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Attitudes Towards Race, Hierarchy and Transformation in the 19th Century*

Sandra J. Peart
David M. Levy

Abstract :

Using the debates between Classical political economists and their critics as our lens, this paper examines the question of whether we're the same or different. Starting with Adam Smith, Classical economics presumed that humans are the same in their capacity for language and trade; observed differences were then explained by incentives, luck and history, and it is the "vanity of the philosopher" incorrectly to conclude otherwise. Such "analytical egalitarianism" was overthrown sometime after 1850, when notions of race and hierarchy came to infect social analysis as a result of attacks on homogeneity by the Victorian Sages (including Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin), in anthropology and biology (James Hunt and Charles Darwin), and among political economists themselves (W.R. Greg). Two questions were at issue. Do everyone's preferences count equally, and is everyone equally capable of making economic decisions? In Smith's account, philosophers and subjects alike are capable of making decisions. The oppositional view held that some are different from others. Since "difference" implied "superiority" in the period we study, we call this doctrine "analytical hierarchicalism."

JEL classification numbers: B 12, Z 1.

I Introduction

Using the debates between Classical political economists and their critics as our lens, this paper examines the seemingly simple question of whether we're the same or different. At the beginning and throughout much of the nineteenth century, social scientists endorsed a hard form of what we have termed "analytical egalitarianism." Starting with Adam Smith, Classical economics presumed that humans are the same in their

capacity for language and trade; observed differences were then explained by incentives, luck and history, and it is the "vanity of the philosopher" incorrectly to conclude that ordinary people are somehow different from the expert (Smith 1776, I. ii Section 4). We show that such analytical egalitarianism was overthrown in the Post-Classical period sometime after 1850, when notions of race and hierarchy came to infect economic and social analysis as a result of attacks on homogeneity by the Victorian Sages (including Thomas

* This paper is an invited summary of our research over the last 5 years. Much of the material here appears in more detailed form in our book, *The "Vanity of the Philosopher": From Equality to Hierarchy in Post-Classical Economics* (University of Michigan Press, 2005). We thank this journal's editors and referees for helpful comments. The patience and encouragement of Masazumi Wakatabe are particularly appreciated.

Carlyle and John Ruskin), in anthropology and biology (James Hunt and Charles Darwin) and among political economists themselves (W.R. Greg).¹⁾ We sketch some disastrous consequences of the transition to hierarchical thinking, and we make the case that political economy in the Classical tradition *rightly* presupposed human homogeneity and *rightly* rejected hierarchical presuppositions of any sort.

At issue between analytical egalitarians and their critics were two questions: whether everyone's preferences count equally; and whether everyone is equally capable of making economic decisions. In Smith's account, all people, philosophers and subjects alike, are motivated by fame and fortune, and we are all equally capable of making decisions. The oppositional view held that some among us are different from others. Since "difference" implied "superiority" in the period we study, we call this doctrine "analytical hierarchicalism."

Those who opposed the Classical economists' presumption of homogeneity focused on two purported heterogeneities between the expert and his subject. First, the expert was presumed to be untainted by considerations of self-interest, while his subject is motivated by self-interest. Second, perhaps because of superior self-control or some other inherent difference, the expert is supposed to be "superior" to or smarter than the subject he studies. It is important to note that this intellectual superiority is not merely a matter of better information: the expert with whom we are concerned is someone who simply doesn't trust all subjects, who holds that some will always be hopelessly prone to making persistent mistakes no matter how much we educate, train, and inculcate.²⁾

The notion of "expert" is deliberately

left broad. The key feature of those *we* refer to as "experts" is that the expert was someone who makes recommendations about how others might achieve human happiness. Depending on the specific context involved in what follows, "experts" may be social commentators, biologists, or political economists (see Peart-Levy 2005a).

F.Y. Edgeworth captured the difference between the egalitarian framework in J.S. Mill, and post-Darwinian ideas which implied that education and other institutional changes would fail to produce the desired social good. In 1881, he wrote that "the authority of Mill, conveying an impression of what other Benthamites have taught openly, that all men, if not equal, are at least *equipotential*, in virtue of equal educatability" would "probably result in the ruin of the race" because it failed to take into account "*difference of quality*" among men (Edgeworth 1881, 132).³⁾ Ours is a story about how the category, "inferior subjects," changes over time: from the Irish, to blacks, to Jews, and so on.

It is precisely this supposition of superiority that Smith opposed, as the "vanity of the philosopher": such vanity implies the subject is in need of guidance from the expert. It also implies that the expert will be predisposed to disapprove of (and even disallow) the subject making unfettered choices in a marketplace or in the direction of her affections in the household and elsewhere. As long as the expert maintains that he possesses insight into the sorts of preferences people "should" possess. — if they only knew better — he must also accept, and may perhaps even demand, responsibility for directing those preferences until the subjects gain the sort of sophistication that he enjoys.⁴⁾ We suggest (Peart-Levy 2005b) that the "sci-

ence” of eugenics operationalized this doctrine.⁵⁾ By contrast, the Classical economists’ egalitarian notion of homogeneity — motivational and otherwise — and choices unfettered by the direction of one’s “betters,” go hand in hand.

