John Stuart Mill's reputation as a tutelary saint of British and American liberalism has survived for nearly a hundred and fifty years. *On Liberty* is still read with interest, even enthusiasm, and has become a touchstone of the liberal thinking that stresses both self-expression and individual rights against an intrusive society's efforts to restrain them. During the 1960s and 1970s, Mill's essay on equality for women made him to an even greater degree into a cult figure of "advanced" liberalism. Present-day conservatives, for their part, have denounced Mill as the enemy of the traditional restraints necessary for social stability, and the advocate of a permissive society (and even a regime of entitlements) in which anarchistic narcissism is encouraged and social obligations ignored. Such a view seems to me mistaken.

I shall argue that in his understanding of liberty and in his conviction that virtue was essential to liberty as well as to the commonweal, and thereby to true happiness, Mill appears—in his own well-known dichotomy—more a conservative Coleridgian than a liberal Benthamite. Mill, I am persuaded, sought spiritual perfection above all, and rejected the social and political systems favored
by advanced liberals in his time and our own. While advocating self-
development in the manner of the German philosophers, he re-
jected irresponsible individualism and insisted on social obligations.
Mill was an opponent of a regime of entitlements: for example,
though sympathetic to voluntary plans for co-partnership and for
consumers' and producers' cooperatives, he criticized government
intervention and a welfare-paternalism that he feared might lead to
a corrupting dependence. He supported economic competition,
with all its faults, as the system producing the best results. Mill's
position on a number of practical issues, his defense of the death
penalty for murder, for one, or his support for the unilateral exercise
of Britain's world power on behalf of liberty and democracy, would
make him a more likely model for a contemporary conservative (or
neoconservative) in our day than for an advanced liberal.

Mill struggled to find an answer to that most insoluble of
philosophical questions—that of free will and necessity—and con-
fronted the long-debated ethical question of choosing between the
satisfaction of physical happiness and virtue. Some recent conserva-
tive writers, admirers like their mentor Leo Strauss of the ancient
philosophers and the ideal of a society living virtuously under the
natural law, have (following a conventional division of philosophers
between Stoics and Epicureans) placed Mill among the Epicureans
who prized sensual pleasure and material happiness. Despite traces
of a hereditary loyalty to a deterministic Benthamism that stressed
such happiness, Mill moved in the direction of Stoicism rather than
Epicureanism. In choosing between virtue and a pleasure with
which a mechanistic necessity has powerful links, Mill rejected the
position of the liberal doctrinaires of his time and ours and chose
virtue.

In confronting a central problem of political philosophy—the
tension between the individual and society—Mill, while not ne-
eglecting the good of the community, never flagged in his concern for
the individual, whose liberty he believed would be seriously threat-
ened in the years ahead. Ideological thinkers like Bentham and
Comte, whom Mill at different periods acknowledged as mentors,
were deciding almost all questions overwhelmingly in favor of
society. Anticipating the course liberal politics would travel in the following century, they welcomed a conformity shaped and imposed by a bureaucratic elite that recognized only material happiness, as Bentham argued, or a scientific-moral elite that preached the duty of self-sacrifice, in Comte's vision. Mill called for a synthesis of liberty and virtue, neither fully possible without the other—a liberty that stressed individual contentment and self-development; yet in balanced fashion enjoined a freely-chosen virtue mindful of social obligations. For Mill there seemed a special need for constructing such a synthesis because he believed the future commercial as well as democratic society might well resemble the liberticide models envisioned by Bentham and Comte, which would entirely subordinate the individual to the community. Mill, like the Protestant reformers, the German idealists and their British disciples Coleridge and Carlyle, called for self-dependence and spiritual perfection as counters to modern tendencies toward conformity and material satisfaction.

In 1836 Mill called for what he described as "neoradicalism," founded on a more complex view of human motivation and needs than Bentham's felicific calculus possessed. He saw his chief political and philosophical mission to be that of transforming features of the Benthamite, radical creed which "were part of the inheritance of the 18th century" by the introduction of certain central conceptions of German transcendental philosophy. He wished to speak, he insisted, "not [for] radicalism but [for] neoradicalism," a position which was not "a bigotted adherence" to any doctrinal form "& which is only to be called radicalism inasmuch as it does not falter or compromise with evils but cuts at their roots." Following such conservative writers as Coleridge and Carlyle, as well as the German idealists, Mill proposed to hold "in the highest reverence all which the vulgar notion of utilitarians represents them to despise." The new political philosophy would take "into account the whole of human nature not the ratiocinative faculty only," would see "Feeling at least as valuable as Thought," and, as Mill's subsequent writings were to make plain, would make a place in the liberal creed for moral virtue and not merely material and sensual happiness *(Earlier Letters, 12: 312).*
Mill was convinced of the essential equality of all men and women, following a path charted by the Lockean philosophy of the tabula rasa. In this he adopted a position of the liberals of his day as of ours but he did so on grounds not always acceptable to advanced liberals. For Mill based his views on a modified free will, as had Coleridge who abandoned the determinism of his Unitarian past. Mill withdrew from his father's Benthamite necessitarianism, and he later dissented from the determinism of Comte and advanced liberals, at a time when free will had become the doctrine of the religious and conservative thinkers, while liberals preferred the outlook of a "scientific" necessity.

During Mill's lifetime, even before the work of Mendel and Weismann on heredity, became known, there was an increasing tendency to see innate variations in physical and mental capacities and inclinations. Mill's friend and biographer, Alexander Bain, noted Mill's unwillingness to accept even the possibility of such hereditary differences, though Bain, also a Lockean associationalist, patiently pointed out the difficulties of a starkly environmentalist position. While there were scientific grounds for accepting associationalist doctrine up to a point, Mill's unwillingness to entertain any doubts was a species of doctrinal belief. Only if this position were correct could he maintain the vision of the "unlimited possibility of improving the moral and intellectual condition of mankind by education" upon which he based his hopes for the future (Autobiography, 75). If people were predestined to occupy a lowly position from the time of birth, if they were not capable of improvement, Mill's view of the world would be shaken. Though granting that a man's character was largely determined by the experiences of his life, forms imposed upon him by others, and social conditions, Mill insisted that a person was still sufficiently free, by acting on himself, to improve his own moral and intellectual lot. His view on the "woman question," as it was frequently called in the last century, rested on this principle.

James Mill, according to his son, saw the future as bringing "a
considerable increase of freedom in the relations between the sexes." Mill insisted nonetheless that his father was free of "sensuality" whether of "a theoretical or of a practical kind." Raised a Calvinist, painfully aware of the strong impulse to sin which helped to lead him to an early and clearly inappropriate marriage, the elder Mill suggested that among the fortunate consequences of an increased sexual freedom was that the imagination of young men would no longer dwell upon sex. The making of sex into one of the central concerns of life was "a perversion" of true feelings, James Mill believed, and "one of the deepest seated and most pervading evils in the human mind" (75). Greater freedom was to be given in the short run so that in the long run men might achieve an even greater repression of the passions than the old religion thought possible.

