

Mill and Sidgwick, Imperialism and Racism

BART SCHULTZ

University of Chicago

This essay is in effect something of a self-review of my book *Henry Sidgwick: Eye of the Universe* (2004) and of the volume, co-edited with Georgios Varouxakis, *Utilitarianism and Empire* (2005). My chief concern here is to go beyond those earlier works in underscoring the arbitrariness of the dominant contextualist and reconstructive historical accounts of J. S. Mill and Henry Sidgwick on the subjects of race and racism. The forms of racism are many, and simple historical accuracy suggests that both Mill and Sidgwick could be described as ‘racist’ on some plausible understandings of that term.

In politics, all abstract terms conceal treachery.

C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*

To prove a negative, the argument must be capable of being expressed in this form:–

No one who is capable of self-control is necessarily vicious;

All negroes
Some negroes } are capable of self-control;
Mr. A’s negro }

therefore

No negroes are
Some negroes are not } necessarily vicious
Mr. A’s negro is not }

John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*

I would like to begin this essay with some designedly naïve remarks about the construction of philosophical heroes versus philosophical villains, remarks that will help define the opposing poles in more or less current philosophical receptions and reconstructions of the work of John Stuart Mill and Henry Sidgwick. Perhaps it is especially appropriate, at this bicentennial moment, to engage in some such reflection on what is living and what is dead in Mill and Sidgwick – or, to adapt a recent title by John Skorupski, ‘Why read Mill and Sidgwick?’ Clearly, there is much that is living in both cases; Mill has become, in Skorupski’s words, a ‘talismanic liberal’, a virtual paradigm case of the liberal mentality, and Sidgwick’s reputation as the great

classical utilitarian successor to Mill has never been higher. And yet, developments in the relatively recent literature on these figures point up some very important and very worrisome topics that we must confront in our readings of Mill and Sidgwick, increasingly enthusiastic as these may be. When it comes to the reception of Mill and Sidgwick and classical utilitarianism generally, we are in an age of transition, and there are some indications of progress. All the more reason to take care that the case for reading Mill and Sidgwick be made in ways that take the full measure of the critics, particularly those critics who make a forceful case for reading both Mill and Sidgwick as representing certain forms of imperialist and racist thinking.

To begin with the positive. Happily, for Mill's current reputation, one finds today a valuable and flourishing literature that casts Mill as a multicultural hero. Prominent public intellectual Martha Nussbaum has increasingly incorporated Millian materials in her 'capabilities' approach and feminist work, calling Mill 'a vital resource for all who care about the future of women and men, and of the justice that may possibly exist between them'. Mill, according to Nussbaum, 'shows with daring and clarity how thoroughly the preferences and desires of women have been deformed by male power'. And what is more, Mill's critique of male power is strengthened by a conception of happiness that makes it 'a richer resource' for 'contemporary feminist and, more generally, anti-hierarchical thinking'.¹ The Mill celebrated by Nussbaum can be deployed for purposes of the new cosmopolitanism that Nussbaum champions against those given to excessive love of country or of communitarian particularity. Indeed, Georgios Varouxakis, in his compelling work on *Mill on Nationality*, has driven the point home: 'Mill's conception of the relationship between obligations to country and obligations to mankind was close to that of Nussbaum.' For both, patriotism is commendable only when it conduces 'to the interests of the whole of humanity'.²

The cosmopolitan account of patriotism and particular loyalties and attachments generally is indeed at a far remove from old-fashioned communitarian love of country right or wrong. Even farther when, as has sometimes happened, Nussbaum overstates her opposition to patriotic loyalty, making such loyalty sound wholly derivative of rather than merely subordinate to one's larger duties to humanity. But in an important interview, Nussbaum explains:

¹ Martha Nussbaum, 'Mill on Happiness: The Enduring Value of a Complex Critique', *Utilitarianism and Empire*, ed. Bart Schultz and Georgios Varouxakis (Lanham, Md., 2005), pp. 120–3.

² Georgios Varouxakis, *Mill on Nationality* (London, 2002), p. 116.

I never said that we should not have a particular love of and attachment to our own nation . . . I compared our relation to our country to our relationship with our own children: just as good parents love their own children more, but still, compatibly with that, may and should seek a nation in which all children have decent life-opportunities, so too we may love our own nation more while seeking a world in which all citizens have decent life-opportunities.

Still, against such types as Richard Rorty, she urges:

The thought that it is only fair that all world citizens should have a decent minimum of life opportunities is a different thought from the thought that we feel a loyalty to all human beings, and we won't be able to think well about how loyalty might possibly support justice unless we make this initial distinction.³

Thus, for Nussbaum, Mill emerges as a hero of feminist, anti-hierarchical, cosmopolitan thinking, one who, better yet, ruthlessly adapted for the modern era the valuable bits in Aristotle about happiness as a complex whole, involving activity. She is in effect worrying about an analogue, at the level of the nation, of the old Bernard Williams challenge that the person who puts ethical impartiality above his or her particular loves may have one thought too many. Like many a defender of impartialism, notably Peter Singer, she deems it more worrisome to have one thought too few – a worry that seems especially apt when it comes to the subject of patriotism, where thoughts are too few to begin with.

Nussbaum's work on Mill tends to accentuate the positive, and she scarcely addresses those critics of Mill who worry that he is an unlikely hero for anti-hierarchical thinking, given his colonialist entanglements. But if she does not directly address the charges of Mill's ethnocentrism, colonialism, imperialism, racism, etc., Anthony Kwame Appiah, her seeming ally in the new cosmopolitanism, does, and in very sharp terms. Mill is in fact the main protagonist of Appiah's subtle work on *The Ethics of Identity*, a book that moves gracefully between a breathtaking range of positions. But on one point, Appiah is quite uncompromising: against the charge, which he takes as common to Uday Mehta, Bhikhu Parikh and John Gray, that 'Mill was an autonomist, and that autonomism is an ethnocentric preference, ruled out by pluralism', he argues that the critics have it backwards. Thus,

In fact, Mill is truly ethnocentric precisely where he suspends the requirement of autonomy. . . . The Mill who says that even the despotism of an Akbar or a Charlemagne can be beneficial for backward societies cannot be accused of foisting an ethic of autonomy upon cultures for whom autonomy is not a value.

³ Martha Nussbaum, 'An Interview with Martha Nussbaum', *The Dualist* (2004), p. 65.

It is not the smallest of ironies that these critics of Mill accept his arguments at their weakest – and reject them at their strongest.⁴

Appiah continues precisely by invoking Mill versus Carlyle on ‘the Negro Question’ – about which more directly – in support of the conclusion that:

It hardly needs to be remarked that liberal universalism, or what’s sometimes derogated as ‘essentialist humanism’, did not have the field to itself in the Enlightenment. Among the principal dissenters from such universalism were the early theorists of racial difference, and their ideas were inevitably enlisted to justify slavery and colonialism, as they later justified genocide. In the history of ideas, then, one should not assume that it’s universalism that has the most to answer for, or that ascriptions of diversity should always command our admiration. Let me go further. Our moral modernity consists chiefly of extending the principle of equal respect to those who had previously been outside the compass of sympathy; in that sense, it has consisted in the ability to see similarity where our predecessors saw only difference. The wisdom was hard-won; it should not be lightly set aside.⁵

Now for the negative, the case against Mill – or, more accurately, that case against Mill that I want to see more effectively addressed (or acknowledged) in cosmopolitan defenses of Mill. Recent decades have also witnessed a minor flourishing of critical literature in which, as Appiah suggests, the younger Mill is cast as grotesquely Eurocentric, complacently and arrogantly imperialistic, and politely racist, arbitrarily confining his liberalism to home turf. These charges are not always made together, but I will review, briefly, some works in which they are raised together, works suggesting that Mill’s ethnocentric, Eurocentric, and colonialist or imperialist predilections amounted to racist tendencies.⁶ For some, Mill’s admiration for his father’s *History of British India* and his own work with the East India Company are

⁴ Anthony Kwame Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, 2004), p. 144.

⁵ Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, pp. 145–6.

