

## JOHN STUART MILL'S DEONTOLOGICAL HEDONISM

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*Thought freed from the senses, as if original, and freed from the Common things; thus the opposite of Dante who saw agape with eros as a common thing in Beatrice's eyes.*<sup>1</sup>

Alternatively, the title for these remarks concerning John Stuart Mill's moral doctrine could have been *Doin' Right Ain't Got No End*, a statement made by one of the characters in Clint Eastwood's film, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*.<sup>2</sup> Why that is so I hope will become evident in the substance of this paper. The direction in which I am headed can be gathered from an entry in Nietzsche's *Daybreak (Morgenröte)* entitled *Fashions in Morality (#131)*:

How the overall moral judgments have shifted! The great men of antique morality, Epictetus for instance, knew nothing of the now normal glorification of thinking of others, of living for others; in the light of our moral fashion they would have to be called downright immoral, for they strove with all their might for their ego and against feeling with others (that is to say, with the sufferings and moral frailties of others).<sup>3</sup>

John Stuart Mill's moral doctrine as it illustrates this shift in the "overall moral judgments" is the focus of my attention. My remarks fall under five headings: 1. The Context of Mill's Moral Doctrine; 2. Socratic Dissatisfaction; 3. The Disinterested and Benevolent Spectator; 4. Minding Other People's Business: Caring and Ruling; 5. The New Holiness.

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<sup>1</sup> R. P. Blackmur, "San Giovanni in Venere," in *A Primer of Ignorance*, ed. Joseph Frank (New York: Harcourt, 1967), p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> The character who makes the statement is "The Redlegs Captain," not otherwise identified, who leads a relentless pursuit of Josey Wales, the outlaw.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 131.

### I The Context of Mill's Moral Doctrine

In a talk given at Kenyon College in 1947, entitled "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," the literary critic Lionel Trilling made this observation:

[T]he moral passions are even more willful and imperious and impatient than the self-seeking passions. All history is at one in telling us that their tendency is to be not only liberating but also restrictive.... [W]e must be aware of the dangers which lie in our most generous wishes. Some paradox of our nature leads us, when once we have made our fellow men the objects of our enlightened interest, to go on to make them the objects of our pity, then of our wisdom, ultimately of our coercion.<sup>4</sup>

John Stuart Mill's moral doctrine exemplifies "the dangers of our most generous wishes;" it teaches us to make our fellow men the objects of our enlightened interest, our pity, our wisdom, and our coercion. The "dangers" make us wonder about the "generosity" of the wishes. Mill's moral passion is an instance of what Nietzsche has described as "the preaching of altruistic morality in the service of individual egoism."<sup>5</sup> Trilling's distinction between what he calls "moral passions" and "self-seeking passions" is endemic to modern moral philosophy and is the core of Mill's own doctrine. The morality Mill preaches requires the dissociation of the self into a self of moral passion, to stay with Trilling's terms, and a self of self-seeking passion, for both of which dissatisfaction is constitutive, because in each case "end" in the sense of *telos* is not. Since what gives unity to the self is the end towards which it moves, a movement for which at least since Plato the word *eros* has been appropriated, Mill's doctrine has no place for *eros*. *Eros* signifies that we

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<sup>4</sup> From Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," in *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953), p. 214, reprinted, with an introduction by Louis Menand (New York: New York Review of Books, 2008), p. 221. This essay also appears in Lionel Trilling, *The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent, Selected Essays*, ed. Leon Wiesentel, (Farrar, Straus, Giroux: New York, 2003). The passage quoted is on page 118.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), #784, p. 412. "One of the most common lies of the nineteenth century," he adds.

are constituted by something other than ourselves. The non-erotic Love of Humanity asserts precisely the opposite.

Mill uses several terms as names to designate his moral doctrine, among them, most obviously, of course, "Utilitarianism." In addition, he speaks of it, and not infrequently, as "that real, though purely human religion that sometimes calls itself the Religion of Humanity and sometimes that of duty."<sup>6</sup> "Religion of Humanity" is Auguste Comte's term. Mill's moral doctrine is in fact a version of what Comte calls the "Religion of Humanity." The canonized version of Mill as the philosopher of unfettered liberty, "the champion of heretics, apostates, blasphemers" does not emphasize this.<sup>7</sup> Mill did. In *Utilitarianism*, speaking of Comte's *Traité de politique positive*, Mill says:

I think it has superabundantly shown the possibility of giving to the service of humanity... both the psychological power and the social efficacy of a religion, making it take hold of human life, and color all thought, feeling, and action in a manner of which the greatest ascendancy ever exercised by any religion may be but a type and foretaste[.]<sup>8</sup>

Mill wished to see his moral doctrine, which he summarizes here under the heading "the service of humanity," given "the psychological power and social efficacy of a religion." Psychological power and social efficacy constitute what Mill calls "the temporal usefulness of religion."<sup>9</sup> He believed that, taught as a religion, his revised utilitarianism would possess this power and this efficacy to an eminent degree:

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<sup>6</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Theism*, in *Three Essays on Religion* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), pp. 255-56. reprints of John Stuart Mill, *Nature, The Utility of Religion, and Theism* (London: Longmans, 1874), pp. 255-56.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life" in *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 179. The canonized version tends to separate the essay *On Liberty* from the context of Mill's work as a whole.

