Although it may be difficult in theory to know what is just and equal, the practical difficulty of inducing those to forbear who can encroach when they like is far greater, for the weaker are always asking for equality and justice, but the powerful care for none of these.

Aristotle, *Politics*, 1318b

The writings of C. Wright Mills that are reviewed here were published in the last six years of his life, from 1956 to 1962. Those "Cold War pre-Vietnam" years of American politics were a lull before the domestic and international turbulence of the next decade and a half, from which the United States in the 1980's is still trying to recover. Mills' books during those quiet years made discordant noises in what seemed to be a fundamentally harmonious and hopeful country. (The exception to this harmony was racial disharmony, but this was never a theme of Mills' work.) For the times, he was an oddity, an American dissenter, criticizing his country's government, academies, people, and its whole way of life. By the end of his life in 1962, however, Mills began to detect echoes of his discords in the academic and intellectual places where in fact he had hoped they would find responsive listeners.

Mills was a critic and a prophet, an angry man with much rhetorical skill. As a critic, Mills' theme, stated at greatest length in
The Power Elite, was a political one, that the modern American regime had proven untrue to its founding vision and to the promise of the Enlightenment which had, he believed, bequeathed to Americans their fundamental heritage of ideas. He sought first of all to expose the extent to which the equality and excellence of America's citizens that he believed to have been the true meaning of the Enlightenment remained unachieved because of the growing power and mediocrity of their "elites." As a prophet, his theme was a theoretical one, that the study of politics and society would become more and more unhinged from the framework of the real and serious problems of modern life: he was a scholar who accused scholarship of becoming irrelevant. Contemporary political scientists and readers of The Political Science Reviewer will see in Mills a "post-behavioralist" revolutionary before the revolution.

With these practical and theoretical themes, Mills restated, in The Sociological Imagination and The Marxists, the lines of critical thought set out in modern times by those whom he regarded as the "classic" social thinkers, especially Marx and Max Weber. In Mills' restatement of these criticisms, there emerged a position he called "radical humanism," in which a revised version of Marxism played the main part. It will be argued here that Mills' radicalism is best understood not as a serious or promising alternative to the bourgeois, liberal democracy of America, but as an unhappy and angry exploitation of the modern experience of great inventions and great wars, of great material accomplishments without commensurate political and moral successes. Mills' "radical humanism" was precisely what Joseph Cropsey called the radicalism of the 1960's in general, "a melange of Marxism, psychology affected by psychoanalysis, and existentialism adapted to the general understanding." It participated in modernity as "a fit, but an episode in a protracted ague." Mills believed that his "humanist" version of Marxism and his disclosure of "the sociological imagination" would point the way for the New Left to begin the end of the ague of mindless materialism and political complacency and that it might even be the harbinger of true democracy and the realm of freedom.

Mills was wrong, I believe: the ague continues, understood far better by those who see the authentic ideas of modern political

philosophy as the fundamental and problematic source of the "crisis" of our age and not as the solution to it. Nevertheless, if Mills did not well understand the various roots and consequences of his criticisms, it is clear that he extracted something of the true power of modern political thought. He exploited and intended to exploit this power in such a way that it generated a rhetoric and an ideology for the New Left whose beginnings he described and welcomed. It was the power of his moral indignation, and not the depth of his theorizing or the originality of his vision or the perspicacity of his analysis of American or world politics, that explains his place in American social thought. It was not truly an unscrupulous or violent indignation, but it had such a hollow center that it invited a politics in which the passion for justice and equality became thoughtless and hence beyond the ability of politics to satisfy.

'10 cast doubts upon the seriousness of Mills' thoughts on democracy and on the three elites of power, knowledge, and morality, and even more, on his constructive project for the "humanist"

2. See this reviewer's article, "Leo Strauss: His Critique of Historicism," in Modern Age, Fall, 1981.
J. Sigler wrote that Mills "was the outstanding recent exponent of radical-reformist social science." "The Political Philosophy of C. Wright Mills," 50 Science and Society, 1988, p. 46.
B. Susser asserted that there was needed in America "a new image of the scholar" which "unites the analytical precision of a Dahl...and the commitment to social relevance of a C. Wright Mills." "The Behavioral Ideology," 22 Political Studies, 1974, p. 288.
elite of morality is, unfortunately, not a constructive task; but Mills' indignation did not always miss its mark, especially in his critique of the behavioral or "value-free" social science which obstructed an accurate view of the true strengths and weaknesses of the American regime. It is to his credit that he recognized as one of those strengths the tolerance for dissenters such as himself. However, he seemed not to realize that, at its core, his own moral position, growing out of the historicism inherent in his sociology of knowledge, denied the very possibility of rational discourse about morality which is the necessary condition for such tolerance. Perhaps exposing this core can make a review of books that are, finally, only impassioned and provocative ones, a theoretically valuable task.

I. On the Elites of Power

Mills' most famous argument, that there is in America a "power elite," is an argument of continuing interest to students of American politics. His best known book, *The Power Elite,* describes a tripartite elite, consisting of "those political, economic, and military circles which as an intricate set of overlapping cliques share decisions having at least national consequences. In so far as national events are decided, the power elite are those who decide them" (PE,18).

Mills admitted that his descriptions of these "cliques" were "caricatures," for he thought that all concepts were caricatures because of their "emphasis upon some characteristics and obsfuscation of others." He admitted, too, that he was stating an "extreme position," not minding that he "confused prediction with description," so that by exaggerating, he could see the important "trends" of the future, especially the increasing centralization of power in modern countries. He took his argument as a whole not to be an "un-


5. The five books by Mills noted at the beginning of this review will be cited in the text by these abbreviations: *The Power Elite,* as "PE"; *The Causes of World War Three,* as "WWWIII"; *The Sociological Imagination,* as "SI"; *The Marxists,* as "M"; and *Power, Politics and People,* as "PPP." Mills' "Comment on Criticism," in C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite, compiled by G. William Domhoff and Hoyt B. Ballard, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), will also be frequently cited in this review, abbreviated as "C."
questionably valid" one, but rather an "hypothesis" offering the
idea of the power elite to be "refined and elaborated" (C, 230-233,
244).

A. Pluralism and the Levels of Power

Mills' hypothesis of the power elite clashes most directly with the
view of America as a pluralistic society with a regime of indirect or
representative democracy. He argued that the pluralist explanations
of American politics were largely derived from an obsolete, "romanti-
cic" image which was accurate in the early Nineteenth Century and
in the New Deal period, but not in the years after World War II. He
regarded the pluralist view as at best a description of "the middle
levels of power" that was confused because it did not distinguish
"between the top, the middle, and the bottom levels of power" (PE,
244). Only at the middle level of power did Mills see pluralistic
politics, a "great scatter of relatively equal balancing units," in the
States, in pressure groups, and within Congress. These competing
centers of power had sometimes to be "taken into account, handled,
cajoled, broken or raised to higher circles" by the power elite, but he
did not regard them as "among those who count" (PE, 266, 290).
Mills explained the negligible importance of the checks and balances
provided by this pluralism at the middle level by arguing that the
power of Congress and the States, of the pressure groups of unions,
white-collar groups and consumers was greatly overshadowed by
that of the power elite. Believing that the "key decisions" were in-
creasingly being made "outside the parliamentary mechanism" by
the power elite, he believed that the constitutional balance of
powers had become "imbalanced" through the supremacy of the ex-
cecutive branch, the relative impotence of Congress, and the passivi-
ty of the judiciary (PE, 260).

Mills held an equally dismal view of the lower or popular level of
power in the United States. National elections seemed to him to be
merely contests between "two giant and unwieldy parties" that
trivialized public life and lacked any effective national discipline,
that were beyond the influence of the individual voters and that
were incapable of "winning psychologically impressive or politically
decisive majorities." He regarded the voters as sovereign "only in
some plebiscitarian moment of adulation" to the national politicians
of the power elite (PE, 253-54, 308, 323). At the base of America's
social structure, Mills saw only a "mass" of people whom he regard-
ed not as genuine citizens but as "cheerful robots," apathetic about politics and easily manipulated by the power elite. He criticized the use of the media of mass communication, especially the "malign force" of television, and public education as "historically unique instruments of psychic management and manipulation" (PE, 310-314). He attributed this process of manipulation not only to the deliberate exploitation of these instruments by the power elite, but to the pervasive political apathy of the people themselves, who were, he believed, "neither radical nor reactionary" in their political thinking, but simply "inactionary" (SI, 41). He complained that the common man in America does not "transcend his daily milieu," but merely drifts through his narrow life by habit. In sum, "the man in the mass just feels pointless" (PE, 320-323).

