

# LIBERAL TOTALITARIANISM: MILL AS FOUNDING FATHER?

*Posted on February 1, 2021 by Wayne Cristaudo*



## 1.

It is a serious question whether the values of political liberty, freedom of speech and tolerance for other points of view on matters of religious and political faith have a future. These values were associated with what its educated elite once considered to be the greatest achievement of Western Civilization. Certainly, the consensus today among ideas-brokers of the West - academics, journalists, teachers, celebrities et. al. - is that such values are merely one more cover for oppression and the entrenchment of privilege of a certain class, race, ethnicity and sexual preference.

Today oppression is considered to be everywhere in the Western world: it is in capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, Christianity, the family, heteronormativity, cisgender-ism, and white privilege/ white supremacy. It also lurks in the hallowed halls of the ivy league universities of the United States whose professoriate, administrators and student body now agree that social justice must be protected from the privilege that poses as free speech.

Moreover, as our educated elite also teach, the oppressive religious, political, social, economic, sexual, racial and ethnic institutions and values all systemically connect. Thus, [the catch all program](#) of Black Lives Matter (BLM) which swiftly segues from stipulating that its "mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes," to "affirm the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum."

A [previous, and more radical](#) version of the BLM website stated: "We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and "villages" that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable."

If today race is the most inflammatory of the various tropes of oppression marshalled by progressives, the fact is that race is only of importance in so far as it fits into a larger narrative norm, i.e., an ideological representation of what constitutes emancipation and oppression.

Thus it is that when a [Thomas Sowell](#) or (the recently deceased) [Walter Williams](#) discuss such basics of

black poverty in the US as welfare dependency and political clientelism, the break-down of black families, ghettoization, exceptionally high rates of criminality and incarceration, widespread domestic violence, and the widespread use of abortion to facilitate, what black conservatives increasingly identify as racial genocide, they can be dismissed as conservatives, who are now synonymous with protectors of white privilege.

Black or Latino conservatives, as NYU [Professor Christina Beltrán writes](#) in the *Washington Post*, are dupes of "multiracial whiteness." In other words, they are race traitors because they do not think about race the way that countless white college students and white academics do, who find their critical race theory leaders in [Robin DiAngelo](#), and [Peggy McIntosh](#) - who are as white as [Rachel Dolezal](#), even if not brazen enough to black-face. But today, black can be white and white can be black, it all depends how you want to spin it.

We have reached a state of affairs where anyone who does not accept either the diagnosis, claims, or tactics of a politically progressive movement such as BLM dedicated to emancipation must be an enemy of the human race.

Critics who point out that BLM is an off-shoot of the 1960s Marxists and terrorists do not deserve their voice, nor employment - and hence companies and universities and schools have been at liberty to fire people who express their disagreement with the BLM formulation, by daring to say, "all lives matter," while social media tech sites can de-platform them for being perpetrators of hate speech. In spite of BLM and Antifa and other progressive movements calling for defunding of the police and freeing prisoners (today), the logical next step will be heavy prison sentences for those who do not get in step with the program - as Eugene Robinson of the *Washington Post* [sums up the situation](#): "there are millions of Americans, almost all white, almost all Republicans, who somehow need to be deprogrammed."

I write this as those who have expressed public support for President Trump by merely [being at the rally](#) on January 6 have [lost their jobs](#), while some [25,000 national guardsmen](#) (whose [political credentials](#) have all been vetted) were called into Washington to ensure that the inauguration of President Biden will not be disrupted by the supposed millions of insurrectionist white supremacist terrorists.

