

5-2002

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The Boundaries of Liberalism in a Global Era:
A Critique of John Stuart Mill

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May 8, 2002

ABSTRACT

The following study examines three works of John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, *Utilitarianism*, and *Three Essays on Religion*, and their subsequent effects on liberalism. Comparing the notion on individual freedom espoused in *On Liberty* to the notion of the social welfare in *Utilitarianism*, this analysis posits that it is impossible for a political philosophy to have two ultimate ends. Thus, Mill's liberalism is inherently flawed. As this philosophy was the foundation of Mill's progressive vision for humanity that he discusses in his *Three Essays on Religion*, this vision becomes paradoxical as well. Contending that the neo-liberalist global economic order is the contemporary parallel for Mill's religion of humanity, this work further demonstrates how these philosophical flaws have spread to infect the core of globalization in the 21st century as well as their implications for future international relations.

INTRODUCTION

Liberalism is the core political theory in the United States of America. Not to claim that, over time, other theories have not influenced the American view, but simply that liberalism more closely resembles the American ideology than any other system of political thought. The main characteristic of liberalism is its emphasis on liberties. However, who the recipients of these freedoms are and the way in which these liberties are granted and/or restricted, varies a great degree amongst theorists, politicians, lawyers, and judges.

This study focuses primarily on contemporary Anglo-American liberalism, one of the main founders of which is John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Most of Mill's political writings are a response to his distaste for the English rule under which he lived. Perhaps this is why his works have flourished among Americans as opposed to Englishmen. Although Mill's name is synonymous with a kind of liberalism, "liberalism" is an umbrella term that encompasses many different theories that he is credited with founding or developing. Among these are libertarianism, egalitarianism, utilitarianism, positivism, humanism, altruism, progressivism, and materialism. Mill has also been credited as being one of the main founders of 20th century first amendment jurisprudence in the United States. One of his mentors, Jeremy Bentham, and he (both utilitarians), have also been credited as the co-founders of 20th century American legislative philosophy, utilitarianism.

But by far the most significant impact Mill has had on the American psyche was his emphasis on individual liberties. His campaign to increase individual liberties has spread over land and time. Mill's *On Liberty* is a cornerstone in modern American

political thought. The ideas expressed in this work reflect concepts in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, perhaps the most sacred of all American laws. Freedom of speech, expression, religion, and press are just some of the liberties granted in this Amendment. Every day in the contemporary American judicial system, lawyers battle viciously over the broad implications surrounding this national treasure. However, during Mill's time, these ideas were explored only in theory, never implemented in practice. Taken for granted by many in contemporary American life, these ideas were radical among the English. Perhaps this is why Mill and his colleagues were often referred to as the English radicals. Opponents, such as *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity* author James Fitzjames Stephens, felt that this type of liberty was unhealthy for a society aiming to progress. The theoretical debate between these two camps eventually grew to vividly symbolize the opposing views of liberals and conservatives.

While credit for the liberal American way obviously cannot solely be granted to Mill, but also to many who have followed his teachings and some which have not, the essence of his political thought is still vivid among democratic theorists. His profound writings still dominate democratic theory courses more than any other writer. The ability of his works to sustain two centuries of political conflicts speaks for itself. Not only have Mill's works enabled the United States to celebrate the longest current constitution in the world, but they have also evolved to characterize the necessities of civilized political engagement in the 21st century. Democracy has surfaced in countries on every continent on Earth, becoming the fundamental building block for sustainable international relations.

Neo-liberalism, an extreme version of free-market capitalism and a descendant of Mill's individualism, represents the current liberal view on the economic landscape.

Neo-liberal capitalism is the dominant form of trade and commerce in the world and is the system of choice in the newly, emerging international, economic framework. Both old liberalism and neo-liberalism are founded on the principle that aggregate economic growth leads to a trickling down effect that benefits all participating individuals. However, old liberalism was rooted in a Puritan social philosophy. Mill's libertarian philosophies led old liberalism to neo-liberalism, a moral shift that granted considerably more individual freedom to those in the economic sphere. Once again, a Millian idea was adopted by American leadership and spread to the corners of the globe. Generally speaking, the 20th century global system of political economy was strongly shaped by the thoughts and writings of John Stuart Mill.

How have Mill's political theories grown to characterize the American ideology and the emerging the global political-economic ideology as well? What is at the core of a system of thought that has grown exponentially over time? Have Mill's theories evolved as he thought they would? What are the drawbacks to Mill's theories? Can these be rectified by minor adjustments or are they indicative of larger, theoretical paradoxes that are solved only through alternative political theories? Are people happier than ever and will the continued evolution of Mill's theories grant increasing amounts of both happiness and leisure for the global polity? This study aims to deconstruct Mill's ideology to assess whether or not his ideas have led and, if allowed to keep evolving, will continue to lead to increased happiness for both individuals and society as a whole.

