Hayek on Mill

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It is perhaps an understatement to say that trying to understand F. A. Hayek's assessment of John Stuart Mill is a complicated matter. Hayek referred to Mill frequently. Sometimes, and particularly in *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), he praised him. What may surprise those who associate both Mill and Hayek with the classical liberal tradition is that more often, and this in writings that both preceded and followed publication of *The Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek criticized Mill. Moreover, the criticisms were not all of a piece, but focused on different aspects of Mill's work.

Part of the problem is that Mill, like Hayek, made so many different contributions: among those mentioned by Hayek were his *System of Logic* ([1843] 1973), the *Principles of Political Economy* ([1848] 1965), and of course *On Liberty* ([1859] 1977). In addition, Mill's own views evolved, sometimes rather dramatically, over time. Which Mill—the doctrinaire utilitarian, the romantic, the one impressed by Auguste Comte or the one who disavowed him, the Mill of the early or of the later editions of *The Principles*, the pre– or post–Harriet Taylor Mill—is the one whose ideas Hayek is examining? Furthermore, it was not just Mill's own thought, but

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the uses that others (perhaps especially those on the Left in England) made of it, that Hayek had occasion to respond to.

But this is not all. Complications arise not only due to the subject, Mill, but also due to his interpreter. Hayek referred to Mill at very different points in time, during which world events and Hayek's own purposes were correspondingly different. We might then expect, for example, that Hayek's references to Mill in his Abuse of Reason project in the early 1940s would emphasize different elements from those in his 1960 restatement of liberal principles in *The Constitution of Liberty*, and that these might differ yet again from his references during the cultural changes and social turmoil that characterized the later 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, although perhaps less dramatically than was the case for Mill, Hayek's own thinking also evolved through time. We might finally note that Hayek occasionally referred to Mill in addresses aimed at more popular audiences, and that this might also change his emphasis.

That Hayek became known as a Mill scholar, one who edited a volume of Mill's correspondence with Harriet Taylor, and whose own personal life in some ways mirrored that of Mill's (right down to the 1854–55 trip to Italy and Greece, which Hayek and his second wife duplicated one hundred years later), might be seen as adding additional complications, or opportunities, to any interpretive enterprise.

Having laid out the caveats, it is time to proceed. I will offer a roughly chronological account, and if there is a major emphasis in what follows, it is that an understanding of past interpretations of Mill, together with a sensitivity to Hayek's own particular project as he made reference to Mill, will be of considerable use in explaining Hayek's assessments.

Some Standard Interpretations of Mill

Except for a fifteen-month sojourn in the United States, F. A. Hayek spent most of the 1920s in Vienna. The trip to the States may have been important, however, in the development of Hayek's ideas about Mill. In reminiscences he recounted how his fondness for the British liberal tradition was formed when during "free evenings" he would read on his own:

> It was then that I discovered my sympathy with the British approach, a country I did not yet know but whose literature increasingly captivated me. It was this experience which, before I had ever set foot on English soil, converted me to a thoroughly English view on moral and political matters, which at once made me feel at home when I later first visited

> England three and a half years later. . . . In the sense of that Gladstonian liberalism, I am much more English than the English.[1]

Possibly even more important, Hayek sat in on Wesley Clair Mitchell's class, Types of Economic Theory, at Columbia. In his lectures, Mitchell (1967–69, 1:600) portrayed Mill as a great reformer,[2] and at times went even further in his characterization, stating for example, "Those who think of Mill merely as a political economist usually neglect Mill the socialist and enlarge upon technical aspects of his work that he valued less than his discovery that institutional arrangements are subject to social control." Indeed, from Mitchell's perspective, Mill was an exemplar for economists interested in reform:

> He was much more than an economist. . . . he followed in the footsteps of Bentham and was true to the tradition of the philosophical radicals. . . . If we are genuinely interested in economics as a social science that may be useful in building a better social organization than the world has yet produced, we can find no more instructive leader to study than Mill. (1:600–601)

When Hayek returned from America, he took a job as the director of the Austrian Institute for Research on the Business Cycle, a position that Ludwig von Mises had helped to set up. For the rest of the decade, Hayek regularly attended Mises's private seminar. In 1927 Mises published a book about the liberal tradition, *Liberalismus*, a translation of which was published by the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) in 1985.[3] In the appendix in a section on the literature of liberty, Mises ([1927] 1985, 195) wrote as follows about Mill:

