



## *Hard Times* and the Moral Equivalence of Markets and Slavery

### The Novelist as Rational Chooser

Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times* gives definitive form to Thomas Carlyle's opposition to the "cash nexus" of market exchange. As we have seen, when Carlyle coined the term *dismal science* he juxtaposed it to the "gay science" of poetry. The debate to which he pointed, economics versus poetry, continues in our own time. The literary critics and philosophers influenced by these literary critics, whom we shall encounter soon, seem to take it for granted, as befits such a great work of art as *Hard Times*, that the story Dickens told is "true" and so can serve as opposition to the truth claims of economic models.<sup>1</sup>

The truth claims on behalf of *Hard Times* are twofold. Not only are claims about the world outside the novel a serviceable approximation of that reality (first), but (second) the acts described in the story are consistent with the laws of the world imagined. I propose to question this tradition root and branch. I shall venture the claim that it is precisely where the novel is "false" in both of these directions—one critical claim about the world outside the story is a transparent falsification and the characters's actions deviate from the laws of Dickens's world to serve Dickens's polemic purpose—that we can see what message *Hard Times* has to convey.

To make my case that we can observe false choices in *Hard Times*, I need to identify a law of Dickens's world independent of the acts of the agents. But

---

1. "Theorists of poetry (or literature more generally) have continued to argue that this form of writing offers a unique solution to the problem of induction either because the literary text constitutes what W. K. Wimsatt called 'a concrete universal' or because, as Steven Knapp has more recently contended, 'the object of literary interest is a special kind of representational structure, each of whose elements acquires, by virtue of its connection with other elements, a network of associations inseparable from the representation itself'" (Poovey 1998, 326–27). In the period we study, Charles Kingsley (1864, xli) offers a kindred explanation for the conflict between Great Man accounts and what today are called "invisible hand explanations" and explains the literary basis of the Great Man stories.

in *Hard Times* this is easy. The law of the world is that the self-described economic-Utilitarian agents seek to maximize their happiness without regard for the happiness of others. The problem with Utilitarianism is its hardness and inhumanity. This is the first of many things that F. R. Leavis, the modern scholar most responsible for *Hard Times*' contemporary fame, writes:

But in *Hard Times* he is for once possessed by a comprehensive vision, one in which the inhumanities of Victorian civilization are seen as fostered and sanctioned by a hard philosophy, the aggressive formulation of an inhumane spirit. The philosophy is represented by Thomas Gradgrind, Esquire, Member of Parliament for Coketown, who has brought up his children on the lines of the experiment recorded by John Stuart Mill as carried out on himself. What Gradgrind stands for is, though repellent, nevertheless respectable. (1990, 341)

### Attacking Modern Economics by Means of Victorian Novels

It is in the spirit of the doctrine of authorial infallibility in great works of art that we might read Martha Nussbaum's recent lecture on economics past and present in light of *Hard Times*. Here she contrasts economic with novelistic accounts:

Mr. Gradgrind knows that storybooks are not simply decorative, not simply amusing—though this already would be enough to cause him to doubt their utility. Literature, he sees, is subversive. It is the enemy of political economy, as Mr. Gradgrind knows that science. It expresses, in its structures and its ways of speaking, a sense of life that is incompatible with the vision of the world embodied in the texts of political economy; and engagement with it forms the imagination and the desires in a manner that subverts that science's norm of rationality. (1991, 878)<sup>2</sup>

Nussbaum asserts—on the basis of her personal experience of life among “the econ”—that the criticism of economics in *Hard Times* is fundamentally fair.

---

2. Nussbaum makes her obligations to Leavis and Williams clear (1991, 907). It is important for what follows that she cites not a single nineteenth-century economist. Leavis and Williams do discuss John Stuart Mill, albeit in Leavis's case in a rather bizarre fashion (Fielding 1956). Moreover, Nussbaum makes the following assertion: “The antagonist throughout will be not sophisticated philosophical forms of utilitarianism, and not the political economy of the greatest philosophical political economists, such as Adam Smith—but the cruder form of economic utilitarianism that is actually used in many areas of public policy-making, and is commended as a norm for still others. (1991, 880). Since one of the little Gradgrinds is named “Adam Smith Gradgrind,” Nussbaum's exemption raises questions too obvious to belabor.

The novel is more nearly true than the competing economic models with which it contends.<sup>3</sup>

While Nussbaum's conflation of the target of *Hard Times*, early- and mid-nineteenth-century economics, with that with which she has personal knowledge might seem to be debatable essentialism, I have no quarrel with at least one central theme in her argument. ChicagoSchool economics does indeed assume a fixed human nature of a fairly simple form. Change incentives, change behavior. That's rational choice theory. Obviously, there are technical details to fuss over, but indeed the critical step is the assumption that human nature is fixed. And the economic teaching that provoked Dickens made a similarly simple claim about human rationality in terms of fixed human nature.

It is the next step I worry about. Nussbaum makes the following claims against modern economics:

It does not even tell us about life expectancy and infant mortality—far less about health, education, political functioning, the quality of ethnic and racial and gender relations. (1991, 904–5)

And this bears on the target of Dickens how? Nussbaum is vague here, and since she does not cite the texts of past economists I shall attempt to reconstruct an argument to fill the gap. She writes as if one need not actually read the past to know what cannot be found there. This seems to me to be as pure an instance of presentism as one could hope to find. This surely means to say that if a concept is not found in modern economics—that economics she knows, with all its high mathematical and statistical technology—it cannot be found in the past. If modern economists do not worry about life expectancy, such concerns are not found in the past. If modern economists of undoubtedly respectable views on race and politics are not concerned in their technical work about “the quality of ethnic and racial and gender relations,” surely those

---

3. “What I am about to say here may seem in some respects obvious. For it is part of the novel's design that the economist's way of thinking, seen in the full context of daily life, should look extremely strange, and the opposing way natural. What I hope to bring out here, however, is that the economic opponent is not a straw man: it is a conception that even now dominates much of our public life, in a form not very different from the form presented in this novel. Once, focusing on the subtle modifications of utilitarianism that one finds in recent philosophy, I felt that the satire of *Hard Times* was unfair. But now that I have spent time in the world of economics, . . . reading the prose and following the arguments, I am convinced that the criticisms in the novel are both fair and urgent. The simple utilitarian idea of what rational choice consists in dominates not only economic thought and practice, but also—given the prestige of economics within the social sciences—a great deal of writing in the other social sciences as well, where ‘rational choice theory’ is taken to be equivalent to utilitarian rational choice theory as practiced in neoclassical economics” (Nussbaum 1991, 882).

blasted souls of economics past could not have been so concerned. Economics present is an upper bound to economics past.

On the contrary, I should argue that the content of economics past serves as a lower bound to economics future. If it was in the past, then as long as we persist in holding to our rational choice vision it can be in our future. Thus, while I think some of Nussbaum's criticisms of economics present are sensible, the defects she points out are not inevitable in a rational choice model of the future precisely because they were dealt by those who worked in the rational choice tradition of the past.<sup>4</sup>

The quarrel I have with Nussbaum is that by using economics present to bound economics past she completely misses the context of the larger debate in which *Hard Times* is but one set piece. A vast amount of classical economics is intertwined with controversies over racial slavery. And, as economic theory is a public good, it was seized upon by noneconomists in the antislavery movement and so entered a great public debate.

Socrates, as represented in the *Meno*, claims that all knowledge is recollection. This chapter is an attempt to remember. In recollection, we discover what we were and thus what we might be again.

### Reading the Silence over Carlyle versus Mill

Let us recall that *Hard Times*, published in 1854, is "Inscribed to Thomas Carlyle" and ask what this might mean to Dickens's contemporaries. The Carlylean twofold doctrine, fully explained in a pair of essays published in 1849–50, is (first) that people of color can be improved to approach human status through enslavement to whites and (second) without this improvement genocide is a policy option. These we have read. Dickens's inscription signifies at a bare minimum his nonrevulsion in the face of this doctrine.

Today, who writes about the Carlyle-Mill debate? Who wants to talk about Carlyle's attack on the role of classical economic theory for its role in black emancipation? Who wants to talk about the fact that this was the same economic theory that Dickens attacked?

As an aid in developing a hypothesis, let us first look at the data. Here is a data collection procedure anyone at a modern research institution can conduct by means of that most magical of scholarly devices, JSTOR. With JSTOR, one can read the relative silence: what is not in one discipline but is in another. Put the following four items in "full-text" mode in the default search engine: Carlyle and Mill and negro question and nigger question. First, restrict the search

---

4. Two words on Nussbaum's technical criticisms. The replacement of a scalar measure of well-being—inflation adjusted money income—with a vector approach to well-being has been a topic of conversation among economics for decades. See, for example, Terleckyj 1975.

to literature journals in JSTOR. What do you find? The search I conducted turned up nothing.<sup>5</sup> No hits. Funny that. Possibly, the words I used have no meaning in the material world? Second, change the search to journals in the field of African American studies. Two hits. Perhaps the words do mean something after all.<sup>6</sup>

One might remember, however, that every now and again someone calls attention to the unhappy fact that there are aspects of the Dickens *opera* that are completely out of tune with the ordered harmony in his hagiography.<sup>7</sup> In particular, there are articles in Dickens's weekly magazine, *Household Words*, that his admirers then and now would wish unwritten. From 1853, here is Lord Denman's linkage of that character in *Bleak House*, concerned more about the well-being of distant slaves than her own children with those words Dickens was publishing in his weekly magazine.

[U]nluckily we cannot disassociate her [Mrs. Jellyby] from some papers in the "Household Words," which appear to have been written for the taste of slave traders only. (Denman 1853, 11)<sup>8</sup>

And this is related to *Hard Times* how? Since Denman's time, scholars have learned the names of the authors of *Household Words* articles. In Kate Flint's introduction to the newest Penguin edition of *Hard Times*, she notes that if

5. The literature journals as of October 11, 1999 are *American Literature*, *ELH*, *MLN*, *Negro American Literature Forum*, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, *Speculum*, *Yale French Studies*, *Black American Literature Forum*, *Modern Language Notes*, *Callaloo*, *Representations*, and *African American Review*.

6. I commend the work of Iva Jones (1967) and James Patterson Smith (1994) to the reader.

7. The reader might wish to consult the work of Michael Goldberg (1972a, 1972b) and William Oddie (1972). The Carlyleanization of Dickens was noted in an unattributed article in *Fraser's* of 1850 ("Charles Dickens and David Copperfield," 709): "The coincidence of opinion between the two authors is the more remarkable, as they are probably divided in opinion upon every other subject, secular or sacred. We even remember a passage in *Dombey and Son* which looks like an overt declaration of war against the great priest of Hero-worship. However this may be, it is certain that no one has been more instrumental than Dickens in fostering that spirit of kindly charity which impels a man to do what he can, however narrow his sphere of action may be, to relieve the sufferings and to instruct the ignorance of his brethren; while Carlyle, on the other hand, treats all such efforts with lofty disdain, and would call them mere attempts to tap an ocean by gimlet-holes, or some such disparaging metaphor." This article is reprinted in Collins 1971, 243–48. Oddie (1972, 131) disagrees with the *Fraser's* judgment.

