

Questions of Race in J. S. Mill's Contributions to Logic

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This article is part of a larger project in which I attempt to show that Western formal logic, from its inception in Aristotle onward, has both been partially constituted by, and partially constitutive of, what has become known as racism. In contrast to this trend, the present article concerns the major philosopher whose contribution to logic has been perhaps the most derided and marginalized, and yet whose character and politics are, from a contemporary perspective, drastically superior—John Stuart Mill. My approach to my core concern will be one of narrowing concentric circles. I will begin with Mill's occasional political writings that bear on the issue of racism, including "The Negro Question." From there, the core of the article will explore the political dimensions of Mill's *A System of Logic*.

I. Questions of Race in Mill's Political Activism

In brief, my argument in this first section is that, despite J. S. Mill's complicity with the immoral colonial rule of the East India Company, he was resolutely opposed to chattel slavery and the violent oppression of the black residents of Jamaica, making him a force for racial justice in his era. In this way, Mill stands in stark contrast to a majority of the other central figures in the history of Western logic, including Aristotle (who articulated an infamous theory of natural slavery), Leibniz (who advertised his formal logic to European monarchs as an instrument for forced Christianization of darker-skinned non-Europeans), and Frege (who celebrates anti-Semitic practices in Germany as well as a young Hitler's rise to power).¹ It is this level, of a progressive logician resisting logic's reactionary history, which is my primary concern.

Beginning with Mill's reply to his erstwhile friend, the famous Scottish satirist Thomas Carlyle, I will detail fifteen reasons why Mill deserves to be recognized as racially progressive in his era. In Mill's "The Negro Question," he (1) sacrifices his friendship with Carlyle and exposes himself to public ridicule by attacking Carlyle's racist views, (2) explicitly links

racist claims to violent majoritarian oppression, (3) exposes the religious justifications of racial oppression as a hypocritical façade (despite being persecuted for his atheism), (4) identifies the oppression of its racial minorities as a moral crisis for the entirety of a given society, (5) names transatlantic slavery as the ultimate social evil, (6) mocks and condemns Carlyle's racist rhetoric, (7) insists that the lighter-skinned people of Spain are no more virtuous (or less vicious) than the darker-skinned people of Haiti, (8) passionately denounces Aristotle's theory of natural slavery on behalf of darker-skinned peoples, and (9) offers an Afrocentric theory of Western civilization (and thereby prefigures that of Martin Bernal in *Black Athena*).² In the second text I will consider, "Disturbances in Jamaica," Mill (10) emphasizes the race of the Jamaicans in the context of their oppression, and (11) does so in the context of fighting for two years for these darker-skinned Jamaicans—even though doing so cost him his political career, and even provoked threats to his life. And in the final text I will consider, "The Slave Power," Mill (12) re-signifies the Aristotelian term "barbarism" to instead describe white Westerners, (13) endorses John Elliott Cairnes' linkage of Manifest Destiny to chattel slavery, (14) finds in chattel slavery sufficient evidence that the U.S. is in actuality a tyranny rather than a democracy, and (15) endorses Cairnes' claims that (a) terms such as "barbarian" are inherently racist and (b) anti-black racism profoundly harms white folks too (specifically by making us monstrous). I will now proceed to a more detailed consideration of these fifteen points.

"The Negro Question" is Mill's response to an essay by Carlyle, directed against the "rights of Negroes" (1984: 87). Carlyle's essay was originally published under the title, "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question," but after Mill's attack, he retitled it "The Nigger Question" (1984: 203). As related by Mill biographer and scholar Bruce Kinzer, this exchange of essays ended the friendship between the young scholar Mill and the much-vaunted elder satirist Carlyle.³ In response to Carlyle's assertion that his own claims proceeded from "the immortal gods," Mill asserts that, if "by the quality of the message we may judge of those who sent it," then it was "*not* from any powers to whom just or good men acknowledge allegiance" (1984: 87). It is difficult to imagine the friendship of the two men surviving this sentence alone. This is the first reason, then, to think that Mill was politically progressive in his time.

Mill refers to Carlyle's "message" as merely "the old law of the strongest," according to which "whoever is more powerful than another, is 'born lord' of that other, the other being born his 'servant'" (1984: 87). Here Mill explicitly links racist thinking to violent majoritarian oppression, a second reason to think he was progressive in his era.

Moreover, Mill's judgment amounts to an indictment of a paraphrase of Aristotle's theory of natural slavery, in which that theory is presented as a variant of the theory of justice famously expounded by Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*. In near-blasphemous defiance of this theory—in both a secular (logical) sense and a religious (Christian) sense—Mill asserts that "if 'the gods' will this, it is the first duty of human beings to resist such gods" (1984: 87). Better atheism, for Mill, than the rule of an immoral deity. Anything else, he argues is "*human* tyranny," and human history is "a record of the struggle by which inch after inch of ground has been wrung from" such tyranny, although he acknowledges that "very much of this work still remains to do" (1984: 87). This, then, is a third reason to think that Mill was progressive in his era.

In response to Carlyle's claim that what afflicts the mid-nineteenth century is "the

Disease of Philanthropy,” Mill insists that the specific issue in question, opposition to the slave trade, was never in fact “an affair of sentiment,” but rather the pursuit of “the cause of justice” (1984: 88). His meaning here, presumably, is that the slave trade was not something which merely offended the subjective tastes of a vocal minority, but rather an objective threat to the near-universally-affirmed concept of justice (1984: 88). Thus, foreshadowing the work of critical theorists in the twentieth century, Mill asserts that the problems of racial minorities are the problems of the majority as well—that is, that racial injustice is a symptom of a structural societal injustice, the rectification of which is necessary for the flourishing of all and for the moral redemption of the racial majority. This is a fourth reason to think Mill racially progressive in his day.

Mill then offers the following invective against slavery, one which in its length alone makes clear the intensity of his view:

For nearly two centuries had negroes, many thousands annually, been seized by force or treachery and carried off to the West Indies to be worked to death, literally to death; for it was the received maxim, the acknowledged dictate of good economy, to wear them out quickly and import more. In this fact every other possible cruelty, tyranny, and wanton oppression was by implication included. And the motive on the part of the slave-owners was the love of gold; or, to speak more truly, of vulgar and puerile ostentation. I have yet to learn that anything more detestable than this has been done by human beings in any part of the earth (1984: 88).

Transatlantic slavery is thus the ultimate social evil for Mill. This is a fifth reason he was racially progressive in his era.