⁶ But I will largely set aside the Catherine Hall versus Peter Mandler debate over the salience of the notion of race in the mid-Victorian context. My sympathies are rather obviously with Hall (see Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects* (Chicago, 2002), p. 497, n. 127), though I think the theorizing about race (and racism) is in both cases somewhat sweeping. However, I should also stress – although it should be quite obvious – that my own take on race and racism follows Hall’s and Thomas Holt’s in recognizing how important it is to go beyond the simple definition of racism as ‘the hostility one group feels toward another on the basis of the alleged biological and/or cultural inferiority of that other’ – that is, how important it is to recognize that ‘both race and ethnicity are socially constructed identities’ and that the task is to locate the historical shifts and transformations of racism (Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Race in the 21st Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), p. 4 and p. 18). This point has also long been stressed by Goldberg: ‘I am suggesting that *race* is a fluid, transforming, historically specific concept parasitic on theoretic and social discourses for the meaning it assumes at any given historical moment’ (David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture* (Oxford, 1993), p. 74). See also Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*

deeply suggestive of his complicity in the growth of the British empire and in justifications for that growth grounded on racial difference. As Uday Mehta put it, in his influential work, *Liberalism and Empire*:

In India... especially following the mutiny of 1857, there was in fact an unmistakable tilt toward the hardening of authoritarian policies and a racializing of political and social attitudes. This was a tilt to which thinkers like J.S. Mill added their prestige and that they justified in their theoretical writings. For example, in *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill had made clear that in colonies that were not of Britain's 'blood and lineage' any move toward greater representation was not to be countenanced.⁷

Indeed, in a rather too discreet footnote, Mehta suggests that the younger Mill was a 'surprising exception' to the generalization that at this historical juncture 'race is seldom deployed as an explicit political category in the writings by British liberals'. Rather, Mill

invests race with far greater seriousness than most of his liberal contemporaries, who generally view it as a catchall term that loosely designates what might be called cultural difference. Instead Mill elaborates the term through the biological notion of 'blood.' Hence for example in the *Considerations on Representative Government* (chaps. 16, 18) he draws what he takes to be the crucial distinction in terms of readiness for representative institutions by reference to 'those of our blood' and those not of our blood.⁸

For Mehta, Mill and the whole lot of classical utilitarians were as wanting in humility as they were overbrimming with fatuity:

The almost pathological extent to which Bentham made precision the guiding ambition of his science of legislation; the confidence with which James Mill could extol the virtue of 'A Code' for India even if it required an 'absolute government'; the certainty with which J.S. Mill knew that 'there is nothing for [backward people] but implicit obedience to an Akbar or a Charlemagne' – by the nineteenth century these political impulses become verities of liberalism when faced with the unfamiliar. They are the intellectual precursors of Francis Fukuyama's confident projections regarding the 'end of history' and the attitude that typically views regimes like those in Cuba and Iran as being in some provisional interregnum.⁹

The unlikely hero of Mehta's book turns out to be Edmund Burke, the last holdout of a humbler form of liberal pluralism before the fanatical onslaught of utilitarian confidence men (never mind that Burke himself was anti-Semitic).

(Cambridge, Mass., 2005) and Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca, NY, 1998).

⁷ Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, 1999), pp. 195–6.

⁸ Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, p. 15.

⁹ Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, p. 214.

Mehta's line is presented as in some respects a more forceful variant of the arguments of Bhikhu Parekh and John Gray, to the effect that comprehensive Millian liberalism failed badly on the count of sensitivity to culture difference and receptiveness to genuine pluralism. Just as the Calvinists were depicted in *On Liberty* as fundamentally out of sync with the progressive tendencies of civilization, so too the Indians, the black Jamaicans, the Irish, and others were in the rearguard of history, not the vanguard, and might need stern discipline.¹⁰ Come to that, as Mill admitted in his *Autobiography*, he was in the later decades of his life not all that confident that the English were fit for democracy. Still, the English, even if they were Calvinists, did not bear the burden of different 'blood'.

Intriguingly, the historian Thomas Holt, in his work *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938*, finds that it is Mill's Burkean tendencies that are the problem, since his admission of cultural difference or otherness was often a type of racism in effect:

Mill was no racist, but variants of his argument for Irish exceptionalism might provide racist thinkers a way of evading the inherent contradictions in liberal democratic thought. A philosopher that pictured society as an aggregation of innately self-seeking individuals had difficulty accounting for the influence of communal values and the impact of culture and history on human thought and behavior. To the extent that racial differences could be invoked to explain deviations from expected behavior, no adjustments in basic propositions were required. For racist ideologues the blacks' cultural differences were cause to cast them into outer darkness, as exceptions of humankind. For liberals like Mill, those same differences could be invoked to make them objects of special treatment. In both cases, their 'otherness' meant that basic premises about human nature and behavior, as applied to Europeans, need not be reexamined.¹¹

Thus, Mill can be effectively damned for either racistly failing to recognize cultural difference or for recognizing cultural difference in a way that played into racist hands. But in any event, and leaving Burke out of it, his views are suspect. David Theo Goldberg, in his important essay 'Liberalism's Limits: Carlyle and Mill on "The Negro Question"', has put the point with maximal severity:

¹⁰ In the rest of this essay, I will focus chiefly on Mill in connection with the Jamaican blacks, though parallel arguments could usually be made about his views of the peoples of India, the Maori, Native Americans, and many others, including of course the Irish, about whom he was often quite disparaging (while also being more positive about their capitalistic potential; see volume XI of the *Collected Works: Essays on England, Ireland, and the Empire* [1982]). Lynn Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India* (Stanford, 1994) is especially helpful on Mill and India, on which subject there is now a considerable literature.

¹¹ Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore, 1992), p. 328.

Mill's argument for benevolent despotism failed to appreciate that neither colonialism nor despotism is ever benevolent. Benevolence here is the commitment to seek the happiness of others. But the mission of colonialism is exploitation and domination of the colonized generally, and Europeanization at least of those among the colonized whose class position makes it possible economically and educationally. And the mandate of despotism, its conceptual logic, is to assume absolute power to achieve the ruler's self-interested ends. Thus colonial despotism could achieve the happiness of colonized Others only by imposing the measure of Europeanized marks of happiness upon the other, which is to say, to force the other to be less so. Mill's argument necessarily assumed superiority of the despotic, benevolent or not; it presupposed that the mark of progress is (to be) defined by those taking themselves to be superior; and it presumes that the ruled will want to be like the rulers even as the former lack the cultural capital (ever?) quite to rise to the task. Mill's ambivalence over the inherent inferiority of 'native Negroes', even as he marked the transformation in the terms of racial definition historically from the inescapable determinism of blood and brain size to the marginally escapable reach of cultural determination, has resonated to this day in liberal ambivalence regarding racial matters.¹²

Goldberg is of course referring to Mill's 1850 response to Thomas Carlyle's virulently racist essay 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question',¹³ which was republished in pamphlet form after Mill's response with the contemptuous title 'Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question'. It would be difficult to find a more baldly racist tract in all of western history: Carlyle parades every vicious prejudice towards blacks known to humanity, depicting a stereotype of 'Quashee', a lazy, laughing, watermelon (or 'pumpkin') eating inferior fit only for paternalistic control and direction by 'the beneficent whip' of whites, who are superior by birth. Indeed, Carlyle calls for – or at least strongly suggests the desirability of – the reinstatement of slavery, condemning, in his usual way, the cruelties of *laissez-faire*. The entire odious performance is cast in an offensively humorous vein, satirizing a 'Universal Abolition of Pain Association'.

Goldberg admits, of course, that Carlyle's essay provoked a scathing critical rejoinder from Mill, who remarked of the slave trade 'I have yet to learn that anything more detestable than this has been done by human beings towards human beings in any part of the earth.'¹⁴ Mill charged Carlyle with:

the vulgar error of imputing every difference which he finds among human beings to an original difference of nature. As well might it be said, that of

¹² David Theo Goldberg, 'Liberalism's Limits: Carlyle and Mill on "The Negro Question"', *Utilitarianism and Empire*, ed. Schultz and Varouxakis, pp. 133–4.

¹³ Carlyle, *Carlyle The Nigger Question, Mill The Negro Question*, ed. Eugene R. August (New York, 1971).

¹⁴ Mill, *Carlyle The Nigger Question, Mill The Negro Question*, ed. August, p. 40; see also *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, XXI (Toronto, 1984).

two trees, sprung from the same stock, one cannot be taller than another but from greater vigour in the original seeding. Is nothing to be attributed to soil, nothing to climate, nothing to difference of exposure – has no storm swept over the one and not the other, no lightning scathed it, no beast browsed on it, no insects preyed on it, no passing stranger stripped off its leaves or its bark? If the trees grew near together, may not the one which, by whatever accident, grew up first, have retarded the other's development by its shade?¹⁵

Moreover, the 'great ethical doctrine' of Carlyle's Discourse 'than which a doctrine more damnable, I should think, never was propounded by a professed moral reformer, is, that one kind of human beings are born servants to another kind'. Mill identified himself with the 'thinking persons' who 'either doubt or positively deny' the innate inferiority of blacks. And he had much sport with Carlyle's insane views about work being the be-all and end-all of existence.