The social role of women—and of sex and marriage—confronted Mill very early because of the Saint-Simonians. In 1828, a leader of the sect, B. P. Enfantin, proclaimed that the Saint-Simonian era would be memorable because it would bring about female emancipation, an achievement of equality for a sex which for millennia seemed fated for subordination. Among Enfantin's first objectives was a release of women from the imposition of eternal sexual fidelity, and from what he regarded as the legal prostitution of marriage. Saint-Simonianism (anticipating advanced liberals of our time) would liberate mankind from such evils by permitting easier rules of divorce and marriage, and, creating a new and more equal relationship between the sexes, would inaugurate an era of happiness. While not "entirely agreeing" with the sect, Mill regarded it at the time "as the greatest enterprise now in progress, for the regeneration of society" (Earlier Letters, 12:88). Years later, in his Autobiography, Mill declared that he honored the Saint-Simonian radicals "most of all for what they have been most cried down for—the boldness and freedom from prejudice with which they treated the subject of family." But Mill himself was neither a defender of sexual promiscuity nor an opponent of marriage, as the followers of Enfantin were. On these matters he agreed with conventional moralists. He wished to see, rather, the re-establishment of the
family on the basis of equality of the sexes. It was "in proclaiming the perfect equality of men and women, and an entirely new order of things in regard to their relations to one another," Mill concluded, that the Saint-Simonians had earned "the grateful remembrance of future generations" (117-18).

Auguste Comte, a one-time secretary of Saint-Simon, to whose views Comte owed much, opposed the "utopian" views of the Saint-Simonians. Comte's rigid opinions on the subject of women and the family aroused Mill to a confrontation with the positivist philosopher during their long correspondence in the 1840s. While recognizing the social necessity of such fundamental institutions as property and marriage—and noting that he was not an adherent of utopian thinking in these matters—Mill maintained that these institutions would undergo more serious changes than Comte appeared to think. For one thing, Mill was less hostile to divorce, of which Comte—who modeled his ideal society on medieval Catholicism—strongly disapproved. But Mill confessed that he stood guilty of "a still more fundamental heresy, since I do not, in principle, acknowledge the necessary subordination of one sex to the other" (Lettres inédites, 208-09).

The disagreement between the two was deeply rooted. Comte was a staunch determinist. People like Mill, Comte was persuaded, put much too much emphasis on training, neglecting the need for a suitable physical constitution to receive such training. Women, like young children, simply did not possess the cerebral structure to perform the complex reasonings of an adult, masculine brain. This was an "inborn inferiority"; the primary role for women was that of mothers (246-49). The verdict of both anatomy and history was clear, Comte argued, and could not be altered by theatrical denunciations of the abuse of women by masculine society which the anarchical tendencies of the century had made so common (249.51). Certainly "since the establishment of monogamy, the term `servitude,'" employed by feminists, "would be entirely inappropriate for characterizing the social status of our sweet companions" (278). Though nineteenth-century thinkers like the phrenologist Gall may have exaggerated the influence of the primordial organism in reaction
against the eighteenth-century's insistence on the importance of education, Comte concluded, organic structure was obviously more significant than training (275-76).

Mill insisted that biological science had not yet advanced to the point where any such solution to the woman question was indicated (221-22). Even the inferiority of children to adults, Mill somewhat impetuously insisted, depended not on anatomical differences but on lack of suitable training. However, there had been nothing, in female education to develop the capacities certain physiologists found wanting in women, while such training formed an important part of the education of men (237-39). Although he had modified or abandoned other opinions he had taken over from "the negative philosophy of my times," Mill wrote Comte, he had remained and would remain firm in his view on women. "This discussion has left with me," he concluded, "some permanent traces, and I think it will have a definite effect on the direction of my works to come" (284).

In 1848, Mill wrote a friend, to whom he had enthusiastically recommended Comte's *Cours de philosophic positive* a decade earlier, that the positivist philosopher was "characteristically and resolutely ignorant of the laws of the formation of character." Comte had assumed that the differences between women and men, philosophers and men of action, rich people and proletarians were "ultimate, or at least necessary facts," and *upon* this foundation he had erected the principles of his sociology. If such principles were put into practice, Mill declared, the result would be a system "the most contrary to human liberty of any now taught or professed." Comte would close everyone's way of life against "all change of destination or purpose," just as he wished to make the contract of marriage indissoluble (*Earlier Letters*, 13:739).

In his tract on *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Mill decried the "legal subordination of one sex to the other" as not only "wrong in itself" but also as "one of the chief hindrances to human improvement" (21:261). It was an undertaking of the highest urgency that something be done to elevate a woman's status within marriage, and to grant women the right to exercise the franchise and to hold public office. The position into which a person was born ought no longer
to constitute "an inexorable bond" (273). It was wrong "to ordain that
to be born a girl instead of a boy, any more than to be born black
instead of white, or a commoner instead of a nobleman, shall decide
the person's position through all life" (274). What was widely
regarded as "the nature of women," Mill argued, was "an eminently
artificial thing," the consequence of "forced repression" and "unnatural stimulation." Women did not as yet possess what all creatures
were entitled to, the right to "liberty of development" (276). Mill
remained convinced that the "mental differences" which existed
between women and men were "but the natural effect of the
differences in their education and circumstances" and indicated "no
radical differences, far less radical inferiority of nature" (302).

The great problem, Mill wrote to a friend in 1870-in a joining
of sensual pleasure and virtue-was "how to obtain the greatest
amount of chastity and happiness for men, women and children."
Society must give marriage, one "with equality of rights on both
sides," a "fair trial," he observed. A puritanical Mill prophesied,
somewhat naively, that in the future sexual passion would become
with men as it already had with many women "completely under the
control of reason." These women had brought their passions under
control "because its becoming so has been the condition upon which
women hoped to obtain the strongest love and admiration of men"
(Later Letters, 17:1693-95). Men and women must consequently
choose chastity, must choose virtue over carnal pleasure and the
animal passions if they were to secure genuine happiness. This was
hardly the doctrine of an advocate of a permissive society.

2.

In an Inaugural Address to the students of St. Andrews in 1867, Mill
called them to the active pursuit of virtue if they were to transform
a crass commercial and democratic society into a good society. He
wished to have undergraduates instructed in the leading systems of
moral philosophy, notably those of the Epicureans and of the Stoics;
and he wished the universities to clarify for their students the
complicated question of whether man's will was free or determined.
Only if students learned the difference between laws that must be
obeyed and free human action, could virtue play its necessary role in creating a stable and progressive society (21:248, 243). Sentimental liberals and conservatives who decried the study of political economy as unfeeling had better learn that its laws operated as necessarily as did the law of gravitation (245). A study of international law, on the other hand, one of values, must teach Englishmen how to make the foreign policy of their nation "enlightened, just and noble." When men understood what was best, conscience would make it difficult for them to act on selfish and false principles (247).

