

# THE MILL NEWS LETTER

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Relatively little attention has been paid to Francis Newman, Mill's contemporary, a man of considerable literary and scholarly range, and brother of John Henry, Cardinal Newman. In this number will be found an article by James Bennett (English, Arkansas) on Mill's view of Newman's Lectures on Political Economy, and also a review of William Robbins' recent book, The Newman Brothers, by F.E.L. Priestley. (Professor Robbins once remarked that he wanted to call his book "Frankie and Johnny.")

The Bibliography of Writings on Mill, prepared by Dudley Hascall (now at Harvard) and the Editor, continues from D through F; my promise in the last number to give corrections and additions to our earlier lists is not here redeemed, but will be in the fulness of time. Please keep the suggestions coming, even if they delay my action. As the list of recent publications will indicate, interest in the "Utilitarian Messiah" continues at full strength; especially noteworthy is the number of dissertations being written on Mill, and it may be that readers would be interested in having accounts of these, derived from Dissertation Abstracts, printed in the News Letter for ready reference.

A Conference on Editing Problems in the Nineteenth Century was held at Toronto on 4 and 5 November, attended by some eighty scholars from across Canada and the United States. The following subjects were treated in papers: Differences between editing machine and hand-set works, by Fredson Bowers (Virginia); Editing Balzac, by Bernard Weinberg (Chicago); British Victorian periodicals, by Michael Wolff (Indiana); Editing the Carlyle letters, by C. R. Sanders (Duke); and Editing Mill's works, by John M. Robson (Toronto). It is hoped that the proceedings will be published in 1967. Professor Sanders promises early publication of the first volumes of his mammoth edition of the Carlyle correspondence.

MILL, FRANCIS W. NEWMAN, AND SOCIALISM:  
MILL'S TWO ARGUMENTATIVE VOICES

James R. Bennett

It is not uncommon for a writer to speak in more than one voice and with more than one point of view. Compare A Tale of a Tub with Gulliver's Travels, or Modern Painters with Unto This Last, or the shifts of tone within An English Mail-Coach. And it is a critical commonplace that a reader should be aware, if writers are to be precisely and accurately understood--even in the case of such writers as Swift and Ruskin and De Quincey, whose voices frequently contrast dramatically--that they speak to a variety of audiences and in a variety of roles. One must be especially careful with a writer like John Stuart Mill, whose colours are less vivid and whose tonal contrasts are less violent. If we are not to misunderstand Mill, we must remember always that he writes to a varied audience and that his stance in a particular situation conditions his meaning.

One of Mill's voices may be described as that of impassioned advocacy; a second is that of calm, qualified, measured argument. Or, as one scholar has expressed it, Mill is both preacher and political economist, both moral philosopher contemplating the proper ends of human life, and scientific economist concerned with the practical realities of economic man.<sup>1</sup> This can be illustrated by a comparison of Mill's Principles of Political Economy (2nd ed., 1849; 3rd ed., 1852) with his attack in the Westminster Review (1851) on Francis W. Newman's Lectures on Political Economy (1851). I will restrict my discussion to the one topic of socialism.

Mill's review<sup>2</sup> stringently rebuts Newman's Lectures. Although Mill concedes that Newman does not "deny that there are evils and injustice in the present economical order of society," he denounces Newman as "an apologist for the existing social system" of private property and competition (442). He morally condemns Newman's contention that property is not created by law, but exists anterior to law, and he logically refutes Newman's argument that property is a natural right.

And then abruptly, only half a dozen paragraphs into his argument, Mill asserts the superiority of socialism (the principle of "cooperation" or "association") over capitalism: "It appears to us that nothing valid can be said against socialism in principle; and that the attempts to assail it, or to defend private property, on the ground of justice, must inevitably fail. The distinction between rich and poor, so slightly connected as it is with merit and demerit, or even with exertion and want of exertion in the individual, is obviously unjust; such a feature could not be put into the rudest imaginings of a perfectly just state of society; the present capricious distribution of the means of life and enjoyment, could only be defended as an admitted imperfection, submitted to as an effect of causes in other respects beneficial. Again, the moral objection to competition, as arming one human being against another, making the good of

each depend upon evil to others, making all who have anything to gain or lose, live as in the midst of enemies, by no means deserves the disdain with which it is treated by some of the adversaries of socialism. . . ."