There surely was some truth to Mills' "caricatures" of the middle and lower levels of American political life. The indifference of American voters and the absence of what Tocqueville called "great" political parties with profound distinctions between them have long been commonplace and reasonable observations about American political life, although Mills' attitude toward the "masses" sometimes reminds one of Burke's jibe at the "democratists" who "treat the humbler part of the community with the greatest contempt whilst, at the same time, they pretend to make them the depositories of all power." Mills' complaints that Congress was not sufficiently representative of the diverse social and economic groups in America and about the growth in the power of the Presidency were not misplaced. These complaints, however, were not fundamentally the concerns of a populist or liberal critic on behalf of the "man in the mass" or of a conservative critic alarmed at deviations from the rules and limits prescribed by his country's constitution. Mills did not draw these caricatures in The Power Elite primarily to encourage a reform of Congress, or a revitalization of the political parties, or an increase in consumers' rights, etc., but to make his case for the existence of the power elite itself and, more generally, to prepare the ground for his alternative ideas and projects, in The Sociological Imagination, The Causes of World War III, and The Marxists. By minimizing, while not denying, the pluralistic character of middle level politics and by portraying the citizens of the lower level as no better than cheerful robots, Mills built up the power of the upper level far beyond what he could establish by analyzing the power elite alone. It was necessary for him to do this because, as will be shown, he could not fit his alter-
native to representative or pluralistic democracy into any of the comprehensive or serious forms of political theory, neither those that explicitly favor nor those that explicitly reject rule by the few over the many, nor-most important of all-those that explicitly favor mixing the rule of the few with that of the many.

B. The Power Elite and Structural Immorality

Mills denied that the power elite in America was either an aristocracy or a ruling class. While he argued that the self-consciousness of the power elite was greater than that of any other groups, he insisted that it was not a "conspiracy" or a group of "solitary rulers" and did not amount to a "club having a permanent membership with fixed and formal boundaries." It was especially controversial that Mills denied that the power elite was a ruling class: he denied this because he did not see any of the three "circles" of the power elite, particularly not the high economic men," as "unilateral" decision-makers. He also argued that his idea of the power elite implied "nothing about the process of decision-making as such." He regarded the three "domains" as so autonomous of one another that the economic elite could rule "only in the often intricate ways of coalition" with the political and military elites (PE, 18, 21, 277-283, 294).

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6. These are some of the views on whether "the power elite" is the same thing as "the ruling class": W.T. Bluhm argues that "in a roundabout way," Mills "seems to attribute a certain centrality to economic power in the triple constellation." Bluhm concludes that Mills does argue that "there is a ruling class' in America, though he does not say it in so many words." W.T. Bluhm, "Marxian Theory: Marx, Engels, Mills." Theories of the Political System (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1965). pp. 436-437.

Aptheker insists that "the ruling class" is the correct conception, criticizes Mills for not seeing this, and uses some of Mills' own arguments to refute him. Aptheker, op. cit., pp. 19-20, 31-33.

Domhoff, one of Mills' most sympathetic supporters, agrees with "the Marxists" (e.g., Aptheker) that Mills does not deal sufficiently with the concept of the ruling class, and that he "did not put it to a detailed empirical test." Domhoff, The Power Elite and Its Critics, in Domhoff and Ballard, op. cit., p. 263.

By rejecting the Marxist concept of the ruling class, Mills attempted to elude such pluralist criticisms of his "ruling elite model" as Robert Dahl's, which demanded a demonstrable pattern of exclusively elite decision-making as proof of the existence of the power elite. Mills, however, frequently insisted that there were divisions and quarrels among the parts of the power elite. He did not think that the power elite was "a homogeneous circle" of elites whose will always prevailed in the face of every obstacle. Within the power elite, he argued, "factions do exist; there are conflicts of policy; individual ambitions do clash." Nevertheless, he believed that the "internal discipline" and the "community of interests" of these factions and individuals were more powerful than the divisions among them, so that on occasion there was indeed an "explicit following of explicitly known interests," such as the international "corporate interests" that sometimes held the power elite together "even across the boundaries of nations at war" (C, 240, 242; PE, 283).

The practical core of Mills' idea of the power elite becomes meaningful only when he identifies the "community of interests" or the "explicitly known interests" of the power elite with those of the military-industrial complex, or, as he put it, "the development of a permanent war establishment by a privately incorporated economy inside a political vacuum." In this case, Mills asserted a "unity of more explicit co-ordination" than that due merely to the structural trends of modern society, especially the increased growth and centralization of the powers of government. Sometimes, then, "during the wars," there is a "quite decisive" unity and co-ordination achieved by the three parts of the power elite. Mills gave only a few examples of the "pivotal moments" when the power elite acted with genuine unity of purpose: the decision to use the atomic bomb, and to go to war in Korea; the positions taken on Quemoy and Matsu and Dienbienphu; and "the maneuvers which involved the United States in WWII" (PE, 19-23; C, 241-242). When complaining about the "inactionary" character of the American people, Mills argued that for many of the great decisions "especially of an international sort" the persuasion, or manipulation, of the people by the power elite was not necessary; "the fact is simply accomplished" (SI, 41).

It is not hard to believe that at moments and on matters such as these, there is indeed a "decisively centralized power" controlled by

7. See, for example, Dahl's "A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model," in Domhoff and Ballard, op. cit., pp. 25-36.
elite groups in the United States. One recalls Tocqueville’s prediction that the executive branch of the national government would become more powerful as the country became more involved in war. In any case, much of Mills’ critique of the power elite amounts to his disagreement with their readiness to prepare for war and to make war. As will be seen later, this denunciation of the “war establishment” culminated in Mills’ quite fantastic “guidelines to peace” in *The Causes of World War III*.

On the basis of Mills’ description of the pluralism within the power elite—with the apparently decisive exception of its unity on matters of war—it is not clear why Mills was so critical of it. The reason for his indignation is clearer in the light of the simplest or most sweeping of his definitions of the power elite: Whatever its particular quantum of power and whoever its members might be, the power elite are "all that we are not"; they are not "ordinary" because they have "the most of what there is to have, which is...money, power, and prestige," so that they "transcend" the ordinary lives of "ordinary men and women" (PE, 3-4, 9). This is sufficient to define the power elite; everywhere there are such elite groups and there are those who resent their having the most of what there is to have. The force of Mills’ critique of these groups, however, is not simply a matter of his resentment of those who are "all that we are not," but comes from his conviction that the power elite of America were not "elite" enough, that they were not an "elect" of superior talents and virtues, but were men of mediocre mind and immoral character.

It is this conviction that gave Mills’ analysis of American political life its cutting edge and not his thesis that there were the powerful, the less powerful, and the powerless in a large and modern country. His indictment of the power elite was the centerpiece of his general view of modern America as having been corrupted by a "structural immorality" that infected every facet of its life. Mills so particularly blamed the power elite—though he at least equally blamed the elites of knowledge—because they set such a low tone for public life. They were guilty, he argued, of "mindlessness" and "the true higher immorality of our time." The elite were not "models of excellence"; they were guilty, together with the "middle-level" Congressmen and State politicians, of crimes and corruptions, of compromising patronage and self-enriching, interlocking relations with the "warlords" and the business elites (PE, 229, 339-342).
The "higher immorality" of the power elite, however, was not, according to Mills, fundamentally their fault; he argued that it was not to be understood as "a matter of corrupt men in fundamentally sound institutions." Mills could never have expected or desired, for example, that the excessive power of the President would be checked or that the unrepresentativeness of Congress would be corrected by merely "institutional" or constitutional means. The higher immorality of the power elite, then, was only the most important or visible part of "a more general immorality," a "structural immorality" that was "a systematic feature of the American elite; its general acceptance is an essential feature of the mass society" (PE, 343). This structural immorality resulted from the fact that "older values and codes of uprightness," the middle-class values of liberal democracy, were no longer believed by Americans. Without these values, and without any "new values," Americans became "morally defenseless," so that the power elite did not have "to win the moral consent of those over whom they hold power." In the moral vacuum of modern American society, the people had become cynical of the immorality of their rulers, and adopted "a sort of Machiavellianism-for-the-little-man" as their own copy of the higher immorality of the power elite (PE, 344-345).

