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Mill and Socialism: A Reply to Capaldi

As Nicholas Capaldi notes, ‘the question of Mill’s relation to socialism continues to puzzle scholars’. There are two possible reasons for this. One is because it seems eminently puzzling that a philosopher with such a fundamental commitment to individual freedom could be a socialist; the other is because Mill was unclear about the relationship. The latter is, to some extent, true; Mill changed his mind about some of the contemporary socialist theories of his day, and also changed the extent to which he was willing to endorse socialism, as he expressly admits, depending on how open to socialism he felt his audience was likely to be.¹ The case is further complicated by the fact that Mill died before finishing what he intended to be his most comprehensive work on socialism, his *Chapters on Socialism*.²

The first possible cause of puzzlement, however, ought to no longer be as perplexing. If one can only conceive of socialism as Stalinist, Soviet and state-centric, then Mill’s self-designation as being ‘under the general designation’ of socialist does indeed seem puzzling.³ But Mill’s relation with socialism becomes much less mystifying, I contend, when one sees that one could, and Mill did, conceive of socialism as small-scale, co-operative and capable of being tried piece-meal and peacefully, rather than requiring the complete overthrow of contemporary society. Moreover, it ought not to be beyond the bounds of belief to think that socialists could be concerned with liberty – and mean by liberty not just their own, warped, understanding, but something liberals would accept. John Rawls identifies the conceptual space that such a form of socialism might occupy as ‘liberal socialism’, an ideology committed both to liberty and equality, and also recognising the claims of community or fraternity.⁴ G.A. Cohen is a good example of a philosopher inhabiting such a space; fundamentally committed to equality, fervently protective of individual liberties, and also insistent that justice has to take into account more than either, and also recognise the claims of community. I think Mill is another (though rather different) such liberal socialist, and when one recognises someone can be a socialist and be committed to individual freedom then Mill’s position is no longer puzzling at all, especially when one realises the impact Mill believed important equalities, and a sense of fraternity or harmony, had on both freedom and his highest ethical goal, utility.

There is not space in an article to explain all the aspects of Mill’s political philosophy at length, nor to properly show how they make him a socialist. Instead, I would like to assess

Capaldi's reading of Mill's relationship to socialism, occasionally challenging that definition of socialism, and more frequently showing where I think Mill's position is more complicated than Capaldi allows. I will then turn to a brief sketch of Mill's socialism, and how it can be said to speak to a debate not just between liberty and equality, but between liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Social Doctrine

Capaldi makes the following claims about socialism as a social doctrine: that it offers an analysis of Europe in transition from a feudal economy (and society) to an industrial one; that it sees the world as divided between those who own capital and those who do not; that it believes this division is based on historical accident or force; that members of both classes thereby 'exhibit dysfunctional and pathological life-styles'; that society is marked by exploitation, inequality and the failure to maximise the potential of every individual and society as a whole; and that people are fundamentally good and corrupted by their environment. He further contends that Mill's social doctrine was rather different, and it is this that I would like to challenge.

Like contemporary socialists, Mill saw society as in transition between feudalism and modernity. Capaldi rightly argues that Mill favoured this transition, though he was no means opposed to all things modern, believing instead we could keep some of the good aspects and reject the bad. However, two things ought to be noted. Firstly, after his 'crisis' in the 1820s, Mill no longer thought the modernity championed by his father and Bentham – a liberal, democratic, free-market society – was the last word in social progress.⁵ Secondly Mill did not take his theory of transition just from the Scottish Enlightenment. Rather, Mill saw himself as living in a 'transitional' or 'critical' society, concepts he took from Henri Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte (who, at the time, forthrightly declared himself to be a Saint-Simonian).⁶ From around 1830 Mill was increasingly concerned not only with completing the work of the current critical age, but with building the forthcoming organic one.

Mill was less sanguine than Saint-Simon that this new organic age would necessarily be better than the preceding one.⁷ Reading Alexis de Tocqueville, Mill realised that even societies which already enjoyed representative democracy, extensive liberties and a free market (like America) could be as repressive as the aristocracies of the Middle Ages.⁸ The tyranny of the majority is not just about majorities *ruling* in their own interests, it is about the ability of majorities to exert social pressure and render everyone the same (something to which Mill's

associationist psychology made him particularly sensitive). The new organic age had to be built with institutions which would make people happy, and this included a built-in ability for the free development of individuality, allowing people and society to progress.

However, this organic age desperately needed building, because neither the contemporary critical age nor the preceding organic one had managed to maximise the potential of every individual, or society itself, to progress. Indeed, they *could not* have done, for if they had, we would not yet need a new organic age, the institutions of which would aid that individual and social progression.