The egalitarianism of the Classical Economists has a consequence which has long been misunderstood. If there is nothing to distinguish one person from another then an appropriate method for determining social policy is to count winners and losers and select the result upon that basis. (Peart-Levy 2005a).⁶⁾ In a society with a larger number of laborers and a smaller number of non-laborers, this analysis may appear to make “class” foundational. Class is a convenient concept as it allows a quick way to determine social policy. We cannot do better than to quote T.R. Malthus on that point at issue :

The professed object of Dr Adam Smith’s inquiry is the nature and causes of the wealth of nations. There is another inquiry, however, perhaps still more interesting, which he occasionally mixes with it, I mean an inquiry into the causes which affect the happiness of nations or the happiness and comforts of the lower orders of society, which is the most numerous class in every nation. (Malthus 1798, ch. 16 Section 1)

On our reading, Classical economists were less interested in “class,” however, and more concerned with the majority affected by any policy they advocated.

II Racism as the Primitive

Notions of “race” and hierarchy are ill-defined, indeed unstable, in the mid-nineteenth and well into the twentieth century. Arguments about race and hierarchy fre-

quently played out both in terms of the Irish and the former slaves in Jamaica (Curtis 1968, 1997). The “labouring classes” were also included in racially-charged discussions of inherited incompetence. And hierarchy and competence were mapped to gender and religion, as well.

This instability of “race” and hierarchy invites us to take what we shall call *racism* as primitive for our analysis and to consider what distinctions were made by those we study.⁷⁾ Taking racism as the foundation for our analysis is very much akin to what Bishop Berkeley proposed by taking perception as the foundation for his work on vision. One learns, Berkeley said, to perceive distance (Levy 2001). In line with Classical economists such as John Stuart Mill, we suggest that people learn to perceive “similarity” or “difference.” Part of the learning process involves images and stories which insist upon human homogeneity as well as images and stories which purport that some people are closer to beasts than they are to people. Even as the perception of homogeneity widened to people across the globe and sympathy extended to other races, the argument was put forward that some are more deserving of sympathy than others, that “charity begins at home.” This slogan is central to nineteenth century “paternalism” in that it recognizes that unregulated sympathy and choices can endanger hierarchy. Taking racism as primitive lets us deal with the question of the Jewish “race” with the same facility with which we deal with the Irish “race.” A “race” is what people of the time perceive it to be.

To provide a thumbnail sketch of the debates on human hierarchy, we use an index of humanity — or human hierarchy — which we denote α for the Greek anthrop, the

human. We use this device to characterize two major positions in the period we study. We shall use α in what follows to *define* a “race” because we find that race is conflated in our period with religion, gender and class. Political economy enters the argument because race is also conflated with *choice*. This conflation is perhaps best illustrated by the remarkable 1860 image by Charles Bennett which conveys the message that a woman who exits the household to engage in market activity changes race. The image, entitled “Slavey,” captures the malleability of “race” unforgettably.⁸⁾ A woman who exits hierarchy through markets — by entering the labour force — devolves into “an enslaved African type of humanity.” She is now perceived as having chosen to be different, and must be so.

The “progressive” doctrine that hierar-



Figure 1 Race as a Choice

chy humanizes, while exiting hierarchy to make self-directed choices causes racial devolution, is central to Charles Kingsley’s influential children’s tale, *Water-Babies*, as well as the *Punch* images we have studied (Peart-Levy 2005a). *Water-Babies* contains the story of the DoAsYouLikes — fond of playing a Jew’s harp — whose devolution to apes and consequent extermination is a matter of no regret. As the last of the ape-men perishes at the hands of a European hunter, he tries to say that he was “man and a brother,” but, having lost of the power of speech, fails in the attempt. The collision with Classical economics occurred by necessity because for these economists such transformations made no sense.

III Theories of Human Capability

What defines the human and measures human capability? By common consent it is “rationality.” In our period, the concept of rationality had a social aspect because it presupposed both common language as well as the capacity for individual choice. Adam Smith supposed a social foundation for political economy when he conjectured that humans trade because they reason and they speak a common language (Smith 1776, I. ii. Section 2 ; Rubinstein 2000). Thus, in terms of our α , there will be a discontinuity of the relation between α and reason at the edge of the development of language.

Having attained the status of human, in the debates we study human capability is related to the ability to make economic and political choices, including the decision to marry and have children. For Classical economists, there are two key aspects of this capability: the ability to sympathize, that is, to take into account other people in the self-interested calculus (Levy-Peart 2004a) ; and

what contemporary economists call “time preference.”⁹⁾

The ability to reason involves the ability to abstract. Those who opposed Classical economics held that such judgements were not to be trusted unless they were directed. Unregulated sympathetic judgements might yield resources to the undeserving. In the debates we have studied, positive time preference was also viewed as a failing.¹⁰⁾ As the case was made that some among us fail to make decisions optimally, perceptions of hierarchy and race entered economics: early British post-Classical writers maintained that lack of patience was a particularly Irish characteristic (see Peart-Levy 2005a).

Here, we are interested in different specifications of the relationship between humanity and economic ability (entailing sympathetic and intertemporal judgements) in the great debates over hierarchy. We focus on two foundational views of the relationship: Adam Smith’s; and a “developmental” account.

