

2009

2008 HES Presidential Address: We're All "Persons" Now: Classical Economists and their Opponents on Marriage, the Franchise, and Socialism

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Recommended Citation

Peart, Sandra J. "2008 HES Presidential Address: We're All "Persons" Now: Classical Economists And Their Opponents On Marriage, The Franchise, And Socialism." *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 31, no. 01 (2009): 3-20. doi:10.1017/S1053837209090026.

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2008 HES PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
WE'RE ALL "PERSONS" NOW: CLASSICAL
ECONOMISTS AND THEIR OPPONENTS
ON MARRIAGE, THE FRANCHISE,
AND SOCIALISM

BY

SANDRA J. PEART

PREAMBLE

I should begin by thanking the History of Economics Society for giving me the opportunity to serve as your President. Like many of you, I've spent most of my career working in economics departments where few, if any, cared one way or the other whether I wrote anything, let alone anything related to the history of economic ideas. This realization came as a shock to me when I left the University of Toronto and began teaching, first at William and Mary and then at Baldwin-Wallace College. At Toronto (here I include both U of T and York), it seemed there were all sorts of folks who found old ideas interesting—Sam Hollander, of course, but also Dusan Pokorny, Donald Moggridge, Sue Howson, Rod Hay (who has just recently passed away), Evelyn Forget, Margaret Schabas, Avi Cohen, Gerry Helleiner, David Foot, Brenda Spotten, Albert Berry, and Bob Dimand. And we had the Mill works with John Robson and Ann Robson, plus the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies and the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology all just around the corner. It was an extraordinary group at an extraordinary time.

One of the first academic conferences I attended was here, organized by president-elect Don Moggridge in 1988. As a graduate student, I spent most of my time sitting behind a registration desk taking names. Since I knew hardly any of you at that time, few of you made an impression. I remember two young snappy dressers, Larry Moss and Roger Koppl, arriving together, talking a mile a minute, demanding attention; I'm very pleased that Larry is here today.

I say all of this to let you know how pleased I am to be participating in the HES conference **at Toronto!** This is the city where I came to know and love the history of economic ideas, and it's wonderful to be able to address you here. More than this, I want

Presidential Address, HES annual meeting (June 2008), Toronto. I am grateful to David Levy, who has worked with me on the research project described in this address. Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond. speart@richmond.edu

to say that the Society has been important to me—as it has been, I’m sure, to others—as a sort of haven where I could find other persons who, like me, have chosen to spend a lifetime thinking and talking and writing about old ideas. I’m grateful that haven exists.

My purpose is to paint a broad brush narrative—it will have some visual representations as well—of how nineteenth-century political economists and their critics confronted a set of basic and related questions: Are men and women equally capable of self governance? Are they equally able to decide when and whom to marry and how many children to have? Can they be trusted equally to cast a ballot? Is their right to property inviolate or might new arrangements be designed and adopted for the production and distribution of wealth?

This is a story interwoven with extraordinary characters: John Stuart Mill will be featured heavily, though not exclusively. Alongside him frequently was his friend and later his wife, Harriet Taylor. Much of the story related to Mill on socialism will be told through the great critics of socialism in the twentieth century, Ludwig von Mises and (especially) Friedrich A. Hayek.

Along the way, we will see that the criticisms in the first instance—in the nineteenth century—were largely about capacity. Critics of political economy made the case that men and women (English and Irish) were differently constituted; women (the Irish) were especially bad at making decisions about the family or voting.

Socialism, however, was different. Though he was intensely critical of Mill on socialism, Hayek’s treatment had nothing at all to do with the capacity of those who might benefit from a full or partial system of socialism. Instead, Hayek focused on the now-familiar argument that a system in which property was redistributed from rich to poor would result in grave consequences in terms of overall economic well-being and self-reliance, and he was critical of Mill for failing to see that some socialism would lead to more.

