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Mill's 'Modern' Radicalism Re-Examined: Joseph Persky's *The Political Economy of Progress*

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Abstract

In *The Political Economy of Progress*, Joseph Persky argues for seeing John Stuart Mill as a consistent 'radical' with much to offer modern 'radical' political discourse. In this article, I further this claim with consideration of Mill's political philosophy, as well as his political economy. Exploring Mill's commitment to radical reordering of the economy, as well as emphasizing his commitment to egalitarianism; his historically nuanced view of 'the progress of justice'; and his desire for a transformation of social (and economic) relations allows us to see more clearly how Mill's radicalism was a specific species of socialism. That is, Mill's early radical enthusiasm for the ideals of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' is also to be seen in his later socialism. Recognizing his 'radicalism' as a species of socialism allows greater understanding of the depth, importance and 'radicalism' of Mill's desired socialist reforms.

Joseph Persky's new book has a two-pronged approach to looking at John Stuart Mill's radical political economy. First, it tries to show to an audience broadly interested in Mill that his radicalism is 'the coherent and compelling product of his utilitarian position'.¹ Second, it aims to persuade 'modern radicals, who have adopted much of Mill's concern with equality and justice, but have lost his progressive optimism – and especially his optimism with respect to fundamental institutional change in people's work lives' that Mill is not merely 'marginally relevant', but 'valuable'.²

Both goals are important for Mill scholarship (leaving aside the question of modern American politics). First, because this adds another fruitful pillar to the broadly 'revisionist' approach to Mill, which rejects the 'two Mills' thesis (in all its forms), which is still surprisingly – and unhelpfully – dominant. Second, because in seeing Mill as not only consistent, but consistently *radical*, it helpfully highlights three often-overlooked elements of his philosophy: (1) his commitment to equality and justice as well as 'the free development of individuality';³ (2) his optimism about improving society, and particularly conditions (very broadly conceived) for working people; (3) his associated commitment to radical change, restructuring and improvement of people's

¹Joseph Persky, *The Political Economy of Progress: John Stuart Mill and Modern Radicalism* (Oxford, 2016), p. xi.

²Persky, *Political Economy*, p. xi.

³J. S. Mill, *On Liberty, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* [henceforth CW], XVIII (Toronto, 1977), p. 261.

working lives. Indeed, as I will argue in this article, one ought to go further than Persky does, understanding the translation of Mill's original Benthamite 'philosophical-radicalism' into a form of socialism as also potentially valuable to a modern audience, being essentially voluntarist, decentralized, organic, and achievable through piecemeal reform from within existing capitalist institutions.⁴

In this article, I first lay out Persky's view of 'radicalism', which I take to be a compelling one. Second, I turn to some specifics of his account of Mill's 'radicalism', in particular considering his engagement with Mill's 'socialism', and to a broader consideration of Mill's radicalism as a distinct species of socialism.

I. Radicalism

As noted above, a core strength of Persky's contribution to Mill scholarship is his emphasis on Mill's consistent radicalism, making sense of this not only in terms of Mill's own development, but also via a better understanding of the radical *milieu* in which Mill was born and raised. It is also worth emphasizing the *nature* of radicalism, which is a mindset, or attitude towards the world, rather than a fixed ideology or set of proposals. In this way, it makes sense to speak both of Mill as consistently radical, and also of people as diverse in their views as Karl Marx and John Rawls as 'radicals'.

Persky is not the first to link Mill with the radical tradition, but his intervention is illuminating as it is founded in political economy, not political theory.⁵ Mill was both a 'radical' in an historical sense (being brought up to be the standard-bearer for a specific form of philosophic radicalism) and a 'radical' in a more expansive sense (being committed to root-and-branch reform of existing society, however incrementally, and – at least from the 1830s onwards – seeing existing institutions as 'provisional' and 'transitional', rather than set in stone).

In modern parlance, being 'radical' can be seen as a synonym for being 'extreme' in the content of one's desires for reform and also in being 'revolutionary' and violent in the means (and speed) by which one thinks reform should be brought about. A proposal that we combat climate change through the immediate, violent overthrow of capitalism and a return to pre-industrial modes of production and political organization might be called 'radical', whereas a proposal that governments use a combination of infrastructure funding, tax incentives and regulation to ensure people only drive electric cars by 2030 might not be. But though we often overlook how 'radical' Mill's ideas were in this sense,⁶ this is not the most useful way of understanding 'radicalism', either historically or for the modern day.

⁴Of course, as Mill himself had political reasons for soft-peddling his socialist commitments before 1848, perhaps Persky also thinks the modern political project of this book would be undermined by claiming Mill for socialism, not radicalism. This said, Persky's stated desire is to speak to a modern radicalism informed by Marx as much as by Rawls (Persky, *Political Economy*, pp. xi–xx).

⁵On Mill's radicalism, and radical inheritance, see also Joseph Hamburger, *Intellectuals in Politics: John Stuart Mill and the Philosophic Radicals* (London, 1965); Gregory Claeys, *Mill and Paternalism* (Cambridge, 2013); Frederick Rosen, *Mill* (Oxford, 2013) and 'From Jeremy Bentham's Radical Philosophy to J. S. Mill's Philosophic Radicalism', *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth Century Political Thought*, ed. Gareth Steadman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 257–94; Helen McCabe, '“Under the General Designation of Socialist”: The Many-Sided-Radicalism of John Stuart Mill' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2010).

⁶Some of Mill's proposals were seen as 'extreme' by his contemporaries, and many would still mark a significant difference from our own institutions, for instance, his proposals regarding property, inheritance

Instead, we should see radicalism as a particular attitude or mindset. Radicals often support very different policy agendas, but they are united in a commitment and openness to root-and-branch reform. That is, a ‘radical’ approach to politics sees nothing as sacred – institutions, beliefs, practices – and thus, nothing is seen as worthy of preservation merely on the *prima facie* grounds that it already exists. Nor are arguments for something’s ‘naturalness’ or ‘inevitability’ (e.g. private property, gender, inequality, poverty) taken at face value, or as being synonymous with ‘good’. Radicalism, then, is always an iconoclastic challenge to the status quo. Not seeing Mill’s writing on property, poverty, equality, democracy, good government, liberty and gender-relations as ‘radical’, then, is to miss something vital in his outlook and proposals. As Persky rightly notes, this attitude is particularly evident in Mill’s writing on property and capitalism.⁷ Mill saw both property and *laissez-faire* capitalism as ‘provisional’,⁸ and thus his endorsement of capitalism (where he makes it at all) is necessarily temporary.⁹

Persky’s key focus is on Mill’s radical political economy. However, a key strength of *The Political Economy of Progress* is how Persky ties Mill’s view of contemporary institutions as ‘provisional’ and ‘temporary’ to his philosophy of history. In particular, Persky’s work is illuminating on how Mill not only saw technological and economic progress as being conditioned by, and dependent on, the level of knowledge in a society, but also on more normative elements, such as people’s underlying concepts of justice.¹⁰ Others have also engaged with how Mill adopted Comte’s tripartite view of history (moving from the theological stage into the metaphysical, and finally to the positive, stage), and charted the impact of the Saint-Simonian view of history moving between ‘organic’ and ‘critical’ ages,¹¹ but Persky’s account is particularly interesting because he focuses on the moral element of Mill’s philosophy of history. He brings to the

and workplace organization. In contrast to this stereotypical view of ‘radicalism’, Mill was generally anti-revolutionary, though even this is more complex and nuanced than usually thought – see McCabe, ‘All of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’, which is capable of being realised’: John Stuart Mill on “Legitimate Socialism” and the 1848 Revolutions in Paris’, *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger* (forthcoming).