In contemporary England, men pursued virtue as a duty not a pleasure. This had had the negative effect of keeping Englishmen from undue wickedness but had not impelled them to a positive pursuit of virtue (252-53). If we wish "men to practise virtue," Mill urged, we must try "to make them love virtue" as "an object in itself," and not merely as an "affair of duty" that left them free otherwise to follow self-indulgent pleasure (253-54).

Mill agreed with the ancient philosophers that the materialistic and self-seeking standards of a commercial and democratic society were inimical to virtue—to honor and personal dignity, to truth-telling; and to moral or physical heroism. An egalitarian society, moreover, threatened to subordinate the individual to the mass, and to suppress liberty and diversity in favor of conformity. Mill noted in his Autobiography that he wished to bring society "nearer to some ideal standard" (117). While determined to preserve "the greatest individual liberty of action," he looked forward to a "change of character" in both laborers and employers which would lead them to associate themselves for the sake of "public and social purposes, and not, as hitherto, solely for narrowly interested ones"—though he warned against "premature attempts to dispense with the inducements of private interest in social affairs," attempts whose very precipitateness might undermine liberty (162-63).

A neoradical Mill constructed a theory of virtue which, though apparently based on utility, took the "inward man" strictly into account. In his essay "Whewell on Moral Philosophy," he sought to refute the intuitionists' claim to a monopoly of virtues such as conscience, duty, and rectitude. No less than the a priori moralists,
did utilitarians decline to lie, steal, or murder on grounds of expediency. Such sentiments belonged as much to a properly conceived utilitarian ethics, Mill argued, though he acknowledged that Bentham had not conceived them properly (10:194). Unless we accepted the fact that mankind was capable of disinterested virtue, Mill noted in his 1833 "Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy," we could not attain "one tenth part of the happiness which our nature is susceptible of." Mill saw no significant increase of happiness resulting from changes in outward conditions alone. "Our hopes of happiness or moral perfection" were founded on inward improvement, and on a faith in the possibility of "virtuous exertion" in favor of social interests. The writer on ethics, if he were to perform his task usefully, must demonstrate "in every sentence and in every line, a firm unwavering confidence in man's capability of virtue." Yet Bentham had proclaimed the hopeless and mistaken view that men were condemned by the necessity of their natures to a "miserable self-seeking." (10:15-16).

In 1836, Mill wrote an article entitled "Civilization," in which he discussed the defects of a modern commercial society in which men concentrated their energies on "money getting," and success depended "not upon what a person is, but upon what he seems" (18:129, 133). The piece resembled, most of all, the argument of Carlyle's conservative critique of bourgeois society, with hints of that writer's puritan Stoicism. An individual became "lost in the crowd," Mill observed (132). Individual character became "enervated." "The spectacle, and even the very idea of pain"-of "harshness, rudeness, and violence," of "the struggle of one indomitable will against another"-had been removed from the sight of the middle classes. Thus while "the refined classes" of modern society possessed more of the "amiable and humane" qualities, they had "much less of the heroic." There had descended upon them "a moral effeminacy, an inaptitude for every kind of struggle" (130-31). In order to counter these tendencies of modern society, it was necessary to discover ways to invigorate the individual character, and to revive the dormant virtue of the refined classes (136).

Borrowing from Coleridge's vision of a clerisy, Mill called for a
transformation of the churches and universities to produce individuals both "determined and qualified to seek Truth ardently, vigorously, and disinterestedly" (141). By means of an education founded not on dogmatic religion but on ancient literature, on history, and on the philosophy of the mind, students might learn the principles governing the progress of man and of society; and understand "the astonishing pliability" of human nature and how best to improve it (145). The chief purpose of education should be to evoke "the greatest possible quantity of intellectual power, and to inspire the intenest love of truth," regardless of where they led (144). This was how to form "great minds" able to maintain "a victorious struggle with the debilitating influences of the age," and to strengthen "the weak side of Civilization by the support of a higher Cultivation" (140, 143). After that, Mill urged that positions of "honour and ascendancy" be filled by virtuous men (147).

Mill, four years later, in an 1840 review "Tocqueville on Democracy in America," observed that Tocqueville had confused the effects of democracy with those of a commercial society, with its "go-ahead spirit-that restless, impatient eagerness for improvement...that mobility, that shifting and fluctuating...that jealousy of superior attainments" that existed in England and the United States (18:191-92): The evil was not a product of equality, then, but of the predominance of the commercial classes who imposed their own image upon all of society (196). Mill denounced this "yoke of bourgeois opinion," holding it responsible for the mediocrity of intellectual life, characterized by the wider diffusion of superficial knowledge, the dominance of a "matter-of-fact spirit," and the "dogmatism of common sense" (194, 196). These were among the results of progress in a society which prided itself on its wealth.

Mill denied that it was inevitable that a modern society beget alienation, rootlessness an imposed conformity, and intellectual mediocrity. Economic and social changes, "though among the greatest," were "not the only forces which shape the course of our species." Ideas were "not always the mere signs and effects of social circumstances"; rather they were themselves "a power in history." A virtue independent of purely economic pressures might alter the
seemingly necessary course of events: If men were made to understand the dangers of the "unbalanced influence of the commercial spirit," and if the "wiser and better-hearted politicians and public teachers" acted to erect "a salutary check" to this influence, there was yet hope (197-98).

In what was for him a rare excursion into utopian fantasizing, Mill constructed, on the model of the ancient philosophers, an ideal state which would be stationary as to population and wealth but progressive as to virtue. There would be in Mill's imagined society no stationary state of human improvement. There would be no pause in "mental culture, and moral and social progress." Relieved from studying "the art of getting on," Mill declared, men could turn their attention to "the Art of Living." He depicted a state as the ancients had postulated-living under law, with all classes content with their relative condition, but with the producing classes prepared to support a leisured class to serve as a model for all in furthering "the graces of life" (Political Economy, 3:755-56). This was hardly an argument that either Victorian radicals or present-day liberals would find acceptable.

