John Stuart Mill, Political Economist

A Reassessment

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John Stuart Mill's reputation as an economic thinker rests almost entirely on *Principles of Political Economy.* First published in 1848, this weighty tome met with immediate success and was widely recognized as a towering achievement on a scale with Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations.* For more than a generation, its influence was unrivaled and established Mill as the dominant economist of the age. At the time of his death in 1873, the *Principles* was in its seventh edition and remained an authoritative text until eclipsed by Alfred Marshall's treatise of 1890.

Today Mill is best known not as a political economist but as a social philosopher whose works *On Liberty, The Subjection of Women,* and *Utilitarianism* are standard fare in college syllabi. Among scholars, however, Mill's economic thought remains very much alive, and not just for its historical significance. He was *the* paradigmatic nineteenth-century liberal, and his concerns, values, and analysis continue to resonate in contemporary liberal societies. And because Mill employed political economy on behalf of a broader program of social reform, he remains highly relevant to current debates on social justice, income inequality, the welfare state, and the future of capitalism.

Unfortunately, Mill's relevance has been consistently compromised by the failure of historians of economics (and other scholars) to squarely confront his actual teaching. All observers recognize that Mill "explored" or "flirted" with

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socialism and expressed a certain "sentimental" attachment to "cooperative" schemes for a future society. Yet nearly all deny that Mill was a "socialist" in any accepted sense of the term, even though he openly identified himself as one in his *Autobiography*. On the contrary, Mill is consistently hailed as a classical economist, a defender of the free market, and a reformer of capitalism whose professed "socialism" was hypothetical and went no further than the welfare state.

Mill and Historians of Economics

The efforts of historians of economics to "save Mill from himself" can be traced to the ideological currents that accompanied the Cold War. Before the rise of bolshevism and fascism in Europe, Mill had been widely viewed as an evolutionary socialist, a proto-Fabian, and had even been placed among the "theoretical adherents" of revolutionary socialism. Beginning in the late 1940s, economic scholars such as Jacob Viner, Lionel Robbins, and Robert Heilbroner would attempt to rebrand Mill as an idealistic thinker who ultimately adhered to the fundamental tenets of classical theory and the market system. For Viner, Mill's flirtation with socialism was "in large degree platonic," a harmless dalliance safely relegated to the "vague future" (1949, 381). In the interim, Mill counseled economic orthodoxy, which, along with his "utopian aspirations," struck just the right tone for mid-Victorians. This tone gave Mill's economic teaching a broad, if eclectic, appeal: he became "a major source of inspiration for the Fabian socialists as well as for the laissez-faire liberals" (363).

The future Lord Robbins noted the ambiguity in Mill's eclecticism. Was Mill an "arch-individualist" or a "good socialist"? Robbins attributed much of the confusion to Mill himself, a divided thinker who "would have dearly liked to believe in socialism in some form or another" (1952, 142). His preferred form of socialism was "*syndicalist* rather than . . . *collectivist*" (159, italics in original), but this did not make Mill a "socialist" in the strict sense of the term. In the end, "Mill's utopia" was mere smoke and his socialist noodling little more than "a plea for an open mind." Through all the "mysterious vicissitudes" of his thoughts on socialism (164 n.), Mill "remained a great Utilitarian and a great exponent of Classical Political Economy" (145).

In *The Worldly Philosophers*, Robert Heilbroner popularized this paradoxical picture of Mill, a "utopian" whose "leanings" were only "mildly Socialist" ([1953] 1999, 133). Mill admittedly envisioned (indeed predicted) a society of workers' cooperatives in which "[c]apitalism would gradually disappear" (132–33). And yet Mill is said to have adhered to "a doctrine English to the core: gradualist, optimistic, realistic, and devoid of radical overtones." In a subsequent work, *Teachings from the Worldly Philosophers* (1996), Heilbroner updated this equivocal portrait of Mill as "a fervent libertarian" whose "utopian yearnings" were balanced by "scrupulous fairness" in analysis and "a recognition of [socialism's] practical difficulties" (129, 141). And although Mill's future utopia—the Stationary State—"must today seem hopelessly

unrealistic," it represents "no leap into socialism" (146, 150). Yet not even Heilbroner was able to reconcile the "astonishing change" from Mill's spirited defense of laissez-faire to his anticipation of the modern welfare state (155).

For Heilbroner, the split nature of Mill's economic doctrine is revealed in the dual character of the *Principles of Political Economy,* at once a "textbook" of pure economic theory and a roadmap of "socioeconomic evolution" (1996, 141). V. W. Bladen, the modern editor of the *Principles,* characterizes it as the hybrid work of a philosopher and a scientist, "a preacher" and a "political economist" (1965, xxxix). A recognition of this duality has not prevented scholars from attempting to square the circle of Mill's eclecticism. Mark Blaug downplays Mill's attacks on capitalism and private property and eschews the "socialist" label—Mill's "sympathetic treatment of socialist arguments" notwithstanding. On the contrary, Mill "is the perfect example of what we mean when we call someone a 'classical liberal'" (1985, 220). John Bell accuses Mill of inescapable inconsistencies, calling him at once "a firm believer in capitalism" and a proto-Fabian socialist. And yet Mill never departed from the free-market principles "expounded by his father" or "abandoned the fundamentals of capitalism" (1980, 252, 253). Bell admits that Mill's cooperative vision "would virtually dispense with the wage system" and with it capitalism, but this vision was "at variance with the economic fundamentals in which he believed" (270–71). Thus, Mill remains "the last of the great classical economists" (271).

Abram Harris also identifies the "socialistic and individualistic tendencies" in Mill's thought and agrees that the latter got the upper hand. Or did they? For although "Mill was no starry-eyed egalitarian," "[h]is philosophy upholds the ideal of a kind of classless society, one in which all divisions except those of taste, interest, and ability are non-existent" (1963, 153). Not to be outdone, E. K. Hunt observes that "Mill not only morally rejected the capitalist structure of his time . . . but he also believed it would ultimately be abolished" (2002, 195). And yet because Mill placed the advent of socialism on the distant horizon, "it is questionable whether he could be properly called a socialist" (196). In fact, "Mill's real objective was to promote the reform of capitalism" (197). Donald Losman shares the notion that Mill's critique of capitalism was merely reformist and required "only minor modifications in the [existing] economic system" (1971, 86). Far from transcending this system, Mill's reforms were aimed at "retaining and re-vitalizing the basic institutional framework of capitalism" (86). "He was, in short, no more a socialist than Professor [Paul] Samuelson," who believed that "'all these evils [of capitalism] can be ameliorated . . . within the framework of the capitalist system'" (104). Similarly, Robert Ekelund and Robert Tollison identify Mill as a modern-day Keynesian and proponent of the welfare state (1976, 214), while Ekelund and Robert Hébert identify Mill as realist who "rejected socialist and romantic proposals for income redistribution as being at odds with the nature of human beings" (1990, 213). As a pioneer in the struggle for a viable form of "distributive justice"—"the distinguishing

feature of his social thought"—Mill stands as an illustrious "forerunner of contemporary liberal economic policy" (Ekelund and Tollison 1976, 214).