It is true (as Capaldi argues) that Mill disagreed with Robert Owen's environmental determinism. Instead, he had a Romantic conception of a self-directing, reflective, authentic self which had some free will (though still being compatible with causation and necessity).⁹ Nevertheless, Mill believed people were affected by their environment. Although people were not necessarily innately good before society corrupted them, Mill believed society could have an important impact on people's characters. This is one reason why the institutions of the forthcoming organic age had to be as perfect as possible – it was only if they were that we had a chance of progressing and improving as individuals to the highest degree contemporarily possible. Moreover, Mill thought humanity was infinitely perfectible and had characteristics which were so inspirational that the infinity of its possibilities for good could be powerful enough to form a humanist religion.¹⁰ He was not as optimistic about the *speed* with which humanity would be perfected as some contemporary socialists, but he did believe it was already valuable, though capable of improvement, and that history was the story of that improvement, which had happened in a jagged, rather than straight, line.

To turn to another aspect of Capaldi's characterisation of socialism's social doctrine, like contemporary socialists, Mill criticised what he saw as the increasing antagonism and rift between the two major classes, those who laboured and those who did not.¹¹ He also claimed that much private property ownership was based on force and historical accident, although he admitted there might be good, utilitarian, reasons for justifying it.¹² The major one being that private property secures for the labourer the product of his own labour.¹³ Mill denied, however, that it could (as it contemporaneously appeared to do) justify anyone's claim to the fruits of *another's* labour, and he felt that the society built on the current system of private property was deeply unjust, for those who laboured longest and at the most arduous tasks were often not even given enough to secure their basic needs, whilst people who did not labour, but merely lived on the profit of land-ownership or the inheritance of the prudence of previous generations, lived in

luxury.¹⁴ Moreover, Mill did not believe that securing for each labourer the fruit of their own labour was the last word in distributive justice.¹⁵

Mill thought capital was delayed consumption, and, as such, it was virtuous of people to accumulate it in their own lifetime. He was concerned, however, at the disutility of passing it between generations – no one, he argued, deserved more than a ‘moderate independence’ from the preceding generation.¹⁶ In part, this was because of the marginal disutility of wealth. More importantly, though, Mill was concerned about the power which was also inherited with wealth, and felt that people were most independent (and therefore most free) when they did not work for wages, but in workers’ co-operatives where they could direct their own labour.¹⁷ These were more easily set up, however, if wealth was diffused through society. Therefore, though it could not prevent people from *bequeathing* their wealth as they pleased, the state could certainly prevent people from *inheriting* large amounts of wealth.¹⁸

Turning to the remaining aspects of Capaldi’s characterisation of socialism’s social doctrine, certainly, Mill has no theory of alienation in the Marxist sense. But he did think power was almost as bad for those who exercised it as it was for the oppressed, and he thought wage-labour rendered people at the very least less free than they could be (and really very un-free if there were not trade unions strong enough to ‘higgle’ in the wage-market on the behalf of workers, because when there were not, employers were in a monopoly position and could dictate what terms they chose).¹⁹ Moreover, he believed there is a certain amount of labour which needs doing to keep us alive and society functioning, and everyone has a *duty* to do their share of that labour, if they can, unless they have earned rest by previous toil.²⁰ In short, then, Mill’s own social doctrine was not so dissimilar to what Capaldi characterises as socialism’s.

Economic Doctrine

According to Capaldi, socialism, as an ‘economic doctrine’ traces the evils of modern life to the unequal distribution of the means of production in the form of private property, and offers four possible ways of re-structuring property relations and ownership of the means of production. He contends that none of these fit Mill’s preferred economic structures, because although Mill did endorse workers’ co-operatives, unlike market socialism (which also endorses them), he has no role for the state in setting prices or managing the economy.

It is here that I would like to challenge both Capaldi's interpretation of Mill and his characterisation of socialism. For socialism can have a fifth economic doctrine, that of co-operation without state interference. That is, a society in which working people pool their (small) savings, and set up either producer or consumer co-operatives, whose management they elect themselves through work-place democracy, the division of the profits of which are divided according to some principle of justice determined by the workers themselves, and which compete with each other in a market system. This was not only Mill's doctrine but that of many contemporary socialists including George Holyoake, Edward Vansittart Neale, William Thompson, Philippe Buchez, and a number of their followers in both Britain and France.²¹ The only state action needed for co-operation to happen was to ensure that capitalist firms did not cheat, and compete unfairly with co-operatives, and for it to be legal to set co-operatives up. Mill was sanguine about co-operation's ability to beat capitalism inside a market system, and was personally instrumental in getting the requisite law (the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1852) passed.²²