I write this as all the major hi-tech social media companies operating out of the USA [have banned](#) the

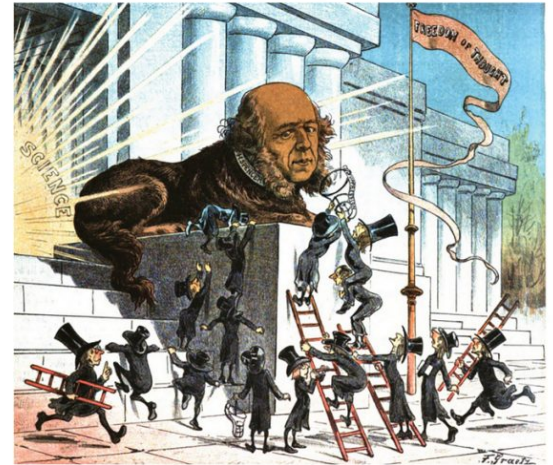
recently departed US President for life from making posts. Anyone [alleging electoral fraud](#), or whatever is deemed an explosive talking point that could lead to violence or hate or prejudice, unless it is the kind of violence that calls for the killing or imprisoning of Donald Trump and his supporters, must also be fact-checked and then de-platformed.

I write this in at a time when all (but parts of one) major media outlets in the US [reported anything that looked like evidence](#) that supported the claim that the Russians had stolen the 2016 election, while repeating endlessly that [all claims about widespread](#) and illegal ballot-harvesting and ballot forging, the lack of rigorous controls over Dominion voting machines, and the bizarre string of events on the election night of 2020 that occurred after ballot counting had closed, including videos of ballots appearing in suitcases and being counted multiple times, are nothing but "conspiracy theories."

In short, I write at a time when the United States can no longer claim to be the "land of the free." And the predictions made by the former KGB operative and Soviet dissident [Yuri Bezmenov](#) in 1984 about how ideological subversion within the USA in its colleges would play out over a generation have come true. Also true is Huey Long's prediction that fascism in America would come, and it would be in the guise of Anti-fascism.

If progressivism of the sort that has given birth to BLM, Antifa, the right of children to choose their sex organs, corporations and state agencies the right to employ or fire people on the basis of their identity and narrative commitments is a Western and not purely US phenomenon ("taking a knee," for example, has become encouraged by sports administrators in Australia), the question arises: how did this situation arise? (What to do about it is, of course, the more pressing problem, and one that is far harder to solve).

There are many people asking that question, and like any historical phenomenon there are many facets to it, and hence, unsurprisingly there are many answers. Some think this is the end product of relativism - this view popularized by Allan Bloom (who follows Leo Strauss in seeing Nietzsche and Weber as core culprits) in his best-seller of 1987, [The Closing of the American Mind](#) is mentioned in Zbigniew Janowki's arresting, provocative and important introductory essay - "Liberalism and the New Opium of the Intellectuals" - to [this collection of J.S. Mill's writings](#).



## JOHN STUART MILL

On Democracy, Freedom and Government  
& Other Selected Writings

Edited by Zbigniew Janowski and Jacob Duggan  
With an Introduction by Nicholas Capaldi

AFTERWORD BY RYSZARD LEGUTKO, AUTHOR OF  
*THE DEMON IN DEMOCRACY*

Although, it is true that those espousing the emancipation of "minorities" are claiming freedom from the totalising narratives and institutions of their oppressors, there is nothing relative about the appeal to emancipation that drives the anti-oppression narrative: emancipation is an all or nothing affair, and anyone who complicates narratives of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality – and whatever other all-pervasive element of identity becomes woven into the narrative dyad of emancipation and oppression – by drawing attention to other features of social being is obviously too privileged to be allowed a platform.

**2.**

Everything I have just written about above is grounded in paradox and dialectic, not the least of which is

that this narrative is supported by - to use a word that circulates widely without the least shame attached to it - the world's "global leaders," present and future: hi-tech billionaires, global financiers, corporate heads, managers and human resources administrators of public and private institutions, military leaders, intelligence operatives, professors teaching in the world's most well-paid illustrious universities, as well as the youth who attend them, school teachers, and journalists, entertainers and athletes.

In sum it is a position held by those with money, political power, social influence, those who broker in ideas, and those who fabricate stories and provide the festivities which forge the social "imaginary" of modern Western Liberal societies.

