

# Universalism, Absolutism, Liberalism, Elitism, Essentialism, and Prejudice

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*In this paper, I intend to discuss and evaluate the debate between Bhikhu Parekh and Georgios Varouxakis regarding the role of race in the philosophy and policy of John Stuart Mill; in particular, criticizing Parekh's attribution of what I term "cultural elitism" as an essential characteristic of liberalism. I will then further examine the accusation that Mill may be racist in light of the phenomenon which John McConahay and Joseph Hough call "symbolic racism". Finally, I will present a detailed description of my analysis of the relations between moral universalism, moral absolutism, liberalism, cultural elitism, racial essentialism, and racial prejudice, and the implications of them all on both domestic and foreign policy.*

For an initial definition of racism, with which I am largely inclined to agree, I defer to George M. Fredrickson, who writes most succinctly in *Racism: A Short History*: "It is when differences that might otherwise be considered ethnocultural are regarded as innate, indelible, and unchangeable that a racist attitude or ideology can be said to exist." (Fredrickson 5). In other words, racism is not merely the feeling that 'you are different from me and I strongly dislike you for that' which constitutes racism. Fredrickson calls that merely "xenophobia" (Fredrickson 6), from Greek, meaning a fear of the strange, alien, or other. Further, racism is not even a position that such dislike of the 'other' is grounded on some objective inferiority of their culture (or conversely, some superiority of one's own). That, Fredrickson suggests, might more properly be called "culturalism" (Fredrickson 7); the position that one culture is objectively superior to all others, and thus that members of other cultures are in the wrong wherever they differ. Rather, racism, as Fredrickson understands it, only exists in the feeling that 'you are *innately* and *permanently* different, and thus are *innately* and *permanently* inferior'; a sense of biological or cultural determinism which inalterably classifies people as fit for different social strata

(Fredrickson 6), or in some cases, as unfit to exist at all.

John Stuart Mill does not concern himself with race as such, in this essentialist sense, instead focusing on the cultural characteristics which he calls “civilization”. He does, however, relate the various peoples of the world to various stages of civilization, and does so in an anthropologically sloppy and racially prejudiced way, broadly categorizing all Europeans as civilized and all non-Europeans as uncivilized. In this respect I must agree with Parekh that Mill had very poor methodology regarding history and anthropology in general (Parekh 88); but as Mill never claims that such distinctions in civilization between Europeans and non-Europeans are due to any essential nature, and in fact implies quite the opposite in his program to bring civilization to non-Europeans, Mill cannot be properly considered a racist by Fredrickson’s definition. But that does not necessarily get Mill off the hook, morally speaking, for he still advocates many morally reprehensible policies in the name of what he considers “civilization”.

To Mill, civilization is most importantly understood as a prerequisite for self-government, in that the self-discipline that is core to civilization solves the problem of the masses. That is to say that Mill believes that a populace which is not so self-disciplined will decay into social and economic ruin if discipline is not imposed from outside (Mill 414-415); and so in order to warrant allowing people to be free from such external imposition of discipline, those people must be able to discipline themselves — in other words, they must become civilized. Thus, as democracy “lowers the eminences” to the common level, civilization must “raise the plains” of that common level (Mill 126), lest the process of democratization merely lower everyone altogether and bring that society to ruin. But as regards race and civilization, Mill does not see this self-discipline as an essentially European characteristic. According to Mill, Europeans are merely historically lucky to have become civilized; they were the right people in the right circumstances at the right time. Further, Mill holds that Europe is still (at the time of his writing) not completely civilized, with vestiges of barbarism still lingering in the old feudal

structures; and further still, that this process of civilization is not manifest destiny for the western world, but could still be stalled or even reversed by conservative interests, if liberal-minded people are not careful. Thus Mill seems not to be essentialist in his notions of civilization, holding that it is simply a certain (albeit superior) way of life which is not inherently European, but potentially open to anyone; and so Mill cannot properly be called a racist, if we are to understand racism (as Fredrickson does) as inherently essentialist.