For Mill, this system of workers' co-operatives would compete with each other in what he calls 'friendly rivalry'.²³ That is, the desire would not be to drive anyone else out of the market, but to do the most good for society – that is, to prosper as an individual concern, to spread best-practice, and to provide the best possible goods or services.²⁴ Instead of a race in which the hindermost runners would be put to death (which is how he conceptualised the contemporary market system), this would be a journey in which no one was ever completely left behind.²⁵ Thus, as well as co-operatives, Mill conceived of 'safety-net' of welfare payments to those who could not labour through no fault of their own.²⁶ Certainly, in his contemporary society this involved the 'less-eligible' 'indoor relief' workhouse system, but it is not clear that Mill thought it *always* would. When people are willing to free-ride on society's generosity, abusing their right to subsistence and using it as an excuse not to labour at all, then we may well need a less-eligible system (though Mill thought aristocrats were as culpable in this as any lazy pauper).²⁷ But when we have all accepted our duty to labour at the necessary work of society, this free-rider problem may well have been dispensed with and the subsistence provided by society need not be as harsh as contemporaneously necessary.²⁸ Moreover, although Mill's ideas about welfare provision might seem unduly harsh, or even cruel, to contemporary egalitarians, it is still important to note that Mill thought people had a *right* to them, which society had a duty to meet.²⁹

Similarly, although Mill thought that competition was good for improvement, technological advance and efficiency, he was opposed to the wage market which set labouring people against each other in a struggle for existence.³⁰ He also thought co-operatives might trade between each other at cost price (though he admitted it might be difficult to determine exactly what that was).³¹ Thus, though he did champion competition, he was not a champion of the market at all times. Nor were contemporary co-operators, some of whom such as Neale, Holyoake, Buchez and Thompson had very similar attitudes to competition as Mill.³²

Moreover, Mill believed that land and natural resources were the 'inheritance of the human race', and that it was unjustified for anyone to claim complete private property rights over them.³³ He thought that agriculture was more efficient when the labourer felt some sort of proprietorship over the land, and for that reason recommended small-scale 'yeoman' farming in Ireland where, he felt, people were not yet ready (after centuries of absentee-landlords and general mismanagement and neglect) for co-operation, and large-scale co-operative farming (perhaps even on Fourierist lines) in Britain.³⁴ These agricultural concerns, however, would only *rent* the land; it would be owned by the state on the behalf of everyone.³⁵ Similarly, any industry which tended to monopoly (often those dealing with natural resource extraction, but also railways and utilities) ought to be state-owned (though possibly privately managed) so that the monopoly profits inherent in them would be shared by all, and not by a rich few who were lucky enough to own shares.³⁶ Thus, though Capaldi is right that workers' co-operatives were not to be the sole form of ownership, it is important to see that the other forms were not private except over articles of consumption.

It is also important to see that this economic system is *not* intended to obliterate the difference between workers and owners by making the workers into owners, as Capaldi argues. Indeed, Mill criticised such plans, and was extremely critical of movements within co-operation back towards employing people for wages.³⁷ Thus, contrary to what Capaldi suggests, Mill's preferred economic system is not the same as contemporary American practices of awarding workers shares in companies, or of working people investing their savings in shares in other companies. Co-operators are not partial owners of their co-operative; they are part of a communal entity which owns the means of production with which they work. Thus, although potential co-operators had to put something into the communal pot in order to join or found the co-operative, they had no claim to taking anything out were they to want to leave (apart, of course, from the portion of the surplus of the co-operative which they had been accorded whilst a member). Moreover, Mill so fervently believed in the superiority of co-operation, not only in

terms of economic efficiency but because any decent worker would want to join a co-operative and be a self-respecting and independent co-operator and not a wage-slave, that he thought within a fairly short space of time that only the least efficient and self-motivating workers would be left working in privately-owned concerns, at which point capitalists would see they would get a far better return for their money by investing it in co-operatives.³⁸ Importantly, however, Mill felt they would eventually do this, not for interest, retaining the right to withdraw their capital at will, but by selling their capital to the co-operative in return for an annuity, which, in turn, would help end the passing of wealth between generations.³⁹ This is neither state, nor private ownership, but communal. Certainly, it is not a version of market socialism as it was developed both in theory and practice in the twentieth century, nor need it be thought of as syndicalism, if one thinks syndicalism has to mean single producer co-operatives covering entire industries and managed by trade unions.⁴⁰ But it is certainly *a* form of socialism – indeed, one which has been called the most important form of socialism in the nineteenth century.⁴¹

With reference to other aspects of Capaldi's analysis of Mill's attitude to socialism's economic doctrine, it is certainly true that Mill did not trace *all* of society's problems to the inequalities stemming from private property. However, he was opposed to the 'elbowing' and 'trampling' of others which contemporary competition engendered, especially between working people, and he felt there would be great gains for utility and freedom if there were different property relations.⁴² Moreover, although he certainly criticised particular kinds of socialism, either because of their bad economics or because of their statist, authoritarian and illiberal aspects, he was never a champion of contemporary society, believing that even communism (which he felt was the most illiberal form of socialism) was more just and more free than contemporary society.⁴³ It is true that he did not think the choice was between communism or contemporary private property, but the 'reformed' system of property relations he did favour was socialism.⁴⁴