Then Mill turns to a point-by-point defence of socialism against Newman's four criticisms. The errors of socialism, Newman argues, may be classified as "moral, political, and economical. Moral:-- 1st, In speaking as though my duties were equal towards all mankind; which is untrue. To have any but a very secondary care for those who are unconnected with me in the relations of life, would be hurtful Quixotism. 2nd, In wonderfully undervaluing the difficulty of subduing a ruinous selfishness in a community that lived on common property. Political:--In imagining that such a community, if men were allowed to choose their own occupations, would not presently break in pieces from their rival preferences; or that if it were subjected to the despotism of a single mind, it could fail to degenerate into apathetic stupidity. But my peculiar business is with the Economic error, which consists in blindness to the fact, that there can be no such thing as price, except through the influence of competition. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Mill's reply, except for conceding that "the second alone touches a really vulnerable point," offers no compromise: "The other three appear to us inconsistent with any just conception of the subject, or any knowledge of the opinions of socialists. . . ." The first moral objection Mill rejects as not only morally and logically bad, but as "thoroughly vulgar minded": "To regard impartially the interests of all--to be concerned in any but a very trifling degree for those who are not in some special relation with self, is termed Quixotism! a word invented to hold up to contempt any nobleness and generosity beyond the conception of the common herd" (445). The political objection "shows a great lack, either of invention or of candour, to see only this alternative, and admit no choice in human affairs between no government at all, and the despotism of one" (446). Newman should have read Owen and Fourier. "Socialists may be over-confident, but they are no such fools as Mr. Newman takes them for; they have foreseen many more objections than he tells them of; and if there are others which they have not foreseen, or have not effectually provided against, his criticisms do not reach the depth even of their failures" (ibid). The economic objection, that there is price only through competition, is no objection at all, since socialists "propose that exchanges between community and community should be at cost price." And he reinforces his argument against competition by exploding the ethics of Newman's argument that competition "(like all the laws of Nature) often severe, is yet a beneficial, as well as a necessary process," as in the case of employing a man in greater need for less money, which Newman defends (Lectures, 12). "Humanity," Mill replies indignantly, "dictates giving the preference to the most necessitous, but does it dictate taking advantage of his necessities?" (446-7.)

This portion of the article is an ardent attack.<sup>4</sup> Newman's Lectures seems vanquished; Newman seems pinned and wriggling as an "apostle of Conservatism"; property and competition seem banished to

the inferno of bad morality and worse logic; socialism seems raised to the paradise where equality reigns at last; and Mill seems the champion of social justice. But is this Mill (or Newman)? I think not. Only a little reading of either Mill or Newman reveals that the truth about them is rather more complicated. Then how explain the article? The answer lies mainly in Mill's new enthusiasm for socialism consequent on the French Revolution of 1848 (earlier reflected in his 1849 attack on Brougham in "The French Revolution of 1848 and its Assailants"). As one historian has made clear, Mill was "in great sympathy with the general mood of the socialist program during the Revolution" and after the Revolution "centered his hopes for the progress of mankind on the dissemination of the socialist doctrine."<sup>5</sup> Inspired by this new enthusiasm, a feeling intensified by the prospect of demolishing an opponent, Mill not only distorted Newman's true position, but his own as well.

But I do not think that in the fervour and anger of this brief review Mill has inadvertently shown his real belief, any more than I think a man is defined by his isolated acts. It is certainly important to know the extent to which a man will commit himself at unguarded moments. But the true man--the whole man--is known by his most fully considered judgments. Mill's attack upon Newman exaggerates Mill's socialistic impulse (as On Liberty exaggerates his individualistic impulse). But one book, his Principles of Political Economy, fully weighs and balances both equality-cooperation and liberty-spontaneity within the soberly practical context of production. And the result is that Mill's Principles resembles Newman's Lectures much more closely than Mill's hostile review suggests.

