

precapitalist social formations like the U'Wa than has historically been the case. These communal societies have too often have been seen from a Social Darwinist rather than a socialist perspective, as losers in a survival of the fittest contest. A Red-Green movement should instead solidarize with people like the U'Wa.

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Jeff Lipkes, *Politics, Religion and Classical Political Economy in Britain: John Stuart Mill and His Followers* (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1999) pp. ix, 228, \$79.95, ISBN 0-312-21741-2.

“Whoever professes to raise the position of a class without elevating its character is a charlatan” (Leslie Stephen, cited in Lipkes, p. 109).

More than any analytical or methodological framework, this conviction united John Stuart Mill and the Blackheath Park Circle late in his career. Lipkes examines the views of the Mill Circle—consisting of John Morley, J. E. Cairnes, Henry Fawcett, William Thomas Thornton, and T. E. Cliffe Leslie—in order to explain how and why they diverged from Mill and, in addition, whether the group retained any semblance of cohesiveness. He argues that religious views go some distance towards explaining both the divergences and the similarities.

This is a welcome book. While the early years of Marginalism have been much studied, less attention has been accorded to the period leading up to 1871. What we have on Mill's later years consists mainly of studies that compartmentalize the Blackheath Park Circle into dissenters or followers of Classical economics. Mill's recantation of the wages fund doctrine following Thornton's publication of the *Fortnightly Review* articles that became *On Labour* (1870), has received much attention (see, e.g., Stigler 1982). Cliffe Leslie and the Historical School have also been examined (Koot 1987). Here, by contrast, we have both dissenters and followers in one study that starts from the neglected observation that these writers all shared a longstanding friendship with Mill. In addition, and also welcome, Lipkes considers how the Circle influenced Mill, by examining how Mill's views evolved late in his life and whether such turnabouts arose, at least in part, as a result of his close contact with the more heretical views held by some of these writers.

The common thread uniting the Blackheath Park Circle is a deep-seated conviction favoring the improvement of mankind, and this emerges as a central theme of the book. Lipkes argues that Mill's growing religiosity implied an increasing propensity to favor the “good” (p. 15); social and economic amelioration of the laboring classes took precedence over political emancipation (p. 21). Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1861) reflects his conviction that policy must encourage moral and intellectual progress (p. 31). Standing alone, such observations will not reorient our understanding of Mill. But Lipkes' contribution here consists of his argument that Mill's views were influenced by a religious transition from the

Religion of Humanity—a “pale and attenuated thing”—to *Theism*—which in Morley’s view conceded altogether too much (pp. 40–41). Similarly, Lipkes argues that political objectives, a zeal for reform, and even altruism, caused Mill to drift (from the orthodoxy): in his famous recantation and support for Thornton, and in his support for Leslie on the Irish land question (pp. 46, 56–57). Late in his life, Mill is said to have increasingly asked how economic theory needed to be revised (or how its application must be limited) in the light of evidence, justice, and the moral improvement of mankind (p. 58).

Cairnes and Fawcett were the two members of the Blackheath Park Circle who followed Mill most closely. Cairnes, in fact, rejected Mill’s “tinkering” with Ricardian premises, remaining loyal to the virtues of “self-control” and “hard work” (p. 83); diverging methodologically from Mill, he found no reason to revise his analysis in light of the empirical evidence. Fawcett is the disciple “most like” Mill (p. 106), passionate in his attempt to solve the major reform issue after 1870—the persistence and severity of what William Stanley Jevons referred to as the “deep and almost hopeless poverty in the mass of people” (Jevons 1870, p. 196).

In Leslie and Thornton, Lipkes presents us with the two leading opponents of Classical political economy in the 1860s, who nonetheless retained the preoccupation with poverty. Lipkes finds a belief in some sort of transcendental principle helped shape both skeptics’ views (p. 151). For both, he argues, political questions were less important than they were for Mill (p. 154). Thornton’s (Theist) religious beliefs were “not incidental” to his rejection of Classical economics (p. 110). His attacks on Ricardian political economy reflect a desire to defend human freedom since, if human nature is free and evolving, prices are indeterminate (pp. 111, 115) and, in fact, any attempt to erect a social science is “tainted,” as there are no “laws” of human nature (p. 124). Leslie, too, finds wages and prices to be indeterminate (p. 138), though for different reasons. Unlike the “greed and whimsy” that underlie Thornton’s analysis, Leslie objects to assumptions of perfect knowledge and rationality (pp. 128, 130).

Not surprisingly, perhaps, in the light of Mill’s continued friendship not only with Thornton and Leslie but also with Cairnes and Fawcett, the Mill that emerges from Lipkes’ study is rather murky: in these late years we see “confusion, equivocation, contradictions and arguments that sometimes lead him to conclusions he does not seem to have intended” (p. 44).

Lipkes does well to remind us of the significance of biographical detail (Leslie’s illness, Fawcett’s blindness, Cairnes’s failing health, the ill-fated relationship between Helen Taylor and Leslie). For all the richness and complexity of the book, the investigation might be expanded. First, this story of the transition to Marginalism might be more satisfying had Lipkes also examined the relationships between these writers and William Stanley Jevons. Since, like Mill and the Blackheath Park Circle, Jevons was immensely preoccupied with the moral and economic improvement of the laboring classes, since his career overlaps the 1860–73 period, and since he, too, knew the Blackheath Park Circle, he seems a natural figure to include in more detail.

The study might also consider methodological issues systematically. Though he recognizes the existence of methodological diversity, Lipkes’s focus is almost

entirely on political and religious views and analytical constructs. There is little detail on Mill's methodological position either in the 1836 essay "On the Definition of Political Economy" or in the 1843 *Logic*, and there is no concerted demonstration that his methodological position changed over time, leading him "closer" to the Historicists. Lipkes suggests that Mill became increasingly skeptical about economic laws, more willing to sanction human behavior that seemed less than optimal, and more often ready to appeal to "extra-economic" criteria (p. 13). He views Mill as "confused" and contradictory, resorting when needed (when an earnest desire to achieve a political goal led him to resort to such tactics) to "ad hoc arguments" (p. 65). Yet while there is no denying that Mill was politically zealous, methodological concerns may have played a more important role in this than Lipkes has allowed. While Lipkes sees in Mill a "political predisposition" that induces him to substitute one set of axioms (custom) for another (maximization) in the context of the Irish land question (p. 64), it is also possible that here (and in other instances where Lipkes finds inconsistency) Mill's argument simply reflects the method and practice of a social scientist following his own recommendations outlined both in the *Essay* and the *Logic*. Mill's method is fully consistent with theory revision, extending even to the basic axiomatic framework, in the light of experiential evidence (see Hollander and Peart 1999). Then, too, Leslie's position on gold, outlined repeatedly in the context of an ongoing debate on the matter with Jevons and Cairnes (Leslie 1879), is difficult to appreciate without a more detailed account of the Historicist methodological position and how that stance related to the method of both Mill and Jevons. Mill's reaction to Jevons—and Jevons's to Mill—is perhaps more methodological than analytical.

Notwithstanding, Lipkes makes a fascinating contribution on a complex set of personalities and analytical and political concerns. He provides us with a new starting point from which to reevaluate one of the key transitions in economics. Though obvious, it bears noting that the central themes with which the Blackheath Park Circle struggled remain largely unresolved: ignorance, poverty, and the improvement of mankind.

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