1. Adam Smith

Smith considers all humans to be alike, with the potential exception of those who are regarded by their fellows as heroic. These

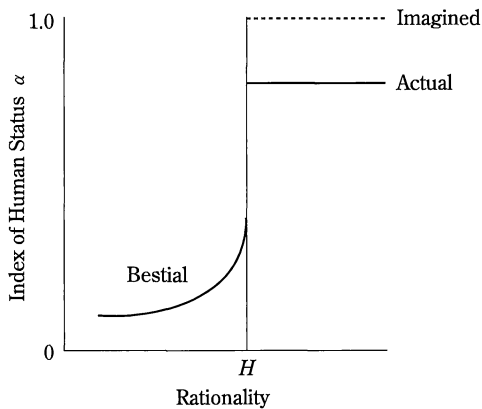


Figure 2 Adam Smith’s View of Human Status

“imagined” types are objects of approval and emulation. All “real” individuals are equally human.

2. Developmental

The next graph presents two developmental views of human nature which are often confounded. First, there is the utilitarian developmental view associated with Mill and Herbert Spencer. Here, there is a positive monotonic relationship between α and economic ability. Second, there is the biological developmental view associated with Greg and Galton. Here, α attains a maximum at H^* and then bends down. The downward sloping portion reflects the biologists’ criticism of utilitarians for paying insufficient attention to the deleterious consequence of undirected sympathy and ethics.¹¹⁾

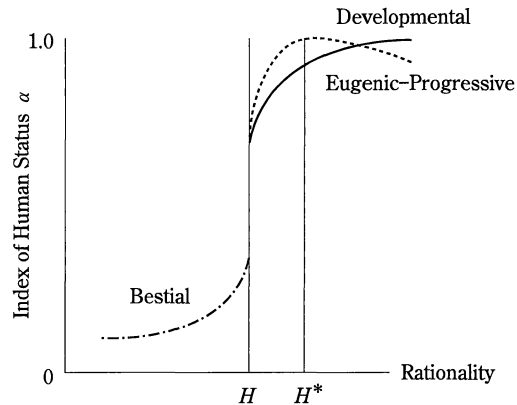


Figure 3 Developmental & Eugenic View of Human Status

Consider the solid line, which represents the utilitarian developmental view. The simple curvature does not tell us what is the causal arrow: do we become better humans as we gain ability to make sensible choices; or do more developed people make more sensible choices? Not surprisingly, there were different views on the matter. For Mill, im-

proved ability to make choices, manifested in part as widened sympathy, improved one's human status. For Mill, the maximum α was attained by Socrates and Jesus Christ who revealed a willingness to die for strangers. And although Mill was critical of crude American materialism, he believed that the highest national α was attained by Americans who were willing to die to abolish the slavery of their fellows (Peart-Levy 2003).

In the second half of the century, biologists called for a reduction, or at least a directing, of human sympathy and ethics—critical considerations in the developmental view. A.R. Wallace had argued in 1864 that the principle of natural selection does not operate with humans because people possess sympathy for their fellow humans: we do not let the mentally infirm and the physically unable perish (Wallace 1864). The founders of what became known as eugenics responded that if this survival of the unfit were the result of sympathy in humans, sympathy should be suppressed.¹²⁾ Thus, without suppression (via eugenic policy), beyond a certain point— H^* —an increase in ability entailing expanded sympathetic judgements, actually *reduces* α . Such thinking led to the eugenicists' program of biological remaking in order to prevent the biological decay that was said to follow the undirected acquisition of sympathetic tendencies in humans, to keep the human race from moving to the right of H^* . The great divide upon which we focus in what follows is between those for whom the life of some people is worth more than the life of others and those for whom it is not.¹³⁾

IV Transformation Theories

The critics of Classical political economy held that human nature was malleable, and Classical economists erred in supposing that

people simply respond to incentives. So, in their view the dotted line version of human development above pertained, and it was up to the so-called expert to prevent people from achieving the downward bending portion of the curve. In other words, they predicted that, without help from their betters, many human beings were incapable of developing properly, and they might instead simply devolve. We focus here on the “character” transformation argument. Human nature was malleable and Mill and other political economists were incorrect to presume otherwise.¹⁴⁾

The poet, John Ruskin, made this case most forcefully in 1860. He contrasted his “chemical” view of political economy with the “mathematical” view of Classical political economists such as Mill. The mathematical approach supposed that the nature of man is fixed and people respond to incentives. By contrast, the chemical approach presupposes that people can be transformed (by experts or other social forces):¹⁵⁾

But the disturbing elements in the social problem are not of the same nature of the constant one: they alter the essence of the creature under examination the moment they are added: they operate, not mathematically, but chemically, introducing conditions which render all our previous knowledge unavailable. (Ruskin 1905, p. 26).¹⁶⁾

For those who subscribed to the “chemical” view, the problem with Classical economics was that it failed to contemplate how to improve the subject.

Admirers of the transformative view often suppose that transformation works in the upward direction: exposure to the right sort of art “improves” people, while exposure

to market-generated culture cannot.¹⁷⁾ The 19th century view of transformation *also* focused on the possibility of transformation downward. If direction and hierarchy improve the human, the question arises, what happens if such hierarchy were removed? In 1849, Thomas Carlyle asserted that the emancipation of the West Indian slaves reduced them to subhuman status (Carlyle 1849, Levy 2001). But nineteenth century arguments about institutions were more long-lasting than the attempt to preserve slavery by Carlyle and his followers. Other, less extreme, forms of hierarchy were offered up as transformative institutions that might improve not only the behavior but also the “essence” of individuals who operated within the hierarchy, while renunciation of hierarchy was said to degrade that essence.