Political Doctrine

Capaldi rightly notes that socialists have recommended all sorts of political doctrines, and adds that it therefore may not be useful to try to characterise any particularly socialist political doctrine. He further argues that it is the role of the government in the economy which is central to determining someone's socialism. As I have shown above, Mill saw a much greater role for the government in the economy than Capaldi allows, though certainly the government would not

have any directing or strategic role, and undoubtedly Mill remained wary of governmental power, in part because having too much done for us rendered people passive rather than active (and both liberty and utility demanded active, choice-making, self-developing people).⁴⁵ On the other hand, in his chapter on *laissez-faire* in *Principles of Political Economy* Mill happily justifies a far greater number of governmental actions than traditional *laissez-faire* economic and political doctrines, and he evidently thought that the utility to be gained from such actions was worth the risk (in particular in a society filled with independent people such as co-operation produced who would be jealous of their freedom and continually being trained in activeness in the workplace).⁴⁶

Policy Doctrine

Capaldi argues that socialism is always either revolutionary or reformist; and that reformist socialism is either top-down or bottom-up. Here, too, I think Mill's position, and socialism's, is more complex than Capaldi allows.

Clearly Mill is 'revolutionary' in many respects; his ideas, after all, are original, radical and encompass a wide-ranging and non-trivial change in the social fabric. I take Capaldi, however, to mean extra-legal, violent and swift change by 'revolutionary', and legal, non-violent and relatively slow change to characterise 'reformist' change.⁴⁷

Mill generally seems in favour of gradual social change because he thought it would take time, and practice, to work out what state the world would ultimately arrive at.⁴⁸ He was extremely concerned that those who wanted to implement wide-spread change immediately could not possibly know how to correctly replace the current order because they had not first tried any new institutions out on a smaller scale.⁴⁹ Mill also thought there would have to be a change in people's characters – and especially their level of moral and intellectual education – before revolutionary social change could be achieved, writing '[a]ll political revolutions, not effected by foreign conquest, originate in moral revolutions', and adding that '[t]he subversion of established institutions is merely one consequence of the previous subversion of established opinions'.⁵⁰ 'The present stage of human improvement', being one in which most people were ill-educated and immoral, was not conducive to successful social change in the long term, however great a short-term 'shake' an immediate revolution might have given it.⁵¹ In particular, if a moral revolution was not achieved before a political one, then no matter how Elysian the scheme under which people were to live, it would be destroyed by over-population.⁵² Therefore,

assuming (as Mill seems to have done) that the rate of moral change is slow, the pace of social change should also be slow.

Although Mill does not speak of the legality of social change directly, his commitment to change happening within existing institutions, and his life-long attempts to bring about social change such as the allowing of divorce, or land reform, or an extended franchise through parliamentary and legal means, evinces that Mill was also generally committed to legal social change. However, there were times when Mill supported extra-legal change. When this was the case, is also when Mill supported violence, for, despite what Capaldi asserts, Mill was not completely opposed to violence in bringing about social change.⁵³ His core principle, which he outlined as early as 1826, is that violence is justifiable as a last resort when it is clear those in power are clinging on in the face of undisputable evidence that the rest of society desires change (though he also occasionally speaks favourably of a violent upset which would ‘shake’ the torpor of his contemporaries and prove to them that theirs was not ‘the best nook of the earth’, or which would get rid of what he saw as the dead-wood of established, and wealthy, society).⁵⁴

Moreover, resort to violence is more morally admirable than putting up with injustice or oppression; Mill declares that ‘war, in a good cause, is not the greatest evil which a nation can suffer’, for although war is indeed bad, far worse than war is ‘the decayed and degraded state of moral ... feeling which thinks nothing *worth* a war’.⁵⁵ Not only did Mill justify violent revolution when it was a last resort, he even explicitly stated this view of revolution in order to support socialist attempts in France to overthrow the government in 1848. Although the French Government had previously been justified in resisting attempts to overthrow it, Mill wrote in August, the Assembly now had no right to stop any future attempt by socialists to ‘rise in arms against’ it because it denied them freedom of speech.⁵⁶

Though Mill is not as committed to the *necessity* of a violent, extra-legal and fast-paced revolution as some socialists, therefore, his socialism is not non-revolutionary. Moreover, his attitude to revolution is very similar to that of some of his contemporary socialists.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Mill is not opposed to revolutionary change through the means Capaldi categorises as ‘reformist’. Although Mill did not ultimately desire parties which represented class interests (wanting everyone to vote in what they believed was the general interest), he did stand for Parliament as a Working Men’s Candidate. He was certainly opposed to technocracy and a Fabian kind of reformist socialism (where society as a whole adopts very small amounts of socialism which gradually increase until the whole of society is wholly socialist). But co-operative socialism is also a kind of ‘bottom-up’ reformist socialism; change happens as more and more

people choose to adopt more and more socialist practices. These are not imposed by a state (though, eventually, such things as communal land ownership will have to be), but created through individual, small-scale endeavours and choices. When it comes to policy doctrines, then, Mill is also a socialist.