Mill continually revised his Principles:<sup>6</sup> between the MS (written 1845-47, rewritten Mar.-Dec., 1847) and the 7th edition (1871) there are 3500 substantive variants, with the largest number of changes occurring in the 3rd edition (1852). Almost half of the changes, as would be expected, are stylistic. But what is more relevant to us here is the great number of alterations which qualify and emphasize, and the much less frequent though highly important changes in opinion or fact, including major amplifications and corrections of information.

His treatment of socialism illustrates his fluctuating efforts to weigh and balance the merits of property.<sup>7</sup> In the 2nd edition (II,i,2), a favorable account of various kinds of socialism replaced an account of St. Simonianism. Yet the last sentence of that paragraph, which argued in the 2nd edition that attacks on property would continue "until the laws of property are freed from whatever portion of injustice they contain" (Works, II,202n), was reduced in length and sting in the 3rd edition (1852). Section 3 of II, i, almost entirely rewritten for the 1852 edition, offers the heart of the argument. It is more sympathetic to socialism than the previous editions, which suggests the shift in Mill's attitudes since the 1848 Revolution. The beginning of the section resembles the tone of Mill's attack on Newman in the Westminster Review, for it builds to the climax that if there were a choice "between Communism with all its chances, and the present state of society with all its sufferings and



injustices" (II, 207), the choice would be clearly for Communism. But that is only half of the section, and the rest presents the kind of careful qualification we expect of Mill at his best and which typifies his Principles. "But to make the comparison applicable," Mill continues, "we must compare Communism at its best, with the régime of individual property, not as it is, but as it might be made. The principle of private property has never yet had a fair trial in any country. . . ." (Ibid.) And he adds the necessity of two conditions, "without which neither Communism nor any other laws or institutions could make the condition of the mass of mankind other than degraded and miserable": universal education and population control (ibid., 208). He concludes, finally, by saying that "we are too ignorant to be qualified to decide which of the two [socialism or individual agency] will be the ultimate form of human society," and that anyway the decision will depend upon "which of the two systems is consistent with the greatest amount of human liberty and spontaneity" (ibid.). (This qualifying stance and measured tone Mill will maintain in his incomplete book on socialism published posthumously in 1879.)

Thus his Principles of Political Economy exhibits the considered wholeness that has recommended it to readers for over one hundred years; thus it swings closer to Newman's Lectures, for both believe that the principle of cooperation is to be tested not only by justice but by freedom. If we add the third test both employed, that of efficiency, we discover more similarity between the two than we would gather from Mill's Westminster attack.

Newman, who in his Lectures praised Mill as that "very cautious man," felt no great conflict between his and Mill's books. Newman did defend capitalism as the most efficient system. "Competition," he wrote, is "an all-combining, all-balancing, and beneficent law" (119); "The trader is the great civilizer and uniter of Mankind" (54); the merchants, and not the government, best deal with the production and distribution of food (67), etc. There is no doubt of Newman's bias. But at the same time there was no man in the century who laboured more indefatigably for social justice, no man more devoted to the idea that the establishment of a humane world depended upon the rectification of bad laws and institutions.

Like Mill he conceived of the problem as a matter both of political economy and of "politics," and politics was moral. It lays down, for example, "what power over the land individuals ought to possess," decided by "justice and expedience" (187). It repudiates *laissez-faire*, unless "strictly confined to Political Economy": "To Politics it is hard to imagine how any sound mind could think of applying it" (188). Like Mill, Newman repeatedly disavows the creed that economic ends alone either are or ought to be the only criteria of moral and political expediency (though R. H. Hutton believed that both "appear sometimes to fall into this error").<sup>8</sup> Hence the state can and must go beyond mere defence of person and property: "It is the duty of the state, not only to fine and tax but also, and much rather, to shelter the houseless, to strengthen the weak, to teach the ignorant, to reconcile the quarrelling, to unite its citizens in firm bonds. This is the true SOCIALISM" (311). Newman constantly reiterated his feeling that there was an excessive disparity between the rich and the poor.