I feel that Varouxakis does an excellent job of demonstrating conclusively that Mill is not, in this essentialist sense, a racist, in chapter 3 of his text *Mill on Nationality*; thus, I will not reproduce the efforts of his entire work here. Instead, I intend to focus on that which I feel Mill may rightly be accused of, namely, cultural elitism. In *Mill on Nationality*, Varouxakis claims that in Mill's day, 'race' was used roughly synonymous with 'culture' or 'ethnicity', and did not imply adherence to the doctrine of racial essentialism (Varouxakis 39). Fredrickson speaks similarly in *Racism*, claiming that often "culture do[es] the work of race" (Fredrickson 141) and that non-essentialist discrimination can still be an "attitude that often creates conflict and misery" (Fredrickson 7). So I will focus here mainly on the issue of cultural elitism rather than racism per se; specifically, on Parekh's accusations that it is inherent to liberalism. I will argue instead that liberalism and elitism are, as they should seem on the surface, antithetical to each other, and that any elitism on the part of a purported liberal such as Mill demonstrates not any entailment of elitism by liberalism, but rather a compromised, unprincipled, or merely utilitarian application of liberal principles by Mill.

Parekh claims that liberalism, despite its claims to value diversity, in fact cherishes only a very limited range of diversity, in particular that within the scope of modernism, secularism, industrialism and individualism, ruling out many traditional, customary, or communitarian ways of life (Parekh 94). However, I must respond that true liberalism rules out only the *enforcement* of traditions, customs, and communitarian rule. People within a truly liberal society are free to

adhere to traditions and customs if they individually choose to do so, and they are free to voluntarily associate into communities of their liking; in fact it is this freedom which is the defining characteristic of liberalism. But people who choose to live that way are *not* free to rob others of their freedom to abstain from such traditions and communities. Parekh himself says on the very same page that liberalism does not rule them out (nor does it rule out the less ambitious or materialistic lifestyles which are opposed to Mill's concept of civilization); although it seems that Mill does strongly argue against them, and seems to consider at least some widespread rejection of such traditions, customs, communities, and contented ways of life as requisites of civilization, which Mill in turn takes to be a necessary prerequisite for liberty and democracy.

Even though as a liberal I cannot condone the *prohibition* of traditional or communitarian ways of life, I feel we need to give Mill's concern about them due consideration. Is the existence of some significant degree of struggle against tradition and community a necessary precondition for liberty to flourish? Parekh notes Mill's opinion that most people find great difficulty in overcoming the pressure to conform (Parekh 87), and from personal observation I share that opinion. Given that premise, it seems clear that an excessive popular emphasis on tradition and community, if unchallenged, will soon lead to cultural homogeneity as the masses bow to the overwhelming pressure to conform. This then can easily lead to oppression of those who are different from the homogenous masses, and the destruction of personal liberty, especially in a democratic society where said masses hold sway over the state. So it seems to me that the frequent and vocal questioning of tradition and community is necessary to have an environment in which liberty can flourish. Parekh notes that liberals often behave as though liberty requires eternal vigilance to maintain in the face of numerous opposed ideologies (Parekh 94), also paraphrases Joseph Raz's opinion that a large portion of the population must share a liberal outlook in order for liberty to thrive (Parekh 99); and I am inclined to agree with both these opinions. For a society to be free, a sufficient proportion of its people must cherish freedom

enough to be willing to defend it, and as people always come to take for granted that which they have long had, a free society must forever be wary that later generations do not forget the value of their freedom and sacrifice it for something else they desire, unaware of the all that they are giving up in the process. But it does not therefrom follow that traditional and communitarian ways ought to be suppressed, for to do so would be to betray liberty itself. It merely demands that it be made continually clear to all in a free society that they do not have to do what tradition and community demand; they are free people with many options, who may, if they choose, do otherwise than the masses and past generations. Further, it is important that those who are brave enough to do so be cherished for their difference rather than condemned for it; though of course criticism of their alternative choices is just as warranted as criticism of the received way of life. The praise they ought to receive is for effort and bravery in trying a new way of life, rather than for any achievement they may make or fail to make in that life they choose; much the same as an inquisitive student ought to be praised for participating in class discussion, even though his 'insights' may have glaring flaws in them.