⁷Persky, *Political Economy*, pp. 72–151.

⁸Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 239. Here, as in other areas of the book, the arguments of *Political Economy* could be usefully bolstered by reference to the *Autobiography*.

⁹Persky, *Political Economy*, pp. 72–148.

¹⁰Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 158. Persky says Mill adopted Condorcet’s ‘viewpoint’, seeing ‘the long story of history as one of progress’, and that he also adopted Comte’s ‘fundamental explanation for that progress as pivoting on periods of intellectual speculation’ (or, in the Saint-Simonian phrase, critical ages). Although acknowledging that Marx ‘was ... a materialist’, Persky goes on to argue that ‘the materialist view is not that different from that of Mill’s’: ‘[a]t first glance, Mill seems to have endorsed an idealistic notion of progress. But his theory might reasonably be described from a Marxist view as incomplete, rather than wrong; this is because ‘Mill gives us little or no clue as to the explanation for the period of widened intellectual speculation ... However, a hypothesis along these lines might be drawn from Marx’ (Persky, *Political Economy*, p.158). I agree that it *might be*. And if Persky’s point is to persuade Marxists that Mill’s view of history is merely ‘deficient’ rather than ‘wrong’, and Marxists can embrace him as a fellow-radical, then maybe this is a warranted reading of Mill’s view. But, in terms of both Mill’s and Marx’s own understanding of their views, I think there are significant differences, which may not be rooted so much in a distinction between materialism and idealism, but in whether or not they adopt a dialectical approach. (This is also the root of my disagreement with Persky over whether Mill has a Marxist conception of alienation and species-being, though I agree he was very critical of the current working conditions of labourers.)

¹¹The two views are connected, and when Mill first came into contact with Comte, Comte was identifying himself with the Saint-Simonians.

fore Mill's *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, where Mill expresses the hope that people would 'develop a more moral and social view of ... work'.¹² Persky reminds us that Mill felt:

Comte created an idea of 'great beauty and grandeur' when he 'encouraged us 'to regard working for the benefit of others as a good in itself ... [W]e should desire it for its own sake, and not for the sake of remuneration, which cannot justly be claimed for doing what we like: that the proper return for a service to society is the gratitude of society'.¹³

To this 'opinion', Mill added, 'we entirely subscribe'.¹⁴

This links with a further useful insight presented by Persky, into Mill's view of 'the progress of justice'.¹⁵ One element of Mill's radical outlook, on this view, is that he saw even contemporary notions of justice as 'provisional'. That is, Mill had a non-provisional commitment to the idea that '[t]he equal claim of everybody to happiness ... involves an equal claim to all the means of happiness', but a more 'provisional' view as to what this entailed in different periods of history, adding to this commitment the proviso, 'in so far as the inevitable conditions of human life, and the general interest, in which that of every individual is included, set limits to the maxim'.¹⁶ Still, though recognizing 'social limits on egalitarianism', Persky rightly points out, 'the key Milleian utilitarian insight into justice is that those social limits are themselves historical entities, subject to material and social progress. They are matters of "expediency" [in Mill's terminology] and not of principle'.¹⁷ Expediency 'is conditional on historically changing conditions', but equality remains 'objectively' just, even if not achievable.¹⁸ As Mill puts it, 'all social inequalities which have ceased to be considered expedient, assume the character not of simply inexpediency, but of injustice, and appear so tyrannical that people are apt to wonder how they ever could have been tolerated'.¹⁹

Persky rightly points out that Mill has in mind economic inequalities, not just legal ones.²⁰ Mill uses the phrase 'accident' in several places to refer to the kind of unjustified inequalities he wants to see eradicated – e.g. 'accident of birth'.²¹ Persky argues that Mill was a luck-egalitarian, seeing 'Progress' as 'allow[ing] a temporal ordering in the

¹²Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 98.

¹³Persky, *Political Economy*, citing Mill (himself parsing Comte) in J. S. Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, CW X (Toronto, 1969), pp. 341–2. Persky references the 1866 (London: N. Trübner) edition: the CW edition gives 1865 as the date for first publication, as two articles in *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, with the Trübner edition being the first time they were published together as one manuscript.

¹⁴Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 98, citing Mill, *Auguste Comte*, p. 342.

¹⁵See Persky, *Political Economy*, pp. 207–14.

¹⁶Mill, *Utilitarianism*, cited Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 207.

¹⁷Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 207.

¹⁸Persky, *Political Economy*. For more on the link between 'real' justice and achievability, see McCabe, '“Navigating by the North Star”: The Role of the “Ideal” in J. S. Mill's View of “Utopian” Schemes and the Possibilities of Social Transformation', *Utilitas*, <<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/utilitas/article/navigating-by-the-north-star-the-role-of-the-ideal-in-john-stuart-mills-view-of-utopian-schemes-and-the-possibilities-of-social-transformation/C7C299E0208DFEE9543D61BC75FE96BA>> (2019).

¹⁹Mill, *Utilitarianism*, cited in Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 208.

²⁰Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 208.

²¹Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 239.

historical movement toward the taming of luck'.²² I agree that Mill saw 'accident[s] of birth' as being a form of luck which had no relevance to justice, and also that his critique of, for instance, the 'aristocracies of colour, race, and sex'²³ could be read as instances of 'brute luck' in modern luck-egalitarian parlance. Moreover, one might see Mill's critiques of 'proportioning of remuneration to work done', even if currently 'highly expedient', as luck-egalitarian because he writes that such proportioning is:

really just, only in so far as the more or less of the work is a matter of choice: when it depends on natural difference of strength or capacity, this principle of remuneration is in itself an injustice: it is giving to those who have; assigning most to those who are already most favoured by nature.²⁴

That is, one might read this passage as suggesting that option luck is an acceptable basis for inequality of outcome/remuneration, but not brute luck. Still, I am not convinced that luck-egalitarianism is the best view of Mill's egalitarianism. In the main this is because I think there is something more relational in Mill's account of justice and equality, as the line about our motivations for working which Persky himself cites (see above) shows.²⁵ This said, it is both important, and one of the many virtues of Persky's book, that he details and emphasizes Mill's commitment to egalitarianism, and shows its consistency throughout Mill's life (sometimes masked by his differentiation between the just and the expedient), having its roots in Bentham's utilitarianism.²⁶

Mill's radicalism, then, both entailed a view that contemporary notions of justice might be 'provisional' (though expedient), and a deep-rooted egalitarianism.²⁷ This, in turn, entailed a commitment to root-and-branch reform, and comprehensive transformation, of existing social, political and economic institutions, including property, class-relations, gender-relations, working conditions, political institutions, the law, religion, the family, and education (among others). Mill's view of what was achievable – and desirable – in terms of both contemporary reform and the possibilities of human society, changed over his lifetime in response to contemporary economic, political and intellectual ideas and reforms.²⁸ Most obviously, as he charts in his *Autobiography*, he started life as a committed Benthamite 'philosophic-radical'; lost some of this faith during his mental 'crisis', exploring other forms of radicalism (including what might seem like an oxymoron – conservative radicalism, associated with Carlyle and Coleridge); and finally came, as he puts it, 'under the general designation of Socialist'.²⁹

Persky does not use this term for Mill's radicalism, separating out the question of 'socialism' from that of Mill's radical political economy of progress; acknowledging only that 'towards the end of his life he moved toward a cautious socialism';³⁰ and

²²Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 209.