The authors of full-length studies of Mill's political economy reach similar conclusions. Pedro Schwartz acknowledges that Mill hoped "that a co-operative social organization could be gradually and peacefully substituted for the capitalist system," but he concludes that Mill was not a socialist, "whether Utopian or revolutionary" (1972, 232–33, 191). Samuel Hollander, author of the definitive study of Mill's economics, fundamentally agrees but is even more ingenious at explaining away Mill's alleged inconsistency and ambivalence. For Hollander, vacillations in Mill's economic policy "do not so much reflect changes of substance . . . but rather an altered perspective" (1985, 602). Mill is also said to have varied his teaching on the basis of his audience, "often taking a more extreme position than his mature reflections justified and thereby suggesting far less consistency than actually exists" (683). Accordingly, Hollander reiterates that George Stigler's assertion that Mill's so-called ambivalence "on the comparative merits of private enterprise and various forms of socialism" is "far from a fair evaluation" (684, 685). "On the whole there was little change in Mill's position over time" (808).

As for the charge of socialism itself, Hollander is evasive. If Mill did identify himself as a "socialist," it was largely in a speculative and provisional sense. Socialism per se "would appear not to reflect Mill's general intention" (1985, 885). Hollander does concede that "Mill's ideal for the future . . . entailed transition from the worker–capitalist relationship of 'dependency,' to a system of worker cooperatives," but "[s]ocialism in the modern sense of the term is not in question" (775). (Certainly, Mill rejected top-down, state collectivism, but his model of cooperation is arguably a purer form of "socialism" than its more modern variants.) Hollander also acknowledges Mill's "extraordinarily sharp set of charges against contemporary capitalism" (782) and his tendency to give socialism "the advantage" (784) and communism "the benefit of the doubt" (793), yet Mill is still best described as an advocate of "reformed capitalism" (793). For all his detail and erudition, Hollander simply follows the conventional lines of interpretation and recapitulates the very equivocations, ambiguities, and inconsistencies present in Mill.

The foregoing summary represents the dominant, almost unanimous view of Mill's status as a political economist. The work of Ludwig von Mises ([1927] 1985), F. A. Hayek (1951), Joseph Schumpeter (1954), Oskar Kurer (1991, 1992), and E. G. West (1978) stands as something of a "minority report" but has not prevented more recent scholars from touting Mill's "classical" credentials and confirming that "Mill was no friend of Socialism" (Kors 2011, 17). If such accounts are marked by equivocation, inconsistency, and contradiction, much of the blame rests with Mill himself. Karl Marx branded Mill's attempt to reconcile private property with socialism a "shallow syncretism" (qtd. in Barber 2009, 119), while W. S. Jevons found Mill's mind "essentially illogical" (qtd. in Maas 2005, 151). The main cause of confusion,

however, is the failure of scholars to closely examine the most relevant texts—key sections from the third edition of the *Principles* (1852), Mill's essay "Claims of Labour" (1845), his speech on "Co-operation" (1864), and the posthumously published *Chapters on Socialism* (1879). In combination, these sources reveal a thinker at stark variance with the scholarly (and popular) image of Mill as "a great exponent of Classical Political Economy."

A Critique of Property—Private and Social

For all his vast learning and erudition, John Stuart Mill was first and foremost a *social reformer,* a self-styled "radical" who dedicated his entire life to the "progress of humanity." As revealed in his *Autobiography,* Mill assumed the mantle of a "reformer of the world" as a youth and pursued this vocation for half a century with a diligence and passion rarely equaled (1963–91, 1:31).[1] Like his "radical" mentors, he would attack privilege, ignorance, oppression, and injustice wherever he found them, and aristocratic Britain was a target-rich environment. Yet Mill went beyond the democratic and market reforms championed by the Benthamites to embrace a far-reaching "moral and social revolution" that would transform a semifeudal England into an egalitarian, postcapitalist cooperative order. Mill's turn to "applied" economics in the 1840s marked a decisive stage in the development of this vision.

Even before the appearance of the *Principles* in 1848, Mill sounded the leading themes of his social economics in "The Claims of Labour" (1845)—an end to the wage system, redistribution of wealth, population control, a cooperative economy, and the stationary state. He would develop these doctrines in successive editions of the *Principles* and beyond. In the "preliminary remarks" to that work, Mill distinguishes between "the laws of Production and Distribution" (2:3), the basis for his proposed economic reforms. But his vision did not merely encompass the leveling of fortunes and universal security—it was far nobler: "All know that it is one thing to be rich, another thing to be enlightened, brave, or humane; that the questions [of] how a nation is made wealthy, and how it is made free, or virtuous, or eminent in literature, in the fine arts, in arms, or in polity, are totally distinct enquiries" (2:3).

This "new" approach to political economy begins in earnest with the chapter "Of Property" in the *Principles,* which marks a sharp break with the preceding chapters. Building on his preliminary distinction between production and distribution, Mill underscores the *social* nature of property and its subordination to the *will* of the community. Whereas production may be subject to "laws," distribution is "of human institution solely" (2:199) and permits a wide berth in practice. Indeed, "mankind" is free to distribute wealth "as they like" and to "whomsoever they please,

1. All subsequent parenthetical citations of Mill refer to *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (1963–91) and provide volume and page numbers.

and on whatever terms" (2:199–200). Historically the distribution of wealth has depended on "the laws and customs of society," in particular the interests of "the ruling portion of the community," and has varied considerably "in different ages and countries." Indeed, it "might be still more different, if mankind so chose" (2:200).