Mill then goes on to condemn three specific examples of Carlyle’s own overt racism. Mill begins with Carlyle’s insistence on the necessity of hard work for black people. “That negroes should exist,” Mill remarks, “and enjoy existence, on so little work, is a scandal in his eyes, worse than their former slavery” (1984: 89). In this context, Mill quotes Carlyle’s use of the racial epithet, “Black Quashee,” a term referring to black people in the West Indies and/or particularly worthless black people. (Note that the use of the adjective “Black” is thus semantically unnecessary, and is presumably intended for additional emphasis). In the same sentence, Mill also quotes Carlyle’s complaint to the effect that these black people are “up to the ears in pumpkins”; as well as Carlyle’s contention that these black people should, on the contrary, again be “servants” “to the whites” (1984: 89). Carlyle had argued that the former slaves grow cash crops for export, such as “the noble elements” of sugar and coffee, in order to promote “commerces, arts, polities, and social developments” (1984: 91). But Mill retorts, in anticipation of later animal rights and environmental ethics rhetoric, that “only a vitiated taste can see any such result in those fopperies of so-called civilization, which myriad hands are now occupied and lives wasted in providing” (1984: 91). This explicit and mocking challenge of Carlyle’s racist language is the sixth reason to believe Mill was racially progressive for his day.

Regarding the second example of Carlyle’s racism, Mill addresses Carlyle’s argument that “the whole West Indies belongs to the whites,” retorting that the black West Indians “could have done better without Colonel Fortescue, than Colonel Fortescue could have

done without them” (1984: 92). To Carlyle’s reference to Haiti as “nothing but a tropical dog-kennel and pestiferous jungle,” as a warning against black freedom, “black Peter exterminating black Paul,” Mill asks, “Are we to listen to arguments grounded on hearsays like these?” (1984: 92) On the contrary, Mill challenges, “If the truth were known, how much worse is it [black Haiti] than white Spain?” (1984: 92) Herein lies the seventh reason to think Mill was racially progressive in his era.

As for his third and final example of Carlyle’s racism, Mill analyzes Carlyle’s central argument, punning on St. Anselm’s famous ontological argument for the existence of God (namely, that God is that, than which nothing greater can be conceived). “But the great ethical doctrine of the Discourse [of Carlyle], than which a doctrine more damnable, I should think, never was propounded by a professed moral reformer, is, that one kind of human beings are born servants to another kind” (1984: 92). Mill, as an upper-middle class white man, thus augments his previous attack on Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery with an explicit denunciation of that theory on behalf of lower-class black men and women. This is an eighth reason to think Mill racially progressive in his era.

At the heart of Carlyle’s Aristotelian theory, according to Mill, is “the vulgar error of imputing every difference which he finds among human beings to an original difference of nature” (1984: 93). (The word “nature” here is ambiguous, it is worth noting, and might refer either to the entirety of the natural world or perhaps to something like the essence of an entity). After expounding on scientific arguments against this theory of innateness, Mill offers the following alternative genealogy of Western thought:

It is curious withal, that the earliest known civilization was, we have the strongest reason to believe, a negro civilization. The original Egyptians are inferred, from the evidence of their sculptures, to have been a negro race: it was from negroes, therefore, that the Greeks learnt their first lessons in civilization; and to the records and traditions of these negroes did the Greek philosophers to the very end of their career resort (I do not say with much fruit) as a treasury of mysterious wisdom (1984: 93).

Granted, Mill’s use of “mysterious” here seems problematic, but it seems significant that Mill is comfortable conceding that all humans, and thereby all human civilizations and cultures, descended from black Africans. This is the ninth reason (and the final one from “The Negro Question”) to think Mill racially progressive for his time.

Mill concludes the essay, returning to his own historical era, by reference to “American slavery” and the powerful negative influence he fears Carlyle’s essay may have in that debate. He even goes so far as to agree with another respondent’s condemnation of Carlyle’s essay as “a true work of the devil” (1984: 95). Though this might sound strong, it might help to remember phrases like “Black Quashee” and “up to the ears in pumpkins,” in light of which the charge seems almost mild.

The second text I will briefly consider is that of a speech Mill gave in Parliament entitled “The Disturbances in Jamaica.” The speech pertains to the brutal floggings and public executions of black Jamaicans (and destruction of their homes) by British colonial officials in the aftermath of the 1865 Morant Bay rebellion—even though the Jamaicans were unarmed and many had actually turned themselves in to the authorities. This text is perhaps

less obviously concerned with racism, even though, as mentioned above, “Quashee” can be used to refer to black people in the West Indies in particular, of which Jamaica is a part. More importantly, Mill’s references to the essay in the *Autobiography* make the connection explicit.

The first hint in the direction of the speech’s race relevance is found in Mill’s observation there that “The perpetrators of those deeds [in Jamaica] were defended and applauded in England by the same kind of people who had so long upheld negro slavery.”⁴ One of the issues at stake, Mill discusses more directly, was “justice to” not the Jamaicans, not the former colonists, but “the negroes” (1984: 118). He repeats this racial emphasis later in the same paragraph, noting “abuses of power committed against negroes and mulattoes,” which sounds much like the contemporary legal terminology of “hate crimes” (1984: 118). This is a tenth reason to think Mill racially progressive in his era.

The following is Mill’s account of the events in question, as reported by special commissioners appointed by the House of Commons:

439 of her Majesty’s subjects, men and women, have been put to death, not in the field, not in armed resistance to the Government, but unarmed, after having fallen into the hands of the authorities, many after having voluntarily surrendered to them. A part were executed without any semblance of trial; the remainder after what were called trials, by what were called courts-martial. Besides those who were put to death, not fewer than 600 men and women were flogged, partly without trial, and partly by sentence of the same courts-martial; and about 1,000 houses, besides other property, were destroyed by military violence (1984: 106).

Even though “no one disputes,” as Mill notes in this speech, “that there has been serious culpability,” and even though Mill chaired a voluntary association dedicated to seeking justice in this matter over a period of two years, they were ultimately “searching in vain,” according to Kinzer, “for a grand jury prepared to indict Eyre,” then Governor of Jamaica (1984: 107; 2007: 202). Despite this failure, in the *Autobiography* Mill claims that he nevertheless received “abusive letters” from back home in Britain, which “graduated from coarse jokes, verbal and pictorial, up to threats of assassination” (1964: 119). This is an eleventh reason to think Mill racially progressive in his day.

The final applied political text I will consider here is “The Slave Power,” a review by Mill of a book on U.S. slavery authored by Irish economist John Elliott Cairnes. Mill praises Cairnes at the beginning of the review as “one of the ablest of the distinguished men who have given lustre to the much-calumniated Irish colleges,” thus introducing race/ethnicity, albeit of a different kind, in the second sentence of the essay (1984: 145). Mill also hails Cairnes as “a first-rate political economist,” and declares his own aim as, accordingly, a “mere condensation of his book” (1984: 145). Cairnes’ thesis Mill reproduces as follows:

[T]hat the Slave Power, whose character and aims are the cause of the American contest, is the most formidable antagonist to civilized progress which has appeared for many centuries, representing a system of society at once retrograde and aggressive, a system, which, containing within it no

germs from which improvement can spring, gravitates inevitably towards barbarism, while it is impelled by exigencies inherent in its position and circumstances to a constant extension of its territorial domain (1984: 146).

Note the surprising reversal of the Aristotelian term “barbarism,” now used to describe the ways of Western white people (rather than the ways of ancient Germanic tribes and black Africans). Here, then, a twelfth reason to think Mill racially progressive in his era.

