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such a criteria. Certainly such a view is not politically correct today, and smacks of racist or ethnocentrist bias. But perhaps Mill could charitably be interpreted to mean groups which are engaged in perpetual warfare and destruction, unable to ever progress far as a people group. Such cultural problems, are at any rate, certainly not a matter of one's race.

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bored quite quickly (See Mill's "Autobiography" in volume I of Mill's Collected Works, and Packer's biography of Mill).

4. This is a common theme of the non-theistic existentialists like Sartre, Camus, and Heidegger. Heidegger claimed, for example, that humans provide the being-ness of the world to it. We are the source of the being of the world, as we are the ones who are able to have meaningful relations. This is a world without any given ideals, but a perpetual idealization of what has not come yet. Jacques Derrida, the French contemporary philosopher, has discussed a similar concept in his later philosophy—the notion of messianic without messiah, or messianicity.
5. Many if not most of those attending this conference are teachers. I think many of us would agree with the words of former President James Monroe that "The question to be asked at the end of an educational step is not, 'what has the student learned?' But 'What has the student become?'" [Documented by Os Guinness, *A Time for Truth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000) p.25]. Unfortunately, we sometimes forget this, and we become concerned that the student is learning particular facts, rather than what sort of a person she is becoming. We realize as well that becoming ethical is not so much a matter of head-knowledge as it is an issue of habits, whether they be virtues or vices. I am thinking here of a story once told to me by a professor of philosophy at a large Catholic University in Canada. He told me that he had many students coming to him professing that they no longer believed in God, and when he would ask them by what reasoning they came to this conclusion, they would oftentimes give him an argument something like the following: 'The Catholic Church speaks for God, The Catholic Church says I should not have sex before marriage, But I am having sex with my girlfriend and enjoy it, so I have decided the Catholic Church must be wrong, so I have also given up belief in God now. This amusing but sad argument demonstrates that it is often not thinking which guides behavior, but oftentimes behavior which guides our thinking.
6. I will not develop Mutahhari's view of Islamic law for this paper.
7. Mill specifically excluded children and those who cannot care for themselves, which is probably not so controversial. But he also included Abackwards states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage . . . Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement . . . Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion (1978, p.69)." There are difficult questions here which must be answered to apply

about the importance of transcendent values and higher sentiments, the valuable role of religion in nurturing the higher capacities of man, and then highlighted Mill's view of liberty. In these respects, at least, the conservative Islamic values and liberal democratic values might share a good deal more common ground than is often expected when it comes to the importance of nurturing higher values in society, even if Mill's view of the limits of liberty might be set at a different place than Mutahhari's. I believe that the struggle we face as societies is attempting to allow for vigorous innovation and creativity by maintaining freedom, not only politically and structurally, but socially as well. The oppressive force of mass opinion often crushes the individual creativity which helps a society to remain vibrant and healthy. I also have argued here that one of the most important oppressive forces in society may be the consumerism which appears to be gradually overtaking the world via the free-market economy. If this is the case, then some concern with the free-market and its consumerism is understandable not only to those who ascribe to Mutahhari, but also to those of us who ascribe to the liberal democratic thinking of Mill.

Endnotes

1. It is well known that Mill had a mental breakdown in his late teens. What brought him out of his depression was literature, whose power was missing in his father and Bentham's utilitarianism. Through that experience, Mill came to realize that poetry, literature, and art provide the nurturing necessary to help one sympathize with others, by developing moral imagination
2. By consumerism I mean the tendency for people to attempt to fill their empty lives with purchased goods. Commodification is the process by which non-market values (peace, happiness, love) are associated with goods we can purchase—for example, when advertising suggests that my purchasing a particular product will make me happy, peaceful, fulfilled, etc.
3. Mill provides five criteria for trying to determine higher from lower capacities. 1) the person acquainted with both types of pleasure is best able to judge which is the superior, or higher, pleasure. 2) The higher pleasures are usually unique to Humans and 3) involve the intellect, not merely the body. 4) Higher pleasures can be chosen without a loss of pride, liberty, or dignity by the one who chooses it. And 5) Higher pleasures are inexhaustible. While I get full of food, the more one exercises the higher capacities, the greater those appetites become. For example: those who pursue education have a greater capacity to learn, while those who do not pursue education get

advocate no-interference policy whereby the society should not in any way attempt to affect or influence moral agents. Society does play a powerful and positive and essential role in the development and life of an individual, and this is why Mill often blames poor education for the lack of happiness and poor moral behavior in society, which keep us from attaining an ideal state of liberty for all. Mill says, "The present wretched education and wretched social arrangements, are the only real hindrance to its being attainable by almost all" (1998, p.74).

