

Variations in the Editions  
of  
J.S. Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*

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The *Principles of Political Economy*, by J.S. Mill, underwent seven editions during his life, each being revised by him with frequent and important alterations.

1st ed.....	1848	6th ed.....	1865
2nd ed.....	1849	7th ed.....	1871
3rd ed.....	1852	8th ed.....	1878
4th ed.....	1857	9th ed.....	1886
5th ed.....	1862		

These were in two volumes. There was also the People's Edition, which Mill published in one volume, in the same year as the sixth edition (1865), with the foreign quotations translated into English, omitting the Appendix. It was in double columns, wretched type closely printed; yet it was kept in that identical type and it has recently been re-issued as a "new impression" without any date (except 1900) and nothing to show that it was Mill's own People's Edition. The omission of the Appendix is a distinct loss as it gave information about French agriculture.

The Preliminary Remarks have been slightly altered in the third, fifth, and sixth editions. The most important alteration is the addition of a new paragraph in the sixth edition (i. 10, paragraph on property in slaves). In the People's Edition the same year (1865) this twelfth paragraph has been accidentally interchanged with the following one (p. 5), to the complete disruption of the reasoning.

A confusion arises between Mill's references to "Laing" (*Travels in Norway*, etc.) and the one reference to "Mr. Samuel Laing" (ii. Bk. iv. 7, § 5, par. 3). The traveller, the elder Samuel, (d. 1868), was the father of the latter (d. 1897), the Finance Minister in India, Chairman of the Brighton Railway, M.P. and author.

The eighth and ninth edition are reprints of the seventh edition. Both of them have a misprint (ii. 143, line 9) of "ribbon" for "linen." As it comes in the midst of the great chapter on "International Trade," Bk. iii. ch. xviii. §7, par. 3, it plays havoc with one of the illustrations and reduces the argument to nonsense. There is nothing to give a hint of the mistake, which can only be corrected by collating the passage with the other editions, revised by Mill himself, none of which have anything but "linen." The passage first appears in the third edition (ii. 141), where the argument is important.

There is also a singular addition made without any known authority in the eighth and ninth editions, published respectively seven and fifteen years after Mill's death. In Bk. v. ch. ix. § 7, par. 6, the French law of partnership is discussed. The first sentence shows in what it is superior to the English one, followed by, "In other respects the French system is far worse than the English." Someone has caused it to be altered in the first person, as if by Mill himself, and it now stands, "In other respects the French system [was, and I believe, still] is, far worse than the English." We have put the interpolated words in brackets. (ii. 519, line

6.)

It may be noted here that an extraordinary misquotation of James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy* occurs in ch. 17 of the eighth and ninth editions. Mill's father (James Mill), writing on "Foreign Trade" (first edition, 1821, p. 86, line 1), said, "In these circumstances no exchange would take place." This is correctly given in the first seven editions of Mill's own book (where he refers to his father's book in its third edition, p. 120), but in the eighth (1878) and ninth (1886) it is altered into "In *the* circumstances, no *change* would take place." (The italics are ours.) The argument is destroyed and an entire mis-statement is placed on record!

About 1891 a very misleading edition of Mill's work was published with a preface by Sir John Lubbock (now Lord Avebury), as one of the Hundred Best Books he had recommended. He said that he left the publisher to choose the edition, and he certainly could not have known the second was the one selected; it happened to be at that date the latest of which the copyright had expired. But it is full of errors, which Mill himself altered in the third edition, and some of the most important parts of his work, as completed in the seventh edition, had not then been written. This valueless reprint must have caused much mischief amongst the believers in "best books." Its type is bad and too closely printed, without margin.

We shall now examine the second edition and note some of the chief changes in the third edition.

