

David Hume Is Pontiff of the World: Thomas Carlyle on Epicureanism, Laissez-Faire, and Public Opinion

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Abstract Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) is well known as one of the earliest and most vociferous critics of Benthamite utilitarianism. However, Carlyle understood Benthamism as the culmination of a much longer eighteenth-century tradition of Epicurean thought. Having been an enthusiastic reader of David Hume during his youth, Carlyle later turned against him, waging an increasingly violent polemic against all forms of Epicureanism. In these later works, Carlyle not only rejected the pursuit of “pleasure” as an appropriate end for the life of the individual, but also took umbrage with Epicurean accounts of sociability as the philosophical underpinnings of laissez-faire, representative democracy, and “public opinion.” For Carlyle, self-interest, no matter how “enlightened,” balanced, or channeled by institutions, could never provide a stable foundation for a political community. Carlyle’s contemporaries were aware that his work was intended as an attack on the Epicurean tradition. When John Stuart Mill attempted to defend Epicureanism against Carlyle, several of the latter’s disciples and sympathizers responded by extending Carlyle’s earlier censures on Epicureanism.

“Epicureans,” fumed Thomas Carlyle in 1826, “Utilitarians, Epicureans, and other tribes of the avowed alien.”¹ Indeed, such explicit references to Epicureanism were far from uncommon in Carlyle’s writings. For instance, in 1828, Carlyle accused Francis Jeffrey, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, of being “Epicurean in creed,” and, in 1832, he complained that his neighbor, Leigh Hunt, was “filled with *Epicurean Philosophy*.”² Three years later, Carlyle once again vented his frustration, sighing over the backslidings of his “Epicurean generation.”³

But to what precisely was Carlyle referring? Certainly he was familiar with some of the most important ancient accounts of Epicurean philosophy, such as the dialogues

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¹ Thomas Carlyle, “Wotton Reinfred: A Romance” (1826–1827), in *The Last Words of Thomas Carlyle* (Boston, 1892), 1–147, at 71.

² Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 12 March 1828, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. Ian Campbell, Aileen Christianson, and David R. Sorensen, 42 vols. (Durham, 1970–), 4:339–44 (hereafter *CL*); Thomas Carlyle, notebook entry dated March 1832, in *Two Note Books of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (New York, 1898), 256–57.

³ Thomas Carlyle to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 3 February 1835, *CL*, 8:36–43.

of Cicero and the poetry of Lucretius.⁴ Moreover, Carlyle also knew some early modern literary expositions of Epicureanism. These included Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), which emphasized the importance of "pleasure" and a "quiet mind"; Sir William Temple's *Upon the Gardens of Epicurus* (1690); and Jonathan Swift's fierce attack upon the latter in *A Tale of a Tub* (1707).⁵

However, a more promising interpretation has been advanced by Frederick Rosen, who suggests that Carlyle was in fact protesting against the moral and political Epicureanism of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832).⁶ While Rosen's argument is persuasive, it is made in passing, and thus stands in need of further elaboration. For instance, of Carlyle's writings, Rosen cites only *Sartor Resartus* (1833–1834) and *On Heroes* (1841), disregarding the rest of Carlyle's voluminous oeuvre. Moreover, Rosen refers exclusively to Bentham and his disciples, neglecting the fact that they stood as heirs to an established eighteenth-century tradition of Epicurean moral and political philosophy, with which Carlyle was well acquainted.

The key figure in this tradition was the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776). As one of Carlyle's earliest biographers remarked, from the moment that Carlyle first read Hume, the latter remained an important presence in his works, "sometimes latent, and at other times obtruding to the surface like primeval granite, but always there."⁷ For Carlyle, Hume was the prime culprit in the development of modern Epicureanism, Bentham and his followers being little more than epigones. In this sense, Carlyle persistently conflated Hume and Bentham, tending to minimize or ignore their differences. An understanding of Carlyle's hostility to Epicureanism during the 1820s sheds new light on his later political writings and particularly on his notorious polemics against utilitarianism, laissez-faire, and representative democracy. In attacking these particular doctrines, Carlyle in fact sought to challenge a far more general Epicurean account of sociability, whereby political life was held to consist in a careful balancing of individual self-interests. And Carlyle's contemporaries were well aware of the anti-Epicurean thrust of his thought.

The interest of such an inquiry is threefold. First, it will deepen our understanding of the role of ancient Greek and Roman thought in Carlyle's work, a subject that has

⁴ For Carlyle's early reading of Cicero, see Thomas Carlyle to Robert Mitchell, 25 March 1815, *CL*, 1:41–45; Thomas Carlyle to James Johnston, 26 June 1818, *CL*, 1:130–35; Thomas Carlyle to Robert Mitchell, 14 July 1819, *CL*, 1:188–92; and *Two Reminiscences of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. John Clubbe (Durham, 1974), 32–33. Carlyle received a copy of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* as a gift in 1822. See *Catalogue of Printed Books, Autograph Letters, Literary Manuscripts ... Formerly the Property of Thomas Carlyle* (London, 1932), 14.

⁵ Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), cited in Reid Barbour, *English Epicures and Stoics: Ancient Legacies in Early Stuart Culture* (Amherst 1998), 70. Carlyle read the work in January 1827. Carlyle, *Two Note Books*, 98–99. For the Temple-Swift controversy, see Robert C. Steensma, "Swift and Epicurus," *Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Languages Association* 17, no. 1 (May 1964): 10–12. In December 1826, Carlyle reported having read "Sir William Temple's works." Carlyle, *Two Note Books*, 84. For Carlyle's references to *A Tale of a Tub*, see Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, March 1821, *CL*, 1:332–33; Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 30 January 1822, *CL*, 2:23–26; and Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 11 November 1823, *CL*, 2:465–69.

⁶ Frederick Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill* (London, 2003), 167–72.

⁷ David Alec Wilson, *Carlyle till Marriage (1795–1826)* (London, 1923), 110. The only attempt to develop this insight, Olle Holmberg's *David Hume in Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus"* (Lund, 1934), does not extend beyond *Sartor* (1833–1834), is extremely dated, and does not deal with Epicureanism.

hitherto been overlooked.⁸ Second, while there is by now a huge body of literature regarding Epicureanism in eighteenth-century British moral and political philosophy, relatively little attempt has been made to pursue the story into the nineteenth.⁹ As one recent commentator has pointed out, Carlyle's works constituted "a generational revolt in print," whereby the British nineteenth century consciously demarcated itself from the eighteenth.¹⁰ Rejection of Epicureanism played a crucial role in this transition, and particularly in the advent of that "obsessive antipathy to selfishness" that so characterized Victorian public moralism.¹¹ Third, a study of Carlyle's polemic against political Epicureanism elucidates the persistence of the natural law tradition, and its associated ideas of duty, obligation, and authority, well into the late nineteenth century. This was key to the transition from eighteenth-century discourses of commercial society to the interventionist, reforming mood of late nineteenth-century British Idealism. Given Carlyle's towering presence in Victorian moral and political thought, such an inquiry can enrich our understanding of some of the commonplaces of the era. Indeed, as one contemporary put it, there was no other thinker "whose works have gone more deeply into the springs of character and action, especially throughout the middle classes."¹²

EPICUREANISM IN CARLYLE'S EARLY WRITINGS

According to Epicurus, all of our ideas and opinions ultimately derived from external sensations. The most important springs of human action were the desires to experience pleasure and to avoid pain. However, contrary to the accusations of his enemies, Epicurus did not advocate a life of brutish sensuality but rather a prudent calculation of which actions would bring the most pleasure and the least pain in the long term. Epicurus thus concluded that a pleasurable life consisted in ease and tranquility, "the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul."¹³

⁸ Doubtless due to the heavy shadow cast by James Anthony Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life, 1795–1835*, 2 vols. (New York, 1882), in which Froude pronounced, "Of classical literature [Carlyle] knew little ... He was not living in ancient Greece or Rome, but in modern Europe" (1:104). Cf. Thomas Flint, "Carlyle as Classicist," *Classical Weekly* 13, no. 7 (December 1919): 51–54.

⁹ To cite only the book-length studies: Wolfgang Bernard Fleischmann, *Lucretius and English Literature 1680–1740* (Paris, 1964); Howard Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition* (London, 1989); Margaret J. Osler, ed., *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquility: Epicurean and Stoic Themes in European Thought* (Cambridge, 1991); Giovanni Bonacina, *Filosofia ellenistica e cultura moderna: Epicureismo, stoicismo e scetticismo da Bayle a Hegel* (Florence, 1996); Pierre Force, *Self-Interest Before Adam Smith* (Cambridge, 2003); Catherine Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (Oxford, 2008); Neven Leddy and Avi Lifschitz, eds., *Epicurus in the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2009). There is no discussion of Epicureanism in Richard Jenkens, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 1980); Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, 1981); or Norman Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1997). The exceptions are Frederick Vaughn, *The Tradition of Political Hedonism From Hobbes to J. S. Mill* (New York, 1982), chaps. 7; Geoffrey Scarre, "Epicurus as a Forerunner of Utilitarianism," *Utilitas* 6, no. 2 (November 1994): 219–31; and Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism*, chaps. 7, 10–11, all of which focus on Bentham and J. S. Mill.

¹⁰ Brian Young, *The Victorian Eighteenth Century: An Intellectual History* (Oxford, 2007), 25–26.

¹¹ Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1991), 65. See also 65–67, 185–89.

¹² "Thomas Carlyle," *North British Review* 4 (February 1846): 505–36, at 506.

¹³ Jones, *Epicurean Tradition*, 55–58, 50, citation in Vaughn, *Tradition of Political Hedonism*, 34–37.