However, apparently contra to this emphasis on the spirit of nonconformity being necessary for liberty to flourish, Varouxakis points out, regarding Mill and nationality, that Mill holds some degree of cultural homogeneity necessary for a democratic government to function (Varouxakis 20-21). It does not appear here that Mill is claiming cultural homogeneity per se to be desirable, nor the facts of human nature which make it necessary for democracy; rather, it is merely an unfortunate fact about the world and human nature that a group of people with insufficient commonality will not function as a cohesive unit. (I see strong parallels here to Mill's take on work ethic, where he holds the ability to be self-motivated, disciplined and industrious to be necessary for civilization to function (Mill 414-415); but, as exemplified in his responses to Carlyle in *The Negro Question* (Mill 90), that does not mean that hard work is good for its own sake). So it seems that Mill feels heterogeneity to be necessary for liberty, and yet homogeneity

is necessary for democracy. It should be noted here that liberalism and democracy are not one and the same thing, and can quite often come into direct conflict — Parekh notes that liberals have often felt threatened by the prospect of democracy (Parekh 94) — but they can be made compatible, and Mill seems to want both in the end. It seems to follow that he must seek a certain balance of homogeneity and heterogeneity, unity amidst diversity, and I feel that a clear example of this fine balancing act can be found in Varouxakis's analysis of what Mill means in his urging of smaller nationalities to join with the larger nations which neighbor them. Mill is not calling for these minority cultures to abandon their own ways of life and take up those of their larger neighbors; rather, he is calling to admit the people of the smaller nations as full and equal citizens of the larger ones, involving the former and their unique ways in the "currents of ideas" of the latter, in the end hoping that each group will learn from the other in a peaceful dialogue, and that both groups thus will improve themselves by this contact. (Varouxakis 14, 18).

But I digress somewhat; let us return to the issue of liberalism and its supposed commitments to individualism at the cost of communitarian ways of life. A person who takes the interests of his family, community, and so forth, to be his interests as well, and acts accordingly, is not illiberal but, as Parekh says, has merely a different notion of the scope of his 'self' (Parekh 98). However, as I see it this sort of communitarianism is not only commendable in itself, but fully compatible with what might otherwise be called an individualist philosophy. Only a family, community, etc., which *insists* that members think and behave their way, *or else face punishment*, is illiberal and incompatible with individualism. Individualism in its positive connotations merely implies community respect for the individual; and communitarianism in likewise positive connotations merely implies individual respect for the community. These attitudes are entirely compatible, and in my opinion any philosophy or ideology lacking either is incomplete. But each can also have negative connotations as well, those being the negation of the complementary attitude's positive connotations. "Individualism" taken negatively implies disrespect for all

things social or communal, placing the individual above the community; “communitarianism” taken negatively implies disrespect for all things individualistic, placing the community above the individual. And as logically follows from my commitment to the positive forms of both attitudes, a philosophy or ideology containing either of these negative forms is in my opinion deeply flawed. To emphasize the negativity of these latter attitudes and the positivity and mutual benefit of the former, I prefer to restrict the use of “individualism” and “communitarianism” to the former, and deem the latter rather “anti-communitarianism” and “anti-individualism”.

But returning to criticism of Mill in particular, I do not entirely disagree with Parekh on all issues he discusses. I agree quite heartily with his criticism of Mill’s (and Raz’) approach to illiberal cultures (Parekh 98-99), even though I share the latter’s opinion that such cultures are culturally inferior in certain important ways. I feel that liberal nations owe precisely the same respect to illiberal nations as liberal people owe to illiberal people within a liberal society. We ought to offer them our protection, aid, and guidance where they will accept it, and otherwise leave them to learn on their own, even from their mistakes, only stepping in to stop them from harming others or from utterly destroying themselves. Applied to international relations, this approach would still allow us in the ‘civilized’ world to entreat and trade with ‘uncivilized’ peoples, provided we do so peaceably. It would allow us to send scholars and even (non-coercive) missionaries and the like to exchange ideas with those peoples, even so far as arguing that those people ought to adopt our customs and ideas; though of course those arguments must stand or fall on their own rational merit and never be pushed by the threat of force. My approach would even allow us to intervene in foreign political affairs, to the extent of defending one group from an aggressive enemy, or liberating an oppressed people from despotic rule — provided that at least some portion of the population is in fact, by their own admission and to our outsiders’ eyes, being oppressed, and our intervention is both warranted by our own liberal standards and welcomed by those we seek to aid. But outright conquest and despotic rule, even in the name of

