The success of Mill's *Principles*

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John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* was published on 25 April 1848. It was written with a high moralistic tone and sustained ethical earnestness hitherto absent from economic discussion. But it was at the same time a major economic treatise, and in its overall conception and execution it challenged the *Wealth of Nations* in a way no other English treatise had done, and no other would, until Marshall's *Principles* (1890). It was not merely the longest work in political economy since the *Wealth of Nations*; Mill actually set out to emulate and to supplant Smith's classic. His own work, he explained in the Preface, was an attempt "to combine [Smith's] practical mode of treating his subject with the increased knowledge since acquired of its theory [and] to exhibit the economical phenomena of society in the relation in which they stand to the best social ideas of the present time, as he did, with such admirable success, in reference to the philosophy of his century."[1] The *Principles* was rapidly successful; and so completely so that, as Foxwell later noted, "English economists, for a whole generation, were men of one book."[2]

What, precisely, were the ingredients of this success? To answer this question involves two enquiries. It is one thing to capture a commanding height, and quite another to hold it. This article deals only with the former; it is an attempt to account for the impact-success of the *Principles*. The task has been undertaken because, while we know in a general way why the *Principles* succeeded—typical assessments are that "there was something in it for everyone," and that Mill achieved "a happy combination of scientific level and accessibility"[3]—the audience

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1. Francis E. Mineka, ed., *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill, 1812–1848* (Toronto, 1963), vols. 12 and 13 of *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill,* at 13:642.

2. Introduction to Anton Menger, *The Right to the Whole Produce of Labour,* trans. M. E. Tanner, with introd. and bibliog. by H. S. Foxwell (London, 1889), p. lxxviii.

3. Barry J. Gordon, *Non-Ricardian Political Economy: Five Neglected Contributions,* Kress Library of Business and Economics Publication no. 20 (Boston, 1967), p. 2; J. A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York, 1954), p. 533.

Mill sought to reach, the tactics he adopted, and the way these affected the final work have been left quite unexplored. In relation to such an influential book, clearly these are important questions.

Sales

The first edition of Mill's *Principles,* 1,000 copies, sold within a year. A total sale of 2,000 (reached by the *Principles* in four years) for "popular" types of work—novels, history, travel, biography—appears to have been good.[4] But the *Principles* was not a best seller. Contrast its sale with sales enjoyed by the first two volumes of T. B. Macaulay's *History of England from the Accession of James II.* These were published towards the end of 1848, at 32/-, and sold 18,000 copies within six months.[5]

There is no comparable work in the period on political economy against which to measure Mill's sales success. However, it is possible to make some general comparisons with Ricardo's and Marshall's *Principles* (see *Table 1*).[6]

These figures are tantalizing, but tell us little. For one thing, Ricardo's "product," severe and abstract, is not comparable with that of Mill or Marshall, both of whom set out to create something more attractive to the general reader. Again, Marshall's work was deliberately priced to sell widely, whereas the price of Mill's work (30/-) put it beyond the means of all but the rich.[7] Moreover, there is some evidence that books in Mill's price range sold for reasons unrelated to price.[8] One assumption underlying these comparisons—that an equal number sold at twice the price is a performance twice as meritorious—is therefore not necessarily correct.

For what they are worth, however, these sales data confirm the more qualitative judgments one can make. There is no doubt that Mill's *Principles* made an immediate and striking impression on contemporaries:

4. J. W. Dodds, *The Age of Paradox* (London, 1953), p. 362.

5. Ibid.

6. Comparison with the *Wealth of Nations* would be apt, but is precluded by the fact that the size of the first edition of that work is not known.

7. Marshall's *Principles* was the first "net book": for details see James J. Barnes, *Free Trade in Books: A Study of the London Book Trade Since 1800* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 143–44.

8. Ibid., pp. 95–96. It is interesting in this connection that Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy,* published as monthly tales between 1832 and 1834 at 1/6d., in the latter year reached a monthly circulation of 10,000: see Blaug, *Ricardian Economics* (New Haven, 1958), p. 129. The People's Edition of Mill's *Principles* (1865), at 7/-, falling to 5/- after the first 4,000, sold 10,000 in five years.

Table 1. Measures of the relative success of Mill's *Principles.*

	Ricardo's *Principles* (1817)	Mill's *Principles* (1848)	Marshall's *Principles* (1890)
Total expenditure represented by sales of the first edition	1	2.8	2.4
Expenditure represented by sales in the first year[a]	1	4.3	3.6
Expenditure represented by sales of the first edition, assuming that Ricardo's *Principles* was published at an average of book prices at mid-century[b]	1	4.7	

[a] This assumes that Ricardo's *Principles* sold 500 copies in the first year, which is probably a generous estimate: see Sraffa's Introduction to Ricardo, *Principles, Works,* 1:xlix–l and n. 1.

[b] Book prices declined from about 1825. The average price per work of all books published in Great Britain was 16/- in 1828, and 8/4½d. in 1853: see Charles Knight, *Passages of a Working Life During Half a Century,* 3 vols. (London,1864), 3:194.

"great" is an epithet frequently applied to the work by reviewers and others writing within a year or two of its publication.

But who bought and read it? And what specific opinions did they express? Here there exists only fragmentary evidence. We do know, however, that Mill planned its impact, and it is possible to identify the kinds of persons he hoped to influence, and the sorts of responses he anticipated.

Mill's aims

Three specific aims can be culled from references in Mill's letters, his *Autobiography,* and the Preface to the *Principles* itself. The *Principles* was, firstly, to supply a need for an up-to-date statement of the science of political economy.[9] Secondly, it was to give a "right" direction to the widespread discusion in the 1840's of applied economic and social issues, in part by adopting the "positive" method of investigating such issues.[10]

9. *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 13:642, 731.

10. Ibid., pp. 640–42. Mill's "positivism" involved two things: (1) the relegation of notions like the "invisible hand" to the limbo of metaphysics (here the influence of Comte is apparent: see, for example, ibid., pp. 626, 631), and (2) the separation of ends from a discussion of the effects of alternative means. In this latter respect Mill's political economy was to be "positive" as distinct from "normative." (Mill was mostly careful to separate his personal views on topical questions from the scientific analysis of the problems, though exceptions can be

And lastly, it was to serve Mill as a vehicle for expressing his personal views on these same economic, moral, and social questions of the day.[11] It was in respect of his first two aims that Mill stood to gain most. By about 1830 Ricardo's economics, which Mill intended to adopt as the theoretical core of his own treatise, was in disrepute among economists, and popular opinion from about 1830 was largely antagonistic to the pretensions of economists of every shade. Mill believed that much of this latter opposition was without foundation, and that in the mid-1840's the purest source of the science was still Ricardo's doctrines. We may infer, however, that he intended not merely to argue the case on his own side, but to win over some of his opponents. For from the time of his recovery from his mental crisis of 1826 Mill had adhered to the conviction that the mere fact of their having been taught opinions—even true ones—does not suffice to move men to accept and act upon correct views. From 1829 he adopted a method which he dubbed "practical eclecticism": the seeking himself, and the seeking to show others, the fragments of truth in the midst of error, and the uniting of these with established truth. By adopting this approach to discussion he hoped to separate the recognition of error from the stigma of defeat, and to make the adoption of truth a "natural and almost spontaneous growth."[12] It is worth stressing that "practical eclecticism" was a strategy for getting a hearing for his views; it does not imply that Mill arrived at the framework and direction of his thought eclectically. With this qualification, it seems fair to see in each of Mill's first two aims in the writing of the *Principles* a significant element of conciliatory intent, and it is with this aspect that we shall be chiefly concerned. To understand just what was involved in these tasks of conciliation we must first survey the views of the opponents of political economy in general, and of Ricardo's economics in particular.

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found.) The distinction is the same as that drawn between "science" and "art" in Mill's *System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (1843), Book VI, chap. 12, sec. 5. It was foreshadowed in his earlier essay "On the Definition of Political Economy; and on the Method of Investigation Proper to It" (1836); reprinted in *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy* (1844) and in *Essays on Economics and Society*, vols. 4 and 5 of *Collected Works* (1967), 4:309–39, at 338.

11. *Earlier Letters, Collected Works*, 13:708. Cf. *Autobiography* (Columbia ed.), pp. 161–64, 165. Although we shall be little concerned with this third aim, it is important to distinguish it from the other two. For it is in this purely normative area that Harriet Taylor's contribution to the *Principles* most probably lay: see John Robson's persuasive discussion in *The Improvement of Mankind: The Social and Political Thought of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto, 1968), chap. 3.

12. *Earlier Letters, Collected Works*, 12:41–42, 45–46, 153.

Attitudes hostile to political economy c.1830 to c.1848

Four main views may be distinguished: those of "practical men," humanitarians, cooperators and Chartists, and economists of a different persuasion from Ricardo.

The economists apart, the three other groups with whom Mill had to deal did not set themselves exclusively against a "school" of economic science headed by Ricardo. Some writers did identify a Ricardian "sect"; generally, however, doctrinal distinctions escaped them.[13] Looking only at the three main periodicals opposed to political economy (the *Quarterly Review, Fraser's Magazine* and *Blackwood's Magazine*), we find writers opposed to the Malthusian principle, for example, using the title "political economist" to embrace such a diverse group as James Mill, Thomas Chalmers, Harriet Martineau, Charles Knight, and Nassau Senior.[14] Many identified political economy with philosophic radicalism;[15] or, more broadly, with an unspecified group of impractical, hard-hearted theorists who arrogated to themselves the right to advise the nation.[16] It is important to emphasize, therefore, that John Mill's task extended beyond defending Ricardo's economics: he had also to establish the legitimacy and good intentions of the subject as a whole.

13. There were exceptions. John Wilson noted the divisions at the famous Political Economy Club debate of 13 January 1831, on the merits of Ricardo's principles. And an anonymous reviewer in *Fraser's* remarked the difference of view between McCulloch and Senior on the question of a poor law for Ireland. See [John Wilson], "Mr. Sadler and the Edinburgh Reviewer," *Blackwood's Magazine* 29 (1831):392–428, at 395; "Senior on the Introduction of Poor Laws Into Ireland," *Fraser's Magazine* 4 (1831):554–65, at 557.

14. See [Wilson], "Mr. Sadler," p. 394; [Maginn?], "Mr. Sadler and the Edinburgh Review," *Fraser's Magazine* 3 (1831):209–21, at 209; [Maginn?], "On National Economy: No. III," ibid., 6 (1832):403–13, at 403; [G. Poulett Scrope], "Jones on the Doctrine of Rent," *Quarterly Review* 46 (1831):81–117, at 97.

15. Southey speaks in a single breath of believers in Saint-Simon and "men upon the same level in England [who] believe in Mr. Malthus, Mr. Ricardo, Jeremy Bentham." [R. Southey] "New Distribution of Property," *Quarterly Review* 45 (1831):407–50, at 444. In 1834 a writer in *Blackwood's* asserted that the doctrines of political economy "are yet, in the main, confined to bodies professing, or approximating to, the peculiar tenets of religious belief or unbelief advocated by their leaders of the Utilitarian school." [Alfred Mallelieu], "The Corn Law Question," *Blackwood's Magazine* 35 (1834):792–801, at 795; cf. [John Eagles], "New Scheme for Maintaining the Poor," ibid., 43 (1838):489–93, at 489.

16. The Tories, in particular, objected to the influence which they felt the economists were exerting on Whig policy. See, for example [David Robinson], "Political Economy: No. I," *Blackwood's Magazine* 26 (1829):510–23, at 510; [W. Johnstone], "Our Domestic Policy: No. I," ibid., p. 771; [Maginn?], "Machinery and the Manufacturing System," *Fraser's Magazine* 2 (1830):420.

Practical men

Two variants of the attitude of the "practical men" are discernible. On the one hand, they accused the economists of habitually "setting off from some imaginary *a priori* assumptions, without troubling themselves with observation or history."[17] On the other hand, they argued that the abstract doctrines of political economy, while true in themselves, could not be applied without many allowances for particular circumstances. The former view was frequently expressed in the pages of the three Tory periodicals. Many M.P.'s adopted the latter view.

