

# Tolerant Imperialism: John Stuart Mill’s Defense of British Rule in India

*Mark Tunick*

**Abstract:** Some critics of John Stuart Mill understand him to advocate the forced assimilation of people he regards as uncivilized and to defend toleration and the principle of liberty only for civilized people of the West. Examination of Mill’s social and political writings and practice while serving the British East India Company shows, instead, that Mill is a tolerant imperialist: Mill defends interference in India to promote the protection of legal rights, respect and toleration for conflicting viewpoints, and a commercial society that can cope with natural threats. He does not think the principle of liberty is waived for the uncivilized or that the West should forcibly reshape them in its own monistic image. Mill’s tolerant imperialism reflects a tension between liberty and moral development that also surfaces when Mill thinks about the scope of government in civilized societies.

## I. Critics of Mill’s Imperialism<sup>1</sup>

John Stuart Mill, an undisputed spokesperson for British imperialism, was a loyal employee of the East India Company for roughly half his life. He saw England and the Company as forces of progress that spread liberal values and improved mankind’s capacity for individuality and the enjoyment of higher pleasures (*Rel* 10:422, 426; *AU* 1:145–46). He praised the improvements to India’s infrastructure, health care system, and educational institutions that were made possible by the Company’s introduction of modernizing technologies (*CW* 30:141–48).

<sup>1</sup>References to Mill’s works will be cited as “*CW* volume: page.” Abbreviations: *AU* (*Autobiography*, 1873: in *CW* 1); *Civ* (“Civilization,” 1836: in *CW* 18); *CW* (John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. John M. Robson et al. [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963-]); *NI* (“A Few Words on Non-Intervention,” 1859: in *CW* 21); *NW* (John Stuart Mill, *Newspaper Writings*, eds. Ann P. Robson and John M. Robson [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986]); *OL* (*On Liberty*, 1859: in *CW* 18); *PPE* (*Principles of Political Economy*, 1848: in *CW* 2, 3); *Rel* (*Three Essays on Religion*, 1874: in *CW* 10); *RG* (*Considerations on Representative Government*, 1861: in *CW* 19); *SpA* (“The Spirit of the Age,” 1831: in *CW* 22); *U* (*Utilitarianism*, 1861: in *CW* 10).

46 Mill's support of British imperialism may seem puzzling given that Mill  
 47 defends toleration, liberty, and experiments in living.<sup>2</sup> How could the theorist  
 48 who defends a principle holding that no one could "rightfully be compelled to  
 49 do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so" (OL 18:223–24) also  
 50 defend a system of imperialism seeking to compel the improvement of  
 51 others? Uday Mehta finds the defense of empire by liberals like Mill  
 52 "ironic," given that liberals should be committed to toleration,  
 53 self-determination, and human dignity.<sup>3</sup> The two positions—support of  
 54 imperialism and defense of liberal values—have been reconciled in the past  
 55 by understanding Mill's principle of liberty to apply only to civilized  
 56 people and Mill to support despotism for the uncivilized. On this view,  
 57 Mill did not think we should be tolerant of the practices and laws of  
 58 peoples, like those living in India, whom he thought uncivilized.

59 Mill has been sharply criticized for championing despotism for  
 60 non-Western peoples. Some critics charge him with ethnocentrically seeking  
 61 to impose the individualist liberal values of his England on the rest of the  
 62 world and advocating cultural assimilation.<sup>4</sup> Bikhu Parekh sees Mill as  
 63 willing to use violent and intolerant forms of coercion to impose a "monistic  
 64 vision of the good life."<sup>5</sup> On Parekh's view, Mill, assuming some cultures are  
 65 superior to others, wants to prevent the ascendancy of an inferior group by  
 66 ruling out any form of diversity that emphasizes "ethnically grounded" or  
 67 "traditional and customary ways of life, as well as those centered on the com-  
 68 munity." For Parekh, Mill is a "missionary" for liberal diversity and intolerant  
 69 of nonliberal ways of life.<sup>6</sup>

70 Some of Mill's critics trace what they perceive as Mill's intolerant imperial-  
 71 ism to racist attitudes.<sup>7</sup> Some link it to a lack of appreciation for radically  
 72 different ways of understanding the world. Mehta argues that Mill, in  
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74 <sup>2</sup>OL 18:260–61, 275; cf. Elizabeth S. Anderson, "John Stuart Mill and Experiments in  
 75 Living," *Ethics* 102 (1991): 4–26.

76 <sup>3</sup>Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,  
 77 1999), 3–4.

78 <sup>4</sup>Bikhu Parekh, "Decolonizing Liberalism," in *The End of 'isms'? Reflections on the  
 79 Fate of Ideological Politics after Communism's Collapse*, ed. Alexander Shtromas  
 80 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 85–103; "Liberalism and Colonialism: a Critique of Locke  
 81 and Mill," in *The Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power*, ed. Jan  
 82 Pieterse and Bikhu Parekh (London: Zed Books, 1995), 81–98; and Eddy Souffrant,  
 83 *Formal Transgression: J.S. Mill's Philosophy of International Affairs* (Lanham: Rowman  
 84 and Littlefield, 2000).

85 <sup>5</sup>Parekh, "Liberalism and Colonialism," 96; cf., "Decolonizing Liberalism."

86 <sup>6</sup>Ibid., "Superior People: The Narrowness of Liberalism from Mill to Rawls," *Times  
 87 Literary Supplement* (February 25, 1994).

88 <sup>7</sup>Shiraz Dossa, "Liberal Imperialism? Natives, Muslims, and Others," *Political  
 89 Theory* 30 (2002):738–45; Vinay Lal, "Organic Conservatism, Administrative  
 90 Realism, and the Imperialist Ethos in the 'Indian Career' of John Stuart Mill," *New  
 Quest* 54 (1998): 54–64; Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial*

wanting to civilize Indians, completely ignores how Indians already have an integral way of life and a system of reference giving meanings to particular things.<sup>8</sup> Mill, according to Mehta's view, in confronting Indian forms of life so different from his own, lacks the humility needed to appreciate how Indian religions and traditions provided "dwellings in which peoples lived and had deeply invested identities."<sup>9</sup> Mill, overly confident in his own claims of knowledge, infantilizes Indians without understanding them. He assumes that Indian experiences were provisional and in need of correction and completion by enlightened guides.<sup>10</sup> This criticism of Mill's defense of British imperialism draws on a broader criticism of liberalism itself as the imposition of what is seen as peculiarly Western ideas of rationality, science, and progress. In seeing India as not yet civilized, Mill imposes a certain historical approach that dismisses folk beliefs that are not rationally demonstrable, including all "unreal, impossible and supernatural events."<sup>11</sup> In Mehta's words, Mill imposes a "cosmopolitanism of reason" that rejects the unfamiliar.<sup>12</sup> Mill wants the British to civilize India, thereby imposing a particular conception of how a people ought to live and what constitutes a good life, without recognizing the validity of different conceptions. Who, ask Mill's critics, is Mill to say that one has mismanaged one's life and is in need of benevolent interference, and why should we assume that civilization will always make all humans happy?<sup>13</sup>

While Mill certainly defends imperialism and a vision of historical progress against which he finds India wanting, I shall argue that many of the above criticisms misrepresent Mill's position. Mill defends what I call "tolerant imperialism" (section 2). He does want England to civilize India, but to civilize, for Mill, does not entail forced assimilation (section 3), nor should the despotism it involves deny the rights of or use power arbitrarily against Indians (section 4). Mill's critics fail to see how Mill tolerates even illiberal practices of Indians and recognizes the importance they play in their lives

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*Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 195–96.

<sup>8</sup>Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 82.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 27–28, 21, 212.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 44, 191.

<sup>11</sup>Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 58–59; and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 10, 238.

<sup>12</sup>Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 20.

<sup>13</sup>Souffrant, *Formal Transgression*, 98–99, 121; cf. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 20, 44–45; Bruce Baum, *Rereading Power and Freedom in J. S. Mill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Jennifer Pitts, "Legislator of the World? A Rereading of Bentham on Colonies," *Political Theory* 31 (2003): 224.

(section 5). There are limits to the toleration Mill would allow, but this reflects, I shall argue, not a lack of respect stemming from racist attitudes (section 6), but rather a tension between liberty and moral development, both of which Mill values—a tension evident not only in Mill’s concept of tolerant imperialism for the East but in the liberalism he advocates for the civilized and not so civilized peoples of the West (section 7).

## II. Tolerant Imperialism

The concept of tolerant imperialism may be perplexing to those who understand imperialism as the forced intervention in the affairs of others or the imposition of one’s values on another people. One must walk a fine line in articulating the concept. I shall follow Voltaire’s footsteps to introduce the difficulty. Toleration, writes Voltaire, is a condition in which “each individual citizen is to be permitted to believe only what his reason tells him, be his reason enlightened or misguided, provided he threatens no disturbance to public order.”<sup>14</sup> Voltaire suggests toleration requires restraint in dealing with other nations. His reason is that we are all ants in a vast universe, and it is absurd to think God cherishes only my anthill.<sup>15</sup> Yet while a policy of toleration seems to entail leaving a “peace-loving people to live unmolested,” Voltaire, a strong advocate of toleration, was not averse to exposing those with a “mental disease to the influence of Reason.” Reason, he notes, is gentle, humane, tolerant, and makes coercion unnecessary.<sup>16</sup> Curing the mental diseases of foreigners sounds suspiciously imperialist and hardly tolerant, hence the puzzle: Can one coherently defend both imperialism and toleration?