<sup>8</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. Oskar Piest, The Library of Liberal Arts (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), chapter 3, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Utility of Religion*, in *Three Essays*, p. 76.

If we now suppose this feeling of unity [with all mankind] to be taught as a religion... I think no one who can realize this conception will feel any misgiving about the sufficiency of the ultimate sanction for the happiness morality.<sup>10</sup>

Of his moral doctrine, Mill says: "It is not only entitled to be called a religion: it is a better religion than any of those that are ordinarily called by that title."<sup>11</sup> And why is this? Because "in the first place it is disinterested," i.e. "it does not tempt... [one] to regard the performance of... [one's] duties to others, mainly as a means to... [one's] own personal salvation.... What now goes by the name of religion operates mainly through the feelings of self-interest... This is the radical inferiority of the best supernatural religions compared to the Religion of Humanity."<sup>12</sup>

Mill entertained the hope that the cultus of Philanthropy would supplant what he called "the inferior religions of history." One might be tempted to regard this as merely Mill's personal aberration did we not know that in fact the Religion of Humanity, "one of the fantasies of the saeculum rationalisticum,"<sup>13</sup> has to a large extent supplanted Christianity and has become the established public religion of the West, "the natural religion of modern democratic society," it has been called.<sup>14</sup> That Comte regarded Mill as a close collaborator is evident from Comte's remark about "my eminent friend, John Stuart Mill, who is," Comte says, "in fact fully associated with the immediate establishment of the new philosophy."<sup>15</sup> Mill confirms what Comte says

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<sup>10</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Utility of Religion*, p. 110.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110-11.

<sup>13</sup> I borrow the term from Michael Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 1975), pp. 75-76.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Manent, *Cours familier de philosophie politique* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), p. 206.

<sup>15</sup> The statement occurs in his *Discours sur L'Esprit Positif*, where Comte speaks of Mill as "mon ami éminent, John Stuart Mill, ainsi pleinement associé à la fondation directe de la nouvelle philosophie," *Oeuvres Choisies d' Auguste Comte*, ed. Henri Gouhier (Paris: Aubier, 1948), p. 192.

regarding the role of his *ami eminent*: "I had contributed more than anyone else to make his speculations known in England."<sup>16</sup> Comte is quite clear about what *la nouvelle philosophie* portends: "While the protestants and the Deists have always attacked religion in the name of God, we, on the contrary, ought finally to get rid of God in the name of religion."<sup>17</sup> Although Mill dissented from the manner in which Comte institutionalized the Religion of Humanity, he fully endorsed the reform of religion on the basis of the altruistic morality proposed by Comte:

We... not only hold that M. Comte was justified in the attempt to develop his philosophy into a religion, and had realized the essential conditions of one, but that all other religions are made better in proportion as, in their practical result, they are brought to coincide with that which he aimed at constructing.<sup>18</sup>

Both Comte and Mill intend the subversion of Christianity through its transformation and replacement by the Religion of Humanity.<sup>19</sup> In *Daybreak (Morgenröte)*, speaking of what he calls "the echo of Christianity in morality," Nietzsche describes how the move is made:

That men today feel the sympathetic, disinterested, generally useful social actions to be the moral actions—this is perhaps the most general effect and conversion which Christianity has produced in Europe: although it was not its intention nor contained in its teaching. But it was the residuum of Christian states of mind left when the very much antithetical... fundamental belief... in the absolute importance of eternal

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<sup>16</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography of John Stuart Mill* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 194.

<sup>17</sup> "Tandis que les protestants et les déistes ont toujours attaqué la religion au nom de Dieu, nous devons, au contraire, écarter finalement Dieu au nom de la religion," Auguste Comte, *Correspondance inédite*, 2, 107. See Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Le Drame de L'Humanisme Athée*, 3e édition, (Paris: Éditions Spes, 1945), p.178.

<sup>18</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 137.

<sup>19</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter 3, p. 42.

personal salvation, together with the dogmas upon which it rested, gradually retreated and the subsidiary belief in 'love,' in 'love of one's neighbor,' in concert with the tremendous practical effect of ecclesiastical charity, was thereby pushed into the foreground. The more one liberated oneself from the dogmas, the more one sought as it were a justification of this liberation in a cult of philanthropy: not to fall short of the Christian ideal in this, but where possible to outdo it, was a secret spur with all French freethinkers from Voltaire up to Auguste Comte: the latter did in fact, with his moral formula *vivre pour autrui*, outchristian Christianity.... In... England [it was] John Stuart Mill who gave the widest currency to the teaching of the sympathetic affects and of pity or the advantage of others as the principle of behavior.<sup>20</sup>

Nietzsche neatly summarizes this in an aphoristic sentence in *Twilight of the Idols (Götzen-Dämmerung)*: "After every little emancipation from theology, one must rehabilitate oneself by showing in a veritably awe-inspiring manner what a moral fanatic one is."<sup>21</sup> The core of the moral fanaticism of this "outchristianed Christianity" is a self that experiences itself as sublime, that can, as Kant puts it, "make palpable to itself the sublimity of its own vocation as superior to nature."<sup>22</sup> Morally, disinterestedness is the assertion of that superiority to nature. Disinterest is moral sublimity.<sup>23</sup> Profiled against the understanding of morality, the morality of the good, that it was intended it should replace, what distinguishes the moral doctrine expounded by Mill and Comte comes clearly into view.