Mill does make some concrete applications with regard to when the State might interfere with commerce. With regard to those who are 'dealers in strong drinks' he says, "the interest, however, of these dealers in promoting intemperance is a real evil and justifies the State in imposing restrictions and requiring guarantees which, but for that justification, would be infringements of legitimate liberty" (1978, p.170). Education and the right raising of the young is also extremely important to Mill, as he believes the state must require education of all minors, and even suggests that the state should prevent certain people from having children, namely, people who cannot provide sustenance and education for a child.

So Mill certainly does not believe in an 'anything goes' 'free-for-all' libertine state where no restrictions on liberty are allowed. But more importantly, he thinks that it is essential for society to ensure that people are habituated and educated towards the socially-beneficial sentiments. I believe that consumerism in culture is gradually undermining our social structures and values. My students come to my Christian liberal arts college with much more knowledge about commodities like Lexus, Nike, Abercrombie and Fitch, NFL etc. than they do about key concepts like justice, morality, Plato, French Revolution, etc. Insofar as our commodified culture inadvertently draws us away from the substantial and towards the commodified, it undermines the basic transcendental understandings which we need to share to have a true society. We are slowly forgetting and neglecting our sense of transcendent values, higher aspirations, and the reality of life as we become more and more directed towards material pursuits, consumer mentality, and buy into the commodification of values which has now begun to permeate cultures worldwide through globalization.

Conclusion

I have argued here that Mutahhari and Mill share common concerns

they should not concern themselves about the well-doing or well-being of one another, unless their own interest is involved. (p.142)

What Mill objects to is the use of oppressive societal pressure in achieving the desired behavior, particularly external sanctions by either law or social custom. This is clear when he says, "Instead of any diminution, there is need of a great increase of disinterested exertion to promote instruments to persuade people to their good than whips and scourges, either of the literal or the metaphorical sort" (ibid).

While some had primarily focused on the punitive sanctions of government as a tool for societal pressure to achieve compliance from individuals, Mill always strongly encourages education over other forms of societal pressures. He always wants to maintain the individual's integrity, while encouraging and persuading through education of the intellect and training of the sentiments:

However, while my actions are not to be interfered with when they not affect others, Mill does say that, "Acts injurious to others require a totally different treatment" (p.145). Mill does distinguish here between the former actions, which are not properly immoral because they do not affect others, and those which are immoral because they do affect the well being of others. As Mill says,

It might be said that the former-- those bad character traits which should be tolerated -- are essentially foolish bad manners. But the latter-- character traits which do affect the good of others -- can be censured. Mill claims that these include:

Cruelty of disposition; malice and ill-nature; that most antisocial and odious of all passions, envy; dissimulation and insincerity, irascibility on insufficient cause, and resentment disproportioned to the provocation the love of domineering over others; the desire to engross more than one's share of advantages . . . , the pride which derives gratification from the abasement of others; the egotism which thinks self and its concerns more important than everything else, and decides all doubtful questions in its own favour-- these are moral vices and constitute a bad and odious moral character; unlike the self-regarding faults previously mentioned, which are not properly immoralities and, to whatever it may be carried, do not constitute wickedness. (ibid)

Mill does not advocate coercion or physical force to bring about compliance from an individual. But on the other hand, Mill does not

1978, p.68). The only grounds of interfering with another's free actions is that his actions would harm others. His freedom must not be interfered with "for his own sake," as Mill says, "His own good, either physical or moral, is not sufficient warrant"(p.69). But what cannot be forgotten is that Mill is discussing a particular type of person: a fully mature and intelligent adult: "It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to say that this doctrine is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties" (ibid).⁷