The difficulty eases if we recognize the elasticity of the concept “imperialism.” Though said by some to be a concept that is “morally bankrupt,”<sup>17</sup> or nearly useless,<sup>18</sup> “imperialism” does have a common meaning despite its variety of usages: it involves intervention in the affairs of others,<sup>19</sup> an imposition,<sup>20</sup> or control of what is not one’s own.<sup>21</sup> The imposition need not transfer sovereignty but may be informal, perhaps based on trade or investment.<sup>22</sup> Impositions or interventions may take many shapes,

<sup>14</sup>Francois Voltaire, *Treatise on Tolerance and other Writings*, ed. Simon Harvey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 24–25.

<sup>17</sup>Robert Johnson, *British Imperialism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), viii.

<sup>18</sup>Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1993), 7.

<sup>19</sup>Pratap Bhanu Mehta, “Empire and Moral Identity,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 17 (2003): 51.

<sup>20</sup>Souffrant, *Formal Transgression*, 135.

<sup>21</sup>Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 7.

<sup>22</sup>John Darwin, “Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion,” *The English Historical Review* 112 (1997): 614–42.

181 ranging from purposeful and self-interested exploitation,<sup>23</sup> imposed  
 182 assimilation,<sup>24</sup> and self-aggrandizement and domination,<sup>25</sup> to beneficent  
 183 trusteeship.<sup>26</sup>

184 An example of how a word like “imperialism” refers to very different  
 185 phenomena is James Fitzjames Stephen’s distinction among senses of “con-  
 186 quest.” Stephen, law Member of the Governor General in Council in India,  
 187 was a contemporary critic of Mill’s political theory but like Mill, a strong  
 188 defender of empire, so strong that he does “not envy the Englishmen Q2  
 189 whose heart does not beat high as he looks at the scarred and shattered  
 190 walls of Delhi or at the union jack flying from the fort at Lahore.”<sup>27</sup>  
 191 Stephen is unembarrassed to say British Empire in India rests on conquest.  
 192 But before we condemn Britain, he insists we distinguish different senses of  
 193 conquest. The conquests of Genghis Khan and the early Moguls often  
 194 involved enslavement and “massacres on the largest scale.” Some conquests  
 195 destroy well-established political institutions, religion, or property. But the  
 196 conquests of the Indian Empire were entirely different. In his rose-spectacled  
 197 view, “they involved no injury . . . to either person or property,” “no inter-  
 198 ference with religion, no confiscation of property, and no destruction of cher-  
 199 ished institutions or associations.”<sup>28</sup> Given that one reason he praises British  
 200 Empire is its role in the abolition of practices such as sati, it is odd for Stephen  
 201 to say empire did not destroy cherished institutions. His position is explained  
 202 in part by his belief that in India “the persons conquered have as a rule been in  
 203 no sense whatever the chosen representatives of any race or nation, or the  
 204 heads of any institutions valued by those who lived under them.” Stephen  
 205 notes, for example, that in the battle of Buxar, the British defeated Nobob  
 206 Vixier of Oudh, who was invading Bengal for the second time. Stephen ulti-  
 207 mately defends the conquest: “No wars recorded in history have inflicted less  
 208 humiliation on anybody” or did so much good and so little harm; the conse-  
 209 quences of English victory have been internal peace, the substitution of law  
 210 and order for oppression and anarchy, and the introduction of principles  
 211  
 212

213 <sup>23</sup>Philip Marshall Brown, “Imperialism,” *The American Journal of International Law* 39  
 214 (1945): 84; cf. Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (New York: David  
 215 McKay Co., Inc., 1974), 32–33; Sidney Morgenbesser, “Imperialism: Some  
 216 Preliminary Distinctions,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 3 (1973): 11–12; Mehta,  
 217 “Empire and Moral Identity,” 57; Herbert Feldman, “Aid as Imperialism?”  
 218 *International Affairs* 43 (1967): 231–32.

219 <sup>24</sup>Darwin, “Imperialism and the Victorians.”

220 <sup>25</sup>Eileen Sullivan, “Liberalism and Imperialism: J. S. Mill’s Defense of the British  
 221 Empire,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983): 608–13.

222 <sup>26</sup>Brown, “Imperialism,” 84; cf. Johnson, *British Imperialism*.

223 <sup>27</sup>Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (London: Oxford University Press,  
 224 1963), 306.

225 <sup>28</sup>James Fitzjames Stephen, “Foundations of the Government of India,” *The  
 Nineteenth Century* 80 (1883): 545.

essential to civilization. Stephen notes that “conquest” is an unpopular word—just as imperialism is today; but he thinks this rests on a “shallow and ignorant sentiment.”<sup>29</sup> For Stephen, British imperialism is “[p]eace compelled by force” so that “all sorts and conditions of men in British India” will “tolerate each other.” Without it, Muslims would tyrannize over Hindus, and Hindus over each other.<sup>30</sup>

Stephen may be entirely wrong about whether British policy was for the good of India, or the extent to which it promoted peace and toleration, or preserved cherished institutions. But we should not be halted from pursuing these claims by a definitional stop sign. If we define imperialism as uninvited use of force to assimilate others for one’s own gain, tolerant imperialism makes no sense. But the concept is intelligible and important for understanding Mill’s political thought. To pave the way for what follows, I shall require that our understanding of imperialism commits to nothing more than what is common to its variety of uses: an intervention or imposition of some form; not all forms need be intolerant. It is important to add that any imposition, even mandatory literacy or vaccination campaigns, ultimately is underwritten by the threat or use of force in some form. A theory of tolerant imperialism sets limits on but does not disavow the use of coercion.

### III. What Mill Means by “Civilizing” Barbarians

The imperialism Mill defends differs from the imperialism most historians understand Britain to have advanced in India, namely, an intervention in fact motivated by the desire of investors and merchants to plunder India, which made many people in India worse off.<sup>31</sup> For example, the Company’s enforced monopolies of rice facilitated the 1770 famine that killed a third of the population in Bengal, and wealth flowed out of India, local artisans were forced into stealing or begging, and fledgling factories were ruined in competition with factories in Britain, contributing to the “peasantization” of India.<sup>32</sup>

The imperialism Mill defends is not self-interested but beneficent, not self-aggrandizing but reluctant. Intervention in the affairs of others is done not for

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 545–47.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 557–58.

<sup>31</sup>Darwin, “Imperialism and the Victorians,” 627–34; Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism*, 83–87.

<sup>32</sup>Rajat Kanta Ray, “Indian Society and the Establishment of British Supremacy, 1765–1818,” in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. William Roger Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2:514–15; D. A. Washbrook, “India, 1818–1860: Two Faces of Colonialism,” in Lewis, 3: 408–14; but see Keith Windschuttle, “Rewriting the History of the British Empire,” *New Criterion* 18 (2000): 5–14; and Johnson, *British Imperialism*, 30–31, 123–24.

271 commercial advantage but for moral purposes, such as to end slavery, recon-  
 272 cile belligerents, end civil wars, or intercede for mild treatment of the van-  
 273 quished (NI 21:111). It is enlightened and selfless, despite the fact that  
 274 English statesmen are forced to develop self-interested motives to justify  
 275 intervention as these are the only ones thought credible (NI 21:111–12).  
 276 Mill is not denying that there were self-interested investors who sought to  
 277 benefit from England's and the Company's presence in India. His point is  
 278 that the only proper justification for that presence is the improvement, the  
 279 civilizing, of the native peoples.<sup>33</sup> Mill believes that civilized people have a  
 280 responsibility to promote the well-being of the uncivilized. A dependency  
 281 that is not yet civilized, "if held at all, must be governed by the dominant  
 282 country, or by persons delegated for that purpose by it," to facilitate its "tran-  
 283 sition to a higher stage of improvement . . . . We need not expect to see that  
 284 ideal realized; but unless some approach to it is, the rulers are guilty of a dere-  
 285 liction of the highest moral trust" (RG 19:567–68). Mill's conditional "if held at  
 286 all" suggests not that the British have a moral duty to enter every territory  
 287 occupied by the uncivilized and improve them, only that where they are  
 288 ruling over a dependency, they must govern beneficently for the moral  
 289 improvement of the subjects.<sup>34</sup>

290 Mill's critics see Mill, in wanting Britain to civilize Indians, as ethnocentric  
 291 and intolerant of non-Western ways of life. One reason they misrepresent Mill  
 292 is they misunderstand what Mill means by becoming civilized. They under-  
 293 stand Mill, in wanting to civilize Indians, to want Indians to give up their  
 294 own traditions and customs and become Western. But this is not what  
 295 Mill's texts and practice indicate he means by civilizing the backward.

296 In his essay "Nature," Mill suggests that civilization is marked by the con-  
 297 quering of nature. Opposing the medieval sentiment that we should not pry  
 298 with nature, Mill thinks it our duty both to master nature with technology, as  
 299 when man excavates wells, drains marshes, and turns away thunderbolts (*Rel*  
 300 10:381–82), and to overcome our instincts: "Nearly every respectable attri-  
 301 bute of humanity is the result not of instinct, but of a victory over instinct"  
 302 (*Rel* 10:393; cf. 383, 402; and *PPE* 2:367). We ought to suppress bad instincts,  
 303 such as the "cruelty" he finds in the East and in Southern Europe (*Rel* 10:398),  
 304 and to cultivate virtues such as veracity, which is not natural, savages being  
 305 "always liars" (*Rel* 10:395).<sup>35</sup>

306 Mill emphasizes two ways in which civilized societies overcome nature:  
 307 through the establishment of the rule of law and the development of coopera-  
 308 tive ventures (*PPE* 3:706–8; *Civ* 18:119–24). With the rule of law, members of  
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310 <sup>33</sup>Cf. George D. Bearce, *British Attitudes Toward India 1784–1858* (Westport, CT:  
 311 Greenwood, 1982), 294–95.