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<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, #132, p. 82.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), p. 515.

<sup>22</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), §28, p. 145.

<sup>23</sup> Alain Besançon, *La Falsification du Bien* (Paris: Julliard, 1985), pp. 47, 92-96, 104; *The Falsification of the Good*, (London: The Claridge Press, 1994), pp. 33, 64-65, 73. Cf. Alain Besançon, *Trois Tentations dans L'Église* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1996), pp. 105-15.

## II Socratic Dissatisfaction

"It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied. Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their side of the question." This is John Stuart Mill's gloss in the second chapter of *Utilitarianism*<sup>24</sup> of that passage in Plato's *Republic*, Book II (372c-373e), where Glaucon, interrupting Socrates' account of the "first city,"<sup>25</sup> accuses Socrates of having failed to provide properly for the inhabitants of this city, not even, Glaucon says, having "given them a relish for their meal, making them feast on dry bread." Socrates acknowledges Glaucon's objection, saying that he had "forgotten" about the need for a relish to the meal. Glaucon then objects to the rude simplicities of life in what he calls "a city of pigs" and what Socrates will call "the true and healthy city." "Now I understand," Socrates says, "the question which you would have me consider is, not only how a city, but how a luxurious city comes into being."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, commenting on the *Republic* in *Politics*, Bk. IV, 1291a18-20, calls it the "first city," formed, as Aristotle observes, "only for the sake of necessities and not for the sake of what is noble."

<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Vintage Press, 1991), Bk. II, 372-73 (pp. 64-65): "They will feed on barley meal and flour of wheat, baking cakes of the meal, and kneading loaves of the flour. These they will serve up on mats of reeds or on clean leaves, and themselves reclining on rude beds of yew or myrtle-boughs. They and their children will feast, drinking of the wine which they have made, wearing garlands on their heads, and singing the praises of the gods, enjoying one another's company. Interrupting. Glaucon said, You call it feasting when you have given them only dry bread for their meal; you have given them a meal without relish. True, I said, I had forgotten—of course their meal must have relish—salt, and olives, and cheese, and they will boil roots and herbs such as country people prepare. For a dessert we shall give them figs, and peas, and beans; and they will roast myrtle-berries and acorns at the fire, drinking wine in moderation.... Socrates, he said, if you were founding a city of pigs, would you feed them any differently? But what would you have me give them, Glaucon? I replied. Why, he said, you should give them the ordinary conveniences of life. People who are to be comfortable are accustomed to lie

Mill believes that dissatisfaction is superior to satisfaction. The rhetorical flourish about Socrates' dissatisfaction and the satisfaction of fools and pigs is meant to assert that. But if Socrates is dissatisfied, it is not because he believes, as Mill does, that dissatisfaction is superior to satisfaction. In the passage at hand, it is not Socrates who expresses dissatisfaction; it is Glaucon, dissatisfied with the satisfaction of the inhabitants of Socrates' "first city." In their satisfaction, Glaucon thinks, they are indistinguishable from "a city of pigs," i.e. nothing sets them apart as human beings. Mill asserts that fools and pigs are satisfied, and therefore fools and pigs, by virtue of the manner in which they hold the opinion that satisfaction is superior to dissatisfaction: they know only "their side of the question." Their side of the question is the superiority of satisfaction to dissatisfaction, i.e. the reality of ends and their ontological priority to our desires. This knowing "only their side of the question" is Mill's swipe, in his attempt to appropriate Socrates for his side of the question, at pre-modern philosophy, which teaches the reality of ends and their ontological priority. But while fools do, pigs do not have opinions, yet they do have a side of the question. They don't, for instance, make an issue of the absence of a relish for their meal; their meal quite naturally satisfies them. Mill's implication here is that man, understanding himself in terms of a supposed teleology of nature, cannot effectively distinguish himself from the pig; his side of the question, nature as end/*telos*, the superiority of satisfaction to dissatisfaction, makes him a fool. In commenting on the exchange between Glaucon and Socrates, Mill takes no note either of Socrates' forgetfulness or of what Socrates calls "the luxurious city," both important items in considering how Socratic dissatisfaction differs from that of Mill.

The luxurious city differs from the city of pigs in this: the existence of the luxurious city requires that some have asked the question, "What is the best kind of life?" And in the luxurious city they have answered this question by saying, "more of, and refinements of, what we enjoyed

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on sofas, and dine off tables, and they should have sauces and sweets in the modern style. Now I understand, I said, the question which you would have me consider is, not only how a city, but how a luxurious city comes into being."



in the city of pigs." The luxurious city is a city of men, not of pigs, for pigs, unlike men, are not concerned with luxury, because they do not seek an answer to the question, "What is the best way of life for us?" The pigs do not need luxury because, being pigs, they are not concerned to seek out what is the best life. What they have as pigs satisfies them. For the pig the life of the pig is the only possible life and, as such, an eminently satisfactory one. For the pig the only possible life is the best life. There is good reason for pigs not to be dissatisfied. For being healthy pigs, they are satisfied as what they are. The pig is not an erotic animal.