George Poulett Scrope was a vehement critic of the Ricardians' method. In 1831 he contrasted unfavorably their "imaginary abstractions" with the "plain and obvious facts" concerning the effect of improvements in agriculture upon rent. Whereas they held that improvements must necessarily lower rents, he said, landlords know well that recent improvements have produced the opposite result.[18] Also in 1831, William Maginn complained in *Fraser's* that, on the subject of population, "twenty theorists have written within the last ten years . . . and all the facts collected by the whole of them, would scarcely fill four of these pages."[19] Somewhat later, speaking of Perronet Thompson's advocacy of free trade, Maginn wrote: "The strength of the economists lies in keeping at a distance from facts."[20] The particular facts ignored, in this instance, were the pockets of unemployment which might be or had been created in industries which lost their protection. A typical affirmation was that "common experience proves . . . false" the assumption of the economists "that all the labour which we save by getting from another country a commodity cheaper than we can ourselves produce it, is immediately turned to some other profitable account."[21]

"Practical men" actively engaged in making law objected not to the

17. [Scrope], "Jones on the Doctrine of Rent," pp. 83, 94.

18. Ibid., and p. 95. Scrope failed to make the Ricardian distinction between immediate and long-term effects.

19. [Maginn?] "Mr. Sadler," p. 209.

20. "On National Economy: No. VII," *Fraser's Magazine* 8 (1833):104. Cf. [Maginn?], "On National Economy: No. I," ibid., 6 (1832):113–18, at 113–14.

21. [W. Johnstone], "Our Domestic Policy: No. I," p. 771. Once again, this criticism failed to take into account the distinction between short- and long-run effects. See also [Edward Edwards], "The Influence of Free Trade Upon the Condition of the Labouring Classes," *Blackwood's Magazine* 27 (1830):553–68, at 560–61, 564; [Mallelieu], "The Corn Law Question," p. 794; [Sir Archibald Alison], "Social and Moral Condition of the Manufacturing Districts in Scotland," ibid., 50 (1841):659–73, at 672; [W. Collis], "On Pauperism and Its Treatment," ibid., 61 (1847):261–85, at 263 (the argument here being put in more general terms); [Maginn?] "On National Economy: No. IX," *Fraser's Magazine* 8 (1833):613. The same argument was used frequently in Parliamentary debate: see, for example, *Hansard*, 3d ser., X (1832), 1035; XI (1832), 1265–66; XIV (1832), 1201.

economists' speculations as such, but to the readiness with which they handed down their dogmas, "literally *ex cathedra,* and, in the tone of oracular authority . . . for the guidance of legislators."[22] M.P.'s of many shades agreed with one who claimed that he was "not inimical to free trade and political economy," but "unfortunately general principles were indiscriminately applied without any reference to the circumstances of each particular case."[23] The same position was adopted by some writers in the Tory periodicals, two of whom are worth quoting. One of the more moderate contributions to *Fraser's Magazine* ran thus, on the doctrine of free trade: "We do not at all say that your theory is wrong: we even go so far as to allow that it may be scientifically right; but we say that it is not adapted to the existing system of the world."[24] Again, W. Collis, in *Blackwood's,* wrote:

> The political economist may be right when he announces, that the introduction of machinery has, on the whole, been beneficial; and that the change of employment from one location to another, depends upon the action of natural laws, of which he is merely the expositor. It may be the case, too, that he is attending carefully to the particular limits of his favourite science, when he occupies his mind with the laws themselves, rather than with their aberrations. But those who treat upon pauperism as an existing evil, to be dealt with now, should remember that they have to do not with natural laws, as they are separated and classified in the works of scientific men, but with the laws in all their complexity of operation, and with the incidents which arise from that complexity.[25]

Humanitarians

In addition to being labeled "impractical theorists," the political economists were accused of having fostered doctrines implying an inevitable enmity between the classes in society. Further, they had allegedly

22. [Scrope], "Jones on the Doctrine of Rent," p. 116. Alexander Baring, speaking in the House of Commons in the debate on the State of the Silk Trade, declaimed against "the presumptuous arrogance with which the present philosophers applied their principles." *Hansard,* 3d ser., X (1832), 1034.

23. Robert Waithman, speaking on the Navigation Laws and Commercial Policy. *Hansard,* 3d ser., XII (1832), 1332. For comparable sentiments expressed by Disraeli see *Hansard,* 3d ser., LIII (1840), 380, and LXXVIII (1845), 1023; by Peel, ibid., LIII (1840), 540, and LVIII (1841), 632; and by Daniel O'Connell, ibid., LV (1840), 96.

24. "The Free-Trade Question," *Fraser's Magazine* 6 (1832):593–98, at 598. Cf. [John Wilson Croker], "The Budget and the Dissolution," *Quarterly Review* 68 (1841):238–80, at 264, 273–75; [Croker], "Peel Policy," ibid., 81 (1847):274–316, at 279–80.

25. "On Pauperism," p. 263.

identified themselves with the capitalist interest, and had taken a stand against the legitimate claims of the workers. Again, they idolized production (wealth) to the neglect of distribution (welfare). Finally, it was held that they spoke as if moral considerations were of no account alongside the purely economic.

Scrope, impassioned, wrote the Ricardian economists down as criminals for, *inter alia,* their doctrine of rent, which implied that landlords could gain only at the expense of others; and for their doctrine of profits, which to him seemed to imply that capitalists can gain only by depressing laborers. These doctrines, he said, "if credited by the public, would place all its classes in perpetual and deadly hostility."[26]

To the humanitarians, more serious than the economists' opposition to the landlords was their alleged attack on the aspirations of the defenseless poor. Ricardo's inverse relation between wages and profits became, in the view of these critics, a flagrant denial of social justice. Thus David Robinson, of *Blackwood's Magazine,* wrote: "By making high profits the *sine qua non* of national wealth, and low wages that of high profits, it in reality makes it the grand principle of civil government, to keep the mass of the human race in the lowest stages of indigence and suffering."[27] Given the fact that such writers were mindful of the (temporary) unemployment likely to be created by a liberalizing of trade, it was to be expected that they would also accuse the economists of wanting to see wages reduced.[28] A similar charge was made in connection with Sadler's Ten Hours Bill (1833). It had been argued earlier that if free trade depressed either the workers or the agricultural interest, then purchasing power would be reduced and "over-production" would result.[29] Now it was said that if the economists were not so obsessed with profits and with the accumulation of capital—their "god, or rather presiding demon"—they would see that shorter hours would not only benefit the workers but would overcome the excess production which, in the view of these critics, competition had produced. But "voluntary blindness" to the real cause of gluts and to the suffering caused by the factory system, so it was alleged, drove the economists back onto the

26. "Jones on the Doctrine of Rent," p. 116.

27. "Political Economy: No. I," p. 511; cf. p. 513. Cf. [Edwards], "The Influences of Free Trade," p. 564.

28. See, for instance, [Mallelieu], "The Corn Law Question," p. 797: "the manufacturer inoculated with the venom of the economic doctrine, who bawls for the abolition of the Corn Laws, really means neither more nor less than *a reduction of wages.*"

29. [W. Johnstone], "Our Domestic Policy: No. I," p. 770; [D. Robinson], "Political Economy: No. III," *Blackwood's Magazine* 26 (1829):789–808, at 789–91, 795, 804.

doctrine they used to explain all ills, namely, overpopulation.[30] By successive imputations of this kind the economists finally came to be regarded as the philosophers of the manufacturing interest, hoodwinking the truly industrious to provide greater profits and enjoyments for the "idle."[31]

Thirdly, it was said by the humanitarians that the economists, in offering advice to the legislator, did so on the assumption that "whatever increases the wealth of a nation *must be* for its benefit." Scrope, for example, argued that, on the contrary, "the theory of wealth is *not* the theory of government"; and "it is of infinitely greater importance *how* the wealth of the community is *distributed,* than what is its absolute amount."[32] A government which took political economy as its guide, he said, "must often sacrifice the real interests of the people it presides over for a glittering fiction."[33]

From this view it was but a short step to argue that moral and humane considerations must take precedence over the merely economic. Charles Dickens was an effective spokesman for this position. "My satire," he explained in the 1850's,

> is against those who see figures and averages, and nothing else—the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time . . . the addled heads who take the average of cold in the Crimea during twelve months, as a reason for clothing a soldier in nankeen on a night when he would be frozen to death in a fur—and who would comfort the labourer in travelling twelve miles a-day to and from his work, by telling him that the average distance of one inhabited place from another on the whole area of England, is not more than four miles.[34]

This attitude is apparent also in Dickens's novels prior to the publication of Mill's *Principles.*[35]

30. [Maginn?], "National Economy: No. IV," *Fraser's Magazine* 7 (1833): 377–92, at 377; [John Wilson], "The Factory System," *Blackwood's Magazine* 33 (1833):419–50, at 420, 423.

31. [Edward Edwards], "The Influence of Free Trade," p. 561; [Maginn?], "On National Economy: No. IX," *Fraser's Magazine* 8 (1833): 613.

32. [G. Poulett Scrope], "The Archbishop of Dublin on Political Economy," *Quarterly Review* 46 (1831):46–54, at 50–52.

33. "The Political Economists," *Quarterly Review* 44 (1831):44. See also *Hansard,* 3d ser., XII (1832), 1321; [Alison], "Social and Moral Condition," p. 659; [G. F. Young], "Free Trade," *Quarterly Review* 86 (1849):148–83, at 156–57, 183.

34. From a letter to Charles Knight, cited by him in *Passages of a Working Life During Half a Century,* 3:188.

35. See Humphry House, *The Dickens World,* 2d ed. (London, 1965), chaps. 3 and 4.

Criticism of the 1834 Poor Law followed similar lines. The principles of that legislation, it was said, were heartless and inhumane.[36] The poor were taught that the legitimate indulgence of their natural affections was a crime, and the rich, that to abandon the poor to their destitution was a sacred duty.[37]

Very often, especially among the writers for *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review,* the moral repugnance excited by the doctrines of the economists was linked with a kind of "speculative Toryism," mindful of the responsibilities of the rich towards the suffering poor, but jealous also of the privileged position of church and aristocracy and concerned to preserve a stable political and social order in the face of industrial change.[38] W. Johnstone, writing in *Blackwood's,* summarized "true Tory principles" as "principles which, while they maintain the due order and proportions of each separate rank in the state, maintain also that protection and support are the right of all, so long as there are the means, within the state, of affording them."[39] David Robinson, John Wilson, and Sir Archibald Alison,[40] all of *Blackwood's,* adopted these principles, as did Southey, J. Gibson Lockhart, Croker, and G. F. Young,[41] of the *Quarterly Review.* Coleridge,[42] Shaftesbury, Richard Castler,[43] and the Young Englanders represented similar views.

To these "philosophic Tories," political economy seemed both heartless and potentially disruptive.[44] Apart from a few evangelicals, their

36. See, for example, some of the comments on the Poor Law Amendment Bill: *Hansard,* 3d ser., LXXVI (1844), 333, 336, 341. See also [John Eagles], "New Scheme," pp. 489–93. With heavy irony, Eagles advised that the bodies of those who died in union workhouses should be made into soup for the remaining inmates. The supply, he said, would be ample.

37. [Scrope], "Jones on the Doctrine of Rent," p. 116; [Maginn?], "On National Economy: No. III," pp. 403, 408.

38. See the comments of Frank Whitson Fetter in "The Economic Articles in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* and Their Authors, 1817–1853," *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 7 (1960):85–90, and idem, "The Economic Articles in the *Quarterly Review,* and Their Authors, 1809–52: I," *Journal of Political Economy* 66 (1958):47–48. The term "speculative Toryism" is John Mill's: see *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 12:83–84.

39. "Our Domestic Policy: No. I," p. 768.

40. (1792–1862), lawyer and historian.

41. (1791–1870), merchant, shipowner, M.P.

42. A useful study is William F. Kennedy, *Humanist Versus Economist: The Economic Thought of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Berkeley, Calif., 1958), esp. chaps. 1–7.

43. (1789–1861); Oastler's attitudes to political economy are indicated in Cecil Driver, *Tory Radical: The Life of Richard Oastler* (New York, 1946), pp. 294–98, 429–33.

