of paper will continue to exist event if I am not seeing it. Moreover, owing to the properties of my mind, my conception of the world doesn't consist only in the fugitive sensations given in the present. Mill explains: "The conception I form of the world existing at any moment, comprises, along with the sensations I am feeling, a countless variety of possibilities of sensation; namely, the whole of those which past observation tells me that I could, under any supposable circumstances, experience at this moment, together with an indefinite and illimitable multitude of others which though I do not know that I could, yet it is possible that I might, experience in circumstances not known to me. These various possibilities are the important thing to me in the world." (Mill, 1979, pp. 179-180).

Mill has used the phrase "possibilities of sensation" in his *System of Logic*, in which he talks about bodies, sensations and the substratum of them. The question is if this substratum really exists independent from our sensations and how could we avoid the extreme idealist metaphysics. He develops a commentary about Kant's metaphysics of things in themselves and the contrast between the things in themselves and the representations of our mind: "Kant himself, on this point, is as explicit as Berkeley or Locke. However firmly, convinced that there exists an universe of 'things in themselves', totally distinct from the universe of phenomena, or of things as they appear to our senses; and even when bringing into use a technical expression (*Noumenon*), to denote what the thing is in itself, as contrasted with the representation of it in our minds; he allows that this representation (the matter of which, he says, consists of our sensations, through the form is given by the laws of the mind itself) is all we know of the object: and that the real nature of the Thing is, and by the constitution of our faculties ever

must remain, at least in the present state of existence, an impenetrable mystery to us." (Mill, 1974, p. 59)

The concept of permanent possibilities of experience transforms the substratum in a permanent possibility and assure the cognitive access to it, but the idea of a permanent substratum as a possibility of sensation is distinguished from sensations as such, it isn't reducible to sensations. We have no other way to conceptualise this substratum than our flow of sensations, but the possibilities of sensations are permanent because they didn't depend on sensations which are experienced by an epistemic subject. This means that they are independent on consciousness. The permanent possibilities of sensations are common to all the human beings while the actual sensations differ from one to another. Although the permanent possibilities are subjective, they are in the same time the same for all the epistemic subjects and in this sense they are objective, because they are available for all the epistemic subjects.

The idea of a difference between the permanent possibilities of sensations and sensations themselves is summarized by Mill in a famous passage: "I believe that Calcutta exists, though I do not perceive it, and that it would still exist if every percipient inhabitant were suddenly to leave the place, or be struck dead. But when I analyse the belief, all I find in it is, that were these events to take place, he Permanent Possibility of sensation which I call Calcutta would still remain; that if I were suddenly transported to the banks of the Hoogly, I should still have the sensations which, if now present, would lead me to affirm that Calcutta exists here and now. We may infer, therefore, that both philosophers and the world at large, when they think of matter, conceive it really as a Permanent Possibility of Sensation. But the majority of philosophers fancy that it is something more; and the world at large, though they have really, as I conceive, nothing in their minds but a Permanent Possibility of sensation, would, if asked the question, undoubtedly agree with the philosophers: and though this is sufficiently explained by the tendency of the human mind to infer difference of things from difference of names, I acknowledge the obligation of showing how it can be possible to believe in an existence transcending all possibilities of sensation, unless on the hypothesis that such an existence actually is, and that we actually perceive it." (Mill, 1979, pp. 184-185).

Mill explanation is given in terms of the capacity of our mind to make generalizations based on the observed laws of our sensations. From our sensations, related with something different from them, we obtain by

association the general notions of difference and inseparability, and then the notion of permanent possibilities of sensation which correspond to the idea of a substratum which transcends our sensations. The natural probability associated with this process is converted into certainty if we take into account the laws of our experience and the law of causation. Therefore, based on the law of causation and on the group of permanent possibilities, we extend universally the laws of our experience from some cases to our entire experience. As a result, the idea of permanent existence become a part of our conception about the external word.

These permanent possibilities have the form of conditional certainties and are the epistemic warrant for our judgments about the world. Skorupski has developed a interpretation of Mill's phenomenalism which can help us to understand it better. Skorupski's thesis is that in Mill's book about Hamilton there is a tension which results from the conflict between his naturalism, his inductivism, and his subjectivism, and the result is the his philosophical moving to phenomenalism: "that is, his insistence on the primacy of consciousness – both epistemologically, as constituting the ultimate baseline from which we reason, and for psychology, as providing the data of that science. If one combines the last two of these tenets (inductivism and the primacy of consciousness), some form of phenomenalism – matter as the permanent possibility of sensation – is inevitable." (Skorupski, 1989, p. 10.)

How shall we interpret this form of phenomenalism centered on the permanent (certified or guaranteed) possibilities of sensation? These possibilities are understood as 'conditional certainties', namely, they have the form of a conditional belief, "If such and such sensations were to occur, then such and such other sensations would occur (with a given degree of probability)", and all of them are mixed in a stable network. The epistemic subject discover in this cluster of possiblities an order of succesion.

Andy Hamilton tries to give a historical explanation for this balance between a psychological and a linguistic approach regarding the idea of permananet possibilities of experience. He asserts that "there are two competing tendencies in Mill's account, those of eighteenth-century psychological analysis, and what would become twentieth-century semantic analysis. The latter tendency – what is sometimes called 'linguistic' phenomenalism – treats Mill's subjunctive conditionals as 'meaning-equivalences', and may therefore be viewed as an attempted 'vindication', or perhaps a reduction, of ordinary discourse." (Andy

Hamilton, 1998, p. 151). I think that is to much to attribute to Mill a semantic turn in the analysis of experience similar with that clearly proposed by Ayer (Ayer, 1940), but the ontological implications of his psychological theory, which are explicitly mentioned by him, connected with the logical form as subjonctive conditioanals of the sentences about permanent possibilities (A statement as "There is a tree in the garden" is equivalent in meaning with "If X were in such-and-such circumstances then we would have so-and-so perceptual experiences") are sufficient arguments to state that Mill's approach was based on a phenomenalist framework as such.

Conclusive remarks

If we accept the idea that Mill's philosphy is a reasearch programme that have to be seriously taken into account as an opened project, thenwe can find some valuable ideas that deserve to be capitalized on. Mill's critique of *a priori* knowledge, his new psychological way based on asscociationist principle and his own version of the relativity of knowledge principle are some of of the ideas which have their own place in contemporary philosophy. I think that Mill's phenomenalism is his big challenge since it leads to a whole new approach, bold, subtle, and unmistakable.

There were previous forms of fenomenalism, Berkeley's and Kant's theories were Mill's historical landmarks, but Mill's project has its own place. Which is then the difference? It is obvious that it is made by the new concept of the permanent possibilities of sensation. For Berkeley objects are groups of actual ideas which are held by a human or a divine mind, for Mill external world itself is a permamenet possibility of experience. This means that, according to Mill, Berkeley is close to phenomenalism when he talks about the potentiality of external things, but he remains an idealist from an ontological point of view. Mill's phenomenalism became an epistemological one in a Kantian framework. Mill tried to avoid the consequences derived from the two previous theories and his idea of permanent possibilities of sensation wasn't only a creative one, but also a solution of some philosophical puzzles, unfortunately, still insufficiently explored. In this paper and others two (See Stoenescu, 2018: Stoenescu, 2021; Stoenescu 2022) I have tried to bring these subjects back to the forefront of the philosophical debate.

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