some greater good such as ‘civilization’ or ‘improvement’, I find morally unjustifiable. Though as a utilitarian Mill would be inclined to disagree, I must assert that the ends do not always justify the means, or more precisely, that one’s means must always be in the spirit of one’s ends, and thus despotic means cannot be used toward liberal ends. We cannot coerce people into freedom; even if it would work, it would be contrary to liberal principles and thus a violation of our own ethical standards. For a people to be free, they must want to be free and must cherish freedom. Open dialogue and setting a shining example of the wonders of freedom are the only ways to free a people; though once those people want freedom, force is justified in aiding them in overthrowing those who would withhold it from them. Thus, a liberal society need only to punish the violent enforcement of traditional or community standards (exactly as it would punish any other violence, no more and no less), making it clear that people will be protected from such violence, so that if they *choose* to defect from their communities, they know that they will be free from retribution. But as regards peaceful communities of voluntarily associated people, the only morally legitimate way to influence them, if ever for some reason they should need influencing, is through dialogue and example; any forceful action taken against them constitutes not individualism proper, but rather anti-communitarianism, and is itself a violation of any principles of liberty it may ostensibly be defending.

In his conclusion, Parekh makes three closing points (Parekh 101-102), which I will now address here. As regards his first point, that liberalism must respect the cultures associated with the individuals it so respects, I agree to the extent just laid out above. We cannot change people by force, and the right to free association is as much a part of liberalism as any other right. However I must qualify this by saying that we may, morally speaking, force others to refrain from the use of force; but that is the extent to which force is justifiable. In all other regards, respect is of paramount importance to a truly liberal society. Parekh’s second point, that a liberal government which does not acknowledge the rights of particular cultural groups per se (rather



than as masses of individuals) loses its legitimacy on the grounds of unequal treatment of the governed, is defeated by this qualification. Liberalism does treat everyone equally: all are free to do whatever they like, live whatever lifestyle they choose, even associating into traditional or communitarian groups, so long as that lifestyle does not involve denying others the same freedom. To afford any further special consideration to groups per se would be to disenfranchise individuals who choose not to associate with any particular cultural group, but rather identify only as themselves, individually, apart from any group association. Parekh's third point seems to conflate the "liberal way of life" with anti-communitarianism ("individualism" in its negative connotations), when instead liberalism merely necessitates true individualism (in its positive connotations). From a properly liberal perspective, communities are not bad; rather, only disrespect of individuals is. Thus, liberalism tolerates all diverse ways of life which do likewise; that is, all ways of life which tolerate other ways of life, and peoples' right to choose their own way of life. Such a reciprocal precondition for tolerance seems only fair, and labeling the demand for it 'assimilationist' is misleading. Any further demands for cultural assimilation do not stem from liberalism, and in fact go completely counter to its principles, making any self-professed liberals who call for such programs (as may be the case with Mill) hypocrites.

Liberalism is not in itself a complete way of life. It is but an answer to a limited set of questions, namely "ought we tolerate difference?" and "ought we tolerate intolerance?", to which it answers "yes" and "no", respectively. Liberalism thus lays out only a very broad framework within which many complete ways of life are possible. This broad framework makes only one demand: that all different ways of life be able to coexist together. To step outside that framework is to allow some ways of life the "freedom" to trample other ways of life, and so, if freedom and tolerance is the goal, then liberalism ought to be seen as an ally, not an enemy. In conclusion, cultural elitism (of which colonialism and imperialism may be species or byproducts) is not essential to liberalism, and is in fact antithetical to it. But both cultural elitism and liberalism may

be employed in different circumstances by the same people, as may be the case with Mill; though such a combination demonstrates that such a person is not fundamentally or essentially a liberal, but rather is a liberal merely for its instrumental or utilitarian value, who may be happy to discard liberalism when an illiberal solution appears more useful to their ends.