²³Mill, *Utilitarianism*, cited in Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 208.

²⁴J. S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, CW II (Toronto, 1963), p. 210.

²⁵For more on this, see the article by Piers Norris Turner in this issue.

²⁶See Persky, *Political Economy*, pp. 26–42.

²⁷See also McCabe, 'Navigating by the North Star'.

²⁸See McCabe, 'Navigating by the North Star'.

²⁹Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 239.

³⁰Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 75. In conversation at the PPE Society Conference, Persky was generous in acknowledging that, as he did not mean only that Mill moved towards socialism around the time of writing *Chapters on Socialism*, but during the period in which he wrote the first edition(s) of *Principles*,

treating the issue of Mill's socialism in a short 'note' at the end of Part 2, *after* a discussion of 'Cooperatives, Unions and Economic Democracy',³¹ the first and last of which are core elements of Mill's socialism.³² He does say that Mill 'viewed his endorsement of workers' cooperatives as a component, perhaps the chief component, of his socialism', and that Mill 'welcomed with the greatest pleasure and interest all socialistic experiments' and 'identifi[ed] ... cooperatives with socialism'.³³ Persky also rightly notes that Mill thought socialism could be brought into being incrementally and via the expansion of small-scale experiments as those proved feasible and desirable, rather than through violent, immediate, wholesale revolutionary action; and that Mill's socialism was decentralized and involved 'competition' of some kind between cooperatives, rather than being centrally planned; and was intended to come into being within the existing system of private property, transforming 'transitional' capitalism from within.³⁴ Moreover, he engages in detail in Part 3 ('Echoes') with Mill's connection to and influence on Marx, the Fabians, and Rawls's understanding of 'liberal socialism', making socialism a core element of the book.³⁵ Lastly, Persky provides an interesting engagement with the question of whether Mill might have approved of European (and particularly Scandinavian) social democracy.³⁶ Still, he does not identify Mill's radical political economy with socialism.

'towards the end of his life' was perhaps a little mean (as Mill was hardly either old or approaching death at 42).

³¹See Persky, *Political Economy*, pp. 148–51.

³²See, for instance, Bruce Baum, 'J. S. Mill and Liberal Socialism', *J. S. Mill's Political Thought: A Bicentennial Reassessment*, ed. Nadia Urbinai and Alex Zakaras (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 98–123; 'J. S. Mill on Freedom and Power', *Polity* 31/2 (1998), pp. 187–216; and 'J. S. Mill's Conception of Economic Freedom', *History of Political Thought* 20/3 (1999), pp. 494–530; Claey's, *Mill and Paternalism*, pp. 123–72; Helen McCabe, 'Mill and Socialism: A Reply to Capaldi', *The Tocqueville Review*, 33/1 (2012), pp. 145–64; 'John Stuart Mill's Analysis of Capitalism and the Road to Socialism', *A New Social Question: Capitalism, Socialism and Utopia*, ed. Casey Harrison (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 8–22; 'John Stuart Mill and Fourierism: "Association", "Friendly Rivalry" and Distributive Justice', *Global Intellectual History* 4/1 (2018), pp. 35–61, and 'Navigating by the North Star'; and Wendy Sarvasy, 'A Reconsideration of the Development and Structure of John Stuart Mill's Socialism', *The Western Political Quarterly* 38/2 (1985), pp. 312–33 and 'J. S. Mill's Theory of Democracy for a Period of Transition between Capitalism and Socialism', *Polity* 16/4 (1984), pp. 567–87.

³³Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 149.

³⁴Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 149.

³⁵A real strength of the book is the section in 'Echoes' on the similarity between Marx's and Mill's economics (despite everything Marx does to deny it). Following Cohen, Persky convincingly traces Marx's 'wilful misreading' of Mill on the laws of production and distribution; Mill's Ricardian labour theory of value; and their similar views regarding the falling rate of profit and capitalist business cycles. He offers some very interesting suggestions regarding *why* Marx was so keen not only to deny there was any similarity in their thinking, but to denigrate Mill's thinking entirely. First, because Mill's analysis was so close to Marx's own, which often put Marx on the attack. Second, because Marx sees Mill as bourgeois, and wants to show bourgeois intellectualism as a 'revolutionary' force is spent. Third, because he sees Mill as endorsing a cooperative form of socialism with which Marx fundamentally disagrees. In this case, the annoyance *both* seems to be that Mill is not 'of' the proletariat, *and* that Mill, in endorsing cooperation, is either wittingly or unwittingly merely furthering his own class interest in maintaining capitalism.

³⁶Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 153. Persky's view is that Mill would have preferred social democracy of this kind to 'more traditionally-Marxist centrally-planned states'. For further support, Persky might point to the long sections in *Principles* where Mill justifies government – and particularly local-government – interventions in the market, as well as his nuanced position on state-funded, and state-provided, education. Even so, Persky is right to note that 'Government could be supportive' of this transition, 'in a number of

Because of this, I will focus on Mill and socialism (and Mill's socialism) in the rest of this piece, an important element of understanding which is to recognize, as part of his utilitarianism, his fundamental commitment to egalitarianism (and the 'provisional' nature of expediency) and to progress, as well as to 'the free development of individuality' (while also noting the fundamental reforms of the economy and particularly the workplace that *that* commitment led him to endorse).³⁷ It also necessitates further engagement with Mill's commitment to 'fraternity' or harmony, hinted at in the passages from *Comte* quoted by Persky. This forms an important element not only of Mill's political and social account of how society will sustainably, peacefully and spontaneously transform into socialism, but also of his political-economic account, which explains how people will be motivated to work in, as well as for, a socialist future.