8. The reader might wish to consider how the Dickens Protective Agency (DPA) deals with Denman's perfectly correct discussion of what was being published in *Household Words*. According to Edgar Johnson (1952, 2:760): "Lord Denman's violence was partly the result of declining health—he died the following year—of which his son sent Dickens an apologetic explanation." The reader who disbelieves in the existence of a DPA might wish to consult Claire Tomalin (1991) on the lengths to which many have gone to conceal the existence of the friendship between Dickens and the woman to whom his wife first applied the label "your actress." Harry Stone describes how recent scholarship has broken through old barriers and the way his work (1994, xix) draws "upon this checkered and fluctuating interest in a darker, more concealed Dickens."

words Dickens wrote in that text are juxtaposed against what he wrote in *Household Words*, their meaning lurches in unexpected directions. There is

an amusing quirkiness in hearing that Coketown was “a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage” until one recollects Dickens’s hysterical attack in an [*Household Words*] article of 1853 on “The Noble Savage.” (Dickens 1995, xix)

We shall encounter the noble savage by and by.

That the Carlyle–Mill debate, which we encountered earlier, frames Denman’s attack on Dickens we learn by reading what Denman says in the open letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe that prefaces the reprinting of his letters to the *Standard*:

[I]n England there are symptoms calculated to mislead. First, the open defence of Slavery by some of our most popular and influential writers. For the unaccountable part they have been induced to take in the great process now going on between mankind and the owners of and traders in Slaves, we, the public, feel the deepest grief, but no alarm as to the ultimate result. (1853, iii–iv)

### Sissy Jupe Passes Her Exam

When Nussbaum writes about Dickens’s attack on economics, she does not consider his attacks on the Christian evangelicals. That these groups ought to be taken as one target is the considered judgment of a modern specialist:

If Dickens was in the main an environmentalist, he could number among the moralists, two of his least favorite groups: evangelicals and political economists. Indeed, these two groups often overlapped in the nineteenth century to produce writers who, in the tradition of Malthus, “preached what might be called evangelical economics.” (Schacht 1990, 78)<sup>9</sup>

We know from the Carlyle–Mill exchange that the cause of black emancipation united Utilitarian and evangelical. As we have seen, the antislavery coalition between Utilitarians and evangelical Christians functioned because in part it was agreed that there is a formal identity between the Golden Rule of Chris-

---

9. The quotation is from Richard Altick (1973, 127). The reader will note that the names of the offensive evangelicals are not given. I shall suggest one name below, that of T. B. Macaulay, whose work illustrates the thesis that Dickens thought of evangelicals and economists as a package.

tianity and the Greatest Happiness Principle of Utilitarianism, thus forging what one might label “broad utilitarianism.”

This agreement on foundations requires a further stipulation to turn it into an effective antislavery coalition; that is, the agreement among the partners that black slaves are at the bottom of the distribution of happiness and that their lot deserves immediate attention. Lord Denman’s attack on Dickens’s views on slavery, as revealed in the *Household Words* review of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, comes from the point of view of a biblical literalism raging against the coming of progressive religion, which would, by denying the imperative to raise the worst off, deny the Gospel:

But it is only of late years that small wits have found the sentiment a proper theme of ridicule. They have all become ashamed of their dark-complexioned brother, and would fain disclaim the relationship. They cannot do so without renouncing that of Him who spoke of the whole family of man as one brotherhood, without distinction of class or colour, and proclaimed eternal happiness or misery to the great ones of the earth, according to the deeds that they shall have done to the least of His brethren. (1853, 12)<sup>10</sup>

Now this raises a series of interesting questions about what to make of *Hard Times* and Leavis’s interpretation of that text, precisely the inconsistency between Utilitarianism and Christianity that forms the philosophical claim in the text for which Leavis vouches “finality.” Consider that celebrated passage in which Sissy Jupe first encounters political economy:

[A]fter eight weeks of induction into the elements of Political Economy, she had only yesterday been set right by a prattler three feet high, for returning to the question “What is the first principle of this science?” the absurd answer, “To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me.” (Dickens 1972, 95; 1995, 60)

Since the economists in *Hard Times* are supposedly Utilitarian, the “absurd” answer is nothing of the kind. Among those qualified to grade such an examination—the founders of Utilitarianism and the opponent they took with most seriousness, as we have seen—her answer has been certified as the correct answer. The Golden Rule of Christianity is an equivalence of the Greatest Happiness Principle of Utilitarianism. Nonetheless, as far as I know, profes-

---

10. Matt. 25:40: “And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done [it] unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done [it] unto me.” The cult of Pan as religious localism is glanced at in chapter 6.

sional students of *Hard Times* follow Leavis in accepting Dickens's claim of the inexorable opposition of Utilitarianism and Christianity.<sup>11</sup>

Only in the very recent (1997) *Companion to Hard Times* is Mill's identification of the Golden Rule with Utilitarianism juxtaposed against Sissy Jupe's answer.<sup>12</sup> As the *Companion* aims to provide "annotation [that] is factual rather than critical," no inference is drawn.<sup>13</sup> Could one fault a naive reader who makes the inference that since *Hard Times* dates from 1854 and Mill's statement from 1861 Dickens had an effect on Mill in a sense other than to protect the record from falsification.

And this connects to the issue of racial slavery how? Perhaps things will be clearer if we appeal to one of the proslavery tracts written in opposition to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by admirers of Carlyle, here the American Rev. E. J. Stearns.<sup>14</sup> Here we find a context in which it makes some sense that the Greatest Happiness Principle of Utilitarianism is morphed to the My Happiness Principle. What temerity the abolitionists have in attacking their betters! Stearns writes that

the slave-holders generally are the *elite* of society,—the picked men . . . far, very far, in advance of "the majority in our world," in both "consideration" and "self-control." As to "an enlightened regard to their own interest," if by that is meant, minding the main chance, i.e., looking out for the greatest good of the greatest number, meaning thereby, as Thelwell has it, "number one," I am very much afraid that they would have to yield the palm to us Yankees. (1853, 47)

---

11. The Utilitarian-Evangelical antislavery coalition is hidden even from a Dickens scholar who works explicitly with the racial texts I discuss later and systematically questions the Leavis tradition: "Until textual or other evidence for such a suggestion is available, it will surely seem more likely that *Hard Times* refers to a general atmosphere of neo-Benthamite theory and practice, and to the wide-spread popular debate engendered by it and available equally to those who had and had not read Bentham" (Oddie 1972, 55). By "neo-Benthamite," Oddie presumably means those who would turn the "Greatest Happiness Principle" into the "My Happiness Principles" and thus turn Utilitarianism into egoism.

Uncritical acceptance of the Leavis reading of Dickens's truthfulness is found in Earle Davis in Gray 1969, 71; Easson 1973, 21; David Lodge in Dickens 1990, 385; Juliet McMaster in Dickens 1990, 412; Samuels 1992, 86; and Nussbaum 1991, 904.

12. Simpson 1997, 117–18. Because Simpson's valuable commentary is keyed to the older Craig Penguin Library edition of *Hard Times*, not the newer Flint Penguin Library edition, I give citations to both the Craig and the Flint editions.

13. Shatto and Paroissien in *ibid.*, 1997, xi.

14. "[I]f there is any inalienable right of another class, it is that so ably set forth by Carlyle,—the right of every man to be compelled to do what he is fit for, if he won't do it voluntarily; and this brings us back to Quashy" (Stearns 1853, 21).



In answer to the supposition that the Atlantic provides a barrier to ideas, this pamphlet was noted in *Household Words*.<sup>15</sup>

### “Inscribed to Thomas Carlyle”

I propose to discuss four aspects of the Carlyle-Mill debate and ask what they tell us about Leavis’s interpretation of Utilitarianism and the Utilitarian economists. These are (1) the “hardness” of Utilitarianism as revealed in this debate and the linked Governor Eyre controversy; (2) the Snow-Leavis controversy, in which the real world reasons for the existence of a Dickens Protective Agency are made clear; (3) John Ruskin’s detailing of the moral equivalence of markets and slavery as a clarion call to the defense of Governor Eyre; and (4) Dickens as a reformer of slavery and his opposition to abolitionism.

#### 1. *Utilitarianism, Spices versus Leisure, and the “Beneficent Whip”*

Although there is a tendency for commentators to attribute the inscription of *Hard Times* to a particular Carlyle book, (i.e., *Past and Present*), no evidence is cited to warrant such particularization.<sup>16</sup> We have quoted Leavis on the “hardness” of Utilitarianism. Now we read his words about human dignity, spontaneity, and Utilitarianism:

Representing human spontaneity, the circus-athletes represent at the same time highly-developed skill and deftness of kinds that bring poise, pride and confident ease—they are always buoyant, and ballet-dancer-like, in training. . . .

Their skills have no value for the Utilitarian calculus, but they express vital human impulse, and they minister to vital human needs. The Horse-riding, frowned upon as frivolous and wasteful by Gradgrind and malignantly scorned by Bounderby. . . . It brings to them, not merely amusement, but art, and the spectacle of triumphant activity that, seeming to contain its end with itself, is, in its easy mastery, joyously self-justified. (1990, 344–45)

Let us see what “Inscribed to Thomas Carlyle” tells us about these important questions:

15. Lynn and Wills 1856, 137: “The Rev. E. J. Stearns, of Maryland, shows by an elaborate calculation, in his criticism of Uncle Tom’s Cabin . . .” The Dickensian opposition to fact was intermittent.

16. Easson 1973, 31. Dickens’s letter to Carlyle about the dedication only talks about Carlyle’s work in general terms, stating that “no man knows your books better than I” (Dickens 1938, 2:567).

If Quashee will not honestly aid in bringing out those sugars, cinnamons, and nobler products of the West Indian Islands, for the benefit of all mankind, then I say neither will the Powers permit Quashee to continue growing pumpkins there for his own lazy benefit; but will sheer him out, by and by, like a lazy gourd overshadowing rich ground; him and all that partake with him,—perhaps in a very terrible manner. For, under favour of Exeter Hall, the “terrible manner” is not yet quite extinct with the Destinies in this Universe; nor will it quite cease, I apprehend, for soft sawder or philanthropic stump-oratory now or henceforth. No; the gods wish besides pumpkins, that spices and valuable products be grown in their West Indies; thus much they have declared in so making the West Indies:—infinitely more they wish, that manful industrious men occupy their West Indies, not indolent two-legged cattle, however “happy” over their abundant pumpkins! Both these things, we may be assured, the immortal gods have decided upon, passed their eternal act of parliament for: and both of them, though all terrestrial Parliaments and entities oppose it to the death, shall be done. Quashee, if he will not help in bringing out the spices, will get himself made a slave again (which state will be a little less ugly than his present one), and with beneficent whip, since other methods avail not, will be compelled to work. (1849, 675)

Here is Mill’s response along several dimensions. First, Carlyle exempts whites from his Gospel of Labor:

Your contributor incessantly prays Heaven that all persons, black and white, may be put in possession of this “divine right of being compelled, if permitted will not serve, to do what work they are appointed for.” But as this cannot be conveniently managed just yet, he will begin with the blacks, and will make them work *for* certain whites, those whites *not* working at all; that so “the eternal purpose and supreme will” may be fulfilled, and “injustice,” which is “for ever accursed,” may cease. (1850, 27)

Second, why is work *per se* valuable?

This pet theory of your contributor about work, we all know well enough, though some persons might not be prepared for so bold an application of it. Let me say a few words on this “gospel of work.” . . .

Work, I imagine, is not a good in itself. There is nothing laudable in work for work’s sake. To work voluntarily for a worthy object is laudable; but what constitutes a worthy object? On this matter, the oracle of which your contributor is the prophet has never yet been prevailed on to declare itself. He revolves in an eternal circle round the idea of work, as if turning up the earth, or driving a shuttle or a quill, were ends in themselves, and

the ends of human existence. Yet, even in case of the most sublime service to humanity, it is not because it is work that it is worthy; the worth lies in the service itself. (27–28)

Third, why are material goods so valuable as to overwhelm the goods of life and freedom?

