

An Interview with John Stuart Mill

by J.L. Black and GPT4 as “A Speaker for the Dead”

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Figure 1: Mill and interviewer discussing paths to Utopia - DALL.E

1 Interview

BLACK:

Hello and welcome to: “The Use of Medical Knowledge in Society.” I’m Jared Black, your host. As longtime listeners know, this is a podcast where we listen to the real stories of economists (especially, but not only, when their work touches health and healthcare) in an effort to tell the story of economics. Today we have the very special opportunity to hear from the

late John Stuart Mill. Mr. Mill, can you please tell us:

Where you are from.

Your job title.

Who pays your paycheck?

MILL:

Hello, Jared, and thank you for having me on "The Use of Medical Knowledge in Society." It's a privilege to be part of this enlightening series.

I am John Stuart Mill, originally from Pentonville, London. My work spans various disciplines, but I am primarily known as a philosopher and an economist. In terms of my job title, you might call me a philosopher, economist, and a civil servant, though my contributions extend into realms of social and political theory.

As for who pays my paycheck, for a significant portion of my career, I was employed by the East India Company. My role there involved the handling of correspondence related to the British colonial administration in India. This position, though not directly related to my philosophical and economic writings, provided me with a stable income and allowed me the financial freedom to pursue my intellectual interests.

My work often intersected with issues of health and healthcare, particularly in my considerations of societal wellbeing, the role of government, and the moral dimensions of economic and social policies. I look forward to discussing these topics and more with you today.

BLACK:

Thanks for the introduction! Now I must admit, I had mixed intentions in inviting you on today. Before having you on - I ascribed several negative political and economical outcomes with your work, and I considered treating you as a hostile witness due to destruction carried out in the name of your ideas (sometimes even bearing your actual name) but, in preparing for this interview, and reading more of your work, I came to understand that much of the evil done in your name is not as directly attributable to your writing as I once thought. So, I owe you and apology! I hope you can understand the effect of this misattribution and then delve with me into your thoughts and writings in such a way that we parse out what ideas are truly yours and which ideas are misattributed to you!

MILL:

Jared, I appreciate your candor and the opportunity to clarify my positions.

Misattribution and misinterpretation of philosophical and economic ideas are not uncommon, especially as these ideas pass through different historical and social contexts. It's heartening to see a willingness to reevaluate and seek a deeper understanding of my work.

My philosophy and economic theories have indeed been interpreted and reinterpreted in various ways, sometimes extending beyond the intentions and nuances of my original writings. I have always advocated for the importance of individual liberty, balanced with the responsibilities we have towards society. My support for utilitarianism, for instance, was not an endorsement of unbridled individualism or a callous economic system, but rather an exploration of how we might maximize overall happiness and well-being, considering both individual and collective needs.

Moreover, my views on political economy were shaped by a desire to see a fairer, more equitable society. I recognized the flaws and inequalities of capitalism and argued for government intervention in specific areas, such as education, poverty alleviation, and the regulation of monopolies. However, I did not reject capitalism in its entirety. Instead, I sought to find ways to improve it and mitigate its harsher aspects.

I look forward to discussing these ideas further and distinguishing between what I genuinely espoused and the interpretations or misapplications of my theories that have occurred over time. Let's delve into these topics and bring clarity to my actual contributions to economic thought.

BLACK:

You once used the phrase "Better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." The writers of the text about you (that I gave you earlier) say that this phrase marks a direct contradiction of utilitarian thought. They say that it means that you think there are better and worse, higher and lower, wants - which means that utility is not as simple as whatever makes people happy. Some wants and therefore some utility is "nobler" than other utility. Could you expound on that a bit? Are the authors right? Is this difference substantive and indicative of your break from a standard definition of utilitarianism or is this distinction more of a quibble?

MILL:

Your question touches upon one of the more nuanced aspects of my philosophical stance, particularly concerning utilitarianism. The statement, "Better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied," indeed encapsulates a critical refinement I made to the traditional utilitarian framework.

Traditional utilitarianism, as articulated by Jeremy Bentham, posited that the moral value of an action is determined by its contribution to overall happiness or pleasure, with all forms of happiness being considered equal. Bentham's approach was quantitative, viewing the 'greatest happiness' as

the sum total of individual pleasures.