This transformational argument was made both in literary and visual forms — in the popular children’s tale by Charles Kingsley, *Water-Babies*, and the caricatures of Irish Fenians published in the 1860s in *Punch*. In both its forms, the argument constituted an attack on Classical political economy. In “chemical” political economy, the renunciation of hierarchy by those who need direction transforms a human into an ape-man. The Irish who chose to achieve self-rule, like the woman who left the home to work in the *Slavey* image above, devolved into a “lesser” race.

While scholars have discussed the ape-like quality of *Punch* caricatures of the Irish (Curtis 1968, 1997),¹⁸⁾ the devolution from human to ape in Kingsley’s *Water-Babies* has been neglected. Such accounts have also neglected the significance of hierarchy (or its renunciation to obtain self-government) in the predicted devolution of the subject; as well as how the visual renderings proved

oppositional to Classical political economy.

To illustrate the nature of chemical political economy further, consider Ruskin’s analysis of the impact of railroad travel on the lower orders in *Fors Clavigera*.¹⁹⁾ Here is an English worker’s transportation in the old days :

In old times, if a Coniston peasant had any business at Ulverstone, he walked to Ulverstone; spent nothing but shoe-leather on the road, drank at the streams, and if he spent a couple of batz when he got to Ulverstone, ‘it was the end of the world.’

In the market economy, post-industrialization, the worker becomes “idle” and “stupid”:

But now he would never think of doing such a thing! He first walks three miles in a contrary direction to a railroad-station, and then travels by railroad twenty-four miles to Ulverstone, paying two shillings fare. During the twenty-four miles transit, he is idle, dusty, stupid, and either more hot or cold than is pleasant to him. In either case he drinks beer at two or three of the stations, passes his time between them with anybody he can find, in talking without having anything to talk of; and such talk always becomes vicious. He arrives at Ulverstone, jaded, half-drunk, and otherwise demoralized, and three shillings, at least, poorer than in the morning. Of that sum a shilling has gone for beer, threepence to a railway shareholder, threepence in coals, and eighteen pence has been spent in employing strong men in the vile mechanical work of making and driving a machine, instead of his own legs to carry the drunken lout. The results, absolute loss and demoralization to the poor on all sides, and

iniquitous gain to the rich. (Ruskin 1878, p. 61)

An English worker got on the train. But the train ride transformed him into a “jaded, half-drunk, and otherwise demoralized” barely human being.

We have emphasized the importance of the egalitarian doctrine of abstract economic man, in the opposition to racial accounts of political economy. In his 1848 *Principles*, Mill outlined the implication of such a method. He rejected racial “explanations” of outcomes, which he condemned specifically with reference to the Irish. Institutions, not “Irishness,” explained the Irish problems :

Is it not, then, a bitter satire on the mode in which opinions are formed on the most important problems of human nature and life, to find public instructors of the greatest pretensions, imputing the backwardness of Irish industry, and the want of energy of the Irish people in improving their condition, to a peculiar indolence and *insouciance* in the Celtic race? Of all vulgar modes of escaping from the consideration of the effect of social and moral influences on the human mind, the most vulgar is that of attributing the diversities of conduct and character to inherent natural differences. (Mill 1848, 319)

The doctrine of abstract economic man has always been contested and in the Victorian period the criticism focused on abstraction from the “fact” of racial difference. As an important instance of this contestation we quote from an 1869 issue of the *Quarterly Review*, written by the co-founder (with Francis Galton) of eugenics, W.R. Greg :

‘Make them peasant-proprietors,’ says Mr. Mill. But Mr. Mill forgets that, till you change the character of the Irish cottier, peasant-proprietorship would work no miracles. He would fall behind the instalments of his purchase-money, and would be called upon to surrender his farm. He would often neglect it in idleness, ignorance, jollity and drink, get into debt, and have to sell his property to the nearest owner of a great estate.... In two generations Ireland would again be England’s difficulty, come back upon her in an aggravated form. Mr. Mill never deigns to consider that an Irishman is an Irishman, and not an average human being — an idiomatic and idiosyncratic, not an abstract, man. (Greg 1869, p. 78)

An Englishman got on Ruskin’s train ; Greg’s Irishman got off. Chemical political economy implies that humans are transformed or improved, changed from one race to another. Unfettered choices that occur with industrialization and economic development serve to reduce human status, because the improving influence of hierarchy is renounced. On the other hand, guidance by the social commentator, embodied in paternalistic institutions, prevents a movement downwards to a lower human status, and may move the individual up in the hierarchy of human status.

V Transformation by Obedience

If racial stereotypes form the molecules of chemical political economy, then we need to consider how Victorian perceptions of human hierarchy changed in the latter half of the 19th century.²⁰ Scholars have long made a distinction between literary racists (Thomas Carlyle in the forefront) and the scientific racists who clustered around James Hunt and his *Anthropological Review*. These

groups had at least one member in common : Charles Kingsley.²¹⁾ Kingsley is known for many contributions. He seems to have contributed one of “facts” in Hunt’s [September 1863] *Negro’s Place in Nature* :

— “Many observers have noticed the fact that the Negro frequently uses the great toe as a thumb.” (Hunt 1863b, 7)

The same claim appeared in Kingsley’s *Water-Babies*, published in installments earlier that year in *Macmillan’s Magazine* :

... they laid of the branches with their great toes, as if they had been thumbs, just as a Hindoo tailor uses his toes to thread his needle” (Kingsley 1863, 217)