Mills identified much of the higher immorality with "the pursuit of the moneied life," of "easy money and estate-building." He complained that the "old effort to get rich" had become an effort to get rich at the expense of the public, through public office, government contracts and favors, and the exploitation of tax laws. In America the meaning of success had become narrowed to "the big money" and men with "an inner moral sense" were no longer in power (PE, 346-347). Without "a firm moral order of belief" and dominated by the desire for personal wealth, the power elite were only metaphorically an elite at all. Mills compared the "intellectual mediocrity" of the power elite with the superior qualities of "the men of affairs" in the early years of the Republic ("once upon a time"), when "to a considerable extent the elite of power and the elite of culture coincided": Mills compared Washington, who "relaxed with Voltaire's 'letters' and Locke's On Human Understanding" Eisenhower, who only read "cowboy tales and detective stories." He concluded that, compared to Washington's America, when "men of power pursued learning, and men of learning were often in positions of power," we have "suffered grievous decline" (PE, 345, 350-353).
C. The Defect of the American Regime

Mills' criticisms of American political and social life in *The Power Elite* left unclear what he really desired for the United States. His argument that power and learning were "divorced" from one another implied a desire for an aristocratic regime of wisdom and virtue, while his critique of the "mass society" pointed to a Tocquevillian democracy where the common people were sufficiently enlightened to expand their self-interest to include the common good. Mills' indignation at the extravagant tastes and styles of American film and fashion celebrities even implied a desire for a simpler and more severe society such as Rousseau prescribed.

In fact, Mills' critique of the American regime was largely anticipated by Tocqueville, who feared that America would develop the features of the "mass society" that Mills denounced, if it were not guided by the right kind of laws and "mores." Tocqueville saw the defect of regimes which, in the name of individual rights and freedom, abandoned the attempt to do what Hobbes had declared to be "impossible," namely the setting down of "rules enough...for the regulating of all the actions and words of men." Regimes which turn away from the "impossibility" of "regulating" men to virtue agree with Hobbes that "in all kinds of actions by the laws pretermitted men have the liberty of doing what their own reasons shall suggest for the most profitable to themselves." Such regimes will be liberal ones, devoted to "the liberty to do or forbear" according to each one's "own discretion" (*Leviathan* II, 21: "Liberty of subjects").

Mills did not like what Americans "do or forbear" according to their "own discretion": he considered it profoundly "immoral" that Americans interpreted "the pursuit of happiness" as "the pursuit of the moneyed life" and the "old effort to get rich"-the pursuits and efforts of private, self-interested men, doing what is precisely "most profitable to themselves." "American legislation," Tocqueville found, "appeals mainly to private interest: that is the great principle which one finds again and again when one studies the laws of the United States" (*Democracy In America* I.1, ch.5). Seeing that liberty would be endangered where private interest is allowed such great discretion, Tocqueville demonstrated the necessity of voluntary associations, a free press, vigorous local government, frequent popular elections, independent judiciaries, and many other forms of "political liberty." He showed, too, that the preoccupation of men in such a regime with what is "most profitable" would have to be
mixed with "mores" not directed to profit and private interest if the regime were not to degenerate into a "mass society" with mediocre "elites." Among the most important of the "mores" that Tocqueville prescribed was the "spirit of religion," because "religion is much more needed in the republic, ..than in the monarchy..., and in democratic republics most of all" (Ibid., I.2, ch.9).

Mills' critique of the centralization and inequality of power that is symbolized by his idea of the power elite-taking it now as a symbol of these "trends" rather than as a precise description of American politics-also benefits from comparison with earlier thoughts on the American regime. Mills rejected the inequality of power that is capped by those who have "the most of what there is to have" and desired instead on "absolute" equality of power in a "true democracy." But equality of power and of the fruits of power in a liberal democracy can never be complete or absolute. It is an "impossibility" to establish such an equality of power while permitting and protecting the citizens' "liberty to do or forbear according to [their] own discretion." As Madison shows, it is impossible, so long as "the diversity in the faculties of men" exists, that there be "a uniformity of interests." As long as this diversity is protected, "the possession of different kinds and degrees of property" will result. To make these degrees of property and power equal would require destroying the liberty which is essential to the existence of the factions that result from the diversity of faculties in acquiring property and power. An absolute equality of power-rather than a pluralistic balance of factions and a mixing of different centers of power-would make it nonsensical to speak of the liberty to act according to one's own discretion. Such an equality of power would, as Rousseau shows, replace one's own discretion with the discretion that all have in common, the "general will," which "considers only the common interest" (Social Contract I.7, II.3). This would eliminate factions and inequality of power altogether, as Madison says, "by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests" (Federalist 10).

II. On the Elites of Knowledge

In his writings after The Power Elite, Mills made it quite clear that he was not, as Talcott Parsons had speculated, "a nostalgic Jeffersonian liberal"; instead, as Parsons added, "he professes to be a
He regarded the axioms recited above as obsolete "romantic pluralism" of no practical value under the conditions of the mid-Twentieth Century. He undertook then, in *The Sociological Imagination* and *The Marxists*, the theoretical project of reviving the "classic tradition" of social thought, by exposing the weaknesses of positivist social science and by expounding the meaning of that tradition as "the sociological imagination" and the central place in it of Marxist humanism ("plain marxism"). In this project, he was inspired by his desire for the "ideal" of humanism, a wholly unprecedented and unrealistic kind of "democracy."

A. Humanism: Liberalism, Marxism, and Historicism

Mills believed that the Twentieth Century had inherited a "secular and humanist tradition of Western civilization" that had culminated in the liberalism and Marxism of the past one hundred years. Explicitly collapsing the distinctions between political philosophy, ideology, and theory, Mills argued that liberalism and Marxism "practically exhaust the political heritage of Western civilization" — "of Greece and Rome and Jerusalem" (M, 13, 23-24). He regarded this "heritage" as a cluster of "ideals" known since antiquity that have become increasingly emancipated from religion, and, therefore, more rational and humanistic. The new "modes and orders" of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment were not, for Mills, bold rejections of the "Classical, Judaic, and Christian images of man's estate," but merely the secular residue and perfection of these images, although he never undertook to explain how Classical, Judaic or Christian political thought could be intelligibly lifted from the foundation of natural or revealed theology. His replacement for this foundation was historicism.

Liberalism

Mills presented the liberal element of the humanist tradition as an undiluted individualism. Perhaps because he looked no deeper than Hobhouse's "Liberal Socialism" (M, 24), he took the "root principle" of liberalism to be "the specific, personal freedom of the

individual...to make no unconditional commitments to any organization." He did not investigate the profound theoretical difficulties that this assertion of "the priceless value of the individual personality" caused for the serious thinkers of modern liberalism, for Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, or explain how in different ways, they solved these difficulties only by insisting upon fundamental limits and restrictions upon individualism. In any case, Mills was persuaded that "liberalism today is at a dead end," and that it had become a mere rhetoric of ideals without "any historical agencies to give it practical effect" (M, 28).

Mills' failure to penetrate to the core of liberal political thought, to its teaching on man's nature as dominated by his most powerful passions and fears, however, did not prevent him from making a timely and telling critique of the social scientists who took their liberal ideals as lightly as Mills himself did. These were the social scientists whose liberalism had become merely "practical, flexible, realistic, pragmatic" but no longer idealistic or "at all utopian" and therefore "irrelevant to political positions having moral content" (M, 21, 29). These were the social scientists who aspired to match the feats of the physical scientists by limiting their social science to the analysis of observable behavior. Mills charged this behavioralistic social science with an "abstracted empiricism," which by its "retreat" into the analysis of "mere fact" became a complacent apology for the established power elites of the liberal democracies. He identified this half-hearted, all-too-realistic liberalism as "the political common denominator of most current social study."9

Mills focused his critique of behavioralism on its "arbitrary epistemology" of "abstracted empiricism," an exaggerated or distorted empiricism that was so "cautious and rigid" that it could not even address "the great social problems and human issues of our time" (SI, 71-73). He saw correctly that this epistemology does lead either to studies of political and social life which are devoid of moral, and hence of political, significance or to the concealing of moral assumptions. To pretend that knowledge of the facts, of how men live, is possible, but not possible of how men ought to live is indeed a way of avoiding political relevance. He did well to complain that to employ an amoral or "value-free" science in the study of

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political life is necessarily to misunderstand political life. Neither citizens nor statesmen make the distinction between facts and values that is required by "abstracted empiricism," and to insist that this epistemology be the heart of social science is to abandon the attempt to understand politics. It abandons the expectation, as Harry Jaffa has written, "that intelligent inquiry into the subject matter of morals and politics may lead to the replacing of merely arbitrary opinions concerning what is good for man with opinions that are not arbitrary." 