This philosophy had important political implications. According to Epicurus, virtue and justice were instrumental and artificial, being valuable solely insofar as they served as a means to one's own pleasure. In particular, he argued, virtue and justice were necessary to the security and stability that a life of pleasure required. Such theories distinguished Epicurus from other ancient Greek thinkers, such as Aristotle and the Stoics, for whom virtue and justice stemmed from a natural inclination toward sociability, consisted in obedience to the eternal laws of nature, and merited pursuit as ends in themselves. In ancient Rome, the followers of Epicurus soon came into conflict with Cicero, who accused them of undermining traditional Roman ideals of duty and of discouraging service to the state.¹⁴

During the early modern period, there was a widespread resurgence of interest in Epicureanism in Britain.¹⁵ One thinker particularly worthy of mention is John Locke, whose *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) Carlyle certainly read.¹⁶ Locke's commitment to Christian theology ruled out any kind of thoroughgoing Epicureanism. However, Locke nonetheless made considerable use of the Epicurean definition of good and evil in terms of pleasure and pain. As he explained, "good" was that "which is apt to cause or increase pleasure or diminish pain," while, on the contrary, "evil" was that "which is apt to produce or increase any pain, or diminish any pleasure in us." It followed that "virtue" was simply that which produced pleasure—that was thus "thought praiseworthy" or deserving of "public esteem." In his response to the *Essay*, Thomas Burnet thus attacked Locke for having embraced not only the "Method" of "the Epicurean Philosophers," "without any other Principles than what are collected from Sense and Experience," but also "Epicurus's Ethics."¹⁷

These aspects of Locke's work soon came under sustained assault in Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* (1711), which Carlyle is also known to have read.¹⁸ Here, Shaftesbury inveighed against "our modern Epicures," who had "made *virtue* so mercenary a thing" and who had "talked so much of its reward, that one can hardly tell what there is in it." Such thinkers, Shaftesbury complained "wou'd new-frame the Human Heart," and "reduce all its Motions, Balances and Weights, to that one Principle and Foundation of a cool and deliberate *Selfishness*."¹⁹ In opposition, Shaftesbury defended the existence of a natural affective

¹⁴ See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1953), 109–11; Jones, *Epicurean Tradition*, 62–78; and A. A. Long, "Pleasure and Utility: The Virtues of Being Epicurean," in *From Epicurus to Epicurus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy* (Oxford, 2006), 178–201.

¹⁵ See generally Vaughn, *Tradition of Political Hedonism*; and Jones, *Epicurean Tradition*.

¹⁶ See Thomas Carlyle to John Fergusson, 25 September 1819, *CL*, 1:196–99; Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 10 August 1824, *CL*, 3:120–24; and *Catalogue of Printed Books*, 14.

¹⁷ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690); Burnet, *Remarks upon An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1697), cited in Vaughn, *Tradition of Political Hedonism*, 83–84, 98, 144–45.

¹⁸ On Shaftesbury's anti-Epicureanism, see Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultured Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1994), 51–69; and Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Ethics in England, 1660–1780* (Cambridge, 2000), 2:85–152. In December 1826, Carlyle noted, "I have read Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*." Carlyle, *Two Note Books*, 71–72.

¹⁹ Anthony Ashley-Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (London, 1737), 2:232, 1:97, 1:116.

sociability, whereby man was naturally capable of disinterested virtue and could further develop this potential through use of his reason.

Another important Epicurean forerunner of Hume was Bernard Mandeville, whose *Fable of the Bees* (1714) emphasized the egotistic sources of human behavior while explicitly avowing a debt to Epicurus.²⁰ Mandeville's work was roundly condemned by Francis Hutcheson in his *Essay on the Nature and the Conduct of the Passions* (1728), which Carlyle appears to have read.²¹ Here, Hutcheson rejected the doctrine of "the old Epicureans" and their modern disciples, to the effect that "all the Desires of the human Mind" were "reducible to *Self-Love*, or the *Desire of private Happiness*."²² Instead, Hutcheson posited the existence of an innate or natural "moral sense," from which stemmed an array of disinterested, benevolent affections.

Despite the best efforts of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, however, the Epicurean validation of the self-regarding passions persisted throughout the Scottish Enlightenment. According to such writers, in a modern commercial society, the role of government was to accommodate, harness, and manage the passions, directing them insofar as possible toward the common good.²³ As several commentators have pointed out, particularly important in this regard was the philosopher David Hume, many of whose ideas were unambiguously Epicurean.²⁴

Hume's works, which seem to have been favorites of the young Carlyle, included *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740), the *Essays* (1741–1742), *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), and the posthumous *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779).²⁵ In these works, Hume reiterated a number of key Epicurean doctrines. For instance, the

²⁰ See E. G. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society* (Cambridge, 1994), 45–51.

²¹ Carlyle owned a copy of the 3rd ed. (London, 1742), as revealed in Rodger L. Tarr, "Thomas Carlyle's Libraries at Chelsea and Ecclefechan," *Studies in Bibliography*, no. 27 (1974): 249–65, at 255. See also the reference to "Hutcheson" and the "moral sense" in Carlyle, "Wotton Reinforced," 62. On Hutcheson's anti-Epicureanism, see James Moore, "Hume and Hutcheson," in *Hume and Hume's Connections*, ed. M. A. Stewart and John P. Wright (University Park, 1995), 23–57, at 33–35; and John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680–1760* (Cambridge, 2005), 286–87.

²² Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay of the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, 3rd ed. (London, 1742), 210. See also *ibid.*, 13.

²³ See generally Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton, 1977); Ronald Hamowy, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Theory of Spontaneous Order* (Carbondale, 1987), 3, 6, 10–13; and Silvia Sebastiani, "Beyond Ancient Virtues: Civil Society and Passions in the Scottish Enlightenment," *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 5 (January 2011): 821–40.

²⁴ For analyses of Hume as an Epicurean, see Antonina Alberti, "Temi epicurei nella gnoseologia di Hume," *Annali dell'Istituto di Filosofia, Firenze*, no. 5 (1983): 211–42; Anna Minerbi Belgrado, "La 'vecchia ipotesi epicurea' nei *Dialoghi sulla religione naturale* di Hume," *Studi settecenteschi*, no. 6 (1988–89): 35–100; Moore, "Hume and Hutcheson," 27; Force, *Self-Interest*, 214–15, 230–31; Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism*, chap. 3; Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 293–96, 306–8, 317–18, 353–54; and Wilson, *Epicureanism*, 199–200. For some qualifications, see James A. Harris, "The Epicurean in Hume," in *Epicurus in the Enlightenment*, ed. Leddy and Lifschitz, 161–81; Peter Loftson, "Hume and Ancient Philosophy," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20, no. 4 (July 2012): 741–72; and Mikko Tolonen, *Mandeville and Hume: Anatomists of Civil Society* (Oxford, 2013), 6–7, 29–30, 74.

²⁵ Carlyle noted that the "best book" he had recently read was "Hume's Essays." Thomas Carlyle to Thomas Murray, 21 June 1815, *CL*, 1:52–56. He soon re-read it. Thomas Carlyle to Robert Mitchell, 16 February 1818, *CL*, 1:118–22.

Treatise adopted an Epicurean epistemology, arguing that all our “ideas” were ultimately derived from sensual “impressions,” which were then processed and categorized through “association” in the mind.²⁶ Similarly, in the *Dialogues*, Hume propounded a thoroughgoing philosophical materialism, explicitly invoking Epicurus as a source.²⁷

In line with the Epicurean tradition, Hume also argued that the “chief spring or actuating principle of the human mind is pleasure or pain.” As he famously put it, “Reason” was thus “the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”²⁸ Insofar as Hume recognized the efficacy of reason at all, it was in a purely instrumental sense, reason serving as means to distinguish between our “calm” and “violent” passions.²⁹ Reason was thus reduced to prudence, counseling the pursuit of those “calm” passions that would bring us maximal, long-term happiness.³⁰

Also like Epicurus, Hume denied that justice stemmed from a natural aptitude for sociability or benevolence or that it consisted in obedience to the eternal laws of nature. Rather, justice was an artificial virtue, serving to better gratify the self-regarding passions. As Hume explained in the *Treatise*, “I observe, that it will be for my interest to leave another in the possession of his goods, *provided* he will act in the same manner with regard to me.” Thus, “justice” established “itself by a kind of convention or agreement.” “Whatever restraint” the laws of justice might “impose upon the passions of men,” Hume concluded, “they are the real offspring of those passions, and are only a more artful and more refin’d way of satisfying them.”³¹

However, while “self-interest” provided the original motive to justice, it was “sympathy” that maintained it. Once men had come to understand “that ’tis impossible to live in society without restraining themselves by certain rules,” they began to “receive a pleasure from the view of such actions as tend to the peace of society, and an uneasiness from such as are contrary to it.” As Hume elaborated, “everything which gives uneasiness in human actions, upon the general survey is call’d *vice*, and whatever produces satisfaction, in the same manner, is denominated *virtue*, [and] this is the reason why the sense of moral good and evil follows upon justice and injustice.”³² In this sense, Hume, like Epicurus, defined justice and virtue in terms of utility and expediency. As he made clear in the *Enquiry*, “Utility” was “the *sole* origin of Justice,” while “the beneficial consequences” of “Virtue” were the “*sole* Foundation of its Merit.”³³

²⁶ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2 vols. (London, 1817), 1:279; Alberti, “Temi epicurei,” 211, 219–23, 242.

²⁷ See Belgrado, “La ‘vecchia ipotesi epicurea,” 61, 82–84.

²⁸ Hume, *Treatise*, 2:300, 2:106.

²⁹ For further discussion, see Terence Pendelbaum, “Hume’s Moral Psychology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton (Cambridge, 1993), 117–47.

³⁰ Hume, *Treatise*, 2:106.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2:205–6, 241; Moore, “Hume and Hutcheson,” 43.

³² Hume, *Treatise*, 2:250, 207. See also *ibid.*, 320–21.