2. Limits of Individual Sovereignty, and the Importance of Society and Education

In his classic work, *On Liberty*, Mill asks the question, "What, then, is the rightful limit to the sovereignty of the individual over himself?" While Mill rejects the notion of social contract as a fictitious imaginative myth with no basis in reality, he does think people do have obligations to the society which protects their rights:

Though society is not founded on contract, and though no good purpose is answered by inventing a contract in order to deduce social obligations from it, everyone who receives the protection of society owes a return for the benefit, and the fact of living in society renders it indispensable that each should be bound to observe a certain line of conduct towards the rest. (p.69)

He goes on to outline these obligation as being first, one has not the right to injure the rightful interests of another, and second, each must bear his own share of responsibility in defending the society. "These conditions society is justified in enforcing at all costs to those who endeavour to withhold fulfillment." If a person's conduct affects no one else, then there is no basis for any societal intervention (although, of course, the public is always free to have their opinions) but if the person's action does affect others, then it becomes a reasonable question to pursue. So, while Mill supports individual liberty and dissent from public opinion adamantly, he simultaneously requires that the pursuit of one's own free liberties does not interfere with the rights of the rest:

It would be a great misunderstanding of this doctrine to suppose that it is one of selfish indifference which pretends that human beings have no business with each other's conduct in life, and that

attempts to bring philosophy and religion together (Mill, "Coleridge" in *Collected Works V10*).

Mill saw the revealed teachings of Jesus to be utilitarian doctrine. He says, "In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as one would be done by, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality" (1998, p.64).

Mill sees in the teachings of Christ a desire for all people to be united in a feeling of mutual sympathy and concern:

If the view adopted by the utilitarian philosophy of the nature of the moral sense be correct, this difficulty will always present itself, until the influences which form moral character have taken the same hold of the principle which they have taken of some of the consequences-- until by the improvement of education, the feeling of unity with our fellow creatures shall be (what it cannot be doubted that Christ intended it to be) as deeply rooted in our character, and to our own consciousness as completely a part of our nature, as the horror of crime is in an ordinarily well-brought up young person. (p.73)

It is through education that this sentiment of unity will be nurtured and strengthened. It is not simply an innate feeling, but a potential feeling which should be intentionally directed towards the good of the community. The more we nurture the higher sentiments, the stronger this social sympathy will become.

7. Limits as essential to true liberty

Mutahhari and Mill both realize that true freedom requires some restriction. Mutahhari saw this to be best seen through the revelation of divine law in the Q'ran.⁶ Mill thought that the principle of liberty could be derived from the utilitarian principle—that the basis for individual liberty was that it would bring about happiness, and that the basis for restricting some personal liberties was that restricting these liberties would bring about a greater happiness as well. Ultimately, Mill advocated that individuals were free to do as they wish so long as their actions did not interfere with the freedoms of others.

Mill is famous for his "principle of liberty" which is "That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others" (Mill,

because **a.** one with faith can have hope that there is order in the world, laws sustained by a just well-intentioned Overseer, and that there is opportunity and possibility in the world; **b.** the man without faith sees the world as hopeless, and consequently has a despairing heart, and **c.** one who has faith expects that good efforts produce good effects—in other words, that justice will follow justice; **d.** faith in the future provides a restful heart and peace

Religious faith also 2) improves social relations, because religious faith “respects truth, honors justice, encourages kindness and mutual confidence, inculcates the spirit of piety, acknowledges moral values, emboldens the individuals to resist tyranny and unites them into a homogeneous body.” He also mentions that “Most of the outstanding men who have shed luster on the world and have shone on the firmament of history, were inspired by religious feelings” We might consider the hundreds of hospitals begun by churches or religious orders as evidence of this in the west.