Three moments in Mill’s more detailed summaries of Cairnes’ book are also worthy of attention for the present article. First, according to Mill, Cairnes interprets the carrying out of “Manifest Destiny”—the rapid expansion of the United States westward to the Pacific Ocean—as the direct result of slave-holders seeking ever more fertile land for slaves to cultivate after the initial lands have become barren (due to a lack of crop rotation and sophisticated cultivation). Cairnes offers the specific examples of “the seizure of Texas, the war with Mexico, the buccaneering expeditions to Central America, and the sanguinary contest for Kansas” (1984: 149). In other words, what the United States understood, and has taught successive generations to understand, as its logical and God-given expansion to fill its current territories is for Cairnes directly related to African-American chattel slavery. In endorsing this view, Mill offers a thirteenth affirmation of his (historically) progressive stance on race.

In the second moment of Mill’s more detailed analysis of Cairnes, since in the South “the whole wealth of a country is monopolized by a thirtieth of its population, while the remainder are by physical or moral causes consigned to compulsory poverty and ignorance,” Mill argues that the “variety of interests which springs from the individual impulses of a free population does not here exist” (1984: 151). In short, the “elements of political opposition are wanting” (1984: 151). The “only possible result” of this state of affairs, in turn, is “a despotism, in the last degree unscrupulous and impatient of control, wielded by the wealthy few” (1984: 151). In short, though “under the form of a democracy,” the slave-holding South of the United States was in fact “an uncontrolled despotism” (1984: 151). Thus, the tyranny of American slavery extends all the way to the top of the political ladder, and it stands in stark opposition to true democracy. In this way, again prefiguring critical race theory, Cairnes and Mill interpret racial oppression as sufficient evidence that an entire Western society possesses a completely different (tyrannical) political structure from the one (democratic) that it claims to possess. Here, a fourteenth reason to think Mill racially progressive in his day.

In the third and final moment of Mill’s analyses of Cairnes, Mill summarizes the latter’s position that slavery as a sociopolitical system creates white Western barbarians: “[s]ide by side with these great land and slave proprietors grows up a white *proletariat* of the worst kind, known in Southern phraseology as ‘mean whites’ or ‘white trash’ ” (1984: 150). Cairnes estimates the number of such people at the time of publication at around “five million,” and he describes them as living “in a condition little removed from savage life,” as “at once degraded and dangerous,” as “an inexhaustible source of ruffianism,” and, returning to the Aristotelian term, as “little removed from absolute barbarism” (1984: 150). Here Cairnes (with Mill’s endorsement) points out the relativity of racial terms such as “barbarian” and makes the Du Boisian point that anti-black racism actively harms white folks as well, by making us monstrous. This, then, is the fifteenth and final reason I will give from Mill’s political writings to support his progressiveness vis-à-vis racial justice.

Despite this considerable evidence, however, it is also important to address prominent critiques of Mill on issues of race. Here I will consider two representative examples, namely those of Charles W. Mills and David Theo Goldberg. In regard to Charles Mills, I wish to begin by affirming that I am in wholehearted agreement with his overall project, including his argument for the existence of a racial contract. I also agree, moreover, with a majority of the essay by Charles Mills that I will analyze here, “Modernity, Persons, and Subpersons.”⁵

Regarding the latter, I concur, more specifically, that “racism is most illuminatingly seen as *a normative system in its own right*”—indeed, in the larger project from which the present article is taken, I consider racism to be part and parcel of the system of formal logic (against which Mill’s *System of Logic* takes its defiant stand) (2006: 213). I agree, secondly, with Charles Mills’ endorsements of (a) George Moss’ claim that racism is “a fully blown system of thought” and (b) Gunnar Myrdal’s claim that racism cannot “be denied high qualities of structural *logic* and consistency.”⁶ And I also agree with Charles Mills that Enlightenment liberals (including Mill) saw non-white humans as, at best, “subpersons.”

As Charles Mills rightly observes, however, there are a variety of ethical stances one can take toward a being conceived of as a subperson, as indicated—and again, this is Charles Mills’ own example—by the variety of positions taken toward non-human animals regarded as subpersons. In other words, many (if not most) animal rights advocates do not view non-human animals as full persons vis-à-vis *homo sapiens*. Or, to use another of Charles Mills’ own examples, even the abolitionists of the Underground Railroad considered the slaves they freed to be inferior to themselves. Like J. S. Mill’s view of the people of India, the abolitionists’ view of the slaves (and perhaps even such animal rights’ advocates view of non-human animals) is of course immoral in an absolute sense (or at least by today’s progressive standards). But like J. S. Mill’s view, these (fellow) abolitionists’ view remains a progressive one in the context in which they lived. Indeed, a majority of people today who condemn those historical views would probably (statistically speaking) have been far more racist (than J. S. Mill or the other abolitionists) had they too lived in the nineteenth century.

Moreover, like the other abolitionists and the (arguably anthropocentric) animal rights advocates, J. S. Mill’s perspective constituted the impetus for his militant interventions in the social injustices of his era. And one of these interventions took place within formal logic, in the form of an attack against the majority of logicians in Western history. The latter viewed non-white humans as, at best, morally vicious and inferior to white humans, and at worst, as non-human animals (or even demonic beings). In summary, the difference I find between J. S. Mill and his fellow Enlightenment egalitarian theorists (such as Locke and Kant) is that the latter viewed non-white “subpersons” as inherently negative beings, while J. S. Mill viewed non-white humans as neutral or positive beings (as I have shown above, and will show again below).

Charles Mills anticipates a version of my response, however, in a section of his essay entitled “The Objections of Variations in Degrees of Racism” (2006: 224). On the one hand, I concede that to argue that a thinker such as J. S. Mill is “nonracist” because he “opposed slavery, genocide, or colonialism, or complained about the ill treatment of non-whites” is “to set the bar very low indeed” (2006: 224). On the other hand, bars such as this one are typically raised in a long, slow, and cumulative historical procession. And J. S. Mill’s

clearing of that bar (however low it was in his era) had a direct causal influence on the raising of that bar for his contemporaries, and for successive generations.

In any event, my focus in the present article is not on a final judgment of J. S. Mill as a person, but rather on his fighting the logical fire (of, among others, Aristotle's theory of natural slavery) with logical fire. And the reason for this focus is that I wish to borrow J. S. Mill's fire to continue his fight—in a world where formal logic (including allegedly neutral standardized tests such as the SATs) is still deployed as a weapon for racial discrimination, and informal logic (especially in the form of critical thinking) remains a powerful defense.

The only objection I would make to Charles Mills' characterization of J. S. Mill is found in the final few sentences in the section of his essay on J. S. Mill. There is a slippage there, from Charles Mills' claim that J. S. Mill views non-white humans as "subpersons," to the claim that J. S. Mill views them as "not fully human" (although the phrase "not fully mature" immediately following is correct) (2006: 245). In other words, there can be fully human subpersons, at least from an Enlightenment perspective, according to which various humans are immature subpersons and yet nevertheless possess moral worth (including children and developmentally disabled human beings).