³³ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (London, 1751), 33. For further discussion, see Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge 1981), 15–21, 31–37; Frederick G. Whelan, *Order and Artifice in Hume’s Political Philosophy* (Princeton, 1985), 159–60, 171–79, 190–91, 212–18; John B. Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume’s Political Philosophy* (Princeton, 1992), 121–27, 167; and Tito Magri, “Hume’s Justice,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume’s ‘Treatise,’* ed. Donald C. Ainslie and Annemarie Butler (Cambridge, 2015), 301–32.

Furthermore, according to Hume, the “sole” motive for “allegiance” was a perception of “the *advantage* which it procures to society.”³⁴ As he famously argued in the *Essays*, “opinion” and “interest” were thus the foundation of government.³⁵ In other words, the security of a regime depended upon its ability to satisfy the self-regarding passions of its subjects. Rather than attempting to resist or extirpate these passions, Hume argued, governors ought to harness and manage them. As he put it in another famous passage of the *Essays* (which would later be particularly important to Carlyle):

Political writers have established it as a maxim, that, in contriving any system of government and fixing the several checks and balances of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a *knave*, and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest. By this interest we must govern him, and, by means of it, make him, notwithstanding his insatiable avarice and ambition, cooperate to public good.³⁶

In short, governors had little choice but to take men as they found them, to govern them “by their passions,” and to “animate them with a spirit of avarice and industry, art and luxury.”³⁷ Thus, while justice was for Hume an artificial virtue, it was also a largely negative one. In a modern commercial society, the role of justice was to provide a framework in which individuals could pursue their own interests, insofar as these did not infringe upon the interests of others.

However, according to Hume, the governors were little better than the governed. As he put it in the *Treatise*, “those whom we chuse for rulers” did “not immediately become of a superior nature to the rest of mankind,” and were frequently driven by “their passions into all excesses of cruelty.”³⁸ For this reason, their selfish passions stood in need of the same checks and balances as those of their subjects.³⁹ Indeed, as several commentators have remarked, Hume’s skepticism regarding the possibility of disinterested virtue in either governors or governed—and his reliance upon an impersonal, institutional machinery to harness and redirect self-interest—represented an important break with the classical republican tradition.⁴⁰ Moreover, it was also typically Epicurean.⁴¹ As James Balfour put it in 1753, Hume’s system was, “in

³⁴ Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 63–64.

³⁵ David Hume, “Of the First Principles of Government,” in *Essays and treatises on several subjects* (London, 1758), 20–22, at 20.

³⁶ Hume, “Of the Independency of Parliaments,” in *Essays and treatises*, 29–32, at 30.

³⁷ Hume, “Of Commerce,” in *Essays and treatises*, 149–57, at 154. On Hume’s rehabilitation of luxury, see Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge, 1994), 144–50.

³⁸ Hume, *Treatise*, 2:273.

³⁹ See Paul Sagar, “The State without Sovereignty: Authority and Obligation in Hume’s Political Philosophy,” *History of Political Thought* 37, no. 2 (January 2016): 271–305.

⁴⁰ See Duncan Forbes, *Hume’s Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, 1975), 221–29; James Moore, “Hume’s Political Science and the Classical Republican Tradition,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* 10, no. 4 (December 1977): 809–39, at 821–22, 825; and Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge, 1983), 30–31.

⁴¹ Force, *Self-Interest*, 214–15, 230–31.

effect, no other than the antient [sic] scheme” that “Epicurus first reduced to some form, and clothed with tolerable decent dress.”⁴²

Over subsequent years, Hume’s Epicureanism was frequently castigated by a number of other Scottish writers whom Carlyle is known to have read. For instance, the historian Adam Ferguson claimed that Epicureanism had contributed to the decline of the Roman republic, implying that the writings of Mandeville and Hume would have the same effect in Britain.⁴³ Similarly, in his *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (1788), the philosopher Thomas Reid claimed that “Mr Hume” agreed with “the Epicureans,” particularly in his contention that “virtue is an empty name, and that it is entitled to no regard, but in as far as it ministers to pleasure or profit.”⁴⁴ For his part, Dugald Stewart inveighed against the philosophy of “Epicurus,” according to which “prudence, temperance, and the other virtues, derive all their value from their tendency to increase the sum of bodily enjoyment,” while also challenging the argument of “Mr Hume” that “justice” was an “artificial” virtue, deriving its “obligations” from “considerations of utility.”⁴⁵ Thus, there was widespread recognition that Hume was “chiefly responsible for the Epicurean and ignoble strain of sentiment” within Scottish moral philosophy.⁴⁶

To summarize, Carlyle was familiar with the Epicureanism debate prior to Hume (Locke, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson). Moreover, he was also acquainted with the works of Hume and with those of the critics who had explicitly accused Hume of Epicureanism (Ferguson, Reid, Stewart). Thus, it is unsurprising that Carlyle frequently associated Hume with a number of key Epicurean doctrines in his early writings. For instance, in his unpublished novel “Wotton Reinfred” (1826–1827), Carlyle railed against “Utilitarians, Epicureans, and other tribes of the avowed alien,” referring specifically to “David Hume.” “What,” exclaims the eponymous Wotton, “was

⁴² James Balfour, *A delineation of the nature and obligation of morality, with reflexions upon Mr Hume’s book entitled An Inquiry concerning the principles of morals* (Edinburgh, 1753), cited in James A. Harris, “The Early Reception of Hume’s Theory of Justice,” in *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain*, ed. Ruth Savage (Oxford, 2012), 210–30, at 212.

⁴³ On Ferguson’s anti-Epicureanism, see Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1985), 199–201; Bonacina, *Filosofia ellenistica e cultura moderna*, 142–43; and Iain McDaniel, *Adam Ferguson in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Roman Past and Europe’s Future* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 9, 66–74. For Carlyle’s reading, see Thomas Carlyle to Jane Baillie Welsh, 18 November 1822, *CL*, 2:204–10; and Thomas Carlyle to Jane Baillie Welsh, 12 January 1823, *CL*, 2:265–70.

⁴⁴ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (Edinburgh, 1788), 458. See also *ibid.*, 410–11. On Reid’s anti-Epicureanism, see Harris, “Epicurean in Hume,” 172–73; and Harris, “Early Reception,” 228. For Carlyle’s reading, see Thomas Carlyle to Robert Mitchell, 24 May 1815, *CL*, 1:45–49; and Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 10 August 1824, *CL*, 3:120–24. For a pioneering study of Carlyle’s debts to Reid, which does not, however, deal with Epicureanism, see Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought* (Basingstoke, 1997).

⁴⁵ Dugald Stewart, *The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1828), 2:308, 1:217. See also *ibid.*, 1:168–70, 210, 2:250–51, 300. On Carlyle’s admiration for the works of Stewart, see Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 10 August 1824, *CL*, 3:120–24; Thomas Carlyle to N. H. Julius, 15 April 1827, *CL*, 4:206–8; and Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 25 August 1828, *CL*, 4:396–401. See also Thomas Carlyle, “State of German Literature” (October 1827), in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 7 vols. (London, 1872), 1:22–73, at 67 (hereafter *CME*); Carlyle, “Burns” (December 1828), in *CME*, 2:1–53, at 17–18; and Carlyle, “Novalis” (July 1829), in *CME*, 2:183–229, at 202–3.

⁴⁶ *Edinburgh Review* (July 1808), cited in Biancamaria Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society: The Edinburgh Review, 1802–1832* (Cambridge, 1985), 89–90.

virtue? Another name for happiness, for pleasure?” “The philosophy of Epicurus,” Carlyle remarked, “was not made for him.”⁴⁷

In this passage of “Wotton Reinfred,” Carlyle had also claimed that “in the senate, the press, the pulpit, the parlour, and the market, David Hume is ruler of the world.”⁴⁸ Similarly, in “Characteristics” (1831), he wrote of “Hume and the innumerable disciples of Hume,” while in “Death of Goethe” (1832), he declared that “David Hume is at this hour pontiff of the world.”⁴⁹ But to whom was Carlyle referring? One likely explanation is provided by the Edinburgh circles in which he was moving at the time. For instance, as a student, Carlyle had studied under Thomas Brown, then professor of moral philosophy (1810–1820).⁵⁰ In his lectures, Brown had sought to defend Hume against the attacks of Reid and Stewart. For instance, he endorsed Hume’s Epicurean doctrines regarding the “association of ideas” and argued that “virtue” meant “nothing more” than “a certain feeling of moral approbation,” excited “by the contemplation of a certain intentional production ... of a certain amount of benefit.”⁵¹

Alongside his teaching, Brown was also a frequent contributor to the *Edinburgh Review*, the premier organ of enlightened Whiggism. Serving as a selective receptacle for the heritage of the Scottish Enlightenment, the *Review* understood the mechanisms of modern commercial society in terms substantially the same as those employed by Hume.⁵² For instance, like Hume, contributors to the *Review* argued that the foundation of government was “public opinion,” namely that of a large, prosperous middle class.⁵³ In particular, it was claimed, the purpose of government was to represent and serve the “interests” of the governed.⁵⁴ Thus, following Hume, they understood justice as an essentially artificial and negative virtue, tending to explain allegiance in terms of expedience. Indeed, this perhaps explains Carlyle’s statement that “Utility” was a concept entertained by “Editors of Whig newspapers,” as well as his claim that “Hume” was “the father of all succeeding

⁴⁷ Carlyle, “Wotton Reinfred,” 71, 53–54, 23–24. See also *ibid.*, 69–73, 102–3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 53–54.

⁴⁹ Carlyle, “Characteristics” (December 1831), *CME*, 4:1–38, at 23–24, 27; Carlyle, “Death of Goethe” (June 1832), *CME*, 4:42–50, at 46.

⁵⁰ Thomas Carlyle, “Christopher North” (1868), in *Reminiscences*, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (London, 1972), 366–81, at 370.