44. Insofar as it was espoused by Benthamites, it was, of course, radical; but also by its encouragement of capital, it promised to supersede the landed aristocracy by another founded upon manufactures and commerce.

opposition had a religious basis only in the sense that the church was part of the established order. There were, however, some thinkers whose attitude to political economy was determined wholly by a Christian or at least a metaphysical world view. These men were not humanitarians in a practical, philanthropic sense, but they were deeply concerned about the destiny of men, and they had certain affinities with backward-looking Tory romanticism. Newman and the Oxford Tractarians opposed the pretensions of political economy to be an independent enquiry. Newman later said that it was "a science at the same time dangerous and leading to occasions of sin . . . if studied by itself, and apart from the control of Revealed Truth." Pusey asserted: "All things must speak of God, refer to God, or they are atheistic. . . . Political Economy without God would be a selfish teaching about the acquisition of wealth."[45] From his own peculiar metaphysics, Thomas Carlyle drew comparable conclusions. Bible, covenants, and worship of one sort or another, he said, men will have. Was it then, he asked rhetorically, to be "pig philosophy"? "Did the Maker of this Universe reveal himself . . . in scrip mainly, in Cotton Trades, and profitable industries and gamblings?" Political economy for a Bible, "M'Croudy" for a psalmist and evangelist, and for worship, "the insatiable desire, and continual sacred effort, to make money": these, he said, are "Devil-worships, fruitful in temporary bullion, in upholstery, gluttony and universal varnish and gold-leaf; and issuing, alas, at length in street barricades, and a confused *return* of them to the Devil whose they are!"[46]

Chartists and cooperators

Owenites and Chartists, however different their methods, can be jointly distinguished from the humanitarians. Their common purpose lay in opposing competition and in seeking basic changes in the ownership and distribution of property. The treatment which follows is only a

45. The Tractarians, in the ascendent from the late 1830's to the mid-1840's, were reactionary in their attitude to the establishment of political economy as a university study. For their role at Oxford in this connection, see S. G. Checkland, "The Advent of Academic Economics in England," *Manchester School* 19 (1951): 43–70, esp. 66–69. The quotations from Newman and Pusey are cited ibid., pp. 66 n. and 67.

46. See "Jesuitism" [1850] in *Latter Day Pamphlets, The Works of Thomas Carlyle, Centenary Edition,* 30 vols. (London, 1896–1903), 20:293–337, at 316–18, 324–25. The quotation expresses equally well Carlyle's earlier views. See Emery Neff, *Carlyle* (London, 1932), esp. chap. 4 and idem, *Carlyle and Mill: An Introduction to Victorian Thought,* 2d ed. rev. (New York, 1926), esp. chap. 8. An excellent brief statement of Carlyle's opposition to political economy is in William D. Grampp, "Classical Economics and Its Moral Critics," *History of Political Economy* 5 (Fall 1973):359–74, esp. 364–68.

sketch, and is deliberately limited to the Chartists and cooperators as critics of political economy.

According to the Owenites, the operation of competition was neither as rational as a planned division of labor nor as just as a communal control of property, with all sharing equally in the fruits of labor. The system of individual competition, Owen complained, could not guarantee that production would match—in size or composition—the wants of consumers. It therefore could not guarantee a full employment of labor or capital. Moreover, it was a system of "universal repulsion." The profit motive led capitalists to value men less highly than machines, while the factory system separated the workman from his food, creating uncertainty, on the one hand, and depriving him of the healthy life of a cultivator, on the other. There was land enough, Owen maintained, to support self-contained communities engaged in agriculture, with manufactures as an appendage. These would be well-educated, well-supervised cooperative societies, enjoying a higher standard of health and comfort than the system of individual competition, favored by the "closet theorists" (political economists), could provide.[47]

Owen's ideas were espoused by the so-called Ricardian socialists: William Thompson, John Gray,[48] and John Francis Bray.[49] But the work of these men is of marginal significance here. Gray had dissociated himself from the Owenites by the early 1830's; Thompson died in 1833; and Bray left England for America in 1842, disappointed that his book had enjoyed little success in England.[50] Of much greater importance is George Jacob Holyoake, who took up Owen's ideas in the late 1830's and became a lasting and effective propagandist for cooperation.[51]

47. This summary of some of Owen's views draws on *The Life of Robert Owen, Written by Himself,* 2 vols. (London, 1857), esp. 1:128–31 and 2:62, 75, 106, 192–93; *Mr. Owen's Arrangements for the Distressed Working Classes, in Three Letters Addressed to David Ricardo, Esq. M.P.* (London, 1819), esp. pp. 21, 23, 24–25; the extracts from his other works in A. L. Morton, *The Life and Ideas of Robert Owen* (London, 1962), pp. 91–95, 135–37, 147–48; and John F. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: Quest for the New Moral World* (New York, 1968), pp. 47–78.

48. (1799–1883); his *A Lecture on Human Happiness* (London, 1825) dwelt especially on the injustice of the existing distribution of income and wealth and the failure of the competitive system to utilize fully the productive powers of society.

49. (1809–97); in *Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy; or, the Age of Might and the Age of Right* (Leeds, 1839) Bray argued the right of every man to possess the whole produce of his labor. He criticized the economists for dismissing cooperative proposals as incompatible with the existing social system without considering whether men and institutions might be changed.

50. J. F. Harrison, pp. 64–65. See also Blaug, *Ricardian Economics,* pp. 140–50, where the works of these three are discussed in greater detail. An earlier work, still useful, is Esther Lowenthal, *The Ricardian Socialists* (New York, 1911).

51. (1817–1906); appointed lecturer to explain the Owenite system in 1841;

Owen's model cooperatives held little appeal for the Chartists. At least the more radical among them felt that politics were controlled by property, and they chose political change—violent if necessary—as the immediate means of breaking the monopoly of land and capital which made of their fellows just so many wage slaves. To men like Feargus O'Connor,[52] Thomas Cooper,[53] George Julian Harney,[54] and Ernest Jones,[55] political economists appeared as "a school who settle all human affairs by a comparison of averages, and a table of profit and loss; who have no other motto for the door of their temple than 'buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest'; who point to Manchester as the model city of their choice; who make the great object of life the accumulation of riches."[56] These words, superficially so close to those used by the humanitarians, in fact carried a very different meaning. The Chartists did not fear free trade because it might harm the landlords, but because the middle-class manufacturers might find in cheap bread an excuse to reduce money wages. And of what ultimate use was it, they asked, to reform the conditions of factory labor, as urged by the humanitarians, if those who controlled capital could always keep the amount of employment relative to the supply of labor balanced in their own favor?[57] The "mystery of oppression" should be made known, Harney cried: "and therefore, just as before the false friend we prefer the open foe, so to the canting philanthropic aristocrat we prefer the brazen faced free-trader, before Lord Ashley we prefer Quaker Bright." The political economist, he alleged, was "the paid servant" of the factory owner. Mere humanitarian sentiment, however, would do nothing to break the latter's monopoly of capital.[58]

Basic social and political change was not a distinguishing doctrine of

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founded and edited the *Reasoner,* a secularist and cooperative paper, from 1846 to 1866.

52. (1794–1855); founded the *Northern Star,* "the most important organ of . . . working class radicalism" (G. D. H. Cole, *Chartist Portraits,* London, 1941), p. 311; advocate of free land and smallholdings, to remove surplus factory labor. For a full study see Donald Read and Eric Glasgow, *Feargus O'Connor: Irishman and Chartist* (London, 1961).

53. (1805–92); supporter of O'Connor in the early 1840's: see Cole, *Chartist Portraits,* pp. 187–217, and *The Life of Thomas Cooper, Written by Himself* [1872] (London, 1882).

54. (1817–97); republican revolutionary: see Cole, *Chartist Portraits,* 268–99, and A. R. Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge: A Portrait of George Julian Harney* (London, 1958).

55. (1819–69); an adherent of Chartism long after its decline; influenced by Karl Marx. Cole, *Chartist Portraits,* 337–57, and John Saville, *Ernest Jones: Chartist* (London, 1952).

56. Samuel M. Kydd in *Cooper's Journal* (1850), p. 466.

57. Ernest Jones in *Notes to the People,* May 1851/May 1852, pp. 391–92.

58. *Democratic Review* 1 (1849/50):372–73; cf. Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge,* pp. 109–11.

the Christian Socialists, though the pioneer, J. M. Ludlow, was a genuine socialist; and the movement as a whole gave impetus to the notion that capital and labor must be reconciled through association in the production and distribution of wealth.[59] The Christian Socialists' overriding objection to political economy was that it made self-interest, undeniably *a* law of human nature, into *the* basic law of human society. "Now what I complain of in political economy," Charles Kingsley wrote in the 1850's, ". . . is that it says, There are laws of nature concerning economy, therefore you must leave them alone to do what they like with you and society!" Kingsley continued: "Indeed, I am inclined to deny to political economy, as yet, the name of a science. It is as yet merely in its analytic stage; explaining the causes of phenomena which already exist. To be a true science, it must . . . learn how, by using the laws which it has discovered, and counteracting them by others when necessary, to produce new forms of society. As yet political economy has produced nothing. It has merely said 'Laissez-faire!' "[60] By saying no more, political economy had inevitably come to be regarded by working men as a rationalization of the existing distribution of wealth and income, when what was needed, in the view of the Christian Socialists, was a positive affirmation that there were duties of property (as well as rights) and rights of labor (not merely duties); and that there is a "higher spirit of fellowship and community purpose" than the spirit of material self-interest.[61]

Political economists

"Practical men," humanitarians, and Owenites and Chartists voiced complaints about political economy in general. The political economists differ from the first three groups as critics in that their target was Ricardo, or at least the Ricardian inner circle (James Mill and McCulloch). They also differed from one another, of course, but Ricardo was the preeminent thinker, hence the one whose work—whether in the original or as expounded by one of his followers—naturally attracted most attention. The target area of criticism has now therefore narrowed and become more concentrated.

59. Ludlow's socialism is described in N. C. Masterman, *John Malcolm Ludlow: The Builder of Christian Socialism* (Cambridge, 1963), esp. pp. 71–72, 89–90; cf. p. 115. For more complete studies of the movement see C. E. Raven, *Christian Socialism, 1848–1854* (London, 1920), and T. Christensen, *Origin and History of Christian Socialism, 1848–54* (Aarhus, 1962).

60. *Charles Kingsley, His Letters and Memories of His Life,* edited by his wife, abridged ed. (London, 1883), p. 209.

61. Kingsley [Parson Lot], "Letters to the Chartists: No. II," and Ludlow, "The Great Partnership," both in *Politics for the People,* No. 17, extra supplement for July 1848.

No precise definition of the group called "political economists" is possible. During the period 1830 to 1850 there was little university teaching in political economy, and certainly nothing amounting to a distinct professional training.[62] On the other hand, writers on economic questions in the major periodicals (*Fraser's, Blackwood's,* and the *Quarterly,* the *Westminster* and the *Edinburgh Review*) were primarily political journalists. The Political Economy Club was, perhaps, the body most closely identified with the "political economists" in the minds of contemporaries; however, its membership included many who cannot be regarded as having had a scientific interest in political economy. Again, there were some thinkers of merit outside the Club. But we are concerned here only with significant criticisms of Ricardo's method, of the laws of population and diminishing returns, and of his views on value, profits, rent, and gluts. Without establishing the extent of the criticism, the critics among the political economists may be fairly adequately represented by Senior, Perronet Thompson, Malthus, Torrens—all members of the Political Economy Club—plus Samuel Bailey and Richard Jones. It is not denied that there were other critics of importance—the anti-Ricardian tradition as a whole is a vast subject which has only recently begun to attract the attention it merits.[63] The purpose here is merely to point out some of the main lines of criticism by economists, taking a small number of writers only, each as an example of typical lines of dissent.