Mill clearly did not hold a Lockean view of property. Property for Mill is a ***social*** not a ***natural*** right, and its individual possession is dependent on the "permission of society" (2:200). Beyond a right to the fruits of one's labor in the narrow sense, there is no natural right to property for Mill. Like Jeremy Bentham, Mill rejected the natural-rights philosophy and viewed property arrangements in culturally contingent and positivist terms. The standard for evaluating such arrangements was, of course, ***utility*** based on the "greatest happiness" principle. Here Mill does not invoke the argument from utility directly, but it is ever present in his repeated references to "justice" and "expediency." In conjunction with this moral imperative, his discretionary notion of distribution and relativist conception of property relations provide a compelling reason for serious consideration of alternative (socialist) economic arrangements.

Mill's famous "examination" of communism and socialism in the third edition of the *Principles* is often presented as an open-minded and impartial treatment of current trends in social philosophy that ends without any substantive conclusions. This is far from the case. The entire presentation is skewed in favor of the communist or socialist alternatives. The major objections to communism—lack of incentive, improvident procreation, malapportionment of labor—are largely swept aside. A communist worker with a stake in a firm could be expected to perform as well or better than a mere wage earner and, with the added advantage of education, would match or surpass the efforts of "the salaried officers in the middle or higher classes" (2:205). Mill attributes hostility toward such prospects to prejudice and a lack of imagination: "Mankind are capable of a far greater amount of public spirit than the present age is accustomed to suppose possible" (2:205). Commentators frequently invoke this epigram as a mark of Mill's doughty optimism but invariably fail to cite the passage that follows. "History bears witness to the success with which large bodies of human beings may be trained to feel the public interest their own. And no soil could be more favourable to the growth of such a feeling, than a Communist association, since all the ambition, and the bodily and mental activity, which are now exerted in the pursuit of separate and self-regarding interests, would require another sphere of employment, and would naturally find it in the pursuit of the general benefit of the community" (2:205).

It would be easy to mistake this passage for Robert Owen or Louis Blanc or even Marx—that is, until Mill invokes the Catholic religious orders as an historical illustration. In view of his agnosticism, the example would appear misplaced, but Mill's "religion of humanity" (borrowed from Auguste Comte), led by a moral and intellectual elite, had distinct affinities with "the spiritual power" of traditional society. Where Mill differed from most socialists was in his emphasis on the value of ***competition*** among cooperatively organized firms. "A contest, who can do

the most for the common good, is not the kind of competition which Socialists repudiate" (2:205)—not *good* socialists at least. A far greater challenge, however, is the task of training "large bodies of human beings" to renounce "the pursuit of separate and self-regarding interests" and redirect their energies to "the pursuit of the general benefit of the community" (2:205).

Far more than a plea for overcoming narrow self-interest, Mill pushes the idea to its radical, socialistic, utopian conclusion. Socialism, unlike communism, retains a place for pecuniary interest as an incentive and reward for performance. This would seem to make socialism superior in view of Mill's emphasis on competition and individual merit. Ideally, however, the communist principle of equal shares *regardless* of performance embodies "a higher standard of justice" still, albeit one admittedly "adapted to a much higher moral condition of human nature" (2:210). Strictly speaking, the policy of different shares is "just" only when everyone is equally capable of performing at the same level of proficiency. But "when it depends on natural difference of strength or capacity, this principle of remuneration is in itself an injustice," for it unfairly "assign[s] most to those who are already most favoured by nature" (2:210). Viewed as such, even socialism falls short of the "higher standard of justice" embodied by communism and remains "a compromise with the selfish type of character formed by the present standard of morality, and fostered by the existing social institutions" (2:210). In an absolute scale of values, socialism ranks *above* reformed capitalism but *below* communism, which assumes "a much higher moral condition of human nature" for its realization (2:210). Socialism may, however, serve as a *transition* to communism. But how is this still "higher ideal" to be achieved? How is the sin of selfishness to be whipped out of the offending Adam? Only through *education*—or, more specifically, only after "education [has] been entirely regenerated" (2:210).

If proper education can answer the objection based on self-interest, it can also resolve the Malthusian conundrum. In a society where all are trained in the principles of moral restraint and social responsibility, the force of opinion will render improvident reproduction far less pervasive. "Communism is precisely the state of things in which opinion might be expected to declare itself with greatest intensity against this kind of selfish intemperance" (2:206). Even without the intense scrutiny of a communist society, education and restraint would alone serve to end poverty: "With these, there could be no poverty, even under the present social institutions" (2:208). As for the fair apportionment of labor, Mill trusts to the experience and ingenuity of mankind to overcome difficulties that are "scarcely worth counting in the comparison" with the "inequality and injustice" of current practices (2:207). Indeed, so great are the "sufferings and injustices" of "the present state of society" that "all the difficulties, great or small, of Communism would be but as dust in the balance" (2:207).

Much has been made of the proviso that follows this striking endorsement of communism over the prevailing system of private property. "But to make the

comparison applicable," Mill insists, "we must compare Communism as its best, with the regime of individual property, not as it is, but as it might be made" (2:207). That neither "Communism at its best" nor "individual property . . . as it might be made" had ever existed did not prevent Mill from drawing the comparison. It is really no comparison at all. Mill has already defined communism as morally superior not only to private ownership but to socialism. By his own admission, the principle of "perfectly equal terms" embodied in communism "is inconsistent with any law of private property" (2:207). What Mill is comparing, however, is not ideal ***capitalism*** and ideal ***communism*** but ideal ***communism*** and ideal ***socialism***. "To judge of the final destination of the institution of property, we must suppose everything rectified, which causes the institution to work in a manner opposed to that equitable principle, of proportion between remuneration and exertion" (2:208). In weighing the question—having conflated reformed capitalism with socialism—Mill positions himself on the fence, leaving the matter to posterity, but his sympathies and arguments are all on the side of communism—"[t]he perfection of both social arrangements and of practical morality" (2:208).

A final objection to communism concerns its potential dangers to independence of spirit and personal liberty, the threat to individuality and spontaneity posed by a collectivist society. Here Mill faces the age-old dilemma of all social thinkers who value both liberty and order, spontaneity and predictability, diversity and conformity. For Mill, the dilemma was particularly acute, for he wanted the benefits of each antinomy without its attendant vagaries—the rose without the thorn. In dispatching other objections to communism, he had relied on the very conformity of opinion he now fears as a threat. This is the same corner Mill would paint himself into throughout his career. Whether the result is defined as "many-sidedness" or "eclecticism," Mill was habitually engaged in an effort to reconcile diverse, incongruent, and occasionally conflicting ideas and principles. This effort is a hallmark of his philosophy and perhaps its outstanding feature. As for communism's alleged threat to liberty, Mill largely sidesteps the issue. First of all, the objection itself, "like all the other objections to the Socialist schemes, is vastly exaggerated" (2:209). (Here and elsewhere Mill uses the terms ***communism*** and ***socialism*** interchangeably in spite of having distinguished them.) Second, "[t]he restraints of Communism would be freedom in comparison with the present condition of the majority of the human race" (2:209). Finally, "it is not by comparison with the present bad state of society that the claims of Communism can be estimated" (2:209). Mill fails to extricate himself from the dilemma: he remains stranded in the corner waiting for the paint to dry.