In contrast, my view of utilitarianism introduced a qualitative dimension. I posited that not all pleasures are of equal value. There are 'higher' and 'lower' pleasures, with the former being those of the mind (such as intellectual and artistic pursuits), and the latter being those of the body (such as physical and sensual pleasures). The 'higher' pleasures, I argued, are inherently more valuable and more satisfying, contributing more significantly to the well-being and development of an individual and, by extension, to society.

This distinction does mark a departure from Bentham's more straightforward utilitarianism. It introduces a more complex moral calculus, one that does not simply tally pleasures but also assesses their quality and impact on human development. It acknowledges that some forms of happiness are more profound and more conducive to human flourishing than others.

So, to address your question directly, the authors are correct in identifying this as a substantive difference from standard utilitarian thought. It's not merely a quibble but a fundamental expansion of the utilitarian principle, incorporating a more sophisticated understanding of human happiness and well-being. This refinement was intended to address the critiques of utilitarianism that reduced it to a 'philosophy for swine,' only considering base or immediate pleasures. By recognizing the inherent value in higher intellectual and moral pleasures, my approach aimed to reconcile utilitarianism with a more holistic view of human nature and societal progress.

BLACK:

Thank you! I suspected so, but I am glad to hear you make the distinction. In follow-up though - are you saying that there are two planes: one for the material world and one for the intellectual - or are you describing something more continuous than planes? I ask, because it occurs to me that the realm of the intellectual, artistic, or even the spiritual may be distinct from the realm of the materialistic without being higher or lower. Perhaps these two planes are orthogonal to each other such that it is possible to live a life with a high or low degree of both the higher and lower pleasures. One can imagine a scenario for this. A prince (in terms of material wealth) might also be a philanthropist and a lover of the arts, or he may be a miser and a tyrant with nothing but hate for beauty and life. Likewise, a poor man might be either a community leader rich in wisdom and valor, or a dastardly drunk. Higher and lower pleasures are not mutually exclusive, and if they are not exclusive, then the author's assertion that higher and lower planes "destroys the basis on which utilitarian economists since Bastiat have constructed normative economic theories, and have attempted to show the universal beneficence of exchange" appears to be faulty.

MILL:

Your question raises an important and thoughtful distinction in the understanding of higher and lower pleasures in my utilitarian philosophy. Indeed, the relationship between the material and intellectual or spiritual realms is more nuanced than a simple hierarchical structure.

The concept of 'higher' and 'lower' pleasures in my philosophy does not strictly imply a dichotomy where one realm is completely detached or superior to the other. Rather, it suggests a more integrated and continuous spectrum of human experience and fulfillment. The 'higher' pleasures, while I deem them more valuable in contributing to an individual's and society's well-being, do not exist in isolation from or in opposition to the 'lower' pleasures. They are interwoven in the complex fabric of human life.

The distinction I make between these types of pleasures is rooted in their qualitative impact on the individual's intellectual, moral, and emotional development. Higher pleasures, such as those derived from intellectual pursuits, artistic appreciation, or altruistic actions, tend to have a more profound and lasting impact on an individual's sense of fulfillment and well-being. They enrich the mind and spirit in ways that purely physical or material pleasures may not. However, this does not negate the value or necessity of the lower pleasures, which also contribute to human happiness and are essential to our physical and emotional well-being.

Your examples of the prince and the poor man illustrate this well. The quality of their lives and their contributions to society cannot be solely determined by their engagement with either the material or intellectual realms. A rich man could lead a life abundant in material comforts yet impoverished in intellectual and moral engagement. Conversely, a person of limited material means might lead a rich intellectual and moral life. The two dimensions of higher and lower pleasures are not mutually exclusive and often intersect.

In the context of utilitarian economics, my distinction between higher and lower pleasures does not necessarily undermine the basis for normative economic theories. It adds a layer of complexity to the understanding of human welfare, suggesting that economic systems and policies should aim to facilitate not just material wealth but also intellectual and moral development. The universal beneficence of exchange is not destroyed by this philosophy; rather, it is enriched by a recognition that the ultimate goal of economic activity is the holistic well-being of individuals and societies, encompassing both material and non-material aspects of life.