Ricardo's deductive method was attacked by a Cambridge-based group of inductivists which included the political economists Richard Jones and John Cazenove and scientists William Whewell, John Herschel, and Charles Babbage.[64] The leaders of this group, Jones and Whewell,

62. See Checkland, "The Advent of Academic Economics."

63. A beginning was made some seventy years ago in E. R. A. Seligman, "On Some Neglected British Economists," *Economic Journal* 13 (1903):335–63 (Part I), 511–35 (Part II). More recently, general discussion of the Ricardian "school" and its opponents has been undertaken by S. G. Checkland, "The Propagation of Ricardian Economics in England," *Economica,* n.s. 16 (1949):40–52; by Ronald L. Meek, "The Decline of Ricardian Economics in England," originally published as a reply to Checkland in *Economica,* n.s. 17 (1950), but rewritten and published in *Economics and Ideology and Other Essays* (London, 1967), pp. 51–74; and by Barry J. Gordon, *Non-Ricardian Political Economy: Five Neglected Contributions.* See also Frank W. Fetter, "The Rise and Decline of Ricardian Economics," *History of Political Economy* 1 (1969):67–84. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis,* esp. pp. 480–90, briefly surveys the work of a number of those who opposed the Ricardians. Anti-Ricardian opinion in the periodicals has been surveyed in B. J. Gordon, "Say's Law, Effective Demand, and the Contemporary British Periodicals, 1820–1850," *Economica,* n.s. 32 (1965):438–46, and "Criticism of Ricardian Views on Value and Distribution in the British Periodicals, 1820–1850," *History of Political Economy* 1 (1969):370–87.

64. Jones (1790–1855) followed Malthus as Professor of Political Economy

held that the true method of arriving at general axioms was successively to adduce cases, being careful to observe whether, with every extension of data, one's original conception of how the facts could be ordered remained valid or required some modification. The Ricardians, by contrast, were content to generalize from casual observation of the cases immediately available to them, or even from introspection.[65] Thus their theory of rent, while deemed by the inductivists to be quite appropriate to the conditions of England, was "to be regarded rather as exceptional than normal, as to the general theory of the subject"; since over much of the world quite different contractual arrangements for renting land, and for furnishing capital to those who actually tilled it, prevailed. Again, while the historical rise in (absolute) rents in England might be ascribed to the operation of the law of diminishing returns, it could equally—and more plausibly, in the opinion of the inductivists—be explained as the effect of applying capital and improved methods of cultivation.[66]

A somewhat different criticism of Ricardo's theory of rent was made independently by Perronet Thompson[67] and Nassau Senior.[68] They argued that rent arises not only because soils of differing fertilities exist but because demand outruns the supply of food which can be produced at a given cost, and price therefore rises above the cost of production.

As early as 1825 Samuel Bailey had insisted that the search for an

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and History at the East India College, Haileybury. Cazenove (1788–1879) was an early member of the Political Economy Club. Whewell (1794–1866) was a Cambridge philosopher and scientist who, together with Herschel (1792–1871) and Babbage (1792–1871), helped establish the continental methods of mathematics at Cambridge. These three and Jones made up an undergraduate set at Cambridge, and their preference for Baconian induction was established at that time. For a more complete statement of their position see N. B. de Marchi and R. P. Sturges, "Malthus and Ricardo's Inductivist Critics: Four Letters to William Whewell," *Economica,* n.s. 40 (November 1973).

65. Jones to Whewell, 24 Feb. 1831, Whewell Papers, Trinity College, Cambridge; and Isaac Todhunter, *William Whewell, D.D.: An Account of His Writings, with Selections from His Literary and Scientific Correspondence,* 2 vols. (London, 1876), 2:125. Cf. Bacon, *Novum Organum,* Book I, Aphorisms XIX, XXVI, XXVIII, LXIV, LXIX.

66. Whewell, in Prefatory Notice to *Literary Remains, Consisting of Lectures and Tracts on Political Economy, of the Late Rev. Richard Jones* (London, 1859); Jones, *An Essay on the Distribution of Wealth, and on the Sources of Taxation: Part I—Rent* (London, 1831), pp. 192–196, 205.

67. Thompson (1783–1869) was proprietor and editor of the *Westminster Review* (1828–36), an M.P. and an effective pamphleteer against the Corn Laws.

68. [N. W. Senior], "Report—On the State of Agriculture," *Quarterly Review* 25 (1821):467–504, at 476; T. Perronet Thompson, *The True Theory of Rent, in Opposition to Mr. Ricardo and Others; Being an Exposition of Fallacies on Rent, Tithes &c., in the Form of a Review of Mr. Mill's Elements of Political Economy,* reprinted from the *Pamphleteer,* 27 (1826), pamphlet no. LIV, pp. 4–9, 16, 20.

invariable standard of value, with which Ricardo had been much occupied in his last years, was futile and misguided. His argument was accepted by Torrens, who at famous meetings of the Political Economy Club in 1831 asserted that Bailey had shown decisively how unsound were Ricardo's views on value.[69] Torrens himself had elsewhere alleged that Ricardo's theory of profits was defective, since it did not take account of non-wage capital.[70] And Malthus had consistently complained against Ricardo that he assumed too easily that there could be no such problem as general overproduction, since the desire to consume would always increase in proportion to the power of purchasing.

Finally, there was criticism of the law of population. Senior, for example, regarded the question of population as one of fact, rather than as one of abstract "tendencies." Hence, while admitting the *power* of population to increase at a geometric rate, he nevertheless believed that the advance of so many nations from a barbaric to a civilized state constituted conclusive proof that subsistence usually increases more rapidly than numbers. He expressed this view in print and also at a meeting of the Political Economy Club in 1835, where he received support from Tooke, McCulloch, and Torrens, all of whom, it appears, looked at the question from the same purely factual standpoint.[71]

"Practical eclecticism" at work

Towards the end of 1844 Mill discerned a revival of public interest in political economy. This could be traced, he thought, to several causes, "some good, some bad": the agitation of the Anti-Corn Law League, the Chartists' fulminations against property, and the growing awareness, partly through official investigations, of the state of the housing and sanitary conditions of the poor and of the worst effects of the factory system. It was the discussion of these questions that Mill felt stood in need of being rightly directed.[72]

Two things were involved. Firstly, Mill wished to remind those being

69. Bailey (1791–1870) devoted much of his book *A Critical Dissertation on the Nature, Measures, and Causes of Value* (London, 1825) to the point. There is a diary account of the meeting of the Political Economy Club in *Political Economy Club, Centenary Volume* (London, 1921), pp. 223–24.

70. See the Preface to Torrens, *An Essay on the External Corn Trade,* 3d ed. (London, 1826), pp. xv–xviii. The point is discussed in G. S. L. Tucker, *Progress and Profits in British Economic Thought, 1650–1850* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 96–97, and Robbins, *Robert Torrens and the Evolution of Classical Economics* (London, 1958), pp. 51–57.

71. Senior, *Two Lectures on Population* (London, 1829); *Political Economy Club, Centenary Volume,* pp. 265–66.

72. *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 13:640–42.

borne along by what he called the "prodigious current . . . of superficial philanthropy" of the underlying reality of economic motivations and of the law of population.[73] To ignore the disincentive to effort wherever rewards are separated from work (as under the pre-1834 Poor Laws) and to ignore the propensity of the lower classes to procreate up to the limit set by "subsistence" was, Mill thought, to make failure inevitable for schemes designed to relieve the poor.[74] Secondly, Mill wanted to rescue from narrow, negative, and inflexible writers of the extreme laissez-faire persuasion "the truths they misapply, and by combining these with other truths to which they are strangers, to deduce conclusions capable of being of some use to the progress of mankind."[75] Harriet Martineau, Edward Baines, Jr. (proprietor and editor of the Leeds *Mercury*), and Thomas Hodgskin (from 1844 to 1856 a leading writer for the London *Economist*) may be taken as representatives of this group. They not only insisted on carrying laissez-faire to its logical extreme in what they recommended but at least Baines and Hodgskin backed this practice with the imperative of natural law.[76] Part of Mill's purpose in writing his treatise in the "positive" manner was to expunge natural order/natural law presuppositions from political economy. On the one hand, therefore, he wanted to reiterate stern necessities, while avoiding the Scylla of "hardheartedness" by clearly demonstrating his concern for the working classes.[77] On the other hand, he wanted to show that laissez-faire is inadequate as a precept for all but the preliminary work of pulling down abuses, while avoiding the Charybdis of "sentimentality" by holding firmly to the laws of population and of the production of wealth.[78]

Thus Mill hoped to dissociate political economy from much of the

73. Ibid., pp. 643–44.

74. Ibid., p. 645.

75. This quotation is from *The Letters of John Stuart Mill,* ed. Hugh S. R. Elliot, 2 vols. (London, 1910), 1:149. It is not explicit in Mill's letter that he is referring to the dicta of the laissez-faire economists. However, the words summarize his known attitude to such men. See also, in this connection, his *Autobiography* (Columbia ed.), pp. 174–75.

76. See, for example, Baines, *On the Moral Influence of Free Trade, and Its Effects on the Prosperity of Nations* (London, 1830), pp. 7–9, 42. Hodgskin's views are expounded by Halévy, *Thomas Hodgskin,* edited in translation, introd. by A. J. Taylor (London, 1956), esp. chap. 3.

77. Mill's concern for the improvement of the working classes, especially, is apparent from his writings and is stated openly in answer to a question put to him on the general purpose of the *Principles*: see *Collected Works,* 5:407.

78. For his view of laissez-faire as a precept see *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 12:152. The *Autobiography* (Columbia ed.), pp. 77–78, contains Mill's recollection of his youthful denunciation of opponents of the Malthusian doctrine and of political economy in general as sentimentalists.

criticism which humanitarians had leveled against it, without at the same time alienating economists other than the most doctrinaire advocates of laissez-faire. This middle course was not newly charted by him in 1844; he had been pursuing it since 1830. For example, in a letter to his Saint-Simonian friend Gustave D'Eichtal in October 1829, Mill disparaged the English worship of the "idol 'production.' " Yet three years later he told his friend that the Saint-Simonians needed to learn English political economy—especially, we may infer, the Malthusian law.[79] Again, Mill agreed with Scrope in 1831 that the distribution of wealth is fully as important as its amount. But it is not the fault of political economy, he said, that some political economists consider nothing except the quantity of goods produced. Mill identified himself on this occasion with another group of political economists who acknowledged that policies affecting the happiness of men cannot be decided "exclusively by the considerations which their own subject presents to them."[80]

In the *Principles* we find Mill still affirming that only while "minds are coarse . . . [and] require coarse stimuli" is it desirable "that the energies of mankind should be kept in employment by the struggle for riches"; and insisting also that it is for society to determine what the distribution of wealth shall be, not any laws which are immutable in the same sense as the laws of production. He added, it is true, that the consequences of any chosen distribution follow as certainly as the effects of physical laws.[81] Among the underlying laws of political economy which were to be taken as data was the law of population. But Mill's treatment of this law is remarkable in that he managed to present it as if it were the foundation of all true philanthropy. This view was expressed by him most clearly in a review of Arthur Helps' *Claims of Labour* which was written immediately preceding the drafting of the *Principles*. The important thing, Mill argued, was to understand Malthus's law "correctly"; that is, with the stress placed upon the prudential check and on the fact that "in an improving country" the minimum acceptable standard of comfort "has on the whole a tendency to rise." He continued, in words which should be quoted in full:

> True, indeed the doctrine teaches this further lesson, that any attempt to produce the same result by other means—any scheme of beneficence which trusts for its moving power to anything but to the influence over the minds and habits of the people, which it either

79. *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 12:37, 109.

80. "The Quarterly Review on the Political Economists," *Examiner,* 30 Jan. 1831, p. 68.

81. *Principles, Collected Works,* 2:21, 199–200; 3:754.

> directly aims at, or may happen indirectly to promote—might, for any *general* effect of a beneficial kind which it can produce, as well be let alone. And, the doctrine being brought thus into conflict with those plans of easy beneficience which accord so well with the inclinations of man, but so ill with the arrangements of nature, we need not wonder that the epithets of "Malthusians" and "Political Economists' are so often considered equivalent to hardhearted, unfeeling, and enemies of the poor;—accusations so far from being true, that no thinkers, of any pretensions to sobriety, cherish such hopeful views of the future social position of labour, or have so long made the permanent increase of its remuneration the turning-point of their political speculations, as those who most broadly acknowledge the doctrine of Malthus.[82]

The schemes Mill thought would be of general and permanent effect —for example, peasant proprietorship—are well known and do not concern us here. But we may note that those, in particular, which he advocated to improve the lot of the industrial wage laborer involved either cooperation among the laborers themselves or the association of labor and capital. Christian Socialists could be expected to endorse these proposals, and Owenites to endorse the spirit if not the detail of Mill's schemes.