Mill may have ranked communism above socialism in terms of pure justice, but he believed socialism had certain practical advantages. He was particularly attracted to the socialist systems developed by Henri de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier, which "are totally free from the objections usually urged against Communism" (2:210). There are admittedly other objections to these systems, but what most impressed Mill was the "great intellectual power" and "large and philosophic

treatment" these authors (and their disciples) brought to questions of morals and society. Saint-Simonism, which captured Mill's attention in the late 1820s for its humanist, historicist, and elitist thrust, is summarily rejected in the *Principles* for its authoritarian and statist features. Fourierism was far more to Mill's taste—"[t]he most skillfully combined, and with the greatest foresight of objections, of all the forms of Socialism" (2:211–12). In Fourier's doctrine of "attractive labor," Mill found a compelling answer to the alleged problem of assigning onerous or disagreeable work. Once penury is removed as a motive, labor will become pleasurable, "a most significant fact, and one from which the student in social philosophy may draw important instruction" (2:213). And what lesson may be drawn from a fair appraisal of Fourierism? A conviction "that this system does no violence to any of the general laws by which human action, even in the present imperfect state of moral and intellectual cultivation, is influenced; and that it would be extremely rash to pronounce it incapable of success" (2:213).

Having vindicated socialism-cum-communism from its detractors, Mill turns to the institution of private property, but not before a gentle reminder for the social reformer. Given the "present imperfect state of moral and intellectual cultivation," it may be necessary for the "political economist" to focus on improving "a society founded on private property and individual competition," yet he should place no "limit [on] the ultimate capabilities of human nature" for a society that has transcended them (2:214).

In the second part of "Of Property," Mill argues for limits on the right of bequest and inheritance and makes a vital distinction between property in land and property in movables. Active labor may not be the sole source of *value*—capital, savings, and past labor also create value—but it is the source of private *property*: the "right of each to his (or her) own faculties" bestows a right "to what he can produce by them, and to whatever he can get for them in a fair market" (2:218). Included in the right to appropriate property is the right to dispose of it, the "right to give this to any other person, . . . and the right of that other to receive and enjoy it" (2:218). The right of bequest and inheritance, however, is not unlimited, but like all property rights should be subject to social control on grounds of fairness and utility. In theory, *bequest* has a solid claim to respect, for it "forms part of the idea of private property," the idea of labor, savings, and title. No such claim can be made on behalf of *inheritance,* which forms no part of the idea. In practice, inheritance creates injustices, bestowing an "advantage" on the idle and undeserving while often leaving the "industrious" with nothing. Theory and practice lead Mill to oppose an unlimited right to inherit and to "strenuously contend that this unearned advantage should be curtailed" (2:216).

Even the right of bequest is subject to objections and reasonable restraint. Historically, it "was seldom recognized," just as property in general "was conceived in a manner totally different from the conception of it in the present time" (2:219). Moreover, the right of bequest may be abused "even in a greater degree" than most

proprietary rights and "so exercised as to conflict with the permanent interests of the human race" (2:223). As such, it is less a "right" than a "privilege" that "might be limited or varied, according to views of expediency" (2:224). The French, for example, have found it useful to restrict the power of bequest in order to end primogeniture and counter the amassing of large fortunes—goals Mill considered "eminently desirable" (2:224).

If Mill had his way—"framing a code of laws according to what seems to me best in itself"—he "should prefer to restrict, not what any one might bequeath, but what any one should be permitted to acquire, by bequest or inheritance" (2:224–25). Under such laws, a testator might dispose of his entire wealth but still be limited in the amount bestowed on any one person. And what for Mill is the outermost limit? An ability "to afford the means of comfortable independence" for a bachelor. If, however, he should choose to marry and have children or "desires any further accession of fortune, he shall work for it" (2:225). Mill obviously envisaged clear limits on what one person might inherit. Strictly speaking, ***any*** right of inheritance is a concession to the "principle of private property" with its inherent "inequalities," for once that principle is accepted, inequality of fortunes (although greatly reduced) is something "we must bear with" (2:225).

Insofar as Mill's ideal society entailed a leveling of fortunes based on redistribution, limits on the right of bequest and inheritance were the primary means to the desired end. He was, of course, well aware that his radical scheme flew in the face of "existing opinions and sentiments" (2:224–25) and "would be unavailing unless the popular sentiment went energetically along with it" (2:225). Cultivating this "sentiment" was among the tasks of reformed education. In the current state of opinion, he fully expected these ideas to be savaged and was (pleasantly?) surprised when they went largely unnoticed by reviewers of the *Principles*. According to Alexander Bain, his protégé and first biographer, Mill was keenly "anticipating a tremendous outcry about his doctrines on Property" and particularly about "his proposals as to Inheritance and Bequest, which, if carried out, would [according to Mill] pull down all large fortunes in two generations" (1882, 89).

Mill expected great improvements to result from the breakup of large fortunes and the dispersion of wealth. Like Bentham, he believed the property of those who died intestate should "escheat to the State," with the proceeds going to "objects of public usefulness" (2:220, 226). Conversely, limits on inheritance would end the practice of "over-enriching a few" and greatly reduce the employment of wealth for useless "ostentation or improper power" (2:226). Moreover, it would greatly multiply the number of "modest" fortunes and expand the "advantages of leisure, and all the real enjoyments which wealth can give" (2:226). And what function would such a leisured class assume once "vanity" was no longer an acceptable or desirable object of affluence? Because the possession of even modest fortunes is a concession to the doctrine of private property—a "right" held at the discretion of society—it is reasonable to expect the well-off to conduct themselves in a manner befitting their

privileges, "either by their direct exertions or by the tone they give to the feelings and tastes of the public." In either case, a society that permits a leisured class "is entitled to expect from them" certain "services" (2:226).