II. Socialism

Persky rightly emphasizes that Mill saw *laissez-faire* capitalism as 'a transitional stage in social evolution' rather than 'as the final achievement of progress'.³⁸ This helpfully challenges most preconceived notions of Mill as a 'classical' *laissez-faire* liberal in economics and in politics.³⁹ Central to this view of capitalism was an underlying view of private property as similarly 'transitional'.⁴⁰ Mill's *normative* critique of capitalism arises from his egalitarianism – a critique which developed over his lifetime (as, in his youth, he saw institutions we would now consider 'capitalist', plus some not-traditionally-capitalist taxation practices, mainly on inheritance, as the last word in social reform).⁴¹ A core element of his critique of capitalism was a normative critique of class structures and interaction as unfair, unjust, and bad for utility. Mill complained that the current unjust structures did not reward workers fairly for their labour. '[T]he produce of labour', 'as we now see it', was:

apportioned ... almost in an inverse ratio to the labour – the largest portions to those who have never worked at all, the next largest to those whose work is almost nominal, and so in a descending scale, the remuneration dwindling as the work grows harder and more disagreeable, until the most fatiguing and exhausting

ways, but is neither the centre of the effort nor the driving force', because 'Mill asserted that the freedom achieved and expanded through the political process is sufficient to begin a new transformation of the economy and society from the bottom up' (Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 74). Moreover, the reasons why Mill is cautious of governmental action in the economy, and supports cooperative socialism, which are grounded in concerns around independence, self-reliance (cooperation was called by many campaigners, including George Jacob Holyoake, whom Mill knew quite well, 'self-help') and the working classes, in particular, taking responsibility for themselves and their well-being, signal that we ought to be cautious in thinking he would embrace European-style welfare states.

³⁷For much more on these (and harmony) being the essential elements of Mill's mature 'radicalism', see McCabe, 'The Many-Sided Radicalism of Mill'.

³⁸Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 74.

³⁹Or, as William Stafford puts it, as a 'paradigmatic liberal' in both politics and economics: Stafford, 'How can a Paradigmatic Liberal Call Himself a Socialist? The Case of John Stuart Mill', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 3/3 (1998), pp. 325–45.

⁴⁰For Persky's excellent account of utilitarian views regarding property, and how Mill adopted, and adapted, them, see Persky, *Political Economy*, pp. 55–71. On the 'transitional' nature of capitalism, see also McCabe, 'Mill's Analysis of Capitalism and the Road to Socialism', pp. 8–22 and 'Navigating by the North Star'.

⁴¹Persky, *Political Economy*, pp. 55–109.

bodily labour cannot count with certainty on being able to earn even the necessities of life.⁴²

As noted above, ‘accidents of birth’ led to people receiving unfair shares in the product of labour generated by all the workers in society. Moreover, the economic system both exacerbated these ‘accidents’ (e.g. people who inherit capital in a capitalist system do better, such that ‘the rule that they who do not work shall not eat’ is only applied to ‘the paupers’ instead of ‘impartially to all’⁴³) and structured rewards in a non-ideal fashion. Mill writes, ‘[t]he rough method of settling the labourer’s share of the produce by the competition of the market, may represent a practical necessity, but certainly not a moral ideal’.⁴⁴ ‘Its defence’, he continues, ‘that civilisation has not hitherto been equal to organising anything better than this first rude approach to an equitable distribution ... in no way affect[s]’ ‘the true moral and social idea of Labour’.⁴⁵

What is more, ‘[p]rivate property’, Mill writes, ‘in every defence made of it, is supposed to mean, the guarantee to individuals of the fruits of their own labour and abstinence’.⁴⁶ Though this is not the same as a guarantee of equality, Mill calls it ‘an equitable principle’ of ‘proportion between remuneration and exertion’, whereby the more the extortion, the higher the share of the product of that exertion. This does not lead to equality of outcome, and elsewhere – as noted – Mill criticizes this as not being ‘really just’ where – at least – the difference in work done is caused by superior strength or talent, rather than choice. But it is an egalitarian principle (even if a rough one), whereby equal exertion should result in equal reward.

Mill expressly notes: ‘[t]hat all should indeed start on perfectly equal terms, is inconsistent with any law of private property’ – that is, this system cannot result in equality of outcome (nor, therefore, equality of starting position for the next generation, if we allow any kinds of inheritance of property). But, he says, respect for the guarantee of the fruit of one’s *own* labour might approximate justice, or as much justice as it is currently possible to attain, given the contemporary moral state of humanity.⁴⁷

However, contemporary capitalism cannot even claim this much. First, under contemporary capitalism, many people do not receive the fruit of their own labours, while others receive ‘the fruits of the labour and abstinence of others, transmitted to them without any merit or exertion of their own’, which ‘is not of the essence of the institution, but a mere incidental consequence, which, when it reaches a certain height, does not promote, but conflicts with, the ends which render private property legitimate’.⁴⁸ That is, it ‘conflicts with’ an ‘equitable principle, or proportion between remuneration and exertion, on which in every vindication of it [i.e. private property] that will bear the light, it is assumed to be grounded’.⁴⁹ This ‘equitable proportion’ is not only not ensured by contemporary capitalism, but basically turned on its head, with ‘the produce of labour ... apportioned ... almost in an inverse ratio to the labour’ done.⁵⁰

⁴²Mill, *Principles*, p. 207.

⁴³Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 239.

⁴⁴Mill, *Comte*, p. 341.

⁴⁵Mill, *Comte*, p. 341.

⁴⁶Mill, *Principles*, p. 208.

⁴⁷Mill, *Principles*, pp. 207–8.

⁴⁸Mill, *Principles*, p. 208.

⁴⁹Mill, *Principles*, p. 208.

⁵⁰Mill, *Principles*, p. 207.

Second, contemporary capitalism is not a system founded in order to achieve this kind of justice. Rather, that is, than being ‘the result ... of just partition, or acquisition by industry’, current property-holding (and property law) is the outcome ‘of conquest and violence: and notwithstanding what industry has been doing for many centuries to modify the work of force, the system still retains many and large traces of its origin’.⁵¹ Property has been allowed in ‘things which never ought to be property’.⁵² Property laws ‘have not held the balance fairly between human beings, but have heaped impediments upon some, to give advantage to others; they have purposely fostered inequalities, and prevented all from starting fair in the race’.⁵³ Rather than ameliorate, existing capitalist institutions ‘aggravate the inequality of chances arising from the natural working of the principle [of private property]’.⁵⁴ Legislation has tended to ‘the concentration of wealth’ rather than its ‘diffusion’.⁵⁵

In *Chapters on Socialism*, Mill furthers this position, noting that even if the ‘race’ in which capitalism makes people run was, in itself, fair, and people had indeed started from the same position, it is not true ‘that ... no one has any reason to complain’ that the ‘race’ provides the vast majority of workers with their ‘daily bread’, for it gives them nothing *but* their ‘daily bread ... and that often in insufficient quantity; almost always of inferior quality; and with no assurance of continuing to have it at all’.⁵⁶ He responds to those who say this is fair because ‘this hard lot ... befalls only those who are outstripped by others, from inferiority of energy or prudence’,⁵⁷ first by questioning if this is indeed true (given, as he has just noted, that this applies to almost all working people), and second by saying:

This, even were it true, would be a very small alleviation of the evil. If some Nero or Domitian were to require a hundred persons to run a race for their lives, on condition that the fifty or twenty who came in hindermost should be put to death, it would not be any diminution of the injustice that the strongest or nimblest would ... escape. The misery and the crime would be that any were put to death at all. So in the economy of society; if there be any who suffer physical privation or moral degradation, whose bodily necessities are either not satisfied or satisfied in a manner which only brutish creatures can be content with, this, though not necessarily the crime of society, is *pro tanto* a failure of the social arrangements.⁵⁸

He adds: ‘to assert as a mitigation of the evil that those who thus suffer are the weaker members of the community, morally or physically, is to add insult to misfortune’.⁵⁹ On the one hand, his reasoning for this is in line with a traditional utilitarian desire to minimize suffering as one way of maximizing happiness (understood as more pleasure over pain over time), and perhaps even reveals something of a paternalistic attitude towards

⁵¹ Mill, *Principles*, p. 207.