In the second edition (1849), Mill enlarges upon Socialists in the chapter "Of Property" (Bk. ii., ch. i., p. 250). He had previously criticised Communism as a system of society "in which no one could by his own exertions improve his condition." So now he says (i. 265), "Far, however, from looking upon the various classes of Socialists with any approach to disrespect, I honour the intentions of almost all who are publicly known in that character." He adds a note to the chapter "Of Slavery" (i. 309) to say that Denmark and France had given it up, and continues, "Still more recently the progress of the American mind towards a determination to rid itself of this odious stain has been manifested by very gratifying symptoms." This passage—second edition, 1849—has been actually reprinted in the Best Book Series with the date of 1891 on the title-page! The footnote referring to "the distress *lately* complained of in Belgium," first appears in the second edition, 1849, but the sentence remains intact even up to the ninth edition (1886, i. 338). Mill's careless references are extremely mystifying to the modern reader.

By 1852 came the third edition. It has a new long preface saying that several chapters had been "either materially added to or entirely re-cast." They related to Ireland ("Means of Abolishing Cottier Tenancy"); a large addition to "International Values"; the chapter of "Of Property" mostly re-written, to give enlarged accounts of Socialism; and additions to "Futurity of the Labouring Classes."

It will be necessary to compare the second and third editions with some detail, owing to the truly remarkable omissions as well as the still more important additions, most of which were retained to the ninth, though sometimes modified. They show the effects of the wars and revolutions of 1848-9, and of the gold discoveries in California in 1851.

Second edition, Bk. i. 5. §9 (i. 99). "This truth, that purchasing produce is not employing labour." In third edition, "This theorem," &c.; retained to ninth. Par. 3 is re-written. Second edition, "The demand for labour is constituted solely by the funds directly set apart for the use of labourers," is omitted in third edition. The second edition has three new, vivid, and picturesque pages, illustrating the use and misuse of Capital (i. 102-4) in which the owners of capital are called A and B. In third edition they are turned into a long footnote, retained as such to ninth edition.

Second edition, Bk. i. 7, §4. par. 3 (i. 131), "machinery has done little of importance," as to agriculture (1849). In third edition (1852) this is altered into, "machinery is only now beginning to show that it can do anything of importance" in regard to agriculture. In § 6, referring to the law of debtors, second edition (i. 139), Mill says, "Of late, indeed, law has thrown a part of its weight into the other scale, by a course of legislation on the subject of insolvent debtors, which is almost a direct encouragement to repudiation of engagements." This passage is omitted in third edition.

Second edition, Bk. i. 9, §4, par 3 (i. 179), (on large and small farming) is contradicted by this footnote in the third edition (i. 179), “The observations in the text may hereafter require some degree of modification from inventions such as the steamplough and the reaping machine. The effect, however, of these improvements, on the relative advantages of large and small farms will depend not on the efficiency of the instruments, but on their costliness. I see no reason to expect that this will be such as to make them inaccessible to small farmers, or combinations of small farmers.” For many years past there has been a regular trade of hiring out these expensive machines to farmers of all kinds, which is a different way to Mill's expectation.

Second edition, Bk. i. 13, §3, par. 7 (i. 239) begins, “Whether the repeal of the corn laws is likely, even temporarily, to give any considerable increase of margin for population to fill up, it would be premature as yet to attempt to decide.” These words, with a few similar lines, are omitted in third edition.

Second edition, Bk. ii. 1, §2, par. 4 (i. 249). Mill's views “Of Property” suffer some change between 1849 and 1852. Here is a specimen. “This attention is not likely to diminish; attacks on the institution of property being, in the existing state of human intellect, a natural expression of the discontent of all those classes on whom, in whatever manner, the present constitution of society bears hardly; and it is a safe prediction that unless the progress of the human mind can be checked, such speculations will never cease, until the laws of property are freed from whatever portion of injustice they contain, and until whatever is well grounded in the opinions, and legitimate in the aims of its assailants, is adopted into the framework of society.” In third edition, after “diminish,” there are merely the words, “but to increase more and more,” without any hope held out about “the framework of society.”