However, there is a further point of distinction to be made here, between someone who is merely illiberal, and someone who is properly a cultural elitist. Mill is certainly illiberal in his prescribed treatment of uncivilized peoples; however, while cultural elitism is a form of illiberalism, not all illiberalism is cultural elitism. Liberalism merely demands that only morally obligatory and forbidden behaviors be regulated with force. But within the broad range of behaviors which are merely permissible (neither forbidden nor obligatory), there are still some which are good (though not obligatory), some which are bad (though not forbidden), and many which are morally irrelevant (such as choices of food, clothing, music, etc.). One may be illiberal and only call for the use of force in encouraging good behavior and discouraging bad behavior, leaving all morally irrelevant behaviors alone. But it is when one calls for the use of force in regulating morally irrelevant behaviors that one becomes a cultural elitist. Mill's emphasis is on those cultural traits relevant to civilization, in particular rationality and industriousness, which I am certainly inclined to consider morally relevant in the sense that they are good (though not obligatory) traits to have; thus I am lead to conclude that while Mill is illiberal and thus wrong in such regards, he is not, strictly, speaking, a cultural elitist, and would perhaps best be labeled a "civilizationalist" instead.

There is still another further consideration though. While Mill is not a racist in Fredrickson's essentialist sense, not even properly a cultural elitist, he does seem to be oddly prejudiced along racial lines, as evidenced in his blanket division of civilized vs uncivilized people along Eurocentric lines. McConahay and Hough address the issue of such non-essentialist racism in their paper titled *Symbolic Racism*. Symbolic racism is, in their words, "the expression in

terms of abstract ideological symbols and symbolic behaviors of the feeling that blacks are violating cherished values and making illegitimate demands for changes in the racial status quo.” (McConahay & Hough 38). Before moving on to address how this relates to Mill and prejudice, I have several issues with this precise definition of symbolic racism and their means of categorizing it; rather, with their labeling of this precise phenomenon as “racism” at all. This definition seems to completely dismiss the possibility that blacks could make illegitimate demands for changes in the status quo; for surely, if their demands were in fact illegitimate, then calling them on it would not be deserving of the pejorative epithet “racism”. There appears to me to be much presumption throughout the entire study that the only reason a white person would hold a position which is counter to that of many black people is because of a dislike for black people per se, dismissing the possibility that there might be real ideological differences involved independent of any race issues, or that some black people might hold the same ideological stances as those accused of “symbolic racism” in this study (e.g. a black person opposing affirmative action).

For example, amongst the items used to measure symbolic racism in earlier studies are affirmative answers to the question “Do you think Negroes who receive welfare could get along without it if they tried or do they really need this help?”, and agreement with the statement “Streets aren’t safe these days without a policeman around” (McConahay & Hough 25). A person could agree with the latter statement without making any considerations of race, merely reflecting a pessimistic outlook on the state of crime in the world today. The former question is ever worse, for a person could give an affirmative answer to that question as a part of a larger position that people on welfare in general, regardless of race, don’t really need or deserve it; but the inclusion of a reference to Negroes in the question makes any such answer seem racist. This is akin to the classic trick question “Have you stopped beating your wife yet?”, to which the correct answer is “No” if the person in question does not have a wife or at least has never beaten her to begin with, yet which seems to implicate the person in question as a wife-beater even under such

circumstances. Later, amidst the measures used in this particular study, is the statement “Negroes have it better than they ever had it before”, agreement with which is taken by McConahay and Hough to be indicative of a symbolically racist attitude, yet which could in fact merely represent optimism regarding the plight of black people, who certainly at the time of their study had things better than at any earlier time in American history, despite the many troubles still plaguing them.

