

Liberty and Industry: John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and the Economic Foundations of Political Membership

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Recent scholarship on liberal exclusion focuses on ways in which liberal norms and standards of rationality disqualify certain persons from the rights of civic membership. Few works, however, move beyond philosophical anthropology in considering the basis of such exclusions. This article examines the economic concerns that frame citizenship and political membership in two strands of modern liberal thought: the work of John Locke and John Stuart Mill. I argue that both thinkers collapse requirements of economic and political membership, excluding the so-called “non-industrious” and economically dependent from the full rights and benefits of political membership, and creating a spectrum of partial citizenships. What begins as a concern for the value of labor in Locke’s writings extends through Mill’s work, creating a tension between democratic participation and the exclusion of the non-industrious. Although both thinkers include provisions for aiding the poor, a vision of economic membership – of inclusion in a community of the industrious – precedes political membership in these liberal frameworks.

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In the opening lines to *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion*, Judith Shklar asserts that “there is no notion more central in politics than citizenship, and none more variable in history, or contested in theory.”¹ A broad examination of the history of political thought demonstrates the truth of Shklar’s assertion. Aristotle devotes the third book of his *Politics* to the subject, and suggests that a complete discussion of the *polis* must begin, at least in part, with the question of citizenship.² Such an investigation is certainly not unique to the ancients. Even liberalism as a

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1. Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 1.

2. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1275a1.

modern, cosmopolitan philosophy must confront the question of citizenship, for although natural rights extend to all human beings as rational, free creatures, the question of extending political rights poses a particular problem for liberal thought.

Liberal theory – beginning, if only incipiently, with Locke’s *Second Treatise* in 1689 and receiving fuller expression in writings throughout the nineteenth century – retains a theoretical commitment to universality, wherein the natural claim to individual freedom and rights extends to humans as humans. Yet the conception of liberalism as a philosophy of natural rights or egalitarian universalism has proved empirically problematic. Political realities dictate that it is the status of citizenship, and not the order of nature, that must and does confer political rights.³ This fundamental tension in liberal thought – the universal, natural rights argument on the one hand and the practical problem of particularity and political membership on the other – necessitates that liberal theories deal with the question of citizenship, of who is and who is not a member of the political community.

How should citizenship be allocated in the liberal framework, and what capacities or qualities are necessary for political membership? The universal anthropological capacities that ground claims to natural equality prove necessary but insufficient for liberal political inclusion.⁴ Political membership and its attending rights and benefits are instead contingent upon certain individual capabilities and activities. Works on the exclusionary character of liberalism expose these contingencies. Uday Mehta locates the force of these exclusions within the framework of liberalism itself, and focuses on the conventional preconditions that underlie the ostensibly minimal, universal capacities of rationality and freedom at the foundation of liberal thought, specifically in Locke’s *Second Treatise*.⁵ Such capacities, Mehta argues, presume a “complex constellation” of social structures and conventions that thus limit their apparent universality. Other scholars similarly attribute the exclusionary basis of liberalism to its philosophical anthropology, contending that the liberal vision of the rational self actually disqualifies entire categories of persons – women, children, the disabled, the “uncivilized” – from the benefits of political inclusion.⁶

3. This was of course Hannah Arendt’s insight in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando, Fl.: Harcourt, Inc., 1973).

4. In referring to “philosophical anthropology” or “anthropological capacities,” I mean the liberal vision of the human person, born rational, free, and equal. This vision of the human person informs the whole of liberal thought regarding the design of political institutions and the preservation of individual rights.

5. Uday S. Mehta, “Liberal Strategies of Exclusion,” *Politics & Society* 18 (1990): 427–54.

6. For a classic feminist critique of the liberal self, see Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), chapter 4. More recently, Nancy Hirschmann argues that gender and class map onto a spectrum of “differential rationality” in liberal thought and yield varying ideals of freedom; see Nancy Hirschmann, *Gender, Class, and Freedom in Modern Political Theory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008). Literature on liberalism and empire, though focused

Recent writings on “partial citizenship” point to the ways in which liberal democratic norms instantiate various kinds and degrees of membership. Elizabeth Cohen introduces the term “semi-citizen” to describe those who possess only some of the rights associated with full citizenship in liberal democracies. Cohen locates the origin of semi-citizenships in the conflict between competing doctrines of inclusion. “While liberalism confers rights on autonomous individuals,” she writes, “democracies create boundaries supported by ethically substantive requirements and qualities expected of members.”⁷ Given this doctrinal conflict within nation-states, she concludes that semi-citizenships are neither new nor extraordinary. They are, rather, “inevitably present, and continually produced, in liberal democratic states.”⁸ Other works call attention to less obvious semi-citizenships: everyday exclusions that manifest even for those who are considered full citizens in the legal sense. Iris Marion Young has argued that contemporary theories of liberal justice ignore, and even conceal, forms of injustice faced by citizens who are members of minority groups. For Young, political theory must remain attentive to “differentiated” forms of citizenship in liberal practice.⁹ In a similar vein, Joe Soss explores how policies for public assistance in liberal states, which often attempt to incentivize good citizenship, actually contribute to marginalizing the poor in civic life.¹⁰

Along with Mehta’s work on liberal exclusion, this literature invites us to examine the membership requirements that give rise to forms of political exclusion and partial citizenships, and to consider their source. This article looks to the history of liberal thought for insight into these themes, and moves beyond

primarily on themes of domination, also points to the tension between liberal universality and the moral exclusion of foreign subjects. See Herman Leibovics, “The Uses of America in John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47 (1986): 567–81; Lynn Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994); Bhikhu Parekh, “Liberalism and Colonialism: A Critique of Locke and Mill,” in *The Decolonization of the Imagination*, ed. J. Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh (London and Atlantic Highlands: Zed Books, 1995), 81–98; Uday S. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

7. Elizabeth Cohen, *Semi-Citizenship in Democratic Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8.

8. *Ibid.*, 2.

9. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

10. Joe Soss, *Unwanted Claims: The Politics of Participation in the U.S. Welfare System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Joe Soss, Sarah Brunch, and Myra Ferree, “From Policy to Polity: Democracy, Paternalism, and the Incorporation of Disadvantaged Citizens,” *American Sociological Review* 75 (2010), 205–26.

the scholarly focus on philosophical anthropology in identifying the basis of liberal exclusion. In particular, I examine the *economic* demands that underlie citizenship and political membership in two strands of modern liberal thought, and argue that both Locke's liberalism and Mill's democratic theory collapse concepts of economic and political membership to exclude the so-called "non-industrious" and economically dependent from the full rights and benefits of membership. What began as a concern for the value of labor in Locke's *Second Treatise* extended through Mill's liberalism in the nineteenth century, raising questions regarding the relationship of liberal theory to democratic politics. Mill recognized the social and individual benefits of extending the franchise to all adults under representative democracy, but at the same time attempted to justify the exclusion of unproductive persons. A vision of economic membership – of inclusion in a community of the industrious, productive, and self-sufficient – precedes political membership in these liberal frameworks.

Yet, as I argue, both thinkers ultimately display an abiding concern for promoting habits of industriousness and self-sufficiency among the poor, seeking the eventual integration of once-indigent persons into the larger community. While they hew to an economic standard of inclusion, both thinkers recognize that social prosperity depends upon industrious subjects and citizens, and emphasize society's duty to even the poorest persons. For both thinkers, the goal is to create conditions under which all persons may eventually find a full place in the polity, albeit under specific terms. Mill prioritizes this goal, I argue, since he affords significant weight to the relationship between effective democratic institutions and a qualified, diverse, and inclusive citizenry.

The argument proceeds in three parts. In the first section, I discuss the centrality of "industriousness" in Locke's framework, and reveal the economic concerns that underlie his visions of freedom and civic membership. I rely on both the *Second Treatise* (1689) and Locke's "Essay on the Poor Law" (1697), as the latter implicitly ties economic activity to political membership and highlights society's duties to inculcate industriousness among the poor. The second section contains an extended discussion of Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government*. I emphasize the unresolved tension between Mill's praise of the franchise and his proposals for limiting the franchise to the self-sufficient. I also distinguish his prescriptions for colonialism and international politics in *On Liberty* from the requirements of domestic citizenship, and argue that his discussion of economic membership is distinct from both his thoughts on colonialism and his concern for educational qualifications. By focusing on Locke and Mill, I also explore how the transition to liberal *democracy* brings an enhanced notion of the common good and of the standards for citizenship necessary for its realization. I conclude by exploring how these economic standards for inclusion persist in present-day liberal democracies, albeit in more concealed forms of differentiated citizenship.