Still, Goldberg has serious doubts. 'It was Carlyle's call to reinstitute slavery to which Mill principally objected ... [His] critical concern with Carlyle's racist sentiment was only secondary and much more understated. Moreover, not only did Mill not object to colonial domination, he insisted upon it, albeit in "benevolent" form.'¹⁶ And Mill only doubted that blacks were biologically inferior; he did not, alas, effectively deny Carlyle's claim that blacks were somehow inferior, so much as recast the inferiority as a historically contingent matter. As Joseph Miller has also observed, 'Mill agrees with Carlyle that blacks generally are less capable than Europeans, comparing blacks to trees that grew in poor soil or poor climate or that might have suffered from exposure, storms or disease.'¹⁷ And in this case, for Goldberg, Mill's defense of *laissez-faire*, rather than limitation of it, was suspect on racial grounds. In

objecting to Carlyle's racist hierarchical naturalism... Mill inscribed in its place and in the name of *laissez faire* and equal opportunity, an imputation of the historical inferiority of blacks. Mill implied that this assumption of inferiority, because historically produced and contingent, was not always the case (Egyptians influenced Greeks) and might one day be overcome. Yet Mill's superficial bow to what has become an Afro-centric cornerstone barely hid beneath the surface the polite racism of his Euro-centric history. Contingent racism is still a form of racism – not so usual, not so bald, not so vituperative, and polite perhaps, but condensing nevertheless even as it is committed to equal opportunity. Equal opportunity among those with the unfair, historically produced inequities of the colonial condition will simply reproduce those inequities, if not expand them.¹⁸

¹⁵ Mill, *Carlyle The Nigger Question, Mill The Negro Question*, ed. August, p. 46.

¹⁶ Goldberg, 'Liberalism's Limits', p. 129.

¹⁷ J. Joseph Miller, 'Chairing the Jamaica Committee: J. S. Mill and the Limits of Colonial Authority', *Utilitarianism and Empire*, ed. Schultz and Varouxakis, p. 163.

¹⁸ Goldberg, 'Liberalism's Limits', p. 130.

Thus, if Carlyle's racism was 'bald and vicious', Mill's was merely 'polite and effete'. Still, 'polite and effete' racism remains dreadful. Mill's

erasure in the name of nonracialism rubs out at once the history of racist invisibility, domination, and exploitation, replacing the memory of an infantilized past with the denial of responsibility for radically unequal and only superficially deracialized presents . . . savages become the permanently unemployable, the uncivilized become crack heads, the lumpenproletariat the underclass, Distressed Needlewomen become sweated labor, poor Irish peasants turn into distressed defaulting family farmers and, well, 'Niggers' become 'Negroes', or blacks scarcely disguised beneath the seemingly benign nomenclature. For every Mill of yesteryear there is today a William Bennett or a Gary Becker. . .¹⁹

However, Goldberg also supports his case by bringing in Mill on India and the claims about people of different blood being unfit for representative government. Mill represented 'colonialism with a human face. The world was to be directed by the most developed and capable nations whose self-interests nevertheless would be mitigated and mediated by the force of utilitarian reason.'²⁰ Essentially the same line is helpfully developed in a recent essay by Anthony Bogue, 'John Stuart Mill and "The Negro Question": Race, Colonialism, and the Ladder of Civilization', which argues:

So what we have here in the debate between Mill and Carlyle are the following. In one current of English political thought, difference was innate, created by nature, and as a consequence there was no chance of political and social equality for those who were nonwhite subjects of the empire. Another current admitted that the black and colonial subjects were indeed inferior but argued that this inferiority was not ordained by nature and therefore could be overcome by contact with civilization and a process of tutelage. Both currents were united in their belief about black inferiority but disagreed on its root causes and naturalness. For those who thought that this so-called inferiority could be overcome, we should note that the goal was envisioned in terms of white normativity. To become fully human and a citizen, the colonial and black subject had to master the protocols of Western civilization, to become in the words of the nineteenth-century English writer Anthony Trollope, a 'Creole Negro.'²¹

These various critiques are harsh: Burke teaming up with Frantz Fanon to blast Mill as a racist and nascent neo-conservative. Like one of those racists, and the Bush administration is indeed full of them, who talk the talk of compassion (some even believing what they are saying) even while whipping up support from racist constituencies with carefully encoded sermons on what makes America great – not to

¹⁹ Goldberg, 'Liberalism's Limits', p. 134.

²⁰ Goldberg, 'Liberalism's Limits', p. 132; see also Goldberg, *Racist Culture* for an important treatment.

²¹ Anthony Bogue, 'John Stuart Mill and "The Negro Question" Race, Colonialism, and the Ladder of Civilization', *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, ed. Andrew Valls (Ithaca, NY, 2005), p. 222.

mention discreetly working behind the scenes to remove blacks from the lists of eligible voters by targeting supposed criminals. Not quite what Gertrude Himmelfarb had in mind, at least one hopes. At any rate, on these readings, taken collectively, Mill is suspect, on the count of racism, both when urging the spread of representative government and laissez-faire and when qualifying their applicability, both when recognizing difference and when being 'blood blind'. Goldberg is incensed both by Mill allowing the English to play Charlemagne in India and by his supposed call (which, incidentally, was in fact quite qualified) for laissez-faire in Jamaica.

Now, at first blush, it might seem that Nussbaum and Appiah are, as Appiah explicitly suggests, utterly at odds with the Mehta, Parekh et al. criticism of universalistic, monistic Millian liberalism. And yet, intriguingly, in the very passages that I cited, Mehta, at least, was spelling out this charge with respect to the very same Millian claim about how despotism might be best for 'backward societies' – *a claim that Appiah concedes is ethnocentric*. Indeed, Mehta's distaste for Millian arrogance is apparently not for Mill's monistic autonomism, but for his lapses into forms of particularism congenial to hierarchical racist thinking, for his allowances for peoples for whom representative political institutions might not be appropriate. Despite its appearance, Mehta's basic critique is rooted in the very same point that Appiah concedes. Moreover, it is a point also at the heart of Holt's reservations about Mill, which painted him as a racist fellow traveler thanks to his concessions to otherness and difference, and that figures in half of Goldberg's critique. And needless to say, Nussbaum's Millian work with Indian feminists, for example, more often finds itself at odds with people defending the domination of women in terms of 'our way of life' than with people defending universal human rights.

Still, this is obviously not to say all is in underlying harmony in Mill studies. For one thing, there are extreme defenders of pluralism, such as Parekh and Gray. But their position is not as widely shared as it may at first seem, among those concerned to criticize colonialist and imperialist forms of racism, and in fact, the more recent currents represented by Nussbaum and Appiah suggest that the pluralist critique of Mill is losing steam, going the way of communitarianism, identity politics, and the other ill-defined movements. In some ways, the point is simple: Mill failed not when he was at his best, but when he was at his worst, and he did have his failings. And if these were not such as to make him a nascent neo-con, they do nonetheless call for censure. Thus, as Jennifer Pitts has put it, in her admirable work *A Turn to Empire*:

Mill, for all his radicalism with regard to domestic politics, placed considerable faith in colonial government as a well-intentioned and legitimate despotism

designed for the improvement of its subjects. Both his writings on India and his role in the Eyre affair suggest that he hesitated before a full-scale inquiry into the structure of colonial rule and the repeated abuses that structure invited. He avoided such an inquiry even though he came to acknowledge, late in life, a mistrust of British political judgment on colonial matters.²²

Pitts, that is, provides a very careful, even-handed analysis of Mill's theoretical and practical work on both India and Jamaica. In the latter case as well as the former, Mill was practically and politically involved; he became the moving force on the Jamaica Committee investigating – or rather, condemning – Governor Eyre's atrocities in response to the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, when Eyre brutally repressed the (perfectly justifiable) uprising and judicially murdered such rebel leaders as Paul Bogle and George William Gordon, the latter being a well-to-do mulatto landowner and member of the Assembly who had long been critical of Eyre but was not directly involved in the rebellion. Eyre's ferocity recalled the British response to the Sepoy Rebellion, and Mill's response to it is, as Goldberg, Bogues and Pitts agree, singularly revealing, suggestive of what he did and did not dissent from in Carlyle (who was a leader of those defending Eyre).²³ Mill wanted Eyre brought to justice, but that was apparently all he wanted, beyond his usual hopes for improving the quality of imperial rule. Mill's

Belief in the incapacity of non-European subjects for self-rule meant that he failed to argue for – perhaps even to imagine – conditions of accountability to colonial subjects. Until backward peoples were deemed, presumably by

²² Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, 2005), p. 160.