312 <sup>34</sup>Cf. James Mill, "Affairs of India," *Edinburgh Review* 16 (1810): 138–44, 154.

313 <sup>35</sup>Mill does, however, suggest that man "necessarily obeys the laws of nature" and  
 314 cannot emancipate himself from them (*Rel* 10:379). The sense in which Mill means we  
 315 must conquer nature is that we must "alter and improve Nature" (*Rel* 10:380).

society respect the rights of other members and check their private passions and desire for vengeance by leaving the resolution of conflicts to an administration of justice (RG 19:377). They are raised from “a government of will to one of law” (RG 19:395).

Civilizing also involves developing cooperative efforts.<sup>36</sup> Cooperation allows projects to be undertaken that secure against the blows of natural calamities (PPE 3:706–8). Uncivilized societies are thinly scattered; have an unequal distribution of wealth; and lack commerce, manufacturing, or agriculture. In them, each person “shifts for himself,” and there is no law or administration of justice (Civ 18:120). “The savage,” in contrast to the civilized, “cannot bear to sacrifice, for any purpose, the satisfaction of his individual will” (Civ 18:122). Mill adds that a key ingredient of civilization is sufficient security of property to render the progressive increase of wealth possible (Civ 18:120), though Mill does not think civilization precludes a socialist or communist economic system (PPE 2:203–13).

Civilizing a people, for Mill, need not entail assimilating them so they become individualists or “English.” Mill saw civilization as a mark of progress, but in his essay “Civilization,” he worried about the threat it posed to liberal values, especially to individuality. Once we are civilized—interacting and cooperating with others—we risk getting “lost in the crowd” (Civ 18:132, 136) and suffer mischiefs associated with the “growing insignificance of the individual in the mass” (Civ 18:133–34). Parekh’s criticism, that Mill’s desire to civilize the world is a desire to impose individualist values on people who may be quite satisfied as members of tightly knit communities, fails to recognize how much Mill worried that civilization would undercut Western-liberal values. Mehta, who recognizes that for Mill the savage has “salutary qualities of individual will and courage,” qualities threatened by the civilizing process, fails to draw out the significance of Mill’s critique of civilization: Mill is not imperiously desirous to make India just like England.<sup>37</sup>

One of Mill’s arguments for civilization is that it places “human beings in contact with persons dissimilar to themselves, and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar” (PPE 3:594), and such exposure may lead to challenges of traditional practices and values. But there is a crucial distinction between proselytizing or otherwise imposing a particular ideology, religion, or way of life on people regarded as semibarbarous, so as to make them like us, and what Mill actually has in mind by civilizing them. Civilizing a society, for Mill, does not mean forcing English ideas or the Bible down the throats of the natives. Doing so, he says, would be objectionable to “Asiatic eyes” and would make England’s interference

<sup>36</sup>Cf. John Robson, “Civilization and Culture as Moral Concepts,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, ed. John Skorupski (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1998), 350 and n. 16.

<sup>37</sup>Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 99–100; cf. CW 20:274.



361 illegitimate. Just as English Protestants would not want their children placed  
 362 in a Roman Catholic seminary, we should not expect Hindus to expose their  
 363 children to the dangers of being made Christian (RG 19:570; cf. CW 30:81,  
 364 125). Mill's view is not unlike Stephen's view two decades later. Stephen  
 365 also defends British imperialism as a means of civilizing India, by which he  
 366 means introducing institutions that promote "peace, order, the supremacy  
 367 of law, the prevention of crime, the redress of wrong."<sup>38</sup> For Stephen,  
 368 Britain's role is to impose a regime of toleration and not to impose  
 369 Christianity, a scientific worldview, or artistic styles, cuisines, or representa-  
 370 tive government.

371 Pointing to Mill's definition of "civilization" is helpful in addressing the con-  
 372 cerns of those who criticize Mill's imperialism as ethnocentric and intolerant. For  
 373 Mill, civilization involves not a monistic conception of the good life but only  
 374 certain conditions, such as the rule of law and the ability to combat disease,  
 375 famine, and natural disasters through cooperative ventures, which allow  
 376 people to pursue their own experiments in living, alone or in community.<sup>39</sup>

377 This will not alleviate all of the concerns of Mill's critics. Many of those who  
 378 see Mill as an intolerant imperialist draw not merely on Mill's general vision  
 379 of civilizing backward peoples, but on specific passages in which Mill advo-  
 380 cates despotism and seems to deny to colonial dependents the protections  
 381 afforded by the principle of liberty. I now turn to this evidence.

#### 382 383 384 **IV. Mill on Despotism and the Applicability of the Harm Principle** 385 **to the Uncivilized** 386

387 Mill's commitment to toleration is apparent in his defense of the liberty of  
 388 individuals to do as they please no matter how erratic or odd their choices,  
 389 so long as they do not harm others. His principle of liberty, or the "harm prin-  
 390 ciple," is that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised  
 391 over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent  
 392 harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient  
 393 warrant" (OL 18:223). The phrase "of a civilized community" in this  
 394 passage might be taken as a limiting condition of the harm principle. Mill dis-  
 395 tinguishes between the principles that apply to civilized and to noncivilized  
 396 peoples. In *On Liberty*, Mill says that his "doctrine," apparently referring to  
 397 the harm principle, "is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity  
 398 of their faculties." He is not speaking of children or of "backward states of  
 399 society in which the race itself may be considered in its nonage" (OL  
 400 18:224). In the same paragraph, he defends despotism for the uncivilized:

402 <sup>38</sup>Stephen, "Foundations of Government of India," 554; cf. Sir Henry Sumner Maine,  
 403 *Village-Communities in the East and West* (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 67–76.

404 <sup>39</sup>This suggests one important sense in which Mill's imperialism is intolerant: it is  
 405 intolerant of dependencies that do not wish to conquer nature and commercialize.

406 “Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians,  
 407 provided the end be their improvement.”<sup>40</sup> Mill reaffirms this position in  
 408 his essay “A Few Remarks on Non-Intervention” of 1859, the same year he  
 409 published *On Liberty*. Mill writes that “it is as little justifiable to force  
 410 our ideas on other people, as to compel them to submit to our will in  
 411 any other respect,” but where the other party “is of a lower degree of civi-  
 412 lization,” then “the rules of ordinary international morality” do not apply,  
 413 for these rules involve reciprocity and “barbarians will not reciprocate.  
 414 They cannot be depended on for observing any rules. Their minds are  
 415 not capable of so great an effort”; thus it is likely “for their benefit that  
 416 they should be conquered and held in subjection by foreigners” (NI  
 417 21:118–21).

418 It is easy to conclude from these passages that Mill is intolerant of bar-  
 419 barians and denies they have rights.<sup>41</sup> To our ears, being “despotic,” “con-  
 420 quering,” and “subjecting” are hard to reconcile with tolerating, which is  
 421 why it is so important to recall the fluidity an author trying to walk a dif-  
 422 ficult line in articulating tolerant imperialism may give to the words, as in  
 423 Stephen’s defense of British “conquest.” What does Mill mean in saying  
 424 despotism is legitimate for barbarians? In saying they may be “conquered,”  
 425 to which of the senses of conquest that Stephen articulates is Mill’s meaning  
 426 closest?

427 Mill’s critics take him to mean Britain may force Indians to become civi-  
 428 lized.<sup>42</sup> The problem with that position is that Mill explicitly rejects it: “I  
 429 am not aware that any community has a right to force another to be civilized”  
 430 (*OL* 18:291). Here Mill rules out the use of force by one community against  
 431 any other community and not merely against other communities that are  
 432 no longer semibarbarous or barbarous. Here (*OL* 18:291) he does not rule  
 433 out force applied to savages, who live in isolation and not in communities  
 434 and whom Mill regards as less advanced than slaves (*RG* 19:394–96; but  
 435 see *Civ* 18:122); but he does rule out force applied to a community. Asians,  
 436 classified by Mill not as savages but as slaves to despots (Mill 1838b,  
 437 10:105; cf. *CW* 17:1562; but see *Rel* 10:398), may be barbarous or semibar-  
 438 barous in Mill’s eyes, but they live in communities, and so he rules out  
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441 <sup>40</sup>*OL* 18:224; cited in Pitts, “Legislator of the World?” 201, and Drayton, *Nature’s*  
 442 *Government*, 94, 227.

443 <sup>41</sup>Eddy Souffrant argues that Mill waives the harm principle for children and those  
 444 not yet civilized (Souffrant, *Formal Transgression*, 8; cf. 70; cf. Mehta, *Liberalism and*  
 445 *Empire* (70, 99, 102). To support his claim that Mill is “careful to include only those indi-  
 446 viduals of maturity” as among those to whom the principle of liberty applies (57),  
 447 Souffrant cites *OL*, *CW* 18:122, but *OL* begins at 18:217. Souffrant also cites *CW*  
 448 18:262. Here Mill recommends training people in youth “to know and benefit by the  
 449 ascertained results of human experience” but says nothing about whether the harm  
 450 principle applies to them.

<sup>42</sup>Parekh, “Decolonizing Liberalism,” 94; “Liberalism and Colonialism,” 95.