Mill and Moving Beyond Socialism and Capitalism

Capaldi suggests that philosophers are either of a Rousseauian (socialist) or a Lockean (liberal) tradition, favouring either liberty or equality, and he places Mill in the same tradition as Frederick Hayek and Milton Friedman, declaring that for all these men, ‘freedom of choice trumps fraternal equality’. I contend, however, that Mill’s attitude to the relationship between liberty, equality and fraternity is a far more complex and nuanced one.

Mill’s writings on liberty have been much-analysed. Yet Mill’s political philosophy was much richer than merely consisting in a commitment to liberty. Fundamentally, he was committed to happiness, and this led him to further commitments to liberty, equality, harmony and progress as I shall now (briefly) endeavour to explain.

As is well known, Mill felt Jeremy Bentham’s concept of happiness was far too narrow.⁵⁸ Although Mill agreed with Bentham that pleasure equals good mental states, and pain bad mental states, he thought a far greater number of things could influence or create these mental states than Bentham had done.⁵⁹ Mill determined that the circumstances most optimal for experiencing happiness were enjoying basic security and at least a minimal level of welfare, being able to freely and authentically develop and pursue one’s own conception of the good, and living in a society in which there were noble and sympathetic people, and in which everyone was capable of acting in the general interest.⁶⁰ One would also be happier if one loved, and was loved in return; if one’s goals were realised; and if one did not prematurely lose the objects of one’s affection.⁶¹ However, Mill thought that to a great degree these things were due to good fortune, and had no scheme for society being able to influence fortune apart from helping people to, as it were, insure against it by being prudent and able to foresee the consequences of their actions, and through, for instance, good public health initiatives and research.⁶²

What Mill meant by basic security and a minimal level of welfare is pretty self-evident. He believed people could not be happy if they were constantly living in fear for their personal safety, or could not bank on any of their long-term projects coming to fruition, such as, for

instance, being generally sure that the crops one planted in spring would neither be burned in the field, or stolen by someone else before harvest.⁶³ He also believed people could not really be happy if they were endlessly worrying where the next meal was coming from, or whether they would find adequate shelter that night.⁶⁴ As noted above, Mill insisted all people had a claim to security and subsistence merely by virtue of being human, and that society had a duty to provide them with these goods if there were no legitimate means by which they could secure them for themselves.⁶⁵

What Mill meant by freely and authentically developing and pursuing one's own conception of the good is rather more complicated, as is what Mill felt this necessitated. Firstly, then, 'freely'. Mill believed people ought not to be *forced* to do anything, unless they were causing harm (or unless their refusal to act would cause harm) to our interests as a progressive being.⁶⁶ We can only be legitimately forced, therefore, when our actions (or inactions) might damage someone's abilities to develop. This development includes developing one's own conception of the good, not only because that is the only route to individual happiness, but because Mill believed society as a whole benefitted and progressed through the free exchange and interplay of ideas, which might either uncover new truths, or make us cling more strongly to truths which had already been discovered, preventing them from becoming dead dogma.⁶⁷

Mill fundamentally believed we had to be free up to that point in part because of arguments also associated with progress. Whenever we are prevented from doing something (or forced to do something, even if it is for our own good), we are not making our own choices or decisions, and these are quintessentially human attributes which allow us to develop both individually and as a species, but they need regular exercise.⁶⁸ If they are not exercised regularly not only do we lose out in terms of possible truths, but people are rendered passive and unable to take responsibility for, or protect, their freedoms, which, in turn, leads to disutility both on an individual and a universal level. Also, of course, we may need that wide scope for freedom in order to freely and authentically develop and pursue our own conceptions of the good, especially if those conceptions are original and violate some societal norms.⁶⁹

'Freely' defined, then, let us move on to 'authentically'. Mill had a fundamental concern about authenticity stemming from his 'crisis' of 1826/7.⁷⁰ In this crisis he realised that he had no authentic connection to any of the goals for which he had been trained to fight since infancy.⁷¹ If all the utilitarian reforms he had been taught to desire were brought about, he himself would not be made happy, because he did not authentically associate his own pleasure with their achievement.⁷² Mill became so concerned about authenticity that he thought it was better for

people to have authentic opinions than correct ones.⁷³ It is the authenticity of a desire which gives it motivating force, and without that force we would never act. Authenticity is also ensured by liberty – when we can freely discuss ideas and conceptions of the good, and when our own can be regularly challenged by others, we have a better chance of having authentic ideas than when we are merely told what to think by society, or some other individual.⁷⁴

Thirdly, then, ‘develop ... our own conception of the good’. Mill thought that in order to do this we needed to be self-conscious and reflective. That is, we had to be able to reflect on our characters, and weigh them up against some standard of good.⁷⁵ Moreover, we had to be able to reflect on what ‘the good’ was, and form our own idea of it by which we desired to live. This, too, takes freedom which provides us with the opportunity to experience other people’s concepts of the good and to talk and think about our own.⁷⁶

Fourthly, pursuing that conception of the good. This takes more than merely liberty of speech and thought, or even liberty of action, though all are intrinsically important.⁷⁷ It also involves another kind of freedom, which Mill calls ‘independence’.⁷⁸ Independence is akin to autonomy (Mill translates it as ‘*autonomie*’); that is, independent people are capable of directing their lives, making choices, living in accordance with their own conceptions of the good.⁷⁹ And independence is aided by living in a society of equals, which brings us to Mill’s commitment to equality.