In short, I feel that the attitude present throughout the entire study is itself prejudiced against the ability of white people to be unprejudiced and yet still disagree with certain positions with popular black support. Not all the items used to measure “symbolic racism” necessarily derive from racism or prejudice, as I’ve just shown; but may in fact be held on independent justification. Further examples include opposition to affirmative action, or voting against particular black candidates (provided there is no expression that they were voted against because they were black). I feel that to take such things as indicators of racism or prejudice is itself prejudiced: assuming that all white people who, for example, oppose affirmative action, must do so because they are racist or prejudiced, and not simply because it runs counter to their moral or ethical principles. I imagine that a black person who opposed affirmative action on libertarian grounds would not be assumed to do so because he had anti-black affect; so such a presumption applied only to white people is itself prejudiced. Further evidence of this prevailing prejudice against whites’ ability to be unprejudiced is indicated by the use of the phrase “socialization to lassie-faire political conservatism” on page 39 of the study, which appears to be making assumption that people only hold their political positions because they were socialized into them (presumably by parents or communities with latent anti-black affect), as though no independent thought on such issues was possible. The study also seems to be flawed by it’s use of a unidimensional political spectrum, grouping libertarians (classical liberals) in with right-conservatives, with whom they have as much differences as they do with left-liberals. They

briefly acknowledge the true multidimensionality behind such a libertarian position on page 41, but then seem to quickly dismiss it as a valid political stance by indicating that such a position correlates strongly with their new type of “racism”. The whole study seems to simply presume that stances in opposition to racial quotas, affirmative action, etc., are only being professed because of anti-black affect; rather than allowing that people might genuinely dislike such policies and thus dislike those people, including many blacks, promoting them.

But underneath this all, I feel there is a valid point to be made. While I disagree strongly that all the things taken to be indicative of racial prejudice are simply masks over anti-black affect as McConahay and Hough portray them, their observation that subtler forms of prejudice do not correlate directly with essentialist or “redneck” racism (McConahay & Hough 31) highlights the fact that one can be racially prejudiced without being racially essentialist; and I feel that such non-essentialist prejudice is deserving of the label of racism, contra to Fredrickson’s definition. However, rather than use the term “symbolic racism”, which I feel has connotations of all the elements I have just criticized, I would make the distinction merely between racial essentialism and racial prejudice, or perhaps, more philosophically put, “metaphysical racism” versus “epistemic racism”. The former makes a factual error in attributing their cultural and behavioral traits to some indelible nature; the other makes a methodological error in simply assuming all people of a certain race to have various cultural or behavioral traits until proven otherwise. And so returning at last to Mill, it seems to me that while he is clearly not racially essentialist, he seems very likely to be racially prejudiced, viz. his blanket assumption of all Europeans as civilized and all non-Europeans as uncivilized.

In conclusion, I feel that there are a number of distinct components of this debate regarding liberalism and racism which need to be understood separately. The first of these is moral universalism, which is the belief that some things (though not necessarily all things) are universally right or universally wrong, and are thus not dependent on time or place, or the

opinions or traditions of anyone. The second is liberalism, which is a form of moral universalism that claims only behaviors which are morally obligatory or forbidden ought to be regulated by force. Within, but not wholly encompassing, the realm of illiberal moral universalism is cultural elitism, which claims that force is justified in the regulation of morally irrelevant behaviors. (Mill, it should be reminded, falls in that range for which I have no name, outside of liberalism but not within cultural elitism). Apart from all of these factors is one which I have not yet mentioned, yet which is closely correlated with cultural elitism and illiberal moral universalism in general, and that is moral absolutism: the position that oneself is completely correct on all moral issues and has nothing to learn from those who are different. Finally, we have our two forms of racism, racial essentialism and racial prejudice, the former of which holds that behavior and culture is determined by some indelible “racial” qualities of a person, and the latter of which makes the quick assumption that all people possessing certain “racial” qualities also possess certain behavior and cultural traits.

