ISSA Proceedings 2006 – Mill On Argumentation

Half the wrong conclusions at which mankind arrive are reached by abuse of metaphors. (Lord Palmerston)**[ii]**

In this essay **[i]** I want to make an approach to understanding Mill's view of argumentation, especially as his attitude toward this activity can be extracted from his essay, *On Liberty*.**[iii]** I will do this in a round-about way by considering three figures of speech, one of them associated with argumentation in general and the other two specifically attributed to Mill's thought. These figures of speech have the character of metaphors or perhaps what Stephen Barker has called *revelatory definitions*. His example is, "architecture is frozen music." As a definition this statement does not say how 'architecture' is used in English, nor does it introduce a new meaning for that term; it rather proposes a new way of looking at architecture. "We must reflect," writes Barker, "about the extent and validity of this comparison between music and buildings; the [revelatory] definition is a good one if the comparison is illuminating." (Barker 1965, p. 204) So, in this essay I will consider how apt and illuminating are the metaphors, "argumentation is war", "the marketplace of ideas" and "society is a debating club", with regard to Mill's views on argumentation. Respectively these figures suggest that argumentation is war-like, debate-like, and free trade-like. Having done that I will try to identify what it is that is unique and peculiar about Mill's view.

1. *War*

Perhaps the most common metaphor associated with argumentation is that "argument is war." It may well have its roots in ancient Greek dialectic. One interpretation of Aristotle is that he taught "dialectic as a form of self-defence, organizing techniques and strategies … into the structured discipline of a philosophical martial art" (Hill & Kagan 1995, p. 34). A long time later, in the 1830s, Richard Whately used a military metaphor to explain why it is an

advantage to have the presumption on your side when engaging in argumentation: an army defending a fort may well be able to turn back any assault, but should the army go "into the open field to encounter the enemy," – that is, should the army go on the offensive – rather than wait for the enemy to attack, it might be defeated (Whately 1846, p. 113). Recently Ralph Johnson and Anthony Blair have given their informal logic textbook the title, *Logical Self-Defense*, intimating that some kind of combat-like attitudes and skills are needed as a safeguard against the "species of illogic" (Johnson and Blair 1983, p. xiv). Most recently the metaphor, "argument is war," has been the point of departure for Deborah Tannen's book, *The Argument Culture*. She speaks of a pervasive tendency – she calls it "agonism" – in our society to engage in argumentative behaviour. "In the argument culture," she writes, "criticism, attack, or opposition are the predominant if not the only way of responding to people and ideas" (Tannen 2003, p. 7). Daniel Cohen, who worries about the metaphor's implications for education, has written that,

Despite any ambiguities and subtle nuances of the word "argument," this metaphor manages to dominate our discourse about arguments and our argumentation practice. We routinely speak, for example, of *strong,* or even *killer*, arguments and *powerful counterattacks*, of *defensible* positions and *winning strategies*, and of *weak* arguments that are easily *shot down* while *strong* ones carry a lot of *firepower* and are *right on target* (Cohen 2004, p. 36).

Tannen (2003, p. 14) points out that 'war' is, however, a key term in many other metaphors as well, such as the war on terror, the *war on crime, the war on cancer, the war on poverty*; to which I may add my own favourite – *the battle of the bulge*. Whenever we are involved in a struggle or competition, and the stakes are high, we seem to be ready for a metaphorical war. Cohen's concern for how easily the language of military conflict can be adapted to that of intellectual engagement is shared by many.

Consider what we might be expected to glean from the argument-is-war metaphor.

1. There are opposing sides in the argumentation.
2. The purpose of engaging in defensive argumentation is to resist the imposition of another's view.
3. The purpose of engaging in offensive argumentation is to impose your view on another.

4. There are few, if any, rules or standards of argumentation to be followed (trickery may be employed; there is no requirement to respect opponents).
5. Winning is more important than getting at the truth.