Mill declared himself opposed to *all* inequality, because it was, in itself, an evil.⁸⁰ However, he cannot have meant this to apply to everything; he was happy, for instance, for there to be better and worse schools, the better ones providing exemplars to aid the improvement of the worse, and he was apparently unconcerned by potential inequalities between co-operative organisations, arising from greater efficiency and demand for what they produced. Moreover, the principles of distributive justice he endorsed (which differ depending on the stage of humanity’s perfection) often allow income inequality.⁸¹ Mill was, however, fundamentally committed to the moral equality of everyone – it is for that reason that utilitarianism demands the greatest happiness *of the greatest number*. He also desired people to see each other as equals, and to see themselves as equals. This, in part, aided tolerance and freedom as we accept both other people’s right to pursue their own concept of the good, and our own right to pursue and develop our own.

Moreover, Mill realised that people’s ability to pursue their own conception of the good was (generally) impeded by their lack of material equality. That is, as noted above, we could

scarcely pursue and develop our own concept of the good if we are completely consumed with trying to secure our next meal.

Furthermore, material inequality generated inequalities of power which also impinged on people's ability to be independent. Really independent people control, direct and organise their own labour (preferably in worker-co-operatives); people who have to work for wages are incapable of the same level of independence.⁸² Yeoman farmers are independent; farm labourers are not.⁸³ It is for this reason that Mill endorsed the strict restrictions on inheritance, and communal ownership of the means of production outlined above. (Independence is also the reason he retained individual ownership of articles of consumption, because these are more intrinsic to our pursuit of our own conception of the good).

Having spent some time explaining what Mill meant by freely and authentically developing and pursuing our own conception of the good, I will turn to the last important aspect of happiness; living in a society which contains noble and sympathetic people capable of acting in the general interest. Noble, or admirable, and sympathetic people inspire us, form part of our moral education, and provide examples from which we can construct our own conceptions of the good.⁸⁴ Not everyone is admirable or sympathetic, but everyone is capable of acting in the general interest, and ought to do so at some important moments such as when voting (governments elected by people voting in their self-interest are merely the tyranny of the majority; governments elected by people voting in what they perceive as the general interest are real democracy).⁸⁵ When we act in the general interest we will be tolerant, knowing that it is in the general interest to allow people to pursue their own conception of the good, however wrong-headed we believe them to be. But Mill wants more than this. Although we may not *force* anyone to do something, Mill thinks we ought to be concerned for everyone's welfare, and reason with, persuade, cajole and even beg people to act in a different manner if we think that would be in their best interest (individually, we ought also to be strong enough to resist this if we really think we are doing the right thing, being, after all, the best judge of our own interest).⁸⁶ This is how he can characterise society as a mechanism by which we might do each other most good.⁸⁷

Rather than be created by institutions (though they can help), this kind of society is created by a fraternal *ethos* which Mill believed would be greatly aided by a religion of humanity. That is, by a humanist (though possibly also theist) religion which looked not towards reward in an afterlife, but found inspiration enough for human endeavour to do good in the potentially infinite perfectibility of humankind, and its also potentially eternal existence on earth.⁸⁸ If we saw something inspirational in the human capacity for development, individuality and happiness,

then we would all co-exist harmoniously in a society in which we fraternally wished each other well and did what we could to help each other.

Capaldi offers modern capitalism as a society in which people are concerned for each other's autonomy; seeing what kind of society Mill felt autonomy necessitated, this claim must no longer seem plausible. Rather, Mill felt autonomy (or, to use his own words, sovereignty or independence) rested on a complicated inter-relation of liberty, equality and fraternity, each of which was worthless without, and depended upon, the others. Mill thought that as humanity progressed it would be able to develop for itself the institutions which actually best captured the balance between these three principles, and also allowed room for progress. He sketched what he believed they might be, but was happy to be proved wrong. His philosophy, however, points us to some very important questions. What claims can the community make on the individual? What claims *must* it make in order for there to be real freedom for any but a privileged few? When must the individual be secured from interference by the state and community at large? Can people flourish without being part of a tolerant and mutually co-operative society? The contemporary debate to which knowledge of Mill's philosophy speaks, therefore, is not merely between liberty and equality, but liberty, equality and fraternity, for his work reveals the possibility of a liberal socialism which is equally fundamentally committed to all three.

