

When the *Three Essays on Religion* were first published, after Mill's death, they were prefaced by this 'Introductory Notice' written by Helen Taylor, Mill's step-daughter (his wife's daughter from a previous marriage).

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The three following *Essays on Religion* were written at considerable intervals of time, without any intention of forming a consecutive series. They mustn't be regarded as a connected body of thought, except insofar as they exhibit the Author's deliberate and exhaustive treatment of the topics under consideration.

The two first of these three Essays were written between 1850 and 1858, the interval between the publication of the *Principles of Political Economy* and that of *Liberty*. During that same period three other Essays - on Justice, on Utility, and on Liberty - were also composed. Of the five Essays written at that time, three have already been presented to the public by the Author. The one on Liberty was expanded into the now well-known work bearing the same title. Those on Justice and Utility were afterwards combined (with some alterations and additions) to make a single work that was published under the name of *Utilitarianism*. The remaining two - on Nature and on the Utility of Religion - are now presented to the public along with a third, on Theism, which was produced at a much later period. In these two first Essays there are clear indications of when they were composed, including the absence of any mention of the works of Mr. Darwin and Sir Henry Maine in passages where the thought expressed coincides with their views

The last Essay in the present volume belongs to a different period; it was written between 1868 and 1870, but wasn't designed as a sequel to the two Essays that now appear along with it; the three weren't intended to appear together at all. On the other hand it is certain that the Author regarded the opinions expressed in these different Essays as basically consistent. The evidence for this lies in the fact that in 1873, after completing his Essay on Theism, he intended to have the Essay on Nature published at once, with only such slight revision as might be thought necessary in preparing it for the press, but substantially in its present form. This shows that his manner of thinking hadn't undergone any substantial change. Whatever discrepancies, therefore, may seem to remain after a really careful comparison between different passages, may be set down either to the fact that the last Essay had not undergone the many revisions which it was the Author's habit to make especially searching and thorough; or to the difference of tone, and of apparent estimate of the relative weight of different considerations, that results from taking a wider view and including a larger number of considerations in the estimate of the subject as a whole, than in dealing with parts of it only.

The fact that the Author intended to publish the Essay on Nature in 1873 is sufficient evidence, if any is needed, that the volume now given to the public was not withheld by him on account of reluctance to encounter whatever odium might result from the free expression of his opinions on religion. That he did not intend to publish the other two Essays at the same time was in accord with his habit in regard to the public utterance of his religious opinions. For at the same time that he was especially deliberate and slow in forming opinions, he had a special dislike for uttering half-formed opinions. He absolutely refused to be hurried into a premature decision on any point to which he did not think he had given sufficient time and labour to have exhausted it to the utmost limit of his own thinking powers. And, in the same way, even after he had arrived at definite conclusions, he refused to allow the curiosity of others to force him to express them before he had worked as hard as he could on expressing them properly, and before, therefore, he

had subjected to the test of time not only the conclusions themselves but also the form in which he had expressed them. The same reasons, therefore, that made him cautious in the spoken utterance of his opinions in proportion as it was necessary to be at once precise and comprehensive in order to be properly understood, which in his judgment was pre-eminently the case in religious speculation, were the reasons that made him abstain from publishing his Essay on Nature for upwards of fifteen years, and might have led him still to withhold the others which now appear in the same volume.

From this point of view it will be seen that the Essay on Theism has both greater value and less than any other of the Author's works. The last considerable work that he completed, it shows the latest state of the Author's mind, the carefully balanced result of the deliberations of a lifetime. On the other hand, there had not been time for it to undergo the revision to which from time to time he subjected most of his writings before making them public. Not only therefore is the style less polished than that of any other of his published works, but even the matter itself, at least in the exact shape it takes here, has never undergone the repeated examination which it certainly would have passed through before he would himself have given it to the world.