Luxury is a sign that human beings seek not mere life, but the best kind of life. Men are concerned with the relishes and refinements of meals; pigs are not. When Glaucon breaks into Socrates' account of the first city, saying, "You have given them a meal without relish!" and calls it "a city of pigs," his interruption reveals that he is concerned with the right way to live. By implication he has introduced the question of what is the best kind of life. Pigs would not notice the absence of relish. Noticing the absence of relish will lead to the presence of philosophy. In the circumstances, it is the introduction to philosophy. To be a complete human being one must ask the question about the best life. To reflect on the question and its meaning is the beginning of philosophy. The answer to the question, as the *Republic* shows, is the philosophic life. What takes place in the *Republic*—its action—is the initiation of that life.<sup>27</sup>

The luxury of the luxurious city is evidence that it is a human city, not a city of pigs. Luxury is sought as the answer to the question, "What thing is most eminently satisfying? What brings completion, fulfillment, wholeness?" Luxury testifies to the fact that human beings ask questions and that even if they lead the simple life, the life opposed to the luxurious life, they do so because they believe that it answers the question, "What is the best kind of life?" This is why Socrates can say, referring to his first city, "[I]n my opinion the true and healthy city is the one that I have described." This is his considered judgment

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<sup>27</sup> With the *Dialogues*, we must remember that we are dealing with poetry, which imitates action.

concerning politics in the light of what really constitutes satisfaction,<sup>28</sup> making clear the Socratic ranking of the political life in comparison with philosophy. Just as Socrates' forgetfulness about the pleasures of the table points toward the primary concern of the *Republic*, philosophy as the pursuit of the truly satisfying, so his "true and healthy city" points to the diminishment of politics and the life of the city in the light of what is most eminently satisfying. The desire for bodily pleasures and the desire for the public honors of the political life recede from view as desirable ends and a deeper dissatisfaction appears as wisdom kindles the *eros* for itself. It is not that these loved and lovable things are not instances of good; it is only that there are better instances. Mill takes no note of Socrates' forgetfulness nor of the luxurious city because Mill is unable to recognize that the dissatisfaction of the Socratic and erotic self—which is the self in pursuit of satisfaction, that is, of completion, fulfillment, perfection, wholeness—differs profoundly from the dissatisfaction which is the essence of his moral doctrine. "The aim of *eros*," Diotima tells Socrates in the *Symposium*, "is the everlasting possession of the good"<sup>29</sup>: "All then is full, possessing and possess'd,/ No craving void left aching in the breast."<sup>30</sup> Mill cannot recognize the erotic self of Socrates because for him there is no everlasting possession of the good, the ontological status of ends having been denied. What takes its place is benevolence without end, the everlasting pursuit of pleasure on behalf of others. *Doin' right ain't got no end*, as the Redlegs Captain in Clint Eastwood's film *The Outlaw Josey Wales* says, for right is not done for the sake of an end as *telos*, and there is no end as *termination* in the pursuit of pleasure and the diminishment of pain on behalf of others.

### III The Disinterested and Benevolent Spectator

Mill's moral doctrine is *Altruism*, a term that designates his teaching more accurately than the term he favors, *utilitarianism* with its

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<sup>28</sup> Plato, *Republic* 373a.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 207a2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard," in *The Complete Poetical Works of Pope*, ed. Henry W. Boynton (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903), p. 111, lines 93-94.

“nebulous comprehensiveness” as it has been called.<sup>31</sup> Altruism—literally “otherism”—is a term invented by Auguste Comte to designate the core teaching of his *Religion of Humanity: vivre pour autrui*, “live for others.” Altruism is an instance of that peculiarly modern union, the marriage between hedonism and moral obligation,<sup>32</sup> which has several philosophical variants, including John Rawls’ “deontological liberalism.”<sup>33</sup> The occupant of what Rawls calls “the original position,” who is behind “a veil of ignorance,” bears a strong resemblance to Mill’s disinterested and benevolent spectator. Mill, professing to be a hedonist, teaches that “[p]leasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things are desirable either for pleasure inherent in themselves or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.”<sup>34</sup> Happiness, then, means pleasure and the absence of pain; unhappiness is pain and the privation of pleasure.<sup>35</sup> The rightness of an action lies in its tendency to produce pleasure, its wrongness in its tendency to produce pain. Here, however, Mill enters a *caveat*: not the pleasure or pain of the agent, as previous versions of philosophical hedonism had taught, but the pleasure or pain of others. This is a very significant departure from philosophic hedonism—I am thinking of Epicurus and Lucretius—for

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<sup>31</sup> Maurice Cowling, *Mill and Liberalism*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> “[L]e principal caractère du positivisme. Il consiste à résumer enfin, dans une même formule, la loi du devoir et celle du bonheur, jusqu’alors proclamées inconciliables par toutes les doctrines[.]... Voilà comment le bonheur coïncidera nécessairement avec le devoir”: Auguste Comte, *Catéchisme Positiviste* (Paris: Librairie Garnier Frères, n.d.), pp. 279–80.

<sup>33</sup> “I suppose with utilitarianism that the good is defined as the satisfaction of rational desire”; “The principles of right... impose restrictions on what are reasonable conceptions of one’s good”: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 30, 31. “Deontological liberalism accepts an essentially utilitarian account of the good, however its theory of rights may differ”: Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 165.

<sup>34</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

which philosophy is itself the greatest pleasure and for that reason constitutive of happiness: *Happy [Felix] is he who has been able to know the causes of things.*<sup>36</sup> Mill's deontologized hedonism instrumentalizes philosophy; it is the servant of "doin' right," *vivre pour autrui*. Philosophy is to be understood and practiced as the promotion of right, not the enjoyment of the good.