So, twentieth-century criticisms of Mill on the economics of socialism (and then later, of planning)—visual and otherwise—contained little to suggest that arguments about socialism were linked to the purported capacity of those who would benefit from social reorganization. This presents a very interesting contrast, one that highlights the fact that by the mid twentieth century arguments about capacity had largely been purged from economic discourse. At Chicago, the London School of Economics, and in the writings of some Austrians, “Homo economicus”—an “as if” consumer like all other consumers and unlike none—had been revamped in economics. Thereafter, it was no longer acceptable—in these circles, at least—to speak about groups of economic actors who might tire more easily (and stop work sooner) than others, as Jevons had done in his *Theory of Political Economy*, writing about how a “man of lower race” who “enjoys possessions less, and loathes labour more” than a more energetic Englishman (Jevons 1871, p. 182).¹

I. THE STARTING POINT: ANALYTICAL EGALITARIANISM

Classical political economists—notably T. R. Malthus, W. N. Senior, Harriet Martineau, John Stuart Mill, and Harriet Taylor—all held that with similar opportunities women

¹On notions of race in Jevons, see Michael White 1994. On rationality among the lower classes see Peart 2000. On race and hierarchy in post-classical economics, see Peart and Levy 2005. None of this is to say that all such discussion was cut off in the mid twentieth century. At least in the discussion of socialism, however, the debate proceeded on different lines.

and men were equally capable. They said this was also true for the Irish, west African slaves, former slaves, and the working poor in England (at least to the extent that educational opportunities were made available to each group). This is a position that David Levy and I have called “analytical egalitarianism.”

Using the framework of analytical egalitarianism, nineteenth-century political economists argued for wide-scale institutional change: first and foremost, the abolition of slavery; the New Poor Law to encourage “prudential behaviour” and delay of marriage; well-defined property rights for Irish and women; and voting rights for Irish and women.

On the other side of this, political economists were attacked by those who said that women weren’t able to make these decisions “rationally” so they shouldn’t be allowed to do so. Left to their own devices, women would make the wrong marriage choice. They would systematically marry the wrong person, or marry at too young an age and have too many children. In 1878 W. S. Jevons extended this argument to say that if child-bearing women were free to enter the labor force, they would respond to the changed incentives by systematically marrying louts (who would not support them) and working too much:

It must be evident, too, that the facility with which a young married woman can now set her children aside, and go to earn good wages in the mills, forms the strongest possible incentive to improvident and wrongful marriages. (Jevons 1878, p. 172).

Attacks on egalitarianism came in many forms: from the “science” of anthropology and eugenics; historians and literary critics such as Thomas Carlyle; art critics such as John Ruskin; and in the popular press, visually—in the artwork especially of John (later Sir John) Tenniel, the principal artist after 1865 for *Punch* magazine.

In what follows, I provide a quick sketch of the analytical egalitarian position on a number of related topics and then focus on the visual attacks. These take two forms: they attack the messenger (the political economist—Harriet Martineau, J. S. Mill); or the group being defended by the economist (the Irish, the former slave, the Italian, etc.). In both cases, the visualizations suggest inferiority (of the economist, and of the group being represented).

II. FRASER’S ON HARRIET MARTINEAU AND THE PREVENTATIVE CHECK

Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country was a major source of agitation against the political economists of the time.² Its editor, William Maginn, introduced Daniel MacLise caricatures of economist celebrities of the time (1830s), notably Harriet Martineau who today is known as a great popularizer of classical political economy.

The context of the attack is this: in the face of scarcity, Robert Malthus had recommended delay of marriage.³ The Malthusian “preventative check” eventually culminated in the very controversial New Poor Law. By the time *Fraser’s* came into

²*Fraser’s* is the first important Victorian periodical to publish portraits of literary figures (Bates 1883, Fisher 2006) and as the periodical most associated with the literary opposition to political economy (Thrall 1934, Baker 1936, Houghton 1966).

³See Waterman 1999 for the case that scarcity is the central problem for classical political economy. *Fraser’s* also ran a portrait of Francis Place in 1836.

being (1830), Harriet Martineau was teaching Malthusian lessons in the form of novels.⁴ Martineau was the first political economist pictured in *any* periodical and the context of the picture suggests that she is too unattractive to marry (hence her position on delaying marriage): masculine, witch-like. In an 1832 review of Martineau's novels, William Maginn stressed the unsoundness of the proposal to delay marriage: "Morality and marriage must ever subsist in a state in correlative proportions. To decrease the prevalence of marriage is to increase the prevalence of immorality. This the whole experience of mankind informs us." (1832, p. 413):

In fact, the grand mistake committed—by both the young lady and the reverend divine in this matter, as in all other parts of the question, is this,— that they theorise instead of consulting facts and human nature. In this way they seem to take for granted, that if they can but stop marriages from going on, all will be right; whereas, no more speedy or effectual method can possibly be adopted for demoralizing and breaking up a community. The natural appetites and passions of men are not to be extinguished . . . (1832, p. 413).