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Pentonville, London on May 20, 1806, John Stuart Mill spent his entire life pursuing academic aspirations. He tackled more subjects than perhaps any other thinker since Aristotle. His works span numerous, interconnected disciplines. It seems that as his interests became more interconnected, the more he applied the premise of his theories to other endeavors. An abstract philosopher by nature and training, he did not shy away from attempting to provide explanations for any dilemma that arose. The intensity of his pursuits and his willingness to take on multiple tasks aimed at understanding the whole limited the amount of time and resources he was able to dedicate to any of the subordinate spokes on his philosophical wheel. What motivated Mill to abandon faith in the status quo and instead choose a life of rebellion by becoming a workaholic philosopher? To gain insight into the bewildering mind of Mill, it is imperative to examine the environment in which he was born and raised.

Mill grew up in 19th century Victorian England. The political culture of England at the time was undemocratic to say the least. Queen Victoria, in collaboration with the Church of England, had encouraged strict Puritanical standards to keep the citizenry in line with the missions of church and parliamentary leaders. Mill found this puritanical morality to be repressive and its abundance of etiquette standards very strict and limiting. Many of his thoughts on limiting the power of a central authority undoubtedly stem from his experiences under this moral authority. Although the majority of England at this time was suffering from the consequences of this regime, Mill's family was among the privileged. As a member of the upper class, Mill's writings are not reflection of the cries of an oppressed underclass. He prospered in an environment that was quite wealthy by

19th century Victorian England standards and as such, had little interaction with the impoverished realities confronting many Englishmen.

His father, James Mill, had definite ideas about almost everything, and especially about education. John Stuart Mill, born in 1806, was the extraordinary result. When he was three, he began to learn Greek. At age seven he had read most of the dialogues of Plato. The next year he began Latin and by the time he was twelve, had mastered geometry, algebra, and the differential calculus; written a Roman history, an Abridgement of the Ancient Universal History, a History of Holland, and a few verses. He took up logic and the work of Thomas Hobbes. At thirteen, he made a complete survey of all there was to be known in the field of political economy. It was a strange, and by our standards a dreadful, upbringing. The miracle is not that Mill subsequently produced great works, but that he managed to avoid a complete destruction of his personality (Heilbroner 126-7).

In 1822, he formed the Utilitarian Society of likeminded thinkers. In 1830, Mill first published his political views in a paper entitled the Examiner. By 1840, he was both the owner and editor of the London and Westminster Reviews. In 1848, he published his *Principles of Political Economy*. Three years later, he married Mrs. Harriet Hardy Taylor. She had a profound influence on Mill, which propelled him to become a proponent of women's rights. In 1858, Mill retired from the British East India Company, where he had worked since 1822. This was also the year in which his wife of seven years passed away.

It was upon the death of his wife that Mill particularly oriented towards his writing. Perhaps feeling uneasy about the uncertainty of life, he spent the remainder of

his years producing tangible works. In 1859, he published his most famous piece, *On Liberty*. Two years later, he published *Considerations on Representative Government*, and in 1863, he published *Utilitarianism*. In 1865, Mill was elected to parliament from Westminster as well as publishing two works, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* and *Auguste Comte and Positivism*. In 1868, Mill was defeated in his parliamentary re-election attempt and retired to Avignon. In 1869, Mill published *The Subjection of Women*. In 1873, Mill died in Avignon at the age of 67. That same year, his autobiography was released. One year later, his *Three Essays on Religion*, the culmination of his career, was also published.

Mill is unquestionably a modern political thinker. The moderns led political philosophy away from faith in God to faith in human control (Mansfield 33). According to modern political thinkers, the fundamental motive of human nature is fear. They view humanity's natural social condition as one of anarchy, where individuals are divorced from society and compete fiercely for scarce resources. Modern political thinkers that preceded Mill, such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau saw society as a system of contracted agreements among equal individuals. In their view, society is inherently artificial and unstable. Modern political thinkers are more concerned with individuals than society as a whole. Three of Mill's works: *On Liberty* (1859), *Utilitarianism* (1863), and *Three Essays on Religion* (1874) comprise the body of analysis for this study on modern political thought.

SUMMATION OF WORKS

Mill's *On Liberty* (1859) is a cornerstone in modern American political thought. The ideas expressed in this work are remarkably similar to the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Every day in the contemporary American judicial system, lawyers battle viciously over the broad implications surrounding this national treasure. Perhaps no other writing has influenced 20th Century political thought more than this work. Attempting to maximize potential benefits for both the individual and society, Mill's essay revolves around the harm principle, which for Mill was the ultimate determination in governing the proper allocation of state power and individual liberty.

In Mill's own words: "That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually and collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can rightfully be exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise. To justify that, the conduct from which it is desired to deter him, must be calculated to produce evil to someone else. The only part of conduct for any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign" (Wootton 610-611).

The harm principle applies not only to government legislation, but to social ethics as well. In this view, no social institution possesses the moral right to restrict individual behavior, such as victimless crimes. Contemporary examples of this logic are present in legal debates surrounding gambling, prostitution, and the legalization of recreational marijuana, requiring lawmakers to make subjective interpretations. The harm principle is undoubtedly Mill's reaction to the Victorian morality within which he was raised. Mill found this puritanical morality to be repressive and full of very strict moral standards, similar to how proponents of the legalization of victimless crimes view the current governmental apparatus.