⁵² Mill, *Principles*, p. 207.

⁵³ Mill, *Principles*, p. 207.

⁵⁴ Mill, *Principles*, p. 207.

⁵⁵ Mill, *Principles*, p. 207.

⁵⁶ J. S. Mill, *Chapters on Socialism*, CW V (Toronto, 1967), p. 713.

⁵⁷ Mill, *Chapters*, p. 713.

⁵⁸ Mill, *Chapters*, p. 713.

⁵⁹ Mill, *Chapters*, p. 713.

those who suffer: '[i]s weakness a justification for suffering? Is it not, on the contrary, an irresistible claim upon every human being for protection against suffering?'⁶⁰

But the concern with *insulting* the 'weak' reveals more of a relational egalitarian position.⁶¹ Moreover, Mill recognizes that inequality remains unchallenged because people refuse to acknowledge relationships with others, or that people as remote from capitalists as workers might be owed the same sort of duties of justice as their own family. He asks: '[i]f the minds and feelings of the prosperous were in a right state, would they accept their prosperity if for the sake of it even one person near them was, for any other cause than voluntary fault, excluded from obtaining a desirable existence?'⁶² (Though here, too, the idea of 'voluntary fault' links to luck-egalitarianism.)

Overall, then, Mill makes multiple critiques of capitalism on egalitarian grounds, several of which – as he notes – echo the critiques of contemporary socialists. As well as this, Mill also criticized capitalism on the grounds of liberty. For instance, he writes:

[t]he generality of labourers ... have as little choice of occupation or freedom of locomotion, are practically as dependent on fixed rules and on the will of others, as they could be on any system short of actual slavery, to say nothing of the entire domestic subjection of one half the species.⁶³

He also endorsed more of contemporary socialist critiques of the efficiency of capitalism than one usually thinks, as well as criticizing contemporary ideas of *laissez-faire*.⁶⁴

Mill's answer to many of these criticisms of capitalism – and what he called his 'Utopia' in 1845 – was to 'heal the widening breach between those who toil and those who live on the produce of former toil' by 'raising the labourer from a mere receiver of hire – a mere bought instrument in the work of production, having no residuary interest in the work itself – to the position of being, in some sort, a partner in it'.⁶⁵ In 1845, he only speaks of profit-sharing, which he also details in the first edition of *Principles* (1848). In later editions, however (and in other relevant essays on economics), Mill endorses cooperation.⁶⁶ And, in Mill's period, cooperation was

⁶⁰Mill, *Chapters*, p. 713.

⁶¹Cf. Elizabeth Anderson, 'What is the Point of Equality?', *Ethics* 109 (1999), pp. 287–337. Though her argument – obviously – is against a Dworkinian form of inequality, and how she thinks the justification of such inequalities as he allows would be expressed to the least well-off, the point is applicable in the case outlined by Mill, where people are *also* justifying inequalities (though not of a Dworkinian nature), and in so doing adding insult to the injury already experienced by the people who – in the main – exert themselves most under, but receive the least from, capitalism.

⁶²Mill, *Chapters*, p. 713. Here, rather than Anderson, he prefigures, perhaps, more of a Cohenite concern with the *ethos* of justice (see G. A. Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (London, 2008)). In this sense, there is a connection to Marx's concept of alienated relations *between people* under capitalism, though I disagree with Persky's claim that Mill has a similar concept of species being to Marx (Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 157).

⁶³Mill, *Principles*, p. 209.

⁶⁴See McCabe, 'Mill's Analysis of Capitalism and the Road to Socialism', pp. 8–22.

⁶⁵J. S. Mill, *The Claims of Labour*, CW IV (Toronto, 1967), p. 382.

⁶⁶See, for instance, Mill, *Principles*, pp. 775–94. This said, it is worth noting that Mill implies in his *Autobiography* that both his and Taylor's views on socialism were held *before* 1848 (but downplayed in the first edition of *Principles*; Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 241). On this topic, Persky (following a familiar theme in Mill scholarship) gives Harriet Taylor an important role in Mill's transition to a greater endorsement of cooperation (and thus socialism), casting Taylor specifically as an Owenite. I am not sure this is

synonymous with, and was an extremely influential and famous form of, socialism – was, in fact, ‘the most important aspect of socialism’ in the period, for socialists were active in cooperative societies; socialists advocated cooperation; and cooperative societies declared their socialism.⁶⁷

Others have charted the political-philosophical reasons Mill gives in *Principles* for endorsing cooperation: as Baum argues, it is Mill’s attempt to democratize the economy, and transfer into people’s working lives his deeply held beliefs regarding freedom which are otherwise found in *Liberty*. (This is one reason it is no surprise we find passages almost identical to *Liberty* in *Principles*, first written a decade before.⁶⁸) Persky’s economic exposition of how Mill foresaw the transition to cooperation is a welcome addition to the usual, more political, account. In particular, it makes Mill’s account of the possible transition to cooperative socialism in *Principles* seem more predictive than normatively prescriptive, or merely expressing a preference.

Persky links Mill’s account of the transition to a cooperative (socialist) future with an excellent account of Mill’s ideas regarding ‘the stationary state’, or a state of no further growth, brought about by falling rates of profit (eventually to nothing).⁶⁹ He argues that:

As savings accumulated, as profit rates fell, as the economy moved toward the stationary state, Mill anticipated the reconstruction of the workplace – from a locus of mind-deadening exploitation to a rational and democratic institution well fitted for free, educated workers. Such a transition was at the very heart of Mill’s radical conception of progress.⁷⁰

Recognizing Mill’s belief in the likelihood of the economy approaching a stationary state might help add weight to his assertion that part of the transition to cooperation will involve capitalists choosing to invest in cooperatives, and ultimately choosing to

borne out in her work (it is Mill, after all, not Taylor, who cites Owen in their first pair of essays, both titled *On Marriage* (John Stuart Mill, *On Marriage*, CW XXI (Toronto, 1984), pp. 48–9) and Mill, as Persky notes, had a knowledge of, and engagement with, Owenites for almost twenty years before he met Taylor). Moreover, although Mill did endorse a form of cooperation, this was not a specifically *Owenite* form, but very much influenced by French thought, from Saint-Simon through to Louis Blanc. Mill met the Saint-Simonians before he met Taylor (as Persky rightly notes), but – again, contrary to thinking of her as an Owenite – Mill credits her with bringing home to him the truth of several elements of Saint-Simonism, not least the central (for Persky’s argument) difference between the laws of production and of distribution. Similarly, Persky describes as ‘generous’ Mill’s crediting of Taylor with co-authoring at least one key chapter of *Principles*, which seems to cast aspersions on the accuracy of Mill’s claim (which there are not very good grounds for doing). Yet this ignores the aforementioned importance of the distinction between production and distribution; Mill’s account of how she affected the ‘tone’ of *Principles*, even if not affecting the ‘scientific’ element; also the fact that Mill emphasized that it was Taylor who expressed the ‘two opposite theories respecting the proper condition of the labouring classes’ (Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 255), of dependence and independence, all of which are central to Persky’s own account of Mill’s radicalism. Similarly, Persky says we can ‘presume’ that ‘not a few of the ‘discussions’ Mill mentions regarding ‘the best Socialistic writers on the Continent’ ‘were with Harriet Taylor’, yet we don’t *need* merely to ‘presume’ this, as we have surviving correspondence where they ‘discuss’ and ‘mediate’ on precisely that (see Appendix G to *Principles*, pp. 1026–37).