Though free enterprise was the best way to build society, luxury which produces no intellectual or aesthetic benefits is evil, and should be regulated by the state. Hence Newman supports a graduated income tax which would transfer to the public sector money intended for luxuries (214), and a severe regulation of encumbrances and non-residence. But Newman's most radical attitude toward the limitation of property is his support of the nationalization of the land (Newman was later Vice-President of the Land Nationalization Society). His conclusion is that property in land is subordinate to the public good. Land is not the private property of anyone; it was not considered so by the old law, and it is not a movable. Tenants, therefore, have a moral right to the land on which their lives depend. "An individual can never have absolute or sole right in land" (141). Like Mill's, Newman's views toward socialism were developing sympathetically at this time. He wrote in Catholic Union (1854) that he believed "Communism to be one mode in which human nature is crying out for a new and better union than has yet been achieved" (5-6).

In all of this Mill concurs, though he would go further toward socialism. Mill recognizes and praises Newman's belief in limitations to the right of property and especially the property in land. "We agree fully with Mr. Newman in the doctrine that there can be, morally speaking, only a qualified property in things not produced by labour, such as the raw material of the earth."<sup>9</sup>

But, like Mill's, Newman's arguments against laissez-faire are always checked and tested by his belief in the social desirability of liberty and spontaneity. Competition is basic to the division of labour, market, and prices (8); it is a necessary and beneficial law of Nature (12); indeed, "Competition is in the market of the world, what gravitation is in the mechanism of the heavens" (119). And Mill, who in his attack on Newman in the Westminster Review gives the impression that he opposes competition, in the Principles firmly supports it: ". . . I utterly dissent from the most conspicuous and vehement part of [the Socialists'] teaching, their declamations against competition. . . . [If] competition has its evils, it prevents greater evils" (Works, III, 194-5). Furthermore, in the Principles Mill expresses himself strongly in favor of laissez-faire: "Laissez-faire, in short, should be the general practice: every departure from it, unless required by some great good, is a certain evil" (ibid., 945). But both urgently desire to lessen the harshness of the competitive system, and both admit that the principle of mere competition is not equitably applicable to the case where labourers compete for bare subsistence. Both repudiate the claims of the doctrinaire political economists that any prices fixed by competition are always the best for the world and moreover are the only possible prices. On the other hand, both warn against centralization, and for similar reasons, especially their suspicion of bureaucratization.

I am not suggesting that Newman and Mill are finally identical on the matter of property and socialism. For the solution of indigence, for example, Newman gives a conservative answer: masses must be "better trained, better watched over, and thereby more intelligent, more moral, and more united in habits and affections to definite families and classes above them" (103); while Mill is receptive to social-

istic solutions. But Newman was not as conservative as Mill implies in his attack in the Westminster Review, nor was Mill as radical as that essay suggests.

Mill's review and his book reveal much about his ambivalent view of socialism, the result, according to Professor Bladen, of a "conflict of ends and uncertainty as to efficacy of means." His fluctuations also illustrate his two roles--preacher and political economist--and his two voices--controversy and qualification.

NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>Vincent W. Bladen, "Introduction," Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy. Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, II (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), xxxix.

<sup>2</sup>Westminster Review, 56 (Oct., 1851), 83-101. In Collected Works, V, 439-57; subsequent references are to this (soon-to-be published) edition.

<sup>3</sup>Lectures on Political Economy (London: Chapman, 1851), 10-11; quoted by JSM, 444-5.

<sup>4</sup>From this point on he discusses Newman's book as "a treatise on political economy, in the narrower sense--an exposition of the working of existing economical laws" (447), in which he appraises, generally negatively, Newman's understanding of Ricardo on rent, of Malthus, of tithes, etc. As we shall see later, he praises Newman's attitude toward property in land.

<sup>5</sup>Iris W. Mueller, John Stuart Mill and French Thought (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 191-92.

<sup>6</sup>See John M. Robson's "Textual Introduction," Principles, Collected Works, II, lxxv-lxxv.