Mill saw the widespread paternalism of the 1840s as inspired by a fear of a Chartist revolt as well as by the sentimentality of a reinvigorated Christianity. This development was particularly worrying to him because of the imminent arrival of democratic politics (Earlier Letters, 13:544). Mill's opinions on this subject have a surprisingly modern ring, though not one that would resonate with the greater part of modern liberalism. The "superficial philanthropy" of the upper classes, he wrote, occupied itself with sanitary and housing reform or with anti-poor-law agitation rather than with the underlying problem of poverty. No one spoke of the need for foresight or self-control on the part of the poor, nor even of the usefulness of Malthusian restraint. The frantic activities of the rich, filled with guilt because of their wealth and desiring to buy off the poor, could only instill in the lower classes "the faith that it is other people's business to take care of them" (13:640-41). What was necessary was to encourage the poor to attain independence rather than to habituate them to dependence. Instead, a mindless and
The pursuit of virtue was, the quality which would stir the working class to exert themselves to overcome their dependence. By self-cultivation, the working classes-like women-would shatter the bonds which, had kept them merely the servants of others (Political Economy, 3:765-66). In the future, none but "the least valuable work-people"—those with "too little understanding, or too little virtue"—would "consent to work all their lives for wages" (793). Some would, as some already had, go into association with capitalists on the basis of profit-sharing; others would associate among themselves along cooperative patterns. (Mill's support for such enterprises led him to speak of himself as sympathetic to socialism.) The participation of workingmen in cooperatives was essential if they were to achieve self dependence, Mill argued (769-94, passim). He concluded by espousing the usefulness, indeed the indispensability of competition, very much in opposition to socialist opinion of the time—and much; of advanced liberal opinion of our own (794-96).

3.

Like Tocqueville, Mill worried about the dangers which the growth of democracy posed to virtue and to liberty. Both men, liberals in their prizing of individual freedom, shared the fears of the coming democracy predominant among conservatives. In the 1830s, the commercial, middle class was in the ascendancy, but the future would see the working class as the strongest. The grand political problem of the future, must be "to prevent the strongest from becoming the only power, Mill wrote in his 1840 essay on Tocqueville. This would end in what Tocqueville had described as the "tyranny of the majority" (18:200). Diversity had characterized former aristocratic societies, while uniformity was the rule in the new democracies. While previously the privileged classes had exaggerated the fearful aristocracy, as well as a guilt-ridden middle class, having lost "the moral dignity of the past," had forgotten that merely passive qualities could not secure well-being. Mill was especially unhappy that the aristocracy, which had once possessed a sense of honor, and both will and character, now "bend with a willing submission to the yoke of bourgeois opinion" (13:712-13).
need to respect private rights, modern society insisted too much that
the individual interest ought to yield to that of the majority (188-90).

The great danger for democracy, Mill was convinced, was "not
too great liberty, but of too ready submission; not of anarchy but of
servility." The danger was of a conformity imposed by a central
power, supposedly to protect citizens but in fact "trampling...with
considerable recklessness, as often as convenient, upon the rights of
individuals, in the name of society and the public good." (This is what
the French historian Elie Halevy, in his The Growth of Philosophic
Radicalism [1904] described as the artificial identification of inter-
est that would be imposed by a Benthamite bureaucracy.) How
could this danger be averted? By popular education and the nour-
ishing of the spirit of liberty, Mill observed. The "superior spirits" in
a democracy ought to bend their efforts "to vindicate and protect the
unfettered exercise of reason, and the moral freedom of the indi-
viduals" (188-89). While ultimate control of government must rest
with the people, the best government was that of "the wisest, and
these must always be a few," Mill declared in an earlier, 1835 essay
"Tocqueville on Democracy in America." Mill saw "the one and only
danger of democracy" to be that of making legislators merely
delegates for putting the wishes of the majority into effect (18:74).
(The conservative Burke, among others, had memorably anticipated
him on this issue.) The critical problem for Mill was how to create
a place for virtue in the political process. Unless this were done, the
egalitarian, democratic state envisioned by Benthamites would, in
pursuing the greatest happiness of the greatest number, make no
place for either virtue or liberty.

Bentham certainly had no place for virtue in his philosophy. In
1838 Mill wrote his "Bentham," an essay distinctly unfriendly to the
utilitarian theorist. Mill cast Bentham among the "negative and
destructive" philosophers of the Enlightenment who perceived
what was false but often failed to know what was true (10:79).
Bentham's philosophy was narrow and inadequate, with no under-
standing of "the most natural and strongest feelings of human
nature" (91). The idea of man, "that most complex being" as "capable
of pursuing spiritual perfection as an end" was foreign to him.
Bentham failed to recognize "the existence of conscience," and was unaware of the idea of "self-respect" or of "honour, and personal dignity." He did not understand "the power of making our volitions effectual." Nor did he perceive the central importance of "that grand duty of man;" self-development. His "ethical system" concerned itself merely with outward behavior and not the inward life. All this had been "a blank in Bentham's system." In all these matters, Mill would argue in his 1840 essay "Coleridge," the Germano-Coleridgian school of philosophy was its superior. This was the philosophical basis for Mill's neoradicalism.

Nor had Bentham made any room for liberty. Bentham had devised a plan for liberticide, Mill argued, a method "for rivetting the yoke of public opinion closer and closer round the necks of all public functionaries," excluding the influence of a minority or even of the official's individual idea of right. And much the same could be said of the system of Auguste Comte's positivist society.

In his "Auguste Comte and Positivism" (1865), Mill was particularly disturbed that Comte had rejected "the first of all the articles in the liberal creed," the right of liberty of conscience. This was the clue to all of Comte's politics. While agreeing with Comte that in practical life men of lesser abilities had to be subordinated to those of greater, Mill insisted that when properly educated, people permitted "to find their places for themselves" would "spontaneously class themselves in a manner much more conformable to their unequal or dissimilar aptitudes, than governments or social institutions are likely to do it for them." The duty of the spiritual power in Comte's utopia—that of "obtruding" upon all persons throughout their lives "the paramount claims of the general interest" and of "guiding men's opinions and enlightening and warning their consciences"—appalled Mill. Yet Comte saw such "frightful aberrations" as "the last and highest result of the evolution of Humanity." It was not necessary to organize such a power to make certain that only the most eminent thinkers would prevail. Such an intellectual ascendancy would come spontaneously. To entrust it to an organized body, as Comte wished to do, would make for just such "a spiritual despotism," enforced by the pressure of
public opinion, as had existed in the middle ages (314). Individual "liberty and spontaneity" formed no part of Comte's ideal (327). Comte had in fact organized "an elaborate system for the total suppression of all independent thought" (351).

In 1855, Mill wrote his wife Harriet from Rome of his intention to write an essay on liberty. There was a growing need for a work on this question, he observed, for "opinion tends to encroach more & more on liberty, & almost all the projects of social reformers in these days are really liberticide-Comte, particularly so" (Later Letters, 14:294).

Mill's On Liberty was not merely a defense of, "negative" freedom, as it has been generally regarded, the classic nineteenth-century liberalism that sought the liberty of the individual from the restraining authority of the state or of society. The essay was also, and perhaps primarily, a neoradical plea for positive liberty, the sense of participation and self-realization, the idea of freedom associated with the German thinkers. Mill was to resort to this concept of positive liberty as the one best suited to counter Comte's priestly despotism as well as Bentham's utilitarian state, both of which intended to use the force of public opinion to mold all into a conformist lump. Mill hoped to place the ultimate spiritual power neither in a positivist priesthood nor in a utilitarian bureaucracy, but, in line with the intuitive morality of the German idealists and Coleridge, in the conscience of the individual. This would be essential if a structure of common moral values, which Mill saw in the future and on the whole welcomed, was not to degenerate into a social despotism. In this way, a virtuous society could remain a free society.