Mutahhari, it seemed to me, saw exactly what is the problem of many cultures in the world today, including my own in the United States. As one becomes more secular in their outlook, one says that life is what they make it—what they do—and more and more—what they buy and own. So marketing has helped producers to sell modern people what they will become, by making them think that what they own or can afford to do is what makes them who they are. This commodification of self is often purely materialistic, in that it has no spiritual or non-physical ideals. It has ideals, but these ideals are purely materialistic—goals of the attainment of happiness through purchased goods and purchased experiences. This commodification of what culture values could not take place if the values themselves were not first changed to some degree.⁵

6. The Instrumental Role of Religion in Supporting Social Sympathy

Mill's Interest in Religion's Power to Direct Sentiments

Mill was not a Christian, but saw religion as beneficial to society, especially to the nurturing of social sentiments. Mill supported the instrumental role which religion can play in fostering social sympathy. Mill was essentially interested in religion—particularly Protestant Christianity's power to help mold social sentiments. There is no question that Mill was quite interested in the benefits and utility of religion. (Mill, 1963, *Utility of Religion*) He spoke highly of Coleridge's

In monotheism, however the goal is always there from the very beginning, clear and unlimited, as well. It always remains new and challenging. No other world vision constitutes the source and spirit of a school of thought, as both an ideal and a motivating force. At the same time, monotheism creates obligation, produces joy, provides guidance and encourages self-sacrifice. (*Goal of Life*, Ch.16)

God provides us an affirmative and concrete goal which has definite purpose for our lives. Yet God, as infinite and unlimited, remains in some sense always beyond us, always new, and always challenging. Theism, for this reason, provides an infinite source of vision and hope.

Mutahhari develops his view of human nature from his monotheism. He says, "Man himself being a kind of animal, has many things in common with other animals. At the same time he has many dissimilarities which distinguish him from other animals and make him superior to them" (*Man and Universe*, Ch.1). He says that the two key features unique to man are differences in attitude and inclination. Man can reflect on his wants and desires in ways animals cannot. Animal desires are inferior to humans' in four ways: 1) Animal desires are strictly material, not spiritual; 2) they are primarily selfish, and not given to transcendental values beyond their immediate kin; 3) they are concerned only with their immediate environment; 4) they are primarily concerned with the instantaneous moment. Man, on the other hand, can have transcendent spiritual values which bring him beyond himself to purposes beyond the present moment and location. In this sense, the transcendent values which Man can have faith in help him to become transcendent to the material part of his life.

5. Benefits of Religion—Mutahhari

Both Mutahhari and Mill believe religion plays a positive, even essential role in nurturing moral sentiments and providing belief in transcendent values. Mutahhari says,

Knowledge without faith is a sharp sword in the hand of a drunken brute. It is a lamp in the hand of a thief to help him pick up the best articles at midnight. (*Man and Universe* Ch2)

In his *Man and Universe* Mutahhari claims that there are benefits which come through religious belief: 1. *Happiness and Delight*, which come to us

money as a basis for self identity and happiness. Part of the problem of obsession with money and goods is that one loses one's concern for the other. While Advertisers may not be intending to break down our society, or reduce awareness of important societal issues, insofar as they provide materialistic goals and desires for me to pursue, and direct my attention towards attaining these goals, they inadvertently help me to forget about others and the societal needs around me (Gustafson, 2001). Insofar as advertisers perpetually manipulate my desires and emotions as they attempt to persuade me to purchase goods and products, they induce a great deal of cynicism in the public, and this loss of good will is detrimental to culture. That is the long term price paid for the short-term benefit to the advertiser's and their clients:

Long experience has revealed that while certain kinds of actions may provide short-term advantages, they tend in the long run to have gravely adverse consequences for the population as a whole. Fraud and deception, for example, may be advantageous for a time-- particularly for those who are concealing the truth-- but they tend, in the long run, to diminish respect for the truth, to increase popular cynicism, to make communication more difficult, and to cause a breakdown in other important institutions. (Leiser, 1979, p.175)

Advertising causes breakdown in society both insofar as it turns my attention towards myself—and I become selfish, arrogant, uninterested in society, and advertising's constant manipulation of my desires eventually causes cynicism and widespread lack of good will towards others.