²³ As Bogues helpfully summarizes it, when the rebellion (largely led by Bogle and his followers) reached its peak, involving some two thousand persons in the parish of St. Thomas, the 'colonial government reacted by establishing a council of war. Arguing that this was but the tip of an island-wide conspiracy to overthrow the colonial government, and with the memory of the Haitian Revolution hovering over the colony, Governor Eyre organized a military force to brutally crush the rebellion. At the end of the day, Eyre unleashed severe repression – 439 persons were killed, hundreds were brutally flogged, thousands of houses were burnt, and many of the leaders including Bogle were hanged. Eyre held Gordon responsible for the rebellion and duly executed him' (Bogues, 'John Stuart Mill', p. 224). The best extended accounts of the rebellion are Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*; Hall, *Civilizing Subjects*; Bernard Semmel, *Jamaican Blood and Victorian Conscience: The Governor Eyre Controversy* (Westport, Conn., 1962); and Gad Heuman, *The Killing Time: The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1994). Hall is particularly good on Eyre's background and character, though she has surprisingly little to say about Mill. (But see the essay 'Competing Masculinities: Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill and the Case of Governor Eyre', *White, Male, and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, ed. Catherine Hall (Cambridge, 1992), for some very illuminating remarks on the construction of both gender and race in this controversy. In developing a comparison between Mill's feminism and his views on race, Hall allows that, for Mill's account, 'whether there would be in the end, whatever the degree of education achieved by the blacks, a *natural* division of labor between the races, remains a problem', p. 288.)

European administrators, capable of participating in their own governance, Mill seemed content to rely on colonial administrators themselves for appropriate restraints on the exercise of power. Other than his expressions of mistrust of the local legislature, Mill said little about how progress toward collective self-government in Jamaica might take place. He resorted, as in India, to the tidier and less political solution of administration checked by criminal courts. Mill, that is, tended to regard colonial subjects as objects of administration rather than participants in a political process.²⁴

Like Mehta, Pitts allows that Burke was more attuned than Mill to the abuses of colonial rule. But like Goldberg and Bogues, she recognizes how Mill's context was more virulently racist: 'liberal colonial reform itself, and liberal cosmopolitanism, had changed by the mid-nineteenth century. British superiority and the justice of British colonial rule were nearly taken for granted by the bulk of the population by the mid-nineteenth century.'²⁵ Thus, in this context, 'Mill's continued opposition to racist argument and his commitment to benevolent and improving colonial government was perhaps the most ambitious posture liberalism could muster. The Eyre trial gives some indication of the constraints on humanitarian discourse more generally in the nineteenth century.'²⁶ Although Pitts does not label Mill a 'polite and effete' racist, she does come quite close: 'both Mill and Tocqueville insisted that claims about *biological* differences or inequalities were unprovable and morally and politically pernicious. And yet their willingness to see the moral and political standards that governed relations within Europe suspended in dealings with other peoples bore the mark of a discourse increasingly founded on the assumptions about the inequality of different peoples.'²⁷ And after all, fierce as Mill's response to Carlyle was, he did not deny that there *might be* biological racial differences; he only claimed that scientific knowledge was insufficiently advanced to demonstrate these. This construction has the support of no less a Mill scholar than the late John Robson, who wrote, in his essay 'Civilization and Culture', that although Mill had little to say on 'race' – the term 'national character' being his more common idiom – which he considered an 'accident of birth' like sex, he did, like others of his time, tend 'to apply it to groups that were indeed genetically loosely interrelated, but distinguished from one another by behaviour and belief'. His position was made clear in a letter to Charles Dupont-White, in which Mill emphatically denied

²⁴ Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, p. 161.

²⁵ Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, p. 162.

²⁶ Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, p. 162. Pitts' argument here is, I believe, primarily concerned with the limits of English and French liberal discourse, rather than with the overall cultural and historical limitations of the 'times'.

²⁷ Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, p. 241.

that his condemnation of the ‘vulgar error’ of attributing everything to race meant that he attributed no influence to race – ‘he did not deny, but in fact admits “pleinement,” “l’influence des races.”’²⁸ But for the critics, agnosticism in this context is deeply suspect.

Such worries are not, to my mind, effectively addressed or even acknowledged by such figures as Nussbaum and Appiah. The most forthright defenses of Mill have come from others with some sympathy for their cosmopolitan line, such as Georgios Varouxakis and H. S. Jones. Against Goldberg, Varouxakis has forcefully argued that the difference between Carlyle and Mill should be counted as a difference between racist and non-racist: ‘I think that the two things are separate and that the term “racism” is not appropriate to describe Mill’s attitude; “Euro-centric” would do.’²⁹ But even so,

Mill’s thought was indeed Euro-centric, and, despite his efforts to be open-minded, he did show himself deplorably ignorant and prejudiced about non-European cultures, not least those of the Indian Peninsula. And his belief that a benevolent despotism was a legitimate mode of governing those he called “barbarians”... was paternalistic and based on assumptions that we cannot accept today.³⁰

In essence, for Varouxakis, to label Mill a type of racist, or even to say, with Parekh that ‘From time to time Mill... came pretty close to the crude racism of his time’, is just too much, given how good he was in the context of his times, even if we admit that his ‘open-mindedness did not reach far enough’. Varouxakis carefully demonstrates, against Mehta, that what ‘Mill actually means when he talks of colonists “of our blood” is their cultural traits, coming from the mother county, the metropolis. He does not use “blood” literally.’³¹

And Jones, for his part, urges that ‘Varouxakis has definitively refuted the surprisingly resilient belief that Mill had recourse to racial explanations in history and political thought’, and condemns Goldberg’s case as ‘curiously slight’. Against Goldberg’s claims about Mill erasing racial subjectivity, Jones argues that:

²⁸ John Robson, ‘Civilisation and Culture as Moral Concepts’, *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, ed. J. Skorupski (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 353. Robson also quotes from Mill’s ‘Remarks on Bentham’s Philosophy’: ‘For a tribe of North American Indians, improvement means, taming down their proud and solitary self-dependence: for a body of emancipated negroes, it means accustoming them to be self-dependent, instead of being merely obedient to orders: for our semi-barbarous ancestors it would have meant softening them; for a race of enervated Asiatics it would mean hardening them’ (p. 368).

²⁹ Georgios Varouxakis, ‘Empire, Race, Euro-centrism: John Stuart Mill and His Critics’, *Utilitarianism and Empire*, ed. Schultz and Varouxakis, p. 142.

³⁰ Varouxakis, ‘Empire, Race, Euro-centrism’, p. 144.

³¹ Varouxakis, ‘Empire, Race, Euro-centrism’, p. 141.

Whereas it is largely true at the beginning of the twenty-first century that self-conscious racial subjectivity is a weapon to be used by the oppressed against their current or former oppressors, this was hardly the case in the nineteenth century. Then, race theory was commonly deployed in support of colonial despotism, as the involvement of Carlyle and others in the Governor Eyre controversy demonstrated. J. S. Mill's stance on colonialism may not satisfy our standards of political correctness, but the political bite of his race-blindness was powerfully progressive in its time.³²

Furthermore, Goldberg's argument for regarding Mill as racist is akin to claims that he was not really a feminist; 'the case for regarding Mill as a racist depends on the belief that his "civilizational perspective" betrayed an unspoken assimilation of "civilization" to white European civilization: the white European, then, embodied the universal standard of human excellence', much as radical feminists charge him with measuring women by male standards, in effect recognizing their worth as men without penises. Jones stresses in response how Mill 'was a consistent believer in the importance of "nurture" rather than "nature"' and how he was 'unsympathetic to "equal but different" arguments: that is, arguments for equality founded on the distinctive qualities of the oppressed. Mill tended to believe that oppression made people oppressed, not that it made people good in some distinctive way.'³³

These defenses of Mill have surely gone very far to clarify just how Mill used such key terms as 'race', 'blood', 'national character', etc. But, despite appearances, they concede a lot to the critics. Varouxakis objects to 'the rather promiscuous use of the term "racist" evinced in the writings of many scholars', but he allows that Mill 'did show himself deplorably ignorant and prejudiced about non-European cultures, not least those of the Indian Peninsula'. Jones allows that Pitts, especially, makes a powerful case: in effect, 'the case of the radical emancipationist against the liberal emancipationist', since Mill 'did not appreciate the extent to which his understanding of what emancipation must entail was itself rooted in domination'.³⁴ Even if we refrain from calling Mill a racist, we are right to call him arrogantly Eurocentric, too complacently accepting of difference as 'inferiority', and blindly paternalistic on the subject of subject peoples being allowed to rule themselves, making their own mistakes, etc. And all this in the name of bare historical accuracy, rather than 'political correctness', whatever that is supposed to mean. And this is not to mention Mill's avowed receptiveness (acknowledged by Robson) to the possibility that science might in

³² H. S. Jones, 'The Early Utilitarians, Race, and Empire: The State of the Argument', *Utilitarianism and Empire*, ed. Schultz and Varouxakis, p. 185.