The Maclise portrait of Martineau appeared the following year. Maginn's words accompanying the portrait tell us that we can see why she's a Malthusian: she's too ugly to marry! The reader "will readily agree with us, after proper inspection, that it is no great wonder that the lady should be pro-Malthusian; and that not even the Irish beau, suggested to her by a Tory songster, is likely to attempt the seduction of the fair philosopher from the doctrines of no-population" (Maginn 1833, p. 576). Scholars who have studied the Maclise image suggest that Martineau is pictured as a "Utilitarian witch" (Fisher 2006, p.120): "The hot water on her fire is the witch's cauldron and the cat is a sexually suspect familiar, while the pen becomes her wand. Another suggests that she is 'brewing a witch's potion, or perhaps a hot toddy'."

III. CAPACITY FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT

Agitation for institutional change in Ireland garnered increasing attention by the mid-1860s and here again the political economists played a key role. Many, like John Bright⁵ and John Stuart Mill, took the position that Ireland was indeed Ireland because of the severe institutional failings there. So, John Stuart Mill wrote in his *Principles of Political Economy* in a now-famous passage that

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, p. 319).

⁴See Huzel 2006.

⁵This is not to suggest all treatments of Ireland among liberals were identical. Bright favoured an end to the law of primogeniture in Ireland, compensation for evicted tenants, loans for those who wished to buy land, and land purchase from English owners at discounts to Irish buyers. But Bright left the liberal party in 1886, objecting to the increasing militancy of the Irish agitation.



He was mocked for this position when W. R. Greg reminded him that the Irish would always sink into poverty and debt *because they are Irish*:

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 newest 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).

The Victorian highly popular journal, *Punch*, featured a huge number of cartoons on the Irish. Consider the image from *Punch* magazine, *Dr. Dulcamara in Dublin*. The Irish, like women, lack the capacity for self-government. So, like Donizetti's operatic treatment in *L'elisir d'amour*, they are duped into seeking after Doctor Dulcamara who sells them the easy tonic, "Radical Reform."

CARTOON.—NOVEMBER 10, 1866.



DR. DULCAMARA IN DUBLIN.

These are hardly fully formed humans.⁶ They have bulging eyes and a protruding jaw. In literary sources, as well, the Irish paddy became a cause célèbre. The telling episode in Charles Kingsley's *Water-Babies* occurs in the tale of the now-extinct DoAsYouLikes who exit hierarchy. There we hear how the DoAsYouLikes who fail to obey their superiors devolve into something savage and Irish:

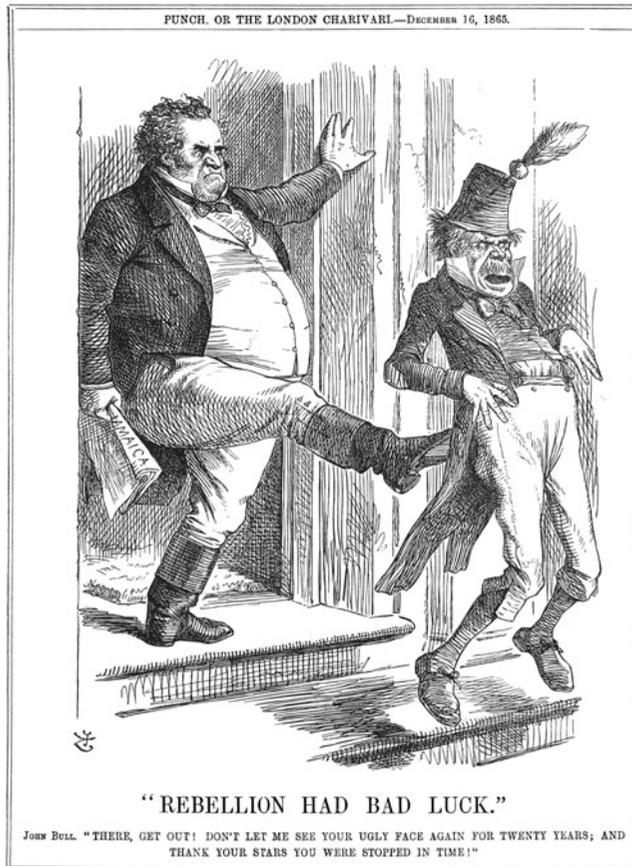
"Why," said Tom, "they are growing no better than savages."