On Liberty was held by Mill to be his most carefully composed work and the one most likely to be of enduring value. We can appreciate why Mill felt this way and judge more adequately of the significance of the book if we consider it in the context of his philosophy of history and his theory of the state. Believing in the progress of society from lower to higher stages of civilization, Mill saw the political culmination of this development as the emergence of a system of representative democracy. Thus he judged representative democracy to be the ideally best polity, i.e., that form of government towards which mankind was progressing (Strauss and Cropsey 796).

Unlike social contract theorists such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, Mill did not believe there were common, natural laws derived from nature. Therefore, men have no need to consult natural or supernatural entities when forming laws, but can instead base them solely on human interactions. Drawing upon the struggle between liberty and authority that has characterized the evolution of political philosophy, Mill voiced concern over the tyranny of the majority. He believed in majority rule, but felt that the majority

had no right to restrict individual behavior except when the harm principle was violated. Intervention designed to protect individuals from harming themselves is not sufficient warrant. Some mechanism (later the 1st Amendment of the United States Constitution) must be present to protect the individual from the tyrannies of the majority and public opinion. Individuality is one of the key elements to happiness and citizens must be allowed to determine their own destiny.

Nevertheless, Mill did not see the emergence of representative democracy as the emergence of utopia. Not only was there an ever-present tendency toward retrogression which society had continually to struggle against, but equally dangerous was the tendency of the most idealistic and high-minded reform movements to harden into dogmatic systems which forced conformity and thereby inhibited future progress. Just as obedience and work were the main conditions of human progress at earlier stages of man's development, so in the civilized period, obedience and industriousness having been engrained, liberty becomes the condition for subsequent progress (Strauss and Cropsey 797). These thoughts would mark the dawn of Mill's progressivism, the notion that humanity will continue to evolve into higher states of intellectual and moral existence.

Stating that society should ensure absolute liberty of thought and discussion to all citizens, Mill wrote of the tremendous benefits society would reap. Mill claimed that when opinions are suppressed, one of those opinions might be true. To suppress the truth is to rob society. It also did not make sense to Mill to suppress those opinions that are known or thought to be known, false. He claimed that when you suppress falsehoods, you are deprived of the ability to see the truth in open competition with error. The

marketplace of ideas is what strengthens the truth. Mill believed that this was the key to social progress, a trend he found to be more valuable than custom and tradition.

When Mill published *Utilitarianism* in 1863, it became the definitive work for the evolving political identity of utilitarians. Utilitarianism says that the basic moral principle is that we ought to do whatever promotes the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Prior to Mill, Jeremy Bentham and the other English Radicals founded the term utilitarianism based on the principle of utility, later to be used for economic calculations in free-market capitalism. Striving to create a complex system of welfare economics based on mathematics, the early utilitarians believed that happiness could be quantified and measured based on units of utility. By using felicific calculus, they hoped to create a database of preference profiles capable of computing happiness and offering prescriptions as to how to maximize pleasure for society as a whole. Due to the limitations of implementing such a vast formula in reality, it was not until Mill released his piece that these ideas became cemented and began to flourish (Mill 140-142).

Mill's utilitarianism assumes a hedonistic theory of value. In his words: "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more requires to be said; in particular what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life on which this theory of morality is grounded—namely, that pleasure,

and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain (Mill 144-5).”

The only things of intrinsic worth are pleasure and the absence of pain, the two elements in calculating happiness. However, not all pleasures and pains are the same. Higher pleasures are more valuable than lower ones and hence hold more utility. The same is true for painful actions. Determining which pleasures are more valuable than others depends on the judgments of the more experienced members of a society, which are subjective and open to different and sometimes controversial interpretations. Mill claims that acts should only be classified as right or wrong if the consequences of those acts are significant enough that society would like to see the person compelled to act in the preferred manner, implying punishments for those who do not. In applying the principle of utilitarianism, the happiness of every being counts equally (Mill 145-149).

Mill believes that humans are predisposed to prefer intellectual pleasures over sensual pleasures. Also, the principle of utility requires an assessment of actions consequences, assuming they are predictable, and not the motives of the person performing the act. Mill’s disregard for the motivations behind an act is in direct opposition to the theories of virtue promoted by the classical school of political thought. According to utilitarians, it is possible for the right thing to be done from a bad motive. The probability of right things resulting from bad motives is again a subjective venture that can vary among situations. For Mill, men should pursue acts as to produce the best

consequences possible. This approach of having the ends justify the means is prevalent in modern political thought (Mill 157-158).

Whereas his predecessors, especially Bentham, were labeled as act utilitarians, Mill was regarded as a rule utilitarian. Act utilitarians calculate the value of utility based on each, individual act. They see each act independently and view the true utilitarian as one who consciously assesses their motivations for each action. Mill, having the benefit of hindsight and understanding the difficulties involved in weighing the vast number of pros and cons before acting decisively, found this approach long-winded and unrealistic. Hence, as a rule utilitarian, he takes a broader perspective and instead, attempts to group acts more broadly. In this view, people should be evaluated in a more long-term fashion on their general tendencies towards similar acts (Mill 160-163).