Second edition. In §3 of the same chapter he naively observes: “That a country of any large extent could be formed into a single co-operative society is not easily conceivable.” But he thought there might be a small socialistic communities all over a country, with a Congress to manage them! Mill forgets that even a Congress is but formed of human beings, and this would be a task only fit for magicians. This paragraph is re-written in third edition, much as it now stands in the ninth. His distinction between Communism “a word of Continental origin, only of late introduced into this country,” and Socialism, “a word which originated among the English Communists ... is now on the Continent employed in a larger sense,” first appears in second edition (i. 250), and is retained to ninth.

Second edition, Bk. ii. 2, §1 (i. 268). Mill's well known passage, “Competition is often spoken of as if it were necessarily a cause of misery and degradation to the labouring class; as if high wages were not precisely as much a product of competition as low wages,” begins in this second edition. In third edition the phrase “unearned advantage” (now called “unearned increment”) is first used (i. 265, lines 15–16).

In §3 of this chapter, Mill makes the strange suggestion that fighting in warfare is always on the co-operative system—apparently forgetting the existence of any general—and he considers its circumstances “stirring and stimulating to the feelings and faculties.” This shows the book was written during what was called England's Forty Years' Peace (1915–1853), when war was admired in theory as much as peace is now. This is omitted in third edition.

Second edition, Bk. ii. 4, §1 (i. 295). “Only through the principle of competition had political economy any pretension to the character of a science... [it] cannot be required to do anything more.” In third edition (i. 292) these words are added, “and indeed cannot do,” before “anything more.” A very distinct assertion as to its powers; retained to ninth edition.

Second edition, Bk. ii. 7, §2, par. 1 (i. 345). If peasant properties bring anxieties, Mill thinks they make the owners superior to an English labourer; “unless he has access to ... parish-pay ... Then indeed he may feel with the old doggerel,”

“Hang sorrow, cast away care,  
The parish is bound to find us.”

This couplet is omitted in third edition, in spite of its lively air of conviction!

Mill wrote much about Ireland in first and second editions. Two chapters are devoted to Cottiers.

Second edition, Bk. ii. 9, §1 (i. 383). A footnote says this chapter (“Of Cottiers”) was written when “the great change in the agricultural economy of Ireland, which must necessarily arise from the joint operation of the potato failure and the poor law of 1847, had not yet begun to take effect. The form which the industrial system of Ireland is tending to assume, remains still in such uncertainty that no speculations grounded on it can at present be hazarded with any prospect of advantage.” This is omitted in third edition.

Second edition, Bk. ii. 10, §1 (i. 396) the chapter on “Means of Abolishing Cottier Tenancy.” Perhaps the most startling “means” is in par. 3. “Cottiers, therefore, must cease to be. Nothing can be done for Ireland without transforming her rural population from cottier tenants into something else. But into what?” Whilst this was being written in 1849, Irish emigration to America had begun, and this outburst is omitted in third edition, where Mill is naturally astonished at the “spontaneous emigration,” which made millions of cottiers “cease to be,” at least in Ireland, without his having to arrange what to do with them. His disapproval of the suggestion that Irish cottiers should be turned into day-labourers, first appears in the third edition (i. 399) retained to ninth edition.

In §5 of the same chapter, the phrase “tenant-right” is explained thus: (second edition, i. 406.) “Under this equivocal phrase, two things are confounded. What it commonly stands for in Irish discussion, is the Ulster practice, which is in fact fixity of tenure .... But to convert this customary limitation of rent into a legal one, and to make it universal, would be to establish a fixity of tenure by law, the objections to which have already been stated.” ... “The same appellation (tenant-right) has of late years been applied, more particularly in England, to something altogether different ... that on the expiration of a lease the landlord should make compensation to the tenant for “unexhausted improvements.” All this is omitted in third edition. Instead, he condemns the Tenant Right League. He says that if this [fixity of tenure] were done by Act of Parliament it would be a “complete expropriation of the higher classes of Ireland” (third edition, i. 463), which he does not altogether approve of, except in an extremity. Nor does he think it desirable there should be none but peasant proprietors in Ireland. Mill, in second edition, is vehement about the “wretched attempts as yet made to do good to Ireland,” but by 1852 these remarks were already out of date, and they are omitted in third edition.