Labor and Industry: The Exclusionary Character of Lockean Liberalism

Mehta identifies the problem of exclusion in Lockean thought, asserting that “Locke’s texts, despite their foundational universality, have an effectively exclusionary thrust.”¹¹ This identification, of course, did not begin with Mehta’s analysis. C.B. Macpherson put forth a provocative series of claims regarding Locke’s underlying economism, his subsequent defense of capitalism, and his justification for excluding the propertyless from political membership.¹² On this last point, Macpherson’s interpretation is quite specific: it is the “low position” of the poorest classes that disqualifies them from membership in the Lockean political community. Macpherson criticized Locke for importing seventeenth-century assumptions about “class rationality” and bourgeois sensibility into both the natural state and the Lockean commonwealth, whereby “the members of the labouring classes are in too low a position to be capable of rational life – that is, capable of regulating their lives by those moral principles Locke supposed were given by reason.”¹³ According to Macpherson, only the propertied can claim the status of “members.” The grounds for Lockean exclusion thus stem from embedded prejudices about the non-propertied classes and their inherent incapacity for rational political action.

As many scholars have noted, this claim of differential class rationality finds little support in Locke’s texts.¹⁴ Still others, most notably James Tully, have challenged the foundations of Macpherson’s possessive individualist thesis as anachronistic and contextually flawed.¹⁵ In highlighting the economic foundations of Lockean political membership, I expand upon Gordon Schochet’s suggestion that Macpherson was almost right – but for all the wrong reasons.¹⁶ While Locke does exclude the poor and dependent from the full benefits of membership, this exclusion does not rest on historical, class-bound assumptions of irrationality. Nor does Locke restrict membership solely to the propertied

11. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 55 (see note 6 above).

12. C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), chapter 5.

13. *Ibid.*, 224.

14. Mehta, “Liberal Strategies of Exclusion,” 434 (see note 5 above); A. John Simmons, “‘Denisons’ and ‘Aliens’: Locke’s Problem of Political Consent,” *Social Theory and Practice* 24 (1998):161–82, at 164.

15. James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 131–32. See also John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the “Two Treatises of Government”* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Richard Ashcraft, *Locke’s “Two Treatises of Government”* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987) and *Revolutionary Politics and Locke’s “Two Treatises of Government”* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

16. Gordon J. Schochet, “Radical Politics and Ashcraft’s Treatise on Locke,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (1989): 491–510, at 506.

classes, as Macpherson alleges.¹⁷ Rather, I argue that Locke ties economic and political membership through a particular vision of the common good and the individual activities necessary to achieve it. For Locke, the idle not only fail to contribute to the common stock, but actually detract from it, failing to fulfill their duty as industrious subjects. What begins for Locke as a moral injunction in the state of nature (the command to labor), extends to the requirements of political membership in the Lockean commonwealth. Industriousness stands as a necessary quality of the Lockean subject, but one that may be fostered through the right kind of institutions. Whereas Macpherson presents Lockean exclusions as permanent for certain inherently “defective” classes, Locke’s recommendations for poor relief suggest an optimism that idle persons might become productive members of political society.

To examine these claims, I begin with Locke’s property chapter in the *Second Treatise*, which discloses the extent of the relationship between the individual laborer and the common stock. I then turn to his “Essay on the Poor Law,” where the implications of this relationship become salient for society and its members.

Labor and Duty

Locke’s seminal discussion of private property is by now well-trodden ground. It is by means of labor that man appropriates land from the natural commons for private but beneficial use, improving upon the work of nature with the effort of human hands. On this point, Locke affirms, “’tis Labour indeed that puts the difference of value on every thing. . . . I think it will be but a very modest Computation to say, that of the Products of the Earth useful to the Life of Man 9/10 are the effects of labor.”¹⁸

I draw attention to this well-known argument for a specific purpose, for beyond these practical benefits of labor, Locke identifies a relationship between labor, human agency, and the divine. The extent of this relationship brings his ideal of the common good into view. In working the soil and mixing his labor with the earth, the individual not only cultivates products for his subsistence, but fulfills his role as a creature of God, and assumes his rightful place in the created universe. Through labor, man mirrors the work of his Creator; just as “the infinitely wise Maker” retains dominion over mankind, so too the individual laborer claims

17. Following MacPherson on this point, E.J. Hundert argues that Locke viewed “the working class as a whole from the standpoint of defective rationality...[that] threatened political stability through economic decay and civil disorder.” E.J. Hundert, “The Making of *Homo Faber*: John Locke Between Ideology and History,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33 (1972): 3–22, at 7. More recently, Hirschmann has identified a similar ideal of “differential rationality” at work in Locke’s writings; see Hirschmann, *Gender, Class, and Freedom in Modern Political Thought*, 80–106 (see note 6 above).

18. John Locke, *Second Treatise in Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 40.

the objects of his work as his own.¹⁹ Ian Shapiro notes a similar connection between divine creation and human labor in the *Second Treatise*, arguing that Locke formulates a “workmanship ideal” based on his theology. “Provided we do not violate the natural law,” Shapiro concludes, “we stand in the same relation to the objects we create as God stands into us; we own them just as he owns us.”²⁰ But labor emerges also as a purposeful, divine command rather than simply or solely a means for justifying private ownership. As Jeremy Waldron argues, labor is “God’s manifest purpose for man” with the potential to benefit individuals both materially and morally.²¹

But as Shapiro’s and Waldron’s interpretations imply, man’s unique position among creation also brings a further set of duties and imperatives. The very law of nature that entitles individuals to private ownership places limitations on the acquisition and use of property, for although God gave the earth for man’s enjoyment, “nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy.”²² The individual who allows his goods to spoil, leaving “the Fruits rotted or the Venison putrefied,” offends the law of nature by invading “his Neighbour’s share, for he had no right, farther than his Use called for any of them, and they might serve to afford him Conveniences of Life.”²³ Locke’s spoilage proviso discloses the relationship between labor, waste, and the common good: the irresponsible and wasteful accumulation of property inflicts harm on the whole of mankind, since it deprives others of the right to enjoy and make productive use of the natural commons. The individual is not only commanded to labor and develop the natural world, but in Locke’s formulation, he is also called to recognize his obligation to the rest of the community. This obligation remains consistent with the second requirement of the natural law, namely the injunction to “preserve mankind” that Locke identifies at the treatise’s beginning.²⁴

Even the initial command to labor can be understood in light of the natural law, the prohibition against spoilage, and Locke’s concern for the public good. Common and uncultivated land is wasteful, for only through labor can individuals add value to the earth and improve its objects for their own use. Locke urges his reader to “consider, what the difference is between an Acre of Land planted with Tobacco or Sugar, sown with Wheat or Barley; and an Acre of

19. *Ibid.*, 6.

20. Ian Shapiro, “Resources, Capacities, and Ownership: The Workmanship Ideal and Distributive Justice,” *Political Theory* 19 (1991): 47–72, at 50.

21. Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke’s Political Thought* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 187. See also Richard Ashcraft’s interpretation: “God not only put us here; he intends us to do something,” in his *Locke’s “Two Treatises of Government,”* 38 (see note 15 above).

22. Locke, *Second Treatise*, 31 (see note 18 above).

23. *Ibid.*, 37.

24. *Ibid.*, 6.

the same Land lying in common, without any Husbandry upon it.”²⁵ The activity of the “Industrious and the Rational” improves the overall economic well-being of the community, for in the Americas – nations without private property developed through human labor – “a King of a large and fruitful Territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day Labourer in England.”²⁶ The idle, by contrast, commit the error of “letting waste,” failing to use their own capacity for labor, and, in a broader sense, allowing the existing products of nature to “spoil” in their uncultivated and common state. They fail to “increase the common stock of mankind” by way of productive activity.²⁷

Drawing on the work of Waldron and Richard Ashcraft, Onur Ulas Ince locates Locke’s ideal of the common good in this injunction “to increase the common stock of mankind,” which “constitutes the privileged nexus...around which the obligations to preserve, to labor, and to improve are interwoven and set in moral, teleological motion.”²⁸ With Ince, I argue that Locke’s focus on the “common stock of mankind” reveals the relationship between human labor and the public good. Each individual, commanded to a life of industriousness, must also apprehend the correspondence between his own work and its benefit to the human community. But what Ince frames as a teleological, individual injunction in the state of nature also has far-reaching implications for Locke’s view of civil society and the activities of those who comprise it. In particular, it frames the Lockean view of civic membership. Beginning as a moral imperative in the natural state, the command to labor and improve mankind translates to a political one in the Lockean commonwealth. Moreover, this imperative of industriousness becomes a standard by which to distinguish productive subjects from dependent “drones,” full members of the polity from those who must forgo its benefits.²⁹ Woven into Lockean thought is the imperative to labor and improve, which provides a basis for distinguishing among differently entitled subjects under positive law. To examine this claim, however, it is necessary to look beyond the *Second Treatise* to Locke’s discussion of the Elizabethan poor laws.