Mill's essay was introduced by an epigraph drawn from the German philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt, an announcement that it was to be no mere tract on freedom of speech or toleration. "The grand, leading principle, towards which every argument unfolded in these pages directly converges," he quoted Humboldt as declaring, "is the absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity" (18:215). Nor did Humboldt, the friend of Goethe and Schiller, stand alone in Germany: "The
Mill's Coleridgian Neoradicalism

doctrine of the rights of individuality, and the claim of the moral nature to develop itself in its own way, was pushed by a whole school of German authors even to exaggeration, "Mill added, making particular mention of Goethe's views on "the right and duty of self-development," and of the writings of Fichte (Autobiography, 179).

Mill sought to protect "individual spontaneity" against "external control" except when this individual liberty brought harm to others. Of course, the state had no right to interfere to protect an individual against his own behavior. Utility—not "abstract right"—continued to be "the ultimate appeal" on ethical questions, but for Mill this was utility "in the largest senses grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being" (Liberty, 18:223-24).

For Mill, as for the school of Goethe, of Coleridge, and of Carlyle, "individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being," and "individual spontaneity" deserving of every encouragement (261). "At present," Mill observed again in 1859, "individuals are lost in the crowd" (the phrase used previously in his 1836 essay on "Civilization"); "society has now fairly got the better of individuality"; even in what they do for pleasure, people think first of conformity (268, 264). Mill called for—using the words of Carlyle's disciple John Sterling—a revival of "Pagan self-assertion" which he held was as much an element of "human worth" as "Christian self-denial" (266). Only where individuality, i.e., individual development, was encouraged, could genius flourish; without such encouragement, "collective mediocrity" prevailed (268). While denying that he was countenancing a Carlylean hero-worship, Mill echoed the Scotsman in complaining that "the greatness of England is now all collective." "It was men of another stamp than this that made England what it has been," he observed, "and men of another stamp will be necessary to prevent its decline." If the "collective mediocrity" of public opinion succeeded in extirpating individuality, England would have emulated the Chinese who "have succeeded beyond all hope in what English philanthropists are so industriously working at—making a people all alike" (269, 272-73).

On Liberty was the exposition, as Mill was to write in his Autobiography, of a "single truth," the importance of diversity which
would be the fruit of the liberty of self-realization: "the importance, to man and society, of a large variety in types of character," and of "giving full freedom to human nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting directions"—yet without losing sight of the prior, moral claims of society (177). Mill's primary theme was that of a positive liberty. Far from making negative liberty an absolute end, as such critics as Fitzjames Stephen and Matthew Arnold alleged, Mill yearned for a time when "the moral and intellectual ascendancy, once exercised by priests," would "pass into the hands of philosophers," when "convictions as to what was right and wrong, useful and pernicious" would be "deeply graven on the feelings by early education and general unanimity of sentiments" (248, 116-17). In the coming period, Mill was convinced, "the self-regarding virtues" would come second to the social, and he urged public opinion to a "great increase of disinterested exertion to promote the good of others" (Liberty, 18:277).

4:
In 1865 Mill was elected Liberal M.P. for the City of Westminster, and served in the House of Commons until his defeat in the election of 1868. During this time in office he spoke out on a number of practical questions, all with roots in the theoretical principles that informed his political outlook. One of the issues which he confronted was capital punishment which advanced liberals in his day as in ours—those whom today's conservatives denounce as advocates of a guilt-ridden, anarchic, permissive society—wished to abolish as morally unjustifiable. Mill, on the other hand, supported capital punishment as, at times, essential.

The opinions of the Owenites had led them "to deny human responsibility," Mill observed in his Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy (1866), since they believe a man's character was "made for him, not by him." The Owenites had even rejected the right of society to inflict punishment (9:453). Mill, in contrast, argued that punishment acted to form the will and therefore was not only permissible but needful. "By counterbalancing the influence of present temptations or acquired bad habits," punishment "restores
the mind to normal preponderance of the love of right, which many moralists and theologians consider to constitute the true definition of our freedom” (458).

In 1860, five years before he entered parliament, Mill anticipated, in a letter to Florence Nightingale, the reasoning of his later position on capital punishment as the proper punishment for the crime of murder: In a book she had written for the instruction of artisans, Nightingale followed the deterministic reasoning of the Owenites, and inferred that there ought to be neither punishment nor blame for a crime, only reformatory discipline. For Mill, however, retaliation for injuries "consciously or intentionally done" was a natural consequence of wrong-doing, and punishment the only way to begin to reform criminals, as well as to deter others. A resentment of evil, he held, was entirely proper; though wrong-doing might be explained, it could not therefore be excused. Ill-doing was properly "an object of aversion;" and if there ceased to be a strong desire to punish crime, Mill warned, the consequence would be the loss of all sense of right and wrong (Later Letters, 15:711-12).

Nightingale’s views were widely shared in philanthropic circles. If the imperfections of social arrangements were the chief causes of crime, these reformers argued, it was unjust, indeed hypocritical of society to exact a penalty for wrongdoing. In the fifties and sixties, members of parliament representing what they described as "progressive" views pressed, and with some success, to lighten punishments, to make easier the lot of the prisoner, and to facilitate early parole. And accompanying these efforts was a movement to end capital punishment, substituting imprisonment for life. In April 1868, a Radical M.P. brought a bill to abolish capital punishment before the House of Commons. The bill attracted the support of virtually all those who composed the Radical wing of the Liberal party.

Mill opposed these Radicals, whom he called "the philanthropists." Parliament had assuredly been right to rid the law of the death penalty imposed in the past for all too many lesser crimes. However, there was no call to remove it as punishment for murder, "the
greatest crime known to the law." For the hardened murderer, there was but one appropriate penalty: "solemnly to blot him out from the fellowship of mankind and from the catalogue of the living." It was fallacious to deny that capital punishment did not deter; equally mistaken was the dread of the error of executing an innocent person, for the English rules of evidence were "even too favorable" to the accused. If the aim of the philanthropists to abolish the death penalty were successful, a Stoic Mill declared, it would be "a fatal victory," one achieved by "an enervation, an effeminacy, in the general mind of the country." The most meaningful and emphatic way for showing our regard for human life was support for the rule "that he who violates that right in another forfeits it for himself" (Parliamentary Speeches, 18:266-71).

Mill hoped that "the mania" for "paring down all our punishments" had "reached its limits," for there was a possibility of ending "any effectual punishment" whatsoever. Penal servitude was becoming "almost nominal," given the low sentences, the comfort of the prisons, and the ease of parole. The "ludicrously inadequate" punishments, even for atrocious assaults, were "almost an encouragement to crime." Mill called for more severe sentences, particularly in the case of crimes most offensive "to the moral sentiments of the community" (272).