Second edition, Bk. 11. §1, par. 2 (i. 417). All par. 2 is altered in important points. “A custom on the subject [of wages], even if established, could not easily maintain itself unaltered in any other than a stationary state of society. An increase or a falling off in the demand for labour, an increase or a diminution of the labouring population, could hardly fail to engender a competition which would break down any custom respecting wages, by giving either to one side or to the other a strong direct interest in infringing it.” This is omitted in third edition, which only retains an introductory line, “Wages, like other things, may be regulated either by competition or by custom.”

Second edition, Bk. ii., 11. §6, par. 4 (i. 438) the words, “means of subsistence,” gives place in third edition (i. 430) to the celebrated phrase “the wages-fund,” retained to ninth edition. The modern discovery that there is no wages-fund, was never actually grasped by Mill, though he did not latterly so strongly assert its existence.

Second edition, Bk. ii. 13, §4, par. 2 (i. 466). Mill again refers to the Irish, and he makes the erroneous statement that they “are nearly the worst adapted people in Europe for settlers in the wilderness.” This is omitted in third edition, as by 1852 facts had proved too strong for his theories!

Second edition, Bk. ii. 14, §6 (i. 489). Mill's view that restriction of work even by trades' unions is good—in 1849—he throws over in 1852. Also he leaves out the passage (i. 490) against Irish immigrants to England.

Second edition, Bk. ii. 16, §5, par. 3 (i. 522) is re-written in third edition (i. 514). It is about rent in relation to capital sunk in improvements. The third edition includes the first mention of the way Bastiat uses

Mr. H.C. Carey's book in defence of property in land (i. 514); retained to ninth edition.

Second edition, Bk. iii. 1, §1, par. 1 (i. 532). The following passage, though retained in the third edition, has a striking alteration in the words here placed in square brackets. "It is a case of the error too common in political economy, of not distinguishing between necessities arising from [laws of nature], and those created by social arrangements." In third edition (i. 524) these words replace them: "the nature of things."

Second edition, Bk. iii. 9, §3, par. 1 (ii. 29). "If the cost of production of gold were reduced one-fourth [by the discovery of more fertile mines,] it might happen that there might not be more of it bought for plate." The unexpected gold discoveries in California, 1851, caused the words in square brackets to be omitted in third edition.

Second edition, Bk. iii. 15, §2, par. 2 (ii. 103). "There is no commodity which is invariable in its cost of production. Gold comes nearest to the idea; but gold is liable to vary in cost of production," etc. In third edition (ii. 102) Mill says: "Gold and silver are the least variable," &c., but gives no reason for including silver. Retained to ninth.

Second edition. A great change in third edition is the addition of five new pages and a long footnote to Bk. iii. 18. The first five sections are retained, the new pages form §6, §7, §8 of the third edition, while §6 of the second edition is used as §9 of the third edition, and closes this celebrated chapter "On International Values," as it did in the earlier editions. This arrangement is retained to ninth edition. The third edition, §6 (ii. 138) begins, "Thus far had the theory of international values been carried in the first and second editions of this work. But intelligent criticisms, and subsequent further investigation, have shown that the doctrine stated in the preceding pages, though correct as far as it goes, is not yet the complete theory of the subject matter." This is retained in fourth edition (1857) and fifth edition (1862), but in the sixth edition (1865) Mill gives a valued name to the "intelligent criticisms (chiefly those of my friend Mr. William Thornton)," and this addition is retained to ninth edition, no reason being given why it should not have been inserted in the third edition.

Second edition, Bk. iv. 1, §3, par. 2 (ii. 257). "Which of the two conflicting agencies" [increase of population and improvement in agricultural skill] "is gaining upon the other, might be conjectured with tolerable accuracy from the money price of agricultural produce," etc. Though this passage is retained, it has a corrective in a short new footnote in third edition (ii. 265), which is retained to ninth edition, as follows: "A still better criterion, perhaps, than that suggested in the text, would be the increase or diminution of the amount of the labourer's wages estimated in agricultural produce."