In the final section in "Of Property," Mill draws a sharp line between the right to property in land and the right to property in movables. Movables—chattels and liquid wealth—are indefeasible—that is, not subject to forfeit or confiscation, but not immune from taxation. Property in land is an altogether different matter, for the earth is "a gift of nature" and "the original inheritance of the whole species" (2:227, 230). Property in land, therefore, is neither "sacred" nor "indefeasible"—even under the best circumstances "its appropriation is wholly a question of general expediency" (2:230). This is particularly the case in Britain, where the highly unequal and exclusive distribution of land had its origin in violence and injustice. Far from being morally defensible, the current distribution and use of land are not even "economically justifiable" (2:229). Mill was particularly hostile to the owners of large estates who lived off the rents of tenant farmers and failed to make improvements to their properties. Such improvements are the "only valid" title to property in land; otherwise, "political economy has nothing to say in defence of landed property" (2:228). Even when the owner is also an improver, the tenant–proprietor relationship is far from just or fair. For Ireland and elsewhere, Mill championed the idea of converting large estates and wastelands into peasant proprietorships. Although the "use of land in agriculture must indeed, for the time being, be of necessity exclusive," it need not be exclusive to the few (2:227). For example, "the land might be occupied for one season only . . . or might be periodically redivided as population increased: or the State might be the universal landlord, and the cultivators tenants under it, either on lease or at will" (2:227).

Limited occupancy, forced division, and wholesale expropriation—all are offered as alternatives to the current system of land tenure. In the *Principles,* Mill is particularly interested in *expropriation,* which he defends on grounds of *justice* and *expediency.* Just as no individual can have an exclusive right to what is the common possession of the species, so "[w]hen private property in land is not expedient, it is unjust" (2:230). The patent injustice in current patterns of ownership serves to undercut an already tenuous "right" to exclusive property in land. It is but a step for the state to reduce the proprietors to "public functionaries" and condemn their vast holdings in the name of "justice." "But if the state is at liberty to treat the possessors of land as public functionaries, it is only going one step further to say, that it is at liberty to discard them. The claim of landowners to the land is altogether subordinate to the general policy of the state. The principle of property gives them no right to the land, but only a right to compensation for whatever portion of their interest in the land it may be the policy of the state to deprive them of. To that, their claim is indefeasible" (2:230).

In this formulation, the proprietor is also a tenant who is merely subleasing. The real (and "universal") landlord is the state itself. As an instrument of justice,

the state will permit "no exclusive right" to property in land that is not "productive of positive good" (2:231–32). And how are disputes over the "positive good" to be resolved? Mill does not precisely say, but "it seems almost an axiom . . . that the balance in all cases of doubt should incline against the proprietor" (2:231). After all, "any exclusive right at all, over a portion of the common inheritance, while there are others who have no portion, is already a privilege" (2:232). And like any other "privilege," property in land may be withdrawn when deemed "inexpedient" and "unjust," whether in the case of an individual or in the case of "the whole body of landlords" (2:231). Mill does require compensation at "full market value" for dispossessed proprietors, a measure seemingly more consistent with general "expediency" than with his principles of "justice." For if private title is forfeited on grounds of *injustice,* why should the owner receive full compensation?

In Mill's scheme, those permitted to retain property in land beyond a modest holding do so at the "sufferance of the community" and on condition that the public have general access to unemployed lands. More generally, the owner "is morally bound, and should wherever the case admits be legally compelled, to make his interest and pleasure consistent with the public good" (2:232). Made mindful that "[t]he species at large still retains [much] of its original claim to the soil of the planet" (2:232), Mill's new proprietor will be transformed into the warden of a conservancy.

The Future of Labor

By Mill's own admission, the treatment of property in the *Principles,* although an "indispensable" part of political economy, goes well beyond the confines of "economical considerations" (2:234). Mill presses even further afield in the chapters "The Stationary State" and "On the Probable Futurity of the Labouring Classes." The "principal object" of the former was "to deprecate a false idea of human society" with an alternative idea consistent with the advent of a stationary economy (3:758). The principal object of the latter was to sketch the "probable" status of labor under such conditions. Here the distinction between production and distribution merges with a projected stagnation to trigger the transformation from capitalism to socialism. Unlike his predecessors, Mill saw a silver lining in the advent of the stationary state.

Mill predicts that with the approach of a no-growth economy, the current fixation on the "mere increase in production" will give way to the more important ends of "improved distribution" and the "remuneration of labour" (3:758). Once aggregate production has placed material security within the reach of all, the question of *increased* production is rendered moot, and "neither the legislator nor the philanthropist need feel any strong interest" in it (3:758). But will not the capitalists, the shareholders, and the managers retain a "strong interest"? Mill does not directly consider the interests of these groups—their days are numbered. It is the workers themselves who must determine their future: the outcome of the crisis in capitalism "must depend on the opinions and habits of the most numerous class, the class

of manual labourers" (3:758). Increased compensation and better working conditions will improve their immediate status, but without an improvement in their "mental cultivation" the evils of overpopulation and poverty will persist (3:763). It is therefore essential that workers cultivate "opinions and habits" consistent with the virtues of prudence, restraint, and moderation. Only to "the degree in which they can be made rational beings" (3:763) will the laboring classes achieve genuine security and well-being.

And how is this rationality of thought and conduct to be instilled? There is already a kind of "spontaneous education" taking place among the multitude, "which may be greatly accelerated and improved by artificial aids" (3:763). Such "aids" include cheap newspapers and tracts, lectures and self-study, as well as political agitation. (There is also, of course, Mill's call for universal schooling.) In conjunction, these "serve to awaken the public spirit" and "diffuse [a] variety of ideas among the mass, and excite thought and reflection in the more intelligent" (3:763–64). Although this awakening may lead to errors in judgment and mistakes in practice, it will cut the leading strings of outmoded authority. But will it not threaten ***all*** authority? The spirit of independence, Mill hastens to add, is "quite consistent" with "a respect for superiority of intellect and knowledge," so "deeply grounded in human nature" is the spirit of "deference" (3:765). Even the mentally emancipated worker will require (and accept) the guidance and leadership of the expert.

Higher wages, better conditions, and mental cultivation will go far toward improving the lot of the many, but they are merely preconditions of a far broader transformation in the social order, a mere prologue to a "form of association . . . which if mankind continue to improve, must be expected in the end to predominate" (3:775). This form of association, Mill declares, "is not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief, and workpeople without a voice in the management, but the association of the labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves" (3:775).