¹ John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, CW I, pp. 239-41. All references to Mill's works are to the Toronto Collected Works, University of Toronto Press, 1962-91.

² As such, *Chapters on Socialism* presents a potential puzzle to the Mill scholar. Capaldi suggests Helen Taylor (Mill's step-daughter and confidant) must have talked to Mill about his views, and would not have published *Chapters* unless it reflected them. Thus, he criticises William Stafford's downplaying of *Chapters'* importance to understanding Mill's socialism. I tend to side with Stafford; *Chapters* is evidently unfinished, and, what is more, strongly echoes corresponding chapters in *Principles of Political Economy*. *Principles*, however, also contains positive chapters where the potential benefits of socialism are revealed, which *Chapters* lacks. As it is unfinished, it seems at least as plausible to suppose Mill intended to write such chapters as to presume that he did not, and that *Chapters* therefore reveals *all* he had to say. Moreover, in terms of criticism of socialism, *Chapters* contains nothing stronger than what is said in *Principles*, which nevertheless remains positive towards Mill's preferred kind of socialism, despite being edited and revised almost up to Mill's death. Moreover, Mill did not withdraw his commitment to socialism from his *Autobiography*, which he was also revising up to his death. Mill, *Chapters on Socialism*, CW V, pp. 713-36; William Stafford, 'How Can a Paradigmatic Liberal Call Himself a Socialist? The Case of John Stuart Mill', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 3/3 (October 1998); Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, CW II and III, pp. 199-215, 758-96, and 975-87; Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 239.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (London, 2001), pp. 136 and 176.

⁵ Mill, *Autobiography*, pp. 173-5.

⁶ Henri Saint-Simon, *The Catechism of the Industrialists*, trans Ghita Ionescu, *The Political Thought of Saint-Simon* (Oxford, 1976), p. 187; Mill, *Autobiography*, pp. 171-3; Mill, Letter 28, to Gustave d'Eichthal, 7 November 1829, CW XII, p. 42; Mill, *Spirit of the Age*, I, II, III, IV and V, CW XXII, pp. 227-35, 238-46, 252-8, 278-83, 289-95, 304-7 and 312-7.

⁷ Alan Ryan, *J.S. Mill* (London, 1974), p. 47.

⁸ Mill, *Autobiography*, pp. 173-5.

⁹ Mill, *A System of Logic*, CW VIII, pp. 836-43.

¹⁰ Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 45; Mill, Letter 524, to Sarah Austin, 7 March 1848, CW XIII, p. 734; Mill, *Theism*, CW X, p. 488; Mill, *Utility of Religion*, CW X, pp. 419-23.

¹¹ Mill, *The Claims of Labour*, CW IV, p. 382.