Moreover, Mill's view of non-European peoples in particular as immature subpersons is also shared by many thinkers considered to be at the forefront of racial justice, including Du Bois and Richard Wright. For Du Bois, the immaturity (qua lack of education and socialization) of freed black folks in the wake of chattel slavery justified his preference for the rule of the Freedman's Bureau over black folks' enfranchisement.⁷ And for Wright, the immaturity (qua religious superstitions) of the citizens of the new African nations in the wake of colonialist rule justified his endorsement of patriarchal (or even despotic) tactics for the indigent African leaders.⁸ Although both positions are controversial and problematic, neither can be legitimately oversimplified as equivalent to the racism of, say, the Nazis or the KKK, in part because both of the former positions assume that the subjects in question will necessarily eventually outgrow the paternalism through a kind of maturation. And this is a view which J. S. Mill undoubtedly shared with his fellow progressive theorists of class and race.

I turn now to David Theo Goldberg, whose discussion of J. S. Mill in *Racist Culture* is similar in the abstract to that of Charles Mills, but with several additional problematic elements not present in Charles Mills' discussion. In the first of these, when Goldberg moves from a general critique of utilitarianism to a closer study of its founding figures, he focuses on James Mill and John Stuart Mill to the exclusion of the first founder of utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham. Perhaps Goldberg does so because Bentham's politics, for example in his pro-animal rights and gay rights positions (and the latter in an eighteenth-century text!), undermine Goldberg's criticisms of utilitarianism as inherently politically regressive.⁹

Second, Goldberg's discussions of James Mill and John Stuart Mill repeatedly conflate the two, minimizing the latter's political activism by framing it within James' much more conservative views. As with Bruce Kinzer's recent biographical study, Goldberg's account repeatedly emphasizes John Stuart's connections and similarities to James, while omitting almost all of their crucial differences. These differences begin with James' totalitarian education and socialization of John Stuart—including James' forbidding John Stuart to play with any children his own age. Consequently, when a fourteen-year-old John Stuart spent a few months away from his father in France, he later referred to that period in his autobiography as "*les plus heureux de ma jeunesse* [the most happy of my youth]" (1993: 22). It was

likely for this reason that John Stuart finally recovered from his famous bout of depression immediately upon his father's death.

There are also political analogues to these personal differences between James and John Stuart. For example, when the Mill family moved to France, James commented that "the French people will soon be very quiet & contented slaves, and the despotism of the Bourbons a quiet, gentle despotism," whereas Kinzer observes that "the one thing that could make France an unendurable place for [John Stuart] would be a conviction that the French people had become 'quiet and contented slaves'" (2006: 31). In short, James was domineering as both a parent and a theorist, whereas John Stuart worked continuously to empower disadvantaged groups in his day, including women and the colonized Jamaicans.

Despite such differences, however, Goldberg repeatedly refers to one or both men with just the last name "Mill," which has the effect on the reader of blending these radically different persons into one. In fact, one could almost say that Goldberg makes John Stuart into a subperson yoked to the combination person (James) "Mill." For example, Goldberg's (a) first paragraph on John Stuart begins as follows: "The same paternalistic logic was used by both James and John Stuart Mill"; (b) the second paragraph on him begins with "John Stuart Mill followed his father into colonial service in 1823"; and (c) the final paragraph on him begins "Both James and John Stuart Mill thus viewed natives as children or childlike" (1993: 34–35). By contrast, Goldberg could also have written, for example, that (a) "J. S. Mill opposed his father's misogynistic stance against women's suffrage"; (b) "J. S. Mill rejected his father's ethnocentric elitism in favor of the ethnic equality of the Irish and Scotch"; and (c) "J. S. Mill, unlike his conservative father, sacrificed his own career in Parliament and endured death threats in two years dedicated to rectifying the unjust treatment of black Jamaicans by the British colonizers."

When Goldberg finishes with his personal criticisms of J. S. Mill, he returns to criticizing utilitarianism as a system, wherein I locate a third problematic element in Goldberg's account. To begin, Goldberg criticizes the utilitarian calculus on the grounds that Mill's "civilized" subjects "furnish the criterion of calculation and hence control the outcome," which thereby "facilitates the drive for power and control" (1993: 35). This takes utilitarianism, however, entirely out of its historical/political context, in which it was a radical political movement that successfully eradicated horrendous social injustices in Britain (as depicted in the fiction of, for example, Charles Dickens).

Additionally, and less charitably still, Goldberg endorses the claim of utilitarianism's critics that "nothing in principle save a subject's good intention stands in the way of racially discriminatory or exclusionary undertakings" (1993: 35). On the contrary, to cite just one example, I would argue that Bentham's original seven aspects of pleasure (including intensity and fecundity) provide a conceptual defense against racist exclusion. Moreover, even in the hedonistic calculus' more simplistic version—when applied comprehensively and by a maximally morally imaginative person—it concludes that racist exclusionary practices hurt everyone in a racist society and hurt all future generations. In this way, the calculus and its proponents concur with (among others) Du Bois, who observes that racism is in one regard even worse for the practitioners than for the victims, insofar as it makes the former into "monsters."¹⁰

Thus, I would argue that it is false—given the very nature of the calculus and the empirical realities of racism—that, as Goldberg speculates, "were the calculus of pleasure and

pain to establish it, slavery and severe racist treatment of a minority by a majority would be obliged by utilitarian consideration” (1993: 34). Goldberg anticipates this counterargument, however, and responds that, “as a matter of empirical fact this is questionable” (1993: 34). He does not, however, offer any support for this response. And it seems to me that to admit even the possibility that racism might provide the greatest net happiness amounts to conceding the fight to racism.¹¹

Overall then, critiques such as those of Charles Mills and Goldberg are of course valid in concluding that J. S. Mill was free of neither prejudice nor complicity with the racial immoralities of his era. But this does not erase Mill’s extensive resistance to other forms of racial (and other) oppression, nor does it mean that Mill’s conception of logic cannot be a powerful weapon in the fight against racial injustice today—injustice which continues to be aided and abetted by the formal logic inaugurated by Aristotle and elaborated by Leibniz and Frege. With these two prominent critiques of J. S. Mill on race thus addressed, I now turn to his logic, in which his progressive political values find effective expression in even that most apparently abstract and apolitical branch of philosophy.

II. Questions of Race in Mill’s *System of Logic*

The *System of Logic* was ultimately very popular, a fact which Mill claims he “never thoroughly understood” (2000: 90). He conceived of the project, he writes, as merely “a text-book of the opposite doctrine” of the “*a priori* view of human knowledge, and of the knowing faculties”—the view that certain kinds of knowledge or ways of obtaining knowledge are innate to human beings, and not instead acquired through experience (2000: 90). On this note, Mill writes that “it is hardly possible to exaggerate the mischiefs of a false” philosophy such as the *a priori* one, because according to him it is “the great intellectual support of false doctrines and bad institutions” (2000: 90, 91). More specifically, Mill asserts that there “never was such an instrument for consecrating all deep-seated prejudices” (2000: 91). The language of “instruments” here recalls both the English translation of Aristotle’s *Organon* and also one of the most important quotes in the history of Western formal logic. It will be helpful to describe this quote briefly here, in part because it offers an opportunity to couch my subsequent analyses of Mill against the background of the history of logic to which his *System* self-consciously responds.