These may not be the only insights that purveyors of the metaphor wish to impress upon us. I have ordered the insights 1 to 5 in what seems to me to be an ascending scale of war-like behaviour: if only 1 – 3 are satisfied then there is only slight support for the metaphor but should either of 4 or 5 be satisfied as well, then it may be said that *argument is war* is a telling metaphor.

To what extent is this revelatory definition true of Mill's argumentative practice? To be sure, his language of argumentation is not entirely free of military or combat images. For example, he remarks that the paradoxes of Rousseau "explode[d] like bombshells" (L ii 35) in the climate of received opinions, and he goes on to observe that in the main the pursuit of truth is a "struggle between combatants fighting under hostile banners" (L ii 36), and that there there is a "violent conflict between parts of the truth" (L ii 39). Also, in his earlier essay on Coleridge, Mill speaks of the importance for philosophy of "antagonist modes of thought" (Mill 1840, p. 104). Nevertheless, the "argument is war" metaphor does not, in my view, capture either Mill's practice of argumentation, or his considered attitude towards it.

Unavoidable for any study of argumentation (in English) must be the recognition that the word "argument" is ambiguous. Thus Tannen marks the distinction between "*making* an argument for a point of view" and "*having* an argument – as in having a fight" (Tannen 2003, p. 4). Let us call these, respectively, the evidential and interactional senses of 'argument'. Given this distinction, it is interesting to observe that the words "argument" and "discussion" each occur about thirty times in chapter 2 of *On Liberty*. However, Mill tends to use the word "argument" in the point-of-view sense of argument, that is, the evidential sense, whereas he uses the word "discussion" in lieu of "argument" in the interactional sense. In other words, if the metaphor were to be adapted to Mill's usage, it would come out not as *argument is war,* but as *discussion is war.*

But in choosing to use the term "discussion," Mill is signalling a pacific attitude towards argumentation rather than an agonistic one. The word "discussion" conjures up images of civility, politeness, turn-taking, and good will in a way that "argument" does not. "Discussion" does not connote violence, deceit or coercion, but rather a certain openness and bilaterality, and tentativeness. Moreover, Mill

is not promoting just any kind of discussions; he is advocating *free discussions* (L ii 9, 24, 25, 26, 30), and *free and equal discussions* (L i 10), which must also be fair *discussions* (L ii 10, 44), and *fair and thorough discussions* (L ii 20). In urging that discussions should have these qualities, Mill is not only rejecting traditional authoritarian views that sought to limit available information, he is proscribing a mode of intellectual intercourse which is very unlike war and which is designed to promote the discovery or maintenance of truth. Hence, conditions 4 and 5 of the metaphor above do not fit Mill's view well at all. For these reasons the "argument is war" metaphor applies to Mill only in a very weak sense.

2. *Debate*

Epistemic justification, for Mill, depends on access to the widest possible range of arguments and objections and, hence, on a social climate that does not restrict the expression of opinions of any kind. "There ought to exist," writes Mill (in a footnote), "the fullest liberty of professing and discussing, as a matter of ethical conviction, any doctrine, however immoral it may be considered" (L ii n.). But in an important essay published over fifty years ago, Willmoore Kendall criticised Mill's defence of unreserved freedom of speech. He thought that it would lead to "deafening noise and demoralizing confusion" because it gave the right to everyone to engage in discussions without imposing any correlative obligations on them (Kendall 1960, p. 40). "Mill's proposals," writes Kendall, "have as one of their tacit premises a false conception of the nature of society, . . . They assume that society is, so to speak, a *debating club* devoted above all to the pursuit of truth, and capable therefore of subordinating itself – and all other considerations, goods, and goals – to that pursuit" (Kendall 1960, p. 36).