1. F. A. Hayek, quoted on page 64 of a manuscript by W. W. Bartley III, titled "Inductive Base." Bartley was a student of Karl Popper's, for whom the "inductive base" was a set of empirical statements about the world. Bartley playfully titled his set of interviews with Hayek "Inductive Base" because they were the "facts" on which the biography he intended to write would be built. The "Inductive Base" interviews, which are not archived, were provided to me by Stephen Kresge. This and any subsequent quotations from unpublished material are used with the permission of the Hayek estate.

2. Mitchell 1967–69, edited by Joseph Dorfman, includes lecture notes stenographically recorded by a student as well as other materials that Dorfman collected. We cannot know, of course, whether Hayek heard the statements quoted in the text, but from the lectures he certainly would have gotten the idea that Mill helped to pave the way for later reform movements in England.

3. The book was originally translated into English in 1962 and published under the title *The Free and Prosperous Commonwealth*. The FEE edition, in a conscious attempt to "rescue" the name of liberalism, is titled *Liberalism in the Classical Tradition*.

> John Stuart Mill is an epigone of classical liberalism, and, especially in his later years, under the influence of his wife, full of feeble compromises. He slips slowly into socialism and is the originator of the thoughtless confounding of liberal and socialist ideas that led to the decline of English liberalism and to the undermining of the living standards of the English people. . . . Without a thorough study of Mill it is impossible to understand the events of the last two generations. For Mill is the great advocate of socialism. All the arguments that could be advanced in favor of socialism are elaborated by him with loving care. In comparison with Mill all other socialist writers—even Marx, Engels, and Lassalle—are scarcely of any importance.[4]

Looking carefully at Mises's (as usual, fairly provocative) prose, we see that at least four claims are made. First, despite his reputation in some quarters, Mill was only an imitator of the classical liberal tradition. Next, particularly in his later years and under the influence of his wife, he slipped closer to socialism. Third, he paved the way for the decline of English liberalism. And fourth, he was a great advocate of socialism.

I think that Hayek would have disagreed with Mises's first claim, for he often identified at least the early Mill as a real liberal. I also doubt that Hayek would have thought of Mill as the greatest advocate of socialism, more important than Marx and Engels, an assertion that without further argument seems simply bizarre.[5]

But Hayek probably *did* agree with the idea that Mill became more sympathetic to socialism under the influence of his wife, and that his "confounding" of socialist and liberal ideas helped lead England away from the classical liberal tradition. The source for the first claim, of course, was Mill's ([1873] 1981, 237) own *Autobiography*, where he noted that in the "third period" of his intellectual development his ideas evolved "hand in hand" with Harriet Taylor's.[6] It is there, too, that Mill stated that whereas in his youth he "was a democrat, but not the least of a Socialist," later and in concert with Taylor he came to a new view:

4. I found out about Mises's words about Mill in Légé 2008, 200. Légé's article is an excellent survey and analysis of the many things that Hayek had to say about Mill.

5. As we will see, a much more plausible claim would be that Mill was more important than Marx for the development of *British* socialism.

6. In an early draft of the autobiography he had put it even more strongly, writing, "The *Principles of Political Economy* and all subsequent writings belong to a third and different stage of my mental progress, which was essentially characterized by the predominating influence of my wife's intellect and character" (Mill [1873] 1981, 234).

> Our ideal of ultimate improvement went far beyond Democracy, and would class us decidedly under the general designation of Socialists. While we repudiated with the greatest energy that tyranny of society over the individual which most Socialistic systems are supposed to involve, we yet looked forward to a time when society will no longer be divided into the idle and the industrious; when the rule that they who do not work shall not eat, will be applied not to paupers only, but impartially to all; when the division of the produce of labour, instead of depending, as in so great a degree it now does, on the accident of birth, will be made by concert, on an acknowledged principle of justice; and when it will no longer either be, or be thought to be, impossible for human beings to exert themselves strenuously in procuring benefits which are not to be exclusively their own, but to be shared with the society they belong to. (239)

The extent to which Mill was *actually* committed to some form of socialism (rather than someone who *looked forward* to a time when its goals might be achieved) is certainly subject to debate. In any event, the claim that he was so committed, and that he thereby helped to pave the way for socialism in Britain, appears to have been a fairly standard interpretation during the interwar period, and not just of Mises.