In the present case, it seems, a noble object means “spices.” “The gods wish, besides pumpkins, that spices and valuable products be grown in their West Indies”—the “noble elements of cinnamon, sugar, coffee, pepper black and grey,” “things far nobler than pumpkins.” Why so? Is what supports life, inferior in dignity to what merely gratifies the sense of taste? Is it the verdict of the “immortal gods” that pepper is noble, freedom (even freedom from the lash) contemptible? (28)

Thus, Carlyle represents in the crudest imaginable terms the type of materialism—“sugars, cinnamons, and nobler products of the West Indian Islands” are everything, leisure and human dignity are nothing—with which Leavis whenever possible saddles Utilitarianism. The real Utilitarian in the debate responds by defending the rights of *black* people to leisure and their dignity as human beings.

These are not subtle texts. But the next round is less subtle still. This is from the February 1850 “Present Time”—one month after Mill’s response—wherein Carlyle considers the possibility that slave labor will fail to emancipate. Destiny itself decrees the sentence for a race’s failure to conform to its standards: death by shooting. But this we have read before.

Ruskin’s statement opening the literary sage’s defense of Governor Eyre will have some importance for our understanding of *Hard Times*. One of the delicate moments in the modern Dickens hagiography is explaining just why he sided with Carlyle. But this really ought not be much of a mystery. Here is an extract from Dickens’s 1853 article “The Noble Savage,” which was published in *Household Words*:

All the noble savage’s wars with his fellow-savages (and he takes no pleasure in anything else) are wars of extermination—which is the best I know of him, and the most comfortable to my mind when I look at him. He has no moral feelings of any kind, sort, or description; and his “mission” may be summed up as simply diabolical. (1853a, 338)<sup>17</sup>

17. Here and elsewhere I depend upon the attributions based on the *Household Words* office book published by Anne Lohrli (1973). The “Noble Savage” results in Oddie’s ranking of Dickens and Carlyle made Oddie 1972, 138: “Carlyle, even in ‘The Nigger Question,’ appears much more benevolent than Dickens about non-whites.”

There is a frantic wickedness in this brute's manner of worrying the air, and gnashing out ". . . O how charmingly cruel he is! O how he tears the flesh of his enemies and crunches the bones! O how like the tiger and the leopard and the wolf and the bear he is! O, row row row row, how fond I am of him!"—which might tempt the Society of Friends to charge at a hand-gallop into the Swartz-Kop location and exterminate the whole kraal. (339)

Is Dickens writing about a character in fiction whose existence need not be a matter of concern? A quick trip to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry for *kraal* explains just who it is that shall be exterminated. These are real people. And in Dickens's closing words we can see his characteristic opposition to cruelty in juxtaposition to his belief that some races ought not to exist:

To conclude as I began. My position is, that if we have anything to learn from the Noble Savage, it is what to avoid. His virtues are a fable; his happiness is a delusion; his nobility, nonsense. We have no greater justification for being cruel to the miserable object, than for being cruel to a WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE or an ISAAC NEWTON; but he passes away before an immeasurably better and higher power than ever ran wild in any earthly woods, and the world will be all the better when his place knows him no more. (339)

How should this be read? For an economist, this raises an inevitable question: what happens when one cannot get rid of an offensive race without cruelty? What happens when these two goals of Dickens come into conflict? The test of how practice bears upon theory comes with the Eyre Controversy of the mid-1860s and the question of what one makes of murderous cruelty as policy? We can observe how Dickens revealed which of the goals was the more important in a letter, complete with a reference to Exeter Hall, which reads as if he had just finished rereading Carlyle's "Negro Question" from fifteen years early:

That platform—sympathy with the black—or the Native, or the Devil—afar off, and that platform indifference to our countrymen at enormous odds in the midst of bloodshed and savagery, makes me stark wild. Only the other day, here was a meeting of jawbones of asses at Manchester, to censure the Jamaica Governor for his manner of putting down the insurrection. So we are badged about New Zealanders and Hottentots, as if they were identical with men in clean shirts at Camberwell, and were bound by pen and ink accordingly. So Exeter Halls holds us in mortal submission to missionaries. (Dickens 1938, 3:445)<sup>18</sup>

---

18. This is quoted by Goldberg (1972a, 147). Carlyle's opinion on state terror had been there from the beginning. Here is the *French Revolution* on the merits of order by desire for "mammon" and terror: "Mammon, cries the generous heart out of all ages and countries, is the basest of known

## 2. *Leavis on Snow and Hard Times*

Leavis was famously involved in a controversy in which the merits of the purportedly distinct literary and scientific cultures were intertwined with competing visions of British government support for higher education. One might have thought that the historical record of the literary sages as guides to public morality would have been at the heart of the Snow-Leavis controversy. Indeed, this was precisely the charge mentioned to C. P. Snow by one of his intellectual betters:

I remember being cross-examined by a scientist of distinction. “Why do most writers take on social opinions which would have been distinctly uncivilised and *démodé* at the time of the Plantagenets? Wasn’t that true of most of the famous twentieth-century writers? Yeats, Pound, Wyndham Lewis, nine out of ten of those who have dominated literary sensibility in our time—weren’t they not only politically silly, but politically wicked? Didn’t the influence of all they represent bring Auschwitz that much nearer?” (Snow 1959, 7)

But this is of course not how the Snow-Leavis controversy played out. Snow was an undisciplined thinker and a slovenly scholar.<sup>19</sup>

There is no sentence that I should willingly write in which the words *undisciplined* or *slovenly* appears modifying “F. R. Leavis.” And it happens that Leavis wrote on *Hard Times* in the aftermath of his attack on Snow. Leavis offered the following claims for Dickens. First, against Dickens’s “friends”:

---

Gods, even of known Devils. In him what glory is there, that ye should worship him? No glory discernible; not even terror: at best, detestability, ill-matched with despicability” (Carlyle 1956, 611).

19. Consider Snow’s scholarship as revealed in his study of Trollope: “He had every [nonlinguistic] gift for a good traveller . . . unusual lack of national or racial prejudice” (1975, 97). [Snow claims the same immunity for the scientific culture (1959, 45).] In particular, *West Indies and the Spanish Main* is described as “one of the most splendid travel books of the nineteenth century.” To pick a passage more or less at random from Trollope’s chapter “Black Men”: “I do not think that education has as yet done much for the black man in the Western world. He can always observe, and often read; but he can seldom reason. I do not mean to assert that he is absolutely without mental powers, as a calf is. He does draw conclusions, but he carries them only a short way. I think that he seldom understands the purpose of industry, the object of truth, or the results of honesty” (Trollope 1860, 57). Trollope’s views were well known. For example, in James Hunt’s notorious *Negro’s Place in Nature*, Trollope is cited as an authority (Hunt 1864, 27): “In conclusion, let me observe that it is not alone the man of science who has discerned the Negro’s unfitness for civilization, as we understand it. Here is Mr. Anthony Trollope, who is certainly quite guiltless of ever having examined the evidence of the distinction between the Negro and European, and yet truly says of the Negro:—‘Give them their liberty, starting them well in the world at what expense you please, and at the end of six months they will come back upon your hands for the means of support. Everything must be done for them; they expect food, clothes and instruction as to every simple act of life, as do children.’” Jones (1967) discusses racial attitudes in Trollope, Carlyle, and Mill in considerable detail.

I can best explain with brevity what I mean in terms of Dickens. And that will enable me to do at the same time something that badly needs doing, which is to make an indignant protest against the established attitude to that very great writer. . . . Dickens is of course a genius, but “as soon as he begins to think he is a child”: there you have the attitude. . . . Moreover, Dickens wasn’t capable of understanding Bentham. (1969, 174–75)

Second, Leavis testifies for *Hard Times* as the refutation of all Utilitarian teaching:<sup>20</sup>

And to come back to *Hard Times*: the undergraduate—or the senior—who has taken the significance of the book, and recognizes the finality with which it leaves the Benthamite calculus, the statistical or Blue Book approach, and the utilitarian ethos placed, can say why neither a “rising standard of living,” nor equality, nor both together, will do when accepted as defining the sufficient preoccupations and aims of thought and effort. (177)

Think again of the consequence of students reading the Carlyle-Mill exchange while they read Dickens’s attack on Utilitarianism. Just how does *Hard Times* refute Mill’s response to Carlyle? Perhaps an explanation would be requested as to just why Dickens takes the side he does. All of this awkwardness can be avoided by the simple expedient of not mentioning such unpleasantness.

### 3. *Ruskin on Hard Times*

As Leavis’s representation of Utilitarianism has been so helpful, perhaps there is more that he has to teach. What about his representation of the reception of *Hard Times*? As point of reference, this is how Leavis begins his famed appendix to the *Great Tradition*: “‘Hard Times’s: An Analytical Note” from which we have quoted him on the hard inhumanities of Utilitarians:<sup>21</sup>

---

20. Behind Dickens, Carlyle lurks. “Carlyle had pointed this out by declaring in *Past and Present* that in the *laissez-faire* state there was one sole link between high and low: typhus fever. Kingsley two years earlier [than Dicken’s *Bleak House*] had found a novelistic form for Carlyle’s ideas by showing in his terrible account of the tailors’s sweat-shops how typhus and other diseases due to the disgusting conditions in which the tailors worked and lived were transmitted to the well-to-do via the clothes made for them there” (Leavis and Leavis 1970, 166).

21. It was retitled when it was reprinted in *ibid.* as “‘Hard Times’s: The World of Bentham.” The older title is used in the version included in the *Norton Critical Edition of Hard Times*, with the editors assuring us (Ford and Monod in Dickens 1990, 340) that “The 1970 version is virtually identical with the 1948 except for a modification of the final sentence of the first paragraph.” Oddie (1972, 55) protests the new title’s “extravagance.”

*Hard Times* is not a difficult work; its intention and nature are pretty obvious. If, then, it is the masterpiece I take it for, why has it not had general recognition? To judge by the critical record, it has had none at all. If there exists anywhere an appreciation, or even an acclaiming reference, I have missed it. (1970, 187)

But, notoriously, Leavis did in fact miss one admiring discussion, that of John Ruskin, mentioned so prominently in John Forster's *Life of Dickens*, which the Leavises themselves commend to the reader.<sup>22</sup> But perhaps this was not all that Ruskin said on the matter.