First published in book form in 1863 and never thereafter out of print, Kingsley’s story for children was arguably the most successful and long-lived disseminator of the chemical thesis. *Water-Babies* had the distinction of being reviewed both by the *Times* and Hunt’s *Anthropological Review*. One of Kingsley’s explicit targets is the political economy of his contemporaries which denies the possibility of transformation.²²⁾

One is transformed by following the recommendations of one’s betters, by submitting to hierarchy. The telling episode in *Water-Babies* occurs in the tale of the now-extinct DoAsYouLikes who exit hierarchy :

And in the next five hundred years they were all dead and gone, by bad food and wild beasts and hunters; all except one tremendous old fellow with jaws like a jack, who stood full seven feet high; and M. Du Chaillu came up to him, and shot

him, as he stood roaring and thumping his breast. And he remembered that his ancestors had once been men, and tried to say, ‘Am I not a man and a brother?’ but had forgotten how to use his tongue; and then he had tried to call for a doctor, but he had forgotten the word for one. So all he said was ‘Ubboboo!’ and died. (Kingsley 1863, 247-48)

In the midst of the American Civil War, no one would miss the reference to the abolitionist question—“Am I not a man and a brother?”²³⁾ And we have a loss of language that accompanies the devolution to bestial.

In this episode about how the absence of compulsion causes racial devolution, Kingsley makes an Irish reference to the jaw as a marker of the primitive :

“Why,” said Tom, “they are growing no better than savages.”

“And look how ugly they are all getting,” said Ellie.

“Yes; when people live on poor vegetables instead of roast beef and plum-pudding, their jaws grow large, and their lips grow coarse, like the poor Paddies who eat potatoes.” (Kingsley 1863, 244)²⁴⁾

The conjunction of Darwinian science, Carlyle, and the devolution thesis in Kingsley is explicated by the review of *Water-Babies* in the *Times* :

And if we should never heard of Tom and Ellie but for the development of Marine Zoology, we may add that Master Tom’s education would have been impossible had not Mr. Darwin published his book on the *Origin of Species*. Mr Kingsley trips up the Darwinian theory, and ask us how we like

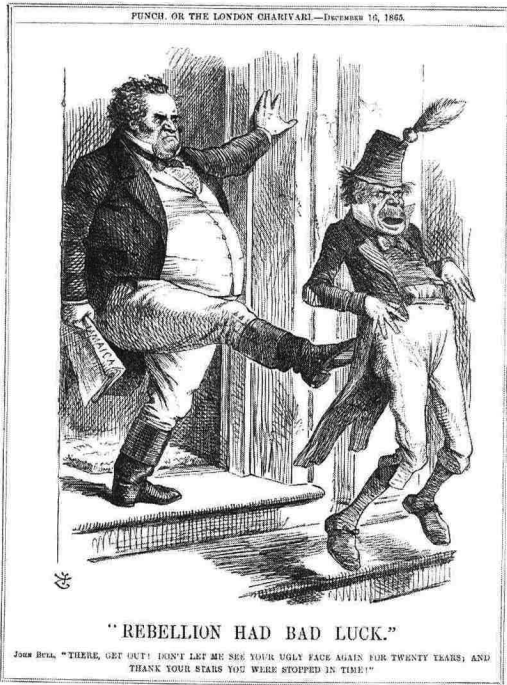


Figure 4 Punch on the Disloyal Irish



Figure 5 Punch on the Loyal Irish

its application when inverted. If an ascent in the order of life be possible, must not a degradation of movement downwards be equally possible? If beasts can be turned into men, must not men be liable to be turned into beasts? Here, indeed, Mr. Kingsley might have quoted the authority of one of his great masters, Mr Carlyle, who long ago warned us of the fate of the dwellers by the Dead Sea who refused to listen to the preaching of Moses. They became apes, poor wretches, and having once had souls they lost them. (*The Times*, 26 January 1864, p. 6)

Those who renounce hierarchy, devolve and exit humanity. This argument was also made visually, in the cartoons of the Victorian magazine, *Punch*. Consider the following example (Figure 4) in which the unruly Irish have devolved to ape-like status. By contrast, those who choose to serve their British masters are viewed as fully human (Figure 5). The message is one of “noblesse oblige”: the expert takes on the much-needed responsibility of ensuring that mankind avoids such terrible outcomes. The contrast with Classical political economy is striking: Smith, Malthus and Mill all trust individuals to make choices on their own, presupposing no special knowledge of what these choices should be.

VI Conclusion

This paper has shown how the political economists’ view of human nature — we’re all the same, equally capable of making choices and of self-improvement — was attacked on a number of fronts at mid-century. We have argued that the divide occurred in terms of *how* transformation might occur: by one’s self (Mill’s view), or

by one's "betters" (the view of Kingsley, Ruskin, and Carlyle).

We turn in closing to our critics, those who hold that we have misconstrued the debates or their participants. We have been told more than once that our outrage at the mid to late nineteenth century notions of race and hierarchy is misplaced. Everyone, we have been told, "was a racist then."²⁵⁾ It will now be clear that we reject this counterargument. We do so because we find it factually incorrect, and analytically flawed. In point of fact, our research demonstrates that there was significant (though unsuccessful) resistance to hierarchy and race. Classical economists rejected racial explanations of observed behavior, and were criticized for doing so. More than this, we find the counterargument embodies a form of not-so-subtle hierarchical thinking: the thought that we today are superior to those of the past; that we who are non-racist must excuse the racist writers of the past, because they simply reflect their times.