Mills' attack on behavioralism is presumably a familiar one to those political scientists who are still alive and well after the "post-behavioral revolution." In any case—whether the Behavioralist Establishmentarians have since gone backwards, or leftwards, into the post-behavioral future or whether Mills was a far-seeing critic in the Eastonian-Eisenhowerian wilderness of the 1950's—he mounted one of the early attacks on the epistemology of behavioralism for its old-fashioned and simplistic "philosophy of science. This was drawn, he argued, "with expedient modifications," from one philosophy of natural science, from "an arbitrarily established Scientific Method" and not from "the classic lines of social science work." He denied that there is any scientific method "as such," for scientific empiricism "means many things, and there is no one final or accepted version, much less any systematic use of any one version" at all times (SI, 58, 119). The meaning of "behavioral" or "empirical" investigation, the methods of such investigations, and the place they have in any theory or model of social science is, according to Mills, relative to the "paradigm" of scientific truth that predominates in a particular time or place, and that merely reflects the social position or "motives" of those who claim to be scientific.

Mills objected to abstracted empiricism most vigorously because he believed that it concealed the liberal social scientists' own moral positions, that it disguised their value judgments with an "assumed neutrality of technique." Such social scientists were not "passionately committed" to justice or freedom or to the humanist values in general, but only to making their social studies into "real science" and to treating their work as "politically neutral and morally irrelevant." He realized that this neutrality was spurious and understood that it was premised upon "a rationalistic and empty optimism" that

modern science would be able to solve mankind’s most serious problems. He rightly objected that we cannot substitute a “technocratic slogan for what ought to be a reasoned moral choice” (SI, 76, 113). He believed, however, that he had found in Marxism properly understood the social science that emancipated the modern humanist from the fetters of abstracted empiricism and moral neutralism.

**Marxism**

Mills’ opinion of Marxism and its part in the humanist tradition was very different from his opinion of liberalism and liberal social science. He believed that Marxism was not obsolete, but that it incorporated the only thing of value in liberalism, its individualistic "ideals." He regarded the "deep and pervasive moral assumptions" of Marxism as the highest and most comprehensive expression of the secular humanism of the West. Mills’ idea of Marxism, however, was of a "plain marxism," purged of several serious "distortions and vulgarizations" and without Marx’s own "errors, ambiguities and inadequacies" (M, 14, 24). In purging Marxism of these errors, Mills denied that historical and dialectical materialism are the enduring core of Marx’s thought and that, in any case, Marx did not give us the comprehensive or final truth about man or the last word about capitalism and the new social order that would replace capitalism. Mills’ approach to Marxism was primarily to defend and celebrate its ideals, especially the ideal of "the realm of freedom." He admitted, for example, that Marx taught the "historical inevitability" of class warfare under the conditions of capitalism. This deterministic element of Marx’s thought made it scientific and not merely "utopian," because Marx designated the proletariat as the

11. Although Aptheker (op. cit., p. 7) quotes Mills’ denial that he is a Marxist, Bluhm (op. cit., p. 436) says that Aptheker himself saw Mills "as a thinker on his way to becoming a Marxist."


"agency of change" that would achieve the Marxist ideals (M, 81, 91-92). Yet Mills did not think that the proletarian revolutions that Marx held to be necessary consequences of capitalism have happened and that this "collapse" of Marx's "labor metaphysic" entailed the collapse of the "central thrust" and the "main political expectation" of Marx's political theory. Denying the inevitability of all the substantive features of Marx's theory of capitalism, including the exploitation of workers, and the alienation and class consciousness of the proletariat, Mills regarded them as Marx's own "moral judgments," true of Victorian capitalism, but increasingly untrue of modern capitalism (M, 108-115, 128-29).

Mills distinguished his "plain marxism" not only from Classic Marxism, but also from the distortions that he called Vulgar and Sophisticated Marxism. These Marxists are wrong, he argued, because they try to salvage the deterministic and predictive features of Marxism. Vulgar Marxism is merely the "official creed" of the Soviet Union, a reduction of all human activity to economically motivated behavior. Although Mills believed that this kind of Marxism is like liberalism in that it serves simply as an ideological defense of a superpower, he also believed that the truly Marxist elements of Soviet ideology, of even Vulgar Marxism, "contain more of value for understanding the social realities of the world today than do the abstractions, the slogans and the fetishes of liberalism" (M, 471). Sophisticated Marxism, on the other hand, is the attempt to retain all of Marx's theories at the expense of their relevance to practical problems. It holds, for example, that the failure of workers in the capitalist countries to develop a proletarian class consciousness is only temporary and is caused primarily by the treachery of the "labor aristocracy" and the social democrats, who are satisfied with the welfare state at the expense of real socialism (M, 97).

Historicism

Mills' critique of Marx's economic and political science and his rejection of Soviet and Sophisticated Marxism led him to posit one principle or "master rule" as the true and enduring meaning of Marxism and as his own main theoretical principle. This is what Mills called "historical specificity," a principle taken from "the practice of Karl Marx himself." It holds that "any man can think only within his own times; but he can think about the past and future, thus attempting to expand 'his time'...[into] the image of an epoch."
The importance of this principle for intelligent Marxists—the "plain marxists"—is very great; it leads them to stress "the humanism of the younger Marx," and it prevents them from neglecting "the interplay of bases and superstructure in the making of history." The principle of historical specificity means that Marx's economic determinism is only "a matter of degree." Plain Marxists, therefore, emphasize "the volition of men in the making of history...in contrast to any Determinist Laws of History" (M, 99, 104). On the grounds of historical specificity, then, Marx's work was "too wrong on too many points." His "method," however, has not been made obsolete by what are, according to Mills, simply massive errors. This method—not the "mysterious" laws of dialectics, which Mills regarded as obscurantist platitudes and doubletalk, but the study of societies through historical specificity—remains as a "signal and lasting contribution to the best sociological ways of reflection and inquiry available" (M, 129-130).

Mills had anticipated this historicist Marxism in his early writings on the sociology of knowledge. Citing Dewey and Mannheim, he had argued that all the ways of determining "truth and validity," and all the criteria and "paradigms" of truth in philosophy, physical science, and social science are "legitimately open to social-historical relativization." The search for truth does not proceed from the human mind "conceived to be intrinsically logical" or able to transcend social and historical limits. Such paradigms and criteria do not come from "a property of human nature," from common sense, for example, but from various forms of inquiry whose relativity is proven by historical and sociological investigation (PPP, 454-456). Mills thus denied that there is any distinction between philosophy and the more or less learned opinions of particular times and places, so that the philosopher or the scientist is only another intellectual with the self-interests and the unconscious or unexamined prejudices peculiar to his time or country or class. Mills' sociology of knowledge denied the possibility suggested by Leo Strauss that "all philosophers..."
form a class by themselves, or that what unites all genuine philosophers is more important than what unites a given philosopher with a particular group of non-philosophers."

Mills attempted to extricate his own paradigm of social-historical relativization from this self-contradiction, which he called the "absolutists' dilemma." He states that all paradigms can have a "degree of truth," as "probabilities...more or less true." He thought of scientific inquiry as "self-correcting," according to the "verificatory model" chosen by the scientific inquirer. But this is no real escape, for such a model itself must be socially and historically relativized. On the point most often at issue, the relation between physical science and social science, Mills called for "empirically supplanting" any "a priori assumption" that there is any "essential" difference between them. This amounts to saying that one relative paradigm can "empirically" supplant another relative paradigm when it is precisely the meaning and validity of empirical evidence itself that is being questioned (PPP, 461-463, 466; M, 104). The same difficulty arises, when Mills argues that social science must take "an historical scope": historical studies are necessary for purposes of comparison, to make statements of social science "empirically adequate", and yet the many uses of history or "images" of one's own time as an historical "epoch" do not themselves have any "trans-historical" meaning. There are no "laws" that apply to all societies, for "we do not know of any universal principles of historical change." So much is this so that the "relevance" of history...is itself subject to the principle of historical specificity" (SI, 145-147, 150, 156). The uses of history turn out to be not simply necessary, but to depend on the character of the age or even the society being studied. Mills "plain marxist" principle of historical specificity is consistent only by exempting itself from the principle of historical specificity.