However, by ever ignoring the cultural dimensions of geopolitics, these so-called global cultural leaders quite falsely assume they not only represent the right side of history but they are the saviours of the entire planet: from the climate to ensuring the protection and preservation of every indigenous, non-Christian culture, from the right of gays to marry and raise children, to the rights of Muslims in the West not being subjected to the insult and injury of living in a country which celebrates Christian holidays.

Its critics – and I am obviously among them – see that the only people to triumph in the long run will be the enemies of every Liberal cause these global leaders are foisting upon the West through legislation, corporate funded agitprop (the anti-capitalist BLM [has been funded](#) by the Ford and Kellogg foundations as well as numerous businesses such as Airbnb), media control and censorship, strategically staged riots, the replacement of history with fantasy, and so on And to re-ask the question in a slightly different manner by drawing upon the common cognate term of progressivism: how has the most Liberal country on earth contributed so much to a state of affairs that it is tearing its social fabric apart in a manner that will assuredly benefit its enemies, who more than ever have shored up their power by appeals to their traditional values? Posed thus, it would seem that one might well ask the question what is it about Liberalism itself that has led to this?

This is the question that is behind Zbigniew Janowski and Jacob Duggans [edition of this collection of writings](#) by the foremost theorist of Liberalism, J.S. Mill. As the Introductory essay by Janowski, and the Afterword by the Polish philosopher Ryszard Legutko (both of whom grew up in communist Poland) make clear, the purpose of this collection is to help people grasp Liberalism as an ideology and Mill's thought as an ideological contribution. Thus, Janowski writes: Mill "is to Liberalism what Marx and

Engels are to Socialism."

This is a strong claim and it is perhaps the only point in this very fine essay that I do not completely agree with: for while Mill is indeed a significant contributor to Liberalism, he did not provide a theory that completely usurped and redefined the character and objectives of a political movement anywhere near to the extent that Marx did. That is to say, there is a good reason why, in spite of his considerable influence, we do not speak of Mill-ism as we do of Marxism. Though, I would add that it is precisely because Liberalism is not the brain-child of one authority, that the kind of detective work done by Janowski and Duggan is all the more valuable: for it discloses the paradox at the heart of the Liberal program that surfaces in a theorist who seems to be - and in many ways is - the most brilliant modern exponent of liberty to have argued for its importance in social life.

Having said that, we should also note that just as Marx did not invent the working class nor its party politicization, Mill is not the inventor of liberty's importance as a social, economic and political value. But the distinctive feature of any ideology is that it takes an idea derived from a feature or aspect of social experience and "logicizes it" so that it mutates into a principle for the orchestration of a collective understanding of other phenomena and the cementing of solidarity around some core values.

The problem with all ideological thinking is that it oversimplifies socio-economic, political, and cultural problems by dissolving them into compartments so that they may be rationally/ theoretically aligned. And being so aligned the various actors who try and steer narrative, policy and legislation in accordance with their ideology avoid the far more difficult and pressing task of muddling along and sifting through the socio-economic-cultural contingencies and interests which in democratic societies have led to the kind of compromises that once typified this kind of regime.

Of course, what they do is spawn a reaction by those whose interests and placement have been completely occluded or distorted by the ideologues. That reaction may then open the door to the political brokering which a democracy evolved to deal with, or it may, as has happened recently in the history of the United States, simply lead to all-out class war.

The ideologue is ultimately a "know-all," someone who believes that they know the essence of a system which they also completely understand. The world is thus not a messy, complicated, barely visible and not very well understood process of "emergent" and "fades," but a clear system, an "idea" that can be identified and taught in its entirety to children, and others who do not know much. Ideology

cannot only be super-imposed upon all that is living, but it is the key to solving all problems of the living.

What is all-important to a political elite who want to ensure their rule and its perpetuity by having subsequent generations think just like them is that their idea of the world, its problem and its solutions, are all very simple, simple enough to be understood by someone who is in their teens or early twenties. Given the expense required to have an elite profession, the sooner one can learn and apply the narrative that will be the source of one's social power the better.