On the other hand, Mill held no anti-property doctrines and made no effort to appease the Chartists. Nor did he try to come to terms with the Oxford Movement or with Carlyle or with the Coleridgians, in any basic sense. He was opposed to the "intuitive" and paternalistic elements in their views, had written his *System of Logic* precisely to state the canons of proof of non-metaphysical knowledge, and had determined that such elements had no place in a "positive" science of political economy.[83]

The *Principles* was, however, well calculated to appeal to the much larger group of critics designated above as "practical men." Mill chose to write in a popular manner. And he set out to make his book one which "while embodying all the abstract science in the completest form yet attained . . . should at the same time be essentially a book of applications exhibiting the principles of the science in the concrete."[84]

Mill nowhere stated that he was specifically seeking a sympathetic reading by legislators and other "practical men," but there can be traced

82. "The Claims of Labour," *Edinburgh Review* 81 (1845):498–525, reprinted in *Collected Works*, 4:365–89, at 366–68.

83. *Autobiography* (Columbia ed.), pp. 157–58; *Earlier Letters, Collected Works*, 13:626, 631.

84. *Earlier Letters, Collected Works*, 13:642, 644, 708.

a change in his attitude towards "practical men" which suggests that he did wish to foster a spirit of cooperation between the economic theorist and the man of affairs. The change is this. In the early 1820's, Mill denounced "practical men" because they themselves despised a knowledge of principles.[85] By the early 1830's, however, he was denouncing both *mere* observation without experimentation (to isolate true causes) *and mere* theory. We have seen this in Mill's concurrence with Scrope in castigating those who know and apply *only* political economy. It appears also in the high regard he expressed for men like J.-B. Say. Had he been "a *mere* political economist," Mill said, he would have been "necessarily a bad one"; since "a subject so 'immersed in matter' (to use the fine expression of Lord Bacon) as a nation's prosperity, must be looked at on many sides in order to be seen rightly even on one."[86] Again, in his essay on the method of political economy (1836) Mill spoke of the union of theory and practice which he now considered the best way to guard against error. Ideally, "the anticipations of the philosopher guide the observation of the practical man, and the specific experience of the practical man warns the philosopher when something is to be added to his theory."[87]

This was the attitude Mill brought to the writing of the *Principles*: he sought to combine the offices of theorist and practical man.[88]

The *Principles,* then, was designed, in part, to conciliate the humanitarian opposition to political economy. It was to be written in a way which gave due place to the point of view of "practical men." And it was to be the first work of orthodox political economy which looked beyond laissez-faire to a future cooperative state of society.

These features all stemmed from Mill's desire to impart a "right"

85. Notice, by contrast, his appreciation of Tooke (*Collected Works,* 4:19) as one of those "who join to their personal experience a knowledge of principle."

86. *Examiner,* 25 Nov. 1832, p. 760.

87. "On the Definition of Political Economy," *Collected Works,* 4:334–35. Cf. "The Truck System," *Examiner,* 19 Dec. 1830, p. 803. See also the references cited by John M. Robson, *The Improvement of Mankind,* p. 170. Professor Robson first drew my attention to this modification in Mill's view.

88. See Preface to the *Principles,* and *Autobiography* (Columbia ed.), pp. 165–66. Mill relied on Harriet Taylor to compensate for his own inadequacies in noticing and estimating the importance of practical difficulties and limitations. *Autobiography* (Columbia ed.), pp. 175–76. The combination of the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* in the *Principles* has been remarked by [Nassau Senior], "J. S. Mill on Political Economy," *Edinburgh Review,* 88 (1848):293–339, at 304; J. N. Keynes, *The Scope and Method of Political Economy* [1890], 4th ed. (New York, 1955), p. 19; and T. W. Hutchison, *"Positive" Economics and Policy Objectives* (London, 1964), p. 29. Each of these writers points to a contrast between Mill's essay on method and the *Principles.* But the union Mill advocated in the essay between theory and experience seems to have been overlooked, and the contrast therefore unduly stressed.

direction to applied economic discussion. He also intended to provide an up-to-date statement of the abstract science of political economy. Here also conciliation was an important part of his goal.

Mill held that all the theoretical developments since Ricardo's death could be exhibited as corollaries flowing from that writer's basic principles, explicit allowance being made for different circumstances, hypothetical or actual.[89] It was implicit in this approach that some of the alleged errors discovered in Ricardo's work by Thompson, Jones, Senior, Bailey, Torrens, and others were in fact nothing more than their own misunderstandings. Mill treated as such the criticisms by Thompson and Senior of Ricardo's theory of rent, and Torrens's objection to Ricardo's theory of profit, in the series of studies "in continuation and completion of Ricardo's doctrines" which he undertook between 1826 and 1831, several of which were published in 1844 as *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*.[90] As to genuine differences of principle, Mill had long believed that they arise only where the parties are guided by different conceptions of method—"by different views concerning the nature of the evidence appropriate to the subject."[91] Mill's strategy of conciliation, as it affected other political economists, therefore involved either bringing them to see that they had misinterpreted Ricardo or showing that the source of their dissent lay in a method different from his. It should be added that Mill did not want openly to attack as false the views held by his fellow economists. This would have put at risk their acknowledgment of correct views. His strategy, it will be remembered, was to look for what was useful, or at least not incompatible with Ricardo's doctrines, in the opinions they held, and to acknowledge this, while at the same time stating positively the true (Ricardian) position.

At least four examples of the practice can be given. (1) Mill, in the *Principles,* implicitly acknowledged Samuel Bailey's strictures on the search for an invariant standard of value, while retaining Ricardo's notion of labor cost as the formal basis of the inverse relation of wages and profits and in accounting for changes in relative values.[92] (2)

89. "De Quincey's Logic of Political Economy," *Collected Works,* 4:394; *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 13:642, 731.

90. "The Nature, Origin, and Progress of Rent," Note IIII to Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,* ed. J. R. McCulloch (Edinburgh, 1820), 4:100–125; and "On Profits, and Interest," *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*; both reprinted in *Collected Works,* 4:163–80, 290–308; see esp. pp. 174, 292–93.

91. "On the Definition of Political Economy," *Collected Works,* 4:324. Cf. Mill's review of Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopedia* vol. XIV, in the *Examiner,* 20 March 1831, pp. 179–80, at 179.

92. See the discussion in Rauner, *Samuel Bailey and the Classical Theory of Value* (London, 1961), pp. 137–39.

Again, Mill expounded Ricardo's laws of distribution, while accepting Richard Jones's observations on different forms of peasant rent as useful facts, showing the limiting influence of custom on the universality—though not, within their own sphere, the correctness—of economic principles based upon the supposition of competition.[93] (3) Thirdly, Mill took over from Edward Gibbon Wakefield the notion that a limited "field of employment" of capital could account for the decline in the rate of profit in advanced nations, though he interpreted it in the sense of limited availability of land of given fertility, entirely rejecting Wakefield's own interpretation, whereby "overinvestment" of capital was identified with a failure of demand and thus made the cause of general gluts.[94] (4) Finally, Mill treated similarly Senior's term "abstinence." Senior had spoken of abstinence as "that agent, distinct from labour and the agency of nature, the concurrence of which is necessary to the existence of Capital, and which stands in the same relation to Profit as Labour does to Wages."[95] Mill also spoke of profits as "the remuneration of abstinence," but he followed Ricardo in insisting that labor productivity is the *cause* of profits.[96] This example, and the previous one, raise the issue of the internal consistency of Mill's theoretical structure. No attempt is made here to resolve that issue, though a plain implication of "practical eclecticism," if that notion is to be taken seriously, is that a fair assessment of Mill presupposes giving at least as close attention to the way he used terms and phrases as to their origin.

Not all criticisms could be dealt with by a fuller exposition of Ricardo's doctrines or rendered compatible with them by careful adaptation. For example, the objection by Malthus, Chalmers, Wakefield, and others that Ricardo had neglected possible—indeed actual—general deficiencies in demand, raised questions of method. The evidence brought

93. *Principles, Collected Works,* 2:239–44, 247–48, 422–23; cf. "De Quincey's Logic of Political Economy," 4:394.

94. Compare Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,* ed. Edward Gibbon Wakefield, 4 vols. (London, 1843, 1:163, 169; 2:344, with Mill, *Principles, Collected Works,* 3:575, 738–41, 749. Cf. also *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 12:236.

95. *An Outline of the Science of Political Economy* [1836] (London School of Economics Reprint, 1938), p. 59.

96. *Principles, Collected Works,* 2:400, 411. In his notes on the first edition (privately circulated) of Senior's *Outline of Political Economy,* Mill commented: "I question if abstinence can be called an agent or an instrument of production. Could not you call it a *condition*? And might not the word *saving* be used, not to supersede but occasionally to alternate with the term abstinence? Labour, natural agents, & *saving*." "Notes on N. W. Senior's *Political Economy,* by John Stuart Mill," *Economica,* n.s. 12 (1945):134–39, at 135.) Cf. the illuminating discussion on value in Ronald L. Meek, "Value in the History of Economic Thought," *History of Political Economy,* 6, no. 3 (1974):249.

by these critics, Mill in effect said, was either not adequate to sustain their contention or could be explained in other ways, suggesting that they had failed to isolate the invariable antecedents of the effects observed. As an example of the former sort of evidence he cited a general fall in prices. A decline in the rate of profit, he said, is an instance of the latter sort: it might be due to a rise in the money wage or to diminishing returns or, if sudden, to an increase in the desire to hold money. But in either case in the long run, as Ricardo had said, goods will not be produced for which there is no demand.[97]

Methodological confusion also lay behind Richard Jones's objection that the law of diminishing returns was not to be observed operating continuously. In the *Principles,* Mill made it clear that the law is premised on a "given state of agricultural skill and knowledge." He also readily allowed that currently the effects of the law were obscured by the counteracting influence of technical improvements in agriculture.[98] A similar acknowledgment was made in respect of the law of population, against which Senior and others had quoted the fact of a progressive rise in the standard of living in civilized nations.[99] It may be asked whether it was a sufficient answer to the critics to allow that these tendencies might be temporarily counteracted. For it was Jones's belief that the force of diminishing returns *rarely* outweighs increases in productivity; and Senior, Whately, and Tooke had all argued that subsistence *usually* increased faster than population. However, Mill himself agreed at least with the latter observation. Moreover, neither Ricardo nor Mill based his acceptance of these two laws on the extent to which their effects might be seen at any particular period or point in time. The laws, they believed, isolated basic physical forces which the will of man could not alter, though he could do much to change the degree to which they impinged on his present and future state of comfort. But unless technical improvements and prudence were in some sense inherent and *superior* forces, the limited powers of the soil and the infinite capacity of population to increase constituted a sufficient rationale to justify the advocacy of measures to increase productivity and to check population. If these measures were successful, so much the better; but that did not alter the basic constitution of man and nature. Ultimately, therefore, there was

97. Mill's position is made clear in two early essays, "War Expenditure," *Westminster Review* 2 (1824), and "On the Influence of Consumption on Production," *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy,* both reprinted in *Collected Works,* 4:3–22 (esp. pp. 16, 17–18) and 262–79.

98. *Principles, Collected Works,* 2:174, 190.

99. Ibid., p. 159.

no incompatibility between the laws of population and of diminishing returns and the facts cited by Ricardo's critics.[100]

Thus Mill treated the criticisms by his fellow economists of Ricardo's doctrines as verbal misunderstandings, whether of the doctrines themselves or of Ricardo's method; or as differences traceable to a disagreement on method. He chose to fix his attention on what was good in their opinions, and by explaining more fully the doctrines and the method of Ricardo, he hoped to provide them with the knowledge which would enable them to rectify their views.[101]

The reaction of readers

How did Mill fare with the groups he hoped to conciliate? For an answer we are dependent on memoirs, letters, and the current periodicals, and this evidence is, as may be expected, patchy.