In a book on the role of Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery in the Spanish Conquest, U.S. historian Lewis Hanke explains that, in the fateful year of 1492, not only did (a) Columbus set out for his encounter with the American continents and peoples, but (b) “Granada, the last of the Moorish kingdoms, fell to the Catholic Kings Ferdinand and Isabella,” and (c) “the Jews were expelled” from Spain.¹² In other words, three large and dramatic race-events happened all in one year, two of which involved the racial purification of Spain from Jewish and Arab peoples, and one of which involved the precursor to the most widespread racial genocide and assimilation in human history. And as if that were not enough, there was also one more important, albeit much smaller, race-related event in that year. Queen Isabella, Hanke tells us,

bluntly asked the scholar Antonio de Nebrija, as he presented to her his Spanish *Gramática*, the first grammar of a European modern language

every written: “What is it for?”, and the Bishop of Avila, speaking on behalf of the scholar, replied: “Your Majesty, *language is the perfect instrument of empire*” (1970: 8, emphasis added).

It is this last sentence which constitutes the quote about “instrument” to which I previously referred. Note the remarkable (apparent) coincidence. The political expulsion of the Moors, the racial banishing of the Jewish people, and the writing of the first ever modern European grammar, all occurred in the same year.

Moreover, grammar and logic are significantly overlapping concepts, as suggested in part by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). One definition there of “logical” is “That follows as a reasonable inference or natural consequence; that is in accordance with the ‘logic’ of events, of human character.” In this way, the metaphorical meaning of logic, namely the order or structure of a discourse, is incorporated into the literal definition of its adjective. Similarly, one of the meanings of “grammar” there is “The fundamental principles or rules of an art or science” (OED, “grammar”). At this level, then, logic and grammar are nearly identical, in that they are the ordering rules of a discourse or science. In other words, insofar as grammar is the form of language—the ways it structures how expression and thought take place within it—then logic is also the grammar of thought.

Insofar as this is true, then the first modern European grammar was also in a sense the first modern European logic, and what occurred in 1492 amounts to the creation and/or formalization not only of a grammar—but also a logic—with which to conquer and subjugate entire nations and races. In that way, logic not only *is*, but is *self-consciously developed and presented as*, a weapon of war. The Spanish did not depend absolutely on the new grammar in order to speak or write Spanish, because they were learning from native speakers in their own homes and families. But with regard to the anticipated new subjects of the Spanish empire, such an invention could conceivably be extremely effective, because adopting the conqueror’s language is both critical to the assimilation of the conquered civilization per se and also facilitates conversion to the conqueror’s religion, which is perhaps equally important for such assimilation.

The problem, to return to Mill, is that the “chief strength” of such an instrument “lies in the appeal which it is accustomed to make to the evidence of mathematics” (2000: 91). For example, this is exactly how Leibniz represents his own attempt at a mathematical formal logic (his *characteristica universalis*). In a phrase that could almost be a verbatim quotation from Bishop Avila’s answer to Queen Isabella, Leibniz asserts in his “Preface to a Universal Characteristic (1678–79)” that “nothing is more effective for the propagation of the faith than this invention [his *characteristica universalis*], except for miracles and the holiness of an Apostolic man or the victories of a great monarch.”¹³ In other words, when one encounters the (almost inevitably darker-skinned indigenous) people, there is no better way (aside from outright warfare) to “whiten” them than to use the universal characteristic. If, as Avila asserted, “language is the perfect instrument of empire,” then the perfect language of the universal characteristic would be an even more perfect instrument thereof. Leibniz elaborates in the next sentence as follows:

For wherever missionaries can once introduce this language, the true religion, the religion entirely in agreement with reason will be established

and in the future apostasy will be feared no more than we fear that people will condemn arithmetic or geometry, once they have learned it (1995: 9).

Just as there is a “true logic” for Leibniz, so there is one “true religion” that corresponds to it, and what is more, the latter can be promulgated and sustained by the former. Logic, expressed in the universal characteristic, is the ultimate weapon in the war for souls. It is the one way to destroy the enemy’s ability to fight back, to disagree and challenge the orthodoxy.

Returning again to Mill, and having thus considered the *System of Logic*’s inspiration, motives, and target, I now turn to a close reading of it. Mill’s “Introduction” begins by noting that there have been “a great diversity” of ways of defining logic, and that these ways have sometimes been used “to beg the question in their favor” (2000: 1). The fallacy of begging the question, or *petitio principii*, is often classified as a form of informal reasoning fallacy involving presumption, and it involves either (a) leaving out a key premise in the argument, (b) restating a premise as the conclusion, or (c) reasoning in a circle. It is important to understand this fallacy here because it foreshadows Mill’s claim in Book II that every syllogism—the Aristotelian form of formal reasoning dominant until Frege—necessarily commits this fallacy. In all three forms of the fallacy, what is at issue is the mere appearance of an inference from the premises to the conclusion, while in actuality the premises already contained the conclusion from the beginning. In other words, it is a stacking of the argumentative deck, and is thus not truly logical at all. One good example of this would be the standard racist argument in which “Everyone knows X’s are bad” (conclusion) because they’re obviously bad (premise). To return to the above quote from Mill, it is thus saying that most so-called formal logic before him was not even logic at all. Real logic for Mill “neither observes, nor invents, nor discovers; but judges” (2000: 9). Logic does not “give [the thinker] proofs, but teaches what makes them proofs,” and is thus, with Bacon, “*ars artium*: the science of science itself” (2000: 9).

Thus oriented, Mill proceeds to Book I, “Of Names and Propositions.” Mill’s aforementioned self-proclaimed conversion to realism notwithstanding, the end of the first chapter asserts that with regard to names, “mankind have multiplied the varieties unnecessarily, and have imagined distinctions among things where there were only distinctions in the manner of naming them” (2000: 22). Race, of course, could be one of these things. The reader is thereby put on guard, so to speak, against treating apparent classifications of human beings as reflecting actual differences in reality. The first two examples of such potentially racially relevant distinctions appear in Chapter Two, section two, and are as follows: “Snow is white,” and “White is an agreeable color” (2000: 25). Mill’s sensual/affective reactions to whiteness are thus put on display. Or perhaps this is intended as a subtle mockery of the prominence of whiteness in primary texts in the history of Western formal logic (such as Aristotle’s *Organon* and many of its medieval commentaries). A brief consideration of the latter will help illustrate the significance of Mill’s use of color examples throughout the *System of Logic*.