The Classical economists' explanation for observed heterogeneity was to appeal to the incentives associated with different institutions. So, for instance, Classical economists such as John Stuart Mill argued that the Irish problem was largely a matter of institutions rather than one of inherent indolence.²⁶⁾ Mill was strenuously opposed by those who claimed the Irishman was "idiosyncratic" and would never be the hard-working Scot. The policy conclusion followed: special measures were required to look after the Irishman, whose inherent difference meant he lacked the capacity to rule himself. Mill struggled with the problem of transition from one set of institutions to another, how new habits are formed as institutions change. Economists who have become accustomed to institution-

free analysis, fail to appreciate how much of Classical economics is designed to deal precisely with the problem of self-motivated human development in the context of institutional change.

A second potential difficulty for our position is that while Carlyle's attitudes on race and hierarchy were horrible, those of, say, a Kingsley were rather more "progressive" and less hateful. The Sages' opposition to markets, it is claimed, might have been framed along lines that we haven't yet considered. By offering paternalism as an alternative to both markets and slavery, some of the Sages might be salvaged as caring, progressive social commentators, commentators who genuinely wished to see the lot of the working poor improved. Thus, there may have been some paternalists whose distrust of markets can be contrasted with our characterization of Ruskin and Carlyle (Levy-Pearl 2001-2002). Those paternalists, the argument continues, were not necessarily racists.

We have argued that, as a matter of fact, those paternalists *were* racists. Posing the problem as a choice among markets, slavery, and (somewhere in between), paternalism, suggests why contemporary scholars might be prepared to defend the Victorian Sages even today. Their analysis today, as in the nineteenth century, is a form of elitism that we find particularly objectionable: in defending Ruskin, Carlyle and Kingsley, our critics are arguing, today, that the working classes of nineteenth century England were in need of transformation by their "betters." We are much more comfortable with, instead, Mill's position that to the extent that transformation might occur, it would be the result of self-discovery and choice rather than at the recommendation (and imposition) of experts.²⁷⁾

We hold that the Classical economists

got it right: an analytical system in which everyone counts equally and is presumed equally capable of making decisions, is the only system which seems morally defensible to us.²⁸⁾ And, not surprisingly, we find analytical systems that presume hierarchy are indefensible. This paper has attempted to explain why.

First, we find the history compelling, and awful. In all the instances above in which a group has been treated as “different,” difference has turned into hierarchy, and hierarchy has sometimes led to terrible analytical and policy consequences.²⁹⁾ As noted above, we also find that systems in which hierarchy is invoked are extraordinarily pliable. The “inferior” becomes any group who is presently out of favor with the analyst.

Most compelling for us, the analysis which presumes difference is terribly tempting to the analysts and policy makers. Once difference creeps into the analysis, the temptation is to presume that difference implies inferiority. It also seems often to imply that the writer, whether social commentator or scientist, somehow “knows better.” And here we find that this is not simply a presumption that the analyst has better information. Instead, it extends to a presumption of inherent superiority. For whatever reason, the analyst presumes the subjects’ choices aren’t to be trusted but instead require looking-after. Somehow, the analyst is privy to knowledge about what decisions “should” be made and what preferences individuals “should” have, if they only knew better. As a society and as a community of academics, we have come to accept the proposition that the scientist is somehow superior to — better motivated or more able than — the individuals under investigation. We fail to trust those individuals to make reasonable choices.

The co-authors find such a presumption of superiority on the part of the analyst is the last, unrecognized and resisted, form of hierarchy in social science. It is, we have argued, simply the “vanity of the philosopher.” (Peart-Levy 2005a)

Finally, we have been asked, what if there are real differences among people? A look around us at any moment suggests that people are, in fact, different — inherent physical differences, for instance, abound. (One co-author is under 5 feet 2 inches, the other is about 6 feet, and relative price changes are not likely to reduce this difference.) So, our argument has much in common with Lionel Robbins, who in 1938 remembered the debates in economics over the differential capacity for happiness:

I have always felt that, as a first approximation in handling questions relating to the lives and actions of large masses of people, the approach which counts each man as one, and, on that assumption, asks which way lies the greatest happiness, is less likely to lead one astray than any of the absolute systems. I do not believe, and I never have believed, that in fact men are necessarily equal or should always be judged as such. But I do believe that, in most cases, political calculations which do not treat them as if they were equal are morally revolting. (Robbins 1938, 635)

The lesson we draw from the history in our “*Vanity of the Philosopher*,” is that a presumption of *group* difference — when the definition of the group is pliable and the analyst is presumed to be in the superior group — is dangerously tempting. Analytical egalitarianism is a defense against the temptation of the theorist.

Explaining the role of the expert in a system of analytical egalitarianism is perhaps the most interesting question we face. Frank Knight regarded the problem of how people pick an expert physician as central. Knight believed that the solution required a strong ethical component to restrict the expert from exploiting someone with less information.³⁰⁾ In such an ethical system, it may be important for the expert to believe that she is no different, except for the possession of information, from ordinary people.