³³ Jones, 'The Early Utilitarians, Race, and Empire', p. 185.

³⁴ Jones, 'The Early Utilitarians, Race, and Empire', p. 186.

the future make out some significant (biological) racial differences. Apparently, when it comes to arboreal metaphors about stunted growth, Mill's depictions of, say, the Jamaicans were rather more sinister than his depictions of subjected women in England. One can make a case, as Nussbaum does, for Mill as anticipating (at least in the English context) some elements of radical feminism, what with his keen sense of the distortions resulting from power and domination; one cannot make such a case with respect to his account of black Jamaicans.

But Varouxakis and Jones do not, I think, bring out just how far Mill's views on, say, the Jamaicans really could have justified a Victorian version of racial profiling.³⁵ Given the conceptual confusions that swirl around the notion of 'race' even in our own day, such that one can find biological essentialists about race casting themselves as anti-racists and anti-biological essentialists cast – not usually by themselves – as racist, one might be forgiven for thinking that on the count of racism, Mill was close enough for imperial government work.³⁶ Unfortunately, it cannot be said that Nussbaum and Appiah candidly acknowledge what a close call this matter is, which is especially surprising in Appiah's case, given how eloquent he has been on the long history of black identity politics, even in the nineteenth century. As Appiah notes, the early W. E. B. DuBois held that 'people are members of the same race if they share features in virtue of being descended largely from people of the same region. Those features may be physical – hence Afro-Americas are Negroes – or cultural – hence Anglo-Americans are English.'³⁷ Which is to say that DuBois, writing within twenty-five years of Mill's death, used the term 'race' in much the way Mill used the term 'blood', while seeking 'to revalue one pole of the opposition of white to black'.³⁸ Contra Jones, there clearly was an anti-racist, black

³⁵ The form of the argument here is something like an historically adapted variant of the case made in Michael Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Berkeley, 2003), which is also the line of Goldberg and Bogue. This critique does not, of course, at all diminish the importance of Varouxakis's reconstruction of Mill's cosmopolitanism, for a recent statement of which see Georgios Varouxakis, 'Cosmopolitan Patriotism in J. S. Mill's Political Thought and Activism' (forthcoming). But the Varouxakis/Jones response does not recognize the cogency of Goldberg's construction of the interweaving of 'race' and 'ethnicity', for an extended treatment of which see Goldberg (1993) which also includes an important critique of Appiah's biological conception of race.

³⁶ See Shelby, *We Who Are Dark*, for an excellent account of biological essentialism versus anti-essentialism; also Goldberg, *Racist Culture*.

³⁷ Anthony Kwame Appiah, 'The Uncompleted Argument: DuBois and the Illusion of Race', *The Idea of Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy Lott (Indianapolis, 2000), pp. 126–7.

³⁸ And as Holt notes, 'by the nineteenth century the term "ethnic" is found in both English and French dictionaries coupled with "race" as one of its synonyms' (Holt, *The Problem of Race in the 21st Century*, p. 17). As Hall points out, 'these two discourses, that of cultural differentialism and that of biological racism, were, as Stuart Hall has argued,

subjectivity for Mill to ignore.³⁹ Indeed, he obviously did so when he was fairly confronted to his face (figuratively speaking) by the Jamaicans Paul Bogle and George William Gordon, who, as Holt argues, effectively used an eclectic blend of Christian and African religious ideas to provide ‘a vehicle for cultural resistance, giving moral authority to an alternative world-view’.⁴⁰ As a relatively recent history of Jamaica puts it, Bogle and Gordon, in their last years,

defined the central themes of justice and concern for the ‘many’, which widened into a struggle against the monopoly of political power that was taken up by Robert Lowe, Sandy Cox and Bain Alves with their trade unions, Marcus Garvey, Norman Manley in his campaign for universal adult suffrage and Alexander Bustamante in his formation of the labour movement, and led to political independence in 1962.⁴¹

In short, they were freedom fighters.⁴² As Bogues notes, during the Morant Bay rebellion, the rebellious crowds at points confronted those police officers who were black with cries of ‘Cleave to the black’.⁴³

not two different systems, but “racism’s two registers”, and in many situations discourses of both were in play, the cultural slipping into the biological, and vice versa’ (Hall, *Civilizing Subjects*, p. 17). Again, Goldberg (*Racist Culture*) takes a similar position. For additional helpful overviews of the cultural content of the notions of race, see the contributions by Joanna de Groot, Nancy Ley Stepan, and Ann Laura Stoler to Catherine Hall, *Cultures of Empire: A Reader* (London, 2000). Clearly, the historical situation in the Caribbean and Latin America was very complex; as Holt observes, of the treatment of mulattos and mixed-blood peoples, ‘they came to occupy a social status not unlike the Jewish and Muslim converts. They were not classified with blacks but as a separate caste, and they filled the interstitial jobs – and some of high status – that American frontier societies with small white settler populations required. In the British West Indies there were legal procedures – if one could pay for them – for having oneself actually declared white by an act of the legislature. In Jamaica in the 1830s the white planters hoped that the brown population could be assimilated to the white side of the racial divide so that they would form a protective bulwark against the soon-to-be-emancipated black slave majority’ (Holt, *The Problem of Race in the 21st Century*, p. 47).

³⁹ One need only think of the histories portrayed in C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York, 1963). It is true that Mill had little to say about the Haitian revolution, but in his essay on the *Edinburgh Review* he did direct some properly nasty remarks at the apologists for the white slaveholders: ‘Then all who venture to doubt whether it is perfectly just and humane to aid in reducing one half of the people of Hayti to slavery, and exterminating the other half, are accused of sympathizing exclusively with the blacks. We wonder what the writer would call sympathizing exclusively with the whites. We should have thought that the lives and liberties of a whole nation were an ample sacrifice for the value of a slight, or rather, as the event proved, an imaginary, addition to the security of the property of a few West India planters’ (Mill, *Collected Works*, I, p. 305).

⁴⁰ Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, p. 291.

⁴¹ Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett, *The Story of the Jamaican People* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1998), pp. 247–8; see also Semmel, *Jamaican Blood and Victorian Conscience*; Hall, *Civilizing Subjects*; and Heuman, *The Killing Time*.

⁴² For a very sobering short account of just how tough the fight was, see Patrick Bryan, ‘The White Minority in Jamaica at the End of the Nineteenth Century’, *The White Minority in the Caribbean*, ed. H. Johnson and K. Watson (Kingston, Jamaica, 1998).

⁴³ Bogues, ‘John Stuart Mill’, p. 223.

And Gad Heuman also compellingly demonstrates how the Morant Bay rebellion ‘was preceded by a long history of slave rebellions as well as a series of riots in the post-emancipation period. Many of the people involved in these riots continued to look to the rebellions as models of resistance’, though after emancipation their agenda ‘included resisting any attempt at re-enslavement and regarded access to land as a measure of full freedom’.⁴⁴ With respect to hero worship, Heuman has a good eye for the historical irony here: ‘although Eyre was regarded as a hero by many of the whites and browns in Jamaica for suppressing the rebellion, he is now nearly forgotten. Instead, Paul Bogle and George William Gordon are Jamaican National Heroes.’⁴⁵

Thus, it is safe to say that even when confronted with a compelling, pragmatic black resistance movement and a possible extension of (genuine) political equality to Jamaican blacks in response, Mill, as Pitts puts it, ‘sought a solution in the imposition of reforms through the colonial authority’.⁴⁶ To say that he was good for his cultural context is to define his cultural context by (a problematic construction of) English ‘whiteness’, when he himself was actively engaging with the Jamaican situation and an avowedly black liberation movement. Surely, as the entire field of postcolonial studies demonstrates, contextualist history need not be a mask for ornamentalism.⁴⁷

The point here needs to be underscored: it is not enough to try to exonerate Mill, in the fashion of Varouxakis and Jones, by showing that he was not working with a biological racial essentialism. The racialism involved in racism is never coherent, and although the term ‘racism’ may have gained currency in the early twentieth century and have many gray areas, there is little reason to resist applying it to earlier periods, when such terms as ‘blood’ etc. seemed to carry a mix of biological and cultural features, just as they sometimes did in more recent times. Indeed, this point is compellingly made by George Fredrickson in his book *Racism: A Short History*. As Fredrickson puts it, ‘Deterministic cultural particularism can do the work of biological racism quite effectively.’ As he observes, with reference to the case of South African apartheid, the

⁴⁴ Heuman, *The Killing Time*, p. 42.

⁴⁵ Heuman, *The Killing Time*, pp. 185–6.

⁴⁶ Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, p. 157.