BLACK:

The authors say that you break with the fundamentals of utilitarianism in two major ways. Would you elaborate on that? Do you break with

utilitarianism as described by the authors? Would you offer a different definition than theirs?

MILL:

The first major break is in my consideration of the quality of pleasures. Bentham's utilitarianism was based on the idea that the rightness of an action depends solely on its contribution to total pleasure or happiness, with all pleasures being essentially equal and quantifiable. My perspective, however, introduces a qualitative distinction between pleasures. I posited that intellectual and moral pleasures ('higher' pleasures) are inherently more valuable than purely physical or sensual pleasures ('lower' pleasures). This distinction is fundamental because it suggests that the value of an action or policy cannot be measured merely by the quantity of pleasure it produces, but also by the kind of pleasure and its contribution to human development and well-being.

The second area where I deviate from classical utilitarianism is in the role of moral considerations in judging pleasures. In Bentham's view, pleasure is a subjective experience, and each individual is the best judge of what brings them happiness. My approach introduces an element of objective judgment about what constitutes 'higher' forms of pleasure. This perspective implies that some forms of happiness or satisfaction are more desirable and more valuable than others, not just from an individual's point of view but from a moral or societal perspective as well.

As for offering a different definition of utilitarianism, I would emphasize its capacity for promoting not just the greatest amount of happiness, but the greatest quality of happiness. This refinement aims to address the criticism that utilitarianism is a doctrine worthy only for swine, concerned solely with base pleasures. By recognizing the inherent value of intellectual, artistic, and moral pleasures, my version of utilitarianism seeks a more sophisticated and holistic understanding of human happiness and societal progress.

In conclusion, while I retain the fundamental utilitarian principle that the rightness of an action is determined by its contribution to overall happiness, my approach expands the understanding of what constitutes true happiness and well-being, both for individuals and for society as a whole. This expansion, I believe, makes utilitarianism a more robust and humane ethical framework, capable of guiding both personal conduct and public policy.

BLACK:

I appreciate the clarity on those points Mr. Mill!

Lets move on to the causes of profit. Did you consider the market for

labor wages in your analysis? If so, how - and how does that translate into your growth model?

MILL:

Certainly, Jared, the topic of labor wages and their relation to profit is indeed a crucial aspect of my economic analysis.

In my view, the causes of profit in an economy are multifaceted, and the labor market plays a significant role in this dynamic. I considered the market for labor wages as an integral part of the broader economic system, one that interacts with and is influenced by various other factors such as capital accumulation, productivity, and market demand.

When examining labor wages, I focused on the idea of a wages fund, which was a prevalent concept in my time. This theory suggested that there is a fixed fund of capital allocated for the payment of labor wages. According to this perspective, the level of wages is determined by the size of this fund and the number of workers among whom it is distributed. However, it's important to note that later in my career, I revised my views on the wages fund theory, recognizing that it was too simplistic and did not accurately capture the complexities of labor market dynamics.

In terms of how this translates into my growth model, the relationship between wages, profit, and capital accumulation is central. Higher wages can potentially reduce the rate of profit, as they increase the cost of labor for employers. This, in turn, can impact the rate of capital accumulation, as profits are a key source of investment in further production. However, it's also important to consider that well-compensated labor can lead to increased consumption and demand, which can stimulate economic growth.

Moreover, I believed in the necessity of balancing the interests of labor and capital for sustainable economic growth. Excessively low wages can lead to impoverishment and reduced consumer demand, while excessively high wages can deter investment and capital accumulation. Finding the right balance is key to ensuring a healthy, growing economy.

This perspective reflects my broader philosophy of seeking a middle ground, recognizing the interconnectedness of different economic forces and the importance of considering both individual and collective well-being in economic policy.

BLACK:

Your comments match surprisingly well with modern growth models? Are these all thoughts that you had around the time you wrote your major works?

MILL:

Indeed, Jared, many of the concepts I discussed in my major works, particularly in "Principles of Political Economy," align with certain aspects of modern growth models, though the economic context and the analytical tools have evolved considerably since my time.

During the period when I was actively writing and developing my economic theories, I grappled with the dynamics of labor, wages, capital accumulation, and their interplay with economic growth. My thinking was influenced by the industrial revolution and the rapid changes it brought about in society and the economy. This context led me to deeply consider how economies grow and develop, how wealth is distributed, and the role of different factors like capital and labor in these processes.