⁵¹ Cited in J. B. Schneewind, *Sidgwick’s Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* (Oxford, 1977), 78–80. See also Thomas Dixon, “Revolt against Reid: The Philosophy of Thomas Brown,” in *Scottish Philosophy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Gordon Graham (Oxford, 2015), 24–41.

⁵² Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics*, 4, 9.

⁵³ On the concept of “public opinion” from Hume through the *Edinburgh Review*, see J. A. W. Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property: The Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Kings-ton, 1983), 260–315; J. W. Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals: Continuity and Change in English Political Thought* (Oxford, 1988), 54–56, 71; Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, 1780–1840* (Cambridge, 1995), 190–97; *idem.*, “Public Opinion, Violence and the Limits of Constitutional Politics,” in *Re-reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England’s Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. James Vernon (Cambridge, 1996), 83–122, at 90–91, 104; Angus Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture: “Habits of Heart and Mind”* (Oxford, 2015), 73–75, 91, 98; and Anna Plasart, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 2015), 163–74.

⁵⁴ On the language of “interests,” see Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651* (Cambridge, 1993), 222–50; Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, 90–96; and Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture*, 86.

Whigs.”⁵⁵ In this regard, it is surely significant that Carlyle accused the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, Francis Jeffrey, of being “Epicurean in creed.”⁵⁶

As one recent commentator has pointed out, this emphasis on utility meant that there was a considerable overlap between the ideas of the *Edinburgh Review* and those of Jeremy Bentham.⁵⁷ Indeed, Bentham would certainly have been one of those whom Carlyle had in mind when he declared that “David Hume is ruler of the world.”⁵⁸ In his *Fragment on Government* (1776), Bentham recalled having read Hume’s *Treatise*, remarking: “I felt as if scales had fallen from my eyes I learnt to see that *utility* was the test and measure of all virtue.”⁵⁹ However, notwithstanding his debts to Hume, Bentham acknowledged that the “Principle of Utility” was of far older origin, stemming ultimately “from Epicurus.”⁶⁰ In this sense, both Hume and Bentham stood in the same Epicurean tradition.⁶¹ However, while such similarities did have some basis in reality, Carlyle tended to push them to extremes, persistently conflating the thought of the two men and often referring to “Hume’s philosophy and Jeremy Bentham” in the same breath.⁶²

In particular, like Epicurus and Hume, Bentham believed that all ideas were ultimately derived from external sense impressions.⁶³ Moreover, he also shared their beliefs regarding the motives of human action, writing: “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*.”⁶⁴ According to Bentham, “Good” meant nothing more than “pleasure or exemption from pain,” while “Evil” meant “pain or loss of pleasure.”⁶⁵ As such, any action could “be said to be conformable to the principle of utility ... when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it.” When men applauded the “virtue” of an action, they were really expressing “a sentiment of appropriation; a sentiment which, when applied to an action, approves of its utility.”⁶⁶

Setting out from the same premises as Epicurus and Hume, Bentham drew a series of political conclusions far more radical than anything his two predecessors had envisaged. Given that the end of government was “happiness” and given that each individual was the “proper judge” of his own “pleasure,” some form of democratic representation would be necessary.⁶⁷ This would not only allow governments to

⁵⁵ Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 10 August 1824, *CL*, 3:120–24; Carlyle, “Boswell’s Life of Johnson” (May 1832), *CME*, 4:67–131, at 129.

⁵⁶ Thomas Carlyle to John A. Carlyle, 12 March 1828, *CL*, 4:339–44.

⁵⁷ Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics*, 93.

⁵⁸ Carlyle, “Wotton Reinfred,” 53–54.

⁵⁹ Jeremy Bentham, *A Fragment on Government* (1776), cited in Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism*, 49.

⁶⁰ Cited in Charles Warren Everett, *The Limits of Jurisprudence Defined: Being Part Two of An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (New York, 1945), 116.

⁶¹ See Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism*, 15–16, 48–57.

⁶² Thomas Carlyle to Jane Baillie Welsh, 8 January 1824, *CL*, 3:8–11.

⁶³ Philip Schofield, *Utility and Democracy: The Political Thought of Jeremy Bentham* (Oxford, 2006), 15–16.

⁶⁴ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), cited in Schofield, *Utility and Democracy*, 29–30.

⁶⁵ Jeremy Bentham, *Codification Proposal* (1822), cited in Schofield, *Utility and Democracy*, 34–35.

⁶⁶ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, cited in Schofield, *Utility and Democracy*, 33–34, and in Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism*, 50–51.

⁶⁷ Jeremy Bentham, *Deontology* (1826), cited in Schofield, *Utility and Democracy*, 48–49.

know what made the governed happy but would also ensure that governments did in fact serve “the greatest happiness” rather than their own “sinister interests.”⁶⁸ Bentham also made great use of the concept of “public opinion,” pushing it far further than Hume and the *Edinburgh Review* had done. For instance, he proposed the creation of a “Public Opinion Tribunal” to act as a “check” upon “the pernicious exercise of the power of government.”⁶⁹ Overall, then, Bentham understood justice as an artificial and negative virtue, believing that the role of government was to provide a framework in which individuals could maximize their own choices of pleasures and live lives that would bring them happiness. To this end, he imagined the contrivance of institutional mechanisms of representation, which would ensure the accountability of rulers to the ruled.⁷⁰

As had been the case with Hume, contemporaries were swift to recognize the Epicurean foundations of Bentham’s creed. Indeed, this was particularly true of Carlyle’s sources and interlocutors. For instance, in 1827, a contributor to the *Westminster Review* pointed out that it had been “Epicurus” who “first taught that general utility, or as Bentham expresses it, ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number’ is the legitimate end of philosophy.”⁷¹ Similarly, Sir James Mackintosh compared the followers of Bentham to “the old Epicureans,” particularly in their “habit of contemplating all things in relation to happiness.”⁷² For their part, the Saint-Simonians, a group of early French socialists whom Carlyle famously encountered in 1830, also accused Bentham of Epicureanism.⁷³ For instance, in a text that Carlyle is known to have read, the Saint-Simonian leader P.-M. Laurent opined that, in their reliance upon the concept of utility, the writings of Bentham served to reproduce “the gross sensualism” of Epicurus.⁷⁴

Thus, it is unsurprising to find that Bentham and his utilitarian followers were frequently set down as Epicureans in Carlyle’s early writings. For instance, in the

⁶⁸ See Schofield, *Utility and Democracy*, 141–55.

⁶⁹ Jeremy Bentham, *Constitutional Code* (1830), cited in Schofield, *Utility and Democracy*, 263–64.

⁷⁰ See Frederick Rosen, “The Origin of Liberal Utilitarianism,” in *Victorian Liberalism: Nineteenth-Century Political Thought and Practice*, ed. Richard Bellamy (London, 1990), 58–70, at 61, 63–66.

⁷¹ *Westminster Review* 8 (1827), cited in George L. Nesbitt, *Benthamite Reviewing: The First Twelve Years of the Westminster Review, 1824–1836* (New York, 1934), 111. For Carlyle’s regular reading of the *Westminster Review*, see Thomas Carlyle to Henry Inglis, 17 June 1829, *CL*, 5:16–17; Thomas Carlyle to William Tait, 23 August 1830, *CL*, 5:147–48; and Thomas Carlyle to John Bowring, 8 February 1831, *CL*, 5:227–28.

⁷² James Mackintosh, *A General View of the Progress of Ethical Philosophy, Chiefly During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1832), 31. Carlyle met “Macintosh” in October 1831, judging him “a whig Philosopher and Politician ... our best of that sort.” Carlyle, *Two Note Books*, 202–3.

⁷³ On Carlyle and the Saint-Simonians, see generally R. K. P. Pankhurst, *The Saint-Simonians, Mill and Carlyle* (London, 1957); Hill Shine, *Carlyle and the Saint-Simonians: The Concept of Historical Periodicity* (Baltimore, 1941); and K. J. Fielding, “Carlyle and the Saint-Simonians (1830–1832): New Considerations,” in *Carlyle and His Contemporaries*, ed. John Clubbe (Durham, 1976), 35–59. On the Saint-Simonians’s reading of Bentham, see Willy Spühler, *Der Saint-Simonismus: Lehre und Leben von Saint-Amand Bazard* (Zurich, 1926), 57–60, 123–29; Michel Bellet, “Saint-simonisme et utilitarisme: Saint-Simon lecteur de Bentham,” in *Bentham et la France: fortune et infortunes de l’utilitarisme*, ed. Emmanuelle de Champs and Jean-Pierre Cléro (Oxford, 2009), 177–96; and Emmanuelle de Champs, *Enlightenment and Utility: Bentham in French, Bentham in France* (Cambridge, 2015), 169–70.