451 force to civilize them (*OL* 18:291).<sup>43</sup> Mill repudiates force for civilizing all but  
 452 savages also in *Representative Government*, where he says the uncivilized who  
 453 have advanced beyond a state of savagery require “not a government of force,  
 454 but one of guidance” (*RG* 19:395). While Mill thinks slavery for savages in the  
 455 “very early state of society” taught them obedience and industriousness, he  
 456 argues that no civilized people in modern life should resort to slavery to  
 457 impart civilization to those under their influence (*RG* 19:395), a distinction  
 458 missed by critics who assume that for Mill, barbarians have no rights.<sup>44</sup>  
 459 While Mill recognizes admixtures of nationalities as beneficial to the uncivi-  
 460 lized, he calls not for their forced assimilation, as Parekh implies when  
 461 discussing Mill’s views on the Bretons and Basques, but for their amalgama-  
 462 tion, saying it is not beneficial to “extinguish types” and we should just soften  
 463 “their extreme form.”<sup>45</sup>

464 The passage (*OL* 18:291) establishes that an as of yet uncivilized  
 465 community—as opposed to savages—may not be forced to be civilized. But **Q3**  
 466 we still do not know what Mill really means here since he does not say  
 467 what sort of force can’t rightly be used. I shall argue that as an imperialist,  
 468 Mill allows some sort of force, such as pedagogical coercion and the imposi-  
 469 tion of non-representative government that need not be consented to; but  
 470 he (*OL* 18:291) indicates his imperialism is tolerant by ruling out other sorts  
 471 of force. Other texts suggest that the sorts of force Mill rules out include  
 472 violence, arbitrary and unjustified punishment, and other acts violating  
 473 the rights of colonial dependents.

474 One sort of force that Mill does condone for children and the uncivilized is  
 475 pedagogical coercion. Some of Mill’s critics, pressed to find passages in which  
 476 Mill advocates violence, argue that pedagogical coercion is a sort of violence.  
 477 Parekh, in a footnote to his claim that Mill condones violence, explains that  
 478 “violence is often justified in pedagogical terms.”<sup>46</sup> Souffrant also argues  
 479 that on Mill’s view, before maturity “one is subject to the requirements and  
 480 teachings of society” and that such pedagogical coercion causes “great  
 481 psychological and social costs to the individual.”<sup>47</sup> But Mill’s defense of  
 482  
 483

484 <sup>43</sup>Mill uses a number of classifications of people—savage, semisavage, slave, semi-  
 485 barbarous, barbarous, and civilized—though he is sometimes slippery with these  
 486 terms. Mill refers to people of India as “semibarbarous” in one work (*RG* 19:577)  
 487 but in another as “barbarous” (*NI* 21:119), and he never makes clear whether the bar-  
 488 barbarous and the semibarbarous are to be treated differently. But he distinguishes  
 489 Indians from savages.

490 <sup>44</sup>Souffrant, *Formal Transgression*, 122. Mill would not exempt “the child and the  
 491 immature from the transactions of slavery.”

492 <sup>45</sup>*RG* 19:549–51; Parekh, “Decolonizing Liberalism,” 91.

493 <sup>46</sup>Parekh, “Decolonizing Liberalism,” 94 n. 30.

494 <sup>47</sup>Souffrant, *Formal Transgression*, 59–60. As both Parekh and Souffrant single out  
 495 colonial educators as violent or psychologically coercive, it is unlikely they are invok-  
 ing a Foulcauldian criticism of education per se, as that might apply to methods of

496 mandatory schooling does not indicate he thinks children and barbarians  
 497 have no rights and are left unprotected by the principle of liberty. Mill  
 498 addresses whether violence is an appropriate pedagogical tool in a newspa-  
 499 per editorial written in 1850. He opposes corporal punishment because it  
 500 creates a bad habit and teaches the wrong lessons. It prepares one for being  
 501 a bully and tyrant, and does not teach one to show respect (NW June 2,  
 502 1850, 1178). Mill is not opposed to flogging brutal adult ruffians (NW  
 503 1139–40; CW 28:272) and leaves open the possibility of corporal punishment  
 504 for boys guilty of certain grave moral delinquencies,<sup>48</sup> but schools being state  
 505 actors, these are cases of punishment for violating the harm principle, not of  
 506 pedagogical coercion. As John Robson has argued, for Mill it is a legitimate  
 507 goal to civilize savages and children but by moralizing, not punishing  
 508 them.<sup>49</sup> That Mill opposes the use of violence on the uncivilized and violation  
 509 of their rights against arbitrary and unjustified coercion is apparent in his  
 510 outcry against Governor Eyre for imposing martial law and wrongfully flog-  
 511 ging and executing Jamaican subjects in 1865.<sup>50</sup> Mill was critical of repression  
 512 during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 as well (CW 16:1205–6, 1282).

513 The passages in his works of 1859 in which Mill defends “despotism” and  
 514 “conquering” of the uncivilized do not show that Mill advocates the use of vio-  
 515 lence or disregards natives’ rights against unjustified coercion. Mill just does  
 516 not say what he means by despotism there. In *Considerations on Representative*  
 517 *Government* Mill uses despotism in very different senses. He says that India  
 518 needs a vigorous despotism to civilize it, but he is critical of the dissolution  
 519 of the Company for it would mean that the governing power in India  
 520 will no longer have knowledge of Indians’ interests and could not be respon-  
 521 sible to them, and this “is despotism” (RG 19:568). So there is a form of despot-  
 522 ism he advocates that avoids a form of despotism he condemns.<sup>51</sup>

523 Mill’s failure to clarify what he means by despotism in the passages we  
 524 have looked at forces us to other texts. These other texts suggest that the des-  
 525 potism Mill defends for semibarbarous or barbarous people involves govern-  
 526 ment acting as a monopoly that provides exclusive alternatives without the  
 527 consent of its subjects. Such a government would use pedagogical coercion,  
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531 education used by India’s internal or precolonial despots as well. See Michel Foucault,  
 532 *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

533 <sup>48</sup>Michael Packe, *The Life of John Stuart Mill* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 482–83.

534 <sup>49</sup>Robson, “Civilization and Culture,” 362. In OL 18:277, Mill rejects “pedagogical  
 535 compulsion” in favor of pedagogical “persuasion” “when the period of education is  
 536 past”; but children and the not yet civilized are still in the “period of education.”  
 537 Still, Mill does not think pedagogical coercion entails enslavement or violence.

538 <sup>50</sup>CW 28:95, 106–8; Bernard Semmel, *Jamaican Blood and Victorian Conscience: The*  
 539 *Governor Eyre Controversy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962).

540 <sup>51</sup>In OL 18:266, Mill also uses two senses of despotism: a despotism that leaves room  
 for and a despotism that crushes individuality.

541 but not enslave, punish people arbitrarily, or use violence to force people to  
 542 assimilate. In *Representative Government* Mill writes that “a rude people . . .  
 543 may be unable” to suppress a desire for revenge and leave justice to  
 544 the laws, so government may need to be despotic for them, to impose “forcible  
 545 restraints upon their actions” (RG 19:377). Here despotism—in the sense  
 546 of a government that is imposed regardless of whether a people accept it—is  
 547 used to uphold rights and enforce toleration. In “Thoughts on Parliamentary  
 548 Reform,” Mill writes: “That power should be exercised over any portion of  
 549 mankind without any obligation of consulting them, is only tolerable while  
 550 they are in an infantine, or a semibarbarous state. In any civilized condition,  
 551 power ought never to be exempt from the necessity of appealing to the reason,  
 552 and recommending itself by motives which justify it to the conscience and  
 553 feelings, of the governed” (CW 19:324). Both passages suggest that for Mill, despotism is the use of power that need not be consented to, not arbitrary power.

554 That despotic government is one providing exclusive alternatives Mill  
 555 suggests in the *Principles of Political Economy*. Here Mill distinguishes two  
 556 exceptions to the *laissez-faire* principle of noninterference that he defends  
 557 for civilized people. One exception is authoritative intervention that involves  
 558 forceful interdiction and penalties. This sort of interference should be used  
 559 minimally and only when acts affect the interests of others. The other excep-  
 560 tion is nonauthoritative intervention —“giving advice and providing non-  
 561 exclusive alternatives.” For example, the state can force parents to educate  
 562 children (PPE 3:948–49), but should not claim a monopoly on education: it  
 563 can prescribe only that certain things be taught, not “how or from whom”  
 564 (PPE 3:950). This sort of intervention may be used more liberally than authorita-  
 565 tive intervention (PPE 3:937–8). A despotic government, for Mill, might refer to  
 566 one in which non-authoritative intervention provided exclusive alternatives.  
 567

568 In being imposed without the consent of the subjects, despotism is opposed  
 569 to self-government. Mill considers ruling India without serving the interest of  
 570 the people is despotism of a bad kind, and believes Company officials with  
 571 their ties to India were more likely than the government in London to  
 572 know these interests (CW 30:49–51; RG 19:570–72). But he did not think  
 573 that the people of India were ready to represent their own interests, be  
 574 members of a legislative council, or hold other high positions.<sup>52</sup> In time  
 575 they may be appointed to many higher administrative offices, and Mill  
 576 even envisions the natives eventually serving on the council and running  
 577 their government without England’s assistance (CW 30:65). Mill is in principle  
 578 for self-government for all people: “[A]ll governments must be regarded as  
 579 extremely imperfect, until every one who is required to obey the laws, has  
 580  
 581