By the use of the figure of speech, *society is a debating club,* Kendall is ridiculing Mill as being naive and unrealistic, and failing to realize that although society values freedom of speech, it values some other liberties equally as much. Kendall then goes on to list a number of conditions that societies who are intent upon the pursuit of truth will insist upon: that people who participate in the discussions should be well-trained, that they should be familiar with the society's orthodoxies, that those who cannot persuade society that its orthodoxies are wrong will suffer isolation or banishment. This, Kendall seems to say, is what is involved in the realistic pursuit of truth, more so than the unrestricted use of free speech that Mill advocates. In summary, Kendall has attributed a model of unrestricted debate to Mill and then gone on to argue that this model cannot serve the purpose it is meant to serve.

Kendall is not the only one to have suggested that Mill subscribes to a debate model of argumentation in *On Liberty*. But debates can be more or less formal. The exchanges that go on in newspapers, around the kitchen table, in seminar rooms and department meetings when people exchange views, listen to each other and are, presumably, willing to be influenced by what others say, these are not improperly referred to as *debates.* A more formal character is given to debate by Woods, Irvine and Walton when they write that

… debates have special rules. They are presided over by a referee or a chairperson who is committed to fairness and objectivity. In addition, debates are often settled, not by debaters themselves, but by a judge or panel of judges. In those cases where the decision is left to the debaters themselves, such as in a Parliament or Congress, a simple majority among the voters is usually sufficient to decide the outcome (Woods et al. 2004, p. 25).

These authors hold that debate is "an effective and objective way to truth" and the only way that "large scale advances in human knowledge are possible" (Woods *et al.* 2004, p. 31). They go on to list some of the rules for different kinds of formal debates, the Oxford and Parliamentary styles. There are, then, a range of modes of argumentation that may be described as debates. They range from something very loosely structured that hardly shows evidence of disagreement at all to something with well-defined rules, clearly marked opposite sides and a conventional decision procedure. Here, again in ascending order, are some of the possible insights that may be intended by saying that someone espouses a *debate model of argumentation.*

1. Two (or more) parties are expressing opposing views for and against a position
2. There are procedural rules: opposing sides take turns presenting, listening to, and criticizing each others' views and/or arguments.
3. There are rules of conduct (personal attacks are not allowed).
4. There are time limits on speakers/writers (another procedural rule).
5. The purpose of engaging in argumentation is to win (argumentation is a zero-sum 'game').
6. There are decision rules: the winner of the argumentation is decided by either (a) an independent umpire, or (b) the vote of the assembly.

I suggest that if a practice of argumentation consists in no more than meeting the first three of these conditions, then it is not especially revealing of the practice of argumentation. That would hardly be enough to say that the argumentation takes

the form of a debate. However, if any or all of conditions 4 to 6 were also met, then this would mean that the practice could indeed be aptly characterized as a debate.

Although Mill is in sympathy with the first three conditions of this debate model, and that therefore it is fair to say that it is his view that argumentation is in some ways debate-like, I don't think that it is at all true that he is advocating a debate model of argumentation in anything but a very loose and general sense. Most important to observe – contra condition 5 – is that Mill does not think that the purpose of the participants in argumentation is to win. He advocates engaging in argumentation as a way of having justified beliefs, of avoiding error, and of finding new truths. Moreover, Mill nowhere indicates that he sees any value in condition 4, imposing a time limit on argumentation. Finally, the upshot of Mill's long argument against authority (L ii 3-20) is that we must be epistemically responsible for our own beliefs. Were it the case that discussions about what is true should be decided by a referee standing apart from the discussion, as condition 6 requires, that referee would be taking the role of an authority from which there would be no appeal, and to let him or her make a decision as to which side has the best argument would be to forego our duties as epistemic agents. The same can be said, *mutatis mutandis,* about the possibility of deciding a debate by a majority vote: Mill was wary of majorities, both in matters intellectual and moral.

In fact, it should be noticed that in *On Liberty*, the text which is at the centre of the discussion of Mill's views on argumentation, the word "debate" occurs not once. However, as we know from his autobiography, Mill was in fact well familiar with debates, acknowledging his own participation in some and using the word 'debate' freely when referring to the activities of others. Why then is the term so strangely absent from *On Liberty*? It may be that Mill deliberately avoided it in that work because he wanted to distinguish his approach to argumentation from the one embodied in debates. This is just speculation, of course, and it does not show that Mill did not have a debate model in mind; but more than passing strange it is that if he did, he would eschew use of the key word, "debate."