In Chapter 3, Mill argues that humans have two motivations to promote general happiness. The first are external motivations that develop from our genuine intentions to please other humans and not to offend God. The second and more important motivation is internal. Mill argues that humans, over the course of a lifetime, develop an innate sense of duty towards community and fellow human beings. For Mill, the justification of this sense of duty is evident when humans experience pain, regret, or remorse when they commit acts that go against these feeling of duty and do not promote the general happiness. The development of this duty is guided by humans' instinctive feeling of unity towards achieving the general happiness of society. This proof of social duty for utilitarians is quite similar to that of justice for the ancient Greeks. The Greek political philosophers, who were of the classical school, felt that the proof of the existence of justice was the acknowledgement of feelings of injustice. In sum, since humans strive for

their own individual happiness, this proves that as a group, we ought to aim for the happiness of the group (Mill 167-176).

Mill's *Three Essays on Religion*, officially published in 1874 after his death, marks the culmination of his literary career. The essays are on nature, the utility of religion, and theism. These works are Mill's attempt to deal with the abstract. It is surprising that this was his last published work since the ideas expressed within the *Three Essays on Religion* provide the structure from which Mill's other works proceed. In fact, any theory on what man ought to do or how society ought to be constructed is inevitably tied to that philosopher's view of nature, religion, and immortality. It is as if Mill went in the reverse order carried out by most political theorists in that he first set up his views on the individual and social liberties that ought to be granted to man, and then went about the task of defining the abstract in terms consistent with his desires.

In his essay on Nature, Mill paints a cruel picture. Unlike many other philosophers, he does not feel that the ideal of human conduct is found in conforming to nature. "In sober truth, nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another are nature's every day performances. Killing, the most criminal act recognized by human laws, Nature does once to every being that lives; and in a large proportion of cases, after protracted tortures such as only the greatest monsters whom we read of ever purposely inflicted on their living fellow-creatures" (Mill 28-9). In this view, Nature does not present humans with morality, but rather immorality. It is brutal and malicious. As such, mankind must pursue a progressive course intended to conquer nature and prevent the atrocities so often ascribed to it. It is important to note that at the time of Mill's writing, technological discoveries, particularly in the field of medicine,

were allowing humans to survive many of nature's diseases. Perhaps these innovations lent support to Mill's notion of conquering and escaping nature (Mill 64-65).

His second essay on the utility of religion aims to lend insight as to how to proceed in reforming nature. Mill claims that government and traditional religion are incapable of changing human nature. Although an atheist at heart, Mill does see some value in the utility of religion. Despite being against natural law, common law, organized religion, and conventional morality, Mill is quite aware of the power these ideas have had on the masses. Thus, Mill prescribes that humans should institute a new form of religion, the religion of humanity, to replace these otherworldly religions. "The idealization of our earthly life, the cultivation of a high conception of what it may be made, is capable of supplying a poetry, and, in the best sense of the word, a religion, equally fitted to exalt the feelings, and (with the same aid from education) still better calculated to ennoble the conduct, than any belief respecting the unseen powers" (Mill 105).

Borrowing the phrase from his colleague Auguste Comte, Mill sees the religion of humanity as a way to keep people organized. Even though to Mill religion is false, it is useful. By substituting the religion of mankind, common people can have something to believe in and humanity as a whole can progress. "The essence of religion is the strong and earnest direction of the emotions and desires towards an ideal object, recognized as of the highest excellence, and as rightfully paramount over all selfish objects of desire. This condition is fulfilled by the Religion of Humanity in as eminent a degree, and in as high a sense, as by the supernatural religions even in their best manifestations, and far more so than in any of their others" (Mill 109).

In his third essay entitled *Theism*, Mill again contends that supernatural religion is false. He claims that God does not exist, but believing in Him can unite humanity. Due to the lack of something higher to worship, he contends that the religion of humanity will inevitably triumph. If set up intelligently, the religion of humanity can unite humans against nature and provide an apparatus from which all humans can cooperate and care for one another. “It must be allowed that, in the present state of our knowledge, the adaptations in Nature afford a large balance of probability in favor of creation by intelligence” (Mill 174). Mill’s views on the religion of humanity are why he is credited as being one of the founders of humanism, altruism, and progressivism. Humanism is a religion of humanity that does not account for supernatural deities and altruism is providing charity and compassion whenever needed to every living human. As humanism and altruism develop across society, humans will inevitably grow closer and more affectionate towards one another. For Mill and other progressives, this moral and intellectual progress is the aim of the religion of humanity.

“To me it seems that human life, small and confined as it is, and as considered merely in the present, it is likely to remain even when the progress of material and moral improvement may have freed it from the greater part of its present calamities, stands greatly in need of any wider range and greater height of aspiration for itself and its destination, which the exercise of imagination can yield to it without running counter to the evidence of fact; and that it is a part of wisdom to make the most of any, even small, probabilities on this subject, which furnish imagination with any footing to support itself upon” (Mill 245). Mill goes on to conclude that, “To do something during life, on even the humblest scale if nothing more is within reach, towards bringing this consummation

ever so little nearer, is the most animating and invigorating thought which can inspire a human creature; and that it is destined, with or without supernatural sanctions, to be the religion of the Future I can entertain no doubt” (Mill 257).