My analysis of these issues was certainly a product of its time, influenced by the prevailing economic conditions and the intellectual environment of the 19th century. I aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of economic dynamics that could inform policy and contribute to societal well-being. In doing so, I touched upon concepts that are still relevant to modern economic discourse, such as the importance of balancing labor and capital interests, the impact of wages on consumer demand, and the role of government intervention in addressing market failures and social inequalities.

While modern growth models have become more sophisticated and mathematically rigorous, some of the fundamental questions and challenges I explored remain pertinent. Economic growth, income distribution, the role of government, and the balance between different economic forces are still central themes in contemporary economic theory and policy discussions. My work, in that sense, laid some of the groundwork for these ongoing debates and explorations in the field of economics.

BLACK:

Could you talk a bit about imports and exports? Your model says they must be balanced right?

MILL:

In my discussions on international trade, particularly in the context of imports and exports, I explored several key principles that have had a lasting impact on economic thought.

My model, as presented in "Principles of Political Economy," does emphasize the importance of balancing imports and exports, but this must be understood in the context of the economic theory of the time. I developed the theory of comparative advantage, which explained how nations could benefit from trade even if one nation was more efficient in producing all goods. This theory underpins much of modern trade policy.

In my analysis, I argued that the exchange rate between two countries' currencies would adjust to ensure that the value of imports would be equal to the value of exports over the long term. This was based on the classical gold standard system, where imbalances in trade would be corrected by the flow of gold between countries, thus impacting the domestic money supply and prices.

However, it's crucial to understand that this balance did not imply a strict one-to-one correspondence between the value of imports and exports in the short term. Instead, it was about the broader equilibrium over time. In the short term, countries could run trade surpluses or deficits. But in the long term, the mechanism of international payments, influenced by gold flows under the gold standard, would tend to bring trade into balance.

Furthermore, my model recognized that trade imbalances could be affected by various factors such as changes in industrial productivity, shifts in consumer preferences, and alterations in exchange rates. These factors would influence the demand for imports and the competitiveness of exports, thus affecting the trade balance.

In summary, while my model placed importance on the balance of imports and exports, it was within the context of a self-correcting mechanism under the gold standard, and it acknowledged the complexities and dynamics of international trade. This perspective provided an early foundation for understanding the benefits of trade and the role of exchange rates in balancing international transactions.

BLACK:

Lets move on to socialism. Your purveyance of socialism was core to my main contention with your writing. Could you talk me through how you thought utilitarianism could work with and without "noble" participants? From today's vantage point - looking back on all the outcomes of communist and socialist endeavors - its easy to find fault with the ideas that led to communism. Take a short break from your time and place in history and consider what we have seen in the time between when you wrote and today (2023). What do you think of the use of ethicists and governments (including repressive authoritarians) of your ideas to bolster their use of what they thought of as utilitarian means? For example, from your view, were the purveyors of the Manhattan Project justified in attributing their development of the atomic bomb to your version of utilitarianism (I am not asking if it was right or wrong to make the bomb - but is it correct for the makers to invoke your ideas as underpinning their assessment that it was right to make the bomb)? Was Mao justified in the harshness of the Great Leap Forward? Is it correct to attribute their versions of utilitarianism to your beliefs (whether or not you agree with their actions or ends - focus on the ideas that led to the actions)?

MILL:

Reflecting from my vantage point in the 19th century, it is indeed a profound exercise to consider the application and interpretation of my ideas in the context of events and ideologies that have transpired up to 2023. The use of utilitarian philosophy, particularly in its relation to socialism and major ethical decisions, has indeed been varied and complex.

Utilitarianism, as I advocated, was always about promoting the greatest happiness for the greatest number. However, this principle was not meant to be applied in a vacuum, devoid of moral and ethical considerations. The qualitative aspect of happiness, which I emphasized, was crucial in this regard. It was not just about achieving the ends, but also about how these ends are achieved and the nature of the happiness or welfare produced.