In 1845 Sir George Clerk, then vice-president of the Board of Trade, had voiced a scepticism, widely shared by legislators, about the relevance of economic theory when he prefaced a rebuke to John Lewis Ricardo for debating protection in the Commons as a question of principle, with the observation: "how very little abstract discussions are suited to the taste of this House."[102] Mill's *Principles* did not dispel all doubts. Nevertheless, it quickly raised him personally to a position of respect, and between 1850 and 1861 he was called upon to give evidence, as an economic "authority," before no less than five Parliamentary Select Committees.[103]

A similar distinction between Mill and political economists in general might be made on the basis of reactions in the three Tory periodicals, many of whose writers before 1848 had expressed both practical and humanitarian objections to political economy. The tone of *Blackwood's*

100. This is not to say either that the laws were consistent with *any* facts and therefore lacked all empirical content, or that they were so far removed from events that policy could safely be formed without taking them into account. Both points have been discussed in N. B. de Marchi, "The Empirical Content and Longevity of Ricardian Economics," *Economica,* n.s. 37 (1970):1–20. See esp. pp. 11–13 for Mill's use of the law of population.

101. This is a paraphrase of Mill's own explanation of "practical eclecticism." See *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 12:42.

102. *Hansard,* 3d ser. LXXVII (1845), 1078.

103. Mill's evidence is reprinted in *Collected Works,* vol. 5. The committees were on The Savings of Middle and Working Classes (1850), The Law of Partnership (1851), The Income and Property Tax (1852), The Bank Acts (1857), and The Income and Property Tax (1861). Mill's first appearance was "arranged" by the Christian Socialists, who largely dictated the enquiry: see Christensen, *Origin and History of Christian Socialism, 1848–54,* pp. 273–74.

towards political economy did not alter.[104] Mill's *Principles* was given a generally favorable review, but more for "the perpetual, earnest, never-forgotten interest, which accompanies the writer throughout, in the great questions at present mooted with respect to the social condition of man" than for the economic doctrines it expounded.[105] Nor was the *Quarterly Review* any less sharp in its censure of political economy, though protectionist G. F. Young in 1849 combined a virulent attack on "the delusive theories" of Malthus, McCulloch, and Ricardo with an acknowledgment of Mill as "one of the most philosophical and candid of the modern school of economists" (for his admission that political economy is based on assumed premisses, which it is not pretended are in complete accord with facts).[106]

A shift of position in relation to political economy is apparent in *Fraser's*. Two special circumstances may account for this. Firstly, the magazine was bought in 1847 by John William Parker, Mill's publisher. Parker also took over editorial control.[107] Not surprisingly, the review of Mill's *Principles* in *Fraser's* amounted almost to a panegyric. The reviewer noted the widespread antipathy to political economy and allowed that there may be a reason for this in the "incorrect language, and . . . hasty and inaccurate generalisation" of *some* economists. However, he dissociated himself from "the large, unthinking, ignorant majority [who] scout every appeal to the authority of political economists," expressed a belief that Mill's work "is destined to dissipate many of the errors . . . linked with the very name of political economy," and dissented from Mill's opinions on certain points only "with diffidence and suspicion."[108] Secondly, John William Parker Jr., the *de facto* editor, was a friend of Charles Kingsley and sympathetic to Christian Socialism.[109] *Fraser's*

104. See, for example [C. G. Prowett], "The English Universities and Their Reforms," *Blackwood's Magazine* 65 (1849):235–44, at 241; [W. H. Smith], "Colonisation—Mr. Wakefield's Theory," ibid., pp. 509–28, esp. pp. 515, 519; [W. E. Aytoun], "Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography," ibid., 68 (1850):592–610, at 594.

105. The reviewer was William Henry Smith (1808–72), barrister and author. He prefaced his review with a reiteration of the traditional *Blackwood's* objections to political economy: neglect of the distribution of wealth and of the welfare of the individual. See "Political Economy, by J. S. Mill," *Blackwood's Magazine* 64 (1848):407–28. Another writer, W. P. Alison, "On the Miseries of Ireland, and Their Remedies," ibid., pp. 658–71, spoke highly of Mill and of "his standard work on Political Economy" (pp. 665, 668, 670–71).

106. "Free Trade," p. 155.

107. Oscar Maurer, "Froude and *Fraser's Magazine*, 1860–1874," *Texas Studies in English* 28 (1949):213–43, at 214–15.

108. "Mill's Political Economy," *Fraser's Magazine* 38 (1848):245–60, esp. pp. 246–47, 254.

109. Raven, *Christian Socialism, 1848–1854*, pp. 109, 125.

began to carry some articles expressing Christian Socialist views.[110] Kingsley and others of this group thought highly of Mill's *Principles,* and it is possible that the sympathy of *Fraser's* towards political economy extended no further than the Christian Socialists' sympathy for Mill's views on the betterment of the condition of the laboring classes.[111] Certainly the old criticisms of political economy still found a place in its pages.[112]

The publication of Mill's *Principles* did not persuade Dickens that his caricatures of political economists might no longer be appropriate.[113] It will be remembered, however, that he said in 1854 that his satire was "against those who see figures and averages, and nothing else." The last phrase might be taken to imply that he acknowledged the distinction for which Mill contended—that, namely, between *mere* political economists and men who combine political economy with larger views. A hint of this may be seen, perhaps, in the fact that Dickens expressly placed Charles Knight in a category apart from those whom he satirized, and Knight was himself one who set Mill apart from McCulloch and "the old race of Political Economists." Knight wrote:

> John Stuart Mill has, to a great extent, revolutionised our political economy. He has done, upon scientific principles, what writers of fiction have been labouring . . . to accomplish by one-sided pictures

110. See, for example, the article "Labour and the Poor," *Fraser's Magazine,* 41 (1850):1–18, which lauded Mill's book and advocated the Associations Ouvrières of Paris. This was possibly written by Ludlow; it expressed the special liking we know he held for the Parisian associations (Masterman, *John Malcolm Ludlow,* pp. 87–90), and it used a number of phrases in referring to Mill and the *Principles* which bear striking resemblance to some in lectures by Ludlow on the relations between labor and capital. Compare pp. 14, 15, 16 of the article with the reprinted lectures in the *Journal of Association,* 1852, pp. 60–64, 69–71, 77–79, 86–88, esp. pp. 62, 63.

111. Kingsley, in *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography,* chap. 32, spoke of Mill's "priceless Chapter 'On the Probable Futurity of the Labouring Classes,' " and urged it upon the worshippers of Mammon, as "both a prophecy and a doom." Edward Vansittart Neale also used Mill as an authority, against Ernest Jones: see a letter published in *Notes to the People* 2 (May 1851/May 1852), p. 562. However, the Christian Socialists regretted that Mill's notion of cooperation was without any moral basis and might mean no more than that whereas individuals once sought to benefit themselves irrespective of the cost to others, associations of individuals could now do the same: see the letter of John Minter Morgan in the *Leader,* 21 Dec. 1850, p. 926. This point recurs also in Kingsley's marginal notes in his copy of the *Principles.* From these notes, too, it is plain that he opposed Mill's stress on diminishing returns and the need to control population. Kingsley's annotated copy of the *Principles* is in the Goldsmiths' Library, University of London.

112. See, for example, "The State and Prospects of the Country," *Fraser's Magazine* 41 (1850):135–51, at 140–41 and 149.

113. *Hard Times* (1854) sketched them perhaps more sharply than the novels published before 1848.

> of individual suffering from the unequal distribution of wealth. Mr. Mill has indicated the way by which the claims of capital and labour, too long conflicting, may be ultimately reconciled, by the participation of those who ostensibly are non-capitalists in the profits of well-directed labour.[114]

Even Carlyle, in the midst of expatiating about "dismal science" and "pig philosophy," remarked in 1850 that "Pigs of sense" now see that the unlimited attainability of "Pig's-wash" is a false goal.[115] Carlyle, however, was not directly moved by Mill's conciliatory efforts. The *Principles* he thought a "very clever book," but compared its many-faceted treatment of its subject to the task of "extracting the cube root in Roman numerals"—an exercise evidently within man's capabilities, but one after all not worth engaging in.[116]

Chartism had lost its appeal by 1850. The former "physical force" men differed among themselves as to what form of action should be taken to achieve the political, thence economic independence of the people. Several agreed, as a tactical compromise, to support the cooperative schemes of the Christian Socialists.[117] There is little to suggest, however, that they knew of the similar schemes advocated by Mill, and they continued to attack all political economists, indiscriminately, as purveyors of "Manchester doctrine" and the philosophy of "profit-mongering."[118]

An exception was Thornton Hunt, editor of the *Leader,* who sought to combine Chartist ideals with other socialist views. He had read extensively in political economy and rejected most of what he read; but he also gave his qualified approval to Mill's book.[119] Robert Owen, too,

114. Knight, *Passages of a Working Life,* 3:191. Knight was known to the working classes as an apologist for the capitalists: see Blaug, *Ricardian Economics,* pp. 145–146 for comments on two of Knight's early works. Holyoake commented thus in 1848 on Knight's short-lived magazine *Voice of the People*: "It tells the old story of political economy, viz., save what you have not got, and go to Church grateful to God for being allowed to do it." *Reasoner* 4 (1848):319.

115. "Jesuitism," *Latter Day Pamphlets, The Works of Thomas Carlyle,* 20:316. Carlyle, of course, long before the *Principles* was published knew that this was true of Mill.

116. Frances Espinasse, *Literary Recollections and Sketches* (London, 1893), quoted in David A. Wilson, *Carlyle at His Zenith, 1848–53,* 6 vols. (New York, 1927), 4:16. I am indebted to Mr. Warren Andrew Ramey III for this reference.

117. Among the supporters of cooperation were Samuel Kydd, George Julian Harney, and Thomas Cooper: see Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge,* pp. 218 ff.; *Cooper's Journal* (1850), pp. 98, 305, 306. Ernest Jones withheld his support: see Saville, *Ernest Jones: Chartist,* pp. 146–49, for relevant excerpts from *Notes to the People;* and Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge,* p. 220.

118. The quotations given above, p. 131, postdate the *Principles.*

119. Hunt (1810–73) advanced, against the doctrine of individual competition,

noted with approval some of Mill's views (on land and marriage).[120] More important, Holyoake at once welcomed the *Principles*. "It had been held," he said, "that the people were made for political economy; but at length political economy [is] being made for the people." Mill was praised for having spoken of communism "with more geniality than any political economist had done before"; and, the *Principles* being priced too high for working men, Holyoake undertook to reprint large extracts for the readers of his paper, *The Reasoner*.[121]

What of Mill's success with the political economists? Of those to whom Mill was opposed on grounds of method, namely, Jones and Whewell, the latter's response is known. Whewell found the *Principles* generally to his liking, though he felt Mill had done Jones an injustice in acknowledging the value of the latter's facts about peasant rents while tampering with Jones's classification of the facts. The classification, Whewell held, was essential to an appreciation of the laws of the progress of improvement under different systems of tenancy.[122] On the basic ques-

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the ideas of communal ownership and control which Owen had earlier advocated. The *Leader*, a weekly, was projected by W. J. Linton and Hunt and first appeared in 1850. It quickly became the main radical paper (information supplied privately by Dr. F. B. Smith); see also Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge*, pp. 219, 228, and E. M. Everett, *The Party of Humanity: The Fortnightly Review and Its Contributors, 1865–1874* (Chapel Hill, 1939), pp. 15–16. Hunt opposed Malthusianism (*Leader*, 4 Jan. 1851, pp. 12–14), but supported Mill's views on land and peasant proprietorship (ibid., 14 Sept. 1850, p. 589; cf. ibid., 7 Sept. 1850, p. 564). He also approved Mill's recognition of custom as a limiting condition on competition (ibid., 26 July 1851, pp. 704–5) and implicitly agreed with his opposition to superficial philanthropy and with his view that communism is the ideal state, which society should seek to attain. Ibid., 5 Oct. 1850, pp. 658–59, and 12 Oct. 1850, pp. 684–85.

120. *Robert Owen's Journal*, III (November 1851–April 1852), p. 72; but see also p. 90.