"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, p. 244).

⁶The occasion of the cartoon is the Reform Act, which enfranchised some two million additional voters and cleared the way for future reform. Bright was explicit about the capacity argument—urging that all men (not women, though) had the capacity for self-governance.

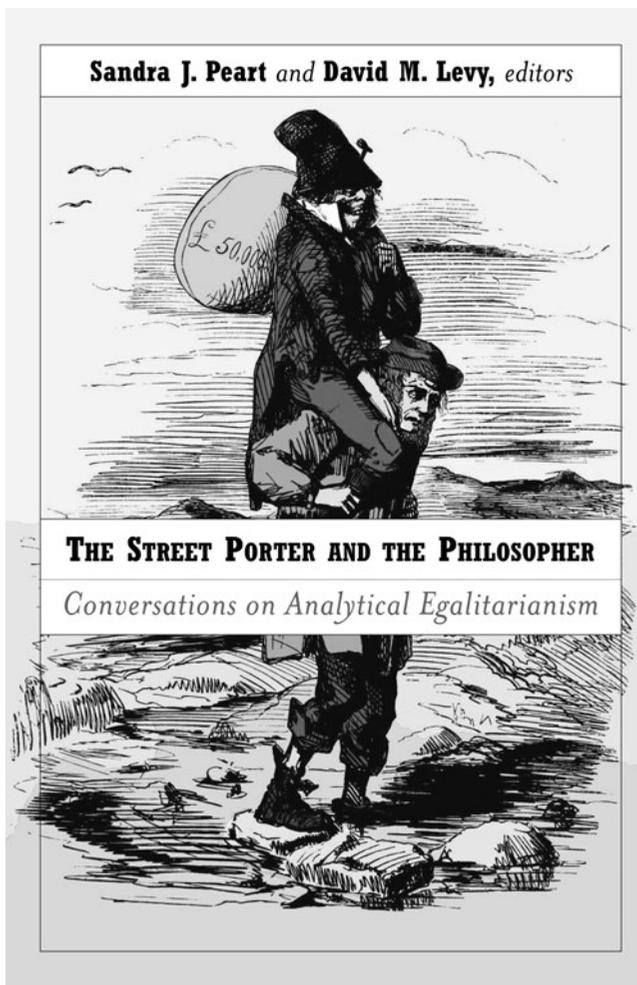
Tenniel perfected his portrayal of the Irish-as-inferior, practicing it frequently for *Punch* (as principal artist after 1865) until any unruly Irishman came to look the same as any other and all were inferior to an Englishman, as in these cartoons, in which the Governor Eyre controversy becomes an issue (in the first), and the contrast between the English and Irish is made (in the second):



IV. POLITICAL ECONOMY AND WOMEN

There has been a good deal of speculation as to Harriet Taylor's influence on Mill.⁷ The Mill-Taylor correspondence reveals that Mill's views on the institution of marriage, at least, were fully formed before he spent a great deal of time with Harriet. Sometime around 1832 or 1833, Mill sent an early essay on marriage to Harriet (long before the 1869 *Subjection of Women*). Here the analytical egalitarianism is crystal clear. The institution of marriage could not be considered apart from the question of whether men and women were to be treated—institutionally—as if they were the same:

⁷For a review of the evidence, see Forget 2003.



And the truth is, that this question of marriage cannot properly be considered by itself alone. The question is not what marriage ought to be, but a far wider question, what woman ought to be. Settle that first, and the other will settle itself. Determine whether marriage is to be a relation between two equal beings, or between a superior & an inferior, between a protector and a dependent; & all other doubts will easily be resolved. (MT Collection LI/1).

Since they were presently not treated *as if* they were the same, institutional change to level that playing field was in order:

The first and indispensable step, therefore, towards the enfranchisement of woman, is that she be so educated, as not to be dependent either on her father or her husband for subsistence: a position which in nine cases out of ten, makes her either the plaything or the slave of the man who feeds her; and in the tenth case, only his humble friend. (MT Collection LI/1).

Women needed access to property and education:

... women will never be what they should be, nor their social position what it should be, until women, as universally as men, have the power of gaining their own livelihood: until, therefore, every girl's parents have either provided her with independent means of subsistence, or given her an education qualifying her to provide those means for herself. (MT Collection LI/1).