25. *Ibid.*, 40.

26. *Ibid.*, 41.

27. *Ibid.*, 37.

28. Onur Ulas Ince, “Enclosing in God’s Name, Accumulating for Mankind: Money, Morality, and Accumulation in John Locke’s Theory of Property,” *Review of Politics* 73 (2011): 29–54, at 42.

29. David Armitage argues that Chapter 5 of the *Second Treatise*, authored around the time of Locke’s *Fundamental Constitutions* for Carolina, is a justification for European dominion of American land. Similarly, Andrew Fitzmaurice interprets Chapter 5 as Locke’s contribution to the Roman Law theory of occupation. In both interpretations, Locke’s discussion of waste and cultivation targets the “Idle” (i.e., non-agricultural) Indian who fails to improve the common stock. My argument, however, turns Locke’s injunction toward the indigent and idle within his own borders. See Armitage, “Locke, Carolina and the *Two Treatises of Government*,” in his *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 90–114; and Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property and Empire 1500–2000* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 120–22.

The Poor Laws and Political Membership

In “An Essay on the Poor Law” (1697),³⁰ Locke aims to amend and strengthen the standing English poor laws, which required every parish to provide work for able-bodied men and subsistence for the local poor. He recommends a series of prescriptions for dealing with “the growth of the poor,” hoping to remedy the “relaxation and corruption of manners” with “a restraint of debauchery” and “strict execution of the laws.”³¹ Each of his particular recommendations hinges on a broader critique of the idle poor as “begging drones, who live unnecessarily upon other people’s labor.”³² He distinguishes “those who can do nothing at all towards their own support,” presumably the infirm and disabled, from able-bodied individuals who simply feign an inability to support themselves. Persons in the latter category live unjustly and *unnecessarily* from the work of others, and it is the suppression of their idleness and unjust dependency that Locke fervently aims to realize.³³ Given the condition of prosperity in seventeenth-century England, he argues that the situation of the poor stems not from scarcity or want of employment, but rather a general state of idleness and moral degradation. He associates idleness with vice and industry with virtue, and he characterizes the increase of poverty and beggary as a social disorder that must be overcome.

Scholarly interpretations of Locke’s “Essay” highlight the harshness of his recommendations, while analyzing his justifications for them. For Hundert, Locke’s harsh attitude toward the poor reveals the degree to which he saw “disciplined labor” as a “distinctly human trait,” to be actualized in and through the workhouse.³⁴ Along similar lines, Tully argues that many of Locke’s prescriptions reduce the beggar to the status of a slave, but for an express purpose: to deconstruct old, customary ways of life and fabricate a new kind of individual, who is “habituated to obedience and useful labor.”³⁵ Departing from the approaches of Tully and Hundert, Nancy Hirschmann downplays the centrality of labor in the “Essay.” She examines Locke’s discussion of children

30. The original title was “Draft of a Representation, Containing a Scheme of Methods for the Employment of the Poor.” I follow scholarly convention in using the title “An Essay on the Poor Law” throughout this article.

31. Locke, “An Essay on the Poor Law,” in *Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press), 182–200, at 184.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Locke intends neither to dismiss nor discount charity, but to ensure that it is well-used and properly directed. In the original draft, he stipulates, “the poor that cannot work, these must be maintained. The poor that can work but will not, these are only wandering beggars which therefore instead of being relieved should be carefully punished.” *Ibid.*, note 2. Unless otherwise noted, the use of “the poor” throughout this article will refer to the latter class of beggars, those who refuse to work. This usage is consistent with Locke’s own argument in the “Essay.”

34. Hundert, “The Making of *Homo Faber*,” 8 (see note 17 above).

35. Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts*, 235, 237 (see note 15 above).

in the work, and concludes that the real problem is irrationality, which is the true cause of poverty.³⁶

Each of these interpretations posits a vision of the ideal Lockean individual: man as *homo faber*, as useful laborer, as reasonable, reliable worker. Like Hundert and Tully, I acknowledge the centrality of labor in the “Essay” and address Locke’s intent to foster habits of industry among the idle. My interpretation goes yet further, however, and examines how the focus on cultivating *laborers* translates into a differentiated vision of the rights of *subjects* based on their economic contributions to the public good. Locke’s proposed remedies for poor relief, I argue, reveal that industriousness stands as a necessary quality for members of the Lockean commonwealth, so much so that the defect of indolence warrants certain violations of individual liberty in pursuance of the common good.

As Hundert emphasizes, much of Locke’s discussion of poverty hinges on the familiar seventeenth-century trope of “dependency” and moral viciousness associated with the poor. Yet the specific grounds for his condemnation of beggary run much deeper, and necessitate a return to the theoretical framework of labor, duty, and the common stock in the *Second Treatise*. Above all, the poor violate the divine command to labor that Locke identifies in the chapter on property; they neglect their duties to God, mankind, and, more immediately, to those with whom they share a political community. Like the individual who appropriates more than he can use from the natural commons, able-bodied men who cannot or will not work harm the common good and offend the law of nature, as their idleness amounts to a kind of wastefulness. Rather than fulfill the divine call to labor and develop the natural world, the idle poor, in Locke’s estimation, only detract from their “Neighbor’s share,” placing “the greatest part of the burden” for their care upon the rest of society. They neglect to use their bodies and minds for the just end of developing the earth and improving the general condition of their communities. The poor instead injure the rest of mankind through their inactivity, living as idle vagabonds who detract from the common stock but contribute nothing in return. Their indolence stands as an example of “letting waste,” since they fail to make use of their natural capacities for improvement and productivity.³⁷ For Locke, a life of idleness is both a practical and moral “evil,” as the poor function as dependent drones rather than productive creators who emulate the work of God through labor and improve the stock of their communities.³⁸

36. Nancy Hirschmann, “Liberal Conservatism, Once and Again: Locke’s ‘Essay on the Poor Law’ and Contemporary U.S. Welfare Reform,” *Constellations* 9 (2002): 335–55, at 339.

37. On this point, Ince draws an important connection between the spoilage proviso and the demand to labor: the former is an instance of making waste (losing actual value), the latter one of letting waste (losing potential value); see Ince, “Enclosing in God’s Name,” 43 (see note 28 above).

38. *Ibid.*, 183. Locke’s language, particularly the metaphor of “dependent drones,” anticipates Bernard Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees*; see Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. F.B. Kaye (Indianapolis, Ind. Liberty Fund, 1988 [1714]).

The poor laws, then, must supplant idleness with industry, sloth with productivity, and corruption with discipline. The true and proper relief of the poor, according to Locke, “consists in finding work for them, and taking care they do not live like drones upon the labour of others.”³⁹ Locke’s specific recommendations for remedying poverty are often just as severe as his general condemnations of the poor. A restraint of idleness comes only through the strict execution of well-known laws, and he proposes to amend the existing but insufficient poor laws with a set of more stringent restrictions. Wandering, idle vagabonds in maritime provinces are to be conscripted into the navy, while beggars over fifty years of age must be sent to a house of correction to endure three years hard labor.⁴⁰ The children of those on parish relief shall be sent to working schools, where a life of hard work from age three will succeed in “making of them sober and industrious all their lives after.”⁴¹ These laws are intended to reform the attitudes of the idle poor, while directing their labors to the general advancement of the public good. Even the education of children aims to inculcate virtues of sobriety and industry, with the ultimate purpose of forming hard-working adults who will in turn contribute to a productive social order.

These punitive and remedial prescriptions that Locke offers can be reduced to a single corrective: those who are physically capable of working will be made to do so, whether in work houses, aboard naval ships, or under the direction of the parish. The laws must intervene to solve the “social disorder” of beggary and end the widespread state of corruption that only encourages a life of dependency. The most effective solution, in Locke’s view, requires severe restrictions: the institutionalization of the poor, the forced education of their children, and finally, a program of forced labor and detention.