3. *Market*

The marketplace-of-ideas metaphor is present in a nascent form in Milton's *Aereopagitica* of 1644. Let truth and falsehood grapple, said Milton, "whoever knew truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter." Alvin Goldman, among

many others, recognizes Mill as belonging to the free speech tradition, writing that Mill (and Milton) "contended that unrestricted speech promotes the discovery and acceptance of truth better than its suppression" (Goldman 1999, p. 193). Goldman then goes on to discuss the thesis that an unrestricted market for ideas is the best way of promoting truth, thereby at least associating the marketplace metaphor with Mill, even if he doesn't exactly pin it on him. Goldman distinguishes two versions of the marketplace image:

The first version understands the term "market" or "marketplace" in the literal, economic sense, and it sees the competitive market mechanism as the kind of disciplining mechanism that promotes the discovery of truth. The second version understands the term "market" or "marketplace" *metaphorically* or *figuratively*. That is, it construes the marketplace of ideas as a market-like arena, in which debate is wide open and robust, in which diverse views are vigorously defended. This kind of a debate arena may or may not result from an economic market mechanism. Under the second version, moreover, what counts is the scope of the resulting debate, not the mechanism that produces it. If a diverse set of views is vigorously aired, this qualifies as an open marketplace of ideas even when government action is required to secure this state of affairs (Goldman 1999, 192).

I prefer to call these, respectively, the strong and the weak senses of the marketplace-of-ideas metaphor. The differences between the two senses are that the strong sense involves there being some market-like mechanism at work in selecting ideas whereas the weak sense of the figure stresses the nature of the discussions as being "wide open and robust," even if some external restraints are imposed. As before, we may list a number of conditions in order of increasing commitment to the metaphor, and then ask how many of the conditions Mill seems to be committed to.

1. There is a wide range of ideas to choose from.
2. Idea producers (or idea advocates) compete robustly with one another
3. The competition of ideas is decided by idea-adopters.
4. The ideas that get adopted by most idea-adopters are "better" (more likely to be true) than the ones that aren't.
5. There are no restrictions on idea producers, advocates or consumers.
6. Each idea-adopter decides what ideas to accept on the basis of perceived advantage to him/herself.

Here the first three conditions give us only the weak sense of the marketplace-of-

ideas-metaphor whereas the inclusion of any, or all, or conditions 4, 5, and 6 would imply something more definite and approach the strong sense of the metaphor.

Woods, Irvine and Walton, in addition to attributing the debate model of argumentation to Mill, go further and characterize the nature of 'Millean debate' as follows:

In a free market, consumers furnish whatever degree of demand there may be for an item offered for sale, and the suppliers and sellers determine the supply. Given these preferences and the limited resources of the consumer, the laws of supply and demand ultimately determine what value is to be accorded each commodity. The worth of a commodity is determined by the degree to which it is accepted or approved by the consumer.

… What Mill is offering us, then, is a kind of free-enterprise, survival-of-the-fittest model – and justification – of debate, one in which truth is understood to be the most important value in the free marketplace of ideas. It is in debate that truth best survives the destructive forces of opposition and criticism (Woods, et al. 2004, p. 30).

Because Woods and his co-authors refer to consumers and suppliers, and the law of supply and demand, they appear to be interpreting Mill in strong sense of the marketplace metaphor, quite literally – attributing to Mill the idea that market forces, and consumer preferences do play a role in the selection of ideas. But Isaiah Berlin, who also employs the metaphor in connection with Mill, may be taken to mean it only in the weak sense: In this passage he connects liberty, the free market of ideas, and truth:

[W]hat made the protection of individual liberty so sacred to Mill? … unless men are left free to live as they wish 'in the path which merely concerns themselves', civilization cannot advance; the truth will not, for lack of a free market in ideas, come to light; … (Berlin 1958, p. 78)

What Berlin seems to be concerned with is the idea that truth is an outcome of free discussion, not at all indicating the mechanism which selects some ideas and rejects others, but leaving that open.