⁷⁴ P.-M. Laurent, “Caractère de notre époque. 2ème article,” *L’Organisateur* 36 (18 April 1830), 2–3. This was a review of Carlyle’s essay “Signs of the Times” (1829).

passage of “Wotton Reinfred” already cited above, Carlyle referred to “Utilitarians” and “Epicureans” within the same sentence.⁷⁵ Similarly, in “Schiller” (1831), he lamented the preponderance of “our honest Benthamites,” comparing their doctrines regarding “Pleasure” and “Utility” to those of “Epicurus.”⁷⁶

In summary, the young Carlyle believed that both Hume and Bentham stood in the same tradition of Epicurean moral and political philosophy. As such, he tended to emphasize the similarities between the two thinkers and to ignore their many differences. In particular, these similarities included a materialist epistemology, whereby all ideas were ultimately derived from physical sensations, as well as the psychological assumption that human action was motivated by “pleasure” and “pain.” With regard to politics, both Hume and Bentham held that justice was an artificial virtue, valuable chiefly as a means to pleasure and happiness. Similarly, the sole foundation of government was utility, that is, the “opinion” of the governed that the government in question served their “interests.” In this sense, justice was also a negative virtue, relying upon a careful balancing of individual self-interests, through the use of an impersonal, institutional machinery. Thus, while Rosen was no doubt right to emphasize Carlyle’s opposition to the Epicureanism of Bentham, it is important to add that the young Carlyle understood Bentham as part of a much longer Epicurean tradition, one ultimately stemming from Hume.⁷⁷

EPICUREANISM IN CARLYLE’S LATER WRITINGS (CA. 1830–1850)

In his subsequent works, Carlyle set out to challenge the moral and political assumptions of his “Epicurean generation.”⁷⁸ In the first place, he argued that pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain were not appropriate ends for the life of an individual. As noted above, Carlyle was familiar with the works of Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart, in which Hume had been accused of Epicureanism. According to Reid and Stewart, Hume’s claim that all ideas were derived from sense, and that human action was motivated exclusively by pleasure and pain, tended to deny the autonomy of the will. In opposition, Reid and Stewart sought to reassert the “active powers” of the mind, arguing that reason could indeed gain mastery over the passions and that human beings were endowed with a natural disposition to virtue, which could be further improved through education, discipline, and training. In short, for Reid and Stewart, virtue was not merely a means to utility, nor duty a means to interest. Rather, they were to be performed as ends in themselves, and for their own sake, in line with man’s nature as a rational and moral being.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Carlyle, “Wotton Reinfred,” 71.

⁷⁶ Carlyle, “Schiller” (March 1831), *CME*, 3:65–110, at 87–90.

⁷⁷ Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism*, 167–72.

⁷⁸ Thomas Carlyle to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 3 February 1835, *CL*, 8:36–43.

⁷⁹ See Schneewind, *Sidgwick’s Ethics*, 64–73, 75; Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1996), 185–205; James A. Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy* (Oxford, 2005), 183–84, 195, 219–33; and idem, “Reid and Hume on the Possibility of Character,” in *Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Thomas Ahnert and Susan Manning (New York, 2011), 31–47, at 32–33, 41–42.

In this regard, Carlyle's later writings were broadly continuous with those of Reid and Stewart.⁸⁰ In the first place, Carlyle inveighed against sensationalist epistemology, claiming that "from Locke's time downwards," "our whole Metaphysics" had been not "spiritual," but rather "material." Further developed by "Hume," this doctrine had dragged "the world into bottomless abysses."⁸¹ The "materialism and sensualism" of "Hume," Carlyle argued, were thus inimical to "spiritual freedom."⁸² Similarly, "Benthamite Utility" would reduce "the infinite celestial Soul of Man to a kind of Hay-balance for weighing ... pleasures and pains on."⁸³ As such, it was the culmination of the "Spiritual Paralysis" that had characterized the "Eighteenth Century."⁸⁴

According to "the Epicurean school of philosophy," Carlyle claimed, human beings were to make themselves "comfortable" and "enjoy" the "world." Such men as envisaged by "Benthamism," he claimed, would be capable of little more than "love of Pleasure, fear of Pain."⁸⁵ As he put it in *Past and Present* (1843), they would wallow in "vulturous hunger for fine wines," "valet reputation," "gilt carriages," and other "Epicurisms." The "whole wretchedness" of "these generations," Carlyle wrote, stemmed from the "pretension" to be "happy," as "happy" as "the fattest pig of Epicurus."⁸⁶ Besides the fact that it did not befit a human being, Carlyle contended, such an ideal of life was ultimately self-defeating. Notwithstanding all the "upholsteries and cookerics" in the world, it would always end in "ennui."⁸⁷

Instead, Carlyle declared, "it is possible for us to be free—to attain to the possession of a spiritual freedom ... not living on any longer in a blind sensualism and egotism, but succeeding to get out and be free."⁸⁸ In order to do this, men would have to lay aside happiness and recognize the "infinite, absolute character of Virtue."⁸⁹ According to Carlyle, virtue was not, as Hume and Bentham had claimed, merely a means to pleasure but rather, as Reid and Stewart had argued, an end in itself. As he explained in "Schiller,"

[T]his truth, that man has in him something higher than a Love of Pleasure ... has been the text of all true Teachers and Preachers, since the beginning of the world ... Once, Epicurus had his Zeno; and if the herd of mankind have at all times been the slaves of Desire ... earnest natures were not wanting who ... asserted for their kind a higher vocation than this; declaring ... that man's soul was no dead Balance for "motives" to sway hither and thither, but a living divine Soul, indefeasibly free, whose birthright it was to be the servant of Virtue, Goodness, God, and in such service to be blessed without fee or reward.⁹⁰

⁸⁰ On Carlyle's debts to Reid and Stewart, see Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics*, 168; and Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*.

⁸¹ Carlyle, "Signs of the Times" (June 1829), *CME*, 2:230–52, at 236–40. See also *ibid.*, 249–50.

⁸² Thomas Carlyle, *Lectures on the History of Literature* (April–July 1838), ed. J. Reay Greene (London, 1892), 204. See also *ibid.*, 214.

⁸³ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) (London, 1904), 75–76. See also Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (1833–1834) (Oxford, 1987), 167.

⁸⁴ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 172–73.

⁸⁵ Carlyle, *Lectures*, 52, 173–75.

⁸⁶ Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (1843) (London, 1912), 261, 274–75, 147–48, 150 (hereafter *PP*).

⁸⁷ Thomas Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850) (London, 1897), 281–82 (hereafter *LDP*).

⁸⁸ Carlyle, *Lectures*, 214.

⁸⁹ Carlyle, "Signs of the Times," *CME*, 2:245.

⁹⁰ Carlyle, "Schiller" (March 1831), *CME*, 3:87–90. See also Carlyle, "Wotton Reinfred," 23–24; Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 124–25; Carlyle, *Lectures*, 203.

In order to attain this ideal, one would have to lay aside “one’s own poor *egoism*, hungry love of happiness &c,” and acknowledge that “Self-renunciation” was “the beginning of virtue for a man.”⁹¹ In other words, one would have to recognize “the Infinite Nature of Duty.”⁹² Rather than “profit-and-loss calculations,” this consisted in “joining” oneself to “the great deep Law of the World.”⁹³ The latter, Carlyle argued, could be discerned through use of “the Inner Light or Moral Conscience” of one’s “own soul.” Carlyle’s generation, then, was called upon to rise above the sordid selfishness and sensuality of the eighteenth century and to thus emerge as “noble European Nineteenth-Century Men.”⁹⁴

In addition to rejecting the pursuit of pleasure as an appropriate end for the life of the individual, Carlyle also took umbrage with Epicurean, utility-based theories of sociability. In particular, he set out to refute Hume’s claim that justice was an artificial and negative virtue, which, in a modern commercial society, could be maintained through an artful management of self-interest and “public opinion.”⁹⁵ Against Hume and his followers, Carlyle argued that genuinely disinterested “virtue,” as understood in ancient political philosophy, remained as necessary as ever. As he wrote in “Voltaire” (April 1829),

It is contended by many that our mere love of personal Pleasure, or Happiness as it is called, acting on every individual ... will of itself lead him to respect the rights of others, and wisely employ his own; to fulfil, on a mere principle of economy, all the duties of a good patriot; so that, in what respects the State ... Virtue, beyond the very common Virtue of loving what is pleasant and hating what is painful, are to be considered as supererogatory qualifications, as ornamental, not essential. Many there are, on the other hand, who pause over this doctrine; cannot discover, in such a universe of conflicting atoms, any principle by which the whole shall cohere; for if every man’s selfishness, infinitely expansive, is to be hemmed-in only by the infinitely-expansive selfishness of every other man, it seems as if we should have a world of mutually repulsive bodies with no centripetal force to bind them together.⁹⁶

Concluding, Carlyle argued that the “Force of Public Opinion” was “ineffectual” as “a basis of public or private Morals.” This, he claimed, could be provided only by “some belief in the necessary, eternal ... nature of Virtue.”⁹⁷

Several months later, Carlyle returned to the same theme in “Signs of the Times,” published in the *Edinburgh Review* in June 1829. Ostensibly, this was a review of W. A. Mackinnon’s *The Rise, Progress, and Present State of Public Opinion* (1828), in which Mackinnon had suggested that the examples of “the ancient republics of Greece and Rome” were irrelevant to modern commercial societies, which

⁹¹ Thomas Carlyle to Geraldine Jewsbury, 26 April 1840, *CL*, 12:118; and Thomas Carlyle to Geraldine Jewsbury, 15 June 1840, *CL*, 12:163–66.

⁹² Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 126; Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 75–76; Carlyle, *PP*, 106.

⁹³ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 57.

⁹⁴ Carlyle, *PP*, 219, 265.

⁹⁵ Many writers had begun to voice skepticism regarding “public opinion.” See Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property*, 298–99; Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, 305; and Wahrman, “Public Opinion,” 99, 104–5.