582 <sup>52</sup>CW 30:51; RG 19:573–74; Abram L. Harris, “John Stuart Mill: Servant of the East  
 583 India Company,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 30 (1964): 193; CW  
 584 30:65. For a dispute about what Mill means in saying Indians should not hold high  
 585 positions, compare Stokes, *English Utilitarians and India*, 255, with Harris, 193–94.

a voice, or the prospect of a voice, in their enactment and administration" (CW 19:323). But representative government will not work if a people have yet to learn obedience or are too passive (RG 19:415–16). The point of despotism and pedagogical coercion is to prepare Indians for self rule, as a means to train people to walk alone (RG 19:396), and so Mill ultimately advocates their self-government, though he had no expectation this would happen anytime soon.<sup>53</sup>

The despotism Mill defends imposes a regime of legal rights that enforces toleration; it does not deny subjects their rights, or support their enslavement or arbitrary punishment, or require their assimilation. But it denies the subjected the opportunity to determine their own way of life or govern themselves, at least for a time. This is a concern to critics including Parekh, who argues that "demands for change must come from within." For Parekh, principles for determining what differences to tolerate "should be dialogically derived and consensually grounded, not arbitrarily imposed by a narrowly defined liberalism," and Mill, unwilling to engage in dialogue, would impose a regime of toleration rather than suggest it as a possibility for a people to choose on their own.<sup>54</sup>

Parekh criticizes Mill for failing to respect Indian autonomy by imposing liberal values on them. One might reply that to demand that Indians choose their own way of life is itself to impose liberal values by expecting them to be autonomous choosers of their culture.<sup>55</sup> Mill's more likely response would be to deny that British imperialism takes away the right of self-determination. Mill suggests that intervention does not violate this right where acts of coercion by other parties prevent self-determination. In "A Few Words on Non-Intervention," Mill defends French intervention in Algeria and English intervention in India (NI 21:118–19), explaining that without intervention, the native governments may fall prey to bands of ruffians (NI 21:120). Mill seems to think that before British involvement in India the principle of self-determination was already violated by prior acts of coercion, Asians having been slaves under despotism.<sup>56</sup>

Mill was not alone in pointing to pre-British India's despotisms to help justify British imperialism. James Mill had argued that without a British presence, India would be parceled out again into despotisms that involved bloody and ferocious invasions.<sup>57</sup> Stephen, too, appeals to the existence of oriental despots prior to a British presence in India to justify empire, as did

<sup>53</sup>Bearce, *British Attitudes toward India*, 292.

<sup>54</sup>Parekh, "Liberalism and Colonialism," 96, 97; "Decolonizing Liberalism," 85.

<sup>55</sup>Baum, *Rereading Power and Freedom in J. S. Mill*, 23; Baum, "Feminism, Liberalism and Cultural Pluralism: J. S. Mill on Mormon Polygyny," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 5 (1997): 239.

<sup>56</sup>CW 10:105; Harris, "Mill: Servant of East India Company," 201.

<sup>57</sup>James Mill, "Art. VII. Voyage aux Indes Orientales" (Review), *Edinburgh Review* 15 (1810): 363–84, 372.

631 Charles Wentworth Dilke and a number of influential Indian supporters of  
 632 British Empire.<sup>58</sup> J. S. Mill points to the relevance of a prior act of coercion  
 633 in a letter to Morley of Sept. 26, 1866. Mill addresses the question of  
 634 whether the British should annex territories not presently under their  
 635 control where the native rulers had no heir. He takes the position that  
 636 where the leader of a real native state—one not conquered—failed to have  
 637 an heir, the leader may adopt an heir, and the failure to have a natural heir  
 638 would not be an excuse for England to annex the state; but Mill would not  
 639 allow the dynasty to continue by adopting, had it been created by conquest  
 640 (CW 16:1202).<sup>59</sup>

641 In 1832 when he defends child labor laws, Mill has already taken the pos-  
 642 sition that a principle of nonintervention is inapplicable where there is prior  
 643 coercion. He says he is a partisan of the “noninterference” philosophy “up  
 644 to a certain point” because individuals can be presumed better judges of  
 645 their own interests than governments as now constituted. But people are, in  
 646 effect, coerced to go against their interests in a case where, unless everybody  
 647 acts in a certain manner, no one will adopt the optimal rule, and so we need  
 648 government to promulgate a compact that no one may exploit children by  
 649 working them too hard (NW January 29, 1832, 400–1). The connection with  
 650 his views on India is that in both cases he adheres to a principle of nonin-  
 651 terference only if there is no prior coercion.

## 654 V. Mill’s Toleration of Traditions, Even if Illiberal

655  
 656 While Mill thinks that Indians can be coerced to become civilized in a number  
 657 of ways, he does not think they are without rights; he does not think they can  
 658 be enslaved or arbitrarily punished. Nor does he intend British imperialism to  
 659 deny the right of self-determination. This deflects several of the concerns of  
 660 Mill’s critics, but concerns remain. One of the most serious is that the very  
 661 notion of pedagogical coercion of Indians, of training them to walk alone,  
 662 demeans them by failing to appreciate that Indians already have a set of tra-  
 663 ditions and beliefs in which they are at home.<sup>60</sup> Even if Indians lived under  
 664 despots prior to British rule, they had their own intellectual traditions and  
 665 practices. While Mill cannot entirely avoid this charge, it loses some of its  
 666

667  
 668 <sup>58</sup>Stephen, “Foundations of Government of India,” 545–46; Charles Wentworth  
 669 Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries during 1866 and*  
 670 *1867* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1868), 226, 277, 355, 373–83; J. K. Majumdar, ed.,  
 671 *Indian Speeches and Documents on British Rule 1821–1918* (Delhi: Kanti Publications,  
 672 1987), 46, 85, 87–88, 136.

673 <sup>59</sup>The argument is not without its critics. Lal wonders why Mill should maintain  
 674 “the invidious distinction between “real” native states and others, and wonders  
 675 how we identify a “really native” state (Lal, “Organic Conservatism”).

<sup>60</sup>Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*; Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*.

force when we recognize the ways in which Mill adopts a position of accommodation to and respect for native Indian culture and law, and toleration even of some illiberal practices.

Mill's language does not always express tolerance. He writes to Comte of how the "little-advanced civilization" of India is "frequently a cause of embarrassment to us."<sup>61</sup> He criticizes the contention of Turks that letting women walk with faces uncovered would topple their society, saying this is just "a mere bugbear to frighten imbeciles with" (NW August 17, 1850, 1181). Mill is critical of a number of Indian practices, such as infanticide, thuggee, sati, the "fraudulent practice" of witchcraft, and the "barbarous practice" of tragga.<sup>62</sup> In these and similar passages Mill shows a lack of tolerance, in Coleridge's sense of that word, but does not disavow a policy of toleration. Coleridge distinguishes toleration from tolerance. Toleration is an accepting attitude toward actions and is a virtue of laws; tolerance is the acceptance of opinions or intellectual commitments contrary to your own. Coleridge defends toleration but criticizes tolerance, as he thinks we should not use law to coerce people, but neither should we simply give in intellectually to opinions we think wrong.<sup>63</sup> In his 1831 letter to Sterling, Mill notes how Coleridge justly disavows tolerance, but that there is a good sense of tolerance, by which Mill must mean toleration (CW 12:74–78).

If Mill sometimes does not express tolerance, the policy he recommends for India is one of toleration. Contrary to Parekh's charge that Millian liberalism is "obsessively anti-tradition, anti-prejudice, anti-custom, anti-conformity, [and] anti-community," and Mehta's charge that Mill rejects Indian religions and traditions because he rejects what is unfamiliar in favor of a cosmopolitanism of reason, Mill does not dismiss the teachings and practices of Indians even as he welcomes their moral improvement.<sup>64</sup> Lynn Zastoupil has argued that under the influence both of the Romantic thinkers and of reformers like Elphinstone who wanted to preserve a "natural India," Mill came to take a conciliatory position on the issue of whether to respect Indian culture. Mill, valuing the "imagination," and appreciating the importance of "pre-existing habits and feelings" in shaping people was, unlike his father, unwilling to

<sup>61</sup>*The Correspondence of John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte*, trans. Oscar A. Haac (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 43.

<sup>62</sup>CW 30:122–25. Thuggee was a practice of stealing from and strangling people. Mill explains tragga as follows: A has a grievance against B, threatens B that A will kill or wound himself or someone else but not B, thereby entailing B's guilt (CW 30:123–24); see Mark Tunick, "John Stuart Mill and Unassimilated Subjects," *Political Studies* 53 (2005): 833–48, 835–36.

<sup>63</sup>Samuel T. Coleridge, "The Friend, vol. 1," in *Collected Works of Coleridge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 91–99.

<sup>64</sup>Parekh, "Superior People"; cf. Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 44–47; Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*.