Of course, it is important to make the simple look learned, and the more one can make ideological simplicities look complicated and profound the more status one may garner amongst peers who do not want those they instruct to think they are dummies. In a world where the associations of most people are riddled with made up stories (entertainment), and information is increasingly shaped and filtered by ideology, we are increasingly drawn into a windowless world - a kind of political monad in which the elite-approved consensus is sovereign.

One's credibility as a professional ideas-broker, someone who can serve as a leader in their information field, who can work in an ivy league university, report in an illustrious newspaper, make decisions about intelligence requires that one does not trust one's own eyes, ears, or mind - because to do so would be to be a victim of the oppressive system that awaits those who are not "woke" to what is really going on with capitalism, patriarchy, white privilege et. al.

If it was the enlightened philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who held that the improvement of the world lay in the replacement of authority based in the shibboleths and privileges of tradition with authority subject to the stringency of reason, the nineteenth century was the century in which politics became an ideological affair.

Though just as the seventeenth century Enlightenment metaphysical "know-alls" could never actually agree about the specific features of what constituted the metaphysical characteristics of experience and the mind, the political know-alls of the nineteenth century also were unable to convince each other of exactly what would fix exactly what, and hence which ideology would triumph.

While Marx and Nietzsche remain the most philosophically acclaimed nineteenth centuries visionaries



of the new socio-economic and political order (and, unlike in the earlier part of the 20th century when they were pitted against each other, those today who acclaim them are generally happy to merge their projects with their own requirements of social justice), the following from Mill's Utilitarianism neatly encapsulates the conceit of Liberalism that Mill felt prone to, and which, inter alia, this collection of writings is drawing attention to:

*"Poverty, in any sense implying suffering, may be completely extinguished by the wisdom of society, combined with the good sense and providence of individuals. Even that most in-tractable of enemies, disease, may be indefinitely reduced in dimensions by good physical and moral education, and proper control of noxious influences; while the progress of science holds out a promise for the future of still more direct conquests over this detestable foe. And every advance in that direction relieves us from some, not only of the chances which cut short our own lives, but, what concerns us still more, which deprive us of those in whom our happiness is wrapt up. As for vicissitudes of fortune, and other disappointments connected with worldly circumstances, these are principally the effect either of gross imprudence, of ill-regulated desires, or of bad or imperfect social institutions."*

Mill's faith in education and wisdom ("The interest of the people is, to choose for their rulers the most instructed and the ablest persons who can be found" is as central to his program as his faith in liberty, is, say unlike Marx whose writings are full of invective and hostility to those who think differently to him, also supportive of open-minded inquiry. Thus, he writes:

*"Scientific politics do not consist in having a set of conclusions ready-made, to be applied everywhere indiscriminately, but in setting the mind to work in a scientific spirit to discover in each instance the truths applicable to the given case. And this, at present, scarcely any two persons do in the same way. Education is not entitled, on this subject, to recommend any set of opinions as resting on the authority of established science. But it can supply the student with materials for his own mind, and helps to use them. It can make him acquainted with the best speculations on the subject, taken from different points of view: none of which will be found complete, while each embodies some considerations re-ally relevant, really requiring to be taken into the account. Education may also introduce us to the principal facts which have a direct bearing on the subject, namely the different modes or stages of civilization that have been found among mankind, and the characteristic properties of each."*

But it is not Mill's open-mindedness and provisional qualities that are at issue if one is considering how Mill contributed to a doctrine that was founded on appeals to initiative, independence of thought, and

liberty, but in its development comes to asphyxiate those very qualities.

Apart from the bipolarisation of the social world into authority and liberty (discussed below) is the general demeanour that is characteristic of so many of the essays in which Mill is the sage who both gives instruction about how to free the world from all its problems, and identifies the stages that lead to people like him perfecting their world.

That demeanour is now so commonplace among our contemporary moralising social elite that to even mention that this is a problem may sound strangely immoral. Closely related to this is the fact that while Mill in numerous places insists upon historical knowledge as important in the development of human society, his reflections upon the past are invariably moralistic and pay no real consideration to why and how people acted as they did.