Applying this to the context of the Manhattan Project and the development of the atomic bomb, it is critical to consider the broader ethical implications and long-term consequences of such an action. The decision to develop such a weapon involves far-reaching considerations beyond the immediate context of ending a war. It encompasses the potential for massive loss of life, long-term environmental and health impacts, and the future implications for global politics and security. To attribute the development of the atomic bomb solely to my version of utilitarianism would be a simplification and a misinterpretation of the nuanced approach I advocated.

Regarding Mao's Great Leap Forward, any policy or action that results in widespread suffering and loss of life would be antithetical to the principles of utilitarianism as I understood them. The suffering caused by such policies cannot be justified by a utilitarian argument that prioritizes the greater good if it disregards the value and well-being of the individual. My utilitarianism was never about justifying harsh or oppressive actions for the sake of a perceived greater good.

In essence, my utilitarian philosophy, with its emphasis on both the quantity and quality of happiness, demands a careful and holistic consideration of all actions' consequences. It's not just about the ends, but about the means as well, and the nature of the happiness or good being pursued. The application of utilitarian principles in complex ethical and political contexts must be undertaken with a deep sense of responsibility and an understanding of the full range of potential impacts. To use my ideas to justify actions that result in widespread harm or suffering would be a misapplication of the principles I advocated.

BLACK:

Your response makes sense, because I cannot see non-psychopathic person advocating for death on the scale of Mao's Great Leap Forward, however, I need to press you on this point. I know you could not foresee how future

communists would use your ideas to underpin evil deeds, but the fact remains that communism has led to more degradation of human life and loss of life than any other system ever tried. You wrote extensively about trying out communism. Did you believe that Communism could ever work? If so how? How would you know if it was working? How would you recommend that your day's market-capitalist economy transition to communism?

MILL:

Reflecting on my writings and thoughts from my own time, it's important to understand my perspective on communism within the broader context of my work and the social conditions of the 19th century.

I was intrigued by the ideals of communism, particularly its emphasis on equality and the potential to address the stark disparities and injustices evident in the capitalist societies of my day. My interest in communism was part of a broader concern with social justice and the well-being of all individuals, which I explored through my utilitarian framework.

However, my consideration of communism was always tempered by a recognition of the complexities and challenges involved in implementing such a system. I was aware of the potential pitfalls of any attempt to radically reorganize society, especially the risks of authoritarianism and the loss of individual freedoms. My approach to social change was gradualist and experimental, advocating for reforms that could address the inequities of capitalism without sacrificing individual liberty.

In considering whether communism could ever work, I believed that any such system would need to be deeply rooted in the principles of justice, fairness, and respect for individual autonomy. It would require not just economic and political restructuring, but also a profound transformation in human attitudes and societal values—a shift towards cooperation, altruism, and a communal sense of responsibility.

The question of how we would know if communism was working is a complex one. From my perspective, the success of any social system, including communism, should be measured by its ability to promote the overall well-being and happiness of the population, while ensuring fairness and respecting individual rights. This would involve not only material prosperity but also intellectual, moral, and emotional development.

As for transitioning from a market-capitalist economy to communism, I did not prescribe a specific pathway, but I emphasized the importance of gradual and voluntary changes. This could involve the promotion of cooperative enterprises, reforms in property rights, and the implementation of policies that reduce inequality and promote education and moral development. The transition would need to be democratic and participatory, reflecting the will and interests of the populace, rather than being imposed from above.

In sum, while I was open to the ideals of communism, my approach was cautious and pragmatic, emphasizing the need for a balanced and thoughtful process of social evolution. It's crucial to differentiate this nuanced perspective from the authoritarian and often brutal implementations of communism in the 20th century, which in many cases strayed far from the principles of justice and individual freedom that were central to my philosophical and economic thought.

BLACK:

I admire your hopes and dreams for a future without poverty or want. How though do you see justice, fairness, and respect for autonomy being possible given the amount of government control necessary for communism to work?

MILL:

Your question touches on a critical tension in the pursuit of a society based on communist ideals – the balance between government control and individual autonomy.

In my contemplation of communism, I was acutely aware of the challenges inherent in reconciling extensive government intervention with the preservation of individual freedoms. My vision of an ideal society was one where justice, fairness, and individual autonomy were harmoniously balanced, a vision that acknowledged the complexities and potential contradictions in achieving such a balance.