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Notes

- 1) This list of characters is not exhaustive ; see Peart-Levy 2005a for details. We prefer “post-Classical,” to the more familiar “neoclassical” terminology. On the origin of the term “neoclassical,” see Colander (2001, pp. 154ff.). We find the transition entailing the rise of hierarchical thinking, the loss of sympathy and the endorsement of eugenical re-making, infects a broad set of economists, not all of whom would be considered “neoclassical.” Traditions within and outside of “neoclassical” economics — the Austrian school scattered by the coming of the Hitler era, as well as the London school and Chicago — revived the presupposition of equal competence in the twentieth century (Peart-Levy 2005a).
- 2) In Smith’s account, people begin from their understanding of the world as summarized by proverbial wisdom. Like Smith, Malthus recognized that the agents about whom he wrote have theories or beliefs of their own : people can *foresee* the misery attendant on an overly large family and they take that into account when they decide to marry. In one remarkable passage Malthus explains that the foresight of ordinary people is an attempt to unwrap the regularities of nature. Because of these regularities, people are both able and willing to work and plan (Malthus 1798, Chapter XVIII, par. 10) For Malthus, at foundation there is no difference between the foresight of the ordinary person and the activity of the greatest of all natural philosophers, Newton. The ordinary person’s wisdom takes proverbial form so that others might profit from it. For more on how Malthus fits into our account, see Peart-Levy 2005b.
- 3) Edgeworth calls Mill’s equal educatability argument “pre-Darwin prejudice” (Edgeworth 1881, 132).
- 4) The expert might also challenge consumer sovereignty. Twentieth century examples in recent history include Maurice Dobb (1933) and J.K. Galbraith (1958). These were countered by Abba Lerner (1934) and F.A. Hayek (1961). But neither Dobb nor Galbraith challenged the doctrine of the stability of the agent’s personal identity through choice.
- 5) Our focus in what follows is mainly on the theories of human nature, transformative or otherwise, and less on the technical investigations by eugenics-influenced economists and statisticians late in the century. For details, see Peart-Levy 2005a and Levy-Peart 2004b.
- 6) The Classical economists’ presupposition of sympathetic agents is critical to block the tyranny of the majority (Peart-Levy 2005d).
- 7) We use the more familiar “racism” rather than the unwieldy “hierarchicalism” here, to signify thinking in which groups are perceived as superior vs. inferior. Glenn Loury’s axiom: “‘Race’ is a socially constructed mode of human categorization” (Loury 2002, 5) is much to the point. In Peart-Levy 2005a we focus on the microfoundations of such a construction while attempting (by using Mill’s constructions) to use the machinery found within the period we study.
- 8) The accompanying text makes it clear that Bennett is on Carlyle’s side in the debate over slavery with Mill: “It will be noticed that the eidolographic development of Miss Hipswidge is strikingly suggestive of the

enslaved African type of humanity. The banjo, castanets, ‘abundant pumpkin,’ and other conventional solaces of that persecuted race are, however, wanting to make the resemblance perfect.” Bennett and Brough (1860, p. 33). The “abundant pumpkin” is a phrase from Carlyle’s “Negro question” discussed in Levy 2001 and Levy-Peart 2001-02.

- 9) On the significance of sympathy, see Levy-Peart 2004a and 2005. On the characterization of time preference late in the century, see Peart 2000 and Peart-Levy 2005d.
- 10) W.S. Jevons, for instance, argued that in matters of intertemporal decisions, the laboring classes were inherently myopic and prone to making systematic mistakes. For a demonstration of such views in Jevons, Marshall, Pigou and Fisher, see Peart 2000; on Pigou, see Collard 1996.
- 11) Is it possible to be “too” rational? Thomas Carlyle judged his adversary, John Stuart Mill, to be a “logic-chopping machine.” At the beginning of Mill’s attempt to bring justice to murdered and mutilated Jamaicans, he wrote that we must not let narrow self-interest distract us from the demands of impartial justice for our fellow creatures (Peart-Levy 2005a).
- 12) See Peart-Levy 2005a and Levy-Peart 2004 b for the texts and details.
- 13) In opposition to Mill’s equality proposition, Edgeworth responded “Accordingly in the ‘koomposh’ of an unlimited pauper population, the most favourable disposition might seem to be (abstracted from practical considerations, and *if* the delineation of Wundt be verified within and beyond the region of sensation), might seem perhaps to be, that adhering *ex hypothesi* to the letter of the first problem, we should be guided by the spirit of the second problem, should wish to cut off the redundant numbers with an illusory portion, so as to transfer substantial (equal) portions to a few. There might be, as it were, a mulcting of many brothers to make a few eldest sons.” (Edgeworth 1877, p. 61). We examine Edgeworth’s position in Peart-Levy 2005a in which we explore his blending of Darwin, Galton and utilitarianism. Edgeworth’s eugenic utilitarianism in *Mathematical Psychics*, which advocates the removal from the population of those with the lowest capacity for happiness, has long been overlooked. One does not fully understand “cardinal utilitarianism” until one realizes that, as formulated by Edgeworth, there is no reason to believe that a person might have positive lifetime utility and thus whose existence forms an impediment to social happiness.
- 14) Mill is clearly in opposition to Ruskin in this debate, but he takes a different position from that of Smith. For Mill, human improvement is possible: the human nature characterization is upward sloping. What separates him from Ruskin and other “progressives” of the time, is that for Mill, “improvement” was to be self- (rather than “expert”-) directed. Unlike Ruskin, human development occurs as individuals freely recognize their human potential in the context of discussion and trial and error. No expert is required to show people what to do or choose and all are equally capable of human improvement. See Peart-Levy 2003.
- 15) Ruskin (and other critics of Mill’s political economy), sometimes writes as though one individual may be transformed into another (better or worse) individual. At the same time, the case was also made that there are group variations: that Irish or blacks as a whole need to be transformed.
- 16) Classical political economy also failed because it supposed that the exchange of untransformed goods was profitable. For exchange to generate net benefits, Ruskin held, there must be a transformation. Ruskin (1905, pp. 90-91).
- 17) Jevons’s “Amusements of the People” relied on this distinction when he called for the “deliberate cultivation of public amusement”: “the well-conducted Concert-room versus the inane and vulgar Music-hall” (Jevons 1878, 7). The discussion within economics over the possibility of metapreferences (George 2001) — when an individual prefers one set of preferences to another — assumes that to the extent that an individual is remade, she is in charge of her own deci-