⁶⁷Iorwerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830–1870* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 145.

⁶⁸See, for example, Mill, *Principles*, p. 209.

⁶⁹Persky, *Political Economy*, pp. 133, 145 and 148.

⁷⁰Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 133.

exchange their capital for annuities paid by the cooperatives, rather than asking for a return on their invested capital, and retaining rights of ownership over that capital. This helps explain how all capital, by an organic and spontaneous process, would become communally owned on Mill's account, which in turn destroys the current two-class system by getting rid of both privately owned capital and inheritance.⁷¹ If the rate of profit across the entire economy is falling, then cooperatives may look like an increasingly good investment, at least compared to privately owned firms. And perhaps, eventually, guaranteed annuities will look like better rewards for abstinence (which, as Persky rightly notes, Mill sees as the root cause of capital accumulations⁷²) than any return one might otherwise get on an investment.⁷³

This said, I think it would be a mistake to think Mill thought cooperation would *only* come about in a stationary state, as this seems to delay the democratic transformation of the economy into a very 'eventual' state. But Mill thought cooperation was available to people immediately (at least in industrialized countries) – it is other forms of socialism he casts as perhaps 'the ultimate' stage of human improvement,⁷⁴ and the stationary state, too, is something towards which we may inexorably be heading, but it is not something we are going to reach immediately.⁷⁵ However, it is not clear that Persky is committed to thinking that a cooperative future will only arrive once we have reached the stationary state: perhaps moving towards one will aid the achievement of the other, and vice versa.

As others have noted, cooperation would transform workers' lives (and utility) by allowing a much greater exercise, and development, of individuality in the workplace (and thus in a very substantial part of people's lives).⁷⁶ It would also transform social relations, doing away with class distinctions, by eradicating the difference between owner and worker, 'idle and industrious',⁷⁷ capitalist and proletarian (to employ language Mill does not use). It would achieve the aim of Mill's utopia, outlined above, making people 'partners' in work. Moreover, it would not merely make them 'partners' with their employers (but not receiving an equal share of the product of their labour), but partners with their fellow-workers, democratically determining the division of the product of labour, and the rules and regulations by which their working days were governed.⁷⁸

Mill felt that such experiences of democracy at the day-to-day, immediate level would form an excellent, and necessary, education in democracy both in the workplace and in national politics. This working experience, and particularly via the ability to determine, and live by, their own concepts of justice, was also important for generating the right kind of social sense, which in *Comte* and the *Autobiography* Mill likens to that

⁷¹See Mill, *Principles*, pp. 793–4. For more on the spontaneity of this process, see Dale E. Miller, 'Mill's "Socialism"', *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 2/2 (2003), pp. 213–28.

⁷²Persky, *Political Economy*, pp. 79–84.

⁷³Mill, *Principles*, pp. 793–4.

⁷⁴For example, Mill, *Autobiography*, pp. 199 and 239; *Principles*, pp. xciii and 214; and *Chapters*, pp. 749–50.

⁷⁵See McCabe, 'Navigating by the North Star'.

⁷⁶See, for instance, Baum, 'Mill and Liberal Socialism', pp. 98–123; 'Mill on Freedom and Power', pp. 187–216; and 'Mill's Conception of Economic Freedom', pp. 494–530; Claeys, *Mill and Paternalism*, pp. 123–72; and Sarvasy, 'Reconsideration of the Development and Structure of Mill's Socialism', pp. 312–33 and 'Mill's Theory of Democracy', pp. 567–87.

⁷⁷Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 239.

⁷⁸See Mill, *Principles*, pp. 769–94.

felt in the military ('in spite', as he says, 'of the anti-social character of its direct object', i.e. war), where people are motivated – even to the extent of sacrificing their own self-interest and, indeed, life – not by the thought of personal reward or remuneration, but by comradeship and, particularly, patriotism.⁷⁹ This Mill does not equate with nationalism (as the modern audience might) but with a care for one's fellow citizens which allowed one to weigh their interests more heavily than one's own, and actually to act in the greatest interest of the greatest number (of which one made one part, but did not count for more than one, in true utilitarian fashion).

This thought is linked to the fact that cooperatives could determine the principles of justice, which they applied to the division of their own product of labour (and would be part of a transformation of society such that all the social product of labour 'will be made by concert, on an acknowledged principle of justice'⁸⁰). Mill records how, initially, producer cooperatives founded by Blanc adopted Blancian principles of distribution or equal shares, but quickly abandoned them for piecework, as not all the workers were motivated to work once they knew their share of the product was assured whether they worked or not, and their colleagues were not willing to see them take a share of the product without having contributed a fair share of the labour.⁸¹

Mill's discussion of forms of socialism which allow for an unequal division of the product of labour (e.g. Saint-Simonism and Fourierism) and forms which insist on an equal division (which he calls 'communism', such as Owenism) provides some guide to the range of options he saw available to cooperatives.⁸² In turn, this helps us flesh out both Mill's concept of equality and the depth of his commitment to socialism.⁸³

As noted above, securing for the labourer the fruit of his or her own labour and abstinence has some claim to be 'just'. It can lead to something like rough equality, if care is taken to temper private property's general effect of tending towards accumulations of capital in fewer and fewer hands.⁸⁴ However, Mill mitigates this endorsement by saying this is only 'expedient' (even if 'highly' so) because it is the 'compromise with the selfish type of character formed by the present standard of morality, and fostered by the existing social institutions'. Thus, 'until education shall have been entirely regenerated, [it] is far more likely to prove immediately successful, than an attempt at a higher ideal'.⁸⁵ This shows Mill did not think such a principle of justice was the 'highest' (or even, necessarily, the highest we could attain) – instead, it was currently 'expedient'.⁸⁶

Earlier, Mill called 'equal shares' more just than the unequal ones (even ones 'grounded on some principle, or supposed principle, of justice or general expediency, and not, like so many of the existing social inequalities, dependent on accident alone') endorsed by Saint-Simon and Fourier. Then he calls 'from each according to

⁷⁹Mill, *Comte*, p. 341; Mill, *Autobiography*, pp. 239–41.

⁸⁰Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 239.