ANALYSIS

Mill's works were undoubtedly groundbreaking when he published them, especially given the context in which he produced them. Despite being labeled radical for the time, these works have evolved to characterize the dominant ideology of the newly forming global political system. The following critique aims to point out the shortfalls of these highly regarded works. As is typical with many philosophical works, what appears invincible in theory is often compromised in practice. This has often been the case with Mill's liberalism. The analysis will begin with a critique of Mill's view on individual liberty followed by a critique on his views on social liberty. The next section of the analysis attempts to show the theoretical restrictions in attempting to implement both forms of liberty within one polity. To conclude, this paper will analyze the extent to which Mill's most abstract visions of human progress have been fulfilled.

In stating his case for unbridled individual freedom in *On Liberty*, Mill posits that the harm principle is the ultimate determining factor in the allocation of individual freedom. Mill states the only time others are warranted in interfering with the freedoms of individuals is for self-protection or to prevent that individual from harming others. While this principle certainly carries theoretical merit, it is also quite subjective, especially if political advantages can be derived from alternative interpretations. For instance, Mill claims that in order to interfere with the liberties of an individual, their conduct must be judged to produce evil to others. As to what the boundaries of "evil" are, Mill makes no clear distinction. Who is qualified to assess this evil and what biases do they carry?

For example, it would appear that contemporary Millians would not find sufficient warrant to stop individuals from using drugs in the privacy of their homes. But if society, out of fear that this behavior might induce others to follow, calculates that this practice could do harm to others, will they not outlaw this freedom? In an integrated society, there are many “what ifs” that arise from granting individuals unpopular freedoms. These possibilities undoubtedly put pressures on democratically elected politicians and ultimately warp any objective notion that Mill may have held regarding a consistent interpretation of the harm principle.

With the benefit of hindsight, it appears that Mill was referring to threats to other’s basic survival rights when he constructed the harm principle. For instance, if a low-income father spends all of his families’ money on gambling, liquor, or prostitution and in turn deprives his wife and children of food and shelter, then he should certainly be punished. But if this father happens to be wealthy and can still afford to provide for his family in addition to paying for his vices, should he be punished as well? Here it is not so much the activities themselves, but how they affect the responsibilities of the individual. In situations like this, should gambling, drinking, and prostitution be outlawed simply because some people cannot handle the remainder of their responsibilities?

It is especially difficult to apply generalized principles to situations that do not threaten others’ basic survival rights. For instance, smoking may be a repulsive habit to many, but should an individual’s freedom to smoke be called into question? While second hand smoke does affect others, this is not a direct threat to survival the way that a drunk driver is. The point is that there is certainly a difference in the degrees of harm or

inconvenience that can potentially affect others by an individual's behavior. In addition, as the previous example points out, the same freedom affects different individuals in different ways. Inevitably, these decisions are subjective and open to external pressures. They are not made in a vacuum. If extremists on either end of the spectrum had the power to subjectively interpret the harm principle, Mill's altruistic vision will not be realized. The absence of these slippery slope realities is a striking flaw in *On Liberty*.

In *Utilitarianism*, Mill's thesis revolves around the principle of utility. This principle holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness and wrong in proportion as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. Actions are placed on a continuum where some right actions are better than others and some wrong actions are worse than others. Additionally, actions are only labeled as wrong, thereby punishable, when they are significant enough to compel society to restrict them. Although he does not believe in natural law, Mill believes that humans prefer intellectual pleasures over sensual pleasure and that this natural judgment motivates all individuals to behave in the proper manner.

Without restrictions on individual freedom, will individuals always prefer intellectual pleasures to sensual pleasures? Why shouldn't individuals do what's easiest? The advertising industry may not agree with Mill, as it is apparent that sensual advertisements are more attractive to viewers than intellectual advertisements. Have increased liberties allowed individuals to become less dependent on obedience and industriousness, the engrained elements in humanity that for Mill, preclude liberty in the civilized period? Who in society is qualified to distinguish among proportional actions

and rank them in a manner acceptable to all individuals? Also, who is qualified to determine whether or not an action is wrong enough to be punishable?

The principle of utility emphasizes the ends justifying the means approach that is common among modern political thought. For Mill, it is possible to do the right thing for the wrong reasons. In other words, the consequences of actions are more important than the motives behind those acts. Therefore, political elites should pursue agendas designed to produce the best results as possible. Mill assumes that the consequences of actions are foreseeable. By this logic, every political decision is a moral gamble due to the unpredictable nature of integrated society. Mill also does not indicate whether or not the best results are intended for individuals or society. The lack of this distinction in *Utilitarianism* opens the door for authoritative, political entrepreneurs to create interpretations favorable to their interests at society's expense.

Again, a philosophy that appears solid in theory is open to numerous subjective interpretations when turned over to the political elites. Whoever is given the responsibility to make these judgments is limited by the scope of their own experiences and values. To make moral generalizations based on these subjective opinions will inevitably affect individuals differently. In other words, the greatest good for the greatest number could be defined as majority rule or could be implemented based on individual politicians' opinions of what the greatest good should be. The greatest good for the greatest number is conveniently abstract, allowing Mill to escape defining whether the greatest good is individual or social liberty.