⁹⁶ Carlyle, “Voltaire” (April 1829), *CME*, 2:176.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 177–78.

were animated not by virtue but rather by “public opinion.”⁹⁸ Commenting, Carlyle wrote,

Love of country, in any high or generous sense ... has little importance attached to it in such reforms ... Men are to be guided only by their self-interests. Good government is a good balancing of these; and, except a keen eye and appetite for self-interest, requires no virtue in any quarter ... the ‘superior morality’, of which we hear so much ... is properly rather an ‘inferior criminality’, produced not by greater love of Virtue, but by greater perfection of Police; and of that far subtler and stronger Police, called Public Opinion.⁹⁹

Such erroneous notions, Carlyle argued, stemmed not from “Socrates” and “Plato,” but rather “Bentham” and “Hume.”¹⁰⁰

That Carlyle considered Hume the taproot of these ideas regarding sociability is confirmed by an entry to his journal in October 1831. Here, Carlyle wrote that “you *cannot* drill a regiment of knaves into a regiment of honest men, enregiment and organize them as cunningly as you will.”¹⁰¹ This was almost certainly a reference to Hume’s claim that in politics, “every man ought to be supposed a *knave*, and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest. By this interest we must govern him, and, by means of it, make him ... cooperate to public good.”¹⁰² One year prior to Carlyle’s journal entry, Hume’s dictum had been quoted approvingly by James Mill, one of Bentham’s leading disciples, in his *Fragment on Mackintosh* (1830).¹⁰³ Thus, it is probable that Carlyle was referring to Hume, as recently cited by Mill.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, in his subsequent writings, Carlyle frequently returned to this point. For instance, in “Characteristics” (1831), he argued that “Utilitarianism” foundered upon “this quite insoluble and impossible problem, *Given a world of Knaves, to produce an Honesty from their united action.*”¹⁰⁵ Similarly, in *On Heroes* (1841), Carlyle alluded to “Hume, and a multitude following him,” again referring to “this hopeless problem, ‘Given a world of Knaves, to educe an Honesty from their united action.’”¹⁰⁶ And, to cite one final example, in *Past and Present* (1843), Carlyle argued that “by no Reform Bill, Ballot-box, Five-point Charter,” “can you perform this alchemy: ‘Given a world of Knaves to produce an Honesty from their united action!’ It is a distillation, once for all, not possible.”¹⁰⁷

⁹⁸ W. A. Mackinnon, *On the Rise, Progress, and Present State of Public Opinion, in Great Britain, and Other Parts of the World* (London, 1828), 218–19, 19. On the *Edinburgh Review*’s substitution of “public opinion” for ancient virtue, see Plasart, *Scottish Enlightenment*, 173–75.

⁹⁹ Carlyle, “Signs of the Times” (June 1829), *CME*, 2:240, 249.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 239, 246.

¹⁰¹ Entry dated 11 October 1831, Carlyle, *Two Note Books*, 205.

¹⁰² Hume, “Of the Independency of Parliaments,” 30.

¹⁰³ James Mill, *Fragment on Mackintosh* (1830), cited in Collini, Winch, and Burrow, *That Noble Science*, 113. See also Robert A. Fenn, *James Mill’s Political Thought* (New York, 1987), 118–27.

¹⁰⁴ Mill had recently blocked Carlyle’s appointment to the new London University. Thomas Carlyle to Anna D. B. Montagu, 17 August 1828, *CL*, 4:388–92.

¹⁰⁵ Carlyle, “Characteristics” (December 1831), *CME*, 4:36–37.

¹⁰⁶ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 229.

¹⁰⁷ Carlyle, *PP*, 25.

Even more explicit confirmation of Carlyle's opposition to Hume's Epicurean theory of sociability is provided by the *Lectures on the History of Literature* (1838). Here, Carlyle informed his audience that

Hume considered virtue to be the same as expediency, profit; that all useful things were virtues; that people in old times found the utility of the thing [and] agreed that for the sake of keeping society together, they would patronize such things as were useful to one another, and consecrate them by some strong sanction, and that was the origin of virtue.¹⁰⁸

This, Carlyle pronounced, was the “most melancholy theory ever propounded.”¹⁰⁹

Carlyle's hostility to Hume's Epicurean theory of sociability seems to have also underpinned his subsequent polemics against laissez-faire. Indeed, as numerous scholars have suggested, the laissez-faire version of political economy had much in common with Epicureanism, particularly in its emphasis on self-interest, both as the driving motivation of individuals and as the source of sociability and justice.¹¹⁰ Particularly relevant in this regard were the writings of J. R. McCulloch, one of the political economists with whom Carlyle was personally acquainted.¹¹¹ As several commentators have pointed out, McCulloch was the proponent of a “thoroughgoing Humean approach to luxury,” and his concept of “economic man” had “much in common with Bentham's pleasure-maximizer.”¹¹² According to McCulloch, Adam Smith's great achievement was to have “shown that it is in every case sound policy, to leave individuals to pursue their own interest in their own way; that, in prosecuting branches of industry advantageous to themselves, they necessarily prosecute such as are, at the same time, advantageous to the public.”¹¹³ Similarly, in an article that Carlyle is known to have read, Bentham's disciple Thomas Perronet Thompson defended the doctrine of “laissez-faire,” arguing that “the desire of all men to enjoy is the precise instrument, the very principle of universal gravitation towards the same point, by virtue of which ... the circuit of the world is carried on.”¹¹⁴ Finally, another political economist with whom Carlyle associated, William Neilson Hancock, explained that in “*laissez-faire*,” “the soundest principles of science coincide with the dictates of common prudence, in teaching each person to mind his own

¹⁰⁸ Carlyle, *Lectures*, 182.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ See Gloria Vivenza, *Adam Smith and the Classics: The Classical Heritage in Adam Smith's Thought* (Oxford, 2001), 54–56, 79–80, 81; Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism*, chap. 6; Neven Leddy, “Adam Smith's Critique of Enlightenment Epicureanism,” in *Epicurus in the Enlightenment*, ed. Leddy and Lifschitz, 195–201; Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 38–40, 50–51; and idem, *Politics in Commercial Society: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), 29–32.

¹¹¹ On Carlyle's relationship with McCulloch, see Alexander Jordan, “Thomas Carlyle and Political Economy: The ‘Dismal Science’ in Context,” *English Historical Review* (forthcoming).

¹¹² M. G. Marshall, “Luxury, Economic Development, and Work Motivation: David Hume, Adam Smith, and J. R. McCulloch,” *History of Political Economy* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 631–48, at 633; G. R. Searle, *Morality and the Market in Victorian Great Britain* (Oxford, 1998), 31.

¹¹³ J. R. McCulloch, *The Principles of Political Economy* (Edinburgh, 1825), 54.

¹¹⁴ [Thomas Perronet Thompson], “Saint-Simonism, &c.,” *Westminster Review* 16 (April 1832): 279–321, at 289. For Carlyle's reading, see Thomas Carlyle to John Stuart Mill, 16 October 1832, *CL*, 6:237–42.

business, and to follow the dictates of enlightened self-interest as the best means of promoting the welfare of himself, of his country, and of the whole family of man."¹¹⁵

In this regard, it is significant that, in *Past and Present*, Carlyle referred to the "Hume" theory of "things well let alone."¹¹⁶ "Laissez-faire," he implied, was not merely an economic doctrine but meant more generally leaving "all to egoism, to ravenous greed of money, of pleasure, of applause."¹¹⁷ In this sense, like utilitarianism, the doctrines of political economists such as "M'Crouty" were "clearly fitter for a reflective pig than for a man."¹¹⁸ To such "Pig Philosophers," Carlyle wrote, "Justice" was little more than a means to better secure "the universal Swine's-trough."¹¹⁹ In short, Carlyle argued, "enlightened Egoism" and "Laissez-faire" would never provide "a practicable Law of Union for a Society of Men."¹²⁰

In opposition to Hume's theory of justice as an artificial virtue, Carlyle attempted to revive a broadly Platonic tradition of natural law.¹²¹ For instance, in *Past and Present*, he argued that "eternal Justice" was distinct from "momentary Expediency" and that it was irreducible to "interests."¹²² Similarly, "Nature and her Laws" operated independently of "Ballot-box, Reform Bill," and "Force of Public Opinion."¹²³ In the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), Carlyle's adherence to the natural-law tradition issued in a fierce polemic against representative democracy, in which he argued that "popular suffrage is not the way of ascertaining what the Laws of the Universe are."¹²⁴ Given that "fools, cowards, knaves, and gluttonous traitors true only to their own appetite" were the "immense majority, in every rank of life," it would be disastrous to govern on the basis of public "opinion."¹²⁵

Having rejected Hume's theory of justice as an artificial virtue, Carlyle also rejected his theory of justice as a negative virtue. Rather than simply balancing and managing the self-interest of individuals, Carlyle argued, the legislator was called upon to play a positive, interventionist role in public life, actively promoting virtue and moral excellence among its citizens. The "right of the ignorant man to be guided by the wiser," and to "be held in the true course by him," Carlyle claimed, had been ordained by "Nature herself."¹²⁶ In this regard, even medieval notions of the "Divine right of Kings" were preferable to the eighteenth-century doctrine that "all goes by self-interest and the checking and balancing of greedy knaveries."¹²⁷ The "end of Government," Carlyle asserted, was to "guide men in the way wherein they should go,

¹¹⁵ W. Neilson Hancock, *On Laissez-faire and the Economic Resources of Ireland* (Dublin, 1848), 10. See also *ibid.*, 3–4, 17. On Carlyle's relationship with Hancock, see Jordan, "Thomas Carlyle and Political Economy."

¹¹⁶ Carlyle, *PP*, 161. See also Carlyle, "Chartism" (December 1839), *CME*, 6:109–86, at 139, 144, 152–53.

¹¹⁷ Carlyle, *PP*, 178.

¹¹⁸ Carlyle, *LDP*, 241.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 266–67.

¹²⁰ Carlyle, *PP*, 32–33. See also *ibid.*, 179.

¹²¹ See Dwight J. Simpson, "Carlyle as a Political Theorist: Natural Law," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 3, no. 3 (August 1959): 263–76.

¹²² Carlyle, *PP*, 18. See also *ibid.*, 147–48.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 27–29.

¹²⁴ Carlyle, *LDP*, 54.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 212–13.

¹²⁶ Carlyle, "Chartism," *CME*, 6:135, 144.