⁴⁷ The allusion is of course to those nostalgic, delusional accounts of empire spawned by the neoconservatism of recent decades, such as David Cannadine’s *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford, 2001). A much better sense of the historical realities of empire – and one consistent with Goldberg’s analysis – can be found in Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006). On the crucial importance of the reciprocal influence of metropole and colony, my sympathies are clearly with Dirks and Hall (*Civilizing Subjects*).

extent to which Afrikaner nationalism was inspired by nineteenth-century European cultural nationalism also contributed to this avoidance of a pseudoscientific rationale. No better example can be found of how a 'cultural essentialism' based on nationality can do the work of a racism based squarely on skin color or other physical characteristics.⁴⁸

On Varouxakis' argument, South African apartheid ought to be called 'Eurocentric' rather than 'racist' – which is surely absurd. At any rate, it is scarcely anachronistic or judgmental to worry about racism in the context of Mill and Sidgwick; it is more anachronistic and judgmental to insist in advance on accepting the 'limits' of their cultural context, etc. As Fredrickson argues, although we must take care not to make 'racism the ideological essence of imperialism', we must, nonetheless, recognize how the 'view of colonial rule as a lengthy and problematic apprenticeship for civilized modernity can be viewed as functionally racist to the degree that it justified denying civil and political rights to indigenous populations for the foreseeable future'.⁴⁹

Admittedly, of the treatment of Gordon, Mill said some wise things, relevant to our own times: 'The great majority of people, especially people in power, are ready to believe almost anything against their political enemies, especially those who have said or published things tending to excite disapprobation of their conduct.'⁵⁰ But he did not pursue such thoughts to their uncomfortable conclusions. Complain as he might about 'the overbearing and insolent disregard of the rights and feelings of inferiors which is the common characteristic of John Bull when he thinks he cannot be resisted', he did not rethink his view of the 'inferiors'.⁵¹ As all, or at least most, sides admit, about the best 'anti-hierarchical' thought one can find in Mill on this subject comes in an 1866 letter to David Urquhart:

But my eyes were first opened to the moral condition of the English nation (I except in these matters the working classes) by the atrocities perpetrated in the Indian Mutiny & the feelings which supported them at home. Then came the sympathy with the lawless rebellion of the Southern Americans in defence of an institution which is the sum of all lawlessness, as Wesley said it was of

⁴⁸ George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, 2002), pp. 8, 3–4.

⁴⁹ Fredrickson, *Racism*, p. 108. Fredrickson is very careful on this score, allowing that 'insofar as those relatively few individuals who assimilated Western civilization could actually gain such rights, the racist aspect was attenuated', and may not, as in the French case, always count as racism 'strictly speaking' (p. 108). But clearly, on his account it does make very good sense to call some such colonial or imperial situations racist, when considering the functional or 'polite' form of racism. And obviously, I completely agree with Fredrickson that 'something that can be legitimately described as racism existed well before the twentieth century or even the late nineteenth century' (p. 100). This is perfectly in keeping with the careful social constructionist line developed by Holt (*The Problem of Race in the 21st Century*) and Hall (*Civilizing Subjects*).

⁵⁰ *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, XXVIII (Toronto, 1988), p. 118.

⁵¹ *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, XVI (Toronto, 1972), p. 1136.

all villainy – & finally came this Jamaica business the authors of which from the first day I knew of it I determined that I would do all in my power to bring to justice if there was not another man in Parlt to stand by me.⁵²

But Mill prefaces this late-in-life explanation with the admission: ‘You approve of my speech because you see that I am not on this occasion standing up for the negroes, or for liberty, deeply as both are interested in the subject – but for the first necessity of human society, law.’ Again, his overwhelming concern, throughout the Eyre business, was with the rule of law. As Kinzer, Robson and Robson remark, ‘The moral legitimacy of such imperial rule turned on the intent and capacity of the dominant country to provide the subject people with a government better – in the sense of promoting “the permanent interests of man as a progressive being” – than they could provide for themselves’, but the ‘men representing the British crown in Jamaica in the autumn of 1865 had disgraced the British Empire and desecrated the principles for which it ought to stand’.⁵³

The best possible construal of Mill’s position is judiciously developed by Joseph Miller: ‘Mill pursues Eyre not simply because Eyre threatens a colonial system whose weaknesses Mill refuses to acknowledge. Rather, Eyre represents a particular vision of colonialism (arbitrary despotism wielded only to the advantage of the colonizer) that is fundamentally at odds with Mill’s considered conception of colonialism.’⁵⁴ And of course, although he was recalled and his career effectively ended, Eyre never was brought to justice; rather, Mill lost his seat in Parliament in thanks for his efforts against the former Governor, the Jamaican Assembly was dissolved (by itself, out of fear of black participation) and Crown rule imposed.⁵⁵ That (along with the

⁵² *Collected Works*, XVI, p. 1206. There were of course others. In another 1866 letter to Urquhart, Mill laments the ‘sympathy of officials with officials & of the classes from whom officials are selected with officials of all sorts’ and ‘the sympathy with authority & power, generated in our higher & upper middle classes by the feeling of being specially privileged to exercise them, & by living in a constant dread of the encroachment of the class beneath which makes it one of their strongest feelings that resistance to authority must be put down per fas et nefas. . . There is much in American politics that is regrettable enough, but I do not observe that there is a particle of the English upper class feeling that authority (meaning the person in authority) must be supported at all costs’ (p. 1209).

⁵³ Bruce L. Kinzer, Ann P. Robson and John M. Robson, *A Moralist In and Out of Parliament: John Stuart Mill at Westminster, 1865–1868* (Toronto, 1992), pp. 216–17.

⁵⁴ Miller, ‘Chairing the Jamaica Committee’, p. 172.

⁵⁵ When the Grand Jury threw out the charges against Eyre, *Punch* celebrated the occasion with a singularly nasty poem, the first stanza of which runs ‘Ye savages thirsting for bloodshed and plunder / Ye miscreants burning for rapine and prey, / By the fear of the lash and the gallows kept under, / Henceforth who shall venture to stand in your way? / Run riot, destroy, ravage, kill without pity, / Let any man how he molests you beware. / Beholding how hard the Jamaica Committee / To ruin are trying to hunt gallant EYRE’ (in *The White Man’s Burden: An Anthology of British Poetry of the Empire*, ed. Chris Brooks and Peter Faulkner (Exeter, 1996), p. 206). Indeed, given the nature of the times,

death threats he received) should have provided Mill with rather more food for thought than it apparently did, though of course he was, at this point in his life, very outspoken about his views and willing to accept the consequences of this forthrightness. Alas, it is pure fantasy to suggest, as some have, that Mill was keeping his better angels under wraps for political purposes.⁵⁶

Now, on the matter of Henry Sidgwick's development of such ideas, I can be uncharacteristically brief. As is well known, Sidgwick, by his own account, early on became a disciple of Mill's, when in the late 1850s he was a Cambridge undergraduate reading Mill's works with the famous secret discussion society, the Apostles. Sidgwick corresponded with Mill in the late 1860s, soliciting his ego ideal's advice on the sticky question of religious subscription – something that the younger and quite unorthodox philosopher was finding very problematic, since swearing to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church was required by his academic position. (Sidgwick of course famously resigned his position on such grounds in 1869, though he continued at Cambridge as a lecturer, in due course, after the law changed, regaining his Fellowship.) They were also, in the late 1860s, fellow members of the short-lived 'Radical Club'. And Sidgwick's great work, *The Methods of Ethics* (1874), contained one of the most extended and probing treatments of utilitarianism ever penned, albeit one that was qualified by the 'dualism of practical reason' – that is, Sidgwick's frustrated conclusion that he had to concede that rational egoism appeared to be just as reasonable as utilitarianism.

Thus, although Sidgwick's views were sophisticated, eclectic and heavily qualified, such that he might better be called a dualist than a utilitarian, it nonetheless remains the case that he himself preferred the title 'utilitarian' and that when it comes to great nineteenth-century

it is hard to see why it is any consolation – or at all to the point – to say that Mill was good for them, not that our own day is much better.