A racist who is not a cultural elitist or otherwise illiberal, but merely a moral universalist, is in my opinion only factually incorrect on the issue of biological determination of cultural traits, or methodologically sloppy in his assumptions about the correlation between biology and culture (depending on what sort of racist he is). I agree with such a person, at least on the broadest picture, about the nature of right and wrong. If something is truly right, then it is universally right, and likewise with things which are wrong; and if something is not universally right or wrong then it is not in fact right or wrong at all, it is merely a choice amongst equally permissible options, no matter how popular or unpopular that choice may be. While a proper treatment of the argument for moral universalism is a topic for a paper of it's own, a short argument for this position follows from the highly intuitive premise that something like the murder of an innocent is not wrong merely because most people disapprove of it; that is, it would not suddenly become morally right if everyone spontaneously changed their mind on the issue. If such a premise is

accepted, then some form of moral universalism is entailed, for we will have conceded at least one universal moral truth; all that remains to debate is which acts in particular are right, wrong, or merely permissible. If a person holding such a stance finds another “race” to be inferior due to certain morally wrong cultural institutions, then to the extent that said person and I agree on the particulars of what is right and wrong, I can agree with him. However, this is only in the loosest sense of “race”, as roughly synonymous with culture or ethnicity; to the extent a person implies such cultural traits are biologically determined, I disagree, but simply as a matter of scientific fact. “Cultural traits” here I understand to mean as variances within human behavior, the attribution of which to biological differences cannot, to the best of my knowledge, be justified by modern science. As far as I am aware there is good evidence that some human behavior is strongly influenced if not determined by biology; but the variations in behavior between different groups of humans is not explainable in purely biological terms. Thus the difference between such a racist and myself, though it is a significant one, is only that I hold that people always have it within them to change, and I at least attempt not to make unfounded assumptions about people.

But with racial essentialists who are also cultural elitists I much more strongly disagree; however, only slightly more so than I would with those who are elitists but not essentialists. The racial aspect is once again a mere matter of factual ignorance or methodological sloppiness. However, with cultural elitism I take very strong philosophical issue. While I hold moral universalism to be correct, I am specifically a *liberal* universalist, the distinguishing trait of liberalism being that while certain things are considered universally obligatory and others universally forbidden, the vast majority are merely permissible; people may do them or not as they please, and many such choices are morally irrelevant matters of taste, neither good nor bad. Cultural elitism thus entails the negation of liberalism. As I reject this doctrine by holding to liberalism, and thus hold that only a limited range of behaviors are morally obligatory, I take issue with cultural elitists of any sort, even those of my own “race” discriminating against others of

my own “race”. In such instances no biological difference is involved, and yet there is still a morally condemnable situation in that discrimination; the further involvement of racial essentialism is simply a point of ignorance added to the moral deficiency of the cultural elitist.

Thus I find that it is cultural elitism, rather than racism per se, which is the real villain which people mean to single out with the label “racism”; but I prefer not to say that non-essentialist cultural elitism is merely a new form of “racism”, for that terminology, associated as it is with biological difference, would tend to gloss over cultural elitism within biologically homogenous groups. A middle class gay white goth art student from San Francisco, a poor white man living in a trailer park in the dust bowls of Oklahoma, and a wealthy white evangelical protestant from Maine who attended an Ivy League school and now works as an executive in his father’s multinational company, all have much biology and ancestry in common; yet their three cultures are worlds apart. Thus I feel we as egalitarians need to focus our attention not only on discrimination along racial lines, but discrimination everywhere, blind to race as true egalitarians should be. Further, this focus should not be on fighting discrimination only against minority culture groups, but also discrimination against individuals who dare to forge their own unique lifestyles and do not strictly belong to any one cultural group.

An attitude which in my experience is closely correlated with cultural elitism is moral absolutism, the former most likely deriving from the latter; for when you believe that you are unquestionably right about some things and anyone who disagrees with you is obviously wrong, it is easy to come to believe that you are right about absolutely everything and anyone different is just bad. I am as strongly opposed to moral absolutism as I am to cultural elitism, and I believe that it is the erroneous conflation of moral absolutism with moral universalism (and the justified opposition to moral absolutism) which leads many in the social sciences and humanities to adopt the doctrine of moral or cultural relativism. But I feel it is very important to make the distinction between universalism and absolutism. As a universalist, I have various beliefs about what sorts of



things are good, bad, irrelevant, obligatory, forbidden, and permissible; and I hold that if those beliefs of mine are true, then they are true universally and necessarily. In short, I hold that there are universal moral laws; and I have some beliefs about what those laws are. However, as I am not an absolutist, I do not hold those beliefs with absolute certainty. Though I believe, for example, that capital punishment is wrong, and universally so, I am open to the possibility that I may be incorrect about the matter, and capital punishment may in fact be morally permissible or even obligatory; but if that is the case, then it is universally permissible or obligatory, and not merely relative to the prevailing opinions of any society. The absence of such an absolutist attitude can go a long way to alleviating cultural elitism, for if one is willing to watch and listen with an open mind, and learn from those different from oneself why they do the things they do, one is likely to see that many of their differences do not make them inferior, but simply different.