Absent from Locke’s essay is any immediate concern for the political liberty of the poor. In adopting the life of dependent drones, the poor of England seemingly surrender their fundamental status as rights-bearing individuals. They live at the discretion of parish overseers or guardians, who serve as justices of the peace over vagabonds and beggars. Those found begging outside of their parishes are sent to hard labor in the navy or to houses of correction. In one respect, we might view these prescriptions as punishments for unlawfulness; just as criminals willfully exclude themselves from the law’s benefits, so too persons found begging outside of their parishes may be subject to the same standards. Locke’s specific proposals for the workhouse, however, suggest that idleness itself amounts to a kind of unlawfulness, a defect in need of correction. The purpose of the workhouse is not simply punitive, but aims to instill “discipline,” understood

39. Locke, “Essay on the Poor Law,” 189 (see note 31 above).

40. *Ibid.*, 185–86.

41. *Ibid.*, 190.

as habits of industriousness and a willingness to support oneself through labor. The goal, as Tully argues in his reading of the “Essay,” is not simply to punish, but to fashion a productive Lockean subject.⁴² Beyond this, Locke suggests that the current condition of the able-bodied poor – idle, undisciplined, unemployed – disqualifies them from the full complement of rights and liberties afforded political subjects.⁴³ This condition, furthermore, requires a program of correction in which punishment meets habituation.⁴⁴

In Locke’s formulation, the able-bodied poor cannot rightly be called full members of the community, for their very existence consists of detracting from rather than providing for the common stock. They fulfill neither the divine call to labor identified in the *Second Treatise* nor the moral imperative to become responsible, productive persons, using their labor for a just and fruitful end. Locke’s specific arguments on the poor law point to the relationship between economic participation and political membership in his theory: those who offer nothing to the public stock cannot achieve full place in the Lockean political community. In fact, *economic membership* exists as a necessary condition for civic membership, as those who fail to contribute to the common good through labor have no claim to the complete benefits of political inclusion. Through a consideration of both the *Second Treatise* and “An Essay on the Poor Law,” industriousness fully emerges alongside rationality as a requisite quality for inclusion in the Lockean political community. Locke’s discussion of political liberty and beggary in the “Essay” reveals the full meaning of “industriousness” in the *Second Treatise*’s chapter on property. The injunction to labor exists not simply for the purpose of individual appropriation and ownership, but to improve the overall condition of mankind. Those who refuse to labor, by contrast – the “idle poor,” as opposed to the “Industrious and Rational” – surrender their political liberty and their status as equal subjects.

It is not the case, of course, that the liberties of the Lockean subject should be so absolute and universal as those of unencumbered individuals in the state of nature. The very act of consent requires that such individuals, as Locke writes, “give up the Equality, Liberty, and Executive Power they had in the State of

42. See Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy*, 337 (see note 15 above).

43. There is an obvious limit to this claim. If any person dies “due to want of relief in any parish,” the parish has committed a “crime” punishable by a fine; Locke, “Essay on the Poor Law,” 198 (see note 31 above).

44. On a related point, Andrew Dilts convincingly argues that punishment negotiates the boundary between member and criminal, insider and outsider in Locke’s theory. Punishment seemingly maintains the terms of the social contract and reinforces knowledge of the behaviors that distinguish members from non-members. Applying Dilts’s insight to the case of the poor, the unique punishment for the able-bodied beggar reinforces the industriousness required of the Lockean subject, and underscores its necessity for maintaining the commonwealth; see Andrew Dilts, *Punishment and Inclusion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), chapter 4.

Nature...to be so far disposed of...as the good of the Society shall require.”⁴⁵ For Macpherson, this use of consent is decisive; only the propertied, Macpherson claims, are capable of expressly consenting to civil society, while all others are made subjects, but not members, via the mechanism of tacit consent.⁴⁶ Locke’s distinction regarding consent therefore explains his harsh treatment of the poor in the “Essay,” since the non-propertied classes exist only as political “subjects” without benefit of the protections afforded property-owning members.

As John Dunn notes, however, Macpherson’s claim rests on a suspect, limited interpretation of a singular passage in the *Second Treatise*.⁴⁷ Without engaging in a direct and complete refutation of Macpherson on consent, as Dunn and A. John Simmons have aptly done, it is important nonetheless to consider the larger questions raised by Macpherson’s arguments.⁴⁸ What precisely are the rights of Lockean “members,” and are those rights contingent upon certain individual qualities? Are certain persons simply “subjected,” denied the full complement of political rights, because they fail to exhibit those qualities?

There is little evidence for Macpherson’s claim that Locke intends to restrict express consent and hence membership to the propertied class. Nor do the questions raised by Macpherson’s thesis demand that we attempt to account here for the “damaging lacuna” in Locke’s theory regarding *who* in fact has expressly consented.⁴⁹ Rather, the relevant concern can be captured by the occasional tension that exists in Locke’s thought between the requirements of individual liberty and those of the “good of society.” The common good, Locke tells us, constitutes the boundary beyond which legislative power ought not extend.⁵⁰ But in framing individual labor as a matter of contribution to the common good, and idleness as an instance of detracting from it, Locke appears to justify depriving the idle poor of society’s “mutual preservation” of liberty.⁵¹ Preservation of life, liberty, and estate, the basic protections extended to Lockean members, are limited in the case of the idle poor, but justifiably so. The common good, after all, would seem to demand it.

We need not, like Macpherson, frame Lockean consent in terms of bourgeois politics in order to analyze political membership. It is not the case that the non-propertied classes are entirely left out of the commonwealth (and hence forever denied its protections) at the moment of its creation. Instead, the relevant

45. Locke, *Second Treatise*, 131 (see note 18 above).

46. Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism*, 247–51 (see note 12 above).

47. John Dunn, “Consent in the Political Theory of John Locke,” in his *Political Obligation in its Historical Context: Essays in Political Theory* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 29–52, at 39–40.

48. Simmons, “‘Denisons’ and ‘Aliens,’” especially 164 (see note 14 above).

49. Dunn, “Consent in the Political Theory of John Locke,” 40 (see note 47 above).

50. *Second Treatise*, 131 (see note 18 above).

51. *Ibid.*, 123.

economic distinction that separates member from non-member concerns the act of labor, which in Locke's terms reveals one's disposition to preserve and add to the commonwealth. Moreover, this focus on labor suggests that the divide between member and outsider (or for Macpherson, member and subject) is not necessarily permanent and enduring for individual persons. Laborers are not necessarily permanently "subjected," forever denied the benefits of political life. Locke indeed places a great deal of hope in the reformatory power of workhouses to encourage industrious habits and form good citizens, who may eventually find places in the commonwealth.

Lockean Membership and Semi-membership

Moreover, the poor are not entirely cast out from the political community or forced beyond its borders; a more complete definition of "political membership" is necessary. There is nothing in Locke's "Essay" to suggest that the poor return to a state of nature, outside the bounds of civic life. Nor does his work deal with the question of suffrage. As idle beggars and vagabonds, the poor are denied the full extent of political liberty afforded members of the polity, subject instead to relocation and detention. The poor in Locke's "Essay" occupy a status analogous to that of the "semi-citizen" that Cohen identifies in contemporary nation-states. The semi-citizen has some, but not all political rights, and the "unbundling" of these rights "has the effect of shaping and managing populations whose diverse elements could not all be governed by a single set of rules."⁵² In Locke's thought, the idle seem to constitute a social element for which the standard complement of rights, benefits, and rules of liberal membership do not apply. The very existence of the workhouse, the "house of correction," establishes a second community for the idle poor, governed by a unique set of rules enforced by parish guardians and directed toward fostering industriousness. Though not entirely asocial, the poor retain an outsider status: their idleness seems to place them beyond the full benefits of the law. If "political membership" entails not simply one's physical place within a given community, but a complement of liberties, benefits, and protections, the idle but able-bodied exist only as partial members.

In illustrating this point, Locke's implied analogy between children and the able-bodied poor is instructive. His proposals relegate the poor to the status of children operating under the tutelage of the law rather than by their own reason and free choice. Here, too, the conceptual lens of the *Second Treatise* proves important. For Locke, children are not born in the full state of equality, though they are born to it, and thus "their parents have a sort of Rule and Jurisdiction

52. Cohen, *Semi-Citizenship in Democratic Politics*, 6 (see note 6 above).

over them.⁵³ Like children, beggars also retain no claim to the liberty afforded equal persons in political society. Children require such subjection due to lack of reason, while the poor do so for want of industry; the economic dependence of the latter translates into forced political dependence.⁵⁴ The laws exert influence over the poor akin to that of parental power, transforming the condition of the poor to “the advantage of [the] kingdom.”⁵⁵ Just as fathers must “inform the Mind, and govern the Actions of their yet ignorant Nonage, till Reason shall take its place,” so too the poor laws aim to supplant idleness with industry, habituating the children of the poor to be “sober and industrious all their lives after.”⁵⁶ Industriousness, like rationality, can and ought to be developed by authority and, where necessary, by a relationship of dependence. In the case of the poor, the laws must seek to form productive persons who may in turn become productive members of political society, no matter the cost to individual liberty.