Since quite a few writers have used this metaphor in connection with Mill's thought, we are led to ask whether either the weak or the strong sense of the marketplace metaphor is a good fit. Consider first this passage from *On Liberty*:

… it was once held to be the duty of governments, in all cases which were considered of importance, to fix prices and regulate the process of manufacture. But it is now recognized, though not till after a long struggle, that both the cheapness and the good quality of commodities are most effectually provided for by leaving the producers and sellers perfectly free, under the sole check of equal freedom to the buyers for supplying themselves elsewhere. This is the so-called doctrine of "free trade," which rests on grounds different from, though equally solid with, the principle of individual liberty … (L v 4).

Here Mill is endorsing the free-trade of the market place philosophy: it is the consumer's freedom to take his business elsewhere that will keep prices down and quality up. There are other passages that seem complementary with this. For example, Mill says, "The truth of an opinion is part of its utility" (L ii 10) thereby connecting economic advantage with truth. If rational agents choose ideas based on their utility, they will also be choosing true ideas, and this is the very point of the marketplace metaphor that others seem to have had in mind. In another passage, Mill refers to a change in the intellectual climate brought about by "popular opinion" adopting those truths it wanted from Rousseau (L ii 35): perhaps an illustration that consumers have a role in the sorting of ideas. There are reasons, then, to think that Mill favoured a free-market economy and that he saw consumer-behaviour as an instrument of selecting ideas.

Even so, Mill is not prepared to surrender complete control of the market to consumers. Consider this passage from his *Principles of Political Economy:*
[T]he proposition that the consumer is a competent judge of the commodity, can be admitted only with numerous abatements and exceptions. He is generally the best judge (though even this is not true universally) of the material objects produced for his use.… But there are other things, of the worth of which the demand of the market is by no means a test; things of which the utility does not consist in ministering to inclinations, nor in serving the daily uses of life, and the want of which is least felt where the need is greatest. This is particularly true of those things which are chiefly useful as tending to raise the character of human beings. The uncultivated cannot be competent judges of cultivation. Those who most need to be made wiser and better, usually desire it least, and if they desire it, would be incapable of finding the way to it by their own lights. (Mill, 1871: Bk V, ch. xi §8; [Radcliffe 1966, 69 -70]).

What Mill intends by *things useful for raising the character of human beings is*

education. He grants that the consumer may well be the best judge of material objects on the market, but denies that education is to be chosen on the basis of consumer preference**[iv]**. It appears then that Mill does not think that the marketplace of ideas metaphor applies universally – is true for all ideas. He goes on to find other exceptions to the "practical principle of non-interference" (Mill 1871: Bk V, ch. xi §9) in the following paragraphs.

Jill Gordon also has resisted the notion that Mill's thought is aptly captured by the marketplace-of- ideas metaphor. She first unpacks the metaphor as implying that "all opinions are to be expressed; … The ideas or opinions compete with one another … [and] … As rational consumers of ideas, we choose the "best" among them." (Gordon 1997, 236). She then argues that the ideas that will survive in the marketplace will be "those espoused by either the most powerful or the most numerous in the society" (Gordon 1997, 240). That ideas should be chosen as the best in this way is inconsistent with Mill's philosophy, maintains Gordon, since it was his avowed purpose to protect minority opinions from coercion by majorities. In a free marketplace of ideas, however, there is no protection for minority opinions, and so, Gordon concludes, the marketplace-of-ideas metaphor is antithetical to Mill's position.