It may bear repeating that it was John Ruskin who, first among the literary sages, alerted his peers to Eyre's importance to their common cause. Ruskin's December 20, 1865, letter to the *Daily Telegraph* was quoted earlier but repays careful rereading. Ruskin opens with compliments to J. S. Mill and Thomas Hughes. He declares himself to be a "King's man" in opposition to the "Mob's men" and then gets down to the business at hand. That business is slavery in America and Europe. I shall proceed line by line:

Not that I like slavery, or object to the emancipation of any kind or number of blacks in due place and time. (Ruskin 1903–12, 18:551)

The letter is dated December 20, 1865. It bears repeating that the agreement of April 9, 1865, at the Appomattox Court House settled one dispute regardless of whether the time and place was right. Ruskin continues, charging that those objecting to Eyre's actions are unaware of the full dimensions of "slavery." This gives some context to the "due place and time":

But I understand something more by "slavery" than either Mr. J. S. Mill or Mr. Hughes; and believe that white emancipation not only ought to precede, but must by law of all fate precede black emancipation. (551)

The "law of all fate" is of course the standard Carlylean appeal to as-if divine revelation. Then, perhaps conscious of the need to address the unbelievers in

---

22. John Ruskin, quoted from *Unto This Last* by John Forster (1966, 2:120–21): "But let us not lose the use of Dickens's wit and insight, because he chooses to speak in a circle of stage fire. He is entirely right in his main drift and purpose in every book he has written; and all of them, but especially *Hard Times*, should be studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions. They will find much that is partial, and, because partial, apparently unjust; but if they examine all the evidence on the other side, which Dickens seems to overlook, it will appear, after all their trouble, that his view was the finally right one, grossly and sharply told." Leavis and Leavis (1970, x): "Professor Edgar Johnson's biography of Dickens cannot claim to have superseded or even to rival Forster's."

his audience, Ruskin, employing the literary gifts that continued to charm all but the hardest heart, launches an argument by parallel construction:

I much dislike the slavery, to a man, of an African labourer, with a spade on his shoulder; but I more dislike the slavery, to the devil, of a Calabrian robber with a gun on his shoulder. (551)

African slaves have men with spades—no better or worse than other men—as masters. And this bears on America and England how?

I dislike the American serf-economy, which separates, occasionally, man and wife; but I more dislike the English serf-economy, which prevents men being able to have wives at all. (551)

To a sensible scholar like Bernard Semmel, this sentence must make no sense whatsoever. He does not quote it.<sup>23</sup> What kind of attack on British capitalism is the argument that “English serfs” do not have wives? And in any event how are we to read “occasionally”? Are American husband and wife upon an occasion temporarily separated or is it upon an occasion that American husband and wife are permanently separated? We continue:

I dislike the slavery which obliges women (if it does) to carry their children over frozen rivers; but I more dislike the slavery which makes them throw their children into wells. (551)

At least one reference is crystal clear: Eliza pursued by dogs is carrying little Harry across the ice.<sup>24</sup> But then to what does Ruskin refer by “the slavery which makes them throw their children into wells”? Is it a novel, the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of the English serfs? In the hope of enlightenment, we continue:

I would willingly hinder the selling of girls on the Gold Coast: but primarily, if I might, would the selling of them in Mayfair. (551)

As we take leave of Ruskin, the letter continues with the Carlylean trope of the importance of masters and the politics of administrative massacre.

We have to be careful reading Ruskin because he makes the case that the kidnaping and serial rape of black girls—prostitution compelled by the

---

23. Semmel 1962, 108–9. Let me thank Wendy Motooka, who provided a bracing correction for my temptation to rely upon even this best of all secondary sources!

24. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (in Ruskin 1903–12, 18:551) and the editor of *Arrows of the Chace* (Ruskin 1880, 2:345) give *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as referenced.



lash<sup>25</sup>—is less of a moral issue than that of white girls prostituting themselves for money. The critical step in what passes for argument is that in which Ruskin denies the possibility of imputing material gain from exchange.<sup>26</sup> The violence of kidnap and rape is morphed into voluntary prostitution. It is just sex taken instrumentally. Thus, for Ruskin there may be no interesting difference between being thrown into a well and falling into one. It is just a hole in the ground. Is this a reference to *Hard Times* and Stephen Blackpool's fatal fall into the Old Hell mine shaft? How can this be? Stephen is in no chronological sense a child. But for a paternalist—the kindest description of the Carlyleans of which I know—are we not all children of our betters?

The line in Ruskin's letter that Semmel does not quote—English serfs without wives—seems to me to make sense in and only in the context provided by *Hard Times*. Stephen and Rachael are doomed by Dickens's plot to pass their lives in separate bedrooms. Is it necessary to stress the fact that Stephen and Rachael find themselves in such a fix because Dickens has given him a wife and the laws of England make divorce impossible for the poor?

Ruskin makes it as clear as can be that “white slavery” is worse than black.<sup>27</sup> The interesting distinctions are racial—whites being “fated” to be more important—and in the details of the masters: blacks being blessed by “men” as masters and whites being cursed by “devils” as masters. This is transparent. The interesting question is whether Ruskin reads *Hard Time* as making this very case.

I do not think Dickens makes the case that black slavery is morally superior to “white slavery”; rather, I think he makes the case that there is a moral equivalence of the two. To establish the moral equivalence of markets and slavery with the argument that there is nothing but the kindness of masters in all institutions, Dickens “mistold” the story of capitalism. There is nothing in the logic of capitalism that would prevent a man and woman of mature years from contracting marriage. Even by the iron logic of Malthusian norms, Stephen and Rachael have delayed marriage sufficiently to support their family. What there is is a legal impediment to recontracting because Dickens rigged the story

---

25. A convenient example is found in an article by George Stephens that is included with Lord Denman's republished attack on Dickens's views on slavery: “The national conscience was awakened to inquiry, and inquiry soon produced conviction. Could it be otherwise than a sin to enslave the soul by enchaining the body? Could it be otherwise than sinful to compel prostitution by the lash?” (Denman 1853, 56).

26. While there is no material gain in exchange, there can be “advantage.” The difference seems to be in what is evaluated by the choosing agent—material gain—and what is evaluated by the poet—advantage. This is discussed in chapter 1.

27. Here is that passage in the 1853 “Nature of the Gothic” that emphasizes the irrelevance of the fate of black people on the Middle Passage: “Men may be beaten, chained, tormented, yoked like cattle, slaughtered like summer flies, and yet remain in one sense and the best sense, free” (Ruskin 1997, 85).

so that Stephen already has a wife. If my reading of Ruskin is correct, then that would suffice.

But perhaps I am not reading Ruskin right. No matter, there is more. To this we turn now.

#### 4. Dickens on Uncle Tom's Cabin and the "Reform" of Slavery.

Fortunately for later scholars, many of the basic facts connecting Dickens and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* have been reported by Harry Stone (1957). In particular, Stone draws attention to the newspaper attack on Dickens's views on slavery by Lord Denman—some of which has been quoted—which was quickly republished under the title *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Bleak House, Slavery, and Slave Trade*. Denman distinguished between those who favored slavery and those who opposed the attempts to abolish it. Dickens he put in the camp of what we might consider the anti-antislavers:

We have a still heavier charge against Mr. Dickens. In one particular instance, but the most important of all at this crisis, he exerts his powers to obstruct the great cause of human improvement—that cause which in general he cordially advocates. He does his best to replunge the world into the most barbarous abuse that ever afflicted it. We do not say that he actually defends slavery or the slave-trade; but he takes pains to discourage, by ridicule, the effort now making to put them down. We believe, indeed, that in general terms he expresses just hatred for both; but so do all those who profit or wish to profit by them, and who, by that general profession, prevent the detail of particulars too atrocious to be endured. The disgusting picture of a woman who pretends zeal for the happiness of Africa, and is constantly employed in securing a life of misery to her own children, is a laboured work of art in his present exhibition. (1853, 9)

Denman characterized the program of those who would use slavery for "education" of the slave and compares this with the real antislavery of the evangelical Clapman sect variety:

The "Times" Reviewer is quite justified in comparing the relation which the present slaveholders in America bear to this question to that of the planters in Jamaica before the great act of emancipation. But those planters and their advocates against the natural rights of the negro were loud in denouncing the experiment of giving freedom to the slave. They declared him unfitted to receive that blessing, urged that he be required to be educated into that capacity. . . . These views were . . . discussed by Mr. Macaulay (as we understood) in an able paper which appeared in the

“Edinburgh Review.” He ridiculed the notion that such preparation was requisite, comparing it to the prudence of the father who advised his son not to bathe until he could swim. (19–20)

Can slavery make one fit for freedom? Here is where the assumption of a fixed human nature becomes a weapon in the war against human bondage. Thirty years had passed, but Denman recalls T. B. Macaulay’s argument against the delay of emancipation. There is no harder rationality principle than that which Macaulay learned from Smith. The institution of slavery cannot remake one’s nature, not for good nor for ill. Here is evangelical-economics policy in one lesson: release the slaves and they grope in freedom to become the same as their masters.<sup>28</sup> This is so even though the masters are white and the slaves are black. Human nature is one and the same everywhere.

Macaulay and his parliamentary associates were unable to effect immediate emancipation. Even with a 20 million pound ransom paid to the West Indian slaveholders by the British taxpayers, emancipation required an additional “apprenticeship” on the part of the slaves. Macaulay himself seems to bear personal responsibility for shortening the period of transition.<sup>29</sup>

Stone, who draws our attention to Denman on Dickens and slavery, also points out the importance of Henry Morley and Dickens’s review of *Uncle*

28. Macaulay (1961, 1:178–79) uses the analogy of wine consumption to argue that it takes time for revolutions to find their equilibrium: “It is the character of such revolutions that we always see the worst of them first. Till men have been some time free, they know not how to use their freedom. The natives of wine countries are generally sober. In climates where wine is a rarity intemperance abounds. A newly liberated people may be compared to a northern army encamped on the Rhine or the Xeres. It is said that, when soldiers in such a situation first find themselves able to indulge without restraint in such a rare and expensive luxury, nothing is to be seen but intoxication. Soon, however, plenty teaches discretion; and, after wine has been for a few months their daily fare, they become more temperate than they had ever been in their own country. In the same manner, the final and permanent fruits of liberty are wisdom, moderation, and mercy. Its immediate effects are often atrocious crimes, conflicting errors, scepticism on points the most clear, dogmatism on points the most mysterious.”

The modern reader will probably not hear Smith’s plain speech behind Macaulay’s cadence (Smith 1976a, 492): “Though in every country there are many people who spend upon such liquors more than they can afford, there are always many more who spend less. It deserves to be remarked too, that, if we consult experience, the cheapness of wine seems to be a cause, not of drunkenness, but of sobriety. . . . When a French regiment comes from some of the northern provinces of France, where wine is somewhat dear, to be quartered in the southern, where it is very cheap, the soldiers, I have frequently heard it observed, are at first debauched by the cheapness and novelty of good wine; but after a few months residence, the greater part of them become as sober as the rest of the inhabitants.”

29. Trevelyan 1961, 1:284–85. See also Morley 1851, 402: “In 1833 the great Act passed, emancipating all the negro slaves in British Colonies and decreeing payment of twenty million in compensation to the slave-owner.” One persistent Carlylean trope is the wasted 20 million pounds. Question: would an undergraduate reader in the late twentieth century know what this number represents? Question: does the rationally choosing editor of Carlyle’s *Past and Present* gloss the number? Yes, this will be on the final exam.

*Tom's Cabin* in an 1852 issue of *Household Words*. Several things are made clear in this review. First, just as Denman suggested, Morley and Dickens propose to reform slavery, to delay emancipation until the black slaves are "suited" for freedom. Slavery, which has mutilated black people, can also, when suitably reformed, heal them. Morley and Dickens describe in detail the hideously cruel treatment visited upon slaves. Cruelty is bad, but intellectual development is good. How shall we choose when the two goals might conflict?