Second edition, Bk. iv. 7 (ii. 315) "On the Probable Futurity of the Labouring Classes," is altered in many parts in third edition, which includes the first reference to a franchise for workmen (i. 327). An indignant footnote is added (ii. 331) urging women's suffrage, beginning: "It is truly disgraceful that in a woman's reign not one step has been made by law towards removing even the smallest portion of the existing injustice to women." It is repeated in fourth edition (ii. 335), 1857, with the addition of reference to "Mr. Fitzroy's Act for the Better Protection of Women and Children against Assaults," as "well-meant though inadequate." But by 1862 the footnote was well out-of-date, and it is omitted in fifth edition.

In this ch. 7 the passages in second edition on the effects of the French Revolution of February, 1848, on the organisation of industry (ii. 326), are omitted in third edition; ten new pages are added about co-operative societies, chiefly French.

Second edition, Bk. v. 1, §2, par. 4 (ii. 342). With regard to contracts: Mill excuses non-performance by saying, "his mind or his circumstances may have altered; or not even that, since the omission to perform may be a mere act of negligence." In the third edition he omits the passage in order to insert a stronger one in the same direction (ii. 358), "and the term fraud, which can scarcely admit of being extended even to the case of voluntary breach of contract when no deception was practised, is certainly not applicable when the omission to perform it is a case of negligence." This dictum is retained to the ninth edition.

Second edition, Bk. v. 2, §3, par. 3 (ii. 354), its last four lines are omitted in third edition (ii. 370) and six new lines, entirely contradictory to second edition are put instead. (This is a not uncommon thing in these two editions. Mill takes for granted no one will notice it!) In par. 5, next page (ii. 355), he says: “It is partial taxation, which is a mild form of robbery.” This line is left out in third edition, and the following replaces it (ii. 371): “It is not the fortunes which are earned, but those which are unearned that it is for the public good to place under limitation”—another contradiction! A further quotation will show Mill’s amazing belief that education of the masses will prevent their being jealous! It is on the same page of the second edition (ii. 355). “It is the part of a good government to provide, that, as far as more paramount considerations permit, the inequality of opportunities shall be remedied. When all kinds of useful instruction shall be as accessible as they might be made, and when the cultivated intelligence of the poorer classes, aided so far as necessary by the guidance and co-operation of the state, shall obviate, as it might so well do, the major part of the disabilities attendant on poverty, the inequalities of fortune arising from people’s own earnings could not justly give umbrage.” In third edition (ii. 371) this is modified as follows: “but if all were done which it would be in the power of a good government to do, by instruction and by legislation to remedy this inequality of opportunities, the difference of fortune ... umbrage.” It is retained to ninth edition in this form, and is very odd reading at the present day.

In the §4 of the same chapter, second edition (ii. 362) on taxation for profits on business, Mill advises an intermediate rate, one-half of the net income being taxed on the higher scale, and the other half on the lower. But in third edition (ii. 379), he says instead: “Or perhaps the claims of justice in this respect might be sufficiently met by allowing the deduction of a fourth on the entire income, interest included.” This is retained to ninth edition.

Second edition, Bk. v. 5, §2, par. 3 (ii. 416). These lines are omitted in third edition, but are useful as throwing a light upon advertising in 1849. “In this country the amount of the duty is moderate, and the abuse of advertising, which is quite as conspicuous as the use, renders the abolition of the tax, though right in principle, a matter of less urgency than it might otherwise be deemed.”

Second edition, Bk. v. 6, §1, par. 2 (ii. 421), “it may be doubted if so great an aversion to taxation would not produce more evil than good.” This is changed in third edition (ii. 437), “it may be doubted ... taxation might not be an unqualified good.” The latter form is retained to ninth edition.

Second edition, Bk. v. 9, §7, par. 6 (ii. 471): “A company with limited responsibility cannot be formed” in France without leave from the *Conseil d’Etat*. In third edition (ii. 489), it is altered to “A joint-stock company,” etc.