The human race can advance only so far under capitalism, even in its reformed version. Workers will eventually demand something more than improved material rewards for their labor; they will demand ***ownership*** and ***control.*** This demand will take the form of the ***cooperative enterprise,*** the worker-owned, worker-managed firm. On the road to an ***associationist*** economy, Mill envisions a two-fold process whereby (1) workers come to exercise ownership and control over individual firms, and (2) the multiplication of such firms leads to a cooperative society marked by industrial democracy. If workers are unable to pool sufficient funds to start their own enterprises, they may borrow from the capitalist himself, who will find it prudent to lend, even "at a diminishing rate of interest" (3:793). In the long run, rather than resist the tide of cooperative labor, the capitalist may even consent "to exchange [his] capital for terminable annuities" (3:793). Thus will the workers gain control over the firm. Repeated instances of such "takeovers" would in time—"by a kind

of spontaneous process" (3:793)—lead to the transformation of the entire economy and with it society.

> Eventually, and in perhaps a less remote future than may be supposed, we may, through the co-operative principle, see our way to a change in society, which would combine the freedom and independence of the individual, with the moral, intellectual, and economical advantages of aggregate production; and which, without violence or spoliation, or even any sudden disturbance of existing habits and expectations, would realize, at least in the industrial department, the best aspirations of the democratic spirit, by putting an end to the division of society into the industrious and the idle, and effacing all social distinctions but those fairly earned by personal services and exertions. (3:793)

Mill not only manages to reconcile the freedom of the individual with the good of the collective but also forecasts a steady, peaceful transformation of society based on consensus. This was a leading feature of Mill's thought and character—he was ever the radical reformer who wanted the fruit without the rind. The fruit was a classless society of shared labor and shared rewards, a world in which all distinctions were abolished save those based on merit. The rind of revolution—class hatred, confiscation, proscriptions—was unthinkable to Mill. It was his aversion to "violence or spoliation," not his alleged reservations toward socialism, that gave his thought its *provisional* character. Mill is emphatic in his support for socialism in the *Principles,* nowhere more so than in projecting the "futurity" of labor. Whatever the merits of different socialist systems, the ideal was sacrosanct, as was the cause—the cause of humanity. "I agree, then, with the Socialist writers in their conception of the form which industrial operations tend to assume in the advance of improvement; and I entirely share their opinion that the time is ripe for commencing this transformation, and that it should by all just and effectual means be aided and encouraged" (3:794).

The "transformation" for which "the time is ripe" is the creation of a workers' democracy in the emergent stationary state. Mill never says that all elements of a market economy would be unwelcome in such a regime, nor does he desire an end to all forms of competition. He does say, however, that a society composed of worker-owned, worker-managed firms "would be the nearest approach to social justice, and the most beneficial ordering of industrial affairs for universal good, which it is possible at present to foresee" (3:794).

The True and Only Heaven

Like "Of Property," the chapter "The Stationary State" represents a break in the scientific account of "economical progress" that otherwise characterizes the *Principles.*

Once more Mill exchanges the role of political economist for social philosopher to ask, "[t]owards what ultimate point is society tending by its industrial progress?" (3:752). Like Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, and David Ricardo, Mill was convinced that the "progressive" state of the British economy was destined to run its course and end in stagnation. He does not provide an argument for the "impossibility of ultimately avoiding the stationary state" (3:752) but simply assumes its inevitability. Given the productivity and expansion of British capitalism over the next several decades, Mill's prediction stands as one of the most premature judgments in the history of economic thought. How could the foremost economist of his time have judged so poorly? It is tempting to attribute Mill's blindness to the glare of his reformist vision. His idea of a no-growth, cooperative society certainly harmonized fetchingly with the stagnationist theory of the stationary state. Did Mill sacrifice his intellectual judgment on the altar of utopia? This surmise is supported by his blunt inversion of the stationary state and his spiritual attitude toward wealth and materialism. Unlike his pessimistic brethren, Mill foresaw, "on the whole, a very considerable improvement on our present condition" as profits declined and increases in wealth leveled off (3:754). Yet the anticipated "improvement" did not merely embrace greater equality, opportunity, and comfort for the many—the goals of the welfare state—but was a prelude to a different type of society altogether. "I confess I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress" (3:754).

This is the "false idea of human society" Mill set out to "deprecate" in "The Stationary State." Like many intellectuals, Mill was no fan of commercial society, at least in its contemporary form. The universal scramble for riches may represent an improvement over feudalism—the race is "open to all" and human energies are kept at play—but it does not represent the "ultimate type" of human improvement: the "dollar-hunter" is best viewed as a transitional type "until the better minds succeed in educating the others into better things" (3:754). Mill may therefore be excused for his relative indifference toward "the kind of economical progress which excites the congratulations of ordinary politicians; the mere increase of production and accumulation" (3:754–55). The maintenance of "national independence" may require a degree of productive capacity, but an ever greater accumulation of riches and higher levels of consumption are no marks of national greatness. An improved ***distribution*** of wealth and property as well as improved ***habits*** among the people are the true path to "social perfection" (3:755, 754). Conversely, mere leveling—political, economic, or social—may lower the great but never raise the humble.

In "The Stationary State," Mill's call for a "better distribution" harkens back to his chapter "Of Property" with its "system of legislation favouring equality of fortunes" (3:755). The aim of this system is to create "a well-paid and affluent

body of labourers" and multiply the number of "moderate" fortunes by breaking up the extensive lands and concentrated wealth of the few. Once achieved, the notable improvement in ***material*** conditions will herald a ***moral*** regeneration that transcends class lines. "[A better distribution will create] a much larger body of persons than at present, not only exempt from the coarser toils, but with sufficient leisure, both physical and mental, from mechanical details, to cultivate freely the graces of life, and afford examples of them to the classes less favourably circumstanced for their growth" (3:755).

Is Mill's world of well-paid workers, independent yeomen, and moderate fortunes consistent with the no-growth economy of the stationary state? As long as the people exercise "a stricter restraint on population"—the sine qua non for any advancement—such a society "is not only perfectly compatible with the stationary state, but, it would seem, more naturally allied with that state than with any other" (3:755). Even without the specter of a stagnant economy, an increase in population for its own sake holds no appeal for Mill. What is the value or advantage of a greater quantity of human beings? An ever-expanding population can only place more pressure on the land and increase crowding. Britain, he says, has already reached a level of population consistent with "all the advantages both of co-operation and social intercourse" (3:756). To expand beyond this point would run the risk of forfeiting these advantages and something more—for man is not merely a ***social*** but also an ***aesthetic*** animal, a creature who needs the tranquility of solitude and the beauties of nature to become fully human. "It is not good for man to be kept perforce at all times in the presence of his species. A world from which solitude has been extirpated, is a very poor ideal. Solitude, in the sense of being alone, is essential to any depth of meditation or of character; and solitude in the presence of natural beauty and grandeur, is the cradle of thoughts and aspirations which are not only good for the individual, but which society could ill do without" (3:756).