4. Mutahhari and Mill on the Higher and Lower Qualities of Man

As Mill, Mutahhari rejects a worldview without ideals higher than just the individual. They both believe that ideals are necessary for mankind to progress. Both Mutahhari and Mill discuss this in terms of higher and lower capacities. If humanity loses its ability to pursue the higher capacities, then it is doomed to live in an animal-like state. Non-materialistic goals must be held in regard over material ends, or society will falter. Of course Mutahhari grounds his view of human nature in theism:

Any life-goals or ideologies, which are strictly material—i.e., strictly of this world, are incapable of providing what humans need:

In his life, both personal and social, man is in need of a number of non-material objectives. Every social system requires a number of objectives which are common between individuals, without which social life would be impossible in its true sense. For, social life means co-operation and attainment of common goals, both material and spiritual. (*Goal of Life*, Ch9)

We cannot live by materialistic goals alone:

Therefore every school of thought and every social system needs a number of spiritual ideas; an ideology, which is above material values, and is so strong that it becomes sacred. This sacredness may be considered worthy enough by a man to sacrifice his personal life for it. (Ch.14)

It is in fact illogical to devote one's life to non-transcendent goals:

A materialistic goal cannot be construed as a sacred goal, It is not above human objectives and self-sacrifice in it is illogical, since it comprises the materialistic ideal. To secure material gains through self-sacrifice is essentially self-contradictory, Can that be called an ideal? (Ch.16)

In his Moral Lectures, Mutahhari specifically criticizes the consumeristic pursuit of money. He claims that these pursuits undermine human dignity, noting that “the power of things over man, and in particular the authority of money, is opposed to the demands of human dignity and nobility, and is as condemnable as idolatry.” (Moral Lectures) Money must be in the service of man, not man in the service of money:

Man can reclaim his identity only by liberating himself from the power of money and by bringing money under his own control. True human personality can emerge when the danger of money and goods remains possible without overcoming man, who is not ruled by them but rules them. This kind of personality is what Islam calls *zūbd*. (*Moral Lectures*, Ch28)

Proper human dignity is achieved when one is not dependent upon

be it, precisely because it could not attain the in-itself without losing itself as for-itself. Human reality therefore is by nature an unhappy consciousness *with no possibility* of surpassing its unhappy state. (Sartre, 1993, p.140)

Man is in some sense a perpetual nihilation:

Man is neither the one nor the other of these beings, for strictly speaking, we should never say of him that he *is* at all. He is what he is not and he is not what he is; he is the nihilation of the contingent In-itself in so far as the self of this nihilation of the contingent In-itself in so far as the self of this nihilation is its flight ahead toward the In-itself as self-cause." (p.735)

As the one who nihilates himself perpetually-- the self-nihilator-- man exists. But as he exists, he does not exist, strictly speaking, as either being-in-itself or in-itself-for-itself, but as nihilation of the in-itself by the nothingness of the for-itself. That continual act is human existence, and that is lived freedom, according to Sartre. Humans create their own meaning and purpose because there is no given purpose to their lives.⁴ We see this today. But what Sartre fails to note is that often, without any transcendent ideals, modern man often turns to the purchase of material objects to fill the void. We see in contemporary postmodern society a rampant materialism—an attempt to find self worth through purchasing goods. This process by which all values are converted into monetary value is the commodification of values. Advertisements tell us that we can purchase happiness, success, peace, even spiritual fulfillment by purchasing particular products. This attempt to sell people non-material values (Happiness, peace, joy) via material goods ultimately undermines transcendent spiritual values. But more than this, it often leads to a self-centeredness which undermines our sense of self as a social being. I am habituated to be concerned most about MY desires, rather than the good of the many. In this way consumerism undermines the fabric of society.