721 disregard India's past and treat its people as a tabula rasa that could be  
 722 molded according to utilitarian dictates.<sup>65</sup> While Mill is committed to ration-  
 723 alism and "empirical proof" (*U* 10:234), he also recognizes the utility of beliefs  
 724 that are not proven true. "Religion," he writes, "may be morally useful  
 725 without being intellectually sustainable" (*Rel* 10:405; cf. 482). Mill defends  
 726 the "principle that in the regulation of the imagination literal truth of facts  
 727 is not the only thing to be considered"; "When the reason is strongly culti-  
 728 vated, the imagination may safely follow its own end, and do its best to  
 729 make life pleasant and lovely inside the castle, in reliance on the fortifications  
 730 raised and maintained by Reason round the outward bounds" (*Rel* 10:484–5).  
 731 Rather than demanding a cosmopolitanism of reason, Mill, while committed  
 732 to reason, recognizes its limits (*Rel* 10:481–85). While he thinks some harmful  
 733 practices outside the bounds of reason should be abolished, Mill recommends  
 734 gentle means of reform even for these, in recognition of the importance they  
 735 play in peoples' lives. An example is offered by Zastoupil: Mill's lenient posi-  
 736 tion toward banditry, or bahirwattia. Mill believes that the custom should be  
 737 abolished but with as little intervention as possible, and recognizes "the  
 738 impropriety of inflicting severe punishments" upon a people "merely for  
 739 not at once renouncing the habits of their whole lives."<sup>66</sup> In an 1858  
 740 Petition supporting the East India Company's continued rule in India, Mill  
 741 defends the Company policy of abstaining "from all interference with any  
 742 of the religious practices of the people of India, except such as are abhorrent  
 743 to humanity," and of conducting "suits, civil or criminal, against the natives"  
 744 according to such rules "as may accommodate the same to the religion and  
 745 manners of the natives" (*CW* 30:81).

746 Mill recommends other policies for India that do not reflect a position we  
 747 would expect from someone who is "obsessively anti-tradition" or intolerant.  
 748 One issue England faced was whether to annex Oudh or allow its king to  
 749 retain control. Moore argues that Mill has theoretical reasons rooted in his  
 750  
 751

752 <sup>65</sup>Lynn Zastoupil, "J. S. Mill and India," *Victorian Studies* 32 (1988): 31–54, 38–40, 44;  
 753 cf. Zastoupil, "India, J. S. Mill, and 'Western' Culture," in *J.S. Mill's Encounter with*  
 754 *India*, ed. Martin Moir, Douglas M. Peers, and Lynn Zastoupil (Toronto: University  
 755 of Toronto Press, 1999); Javej Majeed, "James Mill's The History of British India: A  
 756 Reevaluation," in Moir et al., 63–65, 55–56; and R. J. Moore, "John Stuart Mill at  
 757 East India House," *Historical Studies* 20 (1983): 497–519, who argues it is unfair to  
 758 imply Mill had no objection to forcing India to accept western civilization (516; cf.  
 759 506). Nancy Gardner Cassels notes some instances where Mill is tolerant ("John  
 760 Stuart Mill, Religion, and Law in the Examiner's Office," in Moir et al., 176), but  
 761 also notes illiberal practices Mill criticizes, such as the use of pressed labour, and infan-  
 762 ticide (177). She notes Mill did not support using funds to discourage infanticide, and  
 763 instead recommended reliance on moral influence (178).

764 <sup>66</sup>Zastoupil, "J. S. Mill and India," 45–46; Lynn Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India*  
 765 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 115. See Tunick, "Mill and  
 Unassimilated Subjects," 836.

766 understanding of political economy for wanting annexation: the interests  
 767 of the cultivating population were injured by the existing system with  
 768 its "lawless usurpations and disorderly excesses of the Talookdars," the  
 769 oppressive and often uncontrollable landlords working for the king.<sup>67</sup> Mill's  
 770 political economy and social theory would dictate reducing taluqdari hold-  
 771 ings and extending village settlements. But in 1837, when the situation dete-  
 772 riorated in Oudh, Mill instead recommended replacing the king with an heir:  
 773 "[A]nnexation would remove the last major Muslim state in northern India  
 774 and thus be unpopular among prominent Muslims. Second, the survival of  
 775 Oudh would stand as a model of the Company's good faith, and if the heir  
 776 should prove an unsatisfactory king then the annexation of the state might  
 777 still be accomplished but with the advantage that the Company would be  
 778 seen as having tried to avoid it." Mill wanted to avoid "permanent assump-  
 779 tion of the state"; before doing this the state should try every intermediate  
 780 course which might work.<sup>68</sup> Moore notes that there was also a secret des-  
 781 patch, not listed in Mill's list of his despatches but which he surmises Mill  
 782 was influential in drafting, that suggests that if the king failed in reforming  
 783 Oudh, the state should prefer measures that "effect the least possible  
 784 change in the native institutions of the country . . . if the purposes of good  
 785 government could thereby be secured." England's policy should be to pre-  
 786 serve existing native dynasties and introduce systems of government that  
 787 interfere in the least possible way. According to Moore's view, Mill defers  
 788 to traditions and customs in India only for practical reasons.<sup>69</sup> But Mill's reluc-  
 789 tance to annex Oudh or use force is consistent with his commitment to tolera-  
 790 tion, which he holds not merely for practical reasons but because he recognizes  
 791 the value of customs and traditions that are not "abhorrent to humanity."

792 The respect Mill gives to India's teachings and traditions is evident also in  
 793 his stand in the debate between Orientalists and Anglicists about education  
 794 policy in India. Thomas Macaulay, member of the supreme council of India  
 795 from 1834 to 1838, expressed the Anglicist position most provocatively in  
 796 his "Minute on Education" of February 2, 1835. Macaulay addresses the ques-  
 797 tion of whether an act of Parliament requires education in India to be in  
 798 English, or in Arabic and Sanskrit. He admits he has no knowledge of the  
 799 Eastern languages, but assures us he has formed a correct estimate of their  
 800 value by reading celebrated works in translation, and concludes: "I have  
 801 never found one among [the Orientalists] who could deny that a single  
 802 shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of  
 803 India and Arabia." When we turn from works of imagination to works of  
 804 fact, "the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable . . .  
 805  
 806

807 <sup>67</sup>Moore, "Mill at East India House," 501, citing Mill's "Maine on Village  
 808 Communities," CW 30: 213–28.

809 <sup>68</sup>Ibid., 505, citing Mill's draft despatch of April 11, 1838.

810 <sup>69</sup>Ibid., 506 and n. 43, 518–19; cf. CW 30:15, and xlvii–xlix.

811 all the historical information which has been collected from all the books  
812 written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in  
813 the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England."<sup>70</sup>

814 Turning to the content of the education, Macaulay asks, should we teach  
815 European science, or systems which "whenever they differ from those of  
816 Europe, differ for the worse . . . by universal confession"? Should we teach  
817 medical doctrines "which would disgrace an English farrier,—Astronomy,  
818 which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school,—  
819 History, abounding with kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand  
820 years long,—and Geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of  
821 butter"? He says that fortunately Westerners in the fifteenth and sixteenth  
822 centuries discovered Cicero and Tacitus and willingly soaked in their knowl-  
823 edge rather than confining themselves to Anglo-Saxon chronicles and  
824 Norman-French romances—without this, would England have been what  
825 she now is? "What the Greek and Latin were to the contemporaries of  
826 More and Ascham, our tongue is to the people of India."<sup>71</sup>

827 Macaulay, nevertheless, holds that "it is the duty of the British Government  
828 in India to be not only tolerant, but neutral on all religious questions." We  
829 should not try to convert natives to Christianity or encourage those who  
830 do, but we should not bribe men using state funds "to waste their youth in  
831 learning how they are to purify themselves after touching an ass, or what  
832 text of the Vedas they are to repeat to expiate the crime of killing a goat."<sup>72</sup>  
833 Macaulay states England's goal in a now famous line: "We must at present  
834 do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the  
835 millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour,  
836 but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."<sup>73</sup> Macaulay's  
837 "Minute" is proof, if proof were needed, that critics attack no straw man  
838 when claiming British imperialists infantilized Indians and dismissed their  
839 beliefs, hoping to establish a cosmopolitanism of reason.

840 Macaulay's "Minute" was influential, its ideas on education reflected in  
841 Lord Bentinck's Resolution of March 7, 1835. It declared that "His  
842 Lordship in Council is of opinion that the great object of the British  
843 Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science  
844 among the natives of India; and that all the funds appropriated for the  
845 purpose of education would be best employed on English education  
846 alone."<sup>74</sup> This marked a greater shift toward an Anglicist policy that hoped  
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850 <sup>70</sup>Thomas Macaulay, *Speeches by Lord Macaulay*, ed. G. M. Young (London: Oxford  
851 University Press, 1952), 349.

852 <sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 350–51.

853 <sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 357–58.

854 <sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 359.

855 <sup>74</sup>K. A. Ballhatchet, "The Home Government and Bentinck's Educational Policy,"  
*Cambridge Historical Journal* 10 (1951): 224.

to educate the native learned class in English and rely on them to diffuse their knowledge to the masses.<sup>75</sup>

Mill came to diverge from Macaulay's position and lean toward the Orientalist policy that favored education in the languages, literature, and traditions of India. Mill wrote a letter to Horace Wilson, a leading proponent of Orientalist education policy, expressing support for Wilson and dismay at Bentinck's anglicizing policy. Wilson wanted to reserve government funds for education using Sanskrit and Arabic for India's learned class and for publication of Sanskrit and Arabic books, with no government support for teaching in English, vernacular languages, or modern subjects.<sup>76</sup> The Sirkins argue that Mill had not always taken a pro-Orientalist position, at least in dispatches that he authored on behalf of the Court of Directors. One dispatch of 1829 regards Oriental seminaries and publications as not useful. An 1830 dispatch approves of Wilson's Oriental seminaries, but what it approves are the modernizing measures it mistakenly believes are being carried out, such as classes in math, medicine in the European manner, and natural philosophy, and it recommends promoting only natives who become Europeanized and, thus, qualified for high employments: "[I]t was not approving the Orientalist policy of perpetuating traditional "Hindu and Mahomedan peculiar studies"; the applause was for Anglicist policies.<sup>77</sup>

Q4

But whatever critical stance Mill took toward Orientalist policy on behalf of the Court of Directors is changed in an important draft despatch of 1836 titled "Recent Changes in Native Education," determined by scholars to be Mill's work.<sup>78</sup> In it Mill agrees with Macaulay that England should train a "lettered class." But for Mill, this class must be trained in "institutions for the cultivation of the Oriental languages" that would be supported by the government. In addition, he argues that the administration of justice requires a knowledge of the classical languages of India and Hindu and Mohammedan law, a point Macaulay denied.<sup>79</sup> Mill supports stipends for the native colleges, though they would not exceed what is needed for subsistence.<sup>80</sup> Mill expresses fear of the effects of a sudden anglicizing policy change upon native attitudes; such changes are liable to misinterpretation and could excite alarm and cause disaffection and a fear that England was proselytizing. Change should be

<sup>75</sup>J. F. Hilliker, "Charles Edward Trevelyan as an Educational Reformer in India 1827-1838," *Canadian Journal of History* 9 (1974): 281-90; cf. Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism*, 98-100.