The position that women should have the means to own property and to support themselves, was ridiculed, first, by attacking the capacity of women to work (to save, to marry, to vote); secondly by attacking Mill à la Martineau. Consider first this portrait of a woman who decides to leave the household and seek employment (as a maid). As she does so, the "substance" of the woman is revealed (in an 1860 collection called "Shadow and Substance" by Charles Bennett) and she devolves into a negro who is simply incapable of working for ready money.



Meanwhile, for his position on women, in particular the role of women in the Reform Act, Mill was vilified. First, from *Punch* he is caricatured in this cartoon:



Mill was given a less respectful treatment in the younger and less polished popular magazine of the time, *Judy*, where, like Martineau, his gender is challenged. Indeed, Mill is frequently portrayed as a woman; descriptions of Mill from that time hence often carry the hint that he was feminine, weak and unoriginal. Hayek, too, seems to have absorbed that position. Perhaps the most famous image of the cross-dressing Mill is “Miss Mill Joins the Ladies” (see p. 13) which *Judy* published to celebrate Mill’s defeat for re-election (Kinzer, Robson, and Robson 1992, p. 264).

V. MILL ON SOCIALISM

In his *Principles of Political Economy* Mill famously distinguished between the laws of production—“physical truths”—and of distribution—“a matter of human institution solely” (Mill 1848, p. 199).⁸ Laws of distribution might be altered by “consent of society”: “any disposal whatever of them can only take place by the consent of society, or rather of those who dispose of its active force The

⁸See Hayek 1988: “it is probably John Stuart Mill as much as anyone who is responsible for spreading” this “error.” Mill “overlooks the dependence of size on the *use* made of existing opportunities” (p. 92).



distribution of wealth, therefore, depends on the laws and customs of society. The rules by which it is determined, are what the opinions and feelings of the ruling portion of the community make them, and are very different in different ages and countries” (p. 220). Such changes, however, will have consequences: “Human beings can control their own acts, but not the consequences of their acts either to themselves or to others. Society can subject the distribution of wealth to whatever rules it thinks best: but what practical results will flow from the operation of those rules, must be discovered, like any other physical or mental truths, by observation and reasoning.”⁹

As Hayek (1951, chapter 6) reminds us, the revolution of 1848 prompted Mill to revise the relevant chapters of his *Principles* by creating a new interest in French socialism. Reflecting on this in his *Autobiography*, Mill wrote:

In the first edition the difficulties of Socialism were stated so strongly, that the tone was on the whole that of opposition to it. In the year or two which followed, much

⁹For a review of the literature on what, precisely, Mill meant by his famous distinction, see Hollander 1985. On one side of this are those who, like Hayek and many others before and after Hayek, take Mill to mean there are no productive consequences to a change in distribution; on the other are those who, like Hollander, see Mill having made the connection between production and distribution.

time was given to the study of the best Socialistic writers on the Continent, and to meditation and discussion on the whole range of topics involved in the controversy: and the result was that most of what had been written on the subject in the first edition was cancelled, and replaced by arguments and reflexions which represent a more advanced opinion.¹⁰

The revisions were the product of a series of discussions on the matter between John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor. Hayek writes that “The first instalment of the revised proofs (probably in the type of the first edition) which contains this crucial chapter must have gone to Mrs. Mill early in February and we can gather the nature of her comments from Mill’s replies.”

J. S. M. to H. T.: 15/Monday/ 19 Febr. [1849]/I received your [dear] letter 11 on Saturday & this morning the first instalment of Pol. Ec. This last I will send again (or as much of it as is necessary) when I have been able to make up my mind about it. The objections are I think very inconsiderable as to quantity—much less than I expected In the new matter one of the sentences you have cancelled is a favourite of mine, viz ‘It is probable that this will finally depend upon considerations not to be measured by the coarse standard which in the present state of human improvement is the only one that can be applied to it.’ What I meant was that whether individual agency or Socialism would be best ultimately—(both being necessarily very imperfect now, & both susceptible of immense improvement) will depend on the comparative attractions they will hold out to human beings with all their capacities, both individual & social, infinitely more developed than at present. I do not think it is English improvement only that is too backward to enable this point to be ascertained for if English character is starved in its social part I think Continental is as much or even more so in its individual, & Continental people incapable of entering into the feelings which make very close contacts with crowds of other people both disagreeable & mentally & morally lowering. (Hayek 1951, pp. 134–5).