Mill was not a poet, but he was deeply moved by the verse of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and others. He had a great appreciation for nature and was never so content as when hiking through the forest collecting botanical specimens. He delighted in music and was competent at the keyboard. Much of his adult life was spent in relative seclusion, whether in London or Avignon. Mill understood the intangible value of calm and beauty. He attributed much of mankind's coarseness and low character to the incessant bustle of everyday life. Universal education could place the treasures of art and literature, science and discovery within reach of the many, but these could not fully substitute for direct communion with nature. The need for such communion was all the more reason for population control since unchecked growth would progressively encroach upon (and ultimately extirpate) what remained of the wilds.

For Mill, the advent of the stationary state presents a unique historic opportunity for the transition to a humane economy and a just society. It is a plea for quality over quantity, cooperation over conflict, cultivation over consumption. For example,

advances in technology, instead of increasing production and profits, may serve to reduce the drudgery of labor and emancipate greater numbers from "imprisonment" to machines. The trade-off is inconsequential: nothing of real value is sacrificed. What society loses in aggregate accumulation it gains in "all kinds of mental culture, and moral and social progress" once the "Art of Living" is cultivated alongside the "art of getting on" (3:756). Crowned with "just [governmental] institutions," the stationary state will effect "great changes in human destiny" through "judicious foresight" and applied science (3:757). Like Francis Bacon, Mill dreamed of the conquest of "nature by the intellect and energy of scientific discoverers," whose bounty would become "the common property of the species, and the means of improving and elevating the universal lot" (3:757).

Cooperation and Communism

Some scholars have claimed that Mill's zeal for socialism, stoked by his wife, Harriet Taylor, cooled after her death in 1858. There is little support for this claim. In the four editions of the *Principles* that followed the third, Mill made only incidental changes and retained all the doctrines and prescriptions noted earlier. That his radicalism remained undiminished is also evident in a speech he delivered to the London Society for Promoting Co-operation in 1864. Mill warned the audience not to confuse mere material betterment of the working classes (or cooperation for the profit of the few) with "genuine co-operation"—that is, "[c]o-operation . . . where the whole of the produce is divided" (28:6). This is a distinction upon which "it is absolutely necessary to insist"—anything less than a division among all workers merely elevates some to the status of employers while others remain wage earners. Mill draws a sharp line between cooperative *capitalism,* which retains employer–employee relations, and cooperative *socialism,* in which such relations are abolished. Under the latter, "the whole produce of labour shall, as far as the nature of things will permit, be divided among the workers" (28:6–7). The payment of wages will survive only as a stigma for *bad* workers—the "dishonest," the "idle," and the "intemperate" (28:7).

As in "The Stationary State," here Mill envisions worker ownership and cooperation as a "gradual process" (28:7) facilitated by loans from capitalists at favorable rates of interest. If loathe to participate in the transition, capitalists may be *shamed* into doing so. For once an enlightened and improved people have embraced cooperation, capitalists who continue to hold out will be "ashamed to be the only persons who do not take their share in the useful work of the world" (28:9)—the work of socialism. Popular pressure will bring the capitalists, ashamed or not, to terms, and "no difficulty whatever will be felt of obtaining capital to co-operate with labour" (28:8). With the cooptation of the capitalists, the last obstacle to a cooperative economy will be removed and the path to utopia made level for the march of humanity. In this glorious journey, "our hopes will be realised, and the whole mass of the people will practically adopt co-operation." This will mark a new and

unprecedented epoch in human history, for it "will ultimately regenerate the masses of the country, and through them society itself" (28:9). From the heights of Mount Nebo, Mill catches a glimpse of the Promised Land: "This will be a new millennium"—"the millennium towards which we should strive" (28:8, 9).

That Mill's enthusiasm for socialism showed no sign of waning is also apparent in *Chapters on Socialism,* which remained unfinished at his death in 1873. Here Mill repeats many of the pro-socialist positions he articulated two decades earlier in the third edition of the *Principles.* Although he acknowledges a slight amelioration in the condition of the working classes, the "evils and injustices suffered under the present system are [still] great" (5:736). The extension of political rights may have removed the chains of "law" from common laborers, but they still bear the chains of their "poverty" (5:710). Poverty, however, is not the greatest injustice. The working poor no longer starve, but they are still "chained to a place, to an occupation, and to conformity with the will of an employer." (5:710). The real crime is the *arbitrary* nature of their condition—an "accident of birth" (5:710)—which debars them "both from the enjoyments, and from the mental and moral advantages, which others inherit without exertion and independently of desert" (5:710). *Arbitrary poverty* and *unmerited privilege*—Mill hated nothing more. Their unholy grip on Britain remained "an evil equal to almost any of those against which mankind have hitherto struggled" (5:710). Forty years earlier, during the Reform Bill crisis, Mill welcomed a "moral and social revolution" that would "leave no man one fraction of unearned distinction or unearned importance" (22:245) or an annual income of more than £500 (12:84). Mill's hostility toward "those who have gained the prizes in the lottery of life" (5:710) was inveterate and changed little over time.

Scholars typically approach *Chapters on Socialism* as a dispassionate treatment of the pros and cons of private property and socialism. Nothing could be further from the truth. No doubt, Mill assumes the pose of the unbiased judge and friend of humanity—an ideal legislator, "absolutely impartial between possessors of property and the non-possessors" (5:711). For Mill, impartiality is coeval with "abstract justice and the good of the community," a standard that excludes customs, prescription, and title from consideration. It is the method of Plato, not Aristotle; of Thomas Paine, not Edmund Burke; of John Rawls, not Michael Oakeshott. Armed with abstract principles of justice, an "impartial" Mill was led to condemn the socio-economic order of contemporary Britain root, branch, and leaf. A great deal of his criticism was trenchant and justified—he was rightly appalled by much of what he saw. Yet it was not enough for him to identify and *reform* abuses—the inexorable logic of "expediency" and "justice" demanded a crusade to *transform* society as a whole. Long before he took up the subject of socialism in *Chapters,* his verdict on private property and the claims of labor had been delivered. In both instances, Mill acted less the part of an impartial judge or "unprejudiced legislator" than as lead counsel for the working classes. "The working classes are entitled to claim that the whole field of social institutions should be re-examined, and every consideration

considered as if it now arose for the first time; with the idea constantly in view that the persons who are to be convinced are not those who owe their ease and importance to the present system" (5:711).

