


The discussion of appreciation is interesting and an especially useful corrective to the deontological caricature. As a friendly suggestion, I would like to note that Kant himself may have already had a similar concept: *Liebe des Wohlgefallens* (“the love of satisfaction”). Pärttylli Rinne explicates it as “pleasure taken in the physical or moral perfection, or even the sheer existence, of the object” (*Kant on Love* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), p. 6; Rinne prefers the translation “love of delight”). To love something in this way is distinct from being invested in its well-being (*Liebe des Wohlwollens* or “love of benevolence”) and seems to be an attitude of simply liking it for being the way it is. Rinne’s discussion is one of very few, and the love of satisfaction rarely appears in Kant’s texts outside of lecture notes. Nevertheless, I think Kantians would do well to consider it more carefully. I expect it does not do all the work Hill wants appreciation to do, but we will learn something from figuring out why.

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Helen McCabe, *John Stuart Mill, Socialist*

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Helen McCabe’s book *John Stuart Mill, Socialist* should join the ranks of the essential books on Mill’s political philosophy and political economy. By carefully examining Mill’s self-designation as a “qualified” socialist in his *Autobiography* (Mill, *Collected Works*, 1963–91, vol. i, p. 199), McCabe invites readers to take up a more comprehensive and coherent account of his thought than is offered in much of the secondary literature or generally understood in public discussions. Mill’s admirers and critics alike often regard his defense of individuality and personal liberty in *On Liberty* as the core of his political philosophy rather than as one (very important) part of a structured whole. By contrast, McCabe reminds us that *On Liberty* was written by socialists. Mill and Harriet Taylor, his wife and sometime co-author, emphatically endorsed socialist criticisms of political and economic inequalities (including those due to existing *laissez-faire* and private property arrangements) and supported worker cooperatives to replace wage labor with a more relationally egalitarian workplace. Taking these commitments seriously provides a clarifying lens through which to consider the rest of Mill’s political and economic writings.

At the end, I note a few limitations of McCabe’s discussion, but let me begin by enumerating what I see as its main virtues. First, McCabe’s book is a model of generous scholarship. She engages in detail with the work of others who have addressed parts of her overall argument, including Bruce Baum, Fred Berger, Gregory Claeys, Wendy Donner, Oskar Kurer, Dale Miller, Joseph Persky, Jonathan Riley, Alan Ryan, Wendy Sarvasy, and this reviewer. Topics addressed through close engagement with others’ work include Mill’s view that *laissez-faire* is just a transitional phase, his criticisms of

the system of private property, his support for heavy inheritance taxes, his engagement with the labor movement and other socialist writers of the nineteenth century, his support for worker cooperatives over more centralized forms of socialism, his understanding of the “stationary state,” and his deeply-held relational egalitarian commitments. McCabe’s conscientious approach to scholarship is not just admirable in its own right. It has resulted in a thorough guide, with few gaps, for anyone beginning to grapple with the literature on Mill’s socialism.

That said, McCabe also criticizes and builds on previous scholarship to create a new and innovative interpretive framework. Her remarkable breadth in the history of nineteenth-century radical thought, her sensitivity to the differences among competing views in Europe at the time, and her familiarity with a wide range of Mill’s public and private writings allow her to contextualize and synthesize his commitments in detailed and convincing ways that should give pause to more half-hearted Mill scholars.

Second, more than anyone else of whom I am aware, McCabe has shown the interpretive benefits of consistently attending to when Mill offers reform proposals for the *near-term*, for some *foreseeable future*, or for some *distant ideal* only vaguely conceived. McCabe rightly argues that a crucial task for any Mill interpreter is to present his proposals in a way that reflects his sense of evolving social, political, and economic possibilities. Once one attends to the question of which possibilities are not just *desirable*, but when or how they might become *available*, one can begin to systematically group Mill’s comments about society and thereby grasp the practical tendency of his social and political thought. It is not new to observe that Mill has an account of social development informing his judgments about the institutions appropriate to different states of society, from the state of nature to modern liberal societies. But McCabe consistently and revealingly applies this insight to Mill’s proposals for modern liberal societies going forward.