I must again repeat what the assailants of utilitarianism seldom have the justice to acknowledge, that the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct is not the agent's own happiness but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator.<sup>37</sup>

Pleasure is the good, but actions are right only insofar as they are taken to promote pleasure and diminish pain as another's good.

*Not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned.* It is in this—what he calls its "disinterestedness"—that Mill thinks the moral superiority of the doctrine of altruism consists, and on this basis he proposes it as morally obligatory. "*Of all concerned*" means others as distinguished from myself and myself seen as indistinguishable from the others so far as "the good" is concerned. Moral rightness does not consist in my seeking my "good," but the good of the community. Mill says, "[T]he interests of mankind collectively, or at least indiscriminately, must be in the mind of the agent when conscientiously deciding on the morality of the act."<sup>38</sup> The "morality of the act" means the obligation to promote the pleasures of others and to diminish their pains, whatever the pain to oneself as distinguishable from the others. Mill's moral agent is *the agent as disinterested and benevolent spectator*. Thus defined, the agent must apprehend itself as two discontinuous selves: a self distinguishable from other selves, seeking pleasure as its good—the

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<sup>36</sup> Virgil, *Georgics*, Bk. II, line 490. The context of this line makes clear that "Felix" designates the Epicurean philosopher.

<sup>37</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2, p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 5, p. 65.

“self-seeking self”—and a self which sees itself as indistinguishable from other selves, preferring the good of “all concerned” whatever the pain to itself. Mill is not being original here. The requirement for some form of this distinction is systemic in modern moral and political philosophy, as the instances of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant demonstrate. Mill is simply repeating and restating it in his own terms.

The moral agent is not only *disinterested* and *benevolent*, most importantly it is *spectator*. In seeing itself as indistinguishable from the others, the moral agent sets itself apart, distinguishes itself, as spectator. To be disinterested and benevolent, to be a moral agent in Mill's sense, requires that I be a spectator, that I see myself, i.e., distinguish myself, as indistinguishable from others. To do this, to see myself as indistinguishable from the others, I must distinguish myself from myself as distinguished from others. This self seeing itself as indistinguishable is a self effected through thought, and the word to be underlined here is *effected*, for this self has no author but its own act, the act of thought from which it proceeds. It is a self effecting itself through thought, not a self discovering itself through the object of thought, not a self evoked by the Good. It does not come to light as a potentiality of the human person. The moral agent as a disinterested and benevolent spectator is generated by thinking to be discontinuous with a self thought of as continuous with desire. The act by which thought creates a self discontinuous with desire also creates the thought of a self continuous with desire, a self-seeking self, the self of desire. In order to think of itself, the disinterested and benevolent spectator requires a conceptual foil, the self of desire. The self of desire, no less than the self which is the disinterested and benevolent spectator, is something effected by thought. As thoughts, they are inseparable; neither thought exists without the other. To think myself as disinterested and benevolent requires that I also think myself as interested and self-regarding desire. I could not recognize myself as the disinterested and benevolent spectator, if I did not entertain the possibility of thinking of myself as another opposed self, a self of interested self-regarding desire. These are conceptually constructed, or ideal, selves. Neither self is just *myself*, for neither coincides with the reality I am. And neither is what we have called, speaking of Socrates and Glaucon, an erotic self.

Disinterestedness means indifference to an end or aim proper to myself as a determinate kind of being, i.e., as self-seeking. Disinterestedness is indifference to my specific identity as a human being and to that being being mine. Altruism negates the will to be myself as an actual instance of realized humanness. Mill is explicit that it means indifference to my specific identity as a human being. The utilitarian standard, he says, is an existence as exempt as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments both in point of quality and quantity "secured to all mankind; and not to them only, but so far as the nature of things admits, to the whole sentient creation."<sup>39</sup> If there is not an end constitutive of my identity, it is not clear what I am. As distinctness vanishes, I merge into "the whole sentient creation," ceasing to exercise the will to be myself as a human being, to stand out in my essence.<sup>40</sup> "Man is finished," Nietzsche said, "when he becomes altruistic."<sup>41</sup>

Mill's moral doctrine depends upon the opposition between the disinterested self and its foil the self-interested self, both of which are possible only on the presupposition that ends are irrelevant. The disinterested self is a self without ends, for to recognize dependence upon an end for completeness is recognition of incompleteness, and the disinterested self is always complete, being self-constituted as a whole by the act of thought which creates it. Thus its sublimity. Being without an end, it is not a self constituted through *eros* pursuing the whole. Unlike what Maritain says of "the soul when it loves," that it "aspires toward what it is not, as to another self,"<sup>42</sup> this disinterested self is not actualized by the Good. Doing right, the disinterested self endlessly asserts itself as other than the self-interested self of desire, asserting its completeness and superiority to nature.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, chapter 2, p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 91.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Maritain, "Action and Contemplation" in *Scholasticism and Politics*, ed. Mortimer J. Adler, 2nd ed. (London: Geoffrey Bles: Centenary Press, 1945), p. 136.