121. *Reasoner* 4 (1848): 351. The extracts comprised sections 2 to 5 of the chapter on Property (Book II, chap. 1), ibid., pp. 83–86, 98–101; secs. 1 and 2 of the chapter "Popular Remedies for Low Wages" (Book II, chap. 12), ibid., 5 (1848):115–18; and sec. 10 of Book I, chap. 5, "Fundamental Propositions Respecting Capital," where Mill argued that taxing the rich does not harm the poor if the portion of income taken in taxes would otherwise have been spent unproductively. Ibid. 6 (1849):103–6.

122. I. Todhunter, *William Whewell*, 2:345–46, 352–53. Specifically, Whewell objected that Mill treated cottier and ryot tenancy as one. Jones had stressed that under the ryot system rents are fixed by custom as a proportion of the produce, and tenant and landlord have a common interest in the soil. Under the cottier system, by contrast, rents are determined by competition, irrespective of the size of the produce, and there is no such common interest. Provided the landlord is not despotic, the ryot therefore has a considerable incentive to improve his holding, whereas the cottier has none. *An Essay on the Distribution of Wealth*, pp. 138–42, 143–45. Mill chose to emphasize—what Jones had also admitted—that for the most part landlords had not acted so as to encourage the ryot to effect improvements. *Principles*, *Collected Works*, 2:319–23.

tion, how economic laws are to be derived, Whewell maintained his opposition to Mill. *A priori* predictions, even if checked *a posteriori* to see if anything was lacking in the initial postulates, are no substitute, Whewell implied, for colligations of facts. "How can we say, with any sound sense or use, that the produce of land increases universally in a diminishing ratio, when we have to allow that there is a principle, which we call 'the progress of civilization,' skill and the like, which may prevent this diminishing ratio for centuries, and during the whole life of a nation?"[123]

Scrope, who had supported Jones's method and doctrines in the early 1830's, made no immediate public response to Mill's *Principles*. Evidently, though, he was not favorably impressed, for in 1873 he published a second edition of his own *Principles of Political Economy* (1833), complaining in the preface that he had found Mill's volumes, on perusal, "to reiterate the old fallacies" on population, diminishing returns, and—as he, Scrope, understood the implications of Ricardo's theory of profits—the inevitability of antagonism between laborers and capitalists.[124]

The opinions which Bailey and Perronet Thompson may have expressed on Mill's *Principles* have not survived. However, Senior's opinions are known, since he reviewed Mill's book, together with the *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy,* for the *Edinburgh Review*. Senior expressed dissatisfaction with Mill's views on certain practical questions, but his basic criticisms were methodological. Mill in his essay on method of 1836 had argued that the laws of political economy must be built up by reasoning initially upon simple premisses which are true but not necessarily universal. Invariably in any real economic problem, he had said, more than one cause is involved. The influence of the further causes which are relevant must be added successively to the one initially assumed to be acting alone. Finally, the predictions based upon the concurrence of all the relevant causes must be checked in any particular case, both to see if any secondary cause has been overlooked, and to ascertain whether the causes supposed to be the most important are so in fact. Senior objected that Mill's check was inadequate: "the strangeness of the results of an hypothesis gives no warning" that some condition, more or less important, has been overlooked, since we expect the results of reasoning on assumed premisses to differ from what we observe.[125] Moreover, "a writer who starts from arbitrarily assumed

123. Todhunter, *William Whewell,* 2:346.

124. The new edition was retitled *Political Economy for Plain People* (London, 1873). See Preface, pp. ix–x.

125. "J. S. Mill on Political Economy," *Edinburgh Review* 88 (1848):293–339, at 303–4. Senior had just delivered a course of lectures at Oxford in which his

premisses is in danger of forgetting from time to time their unsubstantial foundation, and of arguing as if it were true."[126]

Both these dangers were real, and Mill sought to guard himself against them by insisting that the theorist unite with his own skills those of the practical man. His success in this respect was implicitly acknowledged by Senior when he remarked that the political economy of the *Principles* is less an hypothetical science than a positive art.[127] Ricardo, however, was accused by Senior of having reasoned from assumed premisses as if they were true in fact. Among the examples Senior gave of premisses so used were the assumptions "that rent arises in consequence of the difference between the fertility of the different qualities of land in cultivation," and "that in the progress of population and wealth agricultural labour becomes less and less proportionally productive." Neither assumption, Senior held, is true; and in relation to the latter, he gave it as the true law "that, in the absence of some disturbing cause, political rather than economical . . . the increased demand for food and the increase of population are usually accompanied, or rather preceded, by improvements in production which occasion the increased quantity to be obtained . . . at a less proportionate expense of labour."[128] Mill had sought to defend Ricardo's theory of rent against Senior, in his 1827 "Dissertation on Rent." Clearly, this had not changed Senior's opinion. Nor it seems had Mill's 1836 essay on method or the *Principles* succeeded in changing Senior's views on the significance of the law of diminishing returns as a positive (as distinct from an abstract) truth.[129]

Mill, in fact, had only one known convert among the political economists, and that not as a result of the *Principles*. Torrens, on reading the *System of Logic* (1843), publicly announced that he had formerly misapprehended Ricardo's method. He proceeded to argue that when due allowance is made for modifying circumstances, strictures such as those made by Jones on Ricardo's abstract theory of rent do not apply.[130] Torrens also acknowledged that his own objection to Ricardo's theory

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views were expounded at greater length. These lectures were published in 1852 as *Four Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*. They have been discussed by Marian Bowley, *Nassau Senior and Classical Economics* (London, 1937), pp. 52–64.

126. *Edinburgh Review* 88 (1848):302.

127. Ibid., p. 304.

128. Ibid., pp. 302–3, 319.

129. Senior's view is superficially close to Whewell's; but see Bowley, *Nassau Senior*, pp. 49, 51, 57–58.

130. *The Budget. On Commercial and Colonial Policy. With an introduction, in which the Deductive Method, as presented in Mr. Mill's System of Logic, is applied to the solution of some controverted questions in Political Economy* (London, 1844), pp. xiii–xv.

of profit could be met by the device of reducing all capital to its labor equivalent.[131]

This survey suggests that Mill realized his conciliatory aims with the Christian Socialists, some of the leading Owenite cooperators, and one influential political economist, Robert Torrens. The small amount of information available of the kind sought—the opinions of the same individuals on political economy before 1848 and on Mill's *Principles,* or political economy in general, shortly after that date—renders the survey an unreliable guide to the extent of Mill's immediate success. It is reasonable to assume, however, that a known success in conciliating one outstanding individual in any of the groups hostile to political economy (Ricardian or unspecified) represents a larger total success among others in the group whose opinions have not survived.

The conciliation of opponents, however, was not Mill's sole purpose with the *Principles.* In any case a large minority was already favorably disposed towards political economy. Advanced Whig and radical newspapers such as the *Scotsman,* the *Globe,* the *Morning Chronicle,* the *Examiner,* the *Sun,* the *True Sun,* and the *Spectator* were generally sympathetic.[132] So, too, were the *Edinburgh Review* and *Westminster Review.*[133] The Anti-Corn Law League from 1838 to 1846 actively promoted specific economic policies of a liberalizing kind.[134] And the *Economist,* begun in 1843, soon became the chief exponent of the principle of laissez-faire.[135]

These organs and the Anti-Corn Law League were chiefly concerned with the political uses of economic doctrines. Their doctrines were not always drawn from Ricardo, and their political philosophy was not

131. Ibid., pp. li and lii. The credit for the discovery of this device was given to Mountifort Longfield (1802–84), who had published it in his *Lectures on Political Economy* (Dublin, 1834): see Robbins, *Robert Torrens and the Evolution of Classical Economics,* pp. 55–57. Mill's defense of Ricardo, using the same device, while probably developed c. 1830, was published only after *The Budget.* See Mill, *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 13:624.

132. Their proprietors, editors, and writers included Torrens, McCulloch, John Black, Edwin Chadwick, Perronet Thompson, Albany Fonblanque, Robert Rintoul, Poulett Thomson, Murdo Young, William Johnson Fox, and Mill himself. For further details, see H. R. Fox Bourne, *English Newspapers: Chapters in the History of Journalism,* 2 vols. (1887; New York, 1966), 2:36–37, 44–45, 56–57, 87–95.

133. See the excellent surveys of the political economy of these two reviews in Frank Whitson Fetter, "The Authorship of Economic Articles in the *Edinburgh Review,* 1802–47," *Journal of Political Economy* 61 (1953):232–59, esp. 232–43, and "Economic Articles in the *Westminster Review* and Their Authors, 1824–51," ibid., 70 (1962):570–96, esp. 570–81.

134. See William D. Grampp, *The Manchester School of Economics* (Stanford, Calif., 1960), esp. p. 2 and chap. 1.

135. See Scott Gordon, "The London *Economist* and the High Tide of Laissez Faire," *Journal of Political Economy* 63 (1955):461–88.

always of the sort to which Mill felt he could give his unreserved approval. His attitude to doctrinaire exponents of laissez-faire has already been mentioned. He was willing to write for the *Edinburgh Review,* but he thought it "of a *stationary* character" in literature and politics: "the most perfect representative of the 18th century to be found in our day."[136] And he berated two of its contributors: William Empson, for a review of Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy,* in which Empson had mixed sympathy for political economy with gentle reproof for some of Miss Martineau's too radical social thinking;[137] and McCulloch for "a Whig homily on a Tory text"—a defense of the House and Window Tax and a warning against the introduction of a property tax.[138] Even the *Westminster Review,* which was at least "on the Movement side," was considered by Mill to have been far too much the instrument of a narrow, negative sect while it was under the influence of his father and of its first two editors, John Bowring (1824–32) and Perronet Thompson (1828–36). Just prior to his assuming the proprietorship and editorship (1837–40) Mill wrote that he hoped "to soften the harder & sterner features of its radicalism and utilitarianism, both of which in the form in which they originally appeared in the *Westminster,* were part of the inheritance of the 18th century." Mill continued:

> The Review ought to represent not radicalism but neoradicalism, a radicalism which is not democracy, not a bigotted adherence to any forms of government or to be called radicalism inasmuch as it does not falter nor compromise with evils but cuts at their roots—& a utilitarianism which takes into account the whole of human nature not the ratiocinative faculty only—the utilitarianism which never makes any peculiar figure as such, nor would ever constitute its followers a sect or school—which fraternizes with all who hold the same *axiomata media* (as Bacon has it) whether their first principle is the same or not—& which holds in the highest reverence all which the vulgar notion of utilitarians represents them to despise—which holds Feeling at least as valuable as Thought, & Poetry not on a par

136. *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 12:313, 13:435.

137. Empson (1791–1852) was a colleague of Malthus's at Haileybury, and later editor of the *Edinburgh Review* (1847–52). His article "Illustrations of Political Economy: Mrs. Marcet—Miss Martineau," *Edinburgh Review* 57 (1833): 1–39, was attacked by Mill in the *Examiner,* 16 June 1833, p. 373.

138. McCulloch wrote two articles in this vein, "Commutation of Taxes: Proposed Tax on Property and Income," *Edinburgh Review* 57 (1833):143–68, and "Complaints and Proposals Regarding Taxation," ibid., pp. 434–48. The latter was the specific target of Mill's criticism: see "On the Defence of the House and Window Tax, in the Edinburgh Review," *Monthly Repository* 7 (1833):575–82.

with, but the necessary condition of, any true & comprehensive Philosophy.[139]

By means of a similar enlargement of view, and judicious balance in the *Principles,* Mill was able to keep the sympathy of those already well-disposed towards political economy, while maintaining an independent attitude on political and social questions. Thomas Hodgskin of the *Economist* remarked on Mill's careful assessment of every point of view. Hodgskin's own social philosophy was one of extreme laissez-faire individualism, leading logically to anarchy. His basic premiss in political economy was that natural justice required that each individual should receive the whole produce of his labor. But he rejected intervention by government, philanthropists, and socialists to achieve this desirable end. Mill, he felt, was too much inclined to treat the laws of distribution as if they were solely under man's control and to look too much, in his proposed cures for the ills of society, to a political economy which took for granted the appropriation of property. Despite these basic differences, Hodgskin appreciated the *Principles* for the fact that "every topic touched on is minutely, carefully, and elaborately treated. The latest information is brought to bear on it; writers of various countries are quoted; different opinions are referred to and noticed; and not only does the work embrace many more topics than other similar works, but they are all examined as if each one were a favourite with the author."[140]

George Grote, Mill's early utilitarian associate, was another who found in the *Principles* a sufficient defense of competition to satisfy his own strongly laissez-faire leanings. He gave Mill a very favorable review in the *Spectator.*[141] The reviewer in the *Westminster* also unconsciously testified to Mill's success in balancing opposing sympathies. He thought the revolutionary government in Paris would appreciate Mill's concern with an improved distribution of wealth; but he was gratified to find that "Mr. Mill . . . separates himself from that class of politicians who have set up in this country as the poor man's patrons, and demolishes the theory upon which their pseudo-philanthropy is founded."[142]

In at least one instance Mill's fairness masked his own view. Francis Bowen, in the *North American Review,* saw in the *Principles* "clear

139. *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 12:312.