Gordon has another argument to the effect that Mill does think we should, in some circumstances, interfere with "the free market in ideas." She finds the following passage in Mill to support her view:

On any of the great open questions … if either of the two opinions has a better claim than the other, not merely to be tolerated, but to be encouraged and countenanced, it is the one which happens at the particular time and place to be in a minority. That is the opinion which, for the time being, represents the neglected interests, the side of human well-being which is in danger of obtaining less than its share. (Gordon 1997, p. 239; [OL ii 36]).

The context here is the two-party system of parliament. Mill saw the two parties as needing each other to correct each others' shortcomings as they attempt to balance the demands of stability and progress. In this passage Mill is advocating what appears to be a kind of affirmative action for minority opinions: they are not to be treated the same as majority opinions but are rather to be encouraged and supported. To take this view is to interfere with the marketplace as a free and open market.

There is more evidence, I think, for Gordon's view than the passage she chose.

Mill considers the concession that free expression of opinions may be permitted on the condition that discussions be fair and temperate. He observes that intemperate ways of argumentation are condemned when used against prevailing opinions but are praised when such means are used in support of accepted opinions. Hence, Mill maintains, we should compensate for this by tolerating intemperate argumentation more so when it is used to attack prevailing opinions than when it is used to defend them, there being "much more need to discourage offensive attacks on infidelity than on religion" (OL ii 44). Taking such compensatory measures, on the present analogy, amounts to an interference with free trade.

We must conclude, therefore, that the strong sense of the marketplace place metaphor does not fit Mill's thought well at all. This is because – contrary to condition 5 of the metaphor – he is not advocating free truck in ideas; several passages in the *Political Economy* and *On Liberty* recommend interference with unrestricted commerce in ideas, if necessary. Moreover, on questions of veritistic value, Mill does not endorse the idea that the view the majority holds is more likely to be true. This is contrary to condition 4 of the metaphor. These reasons, however, do not exclude the possibility that the weak sense of "marketplace of ideas" does fit Mill's view, for the weak sense means only to highlight the forum in which "debate is wide open and robust" and "diverse views are vigorously defended" (Goldman 1999, p. 192) even if there are some constraints placed on the discussion (as Mill would want). And we haven't completely ruled out the strong sense of the metaphor yet since we haven't given reasons to reject condition 6, that each idea-adopter decides what ideas to accept on the basis of perceived advantage to him/herself. Could this be Mill's view? The next section will help us to see the answer to this question.

4. *Mill's standard*

In *On Liberty* Mill declares that, "Whatever people believe, on subjects on which it is of the first importance to believe rightly, they ought to be able to defend against at least *the common objections*" (L ii, 23, my italics). This appears to be what Mill goes about doing in the second chapter of *Utilitarianism*. In *On Liberty* he goes on to stress the importance of being able to answer objections, saying that unless one can respond to objections, one has no grounds for her opinions.

> [W]hen we turn to … morals, religion, politics, social relations, and the business of life, three-fourths of the arguments for every disputed opinion consist in dispelling the appearances which favour some opinion different from it.… He who

knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side; if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion (L ii, 23).

Perhaps for the sake of emphasis Mill's remark that three-fourths of the arguments should deal with objections is intentionally hyperbolic. *The Subjection of Women* has much the same view but it requires that in addition to giving an argument for the thesis and answering actual objections to it, one has to answer *possible objections* as well (SW i 3)**[v]**. However, the highest demand that Mill's standard can place on us is that we must actively seek out objections to our views before we can have a right to hold them with confidence.

… [T]he only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject, is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind …. [F]or, being cognizant of all that can, at least obviously, be said against him, and having taken up his position against all gainsayers knowing that *he has sought for objections and difficulties*, instead of avoiding them, and has shut out no light which can be thrown upon the subject from any quarter – he has a right to think his judgment better than that of any person, or any multitude, who have not gone through a similar process (L ii, 7 – my stress).

Mill's view is that one has no right to make knowledge claims unless he has "sought out objections and difficulties". In other words, the highest level of confidence follows only on some kind of initiative of the arguer to seek out difficulties for himself . (This is another way in which Mill's approach to argumentation is unlike debates.)