The story begins with Aristotle, whose *Categories* (the first book of his logical texts, or *Organon*) begins a pattern of privileging the example of whiteness linked syntactically to positive attributes, and blackness linked to pejorative attributes. As I explore elsewhere, it is

plausible that Aristotle was (perhaps unconsciously) attempting to persuade his ethnically Ionian Athenian students to see him as a similarly light-skinned Macedonian Greek ally—as opposed to the comparatively darker-skinned Persians. As this provides the background context for Mill's use of color terms, and justifies the significance of that usage, I will now consider it in greater detail.

The first two examples in the *Categories* both involve the pairing of a man and a white animal (specifically an ox), and the third example involves knowledge and bravery. Chapter Two then repeats this pattern of examples almost identically, in that 1a20 moves in its examples from “man” to “white” to “knowledge-of-grammar.”¹⁴ Chapter Four's initial presentation of the categories, similarly, lists as its first example of substance, “man,” and as its two examples of quality, “white, grammatical,” and it finishes with four uncombined words—“‘man,’ ‘white,’ ‘runs,’ ‘wins’” (1938: 5). Chapter Five, at 2a19, again offers the two examples of “man” and “white” in sequence, and at 2b29 there is a pair of examples, “man” and “animal,” followed by “white” and “runs” (1938: 7–8). Again at 3b10 Aristotle begins the passage with “man” and moves on to “white” (1938: 9–10).

In further support of these connections, in Chapter Five of the *Categories*, at 3b33, while discussing how substance “does not admit of a more and a less,” Aristotle offers the following example: “For one man is not more a man than another, as one pale thing is more pale than another and one beautiful thing is more beautiful than another” (1938: 10). Here, as Aristotle broaches the issue of degrees and continua, one finds a triadic linkage of “man,” “pale,” and “beautiful.” Note further that, although substance for Aristotle cannot admit of degrees (and so no one man can be better than another in terms of his being a man), one man can still be better than another in terms of being whiter, and perhaps thus more beautiful.

In further support of this claim, the next paragraph, beginning at 4a10, begins to discuss “contraries,” the first example for which is Aristotle's first usage in this text of the word “black.” Technically speaking, then, and irrespective of any significance one might find therein, Aristotle introduces blackness into the *Categories* as a later derivative of whiteness, as something which is defined only in contrariety to whiteness. Whiteness, on the other hand, first appears three chapters earlier, in the second chapter of the book, in his very definition of the subject, which is to say, man.

Even more powerfully connotative of racism, here, is the fact that this first appearance of the word “black” coincides with the first appearance in the *Categories* of explicitly ethical language.¹⁵ “For example,” Aristotle writes, “a colour which is numerically one and the same will not be black and white, nor will numerically the same action be bad and good” (1938: 11). Following the ordering here, “black” pairs with “bad,” “white” pairs with “good,” and the twain do not meet. One is either black or white, and either bad or good, so perhaps, by implication, one is either black-and-bad or white-and-good.

The next paragraph (at 4a22) then undermines the idea that this syntactic linkage is merely accidental, because even though Aristotle scrambles the ordering of adjectives here (relative to the previous example), with “cold instead of hot, or dark instead of pale, or good instead of bad,” either Aristotle or Ackrill (as translator) also substitutes “pale” and “dark” for “white” and “black.” Perhaps there is a suggestion here that, although paleness and badness can coexist (as can darkness and goodness), in both cases there is at least the possibility (if not the outright suggestion) that whiteness and blackness must therefore have

first been diluted to produce the paleness and darkness. In other words, perhaps the goodness of the dark (as opposed to the pure black) comes only from its participation in whiteness, while the badness of the pale (as opposed to the pure white) comes only from its participation in blackness.

Finally on this note, Aristotle also draws the *Categories* to a close with three final examples which syntactically link, on the one hand, whiteness to humanity, and on the other, blackness to immorality. First, in 10a27, “paleness” “the grammatical” and “the just” are strung together, thereby linking whiteness, knowledge, and virtue. Second, in 10b12, the discussion is elaborated by noting that “justice is contrary to injustice and whiteness to blackness,” as a result of which justice is paired with whiteness and injustice with blackness. Third and last, 10b26 has for its four examples “paler,” “more grammatical,” “juster,” and “healthier,” again linking whiteness, knowledge, virtue, and health (1938: 29).

This color/racism connection is further strengthened by Aristotle’s deployment, elsewhere in the *Categories*, of color terms in proximity to the racially charged topic of slavery. In Chapter Seven, at 6b28, early in his discussion of the category of relatives, Aristotle again uses examples with potential race connotations. “For example, the slave is called the slave of a master and the master is called master of a slave” (1938: 18). Aristotle elaborates on this example when he discusses the importance of naming correctly that to which a thing is said to be relative.

Suppose a slave is given as *of a man* and a wing as *of a bird*, and strip off from man his being a master; a slave will no longer be spoken of in relation to a man, for if there is not master there is no slave either. Similarly, strip off from bird its being winged (1938: 20).

Here the slave is implicitly compared to the wing of the bird, a mere part of a body which is lifeless (and even meaningless) apart from its organism; while on the other hand, the master could still be a man without the slave, just as the bird could still be a bird without one of its wings.¹⁶ In other words, and as with the aforementioned first appearance of “black” in the *Categories*, the slave, unlike the man, is defined by Aristotle and exists only in relation to something else. Take mastery away from a man and he is still a man, but take slavery away from the slave and s/he is nothing, because the master is essentially man and only incidentally master, but the slave is essentially slave.

Overall, then, the examples of whiteness and blackness in Aristotle’s *Categories* (and elsewhere in the *Organon*) are more prevalent, and deployed more strategically, than can plausibly be explained away as mere chance, and it is against this significant background that Mill self-consciously deploys his own logical examples in the *System of Logic*, including those involving color.

In contrast to the anti-black, pro-slavery rhetoric of Aristotle’s logical texts, the next example in Mill’s progressive logical textbook is openly subversive, including among examples of the universal “man” the name “Mary,” along with the more predicable “John, Peter,” and “George” (2000: 27). Although section four begins with the stereotypical syntactic linkage of “Whiteness” and “Man,” it continues with the novel introduction of a third specific color to the logical color matrix, as well as an indefinite indicator of other possible colors, with the phrase “whiteness, redness, &c” (2000: 29, 30).

To be precise, this marks the first time in Western history (to the best of my knowledge) that a major innovator in formal logic has used any colors other than whiteness and blackness as examples. Throughout the Medieval period, for example, one sees the same examples rehearsed over and over—and always in proximity to problematic political content involving darker-skinned “barbarians” and “savages.”¹⁷ Perhaps with Mill’s novel introduction of “red” here he is thinking of the skin color traditionally attributed to Native Americans, or of the blood of warfare. After referring to these color-names, Mill then goes on to emphasize their superficiality by noting, as an example, that “what we affirm to *be* whiteness is not snow but the colour of snow” (2000: 31).