Thus Mill's remarks were picked up by socialists in England, perhaps most famously by Sidney Webb (Lord Passfield) who, writing in such outlets as G. B. Shaw's widely read volume *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (Webb [1889] 1961), linked the steady progress of democracy with that of socialism and invoked Mill's name in his account. Having stated that "the economic history of the century is an almost continuous record of the progress of Socialism," Webb continued as follows:

> There is every day a wider consensus that the inevitable outcome of Democracy is the control by the people themselves, not only of their own political organization, but, through that, also of the main instrument of wealth production; the gradual substitution of organized cooperation for the anarchy of the competitive struggle; and the consequent recovery, in the only possible way, of what John Stuart Mill calls "the enormous share which the possessors of the instruments of industry are able to take from the produce." The economic side of the democratic ideal is, in fact, Socialism itself. (47, 52)

Webb went on to note that "the publication of John Stuart Mill's 'Political Economy' in 1848 marks conveniently the boundary of the old

individualist economics. Every edition of Mill's book became more and more socialistic. After his death the world learnt the personal history, penned by his own hand, of his development from a mere political democrat to a convinced Socialist" (80). After listing a program of socialist reforms, Webb invoked Mill again: "This is the programme to which a century of industrial revolution has brought the Radical working man. Like John Stuart Mill, though less explicitly, he has turned from mere political Democracy to a complete, though unconscious, Socialism" (77). Webb (1890) made the same arguments (sometimes with similar wording) in his own book, *Socialism in England*.[7] In both places, he footnoted his citations of Mill with references to the *Autobiography* and to book 4 of the *Principles*.

Webb was not alone in this reading. For L. T. Hobhouse ([1906] 1994, 51) in *Liberalism and Other Writings*, Mill symbolized the transformation of liberal thought from the old classical variety to the new reform liberalism: "In his single person he spans the interval between the old and the new Liberalism." Hobhouse's ultimate characterization of Mill's contribution to liberal thought reads as follows:

> In middle life voluntary cooperation appeared to him the best . . . , but towards the close he recognized that his change of views was such as, on the whole, to rank him with the Socialists, and the brief exposition of the Socialist ideal given in his Autobiography remains perhaps the best summary statement of Liberal Socialism that we possess. (55)

Thirty years later we find a similar interpretation being offered by Hayek's colleague at the London School of Economics, Harold Laski (1936, 293), who noted that late in life Mill had "sufficiently freed himself from the Ricardian prepossessions of his youth as to find in socialism the only alternative to a spectacle of misery he no longer found endurable."[8] Laski (1936, 327) supported his claim about what he termed "Mill's conversion

7. A passage about the 1848 "boundary" is nearly identical, and in addition we have this: "The latter influence of the Political Economists, notably that of John Stuart Mill, gradually prepared the public mind for Socialist proposals, especially on the 'unearned increment' of land values" (Webb 1890, 19).

8. Laski (1936, 275) also wrote, "The typical English socialism was Fabian, a body of doctrine upon which the emphasis of John Stuart Mill's ideas was far more profound than that of Marx." Thus at least as far as English socialism goes, Laski and Mises seem to have had similar views concerning Mill's influence.

to socialism" with a footnote reference to Leslie Stephen's book, *The English Utilitarians*.[9]

Mill was certainly a great advocate of reform, one who looked forward to a day when the ideals of socialism would be realized. This was precisely why he was later interpreted as siding with its forward march through the nineteenth century, and this by friend and foe alike. It may be that both critics like Mises and sympathetic readers from Webb and Mitchell to Hobhouse and Laski overstated the extent to which Mill actually embraced socialism. That men from such diverse points on the ideological spectrum offered essentially the same reading certainly suggests, however, that this was a popular, if not the dominant, interpretation.