¹²⁷ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 199–200.

towards their true good in this life,” regardless of what “Hume” might claim.¹²⁸ Thus, what was required was “not a Reformed Parliament,” designed to represent public opinion, but rather “a Reformed Executive or Sovereign Body of Rulers and Administrators,” designed to guide and enlighten it.¹²⁹

Carlyle frequently articulated this theory through his famous maxim of “Hero-worship.” Indeed, the phrase itself was borrowed from Hume.¹³⁰ By invoking it, Carlyle was responding to Hume’s argument regarding the need to restrain the self-interest of governors through institutional mechanisms. In opposition, Carlyle sought to reassert the possibility of genuinely disinterested authority. In “Voltaire,” Carlyle had complained of the “Utilitarian” doctrine regarding the “love of power.”¹³¹ Shortly thereafter, in “Signs of the Times,” he referred explicitly to Hume’s “Natural History of Religion,” the essay in which the phrase “Hero-worship” had appeared.¹³² From this point onward, the term became a mainstay of Carlyle’s idiom. For instance, in “Boswell’s Life of Johnson” (May 1832), an essay that referred repeatedly to “Hume,” Carlyle declared: “Loyalty, Discipleship, all that was ever meant by *Hero-worship*, lives perennially in the human bosom.” Ordinary men, he argued, were “by nature quite thoroughly *gregarious*” and were endowed with a natural instinct that allowed them to recognize “Great Men.”¹³³ Similarly, in “Sir Walter Scott” (1838), Carlyle referred dismissively to “Hume,” claiming that “hero-worship” was the “indestructible” creed of “mankind,” “whereon politics, religions, loyalties, and all highest human interests have been and can be built.”¹³⁴ And, finally, in his eponymous lectures (1840), Carlyle was even more emphatic, arguing that “Society is founded on Hero-worship.”¹³⁵ In conclusion, against Hume’s Epicurean theory of justice as an artificial and negative virtue, grounded in self-interest, utility, and “opinion,” Carlyle attempted to reassert the canons of natural law, in which justice was both natural and positive, to be observed by rulers and ruled alike.

THE RECEPTION OF CARLYLE’S WRITINGS ON EPICUREANISM (CA. 1850–1870)

That Carlyle’s moral and political writings represented an assault upon Epicureanism was readily apparent to his contemporaries. For instance, in 1842, Carlyle’s friend John Forster contributed a series of articles on the ancient philosophers of Greece to the *Foreign Quarterly Review*.¹³⁶ Here, Forster explained how “Democritus,” a

¹²⁸ Carlyle, *PP*, 160–61. See also *ibid.*, 204–6.

¹²⁹ Carlyle, *LDP*, 98.

¹³⁰ Richard Garnett, *Life of Thomas Carlyle* (London, 1895), 100.

¹³¹ Carlyle, “Voltaire,” *CME*, 2:120. See also *ibid.*, 131.

¹³² Carlyle, “Signs of the Times,” *CME*, 2:247; David Hume, “The Natural History of Religion,” in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1779), 2:422.

¹³³ Carlyle, “Boswell’s Life of Johnson” (May 1832), *CME*, 4:77, 89–90. The references to “Hume” are on 105, 119, 128, 129, and 130.

¹³⁴ Carlyle, “Sir Walter Scott” (January 1838), *CME*, 6:40, 22–23.

¹³⁵ Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 12, 15. As an example of a “hero,” Carlyle cited Cromwell, disagreeing with the “Hume theory” that he had been a “Fanatic-Hypocrite.” *Ibid.*, 229.

¹³⁶ James A. Davis, *John Forster: A Literary Life* (Leicester, 1983), 11–12, 105–7, 184–96, 295.

precursor of Epicurus, had “made virtue and vice depend mainly on human institutions.”¹³⁷ Following Democritus, the “Sophists” argued that “the only foundation of knowledge” was “sensation,” and that “the only foundation of virtue” was “the desire of pleasure.” Continuing, Forster then explained how Plato had set out to refute such notions, asserting that man ought “to conform his will to objective laws of action, which shall be to him the measure of virtue.” A similar mission, Forster noted, had recently been performed by “a great original thinker of modern days,” particularly in his “*Sartor Resartus*.”¹³⁸

Over subsequent years, a spate of similar analyses issued from the press. For instance, in 1852, a reviewer claimed that Carlyle’s “whole theory of life and morals” differed widely from that of “the modern liberal school.” In a word, the reviewer explained, “he is a Stoic, and they are Epicureans.” According to the reviewer, “democratic opinions,” “as held in modern times,” had “historically proceeded from Epicurean views of human nature.” Elaborating, he wrote:

If physical good be the chief end of man, it seems that to attain it he has only to follow his bodily instincts. Now these are nearly the same in all men; and therefore the administration of affairs, or, in other words, the pursuit of their own physical gratification, may be safely entrusted to all mankind Nor is it merely quite safe to entrust every man with an equal share in the government: it is positively unjust to exclude him; for if he is excluded, those who govern will no doubt take to themselves a very unfair share of the good things of the world.¹³⁹

The “new Stoicism” of Carlyle, the reviewer concluded, “seems on the whole to be far better and nobler than the prevalent Epicureanism, against which it protests. Its tendency is to fortify the mental and moral energies. It inculcates the sense of duty, the contempt of pleasure and pain.”¹⁴⁰

The same year, a comparable analysis was put forward by another reviewer, who wrote that “thanks” to Carlyle, “we have pretty well got rid [of the] Epicureanism of last century.”¹⁴¹ And, several years later, in 1856, James Martineau explained how “Carlyle” had refuted “Hume,” along with “the devices of utilitarian *cuisine* for putting pleasure into the pot and drawing virtue out.”¹⁴² Thus, it was quite clear to contemporaries that Carlyle’s works were anti-Epicurean in thrust.

Subsequently, John Stuart Mill, a former friend of Carlyle, took it upon himself to mount a defense of the Epicurean tradition.¹⁴³ For instance, in a series of diary entries dated 1854, Mill noted his disagreement with “Carlyle,” claiming that

¹³⁷ [John Forster], “Socrates and the Sophists of Athens,” *Foreign and Quarterly Review* 60 (January 1843): 181–202, at 187.

¹³⁸ [John Forster], “The Dialogues of Plato,” *Foreign and Quarterly Review* 62 (July 1843): 260–76, at 276, 273.

¹³⁹ “Latter-Day Pamphlets: By Thomas Carlyle,” *English Review* 16 (January 1852): 331–51, at 335–36.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 340. On Carlyle’s Stoicism, see Alexander Jordan, “Noble Just Industrialism: Saint-Simonism in the Political Thought of Thomas Carlyle” (PhD diss., European University Institute, 2015), chap. 1.

¹⁴¹ “Carlyle’s Life of Sterling,” *North British Review* 16 (February 1852): 359–89, at 388–89.

¹⁴² [James Martineau], “Personal Influences on our Present Theology: Newman – Coleridge – Carlyle,” *National Review* 3 (1856): 449–94, at 484. On Martineau’s opposition to utilitarianism, see Schneewind, *Sidgwick’s Ethics*, 237–43.

¹⁴³ See Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism*, chap. 10.

“useful and even permanently valuable things are continually done from vanity, or a selfish desire of riches or power.” Instead of attempting to set up “a new form” of “Stoicism,” “persuading men to sink altogether earthly happiness as a pursuit,” Mill argued, what was needed was “the creed of Epicurus warmed by the additional element of an enthusiastic love of the general good.”¹⁴⁴

In *Utilitarianism* (1863), Mill undertook to bring about such a reconciliation.¹⁴⁵ According to “Mr. Carlyle” and his followers, Mill wrote, “men can do *without* happiness ... all noble human beings have felt this, and could not have become noble but by learning the lesson of *Entsagen*, or renunciation.” In opposition, Mill then proceeded to clarify the ideas of Epicurus, implying that Carlyle had failed to understand them. As Mill pointed out, Epicurus had not advocated a brutish sensuality but rather a more modest kind of “happiness,” consisting in “an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and various pleasures, with a decided predominance of the active over the passive.” Thus, an Epicurean would always choose the “higher” pleasures over the “lower.” Moreover, according to Mill, such an existence was “even now the lot of many, during some considerable proportion of their lives” and, through improvements in “education” and “social arrangements,” might one day be “attainable by almost all.”¹⁴⁶ However, this would depend on continuing social progress, which itself depended upon exactly the kind of renunciation that Carlyle advocated. As Mill admitted,

Though it is only in a very imperfect state of the world’s arrangements that anyone can best serve the happiness of others by the absolute sacrifice of his own, yet so long as the world is in that imperfect state, I fully acknowledge that the readiness to make such a sacrifice is the highest virtue which can be found in man.¹⁴⁷

Thus, according to Mill, the “utilitarian morality” did indeed “recognize in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others.” However, it refused “to admit that the sacrifice is itself a good,” and held that any “sacrifice” that did not “increase” the “sum total of happiness” was “wasted.” Concluding the discussion, Mill claimed that “the morality of self-devotion” could thus be claimed by “utilitarians” no less than by “the Stoic.”¹⁴⁸

For his part, Carlyle seems to have made little attempt to respond to Mill. However, worthy of mention is a manuscript dated October 1865. Here, Carlyle made clear that he did not see the point in Mill’s attempt to stretch the language of happiness to accommodate virtue and nobleness. In his opinion, it would be better to simply speak of the latter in their own right. As he put it,

The greatest happiness of the greatest number, or any happiness of any number or of any individual, myself included; that is not the question, nor ever was. Give up that, I pray

¹⁴⁴ Diary entries dated 20 January 1854 and 8 April 1854, in *The Letters of John Stuart Mill*, ed. H. S. R. Elliot, 2 vols. (London, 1910), 2:361, 385.

¹⁴⁵ See generally Emery Neff, *Carlyle and Mill: An Introduction to Victorian Thought*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1926), 373–77; and Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism*, chap. 10.

¹⁴⁶ John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism” (1863), in *On Liberty and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1991), 143–44.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

you: you don't know to what bad issues it will lead you. Say the greatest nobleness of the greatest number, if you must say something.¹⁴⁹

Thus, while both Mill and Carlyle stressed the importance of virtue, self-sacrifice, and dedication to the public good, Mill maintained that these were ultimately the means to happiness, while Carlyle argued that they were ends in themselves. At this point, the debate between the two men appears to have broken down.