We think, too, that it is possible to combine with the duty of emancipation the not less important duty of undoing the evil that has been done to the slaves' minds and of doing them some good service by way of atonement. When we have clipped men's minds and made them slavish, it is poor compensation that their bodies should be set at large. (Morley and Dickens 1852, 5)

Morley and Dickens appeal to the importance of kind masters; those who would guide by words and not the lash.<sup>30</sup> The reformed slavery would be one without cruelty:

The stripes! Though slavery be not abolished promptly, there can be no reason why stripes should not cease. Though there *may* be little of lashing and wailing in the slave system, as it is commonly administered in North America, yet men are degraded by being set to work by a coarse action of their fears, when the same men are far more capable of being stimulated by an excitement of their love of honour and reward. (5)

Then Morley and Dickens reflect upon innate racial differences and how the newly reformed slavery could make blacks nearly white. The educational prospects of the new model slavery are compared in detail to those of the existing model of slavery. In the existing system, the slaves are too stupid to figure out that they ought to resent their situation. This is why Christianity cannot be preached in full:

The negro has what the phrenologists would call love of approbation very strongly marked. Set him to work for the hope of distinction, instead of the fear of blows. No doubt it has been true that negroes, set to work by any motive which called out their higher feelings as men, would become ambitious and acquire a thirst for freedom in the end. So it is, so let it be. Edu-

---

30. And just where are these kind, new model masters supposed to come from to replace the really existing masters? The fundamental nonseriousness of Dickens as a social reformer is remarked upon by an unknown reviewer in the *Dublin Review* of 1871. The "stupidity" interpretation of Dickens is there pressed ("Two English Novelists: Dickens and Thackeray" 1871).

cate the negroes on plantations, make them intelligent men and women, let them imbibe in their full freedom the doctrines of Christianity. It has been true that it was not safe to give knowledge to men who were placed in a position which the faintest flash of reason would resent. (5)<sup>31</sup>

Under reformed slavery, this defect will be mended and with it the slaves will be remade:

We have been told by a Christian minister, who laboured in his way to elevate the minds of negroes in some North American plantations, that his permission to preach was clogged with many stipulations that he was expressly forbidden to teach anything which might induce a slave to question his position or wish to be free; and that, in consequence, he found himself unable to preach even man's duty to his neighbour. So it has been and must be; the slave who acquires education and religious principle must desire to be free: let it be so. (5)

As a matter of racial destiny, blacks could never really compete with whites, so after the period of beneficent slavery they would leave for lands for which their nature is suitable. Slavery is not essential, Morley and Dickens assure us, *if*:

The time is not far distant when the demand for negroes will be confined wholly to those districts in which the climate appears to be unsuited for field labour by white men: even to those districts whites will become acclimatised, but in those, for some time at any rate, negroes will be needed. *It is not essential that the negroes should be slaves. If, step by step, the degraded race be raised, their higher impulses awakened, their minds developed, their moral ties religiously respected, there will arise out of the present multitude of slaves, by slow degrees, a race of free labourers far more efficient than the present gangs, while the yearly increasing surplus of black population educated into love of freedom would pass over to Liberia.* (5)<sup>32</sup>

---

31. Nicholas Brimblecomb's "attack" on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* points to the biblical texts of Moses leading the slaves out of Egypt as abolitionist forgeries: "It is by no means certain but that this whole account of the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt, and their running away from their masters, is a sheer fabrication, having been foisted, it may be, into the Bible by some lying and wicked abolitionists" (1853, 153). Motooka notes the "love of approbation" here racializes Adam Smith.

32. I have added the emphasis. One of the issues in Dickens's continual sniping at Harriet Beecher Stowe was her treatment of blacks as members of a rather superior race. Blacks, in her account, are noticeably closer to God than are whites. Stone (1957) gives the references to Dickens's correspondence. Stowe's eccentric racism—inconsequential in terms of the contemporary policy debates—was duly noted as a matter of amusement by Nassau Senior, who reviewed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the *Edinburgh Review*.

As we reflect upon how one is supposed to “reform” slavery—by means of what magic wand are the whips to be banished and the Bible uncensored?—it is helpful to recall George Orwell’s reading of the Dickens program to “reform” capitalism:

Bounderby is a bullying windbag and Gradgrind has been morally blinded, but if they were better men, the system would work enough—that, all through, is the implication. And so far as social criticism goes, one can never extract much more from Dickens than this, unless one deliberately reads meaning into him. His whole “message” is one that at first glance looks like an enormous platitude: If men would behave decently the world would be decent.

Naturally this calls for a few characters who are in positions of authority and who *do* behave decently. Hence that recurrent Dickens figure, the Good Rich Man. This character belongs especially to Dickens’s early optimistic period. He is usually a “merchant” (we are not necessarily told what merchandise he deals in), and he is always a superhumanly kind-hearted old gentleman who “trots” to and fro, raising his employees’ wages, patting children on the head, getting debtors out of jail and, in general, acting the fairy godmother. (1968, 1:417)

In a competitive market economy, why does the kindness of masters especially matter? If one’s conditions of employment can be raised by seeking alternatives, then what is so special about the kindness of one’s employer in comparison, say, to the cleanliness of the workplace? There is an enormous number of nonpecuniary forms of compensation that one weighs in considering the net advantages of different employment.<sup>33</sup> If one’s master is unkind and there is nothing offered by way of compensation, move across the street. What if there is no one across the street? Then we question the competitive assumption and need to think hard.

By contrast, in a system of slavery, surely, the kindness of one’s master is of overwhelming importance. And in Dickens’s *Household Words*, both in what he himself wrote and in what he published that was written by others, he emphasizes over and over again the dreadful fate of slaves who are cursed with unkind masters.<sup>34</sup> But still the question is: what shall be done? The choices Dickens

33. The canonical treatment is found in *Wealth of Nations*, book 1, chapter 10, in which the equalization of the net advantages of employment within a labor market are described. In this chapter, Smith describes in detail how the desire for approbation of all people influences their calculation of individual agents. Dickens’s falsification works by ignoring such elements in the economist’s bag of tools. Chapters 9 and 11 demonstrate how they work.

34. The evils of slavery seem easier to appreciate when the slave owners are not British. “A shriek was heard, suddenly, and horrible; another yet more frightful pierced the thunder of the breakers; the sea-water became purple. Those unhappy wretches had made their choice between

seems to imagine are freeing the slaves or removing the cruel masters. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the rational slave is seen as preferring freedom to slavery under the most benevolent master because one never knows who the next master might be.<sup>35</sup> The reading of *Hard Times* for which I shall argue next is that Dickens responds to this by making the case that there is no difference between markets and slavery—everything is just a question of the kindness of the masters.

### The Moral Equivalence of Markets and Slavery

We now take leave of Dickens's journalism, where the Carlylean defense of beneficent slavery and extermination of races has been duly documented in the literature (Oddie 1972; Goldberg 1972a, 1972b). Here I turn to *Hard Times* itself. There are two parts to the argument. First, in the present section I point out a series of odd parallels between *Hard Times* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that for various reasons seem not to have occurred to the commentators on *Hard Times*. These parallels have the effect, I shall argue, of making a case for the moral equivalence of market capitalism and racial slavery. With kindly masters, market capitalism is well suited for the white, and with kindly masters racial slavery is well suited for the black.

The reader will note that I do not count as evidence that to which I believe Ruskin points as a critical opposition between *Hard Times* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. As I read Ruskin, he proposes that the permanent separation of Stephen and Rachael under capitalism stands in opposition to the temporary separation of George and Eliza under slavery. If I am reading Ruskin right, I think he has made my case. As there is more opposition than this, I shall set this separation aside and consider other aspects of the plot.

In the next section, I compare Dickens's views on the dehumanization of slavery, as they were published in his *American Notes*, to his assertions in *Hard Times* about the dehumanization of workers under industrialization. Again, we find an argument for the moral equivalence of markets and racial slavery.

It is easy to think of two reasons why *Hard Times* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

---

the Spaniards and the ground-sharks" (Von Goetznitz 1858, 112). On the other hand, when are the masters kind? John Hollingshead's (1858) treatment of the kindly slave ship captain reads like *Springtime on the Middle Passage*. Lohrli quotes Dickens's policy on some topics: "Let Hollingshead do it. . . . He's the most ignorant man on the staff, but he'll cram up the facts, and won't give us an encyclopaedical article" (Lohrli 1973, 306).

35. "O, but master is so kind! 'Yes, but who knows?—he may die—and then he may be sold to nobody knows who'" (Stowe 1982, 30). This is not the only episode. "'No, Mas'r,' said Nathan; 'you've always been good to me.' 'Well, then, why do you want to leave me?' 'Mas'r may die, and then who get me?—I'd rather be a free man.' After some deliberation, the young master replied, 'Nathan, in your place, I think I should feel very much so, myself. You are free'" (512).

are not customarily read together. First, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is American. By means of a disciplinary convention I find rather odd, British books attacking markets are read in isolation from contemporary American books attacking slavery. But Stowe and Dickens read and wrote about each other's work. Indeed, some of the dialogue in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* about the conditions of the lower classes in Britain's market capitalism seems to reflect the opinions common to the Carlyleans Kingsley and Dickens.<sup>36</sup> Second, under the conventional interpretation *Hard Times* is about market capitalism and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is about racial slavery. What does the one have to do with the other? Isn't socialism the alternative to market capitalism?

While one can indeed point to episodes of socialism in the nineteenth century—the Oneida community and the Shakers stand out in the historical record<sup>37</sup>—these episodes were attempts to model a new society. They were not societies themselves on the scale of Britain or America. The real existing alternative to market capitalism was racial slavery.

In addition to the inscriptions to Carlyle, I find five linkages between the two texts that I propose to discuss. For ease of reference, I present these links in table 2. The table gives the short versions of the textual aspects, the factual background I find important, the interpretation of the texts for which I shall argue, and, when I know of one, a plausible alternative interpretation of the texts. In the following sections, I give my reasons for favoring my own interpretation over the alternative.

### 1. *To Freedom in Blackface*

Mr. Gradgrind's son Tom is in flight for his crime. We get a glimpse of him before he catches a ship for the Americas:

“Look at 'em again,” said Sleary, “look at 'em well. You thee 'em all? Very good. Now, mith;” he put a form for them to sit on; “I have my opinionth, and the Thquire your father hath hith. I don't want to know your brother'th been up to; ith better for me not to know. All I thay ith, the Thquire hath thtood by Thethelia, and I'll thtand by the Thquire. Your brother ith one o' them black thervanth.” (Dickens 1972, 298–99; 1995, 282)

36. Morley and Dickens (1852) praise the character of St. Clare, whose views on the condition of the British working class seemed to reflect the Carlylean views expressed in Kingsley's *Alton Locke*. Chapter 6 cites the scholarship on the British abolitionists' criticism of Stowe using such sources. As Oddie (1972, 150–51) points out, *Alton Locke* offers an even more slavish adherence to the Carlylean line than does *Hard Times*. One point of difference is Dickens's support in *Hard Times* of divorce in the face of Carlyle's emphasis on the permanence of human relationships. This is easy to explain on the basis of the My Happiness theory of belief.

37. “All the possessions and revenues of the [Shaker] settlement are thrown into a common stock, which is managed by the elders” (Dickens 1985, 258–59). He was not impressed.



The image of an escape to freedom in blackface, *westward* across the Atlantic, has a certain undeniable element of robust mirth of the entirely nonpolitically correct variety for which Dickens had a wonderful gift. He is, authorities tell us, and here I do not disagree, the greatest comic novelist in the language.

Might the joke refer to the general flight of black people escaping slavery for market capitalism *eastward* across the Atlantic or to that particularly telling episode in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in which George *darkens* himself to pass for Spanish?