On matters of fiscal probity—far from accepting the Benthamite standard of the greatest happiness for the greatest number—Mill favored a Stoic virtue over the "moral sentiments of the community." Mill condemned what he saw as the immoral plan of the United States to pay off its Civil War debt by inflating the currency. In 1868, the Democratic Party in the United States proposed that the government pay off this debt in "greenbacks," depreciated paper currency. Such a proceeding seemed unjust to Mill who was convinced that it would besmirch the reputation of democratic institutions everywhere. This was the kind of issue on which virtuous men in a democracy must resist popular sentiment. That a suggestion of a virtual repudiation of debt was even advanced was clearly a consequence of the tyranny of the majority when that majority was not bourgeois but working-class. Defrauding public creditors by
payment of "a vast quantity of paper depreciated to worthlessness by excessive issue" would be "the most unfortunate event for the morality of the world," Mill declared in a letter to an American friend (Later Letters, 16:1376).

In another letter to this friend, Mill described the proposition that the currency be inflated in response to democratic pressure as "one of the heaviest blows" that might be given "to the morality and civilization of the human race. If men could not trust one another's promises, society would be reduced to savagery. Virtue, not the easy financial remedies proposed by the greatest number, was the proper criterion of political conduct. This was particularly important when money contracts were at issue, and where the State was a party to the engagement. If the government might defraud, all men would believe they could also do so (Later Letters, 16:1443-45).

In Mill's discussion of Britain's role as a world power, we may see his vision of England's duty (almost by divine appointment) to employ its substantial powers in behalf of liberal and democratic ideals everywhere. Advanced, progressive liberals occupied a rather different position on this question. Suspicious of power, they at times seemed most hostile to the power exerted by their own nation. Mill, on the other hand, had faith in his country and its mission, and strongly objected to the isolationism of the liberals of his day, and to the pacifism of the Radical wing of the Liberal Party.

Mill favored the use of armed force (as embodied in the unrivaled Royal Navy) in the defense of liberty, in Europe and on the high seas. In the teeth of American and French threats of war, Mill supported the Navy's at-times extralegal strikes against the slave trade, a trade he thought a "crime and scandal to humanity." In 1859-the year in which On Liberty appeared-he rejected, in "A Few Words on Non-Intervention," Britain's policy of noninvolvement in European affairs, which the Radical and, often, mainstream liberals championed, and called on his country to intervene, if necessary, to defend the liberties of the peoples of the continent who were struggling against despotism. Mill argued that it would have been both "honourable and virtuous" if England had assisted the rebels when the Russians marched into Hungary to suppress a national
By the Declaration of Paris in 1856, England's Liberal government renounced the nation's traditional wartime naval strategy of seizing not merely contraband but all goods on merchant ships destined for the enemy, even aboard neutral vessels. The Liberals welcomed the opportunity not only to display Britain's peaceful intentions but also to insure the safety of British commerce with belligerents in wars when England was neutral. The Radicals applauded the move as a victory for their principles and as an overdue confession of guilt by their country, which they saw as the chief sinner against international law and morality. Since only England possessed a navy capable of making effective use of this now-abandoned maritime strategy and the military strength of the landed European despots remained intact, the Tories could see the move only as a surrender.

Mill upheld the Tory position, and when serving in Parliament in 1867 called for the resumption of England's belligerent rights at sea. With the loss of her "natural weapon," he observed, Britain would be obliged to increase her military spending and begin a costly program of fortifications. The British would be "for ever in alarm, cowed" by a continental enemy, condemned to seeing "great international iniquities perpetrated before our eyes, and our expressions of deprecation, even of reprobation, passed over with civil, or scarcely civil contempt. To have renounced her maritime rights was "a national blunder," as the Tories had understood. Mill wished to resume these rights not on "narrow grounds of merely British patriotism," but because "the safety, and even the power of England are valuable to the freedom of the world, and therefore to the greatest and most permanent interests of every civilized people" (Parliamentary Speeches, 18:220-27).

The Liberals were shocked at Mill's desertion, the Radicals particularly so. After all, Mill had often been an ally in their fight for the expansion of the suffrage and other causes. For Radicals, the 1856 renunciation of belligerent naval rights had freed maritime trade in wartime just as the 1846 abolition of the corn laws had ushered in a free trade in time of peace. The Radicals loathed the
Mill's Coleridgian Neoradicalism

continental despots, but were more concerned with the immediate economic gains and with what they argued would be the long-range benefits of international commerce. The traditional naval policy had led to expensive armament programs and wars; the new one would not merely secure the profits of international trade (in which British merchants were preeminent), but would lead to a cosmopolitan world order.

Nor could Mill share Radical illusions of the death of national feelings or the imminent coming of world government. He therefore insisted on the usefulness of military training and conscription. In the 1870s, he wished to introduce military drill into schools to create an inexpensive and efficient reserve. After the Franco-Prussian War, he advocated making military service compulsory, using the adoption of something like the Swiss militia system. It was not safe, he argued, to rely entirely on a navy to deter war or to defend the country and its interests (Later Letters, 17:1805-06). On these matters, however, Mill's countrymen generally agreed with the liberals, both advanced and mainstream, and England entered the First World War with a small, volunteer army that soon proved inadequate.

Mill worried about the consequences of these liberal misconceptions, fearing they would prove disastrous to the survival of liberty in the world. In 1871, two years before his death, with Gladstone's Liberal government in office, he observed in a letter to a friend that "the whole state of Europe inspires sadness, but that of England contempt." England was now "incapable of moving even a small army," while signs of the deterioration of the navy were patent. "After this I shall henceforth wish for a Tory Government," he declared (Later Letters, 17:1828-29).

5. Mill raised the banners of progress and order, and pronounced both to be dependent on virtue. Though conservatives praised order and liberals progress (or improvement), for Mill the two were closely connected. The virtues required for order were "industry, integrity, justice and prudence." These were precisely what was required for
improvement, though for this purpose, he argued, they must exist to a greater degree. Similarly, the qualities regarded as most necessary for progress ("mental activity, enterprise, and courage") were also those required by order. Though the police were considered an institution for the maintenance of order; yet what could possibly be more useful to progress-to an increased production, which was progress in "its most familiar and vulgarest aspect"-than the security of life and property? (Representative Government, 19:385-86).

A great danger in modern society was that citizens would devote themselves to commercial interests or to amusement, to material progress or sensual satisfaction, and withdraw from an active participation in government. "Thus there may be progress in wealth, while there is deterioration in virtue" (387). Such a situation was abhorrent to Mill's neoradicalism. Moreover, when virtue was sacrificed to the increase of wealth, other forms of progress were also, and to a greater extent, sacrificed. "Things left to take care of themselves inevitably decay," Mill declared (386). Even without the hope of improvement, life would be "an unceasing struggle" against deterioration. The only remedy for the "natural tendency" of men and society toward degeneration was "good institutions virtuously administered." Only the efforts of men of virtue-some "constantly, and others by fits"-kept the powerful tide of degeneration "from sweeping all before it" (388).