The self-interested self, the self of desire, the foil of the disinterested self, is the incomplete self, necessarily incomplete and unable to be completed. If there are no ends, there is desire, but it is loveless desire, not the desire of *eros*, which is the pursuit of wholeness, completion, fulfillment. Self-interest is understood to be prescribed by desire, not by the objects of desire, that is, by ontologically prior ends. The self of desire is moved by its purposes—which it calls “ends”—prompted by its desires. Unlike *eros*, which is created by what is loved,<sup>43</sup> the end/*telos*-desire produces the object of desire. Ends understood as purposes are hypotheses of desire and are relevant only to the one whose posited purposes they are. The self of desire can only conceive of “felicity” as, in Hobbes’ succinct formulation, “a continual progress of the desire from one object to another,” and not as “the repose of a mind satisfied.”<sup>44</sup> The desiring self, always unable to be satisfied, can never be whole. Once ends lose their ontological priority, *eros* understood as the pursuit of wholeness, has no place. Speaking of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Archbishop of Cambrai, Fénelon, whose doctrine of “pure love” supposes a radical opposition between the disinterested love of God and love of self in formulations strikingly similar to those of Mill and Comte’s altruism, Henri Gouhier writes: “Pure love is not an *eros* which has found its end; it annihilates every trace of *eros*.”<sup>45</sup>

#### IV Minding Other People’s Business: Caring and Ruling

Altruistic virtue is disinterestedness, or indifference to the good as my good. In the *Republic*, the case against justice argued by Glaucon and Adeimantus is that it is “another’s good,” not one’s own.<sup>46</sup> To answer their argument, Socrates argues that justice, being the right order of the soul, makes me good, for it is the right order of the soul that is constitutive of my own fulfillment and perfection as a human being.

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<sup>43</sup> Plato, *Symposium* 204c4–6.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949), pp. 63–64.

<sup>45</sup> “Le pur amour n’est pas un éros qui a trouvé sa fin: il anéantit tout éros”: Henri Gouhier, *Fénelon philosophe* (Paris: Vrin, 1977), quoted in Alain Besançon, *Trois Tentations*, p. 108.

<sup>46</sup> See the beginning of *Republic* Bk. II, 357a–357e.

Political and moral philosophy as originally conceived—Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—teaches that the best life is the philosophic life, not the life lived *pour autrui*. The life lived *pour autrui* is the political life. The political life is the life devoted to ruling. Rule is exercised on the basis of an asserted and recognized claim to superiority, the claim to being the best at serving the good of the city, i.e. the good of others, and therefore entitled to rule in preference to others. “Disinterestedness,” or altruistic virtue, is such a claim. Ruling is “minding other people’s business.” In the *Republic*, Socrates shows that “justice is minding your own business and not being a busy-body,”<sup>47</sup> i.e. it means seeking one’s fulfillment, completion, perfection as a fully realized human being. The justice of ruling depends upon its subsumption within the right order of the soul. That order places primacy in knowledge of the highest things: “For it would be strange to think that the art of politics... is the best knowledge, since man is not the best thing in the world.”<sup>48</sup> If ruling were the best life, philosophy would be impossible. For that would imply that ruling, managing human beings, was the highest human activity and man the best thing in the world. In the exchange with Glaucon about the need for a relish for the meal, Socrates has forgotten about the pleasures of food in the light of other objects of desire that have kindled in him the eros for wisdom.

Glaucon is dissatisfied, disappointed because there’s not a relish for the meal, something that Socrates had “forgotten about.”<sup>49</sup> Glaucon compares those who are unconcerned with relishes for meals to pigs. Glaucon recognizes and directs attention to the difference between man and the other animals: pigs are concerned with food, not with pleasure per se. It is because Glaucon recognizes and acknowledges this difference that Socrates is able to show Glaucon how to become satisfied as a human being through the pursuit of philosophy. The concern with pleasure per se, i.e. as the Good, is distinctly human and separates man from the other animals. The other animals seek food and offspring, but they are neither epicures nor voluptuaries. Epicures and

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<sup>47</sup> Plato, *Republic* 433a1–434a2.

<sup>48</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 7 (1141a20 ff.).

<sup>49</sup> Plato, *Republic* 372c.



voluptuaries seek the Good and, therefore, seek pleasure, i.e. they seek pleasure not simply as pleasure, but as the Good, as what completes, fulfills, perfects. Animals are not hedonists; human beings are. That there are epicures and voluptuaries testifies to the existence of the Good and so to the difference between man and the other animals. This difference is constituted by man's apprehension of the Good. Without this apprehension, man would not view pleasure as the Good. He would simply enjoy it as the pigs do, for there would be no appearance of the Good. To be an epicure or a voluptuary is to have an opinion about what the Good is. It is this apprehension that is the ground of Socrates' dissatisfaction. Philosophy is Socratic dissatisfaction, the existence of philosophy testimony to the actuality of the Good.