While many of the previous critiques may be viewed as impossible for any political thinker to solve unequivocally, they are designed to lend insight to the

fundamental dilemma in Mill's liberalism. If Mill had prioritized either individual liberty or social liberty at the expense of the other, his philosophy would have stood a much better chance of being implemented fairly. However, Mill knew that by making this distinction, he would have acknowledged that humanity is incapable of having both simultaneously, thus disproving either *On Liberty* or *Utilitarianism* in the process. While in many instances, these liberties do not conflict with one another, there are many times when they do. When these two liberties conflict with one another, pure solutions are impossible. The choice between whether a polity should prioritize individual liberty over social liberty or vice-versa is the fundamental dilemma in political theory.

At some point, the needs of society as a whole will conflict with the unbridled individual liberties. Allowing individual liberties to triumph over social liberties may provide temporary emotional relief from governmental intrusion, but if the trend continues unabated, it will lead society into a state of anarchy. Prioritizing social liberties, while more practical, is not an attractive platform for democratically elected politicians. The following section of analysis posits that this inherent dilemma in Mill's philosophy compels society to a perpetual state of confusion, effectively undermining the ultimate goal for Mill, continuous moral progress for humanity.

"On the one hand, Mill proposes as a self-evident truth that the individual's own happiness is the ultimate end at which inborn tendencies of human nature do, if fact, aim. On the other hand, he proposes what he calls "the general happiness" (i.e., the happiness of others) as the ultimate goal. Two ultimate goals, two final ends, on the face of it, are impossible. Recognizing the possibility of conflict between two such goals, Mill subordinates the individual's own happiness to the general happiness and allows himself

to slip into a prescriptive judgment that we should aim at the general happiness even if that does not also serve the purpose of procuring for ourselves our own individual happiness” (Adler 94).

Mill is unable to escape this problem of two ultimate ends. Individuals should supposedly seek their own happiness as the final goal, but if this happiness is subordinate to the social good, it is no longer individual liberty. Individual liberty is defined instead as a relationship to the social or common good. This is a fundamental violation of Mill’s thesis in *On Liberty*, where he argues for boundless individual freedom. The harm principle is only useful when one individual threatens another’s liberty. But what if this “common good” becomes a threat to individual liberty? What happens when the cultural norms contrast with individual notions of religion, politics, or economics? According to Mill, individuals should aim to please the social welfare and if they do not, then society must proceed anyway.

Inevitably, in a democracy, those responsible for crafting the vision of the social good (economists, clergy, political, military and business elites) will come up with a continually changing and compromised version of that at which society should aim. Depending on which parties or special interests have power at any given moment, the ultimate framework for a progressive society is variable. Therefore, this variable framework undoubtedly affects the degree to which individual liberties are stifled or allowed to flourish. It is also quite plausible that under the same political structure, some individuals will enjoy greater liberties than others. The establishment of a political structure that confines both individual and social liberties to circumstances is certainly an undesirable way to govern a progressive society.

Mill's notion of the common good is defined as the well being of the organized community. "The happiness that is common to all human individuals is the *bonum commune hominis*. The general, social welfare, the public good, the good of the community (*bonum commune communitatis*) is also a common good, but common in a different sense—not common because it is the same for all individuals, but common because all members of the community can participate in it. The problem Mill failed to solve can be solved only by making all these distinctions. The happiness of others depends upon the good of the community in which they live. Their participation in the common good enables them to obtain real goods that are a part of or means to their own individual happiness" (Adler 95).

Had Mill not prioritized the social welfare over individual liberties, his problem would not exist. As Aristotle clearly points out, the good of the organized community is founded on the cultivation of virtue in individuals. When virtuous individuals organize, the political structure that results will carry virtue as well. "Thus, there are not two ultimate goals, but only one. The general happiness, the happiness of others, is not an ultimate goal for the individual. He acts for it indirectly when, in acting for his own individual happiness, he also acts for the public common good that is not only a means to his own happiness, but also a means to the happiness of all others who participate in it" (Adler 95).

Since Mill did not address these distinctions, it is no wonder that he did not attach a moral obligation to the pursuit of individual happiness. Mill did not define happiness, as the Classical political philosophers did, as living in accordance with virtue. Classical political thinkers would undoubtedly disagree with Mill's lack of concern for normative

theories in exchange for pragmatic approaches and his subsequent disdain for moral prescriptions. According to Mill, “we are not under the obligation to pursue that which is rightly desired; we are left to calculate what means to employ in order to achieve the end that pleases us most. Its principles are principles of expediency and of results, not of right desire and of obligations to be fulfilled” (Adler 94).

Have Mill’s visions of a morally progressive social structure breeding a liberalized religion of mankind been realized? Without any normative standards for behavior, it does not follow that Mill’s political vision will lead to anything that could be considered morally progressive to Classical political philosophers. However, regarding a liberalized religion of mankind that denies the existence of supernatural entities and instead values expediency and sensual pleasure, Mill’s dreams have shown definite progress.