It is enough for him to know, for example, that women were deprived of their liberty, but the important matters of the roles required for the social symbiosis of a group's survival, and the different sacrificial components and expectations accompanying those roles are of little interest to him. It is, then, as much through his omissions as through specific principled commitments that we can see how Mill succumbs to the ideological temptations that accompany a surfeit of moral abstraction.

### 3.

Of the works that remain part of any history of political thought type course (to be sure a style of course that is far less frequently taught today than the slew of ideologically inflected courses devoted to identity and oppression), [this edition](#) includes Mill's "masterpiece," *On Liberty* in its entirety, and selections from *Considerations on Representative Government* – also a masterly work of political analysis – *The Subjection of Women* – the work that most survives as a testimony to Mill's historical importance to feminism, and the fifth chapter of his *Utilitarianism*. The notable omissions of Mill's "big books" are *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive, Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence* and the *Method of Scientific Investigation and Principles of Political Economy and Some of their Applications to Social Philosophy*. Of the former work, the economist [Joseph Schumpeter](#) has [written that it was](#):

*"One of the great books of the century, representative of one of the leading components of its Zeitgeist, influential with the general reading public as no other Logic has ever been. A less striking patch of color in*

*our picture than is the Origin of Species, it is hardly a less indispensable one—although it does not stand out, as does the Origin of Species, when we look back on the historical sequence of performances and ideas that produced the situation of today in the respective fields, and although Mill's book is dead in a sense in which Darwin's is not."*

### [And that](#)

*"One has in mind the success of this book, as much as or more than the success of its author's Political Economy, when one speaks of Mill's sway over the generation of English intellectuals that entered upon their careers in the 1850's and 1860's. Abroad, part of the reading public was impervious to such influence. But the rest embraced Mill's message with even greater enthusiasm. The book was found in the house of a peasant in Ireland. It was called the "book of books" by an accomplished Viennese woman (a Fabian and suffragist) who felt herself to be progress incarnate. It occupied a place of honor not much below Plato's in the mind of at least one philological philosopher I knew as a boy—all of which I say in order to convey, first, that the book was a living force in bourgeois civilization."*

Both books, though, are mere footnotes in the developments of their respective disciplines. In the case of *Political Economy*, in spite of important insights about competition, and initiative, a refusal to fall for economic reductionism, a recognition of the historical diversity of the nature of property, a rigorous critical discussion of the different kinds of socialism, its opening emphasis upon productive and non-productive labour and its failure to place the problem of supply and demand at the centre of the discipline is indicative of why [Jevons](#), who remains a pioneering figure in modern economics, saw Mill as a symptom of the problem that had to be overcome if economics were to become a science.

In the case of the two volume *Logic*, what may retain its interest for students of Mill is Book VI, that is the culmination of the work, "On the Logic of the Moral Sciences," which lays out Mill's reflections for thinking about society and politics. As that title indicates, and as I have mentioned already, Mill saw politics as primarily a moral problem, which is a common view today. Though one major problem with that view is that the person making the moral judgment rarely thinks it important to scrutinize the fit between his own moral purpose, diagnosis, and prescriptions and his socio-economic interest. I do think this not only a problem in Mill, but a problem within Liberalism that is generally rather good at exposing the interests of those who object to its objectives, whilst generally veiling its own economic aspirations as it represents itself as being the voice of the common or public good.

Coming in at 770 pages - and there is a second volume of Mill's journalism, reviews and translations to follow - Janowski and Duggan are to be congratulated for having found a publisher willing to release a work of this size. As a collection it also does a most thorough job of presenting Mill's political and social priorities and arguments.

The selections are grouped under the following headings: "Of Progress, Education and Future;" "Of Ideologies and Governments;" "On Religion, Liberty, and Freedom of Speech," "On Women and Equality;" and "On America and Democracy." Once the collection is considered under these headings, and when one also takes into account the accompanying introductory essays by Nick Capaldi, and Janowski, the Appendix by John Henry Newman, "Notice of Liberalism in Oxford" and "18 Propositions," and the "Afterward" by Ryzard Legutko, then one should see how important this book really is.