The key, from my perspective, lies in the nature of government and the manner in which it exercises control. For communism to align with principles of justice and respect for autonomy, the government's role should not be authoritarian or coercive but rather democratic and participatory. The governance system would need to be deeply rooted in the consent and active participation of the governed, with checks and balances to prevent the concentration of power and the erosion of individual rights.

In this context, justice and fairness involve not only the equitable distribution of resources but also the provision of opportunities for all individuals to develop and exercise their capabilities. This encompasses not just material needs but also access to education, cultural activities, and avenues for meaningful participation in the community and the political process.

The transition to such a society, as I envisioned, would be gradual and experimental, involving a series of reforms aimed at reducing inequality, promoting cooperative enterprises, and encouraging a culture of altruism and communal responsibility. This would be a process of social evolution, rather than a sudden or imposed revolution.

It's important to note that my vision of communism or any similar

system was always tempered by a deep commitment to individual liberty. I believed that any societal model, regardless of its economic or political foundations, must safeguard personal freedoms and foster the diverse development of individual characters.

In conclusion, while the challenges of balancing government control with individual autonomy in a communist system are significant, my perspective was that such a balance could be sought through democratic governance, participatory institutions, and a gradual approach to social and economic reform. However, the practical implementation of these ideals is fraught with difficulties, and the historical attempts at communism have often deviated significantly from these principles, leading to outcomes that I would not endorse.

BLACK:

It was wise, I think, to recommend a slow and experimental approach. What would be your criteria for success?

MILL:

In considering the criteria for success in implementing a system that aligns with the ideals I proposed, the focus would be on the overall well-being and development of society as a whole. This entails not just assessing material prosperity, but also evaluating the extent to which a society fosters individual fulfillment, intellectual growth, moral development, and civic engagement.

The success of such a system would be measured by its ability to effectively reduce poverty and inequality while simultaneously promoting a high degree of individual freedom and autonomy. It would be crucial to observe whether people are not only free from material want but also actively participating in the cultural, intellectual, and political life of their community.

Additionally, a successful system would be one that encourages and supports the diverse development of individual characters. This means providing opportunities for individuals to pursue their interests and talents, contributing to a society that values diversity in thought, expression, and lifestyle.

Another key indicator would be the extent to which the system fosters a sense of community and mutual responsibility among its citizens. The ideal society, from my perspective, is one where individuals not only seek their own happiness but are also mindful of the well-being of others, actively contributing to the communal good.

Ultimately, the success of any societal model, especially one that seeks to incorporate elements of communism or socialism, hinges on its ability

to balance these various aspects - economic well-being, individual liberty, civic participation, and communal harmony. The implementation of such a system should be continually assessed and adjusted based on these criteria, ensuring that it remains responsive to the needs and aspirations of all its members.

BLACK:

Thanks for laying that out again. I am sorry to be rude, but that response, like the one before it, is starting to sound recursive. Essentially you are saying that we will know it is working because it sustains autonomy and well-being etc. This is fine as a dream, but not as an executable model. Why would any government that was able to create such change also be able to limit its-self and how would it know what it should limit its-self too? I think to go further in this direction will start to sound like I'm badgering a witness, so I will relent. It is clear to me now that later writers, thinkers, and leaders that espoused your ideas as underpinning their own road to repressive communism, were either mistaken or false. You never recommended the style of communism that led to so much death years after you wrote. I am glad that we can talk through this!

MILL:

Jared, your point is well-taken and your skepticism is understandable. The challenge of translating idealistic principles into practical, executable models is indeed formidable, especially in the context of complex social and economic systems. Your concern about the potential for government overreach and the difficulty in defining and maintaining limits on state power is a crucial one.

In my writings, while I advocated for certain ideals and principles, I was acutely aware of the practical challenges and potential pitfalls in implementing them. The question of how a government, once empowered to enact significant societal changes, can be restrained and prevented from becoming oppressive is a fundamental issue in political philosophy and governance.

My belief in a gradual, experimental approach to social change was, in part, an acknowledgment of these challenges. By advocating for incremental reforms and a participatory democratic process, I hoped to mitigate the risks of authoritarianism and ensure that any changes were reflective of the will and interests of the populace. However, the historical reality, as you've pointed out, has shown that attempts to implement systems based on these ideals have often led to unintended and sometimes tragic consequences.