Of course, one may still have opinions about these differences even without being an absolutist or an elitist; these non-moralistic judgments are simply matters of taste. There are various languages, foods, styles of art and music, and so on, which are intimately tied in to the culture of one people or another, that I find irritating, distasteful, garish or obnoxious; and there are other such cultural artifacts which I find incredibly beautiful and sublime. But I do not pretend that these tastes of mine are objectively justified in any way, and thus even though I am a moral universalist I do not say that these differences must be eliminated and all the garish and distasteful things in the world be made sublime and beautiful. For I acknowledge that garish, distasteful, sublime and beautiful are all subjective judgments of mine — though I hold that not all normative judgments are so subjective — and thus these different peoples have every right to express themselves and live their lives in those ways, regardless of what I might think of it. Thus we see illustrated the difference between liberal moral universalism, with its respect for differences in matters of taste, and culturally elitist moral absolutism, which seeks to eliminate all differences from itself. Either of these can be paired with racial essentialism to get a form of

racism, and though such bad science can lead to bad policy either way, the true dangers of what is commonly thought of as racism lie not in this racial essentialism per se, but rather in the cultural elitism which usually accompanies it, to the point that many are tempted to incorrectly label non-essentialist elitism as “racism” simply to have a well-known pejorative to apply to it. However, even if the rightful target of our disdain is properly identified as cultural elitism rather than racism per se, there is still a danger that the term could be applied too broadly, and measures taken against such elitism could end up enforcing a sort of reverse discrimination. Just because someone strongly dislikes elements of another culture does not make them a cultural elitist, so long as they acknowledge the rights of those people to choose those things for themselves (at least as regards mere matters of taste). Conversely, just because cultural elitism is bad does not mean that special measures ought to be taken to promote minority cultures over majority cultures at the expense of freedom and equality, e.g. affirmative action policies. I feel that we can no more force a people to appreciate diversity than we can force them to appreciate freedom, and thus that efforts to promote one culture at the expense of discriminating against another are no more justifiable than using despotism to prepare a people for democracy.

As to Mill, as a utilitarian he is most definitely a moral universalist. He is ostensibly a liberal, and thus ostensibly not an elitist; however I find that Mill is only incidentally a liberal. That is, he is primarily a utilitarian, prescribing those actions which, in his judgment, will bring the greatest overall happiness to the greatest number. Liberalism is merely a social technology used to attain that goal, useful (at least when applied to “civilized” societies who can be trusted to manage themselves) because it allows those who know their desires best to pursue them as they see fit, thus maximizing their happiness, and allows others to learn from examples of alternative lifestyles. But when another social technology, such as so-called enlightened despotism, appears to Mill to serve his utilitarian purpose better, he is happy to abandon liberalism until a more useful time for its application arises. Despite this illiberalism, I do not see

conclusive evidence that Mill is a cultural elitist; rather, he walks those fringes of illiberalism which are not quite cultural elitism. Regarding absolutism, Mill's position is questionable; he certainly seems to think that the British undoubtedly know best on the international scene, but within Britain he encourages liberalism precisely because it allows people the opportunity to learn from those who are different from themselves. Finally, as regards race, while Varouxakis conclusive shows that Mill not a racial *essentialist*, I feel that Mill's brazen assumption of all Europeans as "civilized" and all non-Europeans as "uncivilized" clearly demonstrates a degree of racial *prejudice* on Mill's part, and so to the extent that non-essentialist prejudice may be considered racism (which I am inclined to say it may), Mill may be considered a racist.

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