⁸¹Mill, *Principles*, p. 783.

⁸²Blanc provides something of a problem, for his endorsement of 'communist' principles, Mill says, is only as a transitional stage to the adoption of 'still higher standard of justice, that all should work according to their capacity, and receive according to their wants' (Mill, *Principles*, p. 203).

⁸³See also McCabe 'Navigating by the North Star'.

⁸⁴Mill, *Principles*, p. 208.

⁸⁵Mill, *Principles*, p. 208.

⁸⁶As Persky rightly notes, this does not mean that the 'expedient' isn't important to respect, as a fundamental element of security and justice, both core elements of utility.

his capacities, to each according to his wants' (or needs), which he associates with Blanc, a 'still higher' principle of justice.

Even this principle, then, might not be the 'highest' or 'truest' form of justice – it might still turn out only to be expedient when (if) a communist future in which we have implemented it dawns. But the 'lesser' principles are all 'only' species of expediency, and – as with all that is expedient – this expediency is rooted in specific social, historical, economic and political conditions, some of which we are already experiencing, some of which we are not.

With regard to Persky's argument that we should see Mill as a luck-egalitarian, Mill certainly *does* want to overcome the injustice of luck. Indeed, 'from each according to his capacities, to each according to his needs' is, in some sense, an extension of this: 'from each according to his wants' means our contributions can be meaningfully 'equal', no matter our talents (and the talented don't get, for instance, more leisure time simply by virtue of getting things done more easily or quickly than the less talented), and 'to each according to his needs' both mitigates bad (brute) luck, and ensures that reward is not unjustly affected by good luck. However, this principle does not justify inequalities via a concept of option luck, but – instead – 'wants' or needs. Moreover, Mill's project is something even more than just militating against luck, important though he sees that to be, because this Blancian (indeed, often thought of as Marxian) principle of justice is not just about luck. It is about a nuanced concept of equality, of both contributions and outcomes. As also noted above, it is *also* about a certain form of social relationship, where we are motivated to contribute what we can by recognition of each other's needs: 'cash' is no longer the 'nexus' of human relationships, but concern for each other's needs. We do not see 'our' fair share of the product of labour as being necessarily related to our output, but as being related to our needs.

Mill hints at this as an ideal future state, as Persky rightly notes when he emphasizes how Mill felt '[s]ociety was moving, however slowly, toward a point where people would "regard working for the benefit of others as a good in itself" and "associated this progressive development with the unfolding of justice for the greater number".⁸⁷ But this is a *socialist* concept of justice, and a *socialist* concept of motivation and social relationships. Persky seems to pull back from this, saying 'Mill was surely impressed by the achievements of market economics, and he hesitated at the more extreme claims of socialists'.⁸⁸ This is true, in terms both of their critiques of current capitalism, and in terms of some of their 'extreme' recipes for reform (not least, wholesale revolution with no plan for future institutions). He evidently also held out some hope for a 'perfected' form of capitalism, in which inequalities were mitigated as much as was possible consistent with the basic functioning of private property, proving to be expedient and a plausible choice *vis-à-vis* communism (whose problems, serious though they might be, Mill says are 'as dust in the balance' compared to the evils of contemporary capitalism⁸⁹). But it is not true that Mill 'hesitated' when it comes to endorsing or recognizing socialist principles of justice, *except* when such principles would be not only just, but expedient – and that, as Mill sees it, is not quite yet, for people do not currently have sufficient moral education to allow them to be motivated in the right ways.

⁸⁷Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 207.

⁸⁸Persky, *Political Economy*, p. 208.

⁸⁹Mill, *Principles*, p. 207.

Certainly, Mill 'looked for the cooperative movement to play a transformative role in facilitating the material, intellectual and moral development of the working-classes', but cooperation itself – or at least, cooperation as was successfully being practised in France and England at the time – was *also* transitional. It involved principles of justice which linked remuneration to effort, rather than the 'higher' principles of equality endorsed by Blanc. Indeed, as noted, Blanc's National Workshops had experimented with equal shares, and found them (currently) infeasible, adopting, instead, systems of remuneration which more closely linked remuneration to productivity. But these were early days of cooperation, and the society Mill sketches as 'the nearest approach to social justice, and the most beneficial ordering of industrial affairs for the universal good, which it is possible at present to foresee'⁹⁰ would be able to transcend these 'selfish' motivations and adopt 'still higher' principles of justice, achieving even more than the eradication of the moral, and remunerative, significance of luck.

As noted above, there is, for Mill, a strong connection between the 'height' of the principles of justice we can achieve and the extent to which we take seriously the moral claims of others. That is, for Mill, equality and fraternity are closely aligned. Indeed, Mill said that the 1848 revolution and the establishment of National Workshops represented 'all of "liberty, equality and fraternity" which is capable of being realised now, and ... prepare[s] the way for all which can be realised hereafter'.⁹¹ We see this in Mill's writing about ending class rivalry, the 'widening breach' between people; his comments regarding the mindset of those who benefit from inequalities mentioned above; and in his writing in *Comte* about how we need to 'regard working for the benefit of others as a good in itself, that we should desire it for its own sake, and not for the sake of remuneration' given 'that the moral claim of any one in regard to the provision for his personal wants, is not a question of *quid pro quo* in respect to his co-operation, but of how much the circumstances of society permit to be assigned to him, consistently with the just claims of others'.⁹²

This seems an important lacuna in Persky's argument, which focuses almost solely on equality, but something which would add grist to Persky's mill (pun intended). In particular, it helps show that Mill was not *only* about tinkering with some of the evident problems of capitalism, but about transforming it. It is not only the fundamental institutions of capitalism that Mill sees as changing radically in the future (e.g. property, inheritance, wage markets), but the relationships between people, and their own psychological motivations. This is also a key part of how we will actually achieve the greatest happiness of the greatest number in the future – in part by being motivated much more to *care* about that, rather than always acting in our own interests, and with careful institutional design organizing these individually interested actions into something which benefits the majority.

Of course, this emphasis also makes Mill's socialism clearer. He did have economic reasons for supporting socialism, as well as arguments founded in egalitarianism and liberty. But he also had 'fraternal' reasons for advocating socialism, and saw something important changing, under socialism, in the quality and organization of human relationships. Cooperation was one key mode by which such qualitative change could be brought about.

⁹⁰Mill, *Principles*, p. 794.

⁹¹J. S. Mill, Letter 531 (30 September 1848), *CW XIII* (Toronto, 1963), p. 739.

⁹²Mill, *Comte*, pp. 340–1.

