The whole problem of Laetrile is this: that people want to take it, but it does them no good. And in that simple fact, given that Laetrile is known as a drug, there lies a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the two guiding values of American life from its beginnings. The values are Liberty and Welfare: in the twentieth century they have reached an equipoise of influence and respect; and the outcome of the Laetrile controversy may be not only a sign but a determining factor in the eventual assignment of priority between them. For this reason the issue is of compelling interest to contemporary social philosophy, and analysis of the issue in the terms of the categories of that discipline may serve to indicate some of the intellectual consequences of the options before us. I happen to think that the analysis suggests the advisability of a course of action with regard to Laetrile; I will present and defend that conclusion in the latter half of the paper.

I. The Values

The two ruling values of liberal society were both enunciated by the greatest of all liberals, John Stewart Mill. Fundamental in the system he propounded was the value of Welfare or, as he called it, happiness:

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness ... pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends; and all desirable things ... are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.¹

It is significant that for Mill (perhaps not for his predecessor, Jeremy

¹ An early version of this paper was read at the Forum for Health and Human Values, Farmington, Connecticut, April 19, 1979.
Bentham), it "is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact, that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others." 2 Happiness for Mill is not at all identical with gratification of immediate desire. To be sure, men often in fact "postpone" higher pleasures to indulge in lower ones, but even in so doing they can recognize the "intrinsic superiority of the higher." Of interest to our purposes is his immediate choice of example: people often indulge their immediate desires to the detriment of their health, "though perfectly aware that health is the greater good." 3 By "happiness", then, we must understand the genuine satisfaction of real interests, not just what anyone may foolishly want at any given time.

Turning to the role of government in promoting happiness among its citizens, Mill often seems to be of several minds. 4 His most widely known conclusion, however, and the one that has had the most influence on the society he was addressing, is the powerful statement on Liberty in the work of the same name:

The object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle: ... That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right. 5

Again, as soon as any part of a person's conduct affects prejudicially the interests of others, society has jurisdiction over it, and the question whether the general welfare will or will not be promoted by interfering with it, becomes open to discussion. But there is no room for entertaining any such question when a person's conduct affects the interests of no persons besides himself. ... In all such cases there should be perfect freedom, legal and social, to do the action and stand the consequences. 6

Mill grounds these assertions, not on any Natural and Inalienable Right to Liberty, but on the doctrine of utility expounded above, "utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being." 7 Simple utilitarian calculations will yield the conclusion that government ought not to interfere in the self-regarding choices of individuals – public education should be sufficient to instil prudence and moral integrity; public disapproval should be sufficient deterrent for foolishness and depravity; a government empowered to look after individual welfare will be much too powerful for the people's good; and above all "strongest of all the arguments against the interference of the public with purely personal conduct...", according to Mill, is "that when it does interfere, the odds are that it interferes wrongly, and in the wrong place." 8 Our experience of bureaucratic bungling of well-intentioned