Although the standard sometimes asks us to invent our own objections, Mill ranks the practice of dealing with objections found in actual discussions with others more highly. Why is this? One reason is that the opinions and arguments of others will be an antidote to our own prejudices and blind spots – our possible errors (L ii 7). But the active seeking-out of arguments against one's own opinion is not only for the sake of improving one's position and obtaining a right to hold it. Logic was criticized by the early modern philosophers (especially Bacon and Locke) because it failed to be the method of discovery they wanted it to be. However, argumentation and discussion, as Mill appears to think of these activities, can be sources of discovery. Not just the discovery that one is justified or not justified,

but the discovery of new theses, or new truths, especially on the complicated topics of morals, religion, politics, etc., is facilitated through discussion. If the role of discussion is viewed this way then the third prong of the argument in chapter 2 of *On Liberty* takes on added significance. When opinions conflict and the truth is found "between them" (L ii 34) then discussion may be the vehicle for the discovery of new propositions that would not have emerged otherwise.

Mill's standard is a high standard for belief acceptance. It can be seen as having three components: one positive, one defensive and one critical. The *positive component* consists in giving a good argument for the thesis being advanced; the *defensive component* consists in answering the objections made to that argument; and the *critical component* consists in dealing with arguments directed against the thesis; that is, arguments that deny the conclusion the arguer is attempting to establish. The more freedom we have to engage in discussions, the more effective will this method be. And, it should be clear, it is a normative method for sorting ideas which is quite different from what is entailed by condition six of the marketplace metaphor, that we should decide which ideas to accept on the basis of perceived advantages to ourselves. We thus have good reasons to reject all three of the conditions we listed that might lead us to think that the strong sense of the marketplace metaphor is apt or illuminating about Mill's views on argumentation.

5. *Conclusions*

The three metaphors, argument is war, society is a debating club, and the marketplace of ideas, may each be taken in a weak or a strong sense. The weak sense of the marketplace metaphor is consistent with Mill's thought but it only identifies a necessary condition for successful discussions: that there should be variety and competition of ideas. This must be supplemented not only with Mill's standard but also with a number of restrictions on 'free trade' in ideas thereby making the strong sense of that metaphor misleading as an insight into Mill's views. The argument is war metaphor in its weak version rightly points out that argumentation involves opposition and that the outcome of argumentation may have drastic effects on arguers; however, the stronger version of the metaphor which disregards questions of fairness and respect for others, does not at all match Mill's views. Finally, that argumentation involves rules and standards is reflected in the proposal that the debate model of argumentation is appropriate for Mill. But again, it is only in a weak version of it that will fit Mill's thought. In a stronger version the debate model asks epistemic agents to defer their obligations

to others, and to value victory over truth. This would not be acceptable to Mill.
So, whereas we began with the desire to learn something of Mill's views on argumentation, we end with a dilemna. When any of the three metaphors is taken in its weak sense, it will fit Mill's thought but it will also be minimally informative. However, when the metaphors are taken in their strong senses, they are not truly revelatory of Mill's views on argumentation. In fact, they misrepresent them.

NOTES

[i] An earlier and slimmer version of this essay, "Mill and the metaphors," was presented at the Figured of Democracy conference, Concordia University, Montreal, October, 2005 and a subsequent version, "Mill and the moral economy of ideas," at The John Stuart Mill Bicentennial Conference, University College London, April 2006. I am grateful to F. Rosen, R. H. Johnson, and J. A. Blair for discussion.

[ii] Quoted in Brasher, p. 65.

[iii] For an incisive analysis of the argumentation in On Liberty, ch. 2, see Finocchiaro 2005. For an attempt to paint Mill as having a theory of argumentation, see Hansen (2006).

[iv] "Originality is the one thing which unoriginal minds cannot feel the use of" (L iii 12).

[v] See also last line of L ii 23.

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