In this respect, the series of prescriptions that Locke recommends may be seen as attempts ultimately to integrate the poor fully into the political community, albeit on specific terms. He emphasizes the parish’s duty to its poorest members: communities cannot rightly let persons starve within a condition of relative abundance.⁵⁷ While the poor laws seek to ensure subsistence for the poor and avoid the extreme of destitution, they aim above all to inculcate habits of industry and self-sufficiency among the able-bodied. In fact, all of Locke’s recommendations aim to transform the idle into productive persons who prove “useful to the public” and contribute to the prosperity of their country.⁵⁸ Yet this point, too, underscores the Lockean economic standard for political inclusion: only the industrious may be considered free and equal members, and the laws must see to their creation, however coercive the means.

53. *Ibid.*, 55.

54. At first glance, it seems quite obvious to associate the condition of the poor with that of slaves, as Tully does, but a closer examination of the definition of slavery in the *Second Treatise* reveals the problems with such an interpretation. Authority over slaves is absolute, as the slave has forfeited his own life by his actions. The authority of the law over the poor does not extend to absolute jurisdiction over lives. What is at stake, then, is the distinction between member and outsider, not freeman and slave; see Locke, *Second Treatise*, 22–23 (see note 18 above).

55. Locke, “An Essay on the Poor Law,” 192 (see note 31 above).

56. Locke, *Second Treatise*, 58 and “An Essay on the Poor Law,” 190 (see notes 18 and 31 above, respectively).

57. Works on the Lockean ideal of charity underscore this point, and refer to Locke’s theological commitments as the force behind his normative prescriptions. See Paul E. Sigmund, “Jeremy Waldron and the Religious Turn in Locke Scholarship,” *Review of Politics* 67 (2005): 207–18. In my reading, however, charity also has its limits and purposes, standing not simply as a moral obligation but as a practical means to further habits of industry.

58. Locke, “An Essay on the Poor Law,” 183 (see note 31 above).

Economic Participation and Democratic Exclusion in Mill's *Considerations*

Locke's liberalism assumes certain qualities of political subjects; as such, it excludes the "non-industrious" from the protections afforded to political subjects. This exclusionary thrust, however, is not unique to Lockean thought or, more generally, to contractarian theories of political obligation and subjectship. A similar relationship of economic and political inclusion emerges in the democratic theory of John Stuart Mill, specifically in his writings on representative government. Even as he attempts to offer the ideal conception of free government, Mill ultimately ties political citizenship to economic membership, making the achievement of the former contingent upon that of the latter. Furthermore, the democratic ideology running through Mill's thought has specific implications for how this ideal of economic membership is modified under liberal democracy. This element of his thought receives fullest expression in *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), specifically in his praise of the franchise.

Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government* contains a systematic defense of the benefits of representative institutions. On one level, the work is puzzling and seemingly contradictory; extending the argument from *On Liberty*, it marks Mill's attempt to preserve elite intelligence against the tide of majoritarian politics, while at the same time offering a strong defense of democratic participation and the very kind of egalitarianism that threatens elite competence with collective mediocrity. For all of its apparent contradictions, however, the central argument of *Considerations* concerns the superiority of democratic institutions and the role for minority representation in maintaining effective government.⁵⁹

According to Mill, representative democracy conforms to the standard of the "ideally best polity" he outlines in the work. For a people well-suited to this particular form of government, representative institutions at once utilize and improve citizen character. Popular government can endure only where the people are already at an advanced stage of civilization, where they have attained the level of moral and intellectual development that Mill describes in *On Liberty*, and have become capable of "being improved by free and equal discussion."⁶⁰

59. Scholarly approaches to the tensions between democracy and elite governance in Mill's thought range from dismissal to attempted reconciliation. Gertrude Himmelfarb defined this tension as the "Two Mills Thesis"; see Himmelfarb's "Introduction" to J.S. Mill, *Essay on Politics and Culture* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1962), xxiv. R.P. Anschutz argues that Mill remained unaware of the central inconsistencies in his thought; see Anschutz, *The Philosophy of J.S. Mill* (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1963), 31–32. While this article does deal directly with this tension, it nonetheless addresses one related element: the activities and capacities required for citizenship and democratic participation.

60. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in the *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (hereafter, *CW*), ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963–1991), 18: 224. For more on this element of Mill's *On Liberty* and its implications for colonialism, see Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 133–50.

For Mill, representative institutions succeed in managing a society by means of the existing intelligence of its citizens, and in promoting those very qualities that ensure its success. A condition of mutuality exists between a morally upright, intelligent people and its strong, effective popular institutions.

By demanding the participation of its citizens, representative democracy encourages the development of mentally active, energetic individuals who endeavor to shape their own political circumstances and destinies. On this point, the contrast between democratic citizens and subjects under despotic government is instructive. Mill speaks of the condition of a people under tyranny, where “the nation as a whole, and every individual composing it, are without any potential voice in their own destiny. They exercise no will in respect to their collective interests. All is decided for them by a will not their own.” He further questions his readers, “What sort of human beings can be formed under such a regimen? What development can either their thinking or their active faculties attain under it?”⁶¹ Intellectual and moral passivity characterize subjects of despotic regimes, as there is no agency left to the individual to employ his will and influence the direction of his own life. Part of this argument is familiar from his defense of benevolent despotism in *On Liberty*, but Mill deepens his description of despotism’s influence in *Considerations*.⁶² “Nor is it only their intelligence that they suffer,” he argues, “their moral capacities are equally stunted. Wherever the sphere of action of human beings is artificially circumscribed, their sentiments are narrowed and dwarfed in the same proportion.”⁶³ The development of active, engaged citizens remains virtually impossible under despotic rule, where the exercise of individual agency amounts only to disobedience.

Democratic government, by contrast, urges and indeed demands more of its citizens. The regular participation of democratic citizens stimulates their active faculties, encouraging the exercise of the will, expanding the sentiments, and most importantly, granting individuals freedom and agency to direct the course of their own lives. Such active citizens in turn contribute to the creation and perpetuation of good representative institutions, as they exert “their energies for the good of themselves and of the community, to which the general prosperity is always proportioned.”⁶⁴ In exercising what Mill calls “a public function” in the act of voting, citizens activate their own intelligence and moral character, but

61. John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, in *CW*, 19: 400 (see note 60 above).

62. Nadia Urbinati also acknowledges the importance of despotism in Mill’s theory, viewing despotism as the antithesis of liberty, such that “the category of despotism can be used to track the genealogy of his philosophy of freedom, understand its richness, and grasp its political implications and power.” I use the category here as a point of contrast between the potential capacities of democratic citizens and despotic subjects; see Nadia Urbinati, “The Many Heads of the Hydra: J.S. Mill on Despotism” in *J.S. Mill’s Political Thought: A Bicentennial Reassessment*, ed. Nadia Urbinati and Alex Zakaras (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 66–97, at 69.

63. Mill, *Considerations*, 400 (see note 61 above).

64. *Ibid.*, 406.

perhaps more importantly, contribute to the development of an advanced society capable of sustaining democratic institutions.⁶⁵

Political participation benefits even the least intelligent persons within a political community. Although Mill has often been characterized as an anti-majoritarian thinker, occupied with preserving elite competence against the mediocrity of the many, several of his comments throughout *Considerations* suggest a wider concern for non-elites.⁶⁶ Manual laborers and those who “have fewest intellectual stimuli” stand to benefit morally and intellectually from political citizenship, particularly from the exercise of suffrage. Their activities as citizens and voters encourage them to look beyond narrow self-interest to the “remote causes and events which take place far off.”⁶⁷ They are motivated to understand and weigh interests beyond their own. In addition to its intellectual, educative function, political participation imposes a moral duty on individuals belonging even to the lowest classes of society.⁶⁸ Citizens recognize a correspondence between their own interests and the public good; in considering the relationship between himself and his neighbor, even the laborer “learns to feel for and with his fellow citizens, and becomes consciously a member of a great community.”⁶⁹ For the involved, upright citizen of a good representative democracy, the public good remains always in view.