One of Mill’s next examples of naming is particularly interesting for this investigation, and therefore worth quoting at length:

For example, if in the interior of Africa there were to be discovered a race of animals possessing reason equal to that of human beings, but with the form of an elephant, they would not be called men. Swift’s Houyhnhms were not so called. Or if such newly-discovered beings possessed the form of man without any vestige of reason, it is probable that some other name than that of man would be found for them (2000: 32).

In fact, Jonathan Swift, the famous Anglo-Irish satirist and author of *Gulliver’s Travels*, in which the Houyhnhms appear, also had a name for the other beings, the “Yahoos.” Since Mill was familiar with the Houyhnhms by name, he was presumably also familiar with the Yahoos, which is easier to spell, and therefore had some deliberate reason for not naming them here. Perhaps his intention was to intimate a group of people who already do live in the interior of Africa, and who have already been given various names other than “man.” The most famous of these, of course, is the same word that appears in the revised title of Carlyle’s essay.

It also seems potentially significant that Mill refers in this passage to the Houyhnhms as a “race” of animals, instead of using the more obvious choice of words in relation to animals, i.e., “species.” Perhaps Mill is trying to bring to the reader’s mind the racial classification of human beings. One final reason racism may be in Mill’s mind here is that the title hero of *Gulliver’s Travels*, upon encountering the Houyhnhms, immediately divides them into a complex hierarchy based on their color, which could be an attempt by Swift to suggest European reactions to darker-skinned peoples around the world. And if any of these insights are true, then Mill is intentionally calling to the reader’s mind, in the first book of his treatise on logic, the phenomenon of racial epithets.

In the next numbered section, Mill again takes the side of a human formed in such a way as to be denied humanity by white people, “the robber in the Arabian nights,” and uses the robber as an example of the way that all humans use names to remember and communicate things. Within this section, Mill returns to the Houyhnhm theme of human form explicitly, observing that “the word *man*, besides animal life and rationality, connotes also a certain external form,” and that “it has never been settled what is the lowest degree of that quality which would entitle any creature to be considered a human being” (2000: 39). This lowest degree could exclude, for example, children, developmentally delayed persons, and, of course, darker-skinned peoples the world over.

Mill's first explicit contrast of blackness and whiteness does not come up until well into this first Book, within a larger discussion of relations, and as an example of "Likeness and Unlikeness" (2000: 74). Unlike his predecessors in the history of formal logic (including Aristotle, various medieval logicians, and Leibniz), Mill offers no positive or negative connotations to this difference, and instead even goes so far as to compare the likeness/unlikeness relation to the way that "one person mimics another" through things like "bodily postures" and the "choice of words" (2000: 75). The connotation of mimicking is artificiality, posing, and performance, which suggests that likeness, too, in the (perhaps hypothetical) case of a racial division based exclusively on skin color, is ultimately superficial and malleable. (To whatever degree other, more substantial factors than merely skin color are involved in a racial division, however, the concept of likeness might be less superficial and malleable). Along just such lines, Mill later claims that "likeness and unlikeness" are ultimately not actual states of bodies, but merely "states of consciousness," which suggests that differences in color—like the skin color involved in racial prejudice—might originally have been not only superficial, but also primarily psychological (2000: 79). (It is important to note, however, that in the development of individuals and the histories of communities, in the embodiment of stereotypes and solidarity of shared difference, these distinctions—whatever the nature of their origin—can become ultimately and currently meaningful and important).

After introducing into the logical palette yet another new skin color, "copper-coloured," Mill offers a brief but explicit account of race, which buttresses my claim that the preceding discussions of the Houyhnhms and likeness were intended to suggest the arena of race (2000: 100). This account is prefaced by a discussion of classifications beneath the species level, using the example of Isaac Newton. Newton, Mill explains, belongs not only to the species "man," but also to the "distinct classes" of "Christian, and Englishman, and Mathematician," (2000: 139). The latter terms, however, Mill asserts, are "not, in our sense of the term, distinct Kinds of men" (2000: 139). All the same, he acknowledges, such distinctions may nevertheless mark "different Kinds, or logical species of men," and these would also include the "various races" (2000: 140).

Against the possibility that people of different races are different logical species, however, Mill argues—and in doing so is obviously far ahead of his own time—that

in the progress of physiology it may almost be said to be made out, that the differences which really exist between different races, sexes, &c., follow as consequences, under laws of nature, from a small number of primary differences which can be precisely determined, and which, as the phrase is, *accounts for* all the rest. If this be so, these are not distinctions in kind, no more than Christian, Jew, Mussulman, and Pagan, a difference which carries many consequences along with it (2000: 140).

A paraphrase of this suggestion, framed in light of contemporary genetics, might be that gender and so-called racial differences are the results of tiny variations in DNA or genotype that express themselves as comparatively much more dramatic differences in physical appearance or phenotype. Note also that Mill is here resisting the trend in the history of formal logic of emphasizing essential differences among religious groups, likely in order

to mask lingering racism against the people who make up large percentages of those religious groups. Mill acknowledges religious differences as meaningful, carrying “many consequences,” but refuses to concede that this is grounds for their being understood as different kinds of human beings. In short, neither explicit racism nor implicit racism veiled by religious dogmatism finds a hospitable environment in Mill’s text.

But even if this suggestion about genetics were proven wrong, according to Mill, the only implication would be that the different races would merely “be entitled to be ranked as species by the logician; though not by the naturalist” (2000: 140). This addendum makes it clear that Mill’s argument does not depend in any way on the above block quote. Therefore, he must have offered the addendum for some reason not directly related to his primary argument. That reason, perhaps, is to do some political work toward undermining the reader’s potentially racist views. Also significant is that this hierarchy—which makes logical species into less metaphysically “deep” or “real” things than biological species—thereby reverses the traditional priority and power given to logic vis-à-vis all other disciplines and parts of reality. For example, logical impossibility is usually understood to be more rigorous than metaphysical impossibility, which is itself understood to be more rigorous than physical impossibility, which is understood to be more rigorous than psychological impossibility. In short, Mill again finds a way to uplift darker-skinned peoples while simultaneously undermining traditional logic.

Mill makes the perhaps even bolder move, two numbered sections later in this chapter, of challenging the uniqueness and superiority of the (Aristotle-inspired) definition of “man” as “the rational animal.” Mill notes that “in the Linnaean system,” the word “man” “connotes [refers to] the number of incisors and canine teeth, but does not connote rationality nor any particular form” (2000: 146). Additionally, in the next paragraph, Mill turns to what may be the first deconstruction of whiteness qua whiteness in the history of Western formal logic, thereby performing a perfect reversal of the previously discussed rationality-whiteness syntactic linkage otherwise omnipresent in the historical textbooks by the creators of Western formal logic.