⁵⁶ Though it is true, as Hall notes, that it 'was essential to the Eyre Defense Committee. . . that the true character of the negro as it had been revealed all too clearly by the events at Morant Bay, in their view, should be exposed' (Hall, *Civilizing Subjects*, p. 63). Carlyle's racism (and hero worship) was the basis for the entire Eyre defense, which attracted such literary types as Tennyson, Ruskin, and Dickens (in contrast to the Jamaica Committee, which in addition to Mill attracted such figures as Darwin, T. H. Huxley, and Spencer). See Kinzer, et al., *A Moralist In and Out of Parliament*, for a fairly detailed account of Mill's work with the Jamaica Committee, albeit one that largely avoids the issue of racism. Their work also shows that whatever political self-censoring Mill may have done with respect to the Eyre affair would have been in the first part of 1866, before the fall of the Russell–Gladstone ministry. At best, one might claim, with Pitts (*A Turn to Empire*), that Mill's 'speeches and writings on the subject can be read as an effort to alter the British public's understanding of their rights and obligations as citizens: to enlist their support for the victimized *British subjects*, rather than for the white perpetrators that racial sympathy and national sympathy might otherwise lead them to defend' (p. 154).

utilitarian successors to Mill, he is clearly the main claimant to the title. And when it comes to the recent critical reception of Sidgwick's works on the themes central to this essay, there is a much simpler story to tell. For better or worse, it is largely a case of Schultz versus Schultz – that is, of the different possible interpretations of his politics set out in my book, *Henry Sidgwick, Eye of the Universe*.⁵⁷

Here, however, I will let one of my reviewers make the point. As Rob Shaver puts it, in his review of *Eye* in the *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*:

(iv) After the *Methods*, Sidgwick wrote large *Principles of Political Economy* and *Elements of Politics*. Schultz stresses two aspects of these works. First, although Sidgwick presents himself as writing from traditional political economy, he makes a case for socialism. Second, Sidgwick acquiesces in the racism of his time. He speaks of 'inferior' and 'superior races,' 'civilised' and 'uncivilised' societies; he gives utilitarian, paternalistic arguments for the expansion of the 'civilised nations' without exhibiting knowledge of the 'uncivilised' ones; he uses 'nigger' occasionally in correspondence; his opposition to the Boer war makes no reference to the black population; he does not see the need (as Schultz notes, '[a]stonishingly') to distinguish the duty and the interest of the civilising nations; he respected and relied on works by his friends James Bryce and Charles Henry Pearson which were much more virulent (especially Pearson), and must have lived with the same attitudes from his student, friend, and brother-in-law, Arthur Balfour.

I am not sure that the evidence for racism is as damning as Schultz thinks. Schultz himself presents a counter-case: Sidgwick sees no evidence of 'racial debasement' from mixing races or for inherent racial differences in morality or intelligence, and indeed, given the times, says remarkably little about race at all; he criticises those who think civilisation is 'a monopoly of the white race;' he sees the evil side of colonisation and favours careful protection of the colonised; he demands that the colonised receive the same educational opportunities as the colonisers.⁵⁸

Well, I take that as something of a compliment, to the effect that I succeeded in bringing a certain Sidgwickian even-handedness to a very difficult – indeed, explosive – subject, one made all the more difficult by Sidgwick's well-known penchant for putting his political theoretical views in an excessively abstract way, such that it can be very difficult to figure out just what concrete examples he had in mind. But I would also underscore that however 'good for his times' some aspects of Sidgwick's work might seem, his agnosticism, which was much like Mill's, clearly

⁵⁷ Though the work as a whole was avowedly constructed on Saidian lines (see Bart Schultz, *Henry Sidgwick, Eye of the Universe: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 20); see also Said's contribution to *Relocating Postcolonialism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (Oxford, 2002), for a congenial perspective.

⁵⁸ Rob Shaver, 'Review: Henry Sidgwick, *Eye of the Universe*', *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (12 Feb. 2005).

had an even more problematic side, the more so given that, unlike Mill, Sidgwick in his correspondence sometimes used the ‘N word’ – ‘nigger’ – and this in an alarmingly offhand way. Indeed, despite ample opportunity to blast ‘bald and vicious’ forms of racism of the Carlylean type – as in the case of his review of Charles Henry Pearson’s book, *National Life and Character* – Sidgwick never did so, preferring instead to politely sidestep such issues.

Still, I worry that I did not, in my book, get matters quite right. I do not think that I sufficiently stressed just how close Mill and Sidgwick were on this score, since I tended to read Mill as largely working in a much less virulently racist context than Sidgwick’s,⁵⁹ without stressing how he could be cast as a ‘polite’ racist. Although Sidgwick does not, in any of his major (or minor) works, actually comment on Mill versus Carlyle, his line is extremely close to Mill’s – while conceding that historically, things are not so simple and that the Egyptians and other non-whites played important roles in cultural advance, he nonetheless allows that future science might demonstrate significant racial differences, that ‘savages’ are ‘inferior’, even if it is a contingent inferiority, and that ‘civilized’ Europeans, to whom we owe constitutional government, are for the foreseeable future to be the judges and schoolmasters of the world.⁶⁰ It is in an extremely Millian fashion that he recognizes how the rights of subjected peoples must be protected from the abuses of colonial governments. Indeed, on that count, Sidgwick might be construed as rather better than Mill, bringing to his work a much keener sense of the ferocious cruelty and bigotry that marked the history of colonialism and that promised to mark growing British imperialism. Mill’s late-in-life mistrust of British political judgment on such matters was in fact developed and systematized by Sidgwick, who dealt with the subject far more extensively in such works as *The Elements of Politics*. He was every bit as cosmopolitan as Mill, looking to a future in which duty to humanity would increasingly trump love of country. But he was perhaps rather soberer than Mill when it came to recognizing the obstacles to this.⁶¹ It had not occurred to me how on this count, at least, I might actually defend the superiority of the late Victorian Sidgwick, the friend of imperialist ideologue Sir John

⁵⁹ Along the lines of Peter Mandler, “‘Race’ and ‘Nation’ in Mid-Victorian Thought”, *History, Religion, and Culture*, ed. S. Collini, R. Whitmore and B. Young (Cambridge, 2000) and Varouxakis, *Mill on Nationality*.

⁶⁰ See Schultz, in Schultz and Varouxakis (eds.), *Utilitarianism and Empire* (Lexington Books, 2005), for a more complete summary of the case.

⁶¹ Though both could sound astoundingly naïve, as when Mill claimed that the ‘conduct of the United States towards the Indian tribes has been throughout not only just, but noble’ (quoted in Miller, ‘Chairing the Jamaica Committee’, p. 178).

Seeley, against the mid-Victorian Mill, who was, it had seemed to me, that much closer to the anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist Bentham.

On the other side, however, are some very problematic passages in the *Elements*, passages in which Sidgwick sounds rather more like the defenders of Eyre than like a good Millian. Towards the end of his section on 'Principles of External Policy', Sidgwick discusses 'special restrictions on freedom of contract' in a singularly disturbing way:

[I]f such contracts are left unrestricted, there is some risk that the inferior race may be brought too completely into the power of private employers. This point is of course peculiarly important in the case of colonies in which the superior race cannot or will not undertake the main part of the manual work required: in this case the demand of the capitalist employer for a steady supply of reliable labour led modern civilization in its earlier stage back to the institution of slavery in an extreme form: and prompts even now to longing aspirations after some system of compulsory labour, which shall have the economic advantages of slavery without its evils. But I know no ground for thinking that such a system can be devised: and should accordingly deprecate any attempt to approximate to it. I do not therefore infer – as some have inferred – that contracts of long duration ought to be prohibited altogether; but only that they ought to be carefully supervised and closely watched. The need for this vigilance arises equally – it may be even greater – when the labourers in question are not natives, but aliens belonging to a lower grade of civilization; at the same time there are strong economic reasons for introducing labour from abroad in colonies of this class, where the natives are either not sufficiently numerous or wanting in industrial capacity.⁶²

The plausible suspicion that Sidgwick is here referring to the Jamaican case, as construed by Mill, is strengthened by a footnote a couple of pages earlier that reads: 'in our own empire, the South African colonies form, from this point of view, a series of links intermediate between Australia and New Zealand which are clearly colonies of settlement, and the West Indian islands which are clearly not'. 'Colonies of settlement' are those in which 'the manual labour can be and will be supplied by the civilized race', the other colonies, only loosely so called, being those 'in which it can only supply capital and superior kinds of labour'. Moreover, Sidgwick does emphasize that:

the protection of the lives and property of the settlers will require effective prosecution and exemplary punishment of crimes against them: at the same time, it will be the imperative duty of Government to keep such punishment within the limits of strict justice. The difficult task of fulfilling this double obligation is likely to be better performed if those charged with it are not hampered by pedantic adhesion to the forms of civilized judicial procedure: what is important is that substantial justice should be done in such a manner

⁶² Sidgwick, *The Elements of Politics*, 2nd edn. (London, 1897), pp. 327–8.

as to impress the intellect of the aborigines with the relation between offence and punishment.⁶³

For all of Sidgwick's Millian tendencies, these passages certainly lend themselves to a far from Millian reading. The Morant Bay rebellion was set off precisely in reaction to reassurances in 'the Queen's Letter' that 'The prosperity of the labouring classes, as well as of all other classes, depends, in Jamaica, and in other countries, upon their working for wages, not uncertainly, or capriciously, but steadily and continuously, at the times when their labour is wanted, and for so long as it is wanted.'⁶⁴ This only served to evoke memories of slavery and fears of an attempt to reinstitute it by other means. And of course, the defenders of Eyre were the very ones who complained vociferously about how unfair it was to insist on 'pedantic adherence to the forms of civilized judicial procedure' in the case of a rebellion by those whose labor was needed but not forthcoming, these rebels being equally identifiable by race. Such racism is not all that polite and deserves to be recognized as such.