Mill’s career in Parliament attests to the seriousness with which he champions participation in his written works. Along with his advocacy of women’s suffrage, he argued in favor of an 1866 bill to enfranchise the working classes. In a speech that unites his arguments for liberty of discussion (in *On Liberty*) and for individual improvement (in *Considerations*), he questioned,

65. Dale E. Miller has commented on the continuity of the “educative” and “effective” roles of representative government and has gone so far as to advance a “Civic Mill” who champions active and disinterested participation in public affairs; see his *J.S. Mill: Moral, Social, and Political Thought* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Books, 2010), 171–72 and “John Stuart Mill’s Civic Liberalism,” *History of Political Thought* 21 (Spring 2000): 88–113. Drawing on Mill’s “intoxication” with ancient Greece, Nadia Urbinati emphasizes the discursive, agonistic element of Millian democracy, which ideally involved the participation of the largest possible number of citizens. See Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). On the educative effect of participation in leading individuals to recognize the common good, see Dennis Thompson, *John Stuart Mill and Representative Government* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976) and Alex Zakaras, “John Stuart Mill, Individuality, and Participatory Democracy,” in *J.S. Mill’s Political Thought*, 200–220 (see note 62 above).

66. On Mill’s elitism and skepticism of the *demos*, see Richard J. Arneson, “Democracy and Liberty in Mill’s Theory of Government,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 20 (1982): 43–64; and Graeme Duncan, *Marx and Mill: Two Views of Social Conflict and Social Harmony* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 259.

67. Mill, *Considerations*, 469.

68. Similarly, Zakaras writes that participatory politics “emerges as a haven for lofty ideas and noble sentiments. It gives private citizens a means of escape from the monotony of economic life – a means they are denied under other types of regimes, notably benevolent despotisms”; see Zakaras, “John Stuart Mill, Individuality, and Participatory Democracy,” 210 (see note 65 above).

69. Mill, *Considerations*, 469 (see note 61 above).

are there many of us who so perfectly understand the subject of apprenticeships, let us say, or of the hours of labour, as to have nothing to learn on the subject from intelligent operatives?... There is no question at present of making the working classes predominant. What is asked is sufficient to ensure that their opinions are fairly placed before the House, and are met by real arguments.⁷⁰

Both the individual laborer and the entire society stand to benefit from complete inclusion. Participation grants the laborer a stake in the common good, and society itself is improved by the introduction of once-silenced opinions into the marketplace of ideas.

The Argument for Extending Suffrage

Given Mill's emphasis on the superiority of democratic institutions and their influence on the character of citizens, it is altogether unsurprising that he argues in favor of including all adults in the political community. Several of these arguments also reveal the dangers of excluding certain people or groups from the right to political participation:

...the participation of all in these benefits is the ideally perfect conception of free government. In proportion as any, no matter who, are excluded from it, the interests of the excluded are left without the guarantee accorded to the rest, and they themselves have less scope and encouragement than they might otherwise have.⁷¹

Those who are excluded from such participation lack the drive to improve themselves and the desire to work for the public good. Denial of citizenship reduces individuals to passive, listless observers of their own lives and destinies; it distances agency from ability, and places persons in that unenergetic and uncultivated condition that defines despotic societies rather than free polities.

The entire community suffers in turn, as the individual excluded from citizenship never feels himself a member of the political whole. His concerns do not progress beyond his inclinations, his thoughts remain bound by self-interest, and he is never called upon to weigh any judgments but his own. Mill

70. John Stuart Mill, "Parliamentary Speech of 13 April 1866," in *CW*, 28: 65 (see note 60 above). For more on this speech, which Janice Carlisle has called "the most remarkable contribution to all the debates that took place in 1866," see Carlisle, "Mr. J. Stuart Mill, MP, and the Character of the Working Classes," in *Mill and the Moral Character of Liberalism*, ed. Eldon Eisenach (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 143–68, at 156.

71. Mill, *Considerations*, 469 (see note 61 above).

recommends universal suffrage to maintain the public good and promote citizen virtue. He urges:

Independently of all these considerations, it is a personal injustice to withhold from any one, unless for the prevention of greater evils, the ordinary privilege of having his voice reckoned in the disposal of affairs in which he has the same interest as other people.... No arrangement of the suffrage, therefore, can be permanently satisfactory, in which any person or class is peremptorily excluded; in which the electoral privilege is not open to all persons of full age who desire to obtain it.⁷²

Still, Mill's later discussion of suffrage and its restrictions belies these earlier claims to universality in political rights. One great caveat to his bold assertion regarding universal suffrage concerns the relationship of private and communal interest. He specifies that the privilege of voting must extend to each individual "in the disposal of affairs in which he has the same interest as other people," but in listing the exceptions to the principle of universal suffrage, Mill contends that certain groups do not and cannot in fact have a shared interest in public affairs. Representatives ought to be elected exclusively by taxpayers, as those who do not pay taxes have no rightful claim to decide how public monies should be spent. Non-taxpayers fail to contribute economically to the whole, and as a result, "any power of voting possessed by them is a violation of the fundamental principle of free government; a severance of the power of control, from the interest of its beneficial exercise."⁷³ If such persons were granted the vote, they would exercise control without proper interest, and Mill warns that "they have every motive to be lavish, and none to economize."⁷⁴ He attempts to overcome this difficulty by calling for a direct tax on the poorest classes in society, since only those who contribute to public funds have a rightful stake in how such funds should be allocated.

Economic Membership and the Restriction of Suffrage

In Mill's democratic theory, the rights of political citizenship stem partly from the performance of certain economic and social roles within the society. Individuals who do not pay taxes are not entitled to the full rights of citizenship; they offer nothing to the public funds and can claim no rightful interest in their proper allocation. For similar but more complex reasons, Mill also disqualifies those on parish relief from suffrage, and his argument for this restriction reveals the degree to which economic membership informs his account of political citizenship. His

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*, 471.

74. *Ibid.*

justification for exclusion goes beyond the matter of “shared financial interest” he articulates in the case of non-taxpayers, and centers on questions of dependency, autonomy, and most importantly, the relationship between an industrious citizenry and stable democracy.

At least initially, such justifications bear a notable resemblance to Locke’s proposals regarding the English poor. In Mill’s formulation, persons receiving parish relief *exclude themselves* from the rights of political citizenship. By accepting funds from the community for their subsistence, and becoming dependent upon charity, recipients of parish funds abdicate their claim to equal political rights with their fellow citizens.⁷⁵ At minimum, such individuals offer nothing in terms of productivity; more offensive still is their status as wasteful dependents on the national economy. Writing of the relief recipient, Mill declares, “those to whom he is indebted for the continuance of his very existence, may justly claim the exclusive management of those common concerns, to which he now brings nothing, or less than he takes away.”⁷⁶

On one level, this assertion echoes his logic regarding non-taxpayers and their stake in the public interest. The situation of relief recipients, however, marks an even more extreme violation of his fundamental principle of free government: that interest and control ought to remain in the same hands. Although non-taxpayers do not contribute to the common stock, they presumably support themselves by their own labor, and a direct tax might justify their enfranchisement. Conversely, recipients of parish relief neither contribute financially to the public stores nor provide for themselves. They live exclusively from their neighbors’ funds, and thus granting them an equal right to suffrage wholly divorces the principle of control from that of interest. That is, the power of control must remain with those who at least have a *financial* interest in using that power well. Economic concerns collapse into and ultimately buttress claims for political control and participation, even in a representative democracy where Mill acknowledges the moral and intellectual benefits of extending the rights of citizenship.

In this respect, Mill extends the Lockean argument regarding the common good and economic participation to the context of a democratic society; he conceptualizes political citizenship and the accompanying right to suffrage in terms of contribution to the greater whole. Moreover, he would deny relief recipients the right of suffrage for five years following their receipt of parish funds, suggesting that individuals must prove themselves to be financially established and participating members of society before they can earn the right to full citizenship. Mill denies their claim to *equality* because of their obvious unwillingness to promote the common good through economic contribution.

75. *Ibid.*, 471–72.

76. *Ibid.*, 472.