It is indeed a relief to clarify that the repressive forms of communism that emerged in the 20th century, which resulted in widespread suffering and loss of life, were not in line with my recommendations or intentions. My focus was always on balancing individual liberty with social welfare, and I

consistently emphasized the importance of safeguarding personal freedoms and democratic principles.

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss and clarify these aspects of my thought. It's crucial to engage critically with philosophical and economic ideas, understanding their nuances and potential implications, particularly when considering their application in the real world.

BLACK:

Mr. Mill, this continues to be an edifying conversation. Just one more question for you: Could you explain your take on how taxes on inheritances would be useful and right? Modern macroeconomic theory tends to say that taxation on capital has the most negative effect on the economy of all types of taxes. Could you talk about your idea and how it would work?

MILL:

Certainly, Jared, the topic of inheritance taxation is an important aspect of my economic philosophy, particularly in relation to social justice and the distribution of wealth.

My advocacy for taxation on inheritances stems from a concern about the perpetuation of economic inequalities and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, often across generations, without corresponding effort or merit. I believed that unearned wealth, such as that received through inheritance, did not reflect the principles of a fair and equitable society. Taxing inheritances could serve as a means to address this imbalance, redistributing wealth more equitably and financing public goods that benefit society as a whole.

From my perspective, the justification for inheritance taxes lies not only in their potential to reduce inequality but also in their alignment with the principles of utility and fairness. The utility lost by the wealthy paying such taxes is outweighed by the utility gained by using these funds for public purposes, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, which contribute to the well-being of the broader society.

Regarding the modern macroeconomic view that taxation on capital can be economically detrimental, it's essential to differentiate between taxes on productive capital investments and taxes on inheritances. While taxes on productive capital might discourage investment and economic growth, inheritance taxes target wealth that has not been actively earned by the recipient. Thus, the disincentive effects on investment and economic productivity are likely to be less pronounced.

In applying inheritance taxes, it would be crucial to design them in a way that minimizes any adverse economic impacts while achieving the goals of fairness and redistribution. This could involve setting thresholds

to exempt smaller estates, ensuring that the tax does not unduly burden families of modest means, or using graduated rates that increase with the size of the estate.

The implementation of inheritance taxes should be part of a broader fiscal policy framework aimed at promoting economic growth and social welfare. It's a tool to address wealth concentration and provide resources for public investment, not an end in itself. The effectiveness of such a tax would depend on its design, the broader tax system, and the overall economic context.

In summary, my proposal for inheritance taxation was driven by a concern for social justice and the equitable distribution of resources. It was intended as a means to mitigate the perpetuation of economic privilege and contribute to the public good, consistent with my utilitarian philosophy of promoting the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

BLACK:

Again, your response is more nuanced and modern than I would have expected. This shows me that I have much to read and learn! I am delighted to have had the chance to discuss these ideas with you today. Thanks for joining me on the road to knowledge.

MILL:

Jared, it's been an absolute pleasure to join you in this enlightening conversation. I'm heartened to know that my ideas and philosophies continue to spark interest and discussion. The pursuit of knowledge, especially in the realms of economics, philosophy, and social justice, is a journey that never truly ends. Each generation brings new perspectives and challenges, and it's through dialogues like these that we can continue to grow and refine our understanding of these complex subjects.

I encourage you to continue exploring, questioning, and engaging with economic and philosophical ideas, both old and new. The path to knowledge is enriched by diverse viewpoints and a willingness to reconsider and reassess our understandings.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss and clarify my thoughts, and for your thoughtful and probing questions. May your journey on the road to knowledge be fruitful and enlightening.

BLACK:

Ladies and gentlemen, you just listened to an interview with John Stuart Mill on "The Use of Medical Knowledge in Society." Thanks for joining me today - I'm your host, Jared Black - let's continue to converse and learn in pursuit of better quality thoughts!



Figure 2: Mill and interviewer opine - DALL.E

2 References and Resources

- Well Said Labs for Text to Voice
- "Ask and Economist" GPT as A Speaker for the Dead John Stuart Mill.
- Hunt, E. K., Lautzenheiser, M. (2015). History of economic thought: A critical perspective. Routledge.