Second edition, Bk. v. 10, §5, par. 5 (ii. 503): Mill’s change of opinion on combinations is worth noting. “Combinations to keep up wages are therefore not only permissible but useful, whenever really calculated to have that effect.” In third edition (ii. 521) this passage is replaced by the following: “Combinations to keep up wages are seldom effectual, and when effectual, are, for the reasons which I have assigned, seldom desirable.”

Second edition, Bk. v. 11, §12, par. 2 (ii. 536): “Another example of the same principle [and one of great practical moment] is afforded by what is known as the Wakefield system of colonisation.” The words placed in brackets are omitted in third edition, the rest is retained to ninth edition.

In §14 of the same chapter there is a new paragraph in third edition (ii. 566) in which Mill again refers to the “unparalleled amount of spontaneous emigration from Ireland.” He is not satisfied with its direction, but advises Government to “direct” it “to Australia,” or where required, and where it does not go enough of itself. This was in 1852, when America was the only place the Irish could get at. Australia was far behind in the race for emigrants at that date.

In fourth edition (1857) he says the stream of emigration is already slackening, and government aid “on the self-supporting principle is again becoming necessary.” In fifth edition (1862) he refers to emigration to “the seats of gold discoveries” (unnamed seats, too) as already slackening. In sixth edition (1865) he says

the emigration from Ireland “has since partially revived,” and here he seems to lose his interest in Ireland, for the passage remains in seventh edition (1871), and of course, therefore, in eighth edition (1878) and ninth edition (1886) where it becomes absolutely unmeaning through want of any date.

Bk. v. Chapter 11 completes Mill's book.

We have now made it clear that the third edition has much in common with the seventh, and it remains to point out the chief additions in the other editions, which are indicated in the Prefaces.

The Preface to the first edition (1848) is repeated in all the others, with a different special addition to each.

To the fourth edition (1857) a few lines of special Preface explain that it has been revised, and “additional explanations inserted,” especially in the chapters “On the Influence of Credit on Prices” (Bk. iii. 12), and “On the Regulation of a Convertible Paper Currency” (Bk. iii. 13).

The fifth edition (1862) has a few lines added after a dividing line from the invariable reprint of the Preface to the first edition. Mill says he has brought up the facts to a later date, and added “additional arguments and illustrations.”

In the Preface to the sixth edition (1865) Mill says he has revised it throughout, “like all previous editions,” and added explanations or “answers to new objections” (a significant phrase!) He has altered most the chapter “Of the Rate of Interest” (Bk. iii. 23), “and for most of the new matter there introduced, as well as for many minor improvements, I am indebted to the suggestions and criticisms of my friend Professor Cairnes, one of the most scientific of living political economists.”

The seventh edition (1871) has a Preface that is slightly inaccurate. For Mill says this edition “corresponds exactly with the last Library Edition and with the People's Edition.” But it does not do so in every detail, being brought up to date in many places and a long passage upon fire-insurance omitted. Bk. v. 5, §1, par. 6 (ii. 461). He adds that since the sixth edition: “there has been some instructive discussion on the theory of Demand and Supply, and on the influence of Strikes and Trades Unions on wages, by which additional light has been thrown on these subjects; but the results, in the author's opinion, are not yet ripe for incorporation in a general treatise on Political Economy.”

This Preface to seventh edition has been added to the Preface to the first edition, and both reprinted in the eight edition, without any dates to guide the reader that it does not refer to 1878 (eight edition).

In ninth edition the same first and seventh Prefaces are given, but they are placed with their titles, and a footnote to say the Preface of 1871 (seventh edition) was the last in the author's lifetime. We draw attention to this, as it is the only edition in which it appears, and it is not generally known.

There are many vital omissions and additions in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh editions. Yet the third edition forms the chief bulk of the seventh, and therefore its date being 1852, numberless reference and observations based on them are lamentably out of date, and become ludicrous by 1886 in the ninth and latest two-volumed edition! Surely the difficulty of Mill's monumental work is needlessly increased by the lack of any hints on the subject? Perhaps these Notes may be of some use in unriddling the unsuspected riddle.