Mill's final justification for the exclusion of relief recipients from full citizenship informs and underlies each of these arguments for the restriction of suffrage. It is not the fact of financial dependency alone that disqualifies relief recipients from the franchise. Rather, this financial dependency signals a more dangerous *moral* dependency. In a remarkable conclusion to his discussion of exclusions, Mill elaborates:

These exclusions are not in their nature permanent. They exact such conditions only as all are able, or ought to be able, to fulfil if they choose. They leave the suffrage accessible to all *who are in the normal condition of a human being*: and if any one has to forgo it, he either does not care sufficiently for it, to do for its sake what he is already bound to do, or he is in a general condition of depression and degradation in which this slight addition, necessary for the security of others, would be unfelt, and on emerging from which, this mark of inferiority would disappear with all the rest.⁷⁷

Careful analysis of the logic and content of this passage illustrates the heart of Mill's assessment of human capabilities and the allocation of citizenship. He remains ostensibly faithful to a liberal commitment to universality; the right of suffrage, the hallmark of political citizenship in a democratic regime, extends to human beings as such. In the same breath, however, he undermines such a claim to universality by effectively raising the ante for political inclusion. In his framework, the requisite capacities for liberal universalism and consequently for democratic citizenship come to include qualities like integrity, and, more importantly, for our purposes, industriousness. The industrious and economically self-sufficient exist in the "normal condition" of humanness, while relief recipients fail to attain such a condition and hence have no credible right to inclusion. Their economic status as dependents nullifies their political right to suffrage, and at a more fundamental level, their standing as equal *persons* deserving of the benefits of equal citizenship in a representative democracy.

Loss of economic autonomy and self-sufficiency results in the sacrifice of autonomy of a different order. In the early portions of *Considerations*, Mill highlights the intellectual and moral benefits of democratic participation: individuals under representative democracy become energetic, engaged citizens who actively shape their own futures and political circumstances through the act of voting. When economic autonomy is lost, when the individual becomes dependent on society at large, he must also forfeit his voice in the government and thus his ability to influence his own political destiny. This point is nicely captured by C.L. Ten, who highlights the contradictions in Mill's exclusion of parish recipients, for "the same kind of considerations that led Mill to plead for

77. *Ibid.*, 472; emphasis added.

the extension of suffrage to the working class generally and to women should also be sufficient to outweigh his arguments for exclusion [of non-taxpayers and relief recipients].... If political participation has an educative effect, then those excluded from the franchise are denied one valuable avenue for improvement."⁷⁸ Far from feeling themselves as part of the political community, the economically dependent are "reduced to plead from outside the door to the arbiters of their destiny, not taken into consultation within."⁷⁹

Industriousness, Competence, and Education

But what if, by discussing industry as a qualification for the franchise, Mill is actually focusing on education?⁸⁰ Indeed, Mill's plural voting scheme (his central reform proposal in *Considerations*) hangs on the claim that, "for the purposes of human life," the literate, intelligent minority are worth more than the illiterate, unthinking majority, and should be given greater power in managing public affairs.⁸¹ The plural voting scheme seeks to balance the influence of the educated few against the lower classes, since rule of the latter, as Alex Zakaras reminds us, motivates Mill's fear of a "conformist democracy," among other concerns.⁸² Moreover, as Dennis Thompson has argued, much of Mill's political philosophy is driven by the role that education and competence should play in democratic society, and many of the tensions within his thought – between minority and majority rule, full democratic participation and political exclusion – can be explained by the role he sees for education.⁸³ If education creates a hierarchy of citizens, giving some of them multiple votes and thus increased influence in the political process, then that same reasoning justifies excluding others from that process altogether. And if the true restriction of the franchise is actually based on educational qualifications, then Mill is perhaps simply using the class of relief recipients as a proxy for the uneducated, whose involvement in politics would have potentially disastrous, destabilizing consequences. This is the traditional interpretation of Mill's justification for political exclusion, so much so that the status of non-taxpayers and relief recipients receives little explicit treatment from

78. C.L. Ten, "Democracy, Socialism, and the Working Class," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, ed. John Skorupski (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 372–95 at 384.

79. *Ibid.*, 81.

80. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

81. Mill, "Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform," in *CW*, 19: 323 (see note 60 above).

82. Zakaras, "John Stuart Mill, Individuality, and Participatory Democracy," 202, 210–11 (see note 65 above).

83. Thompson, *John Stuart Mill and Representative Government*, 11–13 (see note 65 above). Following Thompson, J. Joseph Miller argues that the two elements of Mill's thought, competence and participation, are mutually reinforcing under plural voting; see his "J.S. Mill on Plural Voting, Competence, and Participation," *History of Political Thought* 24 (2002): 647–67.

scholars, who largely focus on Mill's educational criteria and ambivalence toward the uneducated classes.⁸⁴

But the economic exclusions Mill recommends ought not be read as part of his discussion of educational qualifications, or in terms of the tension between competence and participation that Thompson identifies. As C.L. Ten acknowledges, the categories of persons excluded for economic reasons (relief recipients and non-taxpayers) exist separately from those who fail to meet the low standard of educational qualification.⁸⁵ Furthermore, although Mill advocated for the eventual, gradual enfranchisement of the working class, those on parish relief do not merit the same benefit. The unproductive and idle comprise a separate case in his thought, one so extreme that it can only be remedied by a material solution: either paying taxes or attaining economic self-sufficiency. Dale Miller explicitly addresses the status of relief recipients in Mill's work, and claims that their disenfranchisement is an issue of fairness; it would be unfair if those who do not work enough to support themselves could vote.⁸⁶ While Miller does distinguish between exclusions based on education and the standing of relief recipients, his interpretation does not go far enough in exposing the basis of economic exclusion. What is truly at stake for Mill is not simply a problem of fairness, of the idle detracting from society, but a wider concern that all citizens possess a rightful interest in society's well-being, not just their own. The exclusion of relief recipients does not depend on education per se, but on the problem of interest. The first step toward the right of suffrage, and the educative experiences it brings, must be to display the potential for shared interest with one's fellow citizens. A minimum level of industriousness discloses this potential, while economic dependency suggests only self-interested motives.

Citizenship and Colonialism?

The distinction between educational and economic requirements also helps to differentiate Mill's imperialist claims from his thoughts on domestic citizenship. One cannot help but note the similarities, linguistic and conceptual, between Mill's justification of economic exclusion and his defense of benevolent despotism in *On Liberty*.⁸⁷ Those "backward states of society" also fall short of

84. This interpretation is evident in the relative silence of scholars on the explicit situation of relief recipients. J. Joseph Miller, for example, briefly mentions the situation of relief recipients when discussing Mill's disqualification of the "illiterate"; see J. Joseph Miller, "J.S. Mill on Plural Voting," 647–67, at 650 (see previous note). As I discuss below, the contributions of C.L. Ten and Dale Miller are notable exceptions to this claim, but their discussions, too, are limited.

85. Ten, "Democracy, Socialism, and the Working Classes," 383 (see note 78 above).

86. Miller, *J.S. Mill: Moral, Social, and Political Thought*, 193–94 (see note 65 above).

87. Mill's discussion of barbarism and imperialism, of course, goes beyond the famous passage in *On Liberty*. For a treatment of barbarism across Mill's writings, see Michael Levin, *J.S. Mill on Civilization and Barbarism* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

the standard of human maturity, the “normal condition of a human being.” And just as the principles of liberty do not apply to individuals within such societies, so too the rights of citizenship cannot extend to those who fail to meet the conditions of humanity, including industriousness, self-sufficiency, integrity, and capacity for free thought. Along these lines, Barbara Arneil notes the symmetry between Mill’s suggested posture toward foreign nations and his endorsement of illiberal, exclusionary practices within England; she labels both phenomena as instances of liberal colonialism, foreign and domestic.⁸⁸

Nonetheless, Mill’s defense of despotism and his discussion of political exclusion rest on distinct theoretical premises, and highlighting this distinction proves central to grasping the particular character of *economic* membership in his thought. Unlike the defense of colonialism, which is predicated upon the capacity for rationality and improvement, his justification for excluding relief recipients and non-taxpayers hinges on his central principle of representative government: the coincidence of control and interest. The economically dependent presumably fail to understand the interests of the community. They cannot grasp “the beneficial exercise” of power directed toward the common good. In other words, the very transformative lesson that individuals may learn in and from political life – an understanding of the common good and an elevation of sentiments beyond self-interest – must also be grasped via economic, commercial participation.

Economic activity thus serves an educative function similar to that offered by political engagement: it forces the individual to weigh interests beyond his own and to appreciate how his choices may bear upon the wider community. Bruce Baum highlights the way in which Mill conceived of economic activity itself as educative, since it may entail the exercise of choice in occupation, partnership in business, or involvement in worker associations, all forms of action that encourage agency.⁸⁹ Similarly, Wendy Donner underscores Mill’s “endorsement of the economic arena as a potential site for education in the excellences” and his argument in favor of democratic workplace partnerships as sites of civic virtue.⁹⁰ Crucially, for Mill, the lessons of commercial activity and economic self-sufficiency must be had *prior* to those learned via politics. Some degree of economic participation thus exists prior to political participation in Mill’s schema;

88. Barbara Arneil, “Liberal Colonialism, Domestic Colonies and Citizenship,” *History of Political Thought* 33 (2012): 491–522.