Mutahhari discusses the problem of an atheistic society, and the emptiness which accompanies the loss of ideals in secular modern thinking. Mutahhari says,

Society is now threatened with an idealistic vacuum. Some people want to fill this vacuum with pure philosophy and some others are seeking the help of literature, art and humanitarian sciences for this purpose. (*Man and Universe*, Ch 4)

Capacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance; and in the majority of young persons it speedily dies away if the occupations to which their position in life has devoted them and the society into which it has town them, are not favorable to keeping that higher capacity in exercise. Men lose their high aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, because they have not time or opportunity for indulging them; and they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them, but because they are either the only ones to which they have access or the only ones which they are any longer capable of enjoying. (p.58)

People become quite adept at ignoring their mortality and the fruitlessness of their lives. The fact seems to be that many people don't realize that they are living and working without significance because they have blinded themselves through consumerism and other methods of self-induced ignorance. The problem, Mill says, is that people fail to nurture the higher feelings, and because of that, they lose their ability to find happiness through the more noble pursuits. Note that part of the problem here is that the demands of the society help the young to lose these capacities. We must be vigilant against letting this happen.

3. Mutahhari's Social Concern and the Loss of Ideals in Modern Atheistic Society

In his essay, *Man and Universe*, Mutahhari laments the loss of ideals in the modern world. He uses the example of Sartre, the French atheist philosopher, who held that we had an endless empty ideal:

Sartre and others say that man should not stop at a boundary, but he should go beyond it and change the previous plan for a new goal, and in this way advance constantly. This means perpetual motion in a direction without having a definite goal and destination from the beginning. (*Goal of Life*, Ch3)

Man has no natural purpose or meaning, according to Sartre. Sartre wrote as a secular god-less thinker when he says that we are own god-project:

The being of human reality is suffering because it rises in being as perpetually haunted by a totality which it is without being able to

This moral education is essential, because only if one's sentiments are rightly aligned with one love the right things in the right way—with a desire for the good of society. So society plays a key role in this process. While Mill saw poetry and art to be the key educators of sentiment in his day, I have argued elsewhere extensively that today's key educator of sentiments—that which provides our directives as to what is truly valuable and worth pursuing—is advertising (Gustafson, 2001). So our contemporary society sponsors and derives values and goals not so much through the associative power of poetry pointing us towards transcendence, but rather, through advertisements indicating, albeit vaguely, that particular consumer products like beer, sportscars, or a brandname of clothing, will give our lives true success and satisfaction.

This sheer secular materialism is something of which John Stuart Mill Himself would be quite critical, given Mill's higher and lower capacity distinction, like the ancient Greek Epicureans. He says that humans have capacities for higher pleasures which animals do not enjoy, including intellect, moral sentiment, noble feeling, and imagination (Mill, 1998, p.56). Humans can enjoy books, while dogs cannot. We can use our imagination to create art or beautiful architecture, while chickens cannot. We can have pleasure from acts of heroism, or from seeing beauty, while animals generally have no such capacity.³

According to Mill, the pursuit of these higher pleasures ultimately leads to a strengthening of society, and develops a social bond and concern for others which helps the individual to transcend his own material existence. This leads to habits and desires which make him care for the others around him:

Not only does all strengthening of social ties, and all healthy growth of society, give to each individual a stronger personal interest in practically consulting the welfare of others; it also leads him to identify his *feelings* more and more with their good, or at least with an ever greater degree of practical consideration for it. He comes, as though instinctively, to be conscious of himself as a being who *of course* pays regard to others. (p.78)

But Mill realized that the man who loses his ability to live an excellent meaning-filled life does not purposefully cast these abilities aside; rather, they gradually fade away as one pursues the typical life lived simply for material success. Mill himself says,

freedom. Of course, it may not seem strange that a Muslim thinker would be critical of commodification of social values, given Muslim disaffection for Hollywood and western materialism, but surprisingly, this critique is rooted in a conception of humans similar in many ways to the western secular thinker John Stuart Mill.

2. Mill's Individualism and His Social Concern

Mill and Mutahhari share a concern for developing and maintaining strong social sentiments. This is often overlooked in Mill's thought because of an apparent tension: on the one hand, one has his *Utilitarianism* in which he presents us the thesis that the Good which we should all follow is to pursue the interest of the many, not our own immediate interests. On the other hand, in his *On Liberty* he suggests that it is in the best interest of society to not restrain the individual's liberty too severely. So Mill is often seen to be speaking out of both sides of his mouth—first saying the one should live for the many, and then saying that the many should put up with the one.