Despite the paucity of Carlyle's own response, however, several of his disciples offered more extended replies. Some simply reiterated Carlyle's earlier objections to Epicureanism, treating Mill as a straightforward representative of the latter. For instance, in *Idealism* (1872), William Graham denounced "the refined Epicureanism of Mill," arguing that "Virtue" was absolute, and must be ready to renounce "all earthly pleasure of outer and inner sense at the supreme order of Reason."¹⁵⁰ Similarly, in his *History of European Morals* (1869), W. E. H. Lecky divided the history of moral philosophy into two great schools, the first being "the stoical," and the second "the epicurean."¹⁵¹ While the "Epicurean" school had existed since ancient times, Lecky argued, it had only come to full fruition "in modern times," due to the influence of writers such as "Bentham." According to such thinkers, the sole "motive to virtue" was "enlightened self-interest." In particular, since "cooperation and organization" were "essential to our happiness," it was prudent to place "some restraint" upon "our appetites" and to obey the law. In opposition, Lecky endorsed the views of the "stoic" school, to the effect that "our will is not governed exclusively by the law of pleasure and pain, but also by the law of duty, which we feel to be distinct from the former, and to carry with it the sense of obligation."¹⁵² To clinch the point, Lecky quoted from "Carlyle's *Hero-worship*," to the effect that "it is not to taste sweet things, but to do noble and true things ... that the poorest son of Adam dimly longs."¹⁵³

However, other disciples and sympathizers of Carlyle put forward more nuanced responses, arguing that Mill had effectively stretched Epicureanism beyond breaking point, arriving at a species of Stoicism similar to that of Carlyle.¹⁵⁴ For instance, in 1870, Carlyle reported having been sent a book "by a Professor Grote," this being a "remonstrance against J. S. Mill and the Utilitarian Theory of Morals."¹⁵⁵ Carlyle was referring to John Grote's *Examination of the Utilitarian Philosophy* (1870), in which it was argued that Mill's "neo-utilitarianism" was in fact "something very

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Carlyle, "A New (Old) Review of Mill's *Liberty*," *Carlyle Newsletter* 6 (1985): 23–27, at 24–25. See also Carlyle, "Shooting Niagara" (1867), *CME*, 7:200–41, at 223–24.

¹⁵⁰ William Graham, *Idealism: An Essay, Metaphysical and Critical* (London, 1872), 79. Carlyle owned a copy. Tarr, "Thomas Carlyle's Libraries," 255. He later provided Graham with a testimonial. William Graham to Thomas Carlyle, 20 January 1876, MS 1772/38, National Library of Scotland.

¹⁵¹ W. E. H. Lecky, *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne*, 2 vols. (London, 1869), 1:3. See also *ibid.*, 14, 180–86. On Lecky's "very long walks with Carlyle" and Carlyle's approval of the book, see *A Memoir of the Right Hon. William Edward Hartpole Lecky ... By His Wife* (New York, 1909), 63, 67–68.

¹⁵² Lecky, *History*, 1:1, 3, 5–6, 13, 102.

¹⁵³ Cited in *ibid.*, 1:58. The quote is from Carlyle, *On Heroes*, 71.

¹⁵⁴ See Maximilian Forschner, "Die Synthese epikureischer und stoischer Elemente in John Stuart Mills Utilitarianism," in *Stoizismus in der europaischen Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst und Politik*, ed. Barbara Neymeyr, Jochen Schmidt, and Bernhard Zimmermann, 2 vols. (Berlin, 2008), 2:1105–40, at 1107, 1113–14, 1119–20, 1132–33.

¹⁵⁵ Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, 2:422.

different” to the older utilitarianism he had set out to defend. Although Mill appeared to “identify his cause with that of the Epicureans,” Grote claimed, it was clear that he also sympathized “with the Stoics.” In particular, by emphasizing disinterested virtue and dedication to the public good, Mill had embraced the cardinal Stoic “doctrine of man’s sociality.” Furthermore, by making a distinction regarding the “quality” of pleasures, Mill had arrived at “a philosophy of happiness as [eudaimonia], or a lofty ideal of what man may rise to, entirely different from a philosophy of happiness as [pleasure].” Thus, Mill differed markedly from the older “Epicurean utilitarianism,” according to which “pleasures” differed only “according to their *quantity*.”¹⁵⁶

Scottish classicist John Stuart Blackie, an old friend and self-described disciple of Carlyle, advanced a similar analysis.¹⁵⁷ In his *Four Phases of Morals* (1871), Blackie attacked “Hume” and “Bentham” for having refurbished “the old doctrine of Epicurus, that for man, as for beast, pleasure is the only good.” What such thinkers had failed to understand, Blackie argued, was that “Pleasure and Good, so far from being of a kindred nature, are generally directly opposite.” In particular, while “Pleasure” was “often passive,” generally involved “shunning difficulty,” and was common to both “man” and “pig,” the “Good” was “always active,” sought to confront “difficulty,” and was reserved to “man” as a “rational” being. Blackie then argued that Mill’s *Utilitarianism* represented a fundamental break with the older Epicurean tradition. By “departing from the original idea of his school,” “that pleasures differ from one another only in intensity,” and by introducing a distinction between “high and low pleasures,” Mill had effectively been “thrown back” on “those innate ideas which it is the characteristic boast of his school to have discarded.” In particular, Blackie argued, “the essential difference in the quality of high and low pleasures” could not “be proved by any external induction, but springs directly out of the intellectual and emotional nature of man.” In this sense, Mill had succeeded in defending “Utilitarianism” only “by throwing overboard all that is most distinctive in the doctrine, and adopting secretly all that is most peculiar to the teaching of his opponents.” Concluding, Blackie wrote,

In ancient times, between Epicureanism and Stoicism there was a distinct and well-marked line of demarcation ... now, under Mr. Mill’s manipulation, this distinction vanishes; the love of pleasure with which he started is sublimated into the love of virtue ... and a Joseph Mazzini consecrating his whole life with the most intense enthusiasm and the most severe self-denial to the ideal of a possible Italian republic, is as much an Epicurean as David Hume sneering at all enthusiasm, and pleasing his soul with the delicate flatteries of fair dames in a Parisian saloon.¹⁵⁸

“This,” Blackie wrote, “is to confound all things, and to reduce the whole affair to a fence of words rather than to a battle of principle.”¹⁵⁹ According to Grote and

¹⁵⁶ John Grote, *An Examination of the Utilitarian Philosophy*, ed. J. B. Mayor (Cambridge, 1870), 15–16, 24, 46–47, 52–53. See also *ibid.*, 60, 62–63, 76, 98–100, 105. Grote writes “eudaimonia” and “pleasure” in ancient Greek.

¹⁵⁷ Stuart Wallace, *John Stuart Blackie: Scottish Scholar and Patriot* (Edinburgh, 2006), 7, 84–85, 164, 220.

¹⁵⁸ John Stuart Blackie, *Four Phases of Morals: Socrates, Aristotle, Christianity, Utilitarianism* (Edinburgh, 1871), 407.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 332, 401–3, 405–6. See also 374, 382, 400.

Blackie, Mill had failed to defend the Epicurean tradition against Carlyle, and had, despite his protestations, ultimately capitulated to the latter's Stoicism.

CONCLUSION

Carlyle has long been known as one of the earliest and most vociferous critics of Benthamite utilitarianism. However, Carlyle understood Benthamism as the culmination of a much longer eighteenth-century tradition of Epicurean moral and political thought. Having been an enthusiastic reader of David Hume during his youth, Carlyle later turned against him, waging an increasingly violent polemic against all forms of Epicureanism. Carlyle not only rejected the pursuit of "pleasure" as an appropriate end for the life of the individual but also took umbrage with Epicurean, utility-based accounts of sociability in which justice was presented as an artificial, negative virtue. According to Carlyle, this theory provided the philosophical underpinnings of laissez-faire, representative democracy, and "public opinion."

However, according to Carlyle, sensations of pleasure would never fulfill the life of the individual, while self-interest—no matter how "enlightened," balanced, or channeled by institutions—would never provide a stable foundation for a political community. Instead, Carlyle sought to vindicate the tenets of Platonic natural law, according to which duty, sociability, and justice were natural and positive virtues, springing from man's nature as a rational and moral being, and incumbent upon both governors and governed alike. Accordingly, the state was called upon to play a positive, interventionist role in public life, actively fostering virtue and moral excellence amongst its citizens. Thus, Carlyle's rejection of Epicureanism made a crucial contribution to the waning of eighteenth-century discourses of commercial society, and to the rise of an interventionist, regulatory, and ethical philosophy, later known as British Idealism. Indeed, as the leading British Idealist philosopher Edward Caird put it shortly after Carlyle's death, his aim had been to "banish the eighteenth-century theory of the limitations of the government to the functions of a grand policeman, and to revive the old Platonic idea that the State had a social and ethical work to perform."¹⁶⁰

The magnitude of Carlyle's contribution in this regard parallels an anecdote recounted by his friend, the Chartist lecturer Thomas Cooper. In 1853, Cooper recalled, Carlyle had unexpectedly received a package from the poet Walter Savage Landor. Cooper wrote,

A loaded truck stopped at the street-door—there was a loud knock—and the maid-servant ran upstairs, breathless, to say that a huge parcel had been brought It was a portrait of David Hume, in full dress "Only think of that old Landor sending me this!" broke out Carlyle again and again, as we all stood gazing on the portrait.¹⁶¹

"Here," Landor had written, "I present a great philosopher to a greater."¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Edward Caird, "The Genius of Carlyle," in *Essays on Literature and Philosophy*, (Glasgow, 1892), 2:230–67, at 266.

¹⁶¹ *The Life of Thomas Cooper: Written by Himself* (London, 1875), 347–49.

¹⁶² *Catalogue of Printed Books*, 40.