For, at a time when Mill probably has very few readers who have not been assigned to read him in a college course (and while he might appear in some women studies courses, his student readership is mainly confined to the relatively small number of history of political thought courses), it provides a compelling case for thinking about Mill in the context of today's Liberal totalitarianism. And this is the purpose behind the essays by Janowski, who has just released [\*Homo Americanus: The Rise of Totalitarian Democracy in America\*](#), and Legutko, who has written [\*The Demon in Democracy Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies\*](#) and more recently, [\*The Cunning of Freedom: Saving the Self in an Age of False Idols\*](#).

For Janowski, it is Mill's bipolar interpretation of history as a "struggle between Authority and Liberty" that has been so fateful. For once history is reduced to a Manichaeian struggle between light and darkness, then disputes about authority and liberty take on apocalyptic importance, then if one's cause is of the light, any objections one might raise to a position one is advancing, say not wanting a child born as a boy wanting to be a girl using their little girls' bathroom, or not wanting to compete in female competition with a biologically born man is merely a voice of darkness - and hate.

Janowski thus picks up on the contemporary Liberal habit of bipolar struggles in which any aspect of identity, social role, or custom can be espied as a struggle for emancipation. Janowski argues that the narrative bi-polarisations of Liberty versus Authority, anti-discrimination versus discrimination, reactionary bigots versus progressives confirm Plato's observation that unconstrained democratic egalitarianism is corrosive to all authority and hierarchy.

For Janowski it is the egalitarian tendency in Mill that is ultimately decisive – “No other modern thinker,” writes Janowski, “was as inimical to the idea of hierarchy or authority as was Mill,” and “his entire philosophy rests on the premise that authority and power are 'evil' in themselves, and, as such, must be fought against and hopefully, done away with.”

The position advanced by Janowski is reinforced by Legutko's “Afterword,” which introduces the dimension of tradition into the picture by noting that “the final aim of the liberal agenda is therefore not to have a free and open society, but to have society in which everyone is a liberal and everything is subservient to the liberal dogmas.”

In Mill's case it is the principle of his idea of the limits of liberty - the Harm Principle - that Legutko identifies as the tactic which enables liberal totalitarianism to capture the citadel of liberal democracy. In the first instance the Harm Principle can be invoked against any kind of traditional appeal to customary authority. Hence someone can claim that there is no harm, say, in pornography or polygamy or gay marriage. Though once the traditional custom has been “revealed” to be oppressive, the Harm Principle can be equally invoked to demonstrate that one's feelings have been harmed by a traditional pronoun or customary expectation of role and behaviour.

Ultimately what Legutko is taking issue with is Mill's simplification about the nature of human society and the kinds of human qualities needed to preserve a free but cohesive and capable society. Another way of saying this is Legutko sees that Mill has a rather naïve psychological understanding of human motivation and a very poor grasp of how the European tradition evolved in such a way to facilitate the kinds of liberties that Mill enjoyed and wanted to push ever further into a more “perfect” set of social institutions and relations.

Without going into the details, I think the general criticisms raised by Janowski and Legutko are amply supported by the selection of writings included here. Further, I think the writings on religion included here reveal the shallowness of Mill's understanding of religion in the European experience.

I also think that if one compares Mill with the great psychologists of the human heart - from Sophocles or Aeschylus, to Augustine to Shakespeare and Dostoevsky, or to take the most diabolical but terrifyingly insightful figure the Marquis de Sade - Mill comes across as more than a little akin to Nietzsche's blinking “last man.”