However this may be, the most important effect of Mills' adoption of historical specificity as his central theoretical principle was to deny any meaning to the idea of human nature. It required a complete surrender to the fact of "human variety," which Mills took as proof that there are no principles of "basic human nature" which could account for the many types of individuals and societies and, therefore, no way to give any order to this variety by distinguishing the good types from the bad, the high from the low, the civilized

from the savage, or the decent from the indecent. Mills supposed
that there is "nothing but 'human culture,' a highly mutable affair," so that the very idea of some human nature "common to man as
man" violates "the social and historical specificity that careful work
in the human studies requires." The Marxist humanist sees as the
"most radical discovery" of modern social science the fact that "so
many of the most intimate features of the person are socially pat-
tterned and even implanted." Convinced of the social-historical
determination not only of "man's ideas and works" but of "man himself," Mills was persuaded of "the great modifiability of man"
and of "the reality of the social and plastic nature of man." In sum,
Mills' humanism asserts that "in truth, we do not know much about
man" (SI, 132, 161, 164).

The principle of historical specificity, according to Mills, means
that there is no "trans-historical theory of the nature of history,"
because man is an historical "entity" and thus cannot know the
meaning of history as a whole, cannot "transcend" it, or discover
any knowledge which would free men from the limits of history.
Mills argued that we cannot "impose" the "thought-model" of our
time upon past thinkers; every thinker or scientist can think "Only
within his own times." This follows clearly enough from the princi-
ple of historical specificity, but it results in the problem of ac-
counting for that principle itself: is not Mills' own insight into the
social-historical relativization of all thought not itself "within his
own times" and relative to his own social position?

Seeing nothing odd about a humanism that means ignorance of
what a human being is, Mills claimed unlimited human mutability
or plasticity as a true and final insight, so that "we can never know
the limits to which men collectively might remake themselves." Nevertheless, he held that the highest type of man is the one who is
capable of exercising "the prerogative of free creativity." A
multitude of such individuals would be Marx's ideal of "the realm of
freedom," a society without a state and without classes. Mills calls
this realm "democracy" and declares that taking seriously the idea of
democracy requires us to aspire to "collective self-control" not only

14. Also, Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Character and Social Structure: The
Psychology of Social Institutions (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1953), pp. xvi,
xviii.
15. Ibid., pp. 356, 480.
over laws and social rules, but over "the structural mechanics of history itself" and in such a way that "those vitally affected by any decision men make have an effective voice in that decision" (SI, 116, 188). Mills envisioned, as the perfected synthesis of liberalism and socialism, a democracy of men with the intellectual powers that have been possessed only by the very few (the "ideal of the Renaissance Man"), a society in which not only a few, but "all men would become men of substantive reason," in a world where "all men everywhere" had acquired "equal power in an absolute democracy of power" (SI, 171-173; C, 243).

B. The Threat to Humanism

Mills presented this humanist "ideal" against the backdrop of a general account of modern society, in which the inequality of power, the structural immorality, and the indifference to public life that he castigated in American politics were portrayed as inherent in the whole modern condition, in the cultural, economic, technological, and political "trends" and "forces" of the Twentieth Century. The major trend of the coming "post-modern period," he argued, was the massive centralization or "rationalization" of all the institutions of society, throwing into doubt the humanist assumptions that "increased rationality is the...prime condition of increased freedom." Modern science, he saw, has not turned out to be "a technological Second Coming" and the ever increasing role of science in modern societies has not caused all men to live "reasonably and without myth, fraud, and superstition." He called this trend the paradox of "rationality without reason," the "collapse of the assumed coincidence of reason and freedom" (SI, 166-169). He believed that this collapse was proven by evidence of man's complete plasticity, such as "ethnographic relativism," the discovery of "the great potential of irrationality in man," and the success which totalitarian governments have had in "historically transforming" whole populations. These facts persuaded Mills that "the value of freedom cannot be based upon `man's basic nature'," and that since "all men are not willing or not able, as the case may be, to acquire the reason that freedom requires," the humanist ideal of the free man might be forgotten or submerged by the trend of the centralization of power and replaced by the ascendency of "the cheerful robot" (SI, 158, 175). Convinced that man is neither supported nor guided by nature to lives of reason and freedom, Mills feared a
future of "rationality without reason," of the decisive centralization of all the means of power and decision-making.

While Mills exaggerated and distorted the centralization of power in America, his restatement of Max Weber's theses on modern society certainly touched upon a fundamental problem of social and political analysis, which is identifying the cause of the increasing centralization of power. Mills' position can be usefully compared to John Stuart Mill's criticism of Tocqueville. He argued that Tocqueville had "confounded the effects of Democracy with the effects of Civilization"; for example, "the growing insignificance of individuals in comparison with the mass" was, according to J.S. Mill, the effect not of democracy, but of "the mere progress of national prosperity," of "industry and wealth." But J.S. Mill's argument seems imprecise compared to Tocqueville's: his analysis of the development of industry, which is favored by the progress of equality, shows how the progress of industry and wealth itself serves as one great cause of the growth of centralization, of the potential "despotism" of the manufacturing class, and of the weakening of public-minded "associations." Tocqueville shows how all these effects are the result, directly or indirectly, of the progress of equality, of the "love of equality" that grows "constantly with equality itself" (Democracy In America II.4, ch.5). Tocqueville goes deeper than both Mill and Mills to show that behind "rationality without reason," there is an opinion, a defect of the regime, a "passion" for prosperity and the conquest of nature that favors more and more equality. Mills does not see that many of the things he dislikes about life in America are the result of Americans' "passion for equality," the demands they make upon themselves and, therefore, on their governments, for greater equality in more and more ways. Mills desired an "absolute" equality of power and did not see, with Tocqueville, that the price of this equality would be more centralization, for "every central power which follows its natural instincts loves equality and favors it." Nor did Mills see that it is the desire for equality that could threaten to produce a society in which there would be mostly "cheerful robots," what Tocqueville describes as

an innumerable multitude of men, alike and equal, constantly circling around in pursuit of the petty and banal pleasures with which they glut their souls" ([Ibid.], II, chs. 3, 6). Mills attributed too much of the "rationality without reason" to the "trends" and "forces" of modernity and too little to the defects of the regime that can be remedied only be carefully nurtured "laws and mores" that attract and hold men to their public duties, their liberties and rights, and their enlightened self-interest.

Mills regarded the fact of the centralization of power and decision-making as "the major clue" to the contemporary human condition and saw in it the basic "parallelism" of the United States and the Soviet Union (SI, 182-183; PPP, 227). His belief in this parallelism of "trends" in America and Russia was most dramatically declared in his defense in 1960 of the Cuban Revolution, when he expressed his optimism about the future of the Cubans' "humanistic revolution," which he said was opposed both to capitalism, which "sacrifices man," and to Communism, which "by its totalitarian concepts, sacrifices the rights of man." While he affirmed that the "formal freedom" in the Western countries was quite real and "immensely valuable," he nevertheless argued that it was more useful to stress the "parallels" in the "structural" conditions of modern countries than to denounce a supposed enemy by condemning "Soviet cultural tyranny" or to "celebrate the formal freedom of cultural workmen" (intellectuals) in the West. He therefore saw many ways in which these two "overdeveloped" societies were similar: they shared the "cultural and social fetish" for technological development and depended upon alienating labor and technological specialists; they both subordinated education to "the economic and military machines" and were without "a senior civil service" independent of "corporation interest" or of "party dictation." He saw a similarity-having abstracted from both the religious and atheistic roots of serious political thought-in the "official Christianity of the Americans" and the "official atheism of the Russians." Without "nationally responsible parties" or voluntary associations "as central facts of power," and because America's "two-party state can be as irresponsible as the one-party state" of the Soviet Union, neither country, he declared, could be called democratic. Becoming "increasing-

ly alike" in these and many other "basic trends," the two countries were seen by him as variations on the theme of centralization (PPP, 227-230).