“I am pretty well disguised, I fancy,” said the young man, with a smile. “A little walnut bark has made my yellow skin a genteel brown, and I’ve dyed

TABLE 2. Decoding Hard Times

Textual Aspect	Factual Background	My Maintained Interpretation	An Alternative Interpretation
Inscription to Thomas Carlyle in 1854	1849–50 Carlyle–Mill debate: 1853 <i>Nigger Question</i>	Carlyle’s racist antieconomics; hence, the dedication is merited	Carlyle’s antieconomics; hence, the dedication is merited
Fleeing in blackface to freedom	Black slaves flee to freedom	Joke about escaped black slaves or of George’s darkening to pass for Spanish	What joke?
Utilitarianism inconsistent with Christianity	Evangelicals–Utilitarians have opposition to racial slavery in common	Emancipation of black slaves not a moral issue	
Unstable marriages under capitalism; Utilitarian sells woman into sexual servitude	Unstable marriages under slavery; selling women into sexual servitude	Moral equivalence of racial slavery and market capitalism	Dickens has a problem with women
Opposition to facts (or averages), that is, increased life expectancy	The fact of increased life expectancy from serfdom to market economy	Attempt to change the subject	Stupidity or ignorance
Terrible consequences of unkind masters	Kindness of masters important for slaves	Moral equivalence of racial slavery and market capitalism	

my hair black; so you see I don't answer to the advertisement at all." (Stowe 1982, 133)

Stowe pauses to explain the sexual facts of American racial slavery:

We remark, *en passant*, that George was, by his father's side, of white descent. His mother was one of those unfortunates of her face, marked out by personal beauty to be the slave of the passions of her possessor, and the mother of children who may never know a father. (133)

We shall return to the issue of sexual slavery in due course.

## 2. *Utilitarianism Is Inconsistent with Christianity*

Sissy Jupe's answer has been discussed sufficiently. In case the reader is wondering whether Dickens is exercising authorial irony,<sup>38</sup> let me document two additional slurs:

The Gradgrind party wanted assistance in cutting the throats of the Graces. (Dickens 1972, 157; 1995, 128)

He sat writing in the room with the deadly-statistical clock, proving something no doubt—probably, in the main, that the Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist. (1972, 238; 1995, 215)

If Dickens could not distinguish between evangelicals and economists, what does this suggest? Reflect upon the Wedgwood cameo of the bound black slave and the question it asks on his behalf: "Am I not a man and a brother?" This is parodied by Carlyle in what I take to be his response to Mill<sup>39</sup> and cited by Denman in response to Dickens. Surely, in Dickens's understanding, Christianity would answer "no." From this, I conclude that for Dickens the emancipation of black slaves is not a moral issue. Of course, Dickens believed in improving the condition of black slaves. How one does this *without* emancipation was described earlier in the review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Unkind mas-

---

38. Richard Watts (1981) brings the apparatus of modern critical theory to bear on *Hard Times*. Judging by his citations, he evidently thinks that sufficient knowledge of Dickens's language community is available in the text itself.

39. "Him too you occasionally tyrannise over; and with bad results to yourselves among others; using the leather in a tyrannous unnecessary manner; withholding, or scantily furnishing, the oats and ventilated stabling that are due. Rugged horse-subduers, one fears they are a little tyrannous at times. 'Am I not a horse, and *half*-brother?'" (Carlyle 1850b, 31).

ters are to be replaced with kind masters. Easy, isn't it? Why didn't the dismal scientists think of that?

### 3. *Selling Women into Sexual Service*

Recent attention paid by scholars to the sexual aspects of *Hard Times* seems to be responsible for some interpretative instability in the commentary on the novel included in the successive Penguin editions. In David Craig's 1972 introduction, following Leavis and Williams, he takes the novel to be mainly about the market economy and industrialization. In Flint's 1995 introduction, she takes it to be mainly about family instability.<sup>40</sup>

The impossibility of a stable Christian marriage among slaves is a standard trope of the antislavery evangelicals. What kind of a marriage could one expect under an institution in which, whenever it suited their master's interests, husband and wife might be sold separately?<sup>41</sup> Is Dickens asserting that marital instability is no different in markets than in slavery?

Marital instability is a hopelessly broad topic. Consequently, I consider only the most narrow aspect of the sexual issues in *Hard Times*, Tom's pandering of Louisa. It is completely nonobvious just how Tom manages to pander his sister to Mr. Bounderby.<sup>42</sup> Here is the transaction:

40. "To put it in this way is not to beg the question of whether or not *Hard Times* is really an 'industrial novel.' My opening discussion of its title should already have shown that Dickens's concern entailed his dealing in the same breath, continually, with both the immediate facts of mill-town life and the less direct, the all-pervasive *cultural* effects of the new intensive production" (David Craig in Dickens 1972, 16). "Dickens's concerns in the novel are far from being entirely with the public world, however. Rather, *Hard Times* is increasingly taken over by an examination of the family, showing how damaging and limiting an upbringing which allows no place for imagination and fancy can be, and how an education and social philosophy based on the recognition of the necessity of looking after one's own interests can blind one to the needs of others" (Kate Flint in Dickens 1995, xii). "In all respects *Hard Times* is more like the work of William Blake than of Friedrich Engels" (Ackroyd 1990, 705).

41. *Suppressed Book* (1864, 57) quotes the Kentucky form of marriage: "until death . . . or as long as circumstances will permit." The acute "Nicholas Brimblecomb" writes this about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853, 23): "The male slave has no duties towards a wife: his duties are to his owner. The female slave has no duties to a husband: she belongs body and soul, to her master. A slave child has no duties to parents: he owes nothing to any one but to his master. Marriages among slaves are an absurdity. . . . It is true that in many cases a male and female slave 'take up together,' as it is termed, but not by marriage. . . . the connection is a merely temporary one, solely for the purpose of propagation, and for the master's benefit alone."

42. "His grovelling sensualities leads him to pander his sister to a man she finds repulsive" (McMaster in Dickens 1990, 419). And she agrees to the contract because? "The psychology of Louisa's development and of her brother Tom's is sound. Having no outlet for her emotional life except in her love for her brother, she lives for him, and marries Bounderby—under pressure from Tom—for Tom's sake ('What does it matter?')" (Leavis in Dickens 1990, 352). Leavis's notion of "sound" escapes me. Richard Fabrizio (1987, 76–77) usefully discusses Tom and Louisa in terms of sibling incest.

What a game girl you are, to be such a first-rate sister, Loo!" whispered Tom.

She clung to him, as she should have clung to some far better nature that day, and was a little shaken in her reserved composure for the first time.

"Old Bounderby's quite ready," said Tom. "Time's up. Good-bye! I shall be on the look-out for you, when you come back. I say, my dear Loo! AN'T it uncommonly jolly now!" (Dickens 1972, 143; 1995, 111)

This is Tom's explanation of the episode later in the story:

"You know our governor, Mr. Harthouse," said Tom, "and therefore you needn't be surprised that Loo married old Bounderby. She never had a lover, and the governor proposed old Bounderby, and she took him."

"Very dutiful in your interesting sister," said Mr. James Harthouse.

"Yes, but she wouldn't have been as dutiful, and it would not have come off as easily," returned the whelp, "if it hadn't been for me."

The tempter merely lifted his eyebrows; but the whelp was obliged to go on.

"I persuaded her," he said, with an edifying air of superiority. "I was stuck in old Bounderby's bank (where I never wanted to be), and I knew I should get into scrapes there, if she put old Bounderby's pipe out; so I told her my wishes, and she came into them. She would do anything for me. It was very game of her, wasn't it?" (1972, 167; 1995, 138–39)

Of course, Harthouse attempts to buy her from Tom, but that transaction does not work so smoothly.<sup>43</sup>

Is Dickens making the claim that all Utilitarians would prostitute their family members if the price were right? Of course not.<sup>44</sup> Mr. Gradgrind—who was not raised as a Utilitarian—passes on Bounderby's proposal of marriage to his daughter, reviews the costs and benefits of the transaction, and encourages her to make the decision *she* thinks best. Gradgrind is a creditable feminist, so the same *choice* that was given to him will be given to her. He treats his daughter as

43. "The whelp went home, and went to bed. If he had any sense of what he had done that night, and had been less of a whelp and more of a brother, he might have turned short on the road, might have gone down to the ill-smelling river that was dyed black, might have gone to bed in it for good and all, and have curtained his head for ever with its filthy waters" (Dickens 1972, 169; 1995, 141). Thus, Tom finds it necessary to be out of the way when Harthouse puts the moves on Louisa. "This is a device to keep him out of the way," said Mrs. Sparsit, starting from the dull office window whence she had watched him last. 'Harthouse is with his sister now!' (1972, 233; 1995, 209).

44. "Although Mr. Gradgrind did not take after Blue Beard, his room was quite a blue chamber in its abundance of blue books" (Dickens 1972, 131; 1995, 98).

a competent optimizing agent, but as both a caring father and an experienced economist he wants to verify the solution by means of standard algorithms:

“I now leave you to judge for yourself,” said Mr. Gradgrind. “I have stated the case, as such cases are usually stated among practical minds; I have stated it, as the case of your mother and myself was stated in its time. The rest, my dear Louisa, is for you to decide.” (Dickens 1972, 135; 1995, 102)

Moreover, upon discovering the truth about the marriage, he protects his daughter with a quiet fierceness that puts the fright in *Bounderby* (1972, 259–62; 1995, 240–43).

The weirdness of a woman making this critical sexual decision on the basis of what best suits her brother’s pecuniary interest—and her brother’s evident belief that even after she was married he can repander her—evaporates if one supposes that *Hard Times* was written in opposition to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Stowe opens her book with a portrait of two slave owners—the decent Shelby and the loutish Haley. When Haley catches sight of the fetching Eliza, guess what transaction first pops into his mind?

“By Jupiter,” said the trader, turning to him in admiration, “there’s an article now! You might make your fortune on that ar gal in Orleans, any day. I’ve seen over a thousand in my day, paid down for gals not a bit handsomer.” (Stowe 1982, 14)

Shelby, motivated by fear of his wife’s reaction, refuses to discuss such a trade. Here and elsewhere, Stowe seems to propose this test for the morals of slave owners: will they sell or buy a woman for sexual service? Some pass, some fail. In all institutions there are good people and bad people. What is important is how institutions bend behavior. Or at least that is how the promarket abolitionists saw the case, as they proposed to end the possibility of such sales by ending the ownership of other humans.<sup>45</sup>

I read Dickens as posing the Martineau–Stowe test in market capitalism.<sup>46</sup> Those who would sell or buy a woman for sexual service are moral monsters; those who would not live in hope of their redemption. Gradgrind Sr. is a unlucky man saved by his pre-Utilitarian upbringing. Dickens seems to make

45. See Hill, Whately, and Hinds 1852, 244–45, on the evils of the system in contrast to the decency of individual slave owners.

46. Dickens regarded Martineau 1837 as the best book on America (Lohrli 1973, 358). If there is truth in the gossip that Lohrli reports (359)—“According to contemporary report, Miss Martineau herself had served Dickens as the model for Mrs. Jellyby”—then we have an easy explanation for the fury at Dickens expressed by Denman (1853) as well as Mill’s famous characterization of Dickens as “that creature” (Collins 1971, 297). Martineau had no children to neglect.

the case that institutions like market capitalism or slavery are neither good nor bad; all that matters is the quality of the people inside the institutions. Thus, capitalism and slavery are morally equivalent, morally neutral.