Consider one passage, on the question of private property, that highlights the importance of McCabe’s approach. In a letter to the Christian socialist Frederick Furnivall in 1850, Mill writes:

The economics of society may be grounded either on the principle of property or on that of community. The principle of property I understand to be, that what any individuals have earned by their own labour, and what the law permits them to be given to them by others, they are allowed to dispose of at pleasure, for their own use . . . This is a great advance, both in justice & in utility, above the mere law of force, but far inferior to the law of community; & there is not & cannot be any reason against the immediate adoption of some form of this last, unless it be that mankind are not yet prepared for it. (1963–91, vol. xiv, p. 50)

In a passage like this, what should we say is Mill’s view of private property? On one hand, he believes we are not yet ready to ground the economics of society on the principle of community. Moreover, he says that the system of private property is a great advance on what preceded it. On the other hand, he also says it is “far inferior” to the principle of community, if we could realize it. To complicate things further, elsewhere he argues that *existing* private property arrangements fail miserably to live up to the core justification of private property itself – that of fairly rewarding effort. Among other passages cited by McCabe on this point is the following one from Mill’s 1851 essay “Newman’s Political Economy”:

It appears to us that nothing valid can be said against socialism in principle; and that the attempts to assail it, or to defend private property, on the ground of justice, must inevitably fail. The distinction between rich and poor, so slightly connected as it is with merit and demerit, or even with exertion and want of exertion in the individual, is obviously unjust; such a feature could not be put into the rudest imaginings of a perfectly just state of society. . . . Socialism, as long as it attacks the existing individualism, is easily triumphant; its weakness hitherto is in what it proposes to substitute. The reasonable objections to socialism are altogether practical, consisting in difficulties to be surmounted, and in the insufficiency of any scheme yet promulgated to provide against them; their removal must be a work of thought and discussion, aided by progressive experiments, and by the general moral improvement of mankind, through good government and education. (1963–91, vol. v, p. 444)

Ultimately, then, I believe McCabe is right to present Mill's view on property as a form of qualified socialism. Doing so highlights the radical nature of his thought and his tendency with respect to what ultimately will be the best economic system from a utilitarian perspective. It respects his full-throated endorsement of the socialist critique of existing economic arrangements, his lifelong commitment to workers' rights, and his belief in humanity's ability to develop its solidaristic capacities. That does not mean that he rejects private property entirely for the foreseeable future or fails to see advantages of that system over what came before. Much of what he writes understandably involves articulating improvements to the existing system of private property. But it would be a mistake to present him as content with the system of private property, even if it were properly reformed.

Third, following McCabe's lead, we begin to notice the places where Mill speaks to a distant future – not yet available – when improvements in public understanding and individual virtue make possible increasingly just and beneficial social, political, and economic arrangements. Noting Mill's use of the language of a "North Star" to refer to this distant and vague ideal, McCabe shows that by the late 1840s his North Star was socialism – or at least a "qualified" socialism constrained by concerns about central planning and an acknowledgment of the benefits of competition. On McCabe's interpretation, it is socialism that allows more of us to achieve our freedom in the sense of Millian individuality. It is socialism that more fully respects Mill's commitment to relational egalitarianism. And it is socialism that embodies the utilitarian social virtue of identifying our own good with the good of others. These three considerations – which McCabe neatly summarizes by the old phrase "liberty, equality, fraternity" – offer a compelling framework for understanding Mill's practical political thought. Mill imagines a future when liberty, equality, and fraternity are not at odds with each other but are realized together – under socialism. He thus proposes not just significant economic redistribution in the near term, or property reforms and worker cooperatives in the foreseeable future. In *Principles of Political Economy*, he also expresses support in the distant ideal for a principle of equal remuneration for all workers who have done their jobs as best they can (1963–91, vol. ii, p. 210). More than any other interpreter, McCabe pulls together Mill's scattered commentary expressing aspects of his distant ideal – vague though it must remain.

Fourth, McCabe lays out a set of six principles to help us grasp how Mill conceives of our making progress toward the North Star. We have already seen three of them: *liberty*, *equality*, and *fraternity*. Mill's fundamental principle, of course, is the principle of

utility. (Despite occasional attempts by commentators to claim otherwise, he remained a committed utilitarian throughout his career.) To those four principles McCabe adds two others, *security* and *progress*, that set a frame within which *liberty*, *equality*, and *fraternity* might be realized over time. Below I argue that, at least with respect to *progress*, the relationship among these principles could have been made more precise, to show the structure of Mill's practical thought and tensions within it. I also believe that a key principle is missing from McCabe's account: the principle of *competence* (or competent decision-making) that features prominently in many of his works. But, despite these limitations, McCabe's principles provide an extremely useful and accessible way into Mill's thought.