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- ¹² *Ibid*, pp. 386-9; Mill, *Principles*, pp. 201, 207-8, 227, 801 and 986.
- ¹³ *Ibid*, p. 208.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 207-8.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 203.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 755.
- ¹⁷ Bruce Baum, 'J.S. Mill and Liberal Socialism', Urbinati and Zakaras edited, *J.S. Mill's Political Thought: A Bicentennial Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 113.
- ¹⁸ Mill, *Principles*, pp. 218-23.
- ¹⁹ Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, CW XXI, p. 295; Mill, *Principles*, p. 932.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 783.
- ²¹ Johnston Birchall, *Co-op: The People's Business* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 9-29; Bernard H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labour Movement 1830-1914: The Socialism of Skilled Workers* (Berkeley, 1980), p. 36; Jonathan Beecher, *Victor Considérant and the Rise and Fall of French Socialism* (Berkeley, 2001), p. 148; William Thompson, *An Inquiry into the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness* (London, 1824), pp. 274-80; Edward Vansittart Neale, *Manual for Co-operators* (London, 1888), pp. 48-55; George Holyoake, *Manual of Co-operation* (New York, 1885), pp. 6-65.
- ²² Stafford, 'Paradigmatic Liberal', p. 330.
- ²³ Mill, *Principles*, p. 792.
- ²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 205.
- ²⁵ Mill, *Chapters*, p. 713.
- ²⁶ Mill, *Principles*, p. 360.
- ²⁷ Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 239.
- ²⁸ Mill, *Principles*, p. 212.
- ²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 360.
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 753.
- ³¹ Mill, *Newman's Political Economy*, CW V, pp. 442-4.
- ³² Neale, *Manual for Co-operators*, pp. 35-6; Holyoake, *The History of Co-operation* Vol. 2 (London, 1906), p. 674; Moss, *French Labour Movement*, pp. 5 and 36.
- ³³ Mill, *Principles*, p. 801.
- ³⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 226-32 and 767.
- ³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 227.
- ³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 955-6.
- ³⁷ Mill, *Co-operation*, CW XXVIII, p. 7.
- ³⁸ Mill, *Principles*, p. 783.
- ³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 783.
- ⁴⁰ Jonathon Riley, 'J.S. Mill's Liberal Utilitarian Assessment of Capitalism versus Socialism', *Utilitas* 8/1 (March 1996), p. 40.
- ⁴¹ Iorwerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830-1870* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 145.
- ⁴² Mill, *Principles*, p. 753.
- ⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 209; Mill, *Chapters*, p. 713.
- ⁴⁴ Capaldi contends that Mill's socialist 'utopia', identified from *Claims* by Oscar Kurer (where Mill does indeed use the word 'Utopia'), is fully compatible with capitalism. This may be the case (though I think it misses the breadth of Mill's ideas), but it is certainly *not* true of Mill's more fully-explained ideas about an ideal (though eminently achievable) economic system in *Principles*, or even his sketch in his *Autobiography*. Oskar Kurer, 'J.S. Mill and Utopian Socialism', *The Economic Record* 68/202 (September 1992), p. 229; Mill, *Claims*, p. 382; Mill, *Principles*, pp. 758-96; Mill, *Autobiography*, pp. 239-41.
- ⁴⁵ Mill, Letter 28, to Gustave d'Eichthal, 7 November 1829, CW XII, pp. 40-1; Mill, Letter 30, to d'Eichthal, 6 March 1830, CW XII, p. 49; W.E. Channing, 'Remarks on Associations', *Complete Works* (London, 1880), pp. 115-6.
- ⁴⁶ Mill, *Principles*, pp. 936-70.
- ⁴⁷ A characterisation which owes a good deal to G.A. Cohen. Cohen, *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 104.
- ⁴⁸ Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 239.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 239-41.
- ⁵⁰ Mill, 'Alison's History of the French Revolution', CW XX, p. 118.
- ⁵¹ Mill, *Principles*, p. 214; Mill, Letter 24, to Gustave d'Eichthal, 11 March 1829, CW XII, p. 28.
- ⁵² Mill, *Principles*, p. 208.
- ⁵³ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, pp. 250-1; Geraint L. Williams, 'J.S. Mill and Political Violence', *Utilitas* 1/1 (May 1989), pp. 101-1.
- ⁵⁴ Mill, Letter 43, to John Sterling, 20-22 October 1831, CW XII, p. 84; Mill, Letter 501, to John Austin, 13 April 1847, CW XIII, pp. 711-5; Mill, 'Catiline's Conspiracy', CW XXVI, p. 343; Mill, 'French Law Against the Press', CW XXV, p. 1118; Mill, 'The Fenian Convicts', CW XXVIII, p. 166; Mill, 'France and the Quarterly Review', CW XXII,

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- p. 176; E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 643-4; Williams, 'Mill and Political Violence', p. 110.
- ⁵⁵ Mill, 'The Contest in America', *CW XXI*, pp. 141-2.
- ⁵⁶ Mill, 'French Law Against the Press', p. 1118.
- ⁵⁷ John Medearis, 'Labor, Democracy, Utility, and Mill's Critique of Private Property', *American Journal of Political Science* 49/1 (January 2005), p. 138.
- ⁵⁸ Mill, *Essay on Bentham*, *CW X*, pp. 97-8.
- ⁵⁹ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, *CW X*, p. 210; Mill, *Bentham*, p. 95.
- ⁶⁰ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, *CW X*, pp. 215-6 and 218; Mill, *Diary*, *CW XXVII*, pp. 262 and 641.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 641.
- ⁶² Mill, *Utilitarianism*, pp. 215-6.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 216.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁵ Mill, *Principles*, p. 360.
- ⁶⁶ Mill, *On Liberty*, *CW XVIII*, p. 260.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 228-75.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 260-75.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 228-75.
- ⁷⁰ Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 141.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷² *Ibid.*
- ⁷³ Mill, *Writings of Junius Redivivus [I]*, *CW I*, pp. 369-70.
- ⁷⁴ Mill, *Liberty*, pp. 228-75.
- ⁷⁵ Mill, *Bentham*, p. 95.
- ⁷⁶ Mill, *Liberty*, pp. 228-75.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 224.
- ⁷⁹ Mill, Letter 1678, to Emile Acolas, 20 September 1871, *CW XVII*, p. 1832.
- ⁸⁰ Mill, Letter 495.1, to Helps, 1847[?] *CW XVII*, p. 2002.
- ⁸¹ Mill, *Principles*, p. 203.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 783-4.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 236.
- ⁸⁴ Mill, *Writings of Junius Redivivus [I]*, *CW I*, pp. 369-70.
- ⁸⁵ Mill, 'Pledges' [1 & 2], *CW XXIII*, pp. 487-94 and 496-504; Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, *CW XIX*, pp. 371-577.
- ⁸⁶ Mill, *Liberty*, p. 224.
- ⁸⁷ Mill, 'Attack on Literature', *CW XXII*, p. 320.
- ⁸⁸ Mill, Letter 383, to Comte, 15 December 1842, *CW XIII*, p. 560; Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 45; Mill, Letter 524, p. 734; Mill, *Utility of Religion*, pp. 419-23.