The Abuse of Reason Project

In late August 1939 Hayek sent a letter to his friend Fritz Machlup saying that now that *The Pure Theory of Capital* was nearly done (it was published in 1941), he would begin work on a new project, tracing the decline of reason from Saint-Simon to Hitler. The plan of the work was contained in an outline prepared in the summer of 1940, titled "The Abuse and Decline of Reason: The Reflections of an Economist on the Self-Destructive Tendencies of Our Scientific Civilization." The introduction was to be titled "The Humility of Individualism." Part 1, called "The Collectivist Hybris," would trace the topic through French, German, English, and American phases. Part 2 was to be called "The Totalitarian Nemesis." In a slightly later outline, the first chapter of part 1 was to be "Scientism."

The Abuse of Reason project would tell a very different story from that of the steady side-by-side progress of socialism and democracy that Webb and others espoused. In Hayek's alternative tale, the steady growth of scientism and of the planning mentality engendered the (in Hayek's view, false) hope that scientific advances would allow the creation of a new planned socialist society. Scientism and socialism grew up together. Hayek would trace out the pedigree and history of the ideas that he felt had led the western world to totalitarianism.[10]

9. Stephen's treatment of Mill on socialism was nuanced; he ultimately found enough evidence on both sides to judge Mill guilty of inconsistency. See Stephen 1906, 3:224–37.

10. Thus the epigraph for the introduction of *The Road to Serfdom*, taken from Lord Acton, reads, "Few discoveries are more irritating than those which expose the pedigree of ideas" (Hayek [1944] 2007, 57).

Only parts of the Abuse of Reason project were completed. "Scientism and the Study of Society" (Hayek [1942–44] 1952) laid out the case against the objectivism, historicism, and collectivism of the scientistic prejudice. The French origins of scientism and of socialism in the writings of Henri Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, and their followers were documented in "The Counter-Revolution of Science" (Hayek [1941] 1952). The beginnings of the German phase were explored in Hayek's ([1951] 1952) essay "Comte and Hegel." And part 2 of the project, showing how the attempt to centrally plan a society, even if begun under a democratic regime, could not accomplish its goals unless political freedoms were also given up, was published in 1944 under the title *The Road to Serfdom*.

Hayek's goal, then, was to trace the dispersion of scientistic ideas in the nineteenth century. Mill played a role in that dispersion. He had gained a "fairly extensive acquaintance with German literature" from John and Sarah Austin (Mill studied law with John, who was much influenced by German jurisprudence, and Sarah was a translator of German works) and from his debating society friends Frederick Maurice and John Sterling. He had also lived for a year as a boy in France, and most importantly carried on an extended correspondence with Gustave d'Eichthal, an early disciple of Comte and later a prominent purveyor of the Saint-Simonian doctrine among the British (Hayek 1942, xi–xxiv). Given the nature of his project, most of Hayek's references to Mill in these writings had to do with how Mill was influenced by the Continental literature, and concerned the part he played in its further dispersion.

Thus we find Hayek devoting a few pages of his chapter "Saint-Simonian Influence" to Mill's reflections in the *Autobiography* on Comte's and Saint-Simon's influence on him, with Hayek ([1941] 1952, 297) concluding that "We have here undoubtedly the first roots of J. S. Mill's socialist leanings." Mill's ([1843] 1973) *System of Logic* was read by Germans and others in Europe, and this helped to spread Comtean positivism across the Continent (Hayek [1941] 1952, 359–60; [1951] 1952, 397). Of course, that Mill ultimately came to regard the Comtean system as despotic, a form of "liberticide," is also mentioned (Hayek [1941] 1952, 258, 352; [1951] 1952, 387).

Hayek (1942) added further detail in "John Stuart Mill at the Age of Twenty-Five," his introductory essay for *The Spirit of the Age*, which collected a series of articles that Mill had published in the weekly *Examiner* in early 1831. There he also briefly mentioned Mill's views on socialism, noting that Mill,

> while sympathizing with the ultimate aims of socialism, disagreed to the end with the concrete suggestions for the abolition of private property, and particularly never ceased, as he put it in the *Political Economy*, "utterly (to) dissent from the most conspicuous and vehement part of their teaching, their declamations against competition." (Hayek 1942, xxx)

At least in this passage it seems clear that Hayek believed, as perhaps Mises, Webb, and some others seem not to have, that Mill did not endorse the concrete proposals put forward by socialists for social reform.