For Mill, there is no resting in the end/*telos* achieved. Dissatisfaction, not coming to completion in perfection and fulfillment, is the essence of Mill's morality. Mill's moral paradigm is the life of ceaseless activity in benefiting others, the life of philanthropy. "Benefiting" in Mill's scheme can only mean relieving the pain of others and producing pleasure for them. Mill's moral universe implies an elite which enjoys the privilege of caring for others, rulers who, because they are rulers, instance the highest moral ideal. But such a moral universe necessarily implies that the largest number of human beings will be those who need to be taken care of, who suffer various kinds of pain and are deprived of many pleasures: the victims. Mill's moral universe must be filled with victims who call forth the activity of the moral elite as rulers. The moral elite is a caring elite. "Caring" is the paradigm of what it means to be good. Jacques Maritain's lucid description of transitive activity makes clear what grounds the accuracy of Nietzsche's judgment of "altruism as the most mendacious form of egoism:"<sup>50</sup>

Transitive activity is that which one being exercises upon another, the so-called patient, in order to act upon it.... The Greeks were right in saying that in this activity, the action in which the agent and the patient intercommunicate is accomplished in the patient, *actio in passio*, and being common to

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<sup>50</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Bk. I: *European Nihilism*, #62, p. 42.

both, makes the agent (notwithstanding its being as such the nobler of the two) dependent on the patient, in which alone it obtains perfection. The Agent is itself *in actu* and attains its perfection only by acting on another than itself, and in the instant of this action. Transitive action is a mendicant action, which achieves itself in another being, and is essentially in need of another being. On the other hand, while the agent's perfection is also, in fact, that of the patient, the agent as such does not seek the patient's good, but its own.... Hence its 'egotism.' People who exercise philanthropy as a transitive activity need the poor to help if they want to be helpful, sinners to preach to if they want to be preachers, victims whose wrongs they can redress. They need *patients*.<sup>51</sup>

"Doin' right ain't got no end." For Mill's altruism doing right is not an end (*telos*) and is endless, interminable. That the many can be satisfied is indicative of their inferiority to the elite, whose superiority is attested by their unsatisfiable dissatisfaction. It is a necessary assumption for the altruistic morality that the many on whose behalf the caring elite is active can be satisfied by the things that satisfy pigs. Mill's city, ruled by a caring elite, is a "city of pigs."

In the essay, *The Utility of Religion*, Mill makes a singularly revealing comment:

[I]n a higher, and, above all, a happier condition of human life, not annihilation but immortality may be the burdensome idea;... that human nature... would find comfort and not sadness in the thought that it is not chained through eternity to a conscious existence which it cannot be assured it will always wish to preserve.<sup>52</sup>

Nothing could make clearer what happens to thinking, and therefore to philosophy in a doctrine such as Mill's—in which thinking is purely instrumental, not an end-in-itself—than the contrast between this passage

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<sup>51</sup> Jacques Maritain, "Action and Contemplation," *Scholasticism and Politics* (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1945), p. 136.

<sup>52</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Utility of Religion*, p. 122.

from *The Utility of Religion* and Socrates' speech in Plato's *Apology* 40e4-41c5:

But if death is a journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead abide, what good, my friends and judges, can be greater than this?... What would not a man give if he might converse with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer? If this be true let me die again and again... Above all, I shall then be able to continue my search into true and false knowledge; as in this world, so also in the next; and I shall find out who is wise, and who pretends to be wise, and is not.... It would be an unspeakable happiness to converse with them and to be with them and to examine them.<sup>53</sup>

"Eros," Diotima told Socrates, "is desire for everlasting possession of the good." Altruism necessarily requires an instrumentalized reason, but the life lived for the sake of philosophical inquiry, the Socratic life, is an end in itself. The exercise of instrumentalized reason provides no reason to live.

Mill's version of a dissatisfied Socrates is a Socrates who has undergone metamorphosis. It is not the Socrates whom Alcibiades observed on the Athenian expedition to Potidaea during the Peloponnesian War. "One morning he was thinking about something," Alcibiades says in the *Symposium*. "He would not give it up, but continued thinking from early dawn until noon. There he stood fixed in thought. The rumor ran through the army that Socrates had been standing and thinking ever since break of day.... He stood there until the following morning."<sup>54</sup> That Socrates poses a problem for philosophical modernity becomes evident in the reservations expressed about him by Montaigne: "These humours soaring to transcendency terrify me as do great unapproachable heights; and for me nothing in the life of Socrates is so awkward to digest as his

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<sup>53</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology Crito*, trans. F.J. Church, rev. Robert D. Cumming, The Library of Liberal Arts Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956).

<sup>54</sup> Plato, *Symposium* 220.

ecstasies....”<sup>55</sup> Mill had explicitly identified Socrates with his moral teaching in the opening paragraph of *Utilitarianism* saying, “the youth Socrates listened to the old Protagoras and asserted... the theory of utilitarianism.”<sup>56</sup> Mill chooses Socrates as the emblem of dissatisfaction, identifying Socrates with his own moral teaching, thereby identifying Socratic dissatisfaction, which is erotic, with the dissatisfaction fueled by the *altruism* Mill teaches, which is not. This identification is a confusion. It joins together things different as if they were the same, and, here, it is intentional. Mill knows that what he is doing is not philosophy in the Socratic sense. “Philosophy,” as Robert Sokolowski has said, “explains by distinguishing; it “consists in making distinctions, in showing how one thing is necessarily not another, in thereby bringing out what that thing necessarily is.”<sup>57</sup> Philosophy in the Socratic sense aims at understanding the being of things through displaying the differences among them, and it rests in this essentially contemplative activity enjoyed for its own sake. Mill, on the contrary, assimilates things that are different and makes them the same.