Of course Mill does say both things, but the tension is not so great as is sometimes projected. First, it should be remembered that Mill's value of individualism is based upon his utilitarianism. He believes that a society is best served by allowing a great deal of individual liberty. So the value of utility is primary to individualism. This can be understood best by realizing Mill's theory of the moral sentiments, which is very much influenced by a theory of moral sentiments and habituation found in a line running from Aristotle to Hutcheson to Adam Smith. Habituation is key as one works to develop moral sentiments in the young through proper education—including poetry and art which evoke social sympathy. As this takes place, the individual comes to associate her own interests with those of the many. In this way, Mill hopes, one's own happiness will be congruous with that of the happiness of others—not by instinct, but almost as though through instinct—once one's sentiments are rightly aligned or habituated. As he says,

Consequently, the smallest germs of the feeling are laid hold of and nourished by the contagion of sympathy and the influences of education; and a complete web of corroborative association is woven round it, by the powerful agency of the external sanctions. This mode of conceiving ourselves and human life, as civilization goes on, is felt to be more and more natural. (p.78)

believed that Islam would have far reaching influence simply through the power of its ideas and the logic of its conclusions. Mutahhari, like Mill, has a liberal attitude regarding the 'goodness' of human nature. Humanistic at the core, Mutahhari is optimistic about humanity when he writes,

Human conscience is not so depraved that people cannot be inspired by anything higher and nobler than their basic material needs. (*Awaited Savior*, Ch7)

Mill believed that education would help bring about peace and the eradication of ills in society. Mill was also a great believer in the human reason and human capacity to overcome evil. He says, for example, in his *Utilitarianism*,

Yet no one whose opinion deserves a moment's consideration can doubt that most of the great positive evils of the world are in themselves removable, and will, if human affairs continue to improve, be in the end reduced within narrow limits. Poverty, in any sense implying suffering, may be completely extinguished by the wisdom of society, combined with the good sense and providence of individuals . . . (1998, p.62)

Despite this shared optimism about human nature, it may seem absurd to claim that John Stuart Mill, the proponent of a classic western secular liberal perspective, and Martyred Mortadha Mutahhari, Iranian Shi'ite Muslim thinker, and co-architect of the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1978-79 have some commonalities—particularly they both provide a strong basis for a critique of consumerism and the commodification of values in society. Middle-Eastern Muslims may think this absurd because Mill is often presented as an example of Western libertine attitudes gone awry—particularly Mill's views regarding the equality of women and claims that fornication and gambling should be tolerated (*On Liberty*). Even in the west, Mill is often associated with a sort of radical individualism, not a social concern for the damage of commodification. In addition to this misperception of Mill (I will argue that it is a misperception) Westerners, and particularly Americans, might think this comparison absurd because a) the only thing many Americans even know about Iran is the hostage Crisis of Jimmy Carter's era, or else the often-repeated claim that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons to threaten the West—neither of which seem to be a promotion of liberty or

2. Their respective theories of human nature, particularly their views on higher capacities in humans, have strong parallels;
 3. Both underline the important role of religion for providing ideals and nurturing those higher capacities, and
 4. both are keenly aware that true liberty requires some restrictions.
- With these commonalities in mind, I believe we will see the common basis for a critique of the role which consumerism plays in undermining higher capacities and transcendent values in society, and thereby, how consumerism can undermine culture itself. I hope that this will help us first of all to more accurately understand Mill and Mutahhari's thought on their own terms, and then see that the theistic Muslim and secular Western traditions both share a common theoretical basis to restrain the consumeristic commodification of culture.²

1. Some Background to Mill and Mutahhari

Mutahhari wrote against materialism and in which he developed a contemporary Islamic view of human nature. Mutahhari saw both the Shah and the Marxists to be devoid of the transcendent values-- which he considered essential for a healthy society. While the Shah was too western, failed to support Iran's own heritage, and seemed to have no transcendent values to guide him, the Marxists were, to Mutahhari's mind, no better, since their goals were purely earthly, and involved nothing transcendent. Mutahhari played a powerful role in laying the groundwork for the Iranian revolution, and he was assassinated in 1979 by a group opposing his conservative philosophies, and after his death Khomeini said that Mutahhari was "the very quintessence of my being". Students appreciated his open style of teaching, and his willingness to entertain various questions and possibilities.