Hayek's Unpublished Paper on Mill

Hayek's early work on Mill, then, was simply a by-product of his investigations of Mill's role in the spread of scientistic ideas to and from the Continent. As he pursued his studies, he found that Mill's correspondence was "widely dispersed among many publications, often in places difficult to find, or only in manuscript" (Hayek 1994, 128–29). Hayek began collecting the unpublished material, and came to the opinion that the correspondence between Mill and Harriet Taylor was "peculiarly fascinating" (129). This led him to write up a number of shorter pieces, and finally to publish his 1951 book on their friendship and marriage.

Probably sometime during the 1940s, Hayek (n.d.) wrote "J. S. Mill, Mrs. Taylor, and Socialism." It appears that the piece was never published during Hayek's lifetime, although it may have served as the basis of other things that he wrote about Mill.[11] (At least part of it—a description of the early Mill—duplicates information in Hayek 1942, "John Stuart Mill at the Age of Twenty-Five.") The essay will be published for the first time in an appendix to *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek* edition of *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor.*

Hayek began the essay by noting that, up until then, there was no way to judge the accuracy of Mill's extravagant praise of Taylor's intellectual abilities and of his claims that she had had a great influence on his thought. Newly discovered letters, however, would allow Hayek to shed light on

11. I discovered the essay in his son Laurence Hayek's study after the latter's death. One may wonder why Hayek never sought to publish the paper. Perhaps the reason is simple: once he decided to do a book on the correspondence, the paper, if it was written before the book, was rendered somewhat superfluous. But we will also see that Hayek engaged in some psychologizing in his unpublished paper, and perhaps he was uncomfortable putting that into print.

the question. After quoting from or summarizing a number of letters from the period in late 1833 when Mill and Taylor had finally made their feelings known to each other, Hayek (n.d., 13) was prepared to draw a fairly strong conclusion: "That Mill was at that time completely under Mrs. Taylor's dominance and that she proved to be the much stronger character of the two is shown beyond doubt by the letters we have." Further evidence was provided by three letters from Mill to Taylor during the period when Mill was working on revisions for the second edition of the *Principles of Political Economy*, all of which show him grappling with Taylor's suggestions for changes and modifications of his treatment.[12]

After telling the stories of Mr. Taylor's death, of Mill and Harriet Taylor's subsequent marriage, and of the effects of the marriage on Mill's other relationships, Hayek turned again to the subject of socialism:

> That Mrs. Mill's influence on his work increased further is clearly shown by the further and decisive advance towards socialism noticeable in the third edition of *Political Economy* which appeared not long after their marriage. It was largely in the form which the relevant chapters of the *Political Economy* were given at that time that they went through the many editions and exerted that great influence to which no less a person than Sidney Webb (or Lord Passfield) has paid eloquent tribute as one of the main causes which assisted the growth of socialism in England. If that is true there can be no doubt now that it was Mrs. Mill rather than John Stuart Mill to whom this is due. (22)

Though he provided no documentation, Hayek added a bit later, "That after their marriage Mrs. Mill's influence increased further and even determined in a large measure his interests is quite clear" (24).

At the end of the essay, Hayek quoted Mill's strong praise of the intellectual talents of his stepdaughter Helen Taylor, who became his companion after Harriet Taylor Mill died. Hayek thought the praise unwarranted, and from this he drew some final conclusions about Mill's character:

> Probably by the education given him by his father in his early youth Mill's character was so formed that he stood in need of someone whom he could adore and to whom he could ascribe all possible perfection. Behind the hard shell of complete self-control and strictly rational behaviour there was a core of a very soft and almost feminine sensi-

12. All three letters—those dated February 19, February 21, and March 21, 1849—would also be reproduced in Hayek's 1951 book.

> tivity, a craving for a strong person on whom he could lean, and on whom he could concentrate all his affection and admiration. No doubt Mrs. Mill was an unusual person. But the picture Mill has given us is throughout determined by his own character and tells us probably more of him than of her. (28)

As far as I know, Hayek never made such strong claims about Mill's character and personality in the work he published in his lifetime. Hayek's caution as a scholar may explain why he ultimately did not seek to publish this piece. It may also be that Mill became a less attractive figure for Hayek after the experience of having read his "peculiarly fascinating" letters.