<sup>7</sup>Mueller's discussion (192-97) of the changes Mill made in the various editions of Political Economy with reference to socialism supports my brief analysis.

<sup>8</sup>"Moral Limits to Economic Theory and Socialist Counter-Theory," The Prospective Review (Aug., 1851), 271.

<sup>9</sup>Works, V, 450. This similarity was observed by the author of "The Tenure of Land," Westminster Review, 82 (July, 1864). Newman repeated his beliefs pertaining to property in land in "On the Relation of the Supply of Food to the Laws of Landed Tenure," The Manchester Athenaeum (1876), in which he praised Mill enthusiastically.

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Liberty, ed. C.J. Friedrich, published as Nomos, IV (1962), has been reissued by the Atherton Press, New York. The volume contains many interesting essays prompted by the centenary of the publication of On Liberty.

Alan Ryan (now of the University of Keele) reports that his book on Inductivism and Ethics is nearing completion.

The recent Supplement to Current Research in British Studies by American and Canadian Scholars, ed. William C. Wilbur for the Conference on British Studies (New York University) contains the following information on work in progress:

Gertrude Himmelfarb (Brooklyn College, N.Y.): a biography of Mill.  
Paul Lucas (Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri): Aspects of Utilitarian Thought.

Mary Mack (Connecticut College, New London, Conn.): Studies in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Political Thought.

John W. Osborne (Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.): The Effect of the Industrial Revolution upon Non-Economic Aspects of English Society.

Timothy Fuller (Political Science, Colorado College) is working on JSM's concept of justice and his ideas concerning punishment.

One purpose of this News Letter is to attempt to prevent unfortunate overlapping of projects. A case in point: the edition of Fitzjames Stephen's Liberty, Equality, Fraternity by Patrick Day, mentioned in our first number, has been given up because a similar edition has been planned for some time by R. J. White of Dowling College, Cambridge. The latter will appear before long from the Cambridge University Press. (Mr. White is also preparing Coleridge's Lay Sermons for the Collected Edition of Coleridge.)

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#### Recent Publications.

- Baumgarten, Murray. "The Ideas of History of Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill." Dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1966.
- Broadbent, John Edward. "The Good Society of John Stuart Mill." Dissertation, Toronto, 1966.
- Ellsworth, John W. "Humanistic Ethics and Liberal Politics: A Study of John Stuart Mill's Political Thought," Dissertation Abstracts, 26(1965), 2300.
- Hall, Roland. "The Diction of John Stuart Mill," Notes & Queries, n.s. 12 (1965), 51-6, 188-94, 246-54, 419-25. (Continued from 1964; see News Letter no. 1.)
- Karns, C. Franklin. "Causal Analysis and Rhetoric: A Survey of the Major Philosophical Conceptions of Cause Prior to John Stuart Mill," Speech Monographs, 32(1965), 36-48.
- Krimerman, Leonard I. "The Utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill: A Reconstruction," Dissertation Abstracts, 25(1965), 5333.
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- "Artist and Scientist: Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill," Queen's Quarterly, 73 (Summer, 1966), 167-86.
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What's in a periodical? Often its name is of little help. And what periodicals are in a library? Often a catalogue is of little help. Michael Wolff, who knows more about the difficulties and delights of periodical mining than anyone else, is looking for fellow-prospectors and investors to help compile a directory of Victorian periodicals. Initially he has questions; finally, we must all hope, he will have answers. I quote from his paper to the Editorial Conference at Toronto (see p.1 above): "What sort of periodicals directory would be of most value to you? What sort of evidence would you like to be able to get at easily? What frustration have you encountered in trying to use magazines or newspapers? What unrecorded journals or unregistered microfilms do you know about? What are your libraries willing to do to help locate and purchase serials in book or microfilm? Would you be willing to cooperate so that instead of each scholar stumbling around independently, a coordinated assault could be made, and where before one hundred researchers looked isolatedly and randomly through ten volumes apiece, they could now economically and systematically look through one thousand together." Answers please to Professor Wolff, Editor, Victorian Studies, University of Indiana.

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