Moreover, such openness to the case for Eyre appears to have been a longstanding Sidgwickian position. At the very time when Mill was working for the Jamaica Committee, when Sidgwick was supposedly a younger and more radically Millian figure, Sidgwick confided to his mother that although all of his friends (this would have included such figures as T. H. Green and A. V. Dicey) were joining the Committee, he could not make up his mind on the matter.⁶⁵ There is in fact no record of his having departed from that agnostic stance. Rather, he was apt to complain, at that time, about Mill's influence waning because of the public displays of his radicalism. And in his own defense, he might well have been able to invoke Mill's own (earlier) words, from *The Principles of Political Economy*:

To civilize a savage, he must be inspired with new wants and desires, even if not of a very elevated kind, provided that their gratification can be a motive to steady and regular bodily and mental exertion. If the negroes of Jamaica and Demerara, after their emancipation had contented themselves, as it was predicted they would do, with the necessaries of life, and abandoned all labour beyond the little which in a tropical climate, with a thin population and abundance of the richest land, is sufficient to support existence, they would have sunk into a condition more barbarous, though less unhappy, than their previous state of slavery. The motive which was most relied on for inducing

⁶³ Sidgwick, *The Elements of Politics*, p. 327.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Geoffrey Dutton, *The Hero as Murderer: The Life of Edward John Eyre, Australian Explorer and Governor of Jamaica, 1815-1901* (Sydney and Melbourne, 1967), p. 250; Dutton's biography is frighteningly sympathetic to Eyre and Carlyle, bringing out how the Carlyleans cast the Governor as a 'hero'.

⁶⁵ Sidgwick to Mary Sidgwick, 21 Jan. 1867 (Sidgwick Papers, Trinity College Library, Cambridge University).

them to work was their love of fine clothes and personal ornaments. No one will stand up for this taste as worthy of being cultivated, and in most societies its indulgence tends to impoverish rather than to enrich; but in the state of mind of the negroes it might have been the only incentive that could make them voluntarily undergo systematic labour, and so acquire or maintain habits of voluntary industry which may be converted to more valuable ends. In England, it is not the desire of wealth that needs to be taught, but the use of wealth, and appreciation of the objects of desire which wealth cannot purchase, or for attaining which it is not required. Every real improvement in the character of the English, whether it consist in giving them higher aspirations, or only a juster estimate of the value of their present objects of desire, must necessarily moderate the ardour of their devotion to the pursuit of wealth.⁶⁶

The somewhat paradoxical point that the Jamaicans might need a more stringent materialistic work ethic to bring them to the civilizational level of the English, who need to get over their materialistic work ethic, suggests how far from innocent Mill's use of the notions of civilization and barbarism really was.⁶⁷ Sidgwick would have had a case for claiming that the older Mill's criticisms of Carlyle obscured their potential points of agreement. And after all, Mill and Sidgwick were as convinced as Carlyle that, in Hall's words, 'colonization could provide a key to a better world',⁶⁸ however much they differed from him in the grounds for such convictions.⁶⁹

A final point. In *Eye*, as Shaver notes, I allowed that, like Mill, Sidgwick 'did a great deal to defend some of the accomplishments

⁶⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, II (Toronto, 1965), pp. 104–5.

⁶⁷ Indeed, many of Mill's remarks about 'the state of mind of the negroes' betray (much) weaker versions of the same Carlylean stereotypes of blacks as 'lazy', 'docile' and 'sensuous', etc. In an 1839 letter to D'Eichthal, he remarked 'I have long been convinced that not only the East as compared to the West, but the black race as compared with the European, is distinguished by characteristics something like those which you assign to them; that the improvement which may be looked for, from a more intimate & sympathetic familiarity between the two, will not be solely on their side, but greatly also on ours; that if our intelligence is more developed & our activity more intense, they possess exactly what is most needful to us as a qualifying counterpoise, in their love of repose & in the superior capacity of animal enjoyment & consequently of sympathetic sensibility, which is characteristic of the negro race' (*Collected Works*, XIII, p. 404).

⁶⁸ Hall, *Civilizing Subjects*, p. 31.

⁶⁹ Hall (*Cultures of Empire*) also gives a helpful conceptual clarification: 'I use "colonialism" to describe the European pattern of exploration and "discovery", of settlement, of dominance over geographically separate "others", which resulted in the uneven development of forms of capitalism across the world and the destruction and/or transformation of other forms of social organization and life. I use "imperialism" to refer to the late nineteenth/early twentieth century moment when European empires reached their formal apogee' (p. 5). Sidgwick was very much within this trajectory from colonialism to imperialism. Hall also rightly stresses the importance of Sidgwick's friend and colleague, Sir John Seeley, a 'founding father' of imperialism: 'Empires, forgotten in the wake of decolonization as an embarrassment and source of guilt, re-emerge as it becomes clear that neo-colonialism is alive and well, and that imperial histories are playing a part in postcolonial politics. . . . Seeley's categories – race, nation and empire – remain central to reconfiguring those histories in postcolonial terms' (p. 3).

of other historical civilizations, that he thought nurture far more important than nature in determining human differences, and that he was mainly impressed by European achievements in science and constitutional government'.⁷⁰ But this, as remarked earlier, does not do justice to the forms of nineteenth-century racism, which often did blend biological and ethnic notions in conceptions of race featuring such things as capacity for self-government. To again cite Fredrickson:

Nativists seeking to restrict immigration from eastern and southern Europe stressed an association between a capacity for self-government and Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-American, or Nordic (not simply white or European) ancestry. Hence the United States was not immune from its own variety of ethnic nationalism. But what the right kind of people inherited from their ancestors was the capacity to be liberal or democratic in the manner prescribed by the Enlightenment and the founding fathers. In Germany, *volkisch* nationalism was explicitly promoted as antithetical to liberalism and the heritage of the Enlightenment, and it had relatively weak opposition from those who sought to make the national project a prototype for humanity as a whole or even a large segment of it.⁷¹

In short, an emphasis on certain European civilizational contributions to self-government is not, in this context, all that reassuring, since such a construction often served quite obviously racist purposes.⁷² If Sidgwick's notions of race, civilization, etc. seem worrisome in this respect, it should be noted that the Millian notion of 'blood' was no more or less incoherent, and in both cases, their agnosticism about the determinants of 'nature' got washed out at the practical political level, where the 'character' of the 'savages' – the stunted trees, whose growth had been 'retarded' – was immutable enough for purposes of maintaining colonial rule and *de facto* racial segregation and domination. More theorizing went into the problem of who was fit for manual labor than how to grant self-rule. This form of racism was perfectly consistent with support for abolitionism, the cause of the North in the American Civil War, etc.

Thus, my uncomfortable conclusion is that Mill and Sidgwick do have some deeply problematic sides, when it comes to matters of race and imperialism, and that the leaders of the resistance in Jamaica and other countries would and could have effectively labeled them as racist, in the equivalent terminology of the day. This is a truth that the new

⁷⁰ Schultz, *Henry Sidgwick*, p. 317.

⁷¹ Fredrickson, *Racism*, p. 91.

⁷² And here Sidgwick's deep indebtedness to the Kantian tradition (as well as to the utilitarian one) might also raise troubling questions; Kant's views were extremely racist (see *The Idea of Race*, ed. Bernasconi and Lott), and the colonialist and imperialist thinking inspired by them was capable of producing such figures as Alfred Milner. More broadly, Mandler ("Race" and "Nation" in Mid-Victorian Thought) highlights some of the (alarming) features of mid-Victorian "Teutonism".

cosmopolitans would do well to admit, rather than simply pronouncing favored philosophers ‘progressive in their time’ on the issue of race while busily reconstructing them for current use on other counts.⁷³

rschultz@uchicago.edu

⁷³ An early version of this paper was presented at the John Stuart Mill Bicentennial Conference at University College London, April 5, 2006. I am grateful to David Weinstein and John Skorupski, for their sharply critical remarks, which convinced me that I had to make my argument even more forcefully, so that it did not get lost in my review of the literature. Thanks also to Anthony Skelton, Graham Finlay, Georgios Varouxakis, Katherine Smits, Todd Campbell, Roger Crisp, Donald Winch, Anne Norton, Thomas Holt, Jennifer Pitts, and Peter Singer for their most helpful comments. And thanks, as always, to Jerry Schneewind.