Twenty-first century global relations are defined first and foremost by economic relationships. The global economy is the primary engine fueling globalization, which with the aid of modern technologies, is accelerating at an unprecedented rate. The new global economic order, driven by American interest, is based on neo-liberalism. Neo-Liberalism is a set of economic policies that favor deregulation, the rule of the market, privatization, a reduced role for government, and elimination of the ideals of collective responsibility (Roddick 249). The core philosophies behind neo-liberalism have roots in Mill’s political philosophy. Mill’s view that we should aim to please the general happiness even if that does not also serve the purpose of promoting individual happiness is precisely the doctrine that the contemporary global economic order is based upon.

“According to the liberals, the purpose of international economic activity is to achieve the optimum or most efficient use of the world’s scarce resources and the maximization of economic growth and efficiency. Liberals are therefore primarily concerned with aggregate measures of economic performance such as the growth of GDP, trade, foreign investment, and per capita income. If the global level of foreign trade and investment are increasing, this is more important to the liberals than any relative gains and losses in trade and foreign investment among states” (Cohn 83). World economic output represents the general happiness and nation-state or local outputs symbolize individual happiness. Finally, Mill’s progressive vision of a religion of humanity has been realized.

But what happens when the general happiness is global in distance and constantly changing to benefit some at the expense of others? “Economic globalization creates wealth, but only for the elite who benefit from the surge of consolidations, mergers, global scale technology, and financial activity. The rising tide of free trade and globalization is supposed to “lift all boats,” and end poverty. But in the half century since this big push began, the world has more poverty than ever before, and the situation is getting worse. Though the U.S. is reaping the greatest benefits of globalization of any country, the benefits are not being shared. According to the Institute for Policy Studies, American CEO’s now earn 417 times the wages of factory workers they employ. Although unemployment in the U.S. is low, the average worker is now earning 10 percent less, adjusting for inflation, than he or she did in the early 1970’s. Globalization exacerbates this trend by setting workers against each other all over the world to keep wages low” (Roddick 62).

It seems that Mill's religion of humanity, neo-liberalist, economic globalization, is based on materialism rather than a progressive morality. It also appears that individuals who are not wealthy are forced to contribute to the general happiness (global economic output) even if it is not in their individual interests to do so. They must because they have no economic alternatives in an integrated global marketplace.

“Unlike the Cold War system, globalization has its own dominant culture, which is why it tends to be homogenizing to a certain degree. In previous eras this sort of cultural homogenization happened on a regional scale—the Romanization of Western Europe and the Mediterranean world, the Islamification of Central Asia, North Africa, Europe and the Middle East by the Arabs and later the Ottomans, or the Russification of Eastern and Central Europe and parts of Eurasia under the Soviets. Culturally speaking, globalization has tended to involve the spread (for better and for worse) of Americanization—from Big Macs to iMacs to Mickey Mouse” (Friedman 9). If the new global order is a human religion that rejects supernatural spirituality and is instead constructed around homogenized materialism, then the neo-liberal, predominantly mass media are the heads of the clergy that serve as the main catalyst for accelerated cultural integration.

“The global media provide the main vehicle for advertising corporate wares for sale, thereby facilitating corporate expansion into new nations, regions, and markets. On the other hand, the global media's news and entertainment provide an informational and ideological environment that helps sustain the political, economic, and moral basis for marketing goods and for having a profit-driven social order. In short, the global media are a necessary component of global capitalism and one of its defining features.”

(Herman and McChesney 10). Historically, the democratic press in the United States has assisted the citizenry in opposing oppressive policies. Are we to believe that contemporary media companies no longer care about public affairs if they conflict with neo-liberalist materialism?

“Since the early 1980’s there has been a dramatic restructuring of national media industries, along with the emergence of a genuinely global commercial media market. The newly developing global media system is dominated by three or four dozen large transnational corporations (TNC’s), with fewer than ten mostly U.S.-based media conglomerates towering over the global market. In addition to the centralization of media power, the major feature of the global media order is its thoroughgoing commercialism, and an associated marked decline in the relative importance of public broadcasting and the applicability of public service standards. Such a concentration of media power in organizations dependent on advertiser support and responsible primarily to shareholders is a clear and present danger to citizens’ participation in public affairs, understanding of public issues, and thus to the effective working of democracy.

Owner and advertiser domination give the commercial media a dual bias threatening the public sphere: they tend to be politically conservative and hostile to criticism of a status quo in which they are major beneficiaries; and they are concerned to provide a congenial media environment for advertising goods. This results in a preference for entertainment over controversy, serious political debate, and discussions and documentaries that dig deeply, inform, and challenge conventional opinion – that is, the media/advertisers’ complex prefers entertainment over cultivation of the public sphere.” (Herman and McChesney 1-7).

Despite the prevalent corporate culture belief that consolidation and deregulation increase financial performance (which is not disputed), the philosophical implications of a future where media oligopolies cooperatively dictate the terms of global information exchange, not to mention democratic values, should be a topic of great concern for any and all that consider themselves leaders. “Imperialism is when you physically occupy another people and force your ways upon them. Global arrogance is when your culture and economic clout are so powerful and widely diffused that you know that you don’t need to occupy other people to influence their lives. What bothers so many people about America today is not that we send our troops everywhere, but that we send our culture, values, economics, technologies, and lifestyles everywhere—whether or not we want to or others want them.” (Friedman 385).