In his Utilitarianism (1861), Mill preached a virtue "desired disinterestedly, for itself;" because, he argued, somewhat loosely, all properly-founded virtue promoted the general happiness. Indeed, taking up the language of the theologians, Mill declared that without such a view of virtue, "the mind is not in a right state, not in a state conformable to utility, not in the state most conducive to the general happiness." We must love virtue even if it did not in an individual case produce the "other desirable consequences which it tends to produce" (10:235). These were hardly the views of a liberal Benthamite.

Conventional moralists had criticized Benthamites for their prudential view of truth. Such a charge could not be directed against
Mill. For Mill, truth had achieved an immanent status. Though it might be expedient to lie to avoid a difficulty, any "deviation from truth" weakened "the trustworthiness of human assertion" upon which "all present social well-being" rested. The "insufficiency" of truth was the principal obstacle to the progress of "civilization, virtue, everything on which human happiness on the largest scale depends." "We feel that the violation, for a present advantage, of a rule of such transcendent expediency, is not expedient," he argued. Truth, then, was a rule of "transcendent expediency" and might be invoked as an ultimate principle (just as individual liberty had been in *On Liberty*), justified by utility "in the largest sense," in being "grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being" (223).

It would be the "habit of virtue" upon which society must rely to defend personal liberty or property as well as other legal or moral rights. For those who loved it, virtue was "desired and cherished, not as a means to happiness, but as a part of their happiness." The "will to be virtuous" could, he believed, be "implanted or awakened" by making a person desire virtue because he sees it will give the highest form of pleasure (235, 238-39).

Mill wished to distinguish his view of happiness from both the more crass ones expounded by Bentham, or the more severe ones preached by Comte, and by Carlyle as well. Unlike Bentham whose philosophy held that in measuring happiness, the child's game of push-pin was as much to be valued as poetry, Mill's work on utilitarianism stressed that some forms of happiness were more valuable than others (210-12). Comte's call for altruistic self-sacrifice-Mill called it the morality of "a blockaded town"-was unnecessarily harsh (Comte, 337). Carlyle had doubted any right to happiness, and urged "the lesson of Entsagen or renunciation," a view clearly kin to the Christian doctrine of self-mortification to which Mill took sharp exception. Nonetheless, for Mill, nobility of character-present in all classes but particularly visible in a moral elite-was a readiness voluntarily to give up individual pleasure for the happiness of others. Mill sought to persuade his readers that so noble and unselfish a philosophy as the Stoics had proposed was still
able to direct the lives of great masses in modern society (Utilitarianism, 214, 217-18).

"The Infinite nature of Duty" that Comte preached, Mill wrote, was a magnificent conception, and possessed a great capacity for inspiring service and achievement. Yet Mill found it unsatisfactory. In calling for "altruism" to conquer egoism, the French positivist asked the individual to repress the satisfaction of all his personal desires other than the brute necessities. Mill did not object to the proposition that egoism ought to be instructed to yield to certain general interests, but he could not accept this wish "to deaden the personal passions and propensities" and to condemn and mortify all personal indulgences (Comte, 335-36). Mill put forward an ideal of life which stressed "personal enjoyments," while still educating individuals to wish to share these with others. For "the notion of a happiness for all, procured by the self-sacrifice of each...is a contradiction." Mill wished to leave room for the "sympathetic encouragement" that made "self-devotion pleasant, not that of making everything else painful." One might encourage service to others by "natural rewards," rather than burden the pursuit of our own interests and inclinations "by visiting it with the reproaches of others and our own conscience" (338). Comte had sought a kind of "unity" or harmony by which life might be somehow "systematized." When "personal propensities" predominated, that unity, while never actually attainable, could not even be approximated. It was therefore necessary to subordinate these propensities, in Mill's words, to "the social feelings, which may be made to act in a uniform direction by a common system of convictions." For Mill, "the fons errorum" of Comte's doctrines was this "inordinate demand for 'unity' and 'systematization'" (335-36). Any system, logically pursued, Mill argued, was illiberal. This was especially the case when the question at issue was happiness. This was an individualist, neoradical reply to both Comte's positivism and Bentham's utilitarianism. "May it not be the fact," he inquired, "that mankind, who after all are made up of single human beings, obtain a greater sum of happiness when each pursues his own [ends], under the rules and conditions required by the good of the rest than when each makes the good of
the rest his own subject, and allows himself no personal pleasure not indispensable to the preservation of his faculties?" (337). Mill's virtuous stress on community, in so many instances, was counterbalanced by a firm faith in the values of liberal individualism.

In 1867, Matthew Arnold published his *Culture and Anarchy*, in which he pilloried Mill, with *On Liberty* particularly in mind, as an enemy of culture and an advocate of moral anarchy. Arnold saw himself as arguing on behalf of culture, humanism, and virtue. Culture was the enemy of "systems-makers and systems," he wrote—of "men like Comte or the late Mr. Buckle [the Victorian historian of civilization] or Mr. Mill." The gospel of the modern liberal, Arnold continued, was "doing as one likes," while culture strove to shape an individual as closely as possible into what was beautiful and good in accordance with a spiritual standard of perfection: Following the Hellenic ideal, culture wished to subdue "the great obvious faults of our animality." The systems-makers, on the other hand, were prepared to yield to the sensual and material tendencies of animality.²

This was clearly a false charge to make against Mill, who was not a systems-maker, nor a foe of culture, nor an opponent of the goal of spiritual perfection. Certainly he was not a devotee of the modern gospel of "doing as one likes." It is remarkable how Arnold's reading of Mill has survived to be repeated, again and again; by Mill's conservative critics in our day.

In his *Autobiography*, Mill acknowledged that mid-Victorian England did not appear to need the lessons offered in *On Liberty*. Fears that "the inevitable growth of social equality and of the government of public opinion" would impose "an oppressive yoke of uniformity in opinion and practise" might well seem fanciful to those who saw only the present situation, Mill granted. But a readiness to listen to new views was characteristic of times of transition, which Europe was experiencing, when old ideas were unsettled. However, in the coming "organic period," Mill wrote (employing Comte's term for a time of unanimity of sentiment, as in Europe's Middle Ages, in contrast to the moral and intellectual anarchy of periods of transition), "some particular body of doctrine" would dominate public
opinion, and would organize "social institutions and modes of action conformably to itself." The new creed would soon acquire the "power of compression" exercised by the dominant views of other organic periods, unless men became aware that such a "noxious power" could not be exercised "without stunting and dwarfing human nature." It would be then that "the teachings of the 'Liberty' will have their greatest value," and Mill was persuaded "that they will retain that value a long time" (177-78).