The word “whiteness,” Mill observes, “connotes nothing,” and “we may define it as ‘the colour produced by the mixture of all the simple rays’ ” (2000: 147). As I describe in detail elsewhere, the medieval logician William of Ockham offers the first breakdown of the quality of whiteness within an organism by speaking of having more or fewer “parts” of whiteness. Here, Mill goes even further, breaking down *whiteness* into something that has parts. This means that, for the first time, whiteness is not pure, simple, or a logical primitive (like the idea of God for Leibniz). Instead, white is the result of a process, the product of every single ray of light, and is therefore the exact opposite of a pure color. It is, on the contrary, the most heterogeneous of all colors. The second-to-last sentence in Mill’s chapter seems to reinforce this point, noting that “the colour of a European is one of the separable accidents of the species man, because it is not an attribute of all human creatures” (2000: 150). Some humans—and remember that, sadly, this is still a contentious claim in Mill’s day—are non-white.

The final chapter of Book I, “On Definitions,” reiterates almost all of the above points, as follows: (a) that “whiteness” connotes nothing, (b) that “whiteness” refers most properly to the sensation of white excited in an observer, (c) that “rational animal” is an inadequate definition of “man” in light of the example of the Houyhnhms, (d) that alternate

classification systems for humans exist (such as, in this case, Cuvier’s “Man is a mammiferous animal having two hands”), and (e) that logicians are not to be trusted when it comes to biological classification (as, in this case, with the following definition of an elephant offered by British mathematician and logician Augustus De Morgan, of “De Morgan’s Laws”: “An animal that naturally drinks by drawing the water into its nose, and the spirting it into its mouth”) (2000: 153, 155, 156, 158, 162).

My final examples from Mill’s *System of Logic* concerning racism are found in Book II, “On Reasoning,” in Chapter Two, “Of Ratiocination, or Syllogism.” The first such example is found in his third concrete example of syllogistic form, and goes as follows:

No one who is capable of self-control is vicious;		
All negroes	}	are capable of self-control
Some negroes		
Mr. A’s negro		
therefore		
No negroes	}	necessarily vicious
Some negroes are not		
Mr. A’s negro is not		

Mill’s next example, on a similar note, concludes with the claim, again contrary to much popular opinion, that “Some pagan was virtuous” (2000: 193).

Having thus defended the virtue, and thereby humanity, of the two (non–mutually exclusive) classes of black people and non-Christians, Mill later makes a similar move with regard to a third class, to which both of these previous classes are often thought to belong. “The savage,” Mill asserts, “who executes unerringly the exact throw which brings down his game, or his enemy . . . owes this power to a long series of previous experiments, the results of which he certainly never framed into any verbal theories or rules” (2000: 212). Though this might sound like a racist denial of thought or verbal expression, it is borne out by, for example, traditional Cherokee bow-and-arrow hunting, which involves a training of the body without consciously aiming at the target.

In further support of my claim that there were explicit anti-racist intentions behind these examples in Mill—and particularly in terms of the color terms “white” and “black”—I will now close this section of the present article with an intriguing metaphor from one of Mill’s personal letters (as quoted in Kinzer):

The great instrument of improvement in men is to supply them with the other half of the truth, one side of which only they have ever seen: to turn round to them the white side of the shield, of which they seeing on the black side, have cut other men’s throats & risked their own to prove that the shield is black (2006: 61).

To spell this out, Mill is claiming that (a) each combatant has a shield, (b) every shield is black on the inside and white on the outside, but (c) never having seen the outside, (d)

each believes his shield to be black all over and is (e) willing to fight with the adversary—which is (f) everyone outside of him—to (g) defend that belief. What are needed, Mill argues, are broader perspectives, open-mindedness, and most of all the willingness to imagine the perspective of the other. (Note also this repetition of the rhetoric of “instrument,” noted above in connection to the first European grammar as an “instrument of empire”).

One could interpret Mill’s metaphor in the above quote as suggesting that, in a sense, everyone is both white *and* black, although we all label everyone else as the opposite of what we are, with the result being needless bloodshed. In short, color relations are relative, socially constructed, and involve political power rather than biological group characteristics. There is a reason, in other words, why we talk about narrow-minded and prejudicial thinking as “black and white” thinking.

III. Conclusion: Logic and Politics

Mainstream philosophers, including logicians, have tended to regard the flaws of their forerunners as peripheral to their philosophical pursuits, as “peccadilloes,” and as meaningless indicators that they were “creatures of their times.”¹⁸ The idea that Aristotle’s endorsing of slavery is irrelevant for his philosophy, or at least his logic, is widely accepted (outside of nonconformists such as John Dewey and critical race theorists). However, if we as philosophers wish to be relevant for our world, we must take seriously the concerns of the larger audiences that we attempt to reach. And those audiences are interested in philosophy’s social and political dimensions, its history, and its claims in even an area as apparently abstract as logic.

It is important to note that various discourses have gone by the name of “logic” over the millennia, and that the definition of that word, when a definition is even actively pursued, has always been controversial and contested. The suggestion I wish to make is that some of the major reasons animating this debate have been, and continue to be, political ones. To put it as a question, and in closing, what are the real reasons that formal logic allegedly seeks a completely precise, clear, and value-free language in which to conduct disciplined inquiry? And why has the pursuit lasted for so long and into the present?

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Notes

1. For an interesting contrast, however, see the politically progressive logical work of the Stoics, who opposed both gender and racial oppression. See, for example, the historical discussions in Paul Herrick's *Introduction to Logic*.
2. See Martin Bernal's *Black Athena Writes Back: Martin Bernal Responds to His Critics*.
3. Quoted in Bruce Kinzer, *J. S. Mill Revisited: Biographical and Political Explorations*, 61.
4. See John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, 117.
5. In editors Joseph Young and Jana Evans Braziel, *Race and the Foundations of Knowledge*, 211–51.
6. See George Moss's *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*, and Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (both quoted in Mills 222).
7. See W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, especially Chapter 2, "Of the Dawn of Freedom," 15–42.
8. See Richard Wright's "The Miracle of Nationalism in the Ivory Coast," in *Black Power*, 775–812.
9. See Jeremy Bentham's "Offences Against One's Self."

10. See, for example, Du Bois at 240.
11. Moreover, this admission might even imply an unconscious residue of racism in oneself, in the form of the fear that racism might actually be warranted and true to some degree after all. That is, racism only creates a net greater happiness for all sentient beings if it condemns the objectively inferior to an inferior status, whereas if all races are in fact equal, then an unequal social arrangement necessarily produces irrational and unjust outcomes. This would be an understandable doubt, especially for persons of color living under anti-black racism (as Du Bois himself admits), but that does not mean it should be taken seriously in an argument over the value of the utilitarian calculus.
12. Lewis Hanke's *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World*, 8.
13. See Leibniz's *Philosophical Writings*, 9.
14. Aristotle's *Categories*, 4.
15. For an intriguing discussion of the metaphorical racial connotations of color terms, see Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*.
16. I am indebted for this insight to my undergraduate student, Alex Sussman, as presented in his essay on potentially politically problematic examples in Aristotle's *Categories* and *On Interpretation*.
17. See, for example, Paul Vincent Spade's *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals*.
18. See Richard Mendelsohn's introductory remarks to Frege's diary, 303–43.

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