Perhaps Mill’s vision of a religion of humanity with two ultimate ends was possible. Wealthy neo-liberals enjoy greater material happiness as the ‘general happiness’ (further global integration of neo-liberal economies), progresses. However, this system benefits the wealthy almost exclusively, not the greatest number that Mill proposed in *Utilitarianism* and contemporary neo-liberals might propagate. Additionally, it comes at the expense of individual liberty for all but the chosen few, who ironically remained chained to the material greed that prevents them from attaining what the classical political philosophers saw as the key to happiness: virtue.

CONCLUSION

John Stuart Mill is the political philosopher credited with liberalism, the dominant ideology in the United States. Its economic hybrid, neo-liberalism, is the defining philosophy of the new global economic order and also descendant from the writings of Mill. In *On Liberty*, Mill argues for unbridled individual freedom without government interference. In *Utilitarianism*, Mill argues that political theories should aim at providing the greatest good for the greatest number, in other words, to seek the general happiness. As Adler points out, two ultimate ends are impossible. Mill attempts to escape this dilemma by stating that if individual liberty and social liberty conflict, then social liberty should triumph at the expense of the individual. The problem with this argument is that it results in a society with a herd mentality.

In *Three Essays on Religion*, Mill condemns nature and organized religion as at best, misleading, and at worst, evil. He proposes that man unite against nature, reject supernatural entities and religions, and create a morally progressive religion of humanity. This religion of humanity, the logic follows, subordinates individual happiness to the general happiness. Applied to the contemporary global era, the neo-liberalist political system measures happiness based on economic efficiency. Thus, the new global economic order is the result of Mill's vision of a religion of mankind. The idea behind neo-liberalism is that if total global economic output increases, everyone will benefit.

On the contrary, however, everyone is not benefiting. This economic philosophy puts the economic well being of individuals below that of the general well being, or the gross global economic output. While total global output has increased under neo-liberalism, the evidence presented shows that it has benefited the wealthy at the expense

of the rest of humanity as well as at the expense of the environment. Additionally, instead of a morally progressive religion of mankind, neo-liberalism perpetuates a materially progressive religion of mankind where worth is measured by material gains, not spiritual virtue.

“As Herman Daly, the founder of ecological economics, observed, we are running the global economy as if we were holding a going-out-of-business sale and America bears a special responsibility. America’s prosperity is an illusion that comes at great cost both to Americans and to the world. It is a prosperity grounded in a cultural trance that alienates us from our spiritual nature and tricks our minds into using money rather than life as the measure of wealth and progress. America’s effort to export this self-destructive economic model to the world represents one of history’s great crimes against humanity and the earth” (Roddick 198).

The imperialistic nature of American neo-liberalism does not require physical occupation or military expansion. Rather, it needs only deregulatory economic policies and greedy elites that allow this moral cancer to spread unheeded across the globe, engulfing humanity in a morally regressive, interconnected system of global oppression. “It was never the Soviet Union but the United States itself that is the true revolutionary power. We believe that our institutions must confine all others to the ash heap of history. We lead an economic system that has effectively buried every other form of production and distribution—leaving great wealth and sometimes, great ruin in its wake. The cultural messages we transmit through Hollywood and McDonald’s go out across the world to capture and also undermine other societies. Unlike more traditional conquerors, we are not content merely to subdue others. We insist that they be like us. And of course

for their own good. We are the world's most relentless proselytizers. The world must be democratic. It must be capitalistic. It must be tied into the subversive messages of the World Wide Web. No wonder many feel threatened by what we represent." -- Historian Ronald Steel (Friedman 384).

Mill intended for his religion of humanity to spread across the earth and push more 'primitive' peoples into joining his church. However, with two ultimate ends to his political philosophy as well as the subordination of individual freedom to that of the social good, his flawed philosophy has not resulted in a morally progressive society, but exactly the opposite. Conducting global affairs in the coming generations is going to be increasingly difficult in a system that continues to ignore the value of spirituality and virtue and instead focuses on subjecting billions of people to wage slavery in order to accommodate the greed of the wealthy few.

"Gross National Product measures neither the health of our children, the quality of their education, nor the joy of their play. It measures neither the beauty of our poetry, nor the strength of our marriages. It is indifferent to the decency of our factories and the safety of our streets alike. It measures neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our wit nor our courage, neither our compassion nor our devotion to country. It measures everything in short, except that which makes life worth living, and it can tell us everything about our country except those things that make us proud to be part of it" – Robert Kennedy (Roddick 257). If the recent wave of terrorism is any indication, it does not appear that the world's individuals will continue to surrender their identities to spiritually void, oppressive economic policies that threaten their freedom of independence. A re-evaluation of the boundaries of Mill's liberalism is imperative if

global leaders aim to prevent the violent conflicts that are certain to surface in the neo-liberalist, global era.

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