<sup>76</sup>Gerald Sirkin and Natalie Robinson Sirkin, "John Stuart Mill and Disutilitarianism in Indian Education," *Journal of General Education* 24 (1973): 232-33.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 239, 241.

<sup>78</sup>K. A. Ballhatchet, "John Stuart Mill and Indian Education," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 11 (1954): 228.

<sup>79</sup>Harris, "Mill: Servant of East India Company," 197; Macaulay, *Speeches*, 356-57.

<sup>80</sup>Harris, "Mill: Servant of East India Company," 200.

901 with great deliberation and caution.<sup>81</sup> But Mill defends Orientalist policy not  
 902 merely for practical reasons. He recognizes the value of Indian thought and  
 903 intellectual productions (CW 17:1687). Mill's despatch was countermanded  
 904 by the president of the Board of Control, but a compromise was adopted in  
 905 1841, which gave limited countenance to the study of Oriental literature.<sup>82</sup>

906 Mill's critics accuse him of not being committed to toleration,  
 907 self-determination, and human dignity for the uncivilized.<sup>83</sup> I have argued  
 908 that in not seeking forced assimilation, in not waiving the harm principle  
 909 for the "not yet civilized," in tolerating even some illiberal practices, and in  
 910 his receptiveness to some features of an Orientalist education policy, Mill  
 911 shows a commitment to human dignity and toleration. But he is unwilling,  
 912 for now, to give Indians their own voice in their governance.

## 915 VI. Mill and the Charge of Racism

916  
 917 Mill's proposed policy of education, while sympathetic to some of  
 918 the Orientalist goals, still engrafts Western education onto the existing  
 919 educational system, rather than recognizing Indian folkways as valid in  
 920 themselves. There are limits to Mill's acceptance of systems of belief and prac-  
 921 tices that he does not think promote moral development. Mill thinks that  
 922 England and some other European nations are more advanced than India  
 923 and other societies not yet civilized. Mill's desire that England take charge  
 924 in bringing about the moral development of Indians—and helping civilize  
 925 them by assisting them in controlling nature and developing cooperative ven-  
 926 tures—and his unwillingness, for now, to let Indians speak for themselves by  
 927 allowing them a representative form of government—has been viewed by  
 928 some critics as evidence that Mill thinks Europeans are intrinsically superior  
 929 and that Mill's imperialism is essentially racist.<sup>84</sup> Before offering what I think  
 930 is a more compelling account of why Mill, a committed liberal, defends British  
 931 imperialism, it is important to respond to this charge.

932 A number of passages may seem to suggest that Mill is a racist. Mill implies  
 933 that communities of European races are the only ones which have "any claim  
 934 to the character of important communities" (AU 1:225); he stereotypes Native  
 935 Americans as indolent (PPE 2:103) and improvident, failing to plan for the  
 936

937  
 938 <sup>81</sup>Ibid., 195–200. Cf. Bearce, *British Attitudes toward India*, 283–84; Moore, "Mill at  
 939 East India House," 500; Ballhatchet, "Home Government and Bentinck's Education  
 940 Policy," 226–28. For criticism of Mill's 1836 draft despatch, including a suggestion  
 941 that it is motivated by Mill's dislike for Macaulay, see Sirkin and Sirkin, "Mill and  
 942 Disutilitarianism," 261–65, 285.

943 <sup>82</sup>Harris, "Mill: Servant of East India Company," 200–201.

944 <sup>83</sup>Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 3–4.

945 <sup>84</sup>Dossa, "Liberal Imperialism?" 739, 742; Lal, "Organic Conservatism"; Drayton,  
*Nature's Government*, 94, 227; cf. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 195–96.

946 future (*PPE* 2:168); he seems to concur with the view that the Chinese lack  
 947 foresight and providence (*PPE* 2:168; cf. *OL* 18:271–72, 273–74); and he con-  
 948 trasts the lack of desire to accumulate wealth among the Indians, Chinese,  
 949 and American Indians with the qualities of someone who has “reason” and  
 950 is “sober” (*PPE* 2:170).

951 But concluding from these passages that Mill is a racist would completely  
 952 misunderstand him. Mill’s argument in *Principles of Political Economy* is that all  
 953 of these characteristics can be changed with a change in institutions and policies.  
 954 This means that these differences in character are not inherent. The Chinese are  
 955 “stagnant” and lack a desire to accumulate wealth, he argues, because they lack  
 956 security of property, moderate and nonarbitrary taxes, and a system of land  
 957 tenure that gives the cultivator the benefits of his labor (*PPE* 2:186). For Mill,  
 958 this is true of all Asiatic populations and of the less industrialized parts of  
 959 Europe: Russia, Turkey, Spain, and Ireland (*PPE* 2:187). In a passage that  
 960 deals a crushing blow to the charge that Mill thinks there are inherent  
 961 biological differences among races, Mill says that it is wrong to impute Irish  
 962 backwardness and laziness to “a peculiar indolence and insouciance in the  
 963 Celtic race.” It is “vulgar” to attribute “diversities of conduct and character to  
 964 inherent natural differences”; rather, it is due to the cottier system that the  
 965 Irish are “less addicted to steady routine labour.” “No labourers work harder,  
 966 in England or America, than the Irish; but not under a cottier system.”<sup>85</sup>

967 Mill rejects the view that there are inherent differences based on race also in  
 968 his debate with Carlyle over the Negro Question. Mill says Carlyle makes the  
 969 vulgar error of “imputing every difference which he finds among human  
 970 beings to an original difference in nature,” and even if there were such differ-  
 971 ences, they create no right to subdue a people (*CW* 21:93). James Hunt,  
 972 founder in 1863 of the Anthropological Society of London, wrote an article  
 973 attacking Mill for not being a racist. Hunt complains that Mill fails to see  
 974 how inferior races are innately unfit, and that their unfitness is transmitted  
 975 hereditarily. He is astonished that Mill cannot understand why a  
 976 “Chinaman, under adequately favorable circumstances, should not become  
 977 as good a sculptor as Phidias, or as inspired a poet as Shakespeare.”<sup>86</sup>

978 Mill thinks that England and other European nations are more advanced  
 979 than societies not yet civilized, not because he thinks their peoples are  
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981  
 982 <sup>85</sup>*PPE* 2:319; cf. *CW* 6:501–2. In a cottier system, terms of contracts for land are deter-  
 983 mined by competition, and rent depends on population growth (*PPE* 2:315).

984 <sup>86</sup>James Hunt, “Race in Legislation and Political Economy,” *Anthropological Review*  
 985 13 (1866): 113–35, 120–21. Hunt’s article is identified by Varouxakis, who argues  
 986 that while Mill may have vaguely pointed to racial origin as a factor in shaping  
 987 national character, Mill’s main point is that these can be changed by institutions, his-  
 988 torical accidents, and effort; see Georgios Varouxakis, “John Stuart Mill on Race,”  
 989 *Utilitas* 10 (1998): 22. Others who reject the view that Mill is a racist include Moore,  
 990 “Mill at East India House,” 518 n. 11; Harris, “Mill: Servant of East India  
 Company,” 201–2; and Robson, “Civilization and Culture,” 340, 357–58.

naturally superior but, I shall argue in the final section, because certain authoritarian institutions were in force in Europe that created the conditions for advancement. Just as Europe once required civilizing institutions, Mill now thinks institutions are needed in India for its advancement, in part to overcome the adverse effects of prior acts of coercion. Those institutions must be despotic in the sense that they pedagogically coerce, promote exclusive programs, and rule without the consent of the governed, but they should not impose power arbitrarily or disregard native rights. Lacking a basis for thinking people in India are inherently incapable of eventual self-government, Mill envisions a day when Indians will govern themselves. Mill advocates not an intolerant despotism, but a despotism to ensure toleration.

## VII. The Imperialism of Mill's Liberalism in East and West

There are limits to the liberty Mill would allow those he regards as not yet civilized. But this is symptomatic of neither a lack of respect for them nor racist attitudes. Mill's willingness to impose a sort of despotism on India is best seen, rather, as a reflection of a tension between liberty and moral development, both of which Mill values, a tension that surfaces also when Mill thinks about the scope of political and social power in civilized societies. While liberty and individuality are, for Mill, conditions of continued moral development, they can come into conflict with the latter because moral development requires instruction, guidance, and other forms of leadership.