In subsequent editions Mill examined different distributional systems of the Saint Simonians and Charles Fourier. For Mill, population growth presented a key stumbling block for the socialist schemes. The laboring classes must understand the self-restraint that characterizes a market economy and be sufficiently restrained to limit their numbers (Mill 1848, pp. 199ff).¹¹ Human nature being what it is, Mill

¹⁰Mill 1981, p. 241. Cf. also the paragraph added to the Preface of the second edition of the *Political Economy*: ‘The additions and alterations in the present edition are generally of little moment; but the increased importance which the Socialist controversy has assumed since this work was written, has made it desirable to enlarge the chapter which treats of it; the more so, as the objections therein stated to the specific schemes propounded by some Socialists, have been erroneously understood as a general condemnation of all that is commonly included under that name. A full appreciation of Socialism, and of the questions which it raises, can only be advantageously attempted in a separate work’ (Mill 1848, p. xcii).

¹¹Ludwig von Mises (1936) denied Mill’s hypothesis that human nature might alter and claimed that motivation would be the same under both settings: “It is not impossible that under Socialism the public spirit will be so general that disinterested devotion to the common welfare will take the place of self-seeking. Here Mill lapses into the dreams of the Utopians and conceives it possible that public opinion will be powerful enough to incite the individual to increased zeal for labour, that ambition and self-conceit will be effective motives, and so on.” “It need only be said that unfortunately we have no reason to assume that human nature will be any different under Socialism from what it is now” (von Mises 1936, p. 157).

foresaw difficulties under socialism; since the cost of bearing children would ultimately rest on society as a whole, without some sort of additional restraint on population (e.g. disgrace associated with having a family one could not support), the population problem would be more severe under socialism than under a system of private property. Mill concluded in favor of small scale and voluntary experimentation—schemes, he writes, that are “capable of being tried on a moderate scale”:

It is for experience to determine how far or how soon any one or more of the possible systems of community of property will be fitted to substitute itself for the ‘organization of industry’ based on private ownership of land and capital. In the meantime we may, without attempting to limit the ultimate capabilities of human nature, affirm, that the political economist, for a considerable time to come, will be chiefly concerned with the conditions of existence and progress belonging to a society founded on private property and individual competition (Mill 1848, p. 214).

As for a system in which property pertained, the overriding aim was to improve the existing system of private property (by, for instance, restricting the amount one might inherit) and individual competition, rather than subvert it.

VI. HAYEK ON MILL

In his Introduction to the Mill-Taylor correspondence, Hayek rightly remarks on the difficulty in coming to understand Mill—especially as Mill relates to his longtime friend, Harriet Taylor. Partly this is because one comes to know Mill’s temperament—as Hayek did—but then it turns out that temperament is insufficient fully to characterize Mill’s positions. So, Hayek writes: “Not by temperament but out of a deeply ingrained sense that this was his duty did Mill grow to be the ‘Saint of Rationalism,’ as Gladstone once so justly described him” (Hayek 1951, p. 16). We are left with a Mill who wrote volumes, including an *Autobiography*, but who remained something of a puzzle through the mid twentieth century (and beyond). Indeed, Hayek finds the existence of the *Autobiography* itself to be singularly unhelpful:

There is thus perhaps no other instance where an autobiography had so much to tell us and where at the same time such a purely intellectual account of a man’s development is so misleading. The *Autobiography* is as remarkable for what it leaves out as for what it discusses—what it leaves out not in any desire to suppress but because Mill thought it genuinely irrelevant. It is one of the most impersonal accounts of a mental development ever attempted, an account in which only the factors found a place that in Mill’s view ought to have influenced it. Of what in the ordinary sense of the word we should call his life, of his human interests and personal relations, we learn practically nothing. Even the account of ‘the most valuable friendship of his life’ is scarcely an exception to this; the feeling of incongruity which this account of Mill’s greatest experience conveys is not least due to its being represented as a purely intellectual experience. It would certainly be a mistake to believe that Mill really was like that, that what he regarded as deserving of a public record gives us a picture of the whole man. (Hayek 1951, p. 17).

For his part, Hayek was sharply critical of Mill's position on institutional change for two reasons. The first was part of his longstanding methodological position that institutions evolve best without direction by ill-informed human designers. Here, rather than direct the argument at any specific institutional reform, Hayek's criticism was a criticism of institution-making (or institutional reform) itself.¹² This follows from Hayek's famous distinction between "law" and "legislation." The constitutional order, "law," is best left unarticulated and evolving, outside the realm of planning or human design. By contrast, as we have just seen, the classical political economists advocated a great deal of human agency and design in the constitutional order.