Thus, the editors have powerfully counterposed Cardinal Newman's devastatingly incisive and prophetic critique about the shortcoming of Liberalism in the Appendix to this volume with Mill's psychological naivety and rationalist approach to religion and society more generally:

*"Whenever men are able to act at all, there is the chance of extreme and intemperate action; and therefore, when there is exercise of mind, there is the chance of wayward or mistaken exercise. Liberty of thought is in itself a good; but it gives an opening to false liberty. Now by Liberalism I mean false liberty of thought, or the exercise of thought upon matters, in which, from the constitution of the human mind, thought cannot be brought to any successful issue, and therefore is out of place. Among such matters are first principles of whatever kind; and of these the most sacred and momentous are especially to be reckoned the truths of Revelation. Liberalism then is the mistake of subjecting to human judgment those revealed doctrines which are in their nature beyond and independent of it, and of claiming to determine on intrinsic grounds the truth and value of propositions which rest for their reception simply on the external authority of the Divine Word."*

#### 4.

Given such criticisms it is easy to overlook Mill's virtues, and indeed the virtues of Liberalism itself. Of Mill, Janowski rightly observes that as "long as Western civilization exists and continues to exercise its influence on its own members and elsewhere, his name will shine brightly in the annals of European political thought."

Given, then, the critical framing of the collection, the editors are also to be commended for having an "Introduction" to the volume written by Nick Capaldi. Capaldi is the author of the definitive intellectual biography on Mill, [\*John Stuart Mill: A Biography\*](#), as well as a political philosopher of considerable gifts who has written much on the virtues and dangers confronting modern liberal democracy.

Capaldi's Introduction draws attention to Mill's fair-mindedness (Mill, he says, is "scrupulous in presenting arguments on both sides of every issue"). He also appreciates that Mill's moral convictions emerge in response to the great transformation occurring in the nineteenth century as England was increasingly becoming a market economy, and the new social roles required of workers and women and their political articulation took on real importance.

Elsewhere Capaldi has argued that the two decisive driving norms of modernity are liberty and equality,

and, whereas Janowski focusses upon the egalitarian tendencies in Mill, Capaldi has noted in his important book (cowritten with Gordon Lloyd) [Liberty and Equality in Political Economy: From Locke versus Rousseau to the Present](#) how Mill defends liberty from the onslaughts of egalitarianism.

In *Liberty and Equality* and elsewhere he also clarifies what Mill meant when he designated himself in his *Autobiography* as a socialist – [socialism, for Mill](#) is “any system, which requires that the land and instruments of production should be the property, not of individuals, but of communities or associations, or of the government.”

Capaldi has also noted how important Mill's role was in attempting to mediate between the great forces of socialization and capital accumulation in the evolution of the modern state, as well as how careful he was not to stake the importance of liberty within the kind of rights narrative that came out of France and its revolution. As Capaldi also points out in “Mill and Socialism:” “Mill opposed the elimination of private property, the elimination of competition, central planning, and even a worker's party. He most especially opposed a ruling class of technocrats as had been suggested by Saint Simon and by now arch-enemy Comte.”

And perhaps the greatest service Capaldi performs in his intellectual biography on Mill is his highlighting of the non-utilitarian and more organicist inspirations that informed Mill. Thus we can see how central creative autonomy and inspiration are to his social vision and political philosophy, and thus how his writings do serve as a bulwark against as the modern progressive tendency to merely assume that an elite can easily rectify social inequality by merely redistributing a society's wealth, without paying sufficient attention to what are the requisites for the creation of wealth and the kind of commodities people like.

It can also be argued that it is Mill's esteem for human spontaneity, initiative and diversity of opinion (as opposed to diversity of essential identities as today's Liberal Woke do) which when closely tied to his understanding of economic activity in a way that makes him far more relevant to understanding the kind of contradictions that engulf modern Western societies than Marx.

For while I think it would simply be too far-fetched to hold that Mill rather than Marx had seized the imagination of the radical students from the 1960s onward who would go onto become the educated elite driving the modern Liberal project, Marx's shortcomings outside of the closed environment of the radical bookish mind was his (and his students) utter failure to understand what drives people to

produce exchange-value: he thinks people will spontaneously cooperate – and without state direction – on a large scale to produce what they need as consumers, without the need for those with private property to pool resources to draw labour into performing the productive tasks that consumers want and that will yield profits.