- sions. The problem of *adult* rehabilitation as one moves from (say) slavery to markets was much on J. S. Mill's mind in his *Principles of Political Economy*. See Peart-Levy 2003.
- 18) Curtis finds that caricatures of the Irish reflect four Irish types: Northern Irish Protestant; rustic male small farmer (Pat); prognathous and hairy plebeian Irishman (Paddy); and "simian Paddy." Like us, he sees a process by which caricatures became increasingly simian, or ape-like, throughout the 1860s. (Curtis 1997, 20; 22; 29).
 - 19) We quote from the 19th century republication in an American periodical to emphasize the contemporary importance. The extracts by Walter Levin in Ruskin (1893) are taken largely from *Fors Clavigera*.
 - 20) We do not wish to imply that it is impossible to conceive of transformation possibilities independently of race. There may also be gender and religious transformations. There is a hint of simianization in a purely English context in a *Punch* cartoon of 4 August 1866, "No Rough-ianism" which carries the caption: "Working-Man: 'Look here, you vagabond! Right or wrong, we won't have *your* help!'" The *English* ruffian holds a rock and a broken branch.
 - 21) Correspondence from Kingsley to Hunt is published in Levy (2001) answering an open question about the Hunt-Kingsley connection. Andrew Farrant and Nicola Tynan are thanked for bringing the importance of *Water-Babies* to our attention.
 - 22) The agents of transformation in *Water-Babies* are fairies: "Some people think that there are no fairies.... And Aunt Agitate, in her Arguments on political economy, says there are none. Well, perhaps there are none, in her political economy." (1863, p. 60) Fairies also play a role in Kingsley's 1864 *Roman and Teuton*, his Regis Lectures of Modern History at Cambridge (Kingsley 1864).
 - 23) It was commented upon in the review in the *Anthropological Review* (Hunt 1863a, 472). The review adds to the information on the title page ("The Rev. Charles Kingsley") that the author is "Honorary Fellow of the Anthropological Society of London, and Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge." (Hunt 1863, 472).
 - 24) Curtis remarks on "Charles Kingsley's description of the poor peasants he saw in County Mayo and Connemera in 1860 as 'white chimpanzees.'" (Curtis 1997, 100)
 - 25) We first encountered this criticism at the Christian A. Johnson conference that featured some of our research at Middlebury College in 2000. The conference proceedings contain a number of pieces that criticize our work as well as our response; see Colander, Prasch and Sheth, 2004.
 - 26) Senior also attributed outcomes to institutions rather than inherent differences: "Almost all the differences between the different races of men, differences so great that we sometimes nearly forget that they all belong to the same species, may be traced to the degree in which they enjoy the blessings of good government." (Senior 1836, p. 76)
 - 27) To fully appreciate the importance of "progressives" like Kingsley, one must consider how he came to endorse (the biologists' goal of) human "progress" at the expense of (the economists' goal of) human "happiness" and claimed that the doctrine of racial survival was the "natural theology of the future." This is the topic of Peart-Levy 2005c.
 - 28) This is not to say that we agree in all respects with all Classical economists, or that we disagree always with all their opponents. We find analysis that presumes homogeneity is compelling, and we object to treatments entailing hierarchy. And we find that, on balance, the Classical economists fall on the side of homogeneity, while (again, on balance), their critics fall on the side of hierarchy.
 - 29) Much of the material in our "Vanity" (Peart-Levy 2005a) has in fact been difficult for us to read. We reproduce it there, and examine the arguments made thereby, in order to set the record straight, to learn from the past, and to make our case in favor of analysis that presumes homogeneous competence.

30) “A patient who would choose his doctor scientifically would, in the first place, have himself to know all medical science, or at least all that known to any and all candidates for the place, and in addition know just the amount of this knowledge possessed by each candidate. But this is only half the story, and perhaps the smaller half. Our poor patient would further be required to know the degree in which each candidate would use his knowledge in his, the patient’s interest.

“If the problem of competence in an agent admits of no solution because of its magnitude and complexity, that of the moral admits of none, of an intellectual sort, by its very nature. One who is to act for another with special competence, superior to that of his principal, and with fidelity, must be picked for competence and trustworthiness by some intuitive process, and must then be trusted. Sanctions of the sort found in every society no doubt help in security trustworthiness. About all these matters we have little knowledge, and the only that can be said with assurance is that (peace to the shade of Jeremy Bentham!), no machinery of sanctions can conceivably function without very large aid from moral forces.” (Knight 1934, 29-30).

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