Those who reconcile Mill's liberalism and his defense of British imperialism in India by seeing Mill as applying different standards to different sorts of people fail to recognize that Mill defends both liberty and moral development for both East and West, for both the civilized and the not yet civilized. Mill neither defends liberty only for advanced societies nor sees imperialism and liberalism as mutually exclusive. Mill thinks Indians need to be civilized, referring in part to the need to alter and amend nature by overcoming private passions and to respect the rule of law; but Mill speaks of the need to check unrestrained private passions in England as well, where a number of people are still unable clearly to conceive of the rights of others (CW 19:327). Civilized societies such as England need leadership from above in the form of "persons of genius" to guide, to "discover new truths, and point out when what were once truths are true no longer," and to "set the example of more enlightened conduct, and better taste and sense in human life."<sup>87</sup> Their "half-instructed" members ought not to discard all authority and trust solely to their own judgment (SpA, 22:243–44; cf. 234). Mill recognizes, at the same time, the dangers of conforming to traditions and deferring to authority (OL 18:274–75). One of his most powerful statements in *On*

<sup>87</sup>OL 18:267; cf. U 10:211–12; Wendy Donner, *The Liberal Self: J. S. Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

1036 *Liberty* is that “if a person possesses any tolerable amount of common sense  
1037 and experience, his own mode of laying out his existence is the best, not  
1038 because it is the best in itself, but because it is his own mode” (*OL* 18:270).  
1039 While encouraging moral development and acknowledging the need for leader-  
1040 ship, Mill also values individual autonomy.<sup>88</sup> Mill grapples with a tension  
1041 between conflicting but essential values and tries to theorize forms of leader-  
1042 ship that will secure both individuality and moral progress, seeking the  
1043 appropriate mix. Mill sometimes changes his views about the proper mix.<sup>89</sup>

1044 The forms leadership should take differ for civilized and not yet civilized  
1045 societies, in Mill’s view. To achieve civilization, Europe in the Middle Ages  
1046 had the benefit of leadership from above in the form of Christendom,  
1047 which, despite defects that included the burning of heretics, “had at least a  
1048 mission for curbing the unruly passions of mankind” (*SpA*, 22:306). The  
1049 clergy, in addition to preserving all letters and culture, “set the first  
1050 example to Europe of industry conducted on a large scale by free labour”  
1051 (*CW* 20:240). It also was a voice for justice rather than vengeance: Mill  
1052 notes the valiant though unsuccessful effort of the Church, through the  
1053 “Truce of God,” to “mitigate the prevailing brutalities, by a forced suspension  
1054 of acts of vengeance and private war during four days and five nights of every  
1055 week” (*CW* 20:241). In *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill gives  
1056 other examples of institutions that tamed and civilized: the Egyptian  
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1059 <sup>88</sup>That Mill is elitist but not authoritarian has been noted numerous times. See  
1060 Michael McPherson, “Mill’s Moral Theory and the Problem of Preference Change,”  
1061 *Ethics* 92 (1982): 268; Jonathan Riley, “One Simple Principle,” *Utilitas* 3 (1991): 25;  
1062 Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill*, 353; Donner, *Liberal Self*, 129; Bernard Semmel, *J. S. Mill*  
1063 *and the Pursuit of Virtue* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 14; C. L. Ten,  
1064 “Mill and Liberty,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30 (1969): 50–51.

1065 <sup>89</sup>Some of Mill’s essays, most notably “Spirit of the Age,” have been classified by  
1066 Himmelfarb as among the “illiberal” works Mill wrote before coming under the influ-  
1067 ence of Harriet Taylor and after she died, which she contrasts with the “liberal” works  
1068 Mill is said to write under Taylor’s influence. See Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Q5*  
1069 “Introduction,” in *Essays on Politics and Culture* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962);  
1070 cf. Linda Raeder, *John Stuart Mill and the Religion of Humanity* (Columbia: University  
1071 of Missouri, 2002). Rather than endorse Himmelfarb’s “Two Mills” thesis, I see  
1072 Mill’s shifts—sometimes emphasizing the need for authority, sometimes emphasizing  
1073 the need to resist authority and promote individuality, as his grappling with a commit-  
1074 ment to conflicting values, seeking the right mix. In rejecting the “Two Mills” thesis I  
1075 follow Ten, “Mill and Liberty”; Peter Berkowitz, “Mill: Liberty, Virtue, and the  
1076 Discipline of Individuality,” in *Mill and the Moral Character of Liberalism*, ed. Eldon J.  
1077 Eisenach (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1998); Donner, *Liberal*  
1078 *Self*; McPherson, “Mill’s Moral Theory”; William Stafford, *John Stuart Mill*  
1079 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 20–21; Semmel, *Mill and the Pursuit of Virtue*,  
1080 4–5, 10–13; and even Joseph Hamburger, who argues that Mill is consistently illiberal,  
in *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,  
1999), 212–13.



1081 hierarchy, the paternal despotisms of China, and the “precious unorganized  
 1082 institution” of the Order of Prophets that kept up upon the ancient Jews an  
 1083 “antagonism of influences which is the only real security for continued pro-  
 1084 gress” (RG 19: 396–97). Mill notes that the Egyptian hierarchies and paternal  
 1085 despots of China were fit instruments for bringing Egypt and China to a more  
 1086 civilized state, but they came to a permanent halt for “want of mental liberty  
 1087 and individuality” (RG 19:396). “Systematic antagonisms” of the sort pro-  
 1088 vided by the Order of Prophets are necessary for a society to be permanently  
 1089 in a condition of both stability and progressiveness (CW 20:269). Europe  
 1090 achieved this essential “complex and manifold character of life” because it  
 1091 was not “free from a contest of rival powers for dominion over society.”  
 1092 Europe was able to coordinate action “among rival powers naturally  
 1093 tending in different directions,” and this was the chief cause of “the spirit  
 1094 of improvement” (CW 20:269–70). The salutary and indispensable influence  
 1095 in Europe of the Christian clergy became the parent of liberty because the  
 1096 spiritual and temporal were kept separate. For many centuries, the Catholic  
 1097 clergy did exert control, and doubters were abhorred. While during this  
 1098 time they were able to help parts of Europe reach a civilized state by “teach-  
 1099 ing [mankind] to set a value upon a distant end, paramount to immediate  
 1100 temptations,” their civilizing influence was checked because their lack of tol-  
 1101 eration became an obstacle to further improvement (SpA 22:304–307). The  
 1102 ascendancy of the Catholic clergy was desired “for that day” despite their  
 1103 great and flagrant vices, but the further progress of European civilization  
 1104 required that the reformation and toleration arise in the more advanced com-  
 1105 munities of Europe (SpA 22:306–7; cf. CW 20:273). Mill contrasts the historical  
 1106 developments in Europe with the dominance of “Mussulmans of old,” who  
 1107 succeeded in merging the supreme religious authority with the temporal,  
 1108 with the result that their society stagnated (CW 20:270); and with the condition  
 1109 of the Hindoos and Turks, who “subdued the minds of the possessors of  
 1110 worldly power,” thereby excluding “the possibility of material conflict of  
 1111 opinion” and accounting for those communities being “stationary” (SpA 22:305).

1112 Europe having achieved a civilized state with systematic antagonisms, the  
 1113 form of leadership appropriate to it is different than the form appropriate for  
 1114 India, where because of prior despotisms and the effects of some of the pre-  
 1115 vailing religions, Mill believes a space still needs to be created for clashes  
 1116 and antagonism that are essential for moral progress. Mill sees that the  
 1117 English working class should not be “treated like children” even though  
 1118 he had an unfavorable view of their character, and he comes to argue that  
 1119 they should represent their own class and speak for themselves.  
 1120 Furthermore, members of Parliament can learn from them if they were given  
 1121 a voice; he is not willing to say the same yet of the people in India.<sup>90</sup> But he  
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1124 <sup>90</sup>CW 3: 763, cited in Janice Carlisle, “Mr. J. Stuart Mill, M. P. and the Character of the  
 1125 Working Class,” in Eisenach, 152; Carlisle, 164–67.

1126 endorses pedagogical coercion in both East and West. Even the representative  
 1127 government he advocates for the civilized, including its less refined classes,  
 1128 harbors elements of imperium in demanding only that people voice their  
 1129 ideas, “right and wrong,” but not guaranteeing their proposals are accepted.<sup>91</sup>

1130 Mill works out the tension between liberty and moral development in his  
 1131 writings about British rule in India by defending tolerant imperialism.  
 1132 Tolerant imperialism is, nevertheless, imperialism. One might think that  
 1133 any characterization of imperialism that appears sympathetic, such as  
 1134 Mill’s, will only encourage imperialists and can be used to cover all manner  
 1135 of sins. That is a risk I hope is outweighed by the potential benefit, in correct-  
 1136 ing misrepresentations of Mill, of refocusing debate about the relation of lib-  
 1137 eralism to Empire. The issue we should address with Mill in mind is whether  
 1138 it is a good idea to interfere in the affairs of other states in order to promote  
 1139 legal rights, respect and toleration for conflicting viewpoints and ways of life,  
 1140 and a commercial society that can cope with natural threats, given that such  
 1141 interference may threaten the hegemony of existing forms of life in which  
 1142 people have deeply invested identities but perhaps fewer alternatives,  
 1143 rather than the issue—false where Mill is concerned—of whether the West  
 1144 should forcibly reshape the rest of the world in its own image.<sup>92</sup>

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1169 <sup>91</sup>Carlisle, “Mill and the Character of the Working Class,” 158.

1170 <sup>92</sup>