If one pursues studies of Mutahhari, a Christian scholar will inevitably come to appreciate aspects of his religious thought-- particularly the way in which he attempts to rationally support his faith—for example, his attempt to provide rational explanations for his religious practices--giving reasons why it is good to pray and not neglect it, why one should avoid becoming addicted to opium, etc. He also works to integrate his religious beliefs and philosophy and practice into and cohesive worldview. These are questions of great importance to a Christian philosopher in the Pietist tradition like myself.

Mill and Mutahhari share a belief that reason will prevail. Mutahhari

important critique of consumerism in culture. Consumerism is the tendency of people to try to find satisfaction, self-worth and their identity through their consumer purchases—clothes, shoes, food, and other material objects. In this paper I will examine the similarities between Martyred Mortadha Mutahhari-- an Iranian Muslim thinker, and John Stuart Mill—the secular western thinker. My goal is to demonstrate that both the classic western European tradition and the Muslim tradition have a strong *and similar* basis for criticizing consumerism in culture.

Some think that John Stuart Mill supported an undisciplined radical unfettered individualism. I disagree with this opinion because it overlooks the many places throughout his *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism* (particularly chapter 3) where he emphasizes the importance of nurturing social sentiments. Many scholars have shown the socially-concerned nature of Mill's philosophy, yet this reputation persists (See: Berger, 1984 / Miller, 1998/ Morales, 1996/ Ottow, 1993/ Paul, 1998/ Robson, 1968/ Semmel, 1984/ Wilson, 1998). His fate is not unlike that of Adam Smith who, despite his belief that his monumental work on moral sentiments was essential for providing the groundwork for a healthy economy, he is remembered anecdotally for his single phrase "invisible hand" as supporting the view that morality will take care of itself. Despite rumors to the contrary, Mill is quite concerned with nurturing the moral sentiments, particularly by poetry and art (Sharpless, 1967, p.169)¹, in Mill's *Autobiography*, his essay, "Inaugural Address at St. Andrews" (Cavanaugh) and his "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties" (Mill, 1963. V.1) and deterring elements which might retard this moral habituation. Consumerism is one such deterrent, and I will here argue that Mill provides the basis sponsoring a critique of consumerism of the west. If Mill does provide basis for such a critique, this would be meaningful for our discussions with our Middle Eastern Muslim colleagues, some of whom consider the west to be inherently consumeristic. Perhaps we can find within one of the classic liberal thinkers of the west the seeds of a critique of consumerism—a critique which resonate with the philosophy of Mutahhari—one of the key Iranian Muslim philosophers of the second half of the 20th century.

Both Mill, of the western European tradition, and Mutahhari, of the Muslim tradition, have a strong *and similar* basis for criticizing consumerism in culture. This is true at four points of contact:

1. Both Mill and Mutahhari emphasize importance of nurturing social sentiments which are transcendent to the individual;

Murtahda Mutahhari and John Stuart Mill's Critique of the Consumeristic Commodification of Culture

Andrew Gustafson *

Abstract

This paper compares the thought of Mill and Mutahhari, particularly their views of moral education, higher sentiments, and their common values. It furthermore argues that Mill and Mutahhari both provide a strong basis for a critique of the consumerization of culture, which often happens in a globalized economy.

Keywords: *Utilitarianism, Liberty, Islam, Mutahhari, Mill, Consumerism, ethics.*

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Introduction:

Philosophers are often criticized for not being practical. It is said that we are too theoretical, too abstract, and not concerned with day to day life. Of course philosophers write about universal ideas—ideas which are abstract and apply to many situations. But it is important for philosophers to also be practical, so that their thought changes the world. Some philosophers, like Mortadha Mutahhari and John Stuart Mill were quite practical, and their philosophies provide a basis for an

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