One challenge to this thought might be Mill's evident concern with freedom and 'individuality', most obviously in *On Liberty*. But though Mill evidently recognized that communism (in particular) might create a 'tyrannical yoke' of public opinion and a society in which 'the absolute dependence of each on all, and surveillance of each by all', might 'grind all down into a tame uniformity of thoughts, feelings, and actions',⁹³ he did not see socialism as being necessarily inconsistent with 'the free development of individuality'.⁹⁴ In the *Autobiography*, he writes:

While we repudiated with the greatest energy the tyranny of society over the individual, we yet looked forward to a time ... when it should no longer either be, or be thought to be, impossible for human beings to exert themselves strenuously for benefits which were not to be exclusively their own, but to be shared with the society they belong to.⁹⁵

That is, if 'the minds and feelings' of everyone (not just the prosperous) 'were in the right state', people ought to be able freely to develop their individuality, but they should also be able to be motivated by concern over the interests of others, and work hard for benefits they will share (where this 'share', on an individual level, might also be quite small). This, evidently, was what Mill believed socialism might achieve, in his preferred form, and the two things (plus more distributive justice) were not mutually incompatible.⁹⁶

After all, the harm principle is aimed at protecting as wide a sphere of liberty as possible for people's self-regarding actions. Having such freedom is not in itself incompatible with fraternal feelings, particularly in a society which adopts the view expressed by the harm principle – that people should be left free to do as they see best so long as they are not causing harm to others. Mill recognizes that a socialist society might *not* hold such a view – but he does not think it impossible that a socialist society *could* adopt this view.

Thus, the harm principle would not be 'provisional', and would still have salience in a socialist society. This said, some of the instances of potential harm-causing which Mill thinks ought to be permitted, on balance, in *On Liberty*, might not exist in a society motivated by fraternity. For instance, Mill notes that some 'damage, or probability of damage, to the interests of others' is caused 'necessarily and therefore legitimately' by individuals 'pursuing a legitimate object'.⁹⁷ Expediency requires that we allow such cases in contemporary society, and the harm principle is not designed to prohibit them. However, Mill notes, '[s]uch oppositions of interest between individuals often arise from bad social institutions', which might well be eradicated in a socialist future.⁹⁸

Similarly, the harm principle allows for the coercion of people whose *inaction* is causing harm – Mill gives examples where we can rightfully compel action, including 'to give evidence in a court of justice, to bear [our] fair share in the common defence ... and to perform certain acts of individual beneficence, such as saving a fellow-creature's life, or

⁹³Mill, *Principles*, p. 209.

⁹⁴Mill, *Principles*, p. 209; John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, CW XVIII (Toronto, 1977), p. 261.

⁹⁵Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 239.

⁹⁶Indeed, in *Principles*, Mill says of this concern about a lack of freedom under communism that 'no doubt this, like all the other objections to Socialist schemes, is vastly exaggerated' (Mill, *Principles*, p. 209).

⁹⁷Mill, *Liberty*, p. 292.

⁹⁸Mill, *Liberty*, p. 293.

interposing to protect the defenceless against ill usage'.⁹⁹ If people were motivated by a due concern for other people's interests, and did not discount them in comparison to much less weighty interests of their own, then these inactions would be less frequent (as might be the ill-usage which we ought to protect others from in the first place). That is, more fraternal, more moral, motivations might make the harm principle obsolete, at least in some areas. Thus, this improved social feeling might actually lessen coercion, even in a society only justifying coercion on the grounds of the harm principle.

There is certainly a tension to be further explored in Mill's writing regarding the positive role he accords to public opinion (for instance, he sees the power of public opinion in communist societies to limit family size as a 'recommendation' of that scheme¹⁰⁰) and his mistrust of its power, and desire to protect people from it, in *On Liberty* (and *Principles*). It seems Mill thought public opinion could be harnessed to help achieve beneficial outcomes (e.g. controlling population size), even when we also needed to ensure that – in areas where its interference was *not* beneficial, of which, of course, he did not think the question of family size was one¹⁰¹ – it also needed to be protected against. And as the moral education of society continued, perhaps also people would recognize where pressure from public opinion was legitimate, and where not, internalizing the essence of the harm principle. That is, Mill's preferred socialist future would be one in which people did indeed 'fe[el] that the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of wellbeing: that it is not only a co-ordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilisation, instruction, education, culture, but is itself a necessary part and condition of all those things', as well as being capable of much more fellow-feeling than Mill currently diagnosed in society.¹⁰² Indeed, as noted above, his preferred form of socialism involved 'all of "liberty, equality and fraternity" which is capable of being realised now, and ... prepare[s] the way for all which can be realised hereafter'.¹⁰³

All in all, then, a socialism which was committed to equality and fraternity and also to Mill's idea of 'the free development of individuality' might not only be Mill's 'utopia', but one which would attain the Marxist goal of a society in which 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all', as well as embodying the ideal of 'from each according to his capacities, to each according to his needs'.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Overall, in *Political Economy*, Persky makes a significant and important contribution to thinking about Mill's political programme, and to bringing his political economy into a more central position in our understanding of that programme, Mill's oeuvre as a whole, and the focus of most Mill scholarship. He extends our understanding of Mill's radical political economy in important ways, and opens up several new lines of inquiry regarding Mill and Marx; Mill and Rawls; Mill and property-owning

⁹⁹Mill, *Liberty*, p. 225. See here also Mill's comments about people whose 'minds and feelings' are in 'a right state', seeing the weakness of others not as a justification for their suffering, but as 'an irresistible claim upon every human being for protection against [that] suffering' (Mill, *Chapters*, p. 713).

¹⁰⁰Mill, *Principles*, p. 206.

¹⁰¹For more on this, see Claeys, *Mill and Paternalism*, especially pp. 173–210.

¹⁰²Mill, *Liberty*, p. 261.

¹⁰³Mill, Letter 531, p. 739.

¹⁰⁴Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, in *Marx and Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 6 (London, 1976), p. 506.

democracy; Mill and luck egalitarianism; Mill and liberal socialism; and Mill's place in a 'canon' of modern radicalism, not all of which I have had time or space to engage with here. Emphasizing Mill's radicalism, from his radical inheritance through to his radical views *on* inheritance, helps us see the consistency of his views and political project. As I have argued above, however, this 'radicalism' was termed by Mill a species of 'qualified Socialism', and I think the socialist label ought to be used for it. This is not merely about labelling, though, but about understanding the depth and nuance of Mill's radicalism, and particularly those elements central to Persky's argument, concerning a radical egalitarianism; a commitment to restructuring work-relations; and the view of capitalism and private property as only 'transitional' or 'provisional' institutions.

Political Economy provides an excellent springboard for serious, scholarly reflection on Mill and Marx as radical, socialist and classical political economists; and for seeing Mill as a resource for modern left-liberals looking beyond Rawls for ideas regarding property-owning democracy, liberal socialism, 'market socialism' and cooperation. This said, as one last word, I think there needs to be more serious attention played to Harriet Taylor – especially as this book is exemplary in its recognition of her daughter, Helen Taylor – not least because Mill's lived, as well as expressed, feminism was a core part of his radicalism (and one in which he is ahead of both Marx and Rawls). A 'modern' radicalism which is not feminist, and which does not recognize the legacy of women in its canon, cannot achieve the political outcomes Persky wants for radical politics in the modern day.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵This article was first presented as a paper at the PPE Society Conference 2019. I am very grateful to Piers Norris Turner for organizing the 'author meets critics' panel, and to Joseph Persky for agreeing to participate. I would also like to acknowledge the generosity of the Hayek Fund for Scholars, which helped fund my attendance.