Second, Hayek was critical of Mill's views specifically related to socialism and here (as is well known) he took the position that *some* intervention, some institution-making, would lead to *more*, full-blown "socialism or collectivism." So, he distinguished between "true" and "false" individualists and placed Mill in the latter tradition alongside the utopian socialists. "True individualism," attributed to Adam Smith, David Hume, Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Lord Acton, traces "the combined effects of individual actions" empirically. In this tradition, institutions and morals emerge without the help of a "designing and directing mind" (Hayek 1945, p. 7). "False individualism," by contrast, is attributed to Mill and the French socialists. False individualists such as Mill insist that freedom is realized in pursuit of a collective purpose and allow that humans sanction and invent institutions.¹³ Tradition, rules, and institutions are designed by rational human action. Hayek predicts that such "design theories" "always" "develop into the opposite of individualism, namely, socialism or collectivism" (Hayek 1945, p. 4).

So long as men are not omniscient, the only way in which freedom can be given to the individual is by such general rules to delimit the sphere in which the decision is his. There can be no freedom if the government is not limited to particular kinds of action but can use its powers in any ways which serve particular ends. (Hayek 1945, p. 19).¹⁴

Hayek faults Mill for passing on to twentieth-century intellectuals the "delusion" that democratic politics is sufficient to limit government. In a 1978 interview with

¹²For a recent treatment that compares Mill, Hayek, and Buchanan, see Peart and Levy 2008. There we argue that Mill's thinking is closer to Buchanan than Hayek. For Mill (and Buchanan), the constitutional order is subject to discussion and change. By contrast, Hayek made the case that the constitutional order is best left unarticulated, outside the realm of public design.

¹³See Caldwell's assessment in the introduction to the *Abuse of Reason* volume of the *Collected Works*: "The distinction between the hubris of the scientific approach and the humility of individualism would be a major theme of Hayek's "Individualism: True and False," and would reappear in still later writings as the contrast between constructivist rationalism and the evolutionary way of thinking" (p. 17). In his review of Hayek's *Constitution of Liberty* (*Economica* 1961), Robbins places Bentham and the two Mills squarely within the empiricist tradition, the key issue being whether Bentham and the Mills judge laws and institutions according to their utility or according to whether they conform to an abstract scheme of rights. For Robbins, Mill is in the former tradition (p. 72).

¹⁴Hayek concludes: "There can be no freedom if the government is not limited to particular kinds of action but can use its powers in any ways which serve particular ends" (Hayek 1945, p. 19).

James Buchanan, he attributes this “delusion” to the Utilitarians, Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, and John Stuart Mill.

Two additional points warrant emphasis. The first relates to Hayek’s perception of Harriet Taylor Mill’s influence on John Stuart Mill. Whatever her *actual* influence on Mill—and here I agree with him on Mill’s own characterization of their relationship as a working partnership¹⁵—Hayek concluded that she had a great deal of influence on him. More than this, he saw her as moving him in precisely the methodological direction of which he disapproved: from the Scottish empiricist tradition to a rationalist, constructivist, and hence interventionist position. So her influence on him was *not* to make him more sentimental but less, to move him towards the rationalist position that Hayek found so problematical:¹⁶

her influence on his thought and outlook, whatever her capacities may have been, were quite as great as Mill asserts, but that they acted in a way somewhat different from what is commonly believed. Far from it having been the sentimental it was the rationalist element in Mill’s thought which was mainly strengthened by her influence. (Hayek 1951, p. 17).¹⁷