It was not any true or deep similarities between these opposed regimes that explain why Mills thought they were so much alike, but the core of his thinking on the idea of humanism. Believing that the humanist ideals were the common intellectual heritage of both the liberal and Marxist countries, he believed that the ways of modernity had infected both countries more or less equally—Mills' "caricatures" of the power elite were matched by these generalizations about the American and Soviet ways of life. But when Mills complained that the power elites of both countries had in common an opposition to "radical criticisms" of their societies (PPP, 250), he indicated truly what he desired. Against modern society everywhere, he insisted upon having a utopian democracy, and against the elites of power everywhere, he insisted upon having elites of morality—the elites of knowledge, intellectuals relieved of their liberal fallacies about human nature and their Marxist myths about the laws of history, and enlightened as truly moral humanists and as radical critics. His final project, therefore, was a practical one, to goad and guide the intellectual elites into a radical and passionate commitment to break the impasse to the "ideal" of democracy caused by the conditions of modern rationality without reason.

III. On Elites of Morality

Having rejected the economic determinism of Marxism and the "rationalistic" determinism of "abstracted empiricism," Mills believed that the way was open to assert more confidently than ever before that man is free to "make history," to make "the reasoned moral choices" that would achieve the ideal democracy of humanism. Making these choices is in fact what Mills took to be the "real meaning" of making history. The ones that he expected and desired to make these choices were a third elite, a true elite of morality, the "plain marxist" humanists with "the sociological imagination."

A. Historical Specificity and Moral Relativism

Mills' idea of the sociological imagination is, at its core, a very
problematic guide to the making of moral decisions by an intellectual elite. Part of the problem, surely, is that as a "theory" or account of morality, it is intelligible, if at all, only to intellectuals; while it imagines or desires things of value to non-intellectuals, it does not speak the language of citizens and statesmen, who rightly eschew the utopianism that Mills seemed proud to claim for the "ideals" of humanism. It is a guide to moral decisions that spurns the teachings of religion, on the one hand, and, on the other, is undeterred by the facts of "human nature" as known by men of experience and common sense, if not by theoreticians. In any case, it is problematic for reasons deeper than these.

Mills taught the sociological imagination as a "new way of thinking"; it was to think, without reservation, in the light of "historical specificity," "social relativity," and "the transformative power of history." In the strangest saying in all of his writings, Mills argued that the sociological imagination, by enabling its possessors to "grasp what is going in the world," gave them the experience of a "transvaluation of values" (SI, 7-8). Declaring his independence from the conventional wisdom of liberalism and Marxism on behalf of "reasoned" morality and "an absolute democracy of power," Mills invoked this most profoundly anti-democratic and amoral principle. To speak of a transvaluation of values is to say that the values of one's project of the future are in some decisive respect superior to those being transvalued; but, as we have seen, Mills' central principle of historical specificity denied that there are or can be any grounds upon which to claim such a superiority.

This deeper problem with Mills' project for "making history" and entrusting it to an elite of intellectuals with the sociological imagination appears clearly in his comment on Max Weber's positivist revision of Marx's ideas. He describes Weber's perception of the "crisis" of Western civilization as a view of "the social world as a chaos of values, a hopeless plurality of gods." As is well known, Weber drew from this view the conclusion that men of science and knowledge could do nothing with this chaos of values but observe it and seek out its historical and social causes; it is, he argued, "one thing to state facts, to determine...the internal structure of cultural values," while it is another, non-scientific thing to judge or to give order to these values or even "to answer questions of the value of culture" itself. Making judgments about the value of culture or the values of any particular culture, Weber held, makes it impossible to gain a "full understanding of the facts" of cultural and political life.
It has been shown, by Strauss in particular, that in fact Weber constantly made judgments about the values he was examining, classifying them as praiseworthy or blameworthy. Mills did not, of course, champion Weber's value-neutrality; but he interpreted Weber's way in the direction of Nietzsche, arguing that Weber could give "no basis for decision...other than his own personal will and integrity." It was to "personal will and integrity," then, "the radical will" (WWIII, 169)—that Mills turned for the basis of his own project of a democratic and humanistic transvaluation of values, and not to Weber's value-free social science. It was just the timid pretension to an impossible "scientific objectivity" and the "fear of any passionate commitment" that Mills denounced in the Weberian social science which he associated with modern liberalism (C, 235). He denied that the social scientist could avoid making "choices of value," and argued that instead of pretending not to have made such choices, the social scientist should be explicit about them (SI, 177; M, 10).

The demands of reason, however, cannot be met simply by being explicit about choices that rest only on "personal will and integrity." Integrity may be only a habit or a lack of spiritedness and one's will quite often goes against one's reason. Mills did not seem to regard this as a problem; he argued that without a "transcendent" or an "immanent" ground for one's values and with no direction from human nature for one's choices, the only guide to choosing is history: "from right inside history," he argued, came the values of men whom he admired as "models of character." As his critique of Marx's idea of historical determinism shows, he certainly did not think that their coming "from right inside history" made them "reasoned" choices. He believed that it was a "commonplace" that "one cannot infer judgments of value from statements of fact," so that it is not possible to say "how we ought to act from what we believe is." (As Nietzsche had put it, "there are no moral phenemena at all.")


Eugene F. Miller explains this problem very clearly: "Positivism"—what Mills called "abstracted empiricism"—came to deny that there can be genuine knowledge of what is good and just, or of the standards (ideals, values) that ought to guide
Neither can we say, Mills continued, "how others ought to act from how we believe we ought to act." He was persuaded of the inability of reason to tell us how we ought to live and how to resolve genuine conflicts of moral opinions; in the face of such conflicts, he concluded, the role of reason is at an end, and "at the very end...moral problems become problems of power," so that "we just have to beat those who disagree with us over the head" (C, 246; SI, 77). The "reasoned moral choices," the making of which Mills claimed as the peculiar virtue of his elite of morality, turned out to be neither "reasoned" nor "moral" choices after all, and Mills' strange call for a "transvaluation of values" began to look in principle like a call to combat.

This is not to deny that, "at the very end," and all too often in-between as well, nations and factions within nations do indeed beat each other over the heads because they do not agree on what is moral or right. But Mills' moral relativism is not derived from this fact of life, because his argument is that, in principle, reason or the mind is incapable of resolving moral differences, whatever allowances have to be made for unreasonable men everywhere. Such a position would lead, as Strauss explained, to "complete chaos."

For to say in the same breath that our sole protection against war between societies and within society is reason, and that according to reason "those individuals and societies who find it congenial to their systems of values to oppress and subjugate others" are as right as those who love peace and justice, means to appeal to reason in the very act of destroying reason.

B. Radical Humanism in Domestic and International Politics

The moral relativism central to Mills' "plain marxism" and "sociological imagination" was the bridge between his critique of the elites of power and of knowledge and his practical project of overcoming the "rationality without reason" which, he believed,
was so unnecessary a betrayal of the ideals of Western Humanism. This relativism linked his critique to his politics, domestic and international; it underlay his view of politics as "a struggle for power" (PE, 171) that made him an early and enthusiastic champion of "radical humanism" (PPP, 220) and the New Left, in domestic politics; to this he added an internationalism wholly abstracted from the realities of genuine power politics.

Believing that the hyper-rationalization of modern societies had made classic liberalism and classic Marxism obsolete, Mills argued that the old "agencies of change" were no longer effective. Now a new "radical agency of change"—the intellectuals, the "cultural apparatus"—should be developed to replace both liberalism's bourgeoisie and its pluralist parliamentarism and Marxism's proletariat and their Communist politics (PPP, 254-256). It would be the task of this elite of morality, and not the power elite of second-rate minds or the elites of knowledge "divorced" from power, to identify "the strategic positions of intervention" in the mass societies of modernity. They were the ones who would locate "the levers by which the structure may be maintained or changed" and undertake to move these levers to bring about true democracy (SI, 131).