The fact that there is zero historical examples of that occurring is wiped aside as of no consequence for Marx because he believes that once the means of production have been sufficiently socialised under bourgeois society that they will still be developed and deployed – even though the monetary signal of exchange, the price of something, will no longer be needed. The reality of Marxism in practice could only ever be a planned economy, in which producers would be forced to do whatever the state/ administrators decided they should do.

To this day defenders of Marx prefer to focus upon inequitable distribution of market economies, which is true – markets are necessarily hierarchical because they reflect the different value/ the price people place upon different things and talents, rather than the inability for a communist economy either to do away with a state elite directing economic performance or even to successfully meet all but the most basic needs of consumers. Marx's economics was based in a pre-utilitarian theory of economics, the labour theory of value which had zero interest in what it was the consumer wanted and was prepared to pay.

While, then, Marx has been the battering ram for the intellectual elite who wish to subject the entire world to their critical understanding of it and thus eliminate oppression which then opened the gate to other social critics who identified other sources of oppression that they could save us from, the fact was that Marxism was plagued by bad economics: the consequence of which involved communist countries jettisoning communism in one way or another (option A: complete dissolution of the politics and economy as the Soviets did it, or option B: keeping the politics and ditching the economics as the Chinese have done), and Western Marxists happy to be employed in institutions which merrily critique capitalism while serving the agenda of globalization

Liberalism has had many failures, including its combination of victim and identity politics with a tendency to see all values in economic terms, and thus to erode values that are literally priceless. Thus, we see in Liberal societies today the contradiction mentioned above, that corporations have become, along with entertainers, the public representatives and financial backers of Liberal virtues.



Liberal society, though, for all its censorship and wokeness, still depends upon the liberty required to enter into productive/ exchange relationships involving property – including savings and talent. But this is precisely why it is the nexus of a Liberal economy with narratives demanding conformity because they are built upon victimhood and suffering, which the elites know how to cure, that threatens the survival of the West. And whereas economic communism could not circumvent the wall of necessity and impoverishment, the Western world is economically wealthier (though spiritually impoverished) than any previous society. It is so wealthy that it can pay people who are actively destroying it.

Liberalism was ever globalist in outreach, and thus its failure to take culture seriously, that is to treat it as anything more than one further opportunity to tear down the pre-conscious traditions of Western culture, has gone hand in hand with a failure to see where the West figures in the greater geopolitical tensions of our time. Its elite still think in terms of the United Nations and the Declaration of Human Rights that have little backing outside the West.

At the same time, they have readily sacrificed the right of freedom of speech to social justice so that they may preserve their own role as social critics and educators, so that they may have clients who they will permanently represent.

Western Liberalism presently seems to be engaged in a tragic comic replay of the Jacobins sacrifice of the Gironde in pursuit of true virtue and public safety. Mill himself might be astonished to think that Liberalism has turned against liberty, though when he expressed his wish that England might undergo the kind of revolution that occurred in France in order "to give that general shake-up to the torpid mind of the nation," he might have considered the fate of the Gironde as a warning of what readily happens in the pursuit of abstract absolutes.

And yet those of us who see the demon in Western democracy, and the totalitarian character of the modern Liberal mind might nevertheless agree that the following words of Mill from *On Liberty* are worth defending and remembering: "*...only through diversity of opinion is there, in the existing state of human intellect, a chance of fair-play to all sides of the truth. When there are persons to be found, who form an exception to the apparent unanimity of the world on any subject, even if the world is in the right, it is always probable that dissentients have something worth hearing to say for themselves, and that truth would lose something by their silence.*"

These words convey the best of Mill, what Janowski and Legutko remind us of, though, is that for

Liberalism to flourish it requires social characteristics of the sort that precede and range further into the expanse of the human heart and its history.

*Wayne Cristaudo is a philosopher, author, and educator, who has published over a [dozen books](#).*

*The [featured image](#) shows, "Salome with the Head of the Baptist," after Guido Reni, by Mariano Salvador Maella, painted in 1761.*