140. Hodgskin's review of the *Principles* appeared in the *Economist,* 27 May 1848, pp. 603–4. See also the comments on the *Principles,* probably by Hodgskin, ibid., 9 Sept. 1848, p. 1032, and 14 Oct. 1848, pp. 1070–71.

141. "John Stuart Mill's Political Economy," *Spectator,* 13 May 1848, pp. 467–69. The attribution of authorship is by William Ellis: see E. K. Blyth, *Life of William Ellis,* 2d ed. (London, 1872), p. 161.

142. "Principles of Political Economy," *Westminster Review* 49 (1848):289–314, at 293.

and decisive refutation . . . of the theories of the Saint Simonians, the Fourierites, the Communists."[143]

Mill is not entirely to blame for such cases of misinterpretation. The events of 1848, both in Europe and in England, determined that the *Principles* as a cautious but nonetheless radical attack on the existing arrangements governing property and distribution would be overshadowed in its reception by the *Principles* as a defense of private rights in property. Mill himself had expected his private opinions on moral and social questions—the third reason for writing the *Principles*—"to offend and scandalize ten times as many people as they shall please."[144] He especially anticipated this to be the reaction to his views on inheritance and bequest. But revolution broke upon Paris two months before the *Principles* was released, and Kennington Common preceded its publication by a mere two weeks. The turmoil in Europe which had followed the Paris revolution made Mill's admission of possible advantages in socialist schemes pale beside his criticisms. *Fraser's* spoke of "the fearful scenes lately enacted in France" and favorably contrasted the feeling of "repose" derived from the *Principles*—as from "a quiet, serene landscape by Claude"—with the mass of controversial and unsettling literature "with which the press has of late years teemed." Senior looked "with terror and pity" on the happenings in Europe and quoted with approval Mill's perception of the tyranny inherent in democratic demands and institutions. Francis Bowen recognized that Mill was "no blind conservative; in England, indeed, he must be considered as belonging to 'the extreme left.' " But whereas Bowen dismissed all Communists as "crackbrained speculatists," Mill was, by contrast, "no wild theorist, but [one who] takes sober and comprehensive views," expounded with "great moderation." Even his notions on distribution were "well considered and defensible, however much they may conflict with existing notions."[145]

The reactions of two broad classes of readers of Mill's *Principles* have now been considered: firstly, opponents of political economy or of particular Ricardian doctrines; secondly, those generally sympathetic to the study, but whose laissez-faire philosophy and other political and

143. "Mill's Political Economy: Population and Property," *North American Review* 67 (1848):370–419, at 372. The attribution of authorship is by Poole. Francis Bowen (1811–90) was proprietor and editor of the *North American Review* (1843–53). From 1853 he taught philosophy at Harvard, also becoming known as a writer on political economy. Mill felt Bowen had given "a totally false idea of the book." *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 13:740.

144. *Earlier Letters, Collected Works,* 13:708; Alexander Bain, *John Stuart Mill: A Criticism, with Personal Recollections* (London, 1882), p. 89.

145. *Fraser's Magazine* 38 (1848):254, 260; *Edinburgh Review* 88 (1848):329, 335–36; *North American Review* 67 (1848):377, 384, 392.

social views Mill did not fully share. Mill consciously sought to show members of the first class that there was no necessary conflict between humane views and political economy and that much of the criticism directed against both Ricardo's doctrines and their supposed implications rested on misunderstanding. He desired to rescue political economy from many in the second class who implicitly identified it simply with laissez-faire policies or Whig political philosophy. In this latter task he took no special care to conceal his own more radical ("socialistic") opinions. But even these appeared mild beside the pronouncements and actions of some of the revolutionaries in Europe, and Mill's work gave no offense on this account.

There remains a third general grouping of individuals who were important to the initial sales success of the *Principles,* but who also constituted part of the base on which Mill's later authority as a political economist was built. This group is the body of young men who had grown to maturity in an era concerned with the "condition of England question," the "labour question," the Corn Laws, and Ireland's problems. Unlike the readers in the first two classes, these young men were still in the process of acquiring opinions. They desired to understand the nature of social enquiry and social laws and to discover workable solutions to the large problems of the day. Mill's *System of Logic* and his *Principles* together supplied a large portion of their needs. At Cambridge the *Principles* was at once taken up for study and discussion by the Apostles, who included in 1848 Fitzjames Stephen (the brother of Leslie Stephen), E. H. Stanley (later Lord Derby), and Vernon Harcourt.[146] Leslie Stephen followed his brother at Cambridge and was joined in the early 1850's by a whole group of men, including Henry Fawcett, who "looked to Mill as their great prophet" in philosophy and political economy.[147] By the early 1850's also at Oxford Mill was "a classic, both as a logician and as a political economist."[148]

It is not surprising that Mill enjoyed little success in changing the views of serious political economists who had long held objections to Ricardo's doctrines. Tooke, Senior, Torrens, Jones, and Perronet Thompson had learned their political economy in the 1820's, or earlier. In 1848

146. Leslie Stephen, *The Life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen,* 2d ed. (London, 1895), pp. 102, 104; cf. also pp. 105, 123. Fitzjames Stephen (1829–94) became a distinguished journalist and lawyer. Stanley (1826–93) twice served as Foreign Secretary. Though a conservative, he held a lasting admiration for Mill and his ideas of self-help. Harcourt (1827–1904) joined Fitzjames Stephen among the early contributors to the *Saturday Review* and was Whewell Professor of International Law at Cambridge and a parliamentary Liberal.

147. See Leslie Stephen, *Life of Henry Fawcett* (London, 1885), pp. 22–24; F. W. Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London, 1906), p. 51.

148. F. W. Hirst, *Early Life and Letters of John Morley,* 2 vols. (London, 1927), 1:22, quoting Charles Crowden, a senior scholar in 1856.

they were at an age when few men are willing to give up cherished opinions.[149] But the *Principles* commanded the admiration of two of the ablest young economists, William Newmarch (1820–82) and Walter Bagehot (1826–77).

Newmarch reviewed Mill's work in the *Athenaeum,* devoting to it two long notices. He assented to most of the doctrines expressed and to many of Mill's practical schemes. The whole, he thought, was better arranged and treated a greater range of topics than its model, the *Wealth of Nations.* "It is assuredly a fuller and clearer development of the truth than anything hitherto attempted by Mr. M'Culloch." And while it fell short of Ricardo's vigorous ratiocination, only occasionally exhibited the combined qualities of Malthus, lacked the eloquence of Chalmers and "the easy and transparent reasoning of Mr. Bailey," it was nonetheless a great fulfillment of a great design.[150]

Bagehot wrote a long assessment—analytically the best apart from Senior's—in the Unitarian *Prospective Review.* He began by listing Mill's special contributions:

> He is the first among great English Economists who has ventured to maintain, that the present division of the industrial community into labourers and capitalists is neither destined nor adapted for a long-continued existence: that a large production of wealth is much less important than a good distribution of it: that a state of industry in which both capital and population are stationary is as favourable to national well-being as one in which they are advancing: that fixed customs are perpetually modifying the effects which unrestrained competition would of itself inevitably produce: that a large body of peasant proprietors is usually a source of great national advantage: and that a system of Emigration on a great scale would be productive of much benefit to the English peasantry by raising their habitual standard of comfort, and therefore putting a check on the reckless increase of a miserable population.

Bagehot was more critical than Newmarch of Mill's exposition of the scientific part of political economy. He felt, too, that Mill shared some of

149. Senior and Jones were 58, Perronet Thompson 65, Torrens 68, and Tooke 74. Torrens's malleability was exceptional.

150. *Athenaeum,* 27 May 1848, pp. 525–27; 3 June 1848, pp. 554–57. The attribution of authorship is based on an entry in the marked file of the *Athenaeum,* now in the possession of the *New Statesman,* and on a comparison of the views expressed with other writings known to be by Newmarch. The spelling in the marked file is Newmarsh, which may have been a variant. It is used, for example, by James Wilson of the *Economist*: see Emilie I. Barrington, *The Servant of All: Pages from the Family, Social and Political Life of My Father James Wilson,* 2 vols. (London, 1927), 2:49.

the habitual shortcomings of the abstract and "positive" approach to the philosophy of wealth; though he added that "these blemishes have rarely been presented in a form so little calculated to offend those whose conception of life may be cast into a somewhat different form," and he had no hesitation in according Mill a status equal to that of Smith and Ricardo.[151]

The ingredients of success

Mill began writing his *Principles* in the knowledge that political economy in general was at a discount with a large segment of the public; that some, but not all, of the widespread criticism of economists was directed against the followers of Ricardo; and that among political economists themselves there was little unity and a significant amount of dissent from Ricardo's method and doctrines. Moreover, before the manuscript went to the publishers, the Corn Laws had been repealed. In one important respect, therefore, the applied work of Ricardo's analysis was done. Nonetheless, the *Principles,* though avowedly Ricardian, won immediate acceptance. We have been occupied with the questions How? and With whom?

Contemporary opinion suggests that the work was appreciated for its humane concern with the problems of the poor and for its acknowledgment that the *science* of wealth has authority only in a limited sphere: in particular, that distribution and the well-being of individuals are quite as important as the amount of wealth produced and that many counteracting causes must be considered in applying abstract principles. In addition, Mill's earnest concern to find out the truth on every question, and his fairness in examining all points of view, won the respect of readers. Reviewers of the *Principles* were unanimous in their praise of these qualities—a unanimity all the more striking in view of the fact that the reviews appeared in periodicals reflecting a wide range of political and social attitudes.[152] It is equally significant, however, that few of the reviewers agreed with Mill on many of his specific schemes for social reform. And agreement sometimes meant only that Mill's finely balanced statement of pros and cons had been swung by a reviewer in the direction of his own particular preferences. The tone or spirit of the book, as

151. "Principles of Political Economy," *Prospective Review* 4 (1848):460–502, esp. pp. 460, 462, 465, 502.

152. Those already mentioned include Whig/liberal periodicals such as the *Edinburgh,* the more radical *Spectator* and the *Westminster Review,* the Tory *Fraser's* and *Blackwood's,* the Unitarian/liberal *Prospective Review,* and the laissez-faire *Economist.* The *Principles* was also reviewed in the dissenting (largely congregational) *Eclectic Review* 88 (1848):360–77.

Mill himself appreciated, evidently was more important than much of its detail.[153]

These factors may account, at a popular level, for the wide appeal of the *Principles*. But one of them—Mill's concern with the "labour question"—probably also went far towards ensuring the ready acceptance of the *Principles* as an exposition of Ricardian economics. The comments by reviewers on the scientific parts of Mill's treatise were directed largely to the laws of population and of diminishing returns and the way in which these operated, together with other causes, to influence profits, the wages fund, and the rate of wages. Bagehot and Senior criticized Mill for not explaining what proportion of output would be made up of wage goods. Both also felt that he had given insufficient weight to the forces tending to increase productivity.[154] But neither they nor other reviewers questioned the relevance of Ricardo's conceptual framework to the question of wages, and this was a question which directly or indirectly occupied as central a place in social and economic discussion in the late 1840's, and in the two decades following, as had the Corn Laws before 1846.[155]

153. See *Autobiography* (Columbia ed.), pp. 165–66, 174.

154. *Prospective Review* 4 (1848), esp. pp. 474–76, 484–87, 499; *Edinburgh Review* 88 (1848):319, 321–24.

155. I am indebted to G. S. L. Tucker, David Butt, F. B. Smith, H. Scott Gordon, and John Robson for constructive comments at various stages.