89. Baum, *Rereading Power and Freedom in J.S. Mill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 204, 209–11.

90. Wendy Donner and Richard Fumerton, *Mill* (London: Blackwell, 2009), 95. Robert Taylor and Yvonne Chiu have recently argued that Mill saw individual industriousness as necessary for creating a civilized society, so much so that he lists “patient industry” among the virtues a benevolent despot ought to foster among “backward” cultures; see their “The Self-Extinguishing Despot: Milleian Democratization,” *Journal of Politics* 73 (2011): 1239–50, at 1244.

it enables and maintains representative government, granting individuals the social interest to use their right of suffrage for the achievement of shared purposes.

Mill's emphasis on the value of economic participation also informs his arguments for supporting the poor and fostering habits of industry. If a government is only as enlightened as its citizenry, then the formation of active, prudent, industrious citizens across all classes must be of primary concern. Beyond this, and like Locke, he acknowledges society's moral obligation to protect persons against "the extreme of want," which as Bruce Baum argues, he viewed as a constraint on freedom and self-development.⁹¹ The condition, Mill writes, "even of those who are unable to find their own support, needs not be one of physical suffering.... This is surely something gained for humanity, important in itself, and still more so as a step to something beyond."⁹² Mill was a great defender of the Poor Law Reform of 1834 and the royal commission that drafted it, and placed great hope in its system of "less-eligibility" as perhaps the best means of encouraging self-sufficiency and discouraging idleness while avoiding the extremes of hunger and destitution. Mill largely shared the commission's sentiments regarding methods for encouraging industry and self-sufficiency, with one significant addition. Public charity, well-directed and limited, could simultaneously prevent poverty, alleviate suffering, and foster the habits of economic life necessary for a robust democratic politics.⁹³

Acknowledging the distinctiveness of Mill's ideal of economic participation and its relationship to political inclusion allows us to recognize the correspondence between representative government and liberal citizenship in his writings. Representative democracy certainly transforms solitary individuals into engaged citizens, but the rights of citizenship, well-exercised, in turn buttress and maintain free, representative institutions. In conflating the requirements of economic participation and political membership, Mill draws no distinction between the constitutive qualities for citizenship and the attributes of the good citizen. In his representative democracy, the only kind of citizen – the only person deserving of the benefits of membership – is the good citizen, since the maintenance of strong popular institutions depends upon the character of human beings as the material of society. He notes, "if we ask ourselves on what causes and conditions good government in all its senses, from the humblest to the most exalted, depends, we find that the principal of them, the one which transcends all others, is the qualities of the human beings composing the society over which the government

91. Bruce Baum, *Rereading Power and Freedom in J.S. Mill*, 11 (see note 89 above).

92. John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, in *CW*, 2: 360 (see note 60 above).

93. For more on Mill's preference for public aid, see Emma Saunders-Hastings, "No Better to Give than to Receive: Charity and Women's Subjection in J.S. Mill," *Polity* 46 (2014): 233–54.

is exercised.”⁹⁴ The qualities of the individual citizen range from industry to competence, integrity, justice, and prudence; each conduces to the creation not only of good human beings, but of good government.⁹⁵ The good citizen, the only kind of person deserving of democratic citizenship, must possess qualities that will contribute to the public good.⁹⁶

Writing in the context of rising democracy, which included parliamentary “checks” on government along with an expanding franchise, Mill offers a thicker vision of the public good than that introduced in Locke’s works. The same concerns that animated Locke’s exclusion of the English poor, problems of dependency and indolence, certainly recur in Mill’s discussion of relief recipients. For Mill, however, far more is at stake than the economic prosperity of society at large, and self-rule accordingly imposes a demanding standard of inclusion. The very persistence of democratic institutions, and of the individual liberties that such institutions preserve, depends upon the right kind of citizenry.

Conclusion

When read in tandem, Locke’s *Second Treatise* and “Essay on the Poor Law” reveal a theory of contractarian politics that limits the extension of complete political liberty to the industrious. While the idle poor are not entirely cast out from the commonwealth, their unwillingness to labor places them in a distinct category of membership, subject to violations of individual liberty. John Stuart Mill, writing nearly two centuries later, adopts a similar line of reasoning to exclude the economically dependent from the right of suffrage in a representative democracy. The very notion of human “maturity” includes the quality of industriousness, and those who fail to contribute economically to their communities cannot possess the full rights of citizenship. For Mill, defining and delimiting citizenship in such a way has profound implications for democratic practice. A free, popular government can thrive only where its members have a grasp of the social interest and the activities necessary to realize it. Economic participation, along with education and the experiences of political life, enables individuals to apprehend this interest.

94. Mill, *Considerations*, 389 (see note 61 above).

95. *Ibid.*, 385. Mill explicitly lists “industry” as a quality of the individual that enables good government.

96. While Mill establishes an economic floor that a person must rise above in order to achieve the right of suffrage, he condemns any strict association between wealth and political power. He rejects Lord Cecil’s proposal to apportion votes based on wealth, resisting Cecil’s logic that likens government to a joint-stock company. For Mill, property ownership and economic participation grant the individual some rightful interest in the social order, and it is that interest alone – and not the *measure* of one’s property or wealth – that grants an equal stake in society; see Mill, “Recent Writers on Reform,” in *CW*, 19: 354 (see note 60 above).

The question becomes whether these economic standards for inclusion are endemic to liberalism as such, or whether they disclose an inherent tension between the categorical principle of liberal universality and the practical demands of political life. Do the economic requirements for citizenship in fact represent a compromise of liberal principles, or do they reflect a particular vision of the individual at work in liberal theory? Mehta, Hirschmann, and others have asserted that liberalism relies upon a “thick” conception of the human person as rational and virtuous, which in turn excludes certain individuals whose capacities fall short of such a heightened standard.⁹⁷ Attention to the role of economic membership in the work of Locke and Mill allows us to expand upon this already thick image of the liberal self. For the qualities of the human person and hence the citizen come to include not only capacities for reason and virtue, but also activities of industry and economic participation. Political inclusion is contingent not only upon qualities and capacities, but dispositions and actions that suggest an individual orientation toward pursuit of the common good.

Contemporary scholarship on the status of the American poor points to the persistence of these contingencies in present-day liberal democracies. Certain theories assert that the design of liberal democratic policies actually marginalizes the poor in civic life. In seeking to foster certain ideals of “good citizenship” by mobilizing wealthier segments of the population, such policies, it is argued, actually restrict the poor’s access to resources that facilitate political participation.⁹⁸ Even social welfare programs, scholars contend, stress certain obligations that potential recipients must fulfill in order to merit “full standing” in the political community and gain access to social services.⁹⁹ Recent literature on differentiated forms of membership provides us with a conceptual vocabulary for analyzing these examples. The poor and welfare recipients often experience civic life as “partial citizens,” endowed with the legal rights of civic membership but lacking the full experiences of inclusion that typify democratic citizenship. While economic standards certainly do not disqualify entire groups from citizenship in the United States or other liberal regimes, they nonetheless continue to differentiate categories of members in the liberal democratic state in subtle and yet significant ways.

Returning to liberal theory, we might question whether the standard liberal language of universality masks the reality of such exclusions in contemporary society. The fact that perceived defects in rationality, virtue, and economic activity do not nullify one’s *legal standing* as citizen contribute to what Cohen

97. Mehta, “Liberal Strategies,” 429 (see note 5 above).

98. See Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); and Stephen Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

99. Suzanne Mettler and Joe Soss, “The Consequences of Public Policy for Democratic Citizenship,” *Perspectives on Politics* 2 (2004): 55–73, at 61.

calls “the myth of full citizenship,” which treats citizenship as binary; one is either “in” or “out.”¹⁰⁰ And this myth subtly reinforces the doctrine of liberal inclusiveness – liberal democracies, after all, do not legally exclude on the basis of economic dependency. Yet attention to the phenomenon of partial citizenships and the status of the poor offer a different picture and substantive conclusion: that the economic dimensions of membership, so intrinsic to the liberal theories of Locke and Mill, continue to inform our most basic notions of citizenship.

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100. Cohen, *Semi-citizenship*, 13 (see note 6 above).