Mills identified the core of this new elite as "the social scientists of the rich societies," who "above all others" were to confront the problems of modern society. The failure of many of them to have done this, he believed, was "surely the greatest human fault...committed by privileged men in our times." While it would be easy to find cases of privileged men committing far greater faults than the retreat into "abstracted empiricism" by American social scientists—after all, as another critic complained, at about this same time, such social scientists only fiddled while Rome burned”—Mills' hyperbole was appropriate to the task he set for the radical humanist. He compared the fault of the social scientists of liberalism, of this implicit acceptance of liberal democracy "pretty much as it is," with Marx, whose values led him "to condemn his society—root, stock, and branch" (SI, 176; M, 11). Both Marx and Mills saw that condemnation, however radical, was not enough for the task of realizing the realm of freedom. Mills intended, then, that the intellectuals ought to do more than condemn their societies; they

ought to change them radically, and not just incrementally or by "piece-meal" reform (SI, 85). This seemed to mean that a revolution should be made; but Mills did not want to draw this conclusion. In the final argument of *The Sociological Imagination*, he argued that change, even radical change, should take place by persuasion rather than revolution; the intellectuals should use their "one often fragile 'means of power'" to "oppose" and "debunk" the power elite and their liberal apologists. This meant to "make demands upon men of power and to hold them responsible for specific courses of events." Holding them responsible, however, did not amount to voting them out of office or enforcing the laws against their illegal or immoral activities; it meant, rather, opposing the "politics of semi-organized irresponsibility" ruled over by the American-and Soviet-power elite. Since Mills believed that in neither country were there "autonomous" publics and that in both countries the one- and two-party systems were "irresponsible," this meant that the intellectuals with "radical values" could be the only ones to approve or disapprove of what the power elite did (PPP, 222; WWIII, 95).

Those who decide should be held responsible to those men and women everywhere who are in any grievous way affected by decisions and defaults. But by whom should they be held responsible?...In both east and West today, the immediate answer is: By the intellectual community. Who else but intellectuals are capable of discerning the role of explicit history-making decisions? (WWIII, 170).

Mills turned, in *The Causes of World War Three*, to the task of spelling out what particular things the radical humanists should demand of the power elite to bring about "the political structure of a modern democratic state." In the United States, what had to be done, "above all," was to make over the "privately incorporated economy" into "a publicly responsible economy." This seemed to give the economic elite rather more prominence than it had in *The Power Elite*; but in fact the point was the same: making over the "privately incorporated economy" of America amounted to the

24. Jay Sigler comments on Mills' argument as follows: "Unfortunately, the source of the intellectual's value structure is not made clear. If his views are not controlled by the 'power elite' then his unguided vision of democracy, based upon some ideology not yet in existence must form his criteria of appraisal. In the absence of such criteria the intellectual community will not concur on any public issue." "The Political Philosophy of C. Wright Mills," 30 *Science and Society*, 1988, p. 450.
replacement of "the permanent war economy" with "a permanent peace economy." The intellectuals' attack on the power elite was, he said, "an attack on war-making" and, therefore, "a fight for the democratic means of history-making" (WWIII, 118-121). Mills' demand that democracy be taken "seriously," his utopian vision of a democracy, or rather a whole world, in which all men are rational to the degree that only a few men have ever been rational, his assertion of man's absolute control over history itself—that is, Mills' "plain marxism," largely collapsed into his fear of World War Three. The radical humanists were urged to try "to save the world" and saving the world meant "the avoidance of war and the rearrangement of human affairs in accordance with the ideals of human freedom and reason" (SI, 193).

Lest this should be thought to be too vague, Mills proceeded to state in great detail what had to be done to realize the ideals of humanism. He called upon the elite of morality to demand that the United States abandon all military bases outside its own boundaries; that NATO and the Warsaw Pact be dissolved; that the countries of Europe become united, neutralist, and disarmed (except for a "citizens' army of riflemen"); and that all American and Soviet troops be withdrawn from Europe. He proposed that the United States establish a "public Science Machine" to undertake "all scientific research and development...relevant to the military," which would be removed from the private economy; and that America unilaterally cease "all further production of...all A-Bombs and H-Bombs." Mills demanded more than these steps to avoid world destruction by unilateral action and to defuse the power of America's military-industrial complex by centralizing military research and development into a single super-bureaucracy. He proposed, also, that the United States reshape the underdeveloped countries into lands of enlightened and scientific humanism: Allocating "some 20 percent" of its military budget for aid to such countries and "increasing this by 10 percent each year," the United States should build "in every culturally underdeveloped area" of the world, under United Nations' auspices, "a first-class educational system" with special attention to the humanities and social sciences; it should train "science writers of all nationalities" to disseminate "the classic ethos of science" to counter the "wasteful trivialities of commercial propaganda" by teaching the scientific "habits of truth and of fearless observation, its demands for careful proof and its invitation to audacious speculation"; and, finally, the United States
should announce one of these programs unilaterally, "one big item every other day, beginning at once and in plain language" (WWIII, 101-110).

Mills' guidelines to peace and the re-arrangement of human affairs were essentially directed at unilateral American action, with the Soviets being "invited and reinvited to join in" (WWIII, 110). He argued that the privately incorporated economies of the liberal democracies were "permanent war economies" and that the radical humanist critique of the power elite in these countries was an attack on war-making. The object of the critique was to institute a "publicly responsible economy," or what is usually called socialism, which, he implied is not devoted to war making, but to world peace. He did not say that he thought it likely that the United States would take the drastic and risky actions he proposed; he argued, rather, that, if the military-industrial complex were dismantled and if the American regime were reshaped into a genuinely "responsible" democracy, then such steps would be clearly seen as the only realistic and practical ones; world peace would follow if the elites of morality would demand the remaking of the United States (WWIII, 116-118). On the other hand, he argued that the Soviet Union was already in a condition to share the lead in making such efforts toward world peace. In the final paragraphs of his final published writing, The Marxists, Mills asserted the "break-up of orthodoxy" in Marxism as evidenced by the development of "marxism outside the Bloc," as well as by the dissenting intellectuals within it, who heroically "talk of possible new meanings of Marxism" (WWIII, 128). In the Soviet Union itself, he wrote, Khrushchev's rule was less harsh and less dictatorial than Stalin's. He declared that, after "the terrible and wonderful historical experiences of half a century," and "however brutal the means" Stalinism had employed for the industrialization achieved elsewhere by the slower means of capitalism, the Soviet Union was approaching the condition of a fully industrialized society which Marx envisaged as "the condition for a successful marxist revolution"-that is, for the realization of the humanist ideals. He concluded his last book with this "most difficult" question-but, truly, a most anti-humanist speculation:

Is it merely wishful thinking to ask the question: Might not a society conforming to the ideals of classic marxism be approximated, via the tortuous road of stalinism, in the Soviet world of Khrushchev and of those who will follow him? (M, 473-474)
Mills seemed to believe, then, that the Soviet Union, which, for all of its centralization, he did not condemn for its "permanent war economy," was more likely to be peace-loving to the point of dissolving the Warsaw Pact, etc., than was the United States.25

Mills described his guidelines for peace and for the rearrangement of human affairs as what the power elite would call a "merely utopian fantasy" or "what perhaps used to be the utopian way"; but he believed that the threat of World War Three had transformed the utopian way into "the only adequate way to think about world politics and the human condition" and the only realistic way for intellectuals to work for human survival (WWIII, 93-94). It seems that Mills supposed that, since "all politics is a struggle for power," once power had been seen to be potentially self-destructive, then no reason for politics would remain, and no one would desire political life itself—that is, the life of one political community naturally distinct from others. His guidelines assumed, for example, that the "culturally underdeveloped" countries really wanted the mindlessly patronizing aid he proposed and to be molded according to the moral relativism of Western social science and humanism. Mills condemned the political apathy of the "mass" of his fellow Americans, but to the elite of moral humanists, he exhorted de-nationalization: Intellectuals, he said, "must become internationalists again"; the "intellectuals of the world...should awake and unite with intellectuals everywhere" and make their "own separate peace" (PPP, 235; WWIII, 145).