Far from issuing a call to moral anarchy and libertinism, Mill wished to preserve a gleam of inner freedom in the repressive climate of what he believed likely in the coming future society. Protestantism at the close of Europe's previous organic period had enjoined the positive freedom, and duty, of the individual to strenuously seek personal salvation against a conformist and powerful universal church. The German romantics and idealists had called for the positive freedom of self-realization as a defense against petty despots and officious bureaucracies of the German states of their time. Similarly, the pursuit of the positive liberty of self-development, as well as the negative liberty of freedom from undue constraints, Mill believed, would prove useful against a future tyranny of public opinion, molded by Comtist priests of humanity who wished to instill a reign of duty and self-sacrifice, or Benthamite bureaucrats and social engineers with their limited vision of what constituted a good society.

In the final analysis, then, Mill was not prepared to follow his one-time mentors, neither Bentham nor Comte-despite his attraction to aspects of their doctrines. For Mill, the power of the majority had to be "tempered by respect for the personality of the individual, and reverence for superiority of cultivated intelligence" ("Bentham," 10:108.09). No less than Bentham, Comte failed to understand liberty, and the rights of the individual to pursue his own way to happiness, as central values. And Mill understood, as the Benthamites and Comtists did not, that the best and most benevolently-founded system would merely confirm the tendencies of a democratic and commercial society toward liberticide.
In his tracts *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism*, a neoradical Mill sought in self-development and the search for moral and "spiritual perfection" (expounded by the German idealists and a conservative Coleridge) a counter to the logic of "liberal" system-makers like Bentham and Comte, a remedy to the faults he had perceived in their views decades earlier; he turned as well to the Stoic faith of republican Rome. For Mill, as for a number of Victorians, among them George Eliot, virtue, duty, and truth became transcendent ideals, guide posts to his conception of a good society. Benthamites and Comtists were dedicated to material happiness, to the general contentment of the masses for whom, it may be argued, liberty, honor, self-respect and the other abstractions must come second to material and sensual satisfaction. For Mill, the welfare of society had to be based on the humanist values of individual personality, personal dignity, and moral perfection. Mill had no doubt that the permanent interests of the human race depended on preferring virtue, which could yield the highest and most meaningful happiness, over a short-sighted sensual and material pleasure.

Liberalism in the commercial and egalitarian societies of our century, in a much more decided way than in the previous one, has almost entirely given itself up to necessity and material happiness. A generation after 1914, John Maynard Keynes, who regarded himself as being in the humanist tradition, saw his Bloomsbury circle as having escaped from the influence of Benthamism—and "the final reductio ad absurdum of Benthamism known as Marxism"—which he believed to be "the worm which has been gnawing at the insides of modern civilization and is responsible for its present moral decay." Both creeds, with their "over-valuation of the economic criterion," saw men as the mere creatures of economic necessity, just as other thinkers saw them as the playthings of their sexual drives. Keynes boasted that Bloomsbury breathed "a purer, sweeter air by far than Freud cum Marx," an intellectual combine that has dominated the thought of advanced liberals in our times. But Bloomsbury fell into another and as dangerous a snare: Bloomsbury had freely
chosen pleasure rather than virtue, not because they saw themselves under the sway of an animal necessity, but because they were willfully narcissistic. By the late 1930s, Keynes observed that Bloomsbury had gone too far, having forgotten "that civilisation was a thin and precarious crust erected by the personality and the will of a very few, and only maintained by rules and conventions skilfully put across and guilefully preserved."

If a crude Mandan and/or Freudian interpretation of men and history have been among the leading insignia of many contemporary liberals, so has a necessitarian behavioral psychology, whose outstanding representative was B. F. Skinner. Skinner, a builder of utopias, viewed man as a machine or an animal. His principal targets were "the myth" of autonomous man, and the idea of free will, and "the literature of freedom and dignity" which supports such a view. John Stuart Mill, despite the links between behaviorism and Mill's associationalism, became—and correctly so—Skinner's principal villain. In the best Comtian (or Marxist) manner, Skinner described the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as historically connected with "the aggrandizement of the individual" at the expense of society. Mill had vaunted man as "a moral hero," possessing "inner virtues" and engaged in a grand "moral struggle." Skinner, on the other hand, did not encourage such a struggle but wished "to make life less punishing," and welcomed a future "beyond freedom and dignity."!

In this past generation, social scientists—resembling the scientific and technical cadres of Comte's elite—became convinced that their expertise could bring about an era of social and personal happiness. They, too, believed that they could "make life less punishing," and like Mill's Owenite opponents saw none of man's ills as due to himself (or to the human condition) but, rather, regarded all injuries and wrongs as consequences of the remediable malfunctioning of society. Psychologists, employing the wisdom of the behaviorists or the psychoanalysts, would inaugurate a time of personal contentment; sociologists believed they could disentangle class and racial conflicts; Keynesian economists, despite their master's
doubts concerning Benthamism, were certain they could produce the greatest material happiness for the greatest number—employing when expedient what Mill had seen as an immoral inflating of the currency. The effect of much of this was to foster a new paternalism, to promote an increased dependence upon the state, instead of the individual independence and self-dependence that Mill had urged. The personal and social problems, of course, remain unsolved. We now recognize that social science has failed to realize its hubristic, utopian claims, and must look again at Mill's solution.

Mill's neoradical synthesis of liberty and virtue was not one of a perfection imposed upon men but rather Goethe's goal of self-perfection, not a state-directed, coercive model of development but one of individual responsibility and self-development leading to self-dependence. This was the ideal that underlay his rejection of both welfare-paternalism and the arguments of opponents of the death penalty. Mill called on men and women to achieve a positive liberty, to assume control over their lives. He spoke of the feeling of moral freedom" that came when an individual believed that he could modify his own character if he wished. And he reconciled positive and negative liberty, arguing that only when an individual was permitted to develop freely, without unnecessary social or political constraints, could he become self-dependent and usefully participate in the life of his society. Nor did a virtuous concern with the common interest undermine liberty and individual happiness, for, Mill believed, only by promoting the interests of others along with his own could a man further his personal development. A life given up to a narrow self-interest diminished individuality and, consequently, both liberty and happiness.

Mill understood that a good society which wished to retain liberty could not long survive the eclipse of a freely chosen virtue. Mill's view of a truly free man in a free society was not that of a qualified Benthamite liberal, as Mill is often cast, or a modified Comtist (whom Victorians placed in the camp of advanced liberalism) but a Coleridgian seeker after moral perfection. What Mill over a century and a half ago called neoradicalism, with its choice of virtue
over a potentially liberticide material interest, may be the basis for a present-day liberal reply to the enemies of moral and political freedom on both the left and the right.

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NOTES
This essay is based substantially on the author's John Stuart Mill and the Pursuit of Virtue (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984). The argument, however, follows a fresh, though not discordant, direction.