VII. CONCLUSION

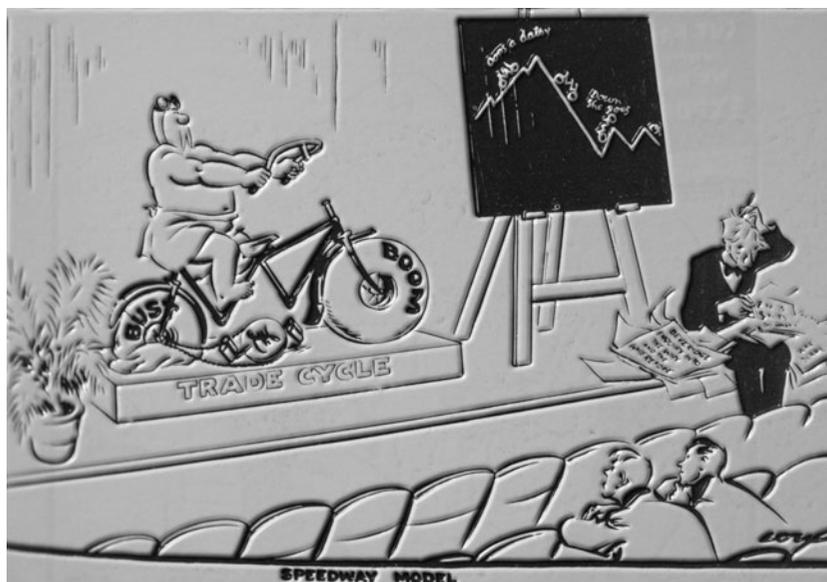
I have yet to remark on the second feature of this twentieth-century debate: Hayek (like Mises before him) quite deliberately moved away from the capacity arguments that were so central to the late nineteenth-century debates about economic agency and institutions. And this brings us back to my opening remarks about analytical egalitarianism—Hayek’s objections to socialism contain no hint of argument that the poor will be poor because they are the poor: there’s nothing to suggest the poor are inferior and *for that reason* should not be helped; nothing to suggest the poor lack the self-restraint to behave prudently.¹⁸ Reaching back to Mill from the twentieth century to engage with him in a debate over socialism, Hayek instead focused in large measure on Mill’s influence (and on Harriet’s influence on Mill), on how Mill was read and believed in the twentieth century by those who favored collectivism. Once he came to the position that human agency over institutions must be limited, he would have to disagree with Mill’s entire approach towards social and economic reform. Hayek takes the position—in line with Mill—that democracy is insufficient to block

¹⁵See Forget 2003.

¹⁶Packe, (1954, pp. 316–17) contains a similar judgment, *The Life of John Stuart Mill*.

¹⁷“Even if merely her influence on Mill was as great as he asserts, we should have to think of her as one of the major figures who shaped opinion during the later Victorian era . . . The best known version of Mill’s estimate of his wife’s genius in the *Autobiography* is too long to be quoted in full, and it would probably be unnecessary to do so. A few sentences will recall the general tone of a description which extends over many pages: ‘Her intellectual gifts did but minister to a moral character at once the noblest and the best balanced which I have ever met with in life. Her unselfishness was not that of a taught system of duties, but of a heart which thoroughly identified itself with the feelings of others, and often went to excess in consideration for them[,] by imaginatively investing their feelings with the intensity of its own’” (Hayek 1951, p. 13).

¹⁸This is not to say that capacity arguments did not persist. On the contrary, the basis for opposition to the minimum income tax proposal was largely about capacity and eugenicists continued to make capacity arguments as well (see Peart and Levy 2005).



institutional reform. For Mill, this is a good feature of democracy, but for Hayek, it is highly problematical. And, of course, Hayek takes the additional and well-known position that some reform would lead to full-blown socialism, but here he engaged less with Mill than with twentieth-century collectivists.¹⁹

Significantly, the images that were *now* used to portray the twentieth-century debate over intervention (planning) by David Low also take Hayek's position that it's not a matter of capacity.²⁰ Close to a century after the Tenniel drawings of the Irish, we find that economists are still attacked—made to look rather inept—but the drawings show people as people. They aren't everywhere and always the same, but systematic differences among groups of agents tended to disappear, as homogeneity—personhood—returned to economics.

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¹⁹There was, of course, another layer to the debate—though one that did not engage with Mill—over the calculation problem (Levy and Peart 2008). If we read the work of Maurice Dobb, there is a strong flavor of analytical hierarchy: the suggestion that preferences which were not in line with those of the planners should be changed or ignored. So, for instance, Dobb made the case that that remaking people's preferences gets rid of scarcity: "If taste is mainly acquired, rather than innate, and shaped by culture and convention, as seems to be the case, there is no reason why, in a socialist order, the State should entirely abrogate the right of creating tastes in favor of being its creature. In the creation of 'new wants,' in particular, with which economic progress is so largely concerned, the verdict of a price-system can never give more than a modicum of aid." (Dobb 1933, p. 592).

²⁰The Low image is reproduced with permission from Solo Syndication.

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