Mills' audacious guidelines for world peace and for justice and equality among the powerful and weak countries have not been followed. It is easy to see how improbable it is that they would be followed, just as it is easy to see that the inequality between coun-

25. Aptheker criticized Mills for blaming the Soviet Union equally with the United States for the Cold War. But he also observes that in "The Balance of Blame" (The Nation, June 18, 1960), Mills "conveys a great sense of the very powerful and urgent will for peace in the U.S.S.R....It explicitly affirms that the 'balance of blame' at present in tipping the scales toward war falls upon the United States and not the Soviet Union....Mills does...make clear here that such [economic] compulsions [toward war making] are absent in the U.S.S.R....Le explicitly affirms that the 'balance of blame' at present in tipping the scales toward war falls upon the United States and not the Soviet Union....Mills does...make clear here that such [economic] compulsions [toward war making] are absent in the U.S.S.R....He asserts, finally, that Mills' "essay is very strong in its appeal that the persistent proposals for real and general disarmament raised by the U.S.S.R. be considered with full seriousness; and it concludes with a ringing appeal for the necessity of peaceful co-existence." Aptheker, op. cit., p. 88.
tries and the probability of nuclear war that inspired the guidelines have not decreased, nor do they seem likely to decrease. To the extent that the New Left and even its "post-behavioralist" proselytes have taken up the guidelines and the apolitical transnationalism they represent, they are more easily seen to rest neither on reason nor necessity, but on a narrow if "passionate" partisanship. Mills' historicist humanism would replace the trans-historical grounds for moral choice of revelation or natural reason with that of commitment, will, and integrity, intended to transcend all national or parochial prejudices. Yet this means that the commitment to the humanist ideals is a partisanship or parochialism after all, limited, as Strauss observed, "to the community of relativists who understand each other...because they are united by identically the same fundamental commitment." The radical humanist pretension to transnationalism discloses merely another "provincialism." 27

IV. Conclusion

Mills did not and could not follow to its conclusion his thought on the three elites of power, knowledge, and morality. His humanist "provincialism" came largely from the contempt for the capitalist or bourgeois way of life established by the regimes of liberal democracy. Instead of regimes ruled by those devoted to this way of life, he wanted the congruence of the three elites and a regime in which the rulers or decision-makers were truly elite, in intellect and morality as well as in power. But Mills was prevented from making a clear or explicit case for rule by a genuine elite because of his "democratism," his overriding passion for equality. In fact, this passion was so decisive in Mills' thought that it prevented him from thinking about "regimes" in any proper way at all; his thought was not truly political thought because he evaded the idea that some regimes are fundamentally or naturally superior to others by virtue of their devotion to higher ends. He avoided this difficult but truly

26. For example, David Easton, in "The New Revolution in Political Science," 63 APSR, 1969, argues that, with the Behavioral Revolution properly secured, adjusted, and funded, all serious "intellectuals," as "defenders of humane values," ought to realize the need for "new kinds of...arrangements in political systems," and that they can see this more clearly when they are liberated from "bondage to the unique needs and objectives" of their own countries. pp. 1060-1061.

political idea by lapsing into fantasies of a "realm of freedom" where "all men everywhere" had "equal power in an absolute democracy." Mills' democratism and his evasion of the political question of the best and worst regimes resulted from the necessity of filling the vacuum caused by his assumption that human nature is empty of all substantive or fixed contents and limits. His historicism led him to suppose that "the limits of possible human development" were unknown (WWIII, 94), and he interpreted this to mean that it is known that there are no limits at all. If human nature is nothing, then boundless "creativity" becomes the only human activity and equality in creativity takes the place of natural differences and limits. Mills took it to be an absolute insight that the "most intimate features" of men are socially and historically determined and that the final reality of man is his "social and plastic nature." Dazzled by the spectacle of the diversity and modifiability of man, he felt free to assume, for example, that there could be a society without "a sort of quota of men who when appropriately provoked will resort to violence" (PE, 172). His premise of the limitless modifiability of man, however, would equally suggest a society in which the least, or the least reasonable, provocation would result in violence: not a perfectly peaceful society, but a perfectly violent one.

It was quite arbitrary of Mills to derive a peaceful society-and, it seems, a peaceful world-from the premise of complete human plasticity. He thought that such plasticity would result in a "democracy of power" so egalitarian that power itself would be irrelevant. In fact, on this premise, it is more likely, as Nietzsche showed, that man's "plastic power," his capacity for "free creativity," would be manifest as the will to power, which is the will of some to wield power over others. It was at least consistent for Nietzsche to ignore the problem of how men should be guided by law and morality to the best use of this "plastic power," for unlike Mills, Nietzsche was not bound by democratism; his own contempt for the "herd" of "cheerful robots" was deadly serious. It is precisely the godlike power to make history that requires Nietzsche's "agency of change"--"free spirits" and cruel nobilities--to use and to master others, to do what Mills' humanist intellectuals must not do, even though he surely tempted them by speculating that their "ideals of

28. Mills is here disagreeing with Mosca's assumption that all societies always have such a "quota of men."
classic marxism" lay at the end of "the tortuous road of stalinism." It was irresponsible of Mills to imitate Nietzsche's indifference to moderation and to the practical consequences of declaring according to some "thought-model" that human nature is the "prerogative of free creativity." The difference is decisive between Mills' bravado and Nietzsche's full comprehension and acceptance of the terrors of seeing human nature with "historical specificity," and of cutting human nature loose from all natural ends, beginnings, and limits except the will to power and the desire of creation. Mills' "radical humanism," then, was impelled by the passion for equality and for an "ideal" democracy, compared to which the United States and the Soviet Union—representing the fundamental alternatives in the real world—looked more or less equally undemocratic. Mills dismissed as out of date the "Tocqueville-quoting" pluralists who saw more differences than similarities in the two regimes (PE, 271). Nevertheless, Tocqueville saw rightly how the passion for equality leads men to imagine "the possibility of an ideal but always fugitive perfection" and to "stretch" the "scope of human perfectibility...beyond reason" (Democracy in America II.1, ch.9).

Mills constructed his radical humanism in a most unsatisfactory and unsatisfying way: his scavenging through the history of Western civilization— or picking and choosing "from right inside" it—produced only a pseudo-ideal of "man's estate." Perhaps this is because Mills' thought was wholly within the confines of the "sociological" perspective on man, however critical he was of the increasing thinness of sociology that came from neglecting its own "classical tradition." That tradition itself, by definition and by virtue of its fundamental theorist, Marx, abstracts from the political and the rational and takes its bearings from the sub-political (the economic, the social, the multitudinous) and the sub-rational (hence the relativistic and the easily modified). The sub-political or sociological may well exhibit a diversity so much greater than the political as to approach an infinite and unordered variety. The political, however, is not a function of the sub-political—no more than is "all politics...a struggle for power." The ideas of the general will, the divine right of kings, the social contract, the consent of the governed, the rule of the wise, for example, are not mere "symbol spheres" or "symbols of justification," as Mills believed (SI, 36), but attempts to prove-as nearly as unaided reason or philosophy can prove—that there are true or real or natural grounds for obeying the
laws. Mills did not take these proofs seriously and therefore saw only the sub-political dimension of politics; this caused his own idea of the best or "ideal" regime, an "absolute" democracy, to have no truly political or rational meaning.

In any case, this pseudo-ideal is neither serious nor clear, for it obscures and softens what is hard and uncompromising in the political philosophies of both antiquity and modernity. Even setting aside Mills' "humanist" abstraction from the irremovable religious roots of Western civilization, one objects to his reduction of Liberalism to individualism, which leaves out the strong chains of obedience binding the citizen to his sovereign; one objects to his overlooking the requirements for a people's democracy of a radical homogeneity and absolute conformity to the general will; and one objects to his reducing the complexity of Marx's philosophy of history to a fantasy of abundance and gentleness. Mills' pseudo-ideal evades serious thought about the ends and purposes of human life, leaving room for disagreements only about the means—whether "radical" or "piecemeal"—by which these spuriously extracted "ideals" and "values" could be achieved. Most of all, one objects to Mills' unlearned reduction of the philosopher's timeless passion for truth to a promiscuous urge to "free creativity." When the pseudo-ideal is pressed for a concrete or practical meaning, one is disappointed to see that it yields another fantasy of a world without war, without empires or superpowers, and of the unlimited generosity of the wealthiest country.

Mills' "radical humanism," I conclude, was an unsuccessful attempt to combine the cutting moral edge of Marx's utopian thought with the moral relativism of avant-garde or historicist social science. It did not contribute to an understanding of the most difficult problem of modern political philosophy, which is the relation between nature and history, and therewith, between knowledge and history, or the alleged historicity of all thought. Marxist humanism such as Mills' does not illuminate this problem, but only embraces and radicalizes it. Marx himself is famous for his saying that religion is the opiate of the masses; but, in the case of Mills, it seems more true to say that history is the opiate of the intellectuals. 29

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