No less than Marx, Mill would subject the entire society to *Kritik* from the perspective of labor and without appeal to the interests of the fortunate few. And like Marx, Mill finds fault with his fellow socialists, but not with "true" socialism itself. Apart from retaining a role for competition, Mill consistently emphasized the "intellectual and moral" improvement of the many as the corollary of their material emancipation. He was clearly convinced that "the intellectual and moral grounds of Socialism" were far superior to those of capitalism and that their propagation could "give the present economic system of society its best chance" (5:736)—until socialism had proven its superiority.

What is most remarkable in *Chapters* is not Mill's sympathy and support for socialism, but his identification of communism with an even higher stage of human development. Mill had made this declaration in the third edition of the *Principles,* and he repeats it here. Under socialism, the persistence of a monetary incentive to labor is assigned to "the imperfect degree of moral cultivation which mankind have yet reached" (5:739). Under communism, the incentive of greater shares would be replaced by "the incentives of public spirit, of conscience, and of . . . honour and credit" (5:739). Even under socialism, the pecuniary motive—self-interest—is an "infirmity," an "inferior efficacy of public and social feelings" (5:740). Fortunately, this "infirmity" is not an inherent or natural defect and therefore "not inevitable"—it is merely "the result of imperfect education." Admittedly, motives of self-interest—"with men as they now are" (5:740)—will continue to drive economic activity for the foreseeable future, until more men of "higher character" appear on the scene. After all, "[t]he education of human beings is one of the most difficult of all arts" (5:740).

Difficult perhaps, but not impossible. "I reject altogether the notion that it is impossible for education and cultivation such as is implied in [communism] to be made the inheritance of every person in the nation" (5:746). But how would such a monumental task—the reeducation of an entire nation—be achieved? Obviously, "only a Communistic association can effectively train mankind for Communism" (5:746), but by what means? Characteristically, Mill advocates small-scale "experiments" to test their viability for the whole. "It is for Communism, then, to prove, by practical experiment, its power of giving this training. Experiments alone can show whether there is as yet in any portion of the population a sufficiently high level of moral cultivation to make Communism succeed, and to give to the next generation among themselves the education necessary to keep up that high level permanently" (5:746).

Although there is no certainty that such "experiments" would prove successful, Mill is confident that they could be tried without any great risk to society. He does not address how "successful" experiments in communist education might influence

practices more generally, but, like successful experiments in industrial cooperation, the example could be expected to spread by a "spontaneous process" and merge with the progressive trend. By his own admission, socialism would entail "an entire renovation of the social fabric . . . establishing the economic constitution of society upon an entirely new basis, other than that of private property and competition" (5:749). Communism would entail the same economic reordering *plus* the elimination of the "inferior efficacy" of self-interest as a motive in labor. Mill found socialism, in particular the Fourierest variety, "attractive in itself" and feasible, for it "requires less from common humanity" than communism (5:748). Communism, which replaces self-interest with altruism, presents a greater challenge and would be the achievement of a more remote posterity. It remains uncertain if either socialism or communism can succeed on a comprehensive scale. What is certain, however, "is, that Communism, to be successful, requires a high standard of both moral and intellectual education in all the members of the community" (5:746). If socialism is the moon, communism is the stars.

Conclusion

The tendency of scholars to downplay Mill's "flirtation" with socialism and underscore his liberal credentials—their attempts to "save Mill from himself"—may in part be ascribed to the disastrous "experiments" conducted in the name of socialism in the twentieth century. Whether in the form of National Socialism, Soviet communism, or their offshoots, socialism has been stigmatized by liberals as an ideology at variance with individualism, democracy, and the "open society." That Mill ardently believed socialism compatible, indeed coeval, with all three (properly understood) is less a cruel irony than a testament to his eclecticism and utopian longings. Looking down from Auguste Comte's heaven of secular saints, Mill would only shake his head at the dystopian "socialisms" of the twentieth century. (It was Mill, after all, who on the floor of the House of Commons coined the word *dystopia*.) His dream of a socialist future has little in common with the spirit and less with the letter of the collectivist, state-centered nightmares of the twentieth century. In this sense, Robert Heilbroner was correct in placing Mill among the utopian socialists and in linking him (anachronistically) with Fabianism and the modern welfare state. Such benign attributions cannot, however, entirely exonerate Mill from the charge of gross naïveté in championing "a moral and social revolution" that would inaugurate the reign of justice and equality.

Although not a revolutionary like Marx, Mill was recognized by some contemporaries, such as the French socialist Benoît Malon, as among the leading "theoretical adherents" of revolutionary socialism (Brogan 1966, 290). As a few scholars have observed, the two thinkers' humanist visions and ultimate aims were strikingly similar. In the leading study of Marx and Mill, Graeme Duncan finds a number of "affinities between their conceptions of man—autonomy, activity, a true

consciousness and sociality loom large in each—and there are surprising elements of utopianism, glimpses of a radically different future, in Mill's social vision" (1973, 293). Similarly, W. A. Kaufman suggests that "Mill's ideal of the good life is more like Marx's conception of unalienated man than it is like Bentham's happy man" (1971, 202). The setting for this "good life"—a classless, cooperative society marked by free labor, material sufficiency, and genuine equality—is also common to both. Unlike Marx, Mill did not envision the euthanasia of the state, but he did anticipate the substitution of cooperation for coercion. As Alan Ryan has noted, "[I]t is hard to believe that Marx and Mill would have been far apart on most practical issues" (1984, 159). Nor would life in the stationary state appear at odds with the Marxian vision. Admittedly, Mill's version looks more like Rawls's "property-owning democracy" than a full-blown socialist society, but even Marx recognized a long transitional period before the reign of pure communism. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see notable "parallels between Mill's vision of a benign quasi-stationary state and Marx's utopian vision of communism" (Rostow 1990, 93). Just as one might "fish in the afternoon, raise cattle in the evening, and critique after dinner" in Mill's utopia, one could "cultivate freely the graces of life" in Marx's.

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