#### 4. *Opposition to Facts*

Save for Leavis, and perhaps Nussbaum, even Dickens's warmest friends have some difficulty in explaining just why one would be opposed to the use of statistical methods for social policy. Indeed, one reads in generally admiring accounts that such an attitude would be, to be blunt, simply stupid, so Dickens could not have really believed this.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, anyone who has read Mill's *Autobiography*, and is willing to make a distinction between theory and fact, realizes that Utilitarians like James Mill were more theory entranced than fact entranced.<sup>48</sup> As was described earlier in their debate with Macaulay over Mill's *Government*, it was the Utilitarians who stood for a priori worst-case models of government against the empirical model of government defended by Macaulay. Could it be that Dickens could not tell the difference between an evangelical like Macaulay and a Utilitarian economist like Mill? And perhaps from our point of view this is exactly right?

Perhaps there is one particular aspect of Dickens's opposition to facts that can be given context. Consider the exchange between Louisa and her father in light of one particular fact to which Mr. Gradgrind—Dickens's best of Utilitarians—is particularly attentive:

“Father, I have often thought that life is very short.”—This was so distinctly one of his subjects that he interposed:

“It is short, no doubt, my dear. Still, the average duration of human life is proved to have increased of late years. The calculations of various life assurance and annuity offices, among other figures which cannot go wrong, have established the fact.”

“I speak of my own life, father.”

---

47. “The very journal in which the novel appeared is itself a complete answer to any man, who, treating in a hard-fact spirit all the fanciful allusions of the novelist, should accuse Mr. Dickens of attacking this good movement and the other hand of opposing the search after statistical and other information by which only real light can be thrown on social questions. What is *Household Words* but a great magazine of facts?” (John Forster in Collins 1971, 302). “But we are missing Dickens point if we fail to see that in condemning Thomas Gradgrind, the representative figure, we are invited also to condemn the kind of thinking and the methods of enquiry and legislation which in fact promoted a large measure of social and industrial reform” (Williams 1958, 94).

48. This is the burden of the argument advanced by Alan Ryan as quoted by Sylvia Manning (1984, 201). Let me acknowledge how much Manning's work helped me to find my way around the scattered scholarship. Kate Flint's edition of *Hard Times* has helped with the more recent scholarship.

“O indeed? Still,” said Mr. Gradgrind, “I need not point out to you, Louisa, that it is governed by the laws which govern lives in the aggregate.” (Dickens 1972, 135; 1995, 103)

The context in which I argue this might be read is the attack on Robert Southey’s defense of feudal “slavery”—the term is Southey’s—by Macaulay. Macaulay’s argument against Southey depended upon his claim that the life expectancy of British workers had increased since feudal times and thus it could hardly be the case that the well-being of the workers had declined.<sup>49</sup> We need not presume that Dickens had direct knowledge of this article because Carlyle has a perfectly competent summary of the debate in *Chartism*. Here Carlyle emphasizes the important of this critical fact in the debate about the worth of the movement from feudal slavery to a market economy:<sup>50</sup>

Twice or three times have we heard the lamentations and prophecies of a humane Jeremiah, mourner for the poor, cut short by a statistical fact of the most decisive nature: How can the condition of the poor other than good, be other than better; has not the average duration of life in England, and therefore among the most numerous class in England, been proved to have increased? Our Jeremiah had to admit that, if so, it was an astounding fact: whereby all that ever he, for his part, had observed on other sides of the matter was overset without remedy. If life lasts longer, life must be less worn upon, by outward suffering, by inward discontent, by hardship of any kind; the general condition of the poor must be bettering instead of worsening. So was our Jeremiah cut short. (1840, 10)

Carlyle finds the evidence mixed and concludes:

The condition of the working man in this country, what it is and has been, whether it is improving or retrograding,—is a question to which from statistics hitherto no solution can be got. Hitherto, after many tables and statements, one is still left mainly to what he can ascertain by his own eyes, looking at the concrete phenomenon for himself. (11)

---

49. “The term of human life is decidedly longer in England than in any former age, respecting which we possess any information on which we can rely. All the rants in the world about picturesque cottages and temples of Mammon will not shake this argument. No test of the physical well-being of society can be named so decisive as that which is furnished by bills of mortality. That the lives of the people of this country have been gradually lengthening during the course of several generations, is as certain as any fact in statistics; and that the lives of men should become longer and longer, while their bodily condition during life is becoming worse and worse, is utterly incredible” (Macaulay 1961, 2:217).

50. Poovey (1998, 315), who cites *Chartism*, does not tell the reader the “fact” at issue.

If one renounces statistics and uses one's "own eyes," what results?<sup>51</sup> This may partly explain why the debate between the Carlyleans and the economists often involved racial stereotypes versus averages. When Carlyle and crew offered racial explanations for the poverty in Ireland or unemployment in Jamaica, the economists produced facts. If Ireland's problems are those of the Celtic race, why is it a *fact* that on average the Irish in America, where they actually get paid for their efforts, work so hard? If Jamaican unemployment is the result of the racial characteristics of blacks, why is it a *fact* that the workers in Manchester are unemployed as a result of a strike for wages?

When an aggregation is required, a Utilitarian might think of the mean or median of a group. When Dickens aggregates, he seems to think of the race or class.<sup>52</sup> When Dickens published Eliza Lynn's article on the effect of the liver on the intellectual development of negroes, she announced the doctrine that "what is true of individuals is also of races."<sup>53</sup> Perhaps this resonated with readers familiar with Robert Knox's or Benjamin Disraeli's doctrine that "Race is all."<sup>54</sup>

### 5. *The Terrible Consequences of Unkind Masters*

Dickens's master-centric view of the social order is clearly explained by Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times*:

"Of course," said Mr. Bounderby. "Now perhaps you'll let the gentleman know, how you would set this muddle (as you're so fond of calling it) to rights."

51. A powerful case for the "stupidity" interpretation of this argument would be to think through how one might compare the well-being of thirteenth-century workers to that of nineteenth-century workers using only one's "own eyes." The renunciation of statistical methods may explain why impressionistic comparisons were continually being made between the well-being of the "white slaves" of Britain and the black slaves of America.

52. Michael Hollington (1992) develops an interesting reading of *Hard Times* in terms of the hierarchy of body language.

53. "A man with a diseased or torpid liver never works heathfully, or with the full power of his mental organization. And what is true of individuals is also of races. Thus, the inactive liver of hot climates creates a smaller, less energetic, less finely organized, and more basely developed brain than is found in the temperate latitudes; passing gradually from the elliptical skull of the Caucasian—the ideal man—to the pyramidal head of the red or copper-coloured man, down to the lowest type of all, the prognathous, or jaw-protruding skull of the negro; as the lines fall near or more distant from the equator. So, by this showing, poor Quashie owes, not only his skill, but his skull to the unsuspected liver of his: not only the brand of Cain and the sign of slavery on his hide, but the cerebral development and ape likeness which ignorance seizes hold of, as the cause and excuse of cruelty" (Lynn 1857, 528). The correspondence of Kingsley and Hunt, discussed in chapter 5, is equally illuminating.

54. Robert Young (1995) has an extensive discussion of Knox and his doctrine that "race is all." L. J. Rather discusses Disraeli's doctrine that "race is everything." Robert Knox (1850, 91) directs his doctrine that "race is everything" against Macaulay.



“I donno, sir. I canna be expecten to’t. ’Tis not me as should be looken to for that, sir. ’Tis them as is put ower me, and ower aw the rest of us. What do they tak upon themseln, sir, if not to do’t?” (1972, 181; 1995, 153)

There is, in Dickens’s view, only one master for each of us in the market:<sup>55</sup>

“You can finish off what you’re at,” said Mr Bounderby, with a meaning nod, “and then go elsewhere.”

“Sir, yo know weel,” and Stephen expressively, “that if I canna get work wi’ yo, I canna get it elsewheer.” (1972, 183; 1995, 155)

Blackpool cannot get work under his own name, so he must leave his name and the community in search of employment elsewhere.<sup>56</sup> As a result of this, he leaves himself vulnerable to Tom’s machinations, is falsely suspected of theft, and falls, upon his return, into the fatal mine shaft.

Again, taking *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a comparison, we see a case being made for the moral equivalence of market capitalism and racial slavery. When we first meet Eliza’s husband George, he is saying goodbye to his family prefatory to his flight to Canada. And why is he risking his life and the happiness of his much-loved family? The answer is an unkind master (Stowe 1982, 27–31).

### *An Evaluation of These Episodes*

Dickens has morphed the Greatest Happiness Principle of Utilitarianism into the My Happiness Principle of the unsocialized. Dickens can, when he so desires, present completely coherent characters operating on the My Happiness Principle.<sup>57</sup> Consider as evidence Mr. James Harthouse, who would make a perfectly fine example of the professional expert witness:

Mrs. Bounderby, no: you know I make no pretence with you. You know I am a sordid piece of human nature, ready to sell myself at any time for any reasonable sum, and altogether incapable of any Arcadian proceeding whatever. (1972, 198; 1995, 172)

55. In *American Notes*, Dickens (1985, 266) is flummoxed by the possibility that one could change not only masters but occupations!

56. “[H]e sent me the only letter I have had from him, saying that he was forced to seek work in another name.” (Dickens 1972, 271; 1995, 253).

57. Charles Duffy in conversation with Carlyle: “I suggested that the difference between his men and women and Thackeray’s seemed to me like the difference between Sinbad the Sailor and Robinson Crusoe.” “Yes, he said, Thackeray had more reality in him and would cut up into a dozen Dickenses” (Collins 1971, 204).

Similarly, Bitzer's sticking mom in the workhouse as an economizing device, and then being berated for giving her tea rather than selling it to her, is a lovely touch:

Having satisfied himself, on his father's death, that his mother had a right of settlement in Coketown, this excellent young economist had asserted that right for her with such a steadfast adherence to the principle of the case, that she had been shut up in the workhouse ever since. It must be admitted that he allowed her half a pound of tea a year, which was weak in him: first, because all gifts have an inevitable tendency to pauperize the recipient, and secondly, because his only reasonable transaction in that commodity would have been to buy it for as little as he could possibly give, and sell it for as much as he could possibly get; it having been clearly ascertained by philosophers that in this is comprised the whole duty of man—not a part of man's duty, but the whole. (1972, 150; 1995, 120)

I believe that two of the episodes I point to—selling women into sexual service as a test of moral motivation and the terrible consequences of unkind masters—are compelling internal evidence that *Hard Times* ought to be read juxtaposed to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. They stand out in the text precisely because they make no sense as narrowly defined self-interested behavior within a market economy. The disasters in the episodes I have pointed out happen because agents *fail* to maximize their own well-being in some material sense. They are not operating on the My Happiness Principle. The best way I see to explain their behavior is that they have been endowed with a sufficiently perverted sense of the Greatest Happiness Principle for Dickens to let go of the law that Utilitarian agents act in their own narrow interests to make his polemical point against markets.

Need one stress that British market capitalism circa 1850 gave no one the legal right to sell others into sexual service? Louisa marries Mr. Bounderby to make Tom happy. She is not marrying to find her own happiness or even to suit the interests of her parents. Her father certainly tries to help her find her own happiness in marriage. He asks her to consider all the right, self-regarding, cost-benefit calculations. It would never occur to this best of all possible Utilitarians—although the same might be said if he were a well-watered houseplant—that she would marry to make her brother happy. But marrying to make her brother happy is how the story goes.