The guiding idea of McCabe's discussion is that, ultimately, Mill believed his principles would be best combined and realized under a still-to-be-specified form of socialism. With respect to *liberty*, she argues that socialism as a distant ideal is not a threat to liberty so much as the condition under which we can become fully free and independent, as long as liberty and socialism are both properly conceived. Commentators do not always appreciate how much Mill regarded the economic conditions around him as oppressive for most people. In his *Chapters on Socialism*, he writes: "No longer enslaved or made dependent by force of law, the great majority are so by force of poverty; they are still chained to a place, to an occupation, and to conformity with the will of an employer" (1963–91, vol. v, p. 710). By contrast, in *Principles of Political Economy* he argues that worker cooperatives would offer not only a more relationally egalitarian workplace, but freedom:

[W]e may, through the co-operative principle, see our way to a change in society, which would combine the freedom and independence of the individual, with the moral, intellectual, and economical advantages of aggregate production; and which, without violence or spoliation, or even any sudden disturbance of existing habits and expectations, would realize, at least in the industrial department, the best aspirations of the democratic spirit, by putting an end to the division of society into the industrious and the idle, and effacing all social distinctions but those fairly earned by personal services and exertions. (1963–91, vol. iii, p. 793)

This discussion of cooperatives shows Mill arguing not just against social and political domination – as he does in *On Liberty* – but against economic domination as well.

With respect to *fraternity*, McCabe focuses on the passages where Mill emphasizes the importance to society of a sense of solidarity, social harmony, or identification of one's good with the good of others. In a passage rarely quoted from *On Liberty* itself, Mill writes: "I am the last person to undervalue the self-regarding virtues: *they are only second in importance, if even second, to the social*" (1963–91, vol. xviii, p. 277; emphasis added). In passages like the following from *Utilitarianism*, Mill gives a sense of what this might mean for his distant ideal:

[A]lready a person in whom the social feeling is at all developed, cannot bring himself to think of the rest of his fellow creatures as struggling rivals with him for the means of happiness, whom he must desire to see defeated in their object in order that he may succeed in his. The deeply-rooted conception which every individual even now has of himself as a social being, tends to make him feel it one of his natural wants that there should be harmony between his feelings and aims and those of his fellow creatures. (1963–91, vol. x, p. 233)

For Mill, any move toward the ideal will be determined significantly by our ability to further develop our sense of harmony with the feelings and aims of our fellow creatures.

Now, it is fair at this point to ask just how individuality is to be maintained in a society in which we all identify our own good with the good of others, and in which our feelings all share in the feelings of others. But the present point is that to ask this question is to join McCabe in examining what Mill's distant ideal can tell us about how to interpret his moral and political thought.

With respect to *equality*, McCabe generously engages with my own work on Mill's relational egalitarianism along with earlier contributions by Fred Berger, Maria Morales, and others. She and I are in broad agreement that a core part of Mill's ideal, and even much of what he recommends in the near term, is driven by a commitment to relational equality that reflects a practical understanding of what a just or impartial consideration of interests requires, and what sorts of relationships foster the cooperative and social virtues. As Mill wrote to Arthur Helps in the late 1840s: "In my estimation the art of living with others consists first & chiefly in treating & being treated by them as equals" (1963–91, vol. xvii, p. 2000). Mill was famous in his day as a social reformer for his defense of women's equality, his support for workers' rights, his effort to hold Governor Eyre of Jamaica accountable for atrocities against Black Jamaicans, and his support for the North in the American Civil War, which he saw fundamentally as a fight to eradicate slavery. In *Utilitarianism*, he tells us:

The entire history of social improvement has been a series of transitions, by which one custom or institution after another, from being a supposed primary necessity of social existence, has passed into the rank of an universally stigmatized injustice and tyranny. So it has been with the distinctions of slaves and freemen, nobles and serfs, patricians and plebeians; so it will be, and in part already is, with the aristocracies of colour, race, and sex. (1963–91, vol. x, p. 259)

It bears repeating that, as Mill saw it, the impartial consideration of interests on the utilitarian theory requires relational egalitarianism in practice (1963–91, vol. x, pp. 257–58). And so, we can begin to see how the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity might be woven together in support of the principle of utility.

Finally, a fifth important feature of McCabe's book is its detailed and careful commentary on the role of Harriet Taylor as a co-author with Mill on certain works. McCabe argues convincingly that some essays and chapters, and all of *On Liberty*, should be attributed to Mill and Taylor rather than just to Mill.

McCabe has done more than anyone recently to try to resolve long-standing questions about Taylor's philosophical partnership with Mill. Some reasonable disagreements remain, as McCabe herself would agree. No doubt, other utilitarian and radical influences contributed to his concerns about economic inequality and widespread poverty and to his growing support for socialist proposals. Yet, McCabe makes clear that Taylor was fully Mill's partner in imagining and discussing socialist possibilities. In his *Autobiography*, Mill credits her with making the more humanistic and visionary contribution, and himself with making the more scientific contribution (1963–91, vol. i, pp. 255, 257). He also states explicitly that she is the leading partner on at least one key chapter of *Principles of Political Economy* concerning socialism (1963–91, vol. i, pp. 255, 257).

