

Progress, Civilization, and