Wendy Motooka—who has helped so much in my work—suggests an alternative interpretation. Dickens views women as beings outside material motivation. Louisa does not act in a self-interested manner because in Dickens's view woman cannot.<sup>58</sup> I do not have evidence against this reading, only a

---

58. Hill, Whately, and Hinds (1852, 239) quote an attack on Harriet Beecher Stowe for trading "the natural feminine instincts for peace" for "that snug country place."

feeling that Dickens's abilities as a maker of characters is unlimited. It is worthy of notice, perhaps, that Mr. Gradgrind evidently sees no reason why his daughter should be treated any differently than he was. All Dickens would need to do is present her as her father imagines her to be. And, since "her father" is a character in Dickens's book, this ought not to be impossible for him.

The firm owners in *Hard Times* all seem to be male. Bounderby embodies the My Happiness Principle wonderfully. But he is not the only firm owner. Those who collude to attain monopsonistic power in a labor market are of course conceivable. When Bounderby fires Blackpool, Dickens describes an employer firing a competent worker for purely personal reasons. Why would Bounderby's private reasons make Blackpool less attractive to other employers?<sup>59</sup> Dickens is not describing something like an industrywide downturn in demand, which would, of course, lead to industrywide layoffs. If other employers—presumed to be interested in maximizing their own individual profits—turn down a profit-making employee out of a sense of moral community with Bounderby, then Dickens has again fallen into incoherence. Indeed, the image of the social solidarity of the terminally selfish has a fatuousness exceeding that of Louisa marrying to serve Tom's pecuniary desires. At least Louisa was related to Tom.<sup>60</sup> There has to be some Greatest Happiness Principle at work among the masters for them to turn down a profit opportunity by rejecting a capable worker.

These two episodes I regard as evidence that *Hard Times* echoes *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because the acts of Dickens's Utilitarian agents make no sense in their own severe logic. Their choices are exempted from Dickens's law of the My Happiness Principle for the sake of his polemic matching the horrors of slavery with the horrors of the market. Motooka's alternative reading would have us attend particularly to the behavior of the males in the plot.

Dickens's statement of the inevitable opposition of Utilitarianism and Christianity denies the meaning of their joint opposition to racial slavery. This seems to me compelling evidence of his denial of the moral content of abolitionism. To use Carlyle's phrase, he denies that the "cause of black emancipation" is "sacred." In this denial, he stands in opposition to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and much much more.

But Dickens's denial takes the form a historical falsification. Utilitarians and at least an important part of British Christianity were allied. A finding of falsification in *Hard Times* is hardly original with me. Such a charge, without

---

59. "He was a good power-loom weaver, and a man of perfect integrity" (Dickens 1972, 103; 1995, 69).

60. Can we get Dickens out of the box by appealing to a game-theoretic reciprocity strategy (Tit-for-Tat) upon which the masters act? We can't because this strategy is formally one way of stating the Golden Rule! Chapter 10 has the details.

details, was made while Dickens lived by W. B. Hodgson. Hodgson is important because he was a very well informed economist<sup>61</sup> who knew Carlyle.<sup>62</sup> I believe Dickens engaged in knowing misrepresentation; Hodgson only alleged *unwilling* misrepresentation in *Hard Times*:

And here I cannot but express my deep regret that one to whom we all owe, and to whom we all pay, so much gratitude, and affection, and admiration, for all he has written and done in the cause of good—I mean Mr. Charles Dickens—should have lent his great genius and name to the discrediting of the subject whose claims I now advocate. Much as I am grieved, however, I am not much surprised, for men of purely literary culture, with keen and kindly sympathies which range them on what seems the side of the poor and weak against the rich and strong, and, on the other hand, with refined tastes, which are shocked by the insolence of success and the ostentation incident to newly acquired wealth, are ever most apt to fall into the mistaken estimate of this subject which marks most that has yet appeared of his new tale, *Hard Times*. Of wilful misrepresentation we know him to be incapable; not the less is the misrepresentation to be deplored. (1917, 191)

What Hodgson does not know about Dickens's humanitarianism—he is writing as it is happening—is explained by Oddie, who notes that

the admirer of Dickens must face the unpalatable fact that his views about black and brown, though humanitarian at the beginning of his career, grew progressively more illiberal, and that his utterances on the subject on more than one occasion reached depths of savagery never plumbed by Carlyle even in "Model Prisons." (1972, 135).

The joke about escaping to freedom in blackface is amusing only if one laughs. I think most readers do not find the episode funny.<sup>63</sup>

Why did Dickens oppose the use of facts? Dickens does emphasize the

---

61. Evidence for my judgment "well-informed" is provided in the lecture itself; he knows Samuel Bailey and Richard Whately (Hodgson 1917, 170–72). These are serious thinkers, as a quick tour of Schumpeter 1954 will attest. A more pointed claim of misrepresentation is made by Edwin Whipple, who is quoted in Watts 1981, 135. But Whipple shows no evidence of actually knowing any real economists (Collins 1971, 315–21). Nor, in Whipple's defense, does Watts, who fails to cite everyone who would matter.

62. Hodgson 1883, 371: "He is an unsatisfactory man."

63. "Black, as with Tom in blackamoor make-up, does have some of its customary associations with evil; but it is characteristically a pigmentation applied from without, and connotes a social degradation rather than innate evil." If black equals evil what are we to make of black slaves? (McMasters in Dickens 1990, 413). There is no mirth here.

importance to Gradgrind of the fact of increasing life expectancy. Carlyle explains in great detail why this fact is central to the debate over the condition of the country. Although Carlyle does not explain this to the reader, Southey was defending the claim that feudal slavery was better for the worker than was the market economy. Macaulay's citation of a fact, the fact of increasing life expectancy, was the death of that argument. I'm not sure this is a compelling explanation for the opposition to facts per se. But I would defend it against the alternative explanation, that of Dickens's stupidity.

### Human Malleability—Deformed by Choice

After a lengthy detour, we return to the question of rational choice models and their presupposition of a fixed human nature. If the antislavery coalition held to a fixed nature for all humans, what did those who wrote against them hold?

Not surprisingly, the answer is human malleability. Of course, humans can be remade for the worse as well as for the better. Perhaps the most dramatic example of Dickens's belief in the ability of slavery to remake human nature for the worse is the following passage from *American Notes*. The cruelty of their masters has turned slaves in America into beasts more closely resembling Swift's "humans":

To those who are happily unaccustomed to them, the countenances in the streets and labouring places, too, are shocking. All men who know that there are laws against instructing slaves, of which the pains and penalties greatly exceed in their amount, the fines imposed on those who main and torture them, must be prepared to find their faces very low in the scale of intellectual expression. But the darkness—not of skin, but mind—which meets the stranger's eye at every turn; the brutalizing and blotting out of all fairer characters traced by Nature's hand; immeasurably outdo his worst belief. That travelled creation of the great satirist's brain, who fresh from living among horses, peered from a high casement down upon his own kind with trembling horror, was scarcely more repelled and daunted by the sight, than those who look upon some of these faces for the first time must surely be. (Dickens 1985, 183)

Capitalism remakes humans for the worse, too. Here is one of Dickens's accounts of Coketown, where human nature is again remade:<sup>64</sup>

---

64. "More than with social and economic problems, Dickens in *Hard Times* is concerned with the psychic effects of the new industrialization. A new personality type is evolving whose ideal is the lobotomized Bitzer." (Fabrizio 1987, 87)

You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful. If the members of a religious persuasion built a chapel there—as the members of eighteen religious persuasions had done—they made it a pious warehouse of red brick, with sometimes (but this only in highly ornamented examples) a bell in a bird-cage on the top of it. . . . All the public inscriptions in the town were painted alike, in severe characters of black and white. The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction. Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact. . . .

A town so sacred to fact, and so triumphant in its assertion, of course got on well? Why no, not quite well. No? Dear me! (1972, 65–66; 1995, 29)

And how is human nature remade? We read in Morley and Dickens's discussion of American slavery how slave owners operating on the *supply* side prevent the dissemination of Christianity and so deform the slaves. Somehow British industrial capitalism operating on the *demand* side prevents the dissemination of Christianity and so deforms the workers. Dickens's workers have a choice of eighteen denominations; Adam Smith's vision of religion as a competitive industry is alive outside of America:

No. Coketown did not come out of its own furnaces, in all respects like gold that had stood the fire. First, the perplexing mystery of the place was, Who belonged to the eighteen denominations? Because, whoever did, the labouring people did not. It was very strange to walk through the streets on a Sunday morning, and note how few of *them* the barbarous jangling of bells that was driving the sick and nervous mad, called away from their own quarter, from their own close rooms, from the corners of their own streets, where they lounged listlessly, gazing at all the church and chapel going, as at a thing with which they had no manner of concern. (1972, 66; 1995, 29–30)

Dickens's workers cannot select among the eighteen denominations. Like stories of the reaction of Soviet refugees to American supermarkets, his workers are frozen by choice:

Nor was it merely the stranger who noticed this, because there was a native organization in Coketown itself, whose members were to be heard of in the

House of Commons every session indignantly petitioning, for acts of parliament that should make these people religious by main force. Then, came the Teetotal Society, who complained that these same people *would* get drunk, and showed in tabular statements that they did get drunk, and proved at tea parties that no inducement, human or Divine (except a medal), would induce them to forgo their custom of getting drunk. Then, came the chemist and druggist, with other tabular statements, showing that when they didn't get drunk, they took opium. (1972, 66; 1995, 29–30)

Surely there never was such fragile china-ware as that of which the millers of Coketown were made. (1972, 145; 1995, 115)

Decades after *Culture and Society*, Williams returned to *Hard Times* and noticed something interesting about these and other related passages:

For at its deepest, most formative level, *Hard Times* is composed from two incompatible ideological positions, which are unevenly held both by Dickens and by many of his intended readers. Put broadly, these positions are: first, that environment influences and in some sense determines character; second, that some virtues and vices are original and both triumph over and in some cases can change any environment. (1983, 169)

Perhaps there is a simple solution to Williams's puzzle. The masters of mankind are outside the chain of cause and effect. The higher orders can—for good or evil—remake the lower orders. They are like our parents would be if we never grew up. And if these lower orders object to their remaking? As we learn from the Eyre Controversy, that only proves that they are not fit to be human and are outside the rule of law.

In this context, perhaps, we might wish to reread Dickens's famous letter of June 17, 1854, about his quarrel with Mr. Gradgrind:

I often say to Mr. Gradgrind that there is reason and good intention in much that he does—in fact, in all that he does—but that he over-does it. Perhaps by dint of his going his way and my going mine, we shall meet at last at some halfway house where there are flowers on the carpets, and a little standing-room for Queen Mab's Chariot among the Steam Engines. (1993, 354)

As I read this, Dickens renounces any deep quarrel with the market economy; he just wants to have a hand in the mastering.

## Conclusion

There are three mistakes that I find scholars making in reading *Hard Times*. The first is to assume that what Dickens said about his opponents is always an accurate statement of their views. The charge of misrepresentation was made while he lived. The second mistake is to read midcentury antimarket British works in isolation from antislavery American works of the same period. The charge of anti-antislavery was made while Dickens lived.

In my view, whatever theorists might argue about a possible socialism, the material world of the 1850s was divided between people who believed in markets and people who believed in slavery. What made one less attractive made its alternative more attractive. The third and final mistake—the one my fellow economists often commit—is to fail to treat Dickens with all due seriousness, to assume that his opinions are the result of some drab combination of ignorance and stupidity. I find it most fitting that I close on a point of full agreement with F. R. Leavis, who first taught the world that *Hard Times* is worthy of the most serious study.