As I wrote near the outset, McCabe does us the great service of reminding us that socialists wrote *On Liberty*, which not only reminds us how liberal socialism can be

defended but also underscores that the essay was a work of co-authorship. Mill reports that “there was not a sentence of it that was not several times gone through by us together, turned over in many ways” (1963–91, vol. i, p. 257), including the chapter on individuality, which many so admire. Of course, we needn’t conclude that Taylor is equally the co-author in every part of that work, or that Mill is. Certainly, there is much in *On Liberty* that can be traced to Mill’s inheritance from Bentham, including some of his arguments concerning freedom of discussion and his anti-paternalism. But the chapter on individuality goes well beyond Bentham in clear ways, for example in its emphasis on character development as a means for promoting happiness. We should not ignore Taylor’s likely role in this significant development within the utilitarian tradition.

Altogether, *John Stuart Mill, Socialist* offers a thorough and convincing new framework within which to re-evaluate our understanding of Mill’s moral, political, and economic commitments. It is important to remember that, as a utilitarian, Mill’s commitment to the socialist ideal is an empirical matter and, therefore, open to revision. What interpreters must understand is *why* he endorses a form of socialism. McCabe’s framework is a big step forward in this respect, and thereby allows us to imagine what Mill might endorse today. Interestingly, because of Mill’s resistance to centralized state-socialism, McCabe hesitates to conclude that Mill would endorse modern social democratic or welfare state arrangements. But I would argue that the Millian principles McCabe identifies, combined with his experimentalist approach, strongly suggest that Mill would be enthusiastic about how well some societies have been able to weave together liberal, egalitarian, and fraternal commitments.

I will conclude by noting two limitations of McCabe’s discussion that, if addressed, would add complexity but also improve her account. The first is that the principle of *competence* also plays a prominent and consistent role in Mill’s moral and political thought. The easiest place to see this is in *Considerations on Representative Government* where he makes the allocation of decision-making authority an element of the “twofold division of the merit which any set of political institutions can possess” (1963–91, vol. xix, p. 392). This element concerns how well institutions “organize the moral, intellectual, and active worth already existing, so as to operate with the greatest effect on public affairs” (1963–91, vol. xix, p. 392). In this, Mill explicitly applies Bentham’s thinking on the importance of “appropriate official aptitude” for any utilitarian system. Maximizing utility depends on having decision-makers who are public spirited, expert, and capable of putting their judgments into action – in other words, *competent*. How to weave this principle of competence together with his commitments to progress, liberty, and equality becomes a defining challenge of Mill’s institutional designs. It informs his support for representative government itself as well as specific proposals like his rejection of “pledges” and his attempt to frame a system of plural voting. It also informs his anti-paternalism in *On Liberty* and his account of moral decision-making, especially with respect to the following of general practical rules.

I would have also preferred that McCabe had given even greater weight to the principle of progress in Mill’s practical thought. The basic thought is this. I agree that Mill imagines an ideal much as McCabe describes, but he also believes that, as fallible creatures, we are never likely to be in a position to say with confidence that we have achieved the ideal. Openness to experimentation, learning, and change therefore are permanent parts of Mill’s vision. The difficulty of knowing what utility ideally requires means that, in practice, Mill often treats “progress” or “improvement” as the principal end in view. Mill’s liberalism is therefore built on the idea that social and

political institutions must protect and sustain the free discussion and social experimentation necessary for individual and social progress (1963–91, vol. xviii, pp. 231, 272; vol. i, p. 259). These practices not coincidentally serve to keep social and political authority's decision-making grounded in reason rather than in its mere "likings and dislikings" (1963–91, vol. xviii, p. 222). This understanding of Mill's principle of progress matters for McCabe's discussion because some social and political arrangements that might be attractive for one reason or another will be ruled out by Mill for failing to protect and sustain free discussion and social experimentation.

Mill and Taylor's socialism is not compromised by such constraints for, after all, their version of socialism is *liberal* socialism. I do not mean to suggest that McCabe's discussion implies otherwise. But the permanent significance of Mill's liberal commitment to progress merits even greater attention in an account of the structure or priority of Mill's principles. *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government* put his commitment to progress front and center, and it constrains what other arrangements Mill considers live options.

McCabe's book deserves careful study by anyone interested in Mill's moral and political philosophy or current debates about socialism and the liberal tradition. Students of Mill have long been attracted by his ability and willingness to weave together a wide range of insights. He does not always draw sharp conceptual contrasts that attract readers to other thinkers such as Marx's insistence that overcoming oppression requires revolution or Hayek's claim that the only alternative to libertarianism is totalitarianism. But McCabe shows us how Mill crafted a sophisticated and substantive reform program (one that anticipates ideas of both Marx and Hayek) that can still speak to us today.

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