Mill in Hayek's Later Work

Hayek's references to Mill in *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960) were mostly favorable, many of them simply noting his place in the pantheon of classical liberal thinkers (see, e.g., Hayek 1960, 8, 30, 177, 394). Among the things he praised Mill for were his argument for tolerance (30), his anti-interventionism (220), and his opposition to progressive taxation (308). All of this is as one would expect, given that the purpose of Hayek's book was to restate for the twentieth century the principles of liberal constitutionalism.

There are a few exceptions, though. For example, Hayek blamed Mill for helping to introduce *homo oeconomicus* and other elements of the rationalist tradition into economics (61). This was an important point for Hayek, for one of the central arguments in his book was that the institutions of liberty allow fallible humans to make the best use of their (always dispersed) knowledge, an insight that he claimed was overlooked by those in the rationalist tradition. Hayek also chided Mill for overstating his attack on "moral coercion" in *On Liberty* (146). Hayek's view on that point is of a piece with his claim in "Individualism: True and False," which may be read as an early statement of the themes to be found in *The Constitution of Liberty*. There he said that Mill in *On Liberty* promoted a dangerous kind of individualism, the Germanic sort that is associated with having an "original personality" (Hayek [1946] 1948, 26–27).

Even though it was not to be published until the 1970s, we know that soon after Hayek completed *The Constitution of Liberty* he began work on *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*. In his introduction to the three-volume opus, Hayek (1973–79, 1:2) explained why a new work was necessary:

> It was only after I had completed that work [i.e., *Constitution of Liberty*] that I came to see clearly why those ideals [of liberal constitutionalism] had failed to retain the support of the idealists to whom all the great political movements are due, and to understand what are the governing beliefs of our time which have proved irreconcilable with them. It seems to me now that the reasons for this development were chiefly: the loss of the belief in a justice independent of personal interest; a consequent use of legislation to authorize coercion, not merely to prevent unjust action but to achieve particular results for specific persons or groups; and the fusion in the same representative assemblies of the task of articulating the rules of just conduct with that of directing government.

Hayek's goal was to show how faith in the ideal of liberal constitutionalism had been undermined by intellectual and political developments. As such, his critical discussions of Mill in *Law, Legislation, and Liberty* principally centered on Mill's role in the transmission of ideas that were inimical to that tradition.

Thus Hayek (1973–79, 2:63–64), in his own chapter on social justice (a term he famously viewed as an oxymoron), criticized Mill for confusing just individual conduct with distributive justice. He also claimed that Mill was in part responsible for the idea "that the 'control of government' by the democratically elected [legislature] would adequately replace the traditional limitations" such as constitutions (3:3). This seems a rather egregious misreading of Mill on democracy, at least if we take his warnings in *Considerations on Representative Government* (Mill [1861] 1977) as representative.[13]

There are actually relatively few citations to Mill in *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, but more may be found in contemporaneous works. For example, in his article "Liberalism," originally prepared for an Italian

13. Hayek (1973–79, 3:178, n. 9) stated in the footnote attached to the line quoted above that Mill "argues in *On Liberty* that 'the nation did not need to be protected against its own will.'" Mill was not arguing in favor of that position, however, but only recounting how the idea came to be popularly believed. Furthermore it seems clear in such passages as the following that Mill ([1861] 1977, 446), like Hayek, was no fan of unlimited democracy: "One of the greatest dangers, therefore, of democracy, as of all other forms of government, lies in the sinister interest of the holders of power: it is the danger of class legislation; of government intended for (whether really effecting it or not) the immediate benefit of the dominant class, to the lasting detriment of the whole. And one of the most important questions demanding consideration, in determining the best constitution of a representative government, is how to provide efficacious securities against this evil."

encyclopedia, Hayek (1978, 129–30) portrayed Mill once again as having led liberals in England toward socialism:

> John Stuart Mill, in his celebrated book *On Liberty* (1859), directed his criticism chiefly against the tyranny of opinion rather than the actions of government, and by his advocacy of distributive justice and a general sympathetic attitude towards socialist aspirations in some of his other works, prepared the gradual transition of a large part of the liberal intellectuals to a moderate socialism.