Mill is engaged not so much in trying to understand something, as he is in trying to persuade us to believe something. Mill’s procedure aims to produce unanimity of belief, like-mindedness about the way to live, not philosophical understanding. This is a political aim, not a philosophical one. “From the winter of 1821, when I first read Bentham,” Mill writes in his autobiography, “I had what truly might be called an object in life; to be a reformer in the world. My conception of my own happiness was entirely identified with this object.”<sup>58</sup> Mill is engaged in producing a change in religion and, as Machiavelli has

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<sup>55</sup> “Ces humeurs transcendantes m’effrayent, comme les lieux hautains et inaccessibles; et rien ne m’est à digerer fascheux en la vie de Socrate que ses ecstases et ses demoneries”: Montaigne, *Essais*, III., 13 (near end). The English is from Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 1268.

<sup>56</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter 1, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Sokolowski, “The Method of Philosophy: Making Distinctions,” in *The Review of Metaphysics* (March 1998): 516.

<sup>58</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, Chapter V, p. 93.

observed, “[W]hen a new sect—that is a new religion—emerges, its first concern is to extinguish the old to give itself reputation.”<sup>59</sup> Taking over symbols of the old order and infusing into them a new content is the ordinary means of the suppression of an existing religion. It is not to be confused with philosophy. Comte is very specific about the role of a caring elite:

The dedication of the strong to the weak can be assured only by the occurrence of an order of the strong which has obtained social ascendancy by means of its zeal for the weak and the consequent veneration freely accorded them by the weak. It is thus that the priesthood [of the Religion of Humanity] becomes the soul of the true Sociocracy.<sup>60</sup>

Mill approaches vehemence in his repudiation of Comte’s organization of the Religion of Humanity. Nevertheless, the difference between them regarding that religion is perhaps best described as a difference in political style. In what is essential Mill does not differ: “I agreed with him [Comte] that the moral and intellectual ascendancy, once exercised by priests, must in time pass into the hands of the philosophers....”<sup>61</sup> Although the means differ by which their rule is to be effected, for both Mill and Comte philosophers rule. Unlike the philosophers in Socrates’ best city set forth in the *Republic*, neither Mill’s nor Comte’s philosophers have to be compelled to rule.

## V The New Holiness

Auguste Comte’s *Catéchisme Postiviste* teaches that for those who practice the Religion of Humanity “religion must above all dispose us

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<sup>59</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, II. 5. 1, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 139.

<sup>60</sup> “On ne peut assurer le dévouement des forts aux faibles que par l’avènement d’une classe des forts qui ne puisse obtenir d’ascendant social qu’en se dévouant aux faibles, d’après leur libre vénération. C’est ainsi que le sacerdoce devient l’ame de la vraie sociocratie”: Auguste Comte, *Catéchisme*, pp. 306–307.

<sup>61</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (1944), p. 148.

and teach us to live for others.”<sup>62</sup> Practically every form of Christianity has been significantly penetrated by the moral doctrine of altruism and has adopted the procedure described by the German term, *die Gleichschaltung*, “correct alignment,” or, more familiarly and concretely, “political correctness,” attempting to harmonize their teaching with it by means of a shift that has been characterized as “from orthodoxy to orthopraxis.”<sup>63</sup> “henceforth and forever God is only present in and as one’s neighbor.”<sup>64</sup> Alain Besançon has labeled this shift “la nouvelle sainteté,”<sup>65</sup> “the new holiness,” in which one proposes to practice their religion in terms of what St. Ignatius Loyola, a contemplative even in the midst of action, called *effusio ad exteriora*, the pouring oneself out toward external things.

The works of mercy in Christianity are eschatological signs: not works of “this world,” but signs of the new creation brought into existence through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. They signify the very opposite of “philanthropy,” or the “religion of humanity.” They are not concerned with building the city of man, but are evidences of the presence of the city of God. As the works of mercy performed by Christ related in the Gospels, which as a Christian one is to imitate, their doing, their being done, is evidence that a new world has been created, brought into existence through the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. This was the testimony of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. It is portrayed and taught in the great painting by Rubens, *The Miracles of St. Ignatius Loyola*. In Rubens’s painting the saint, vested in a chasuble for the celebration of Mass, is presented in a state of ecstatic contemplation surrounded by those for

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<sup>62</sup> “La religion doit surtout nous disposer et nous enseigner à vivre pour autrui”: Auguste Comte, *Catéchisme*, pp. 306–307.

<sup>63</sup> This is Thomas Sheehan’s description in “Revolution in Catholicism,” *The New York Review of Books*, June 14, 1984, p. 38.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Sheehan, as quoted by Paul Mankowski, S.J., “Atheistic Catholics,” in *Faith, Moral Reasoning, and Contemporary American Life Lecture Series 1991–93* (Brighton, Massachusetts: The Cambridge Center for the Study of Faith and Culture, 1994), p. 95.

<sup>65</sup> Alain Besançon, *Trois Tentations*, p. 133.

whom cures have been effected through his intercession. This painting portrays and teaches the wonderful union of *eros* and *agape*. Although the contemplation of the philosophers is to be distinguished from the contemplation of the saints—the former being “what the energies of human nature left to themselves can achieve,” the latter a divinely infused gift—nevertheless, “supernatural contemplation achieves and fulfills a natural aspiration to contemplation which is consubstantial to man.”<sup>66</sup> We could not receive the divine gift if we were not naturally ordered to contemplative activity. “Grace elevates and perfects, it does not destroy, nature.”

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<sup>66</sup>Jacques Maritain, “Action and Contemplation,” pp. 141-42.