Aside from some mentions of Mill in minor pieces and popular addresses (see Légé 2008, 211–12, for citations), Hayek's (1988) last words on Mill may be found in *The Fatal Conceit*. Hayek's final book was meant to contain his conclusive refutation of socialism. There is some question, however, as to how much of the book was Hayek's, and how much should be attributed to his editor, W. W. Bartley III (Caldwell 2004, 316–19). Though there were early drafts of the book, it was also in part cobbled together by the editor from notes to be found on the three-by-five-inch cards that Hayek used to write down thoughts and ideas. A recently published reminiscence by Charlotte Cubitt (2006), who was Hayek's secretary during this period, leads to even more doubt about how much of the book should be attributed to Hayek, and of that, how far the deterioration of his mental faculties may have played a role in what ultimately got published.

In any event, in addition to his previously aired complaints that Mill and the "Benthamite tradition" had contributed to the "constructivist" worldview (Hayek 1988, 52) and to a false concept of liberty (65), Hayek also began faulting Mill for his economics. He repeated the old view that Mill believed that the laws of production are physical truths while the laws of distribution are a matter of human institutions, and added to it that Mill believed that the size of the product is independent of its distribution (92–93).[14] Hayek also noted the problems that arise due to Mill's ignorance of marginalism (148–49). He concluded with the statement that Mill "probably led more intellectuals into socialism than any other single person: fabianism was in its beginnings essentially formed by a group of his followers" (149), a claim much in accordance with the view that Laski had

14. Hayek probably first encountered the claim about the difference between the laws of production and the laws of distribution when he sat in on Wesley Clair Mitchell's class, Types of Economic Theory, on his trip to America in the early 1920s. Whatever one thinks of the validity of the first of these charges, the second—that the size of the product is independent of its distribution—seems clearly wrong: see Mill [1848] 1965, bk. 2, chap 1, p. 200.

voiced in 1936. Characteristically, Hayek ended his comment on Mill with the words that "we must probably forgive Mill much for his infatuation with the lady who later became his wife" (149).

Conclusions

What conclusions might we draw from our sketch of Hayek's various characterizations of, and reactions to, John Stuart Mill's writings and life?

It is probably best to start off by noting that Hayek knew *a lot* about Mill, probably for a time more than any other contemporary scholar. So we should not underestimate him.

Next, what he had to say about Mill, what portion of Mill's work he drew upon, was very much dictated by the sort of project he was working on. When he was making an argument about how the British liberal tradition lost its bearings, or about how Comtean positivism came to be known and gained influence across Europe, Mill was classed among the perpetrators. When he was writing about what made the British liberal tradition great, Mill could be one of the heroes. There is, I think, no inconsistency in the fact that Hayek could hold both views simultaneously.

Third, it seems evident from his unpublished piece that his reading of the Mill-Taylor letters gave Hayek a bit of a shock. He knew, of course, from the *Autobiography* that Mill had an elevated opinion of Mrs. Taylor. The letters seem to have convinced Hayek that she dominated him. Hayek would doubtless have seen this as a weakness, and he might well have lost some respect for Mill as a result. It may also have provided a convenient explanation for Hayek for why a great mind like Mill might nonetheless "desert" the liberal camp. (Hayek's hope to lead others to the same conclusion might have helped motivate him to write the book on the correspondence between Mill and Taylor.) Given what has sometimes been said about the dominating personality of Hayek's second wife, one wonders whether Hayek would later in his life have felt even more commonalities with Mill.

It is an open question about how seriously we should take some of the things that Hayek said about Mill's economics in some of his later writings, and particularly in *The Fatal Conceit*. Especially given the recent book by Cubitt, it is probably best not to take them too seriously. On the other hand, in the late 1960s and the 1970s Hayek was probably more pessimistic about the prospects for the Western democracies than at any other time, so perhaps his complaints against Mill loomed larger in his mind in this later period.

I will note in closing that only occasionally have I commented on how accurate I thought Hayek's depiction of Mill's views was. If one were to do a more thorough exploration of that topic, it would be important to keep in mind that in his writings Hayek frequently was simply responding, for better or worse, to other people's views of what Mill had written. Perhaps it is evident that on some matters our own views today differ, sometimes considerably, from those to which he was responding.[15]

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15. To put it another way: neither Hayek nor his opponents had read Sam Hollander on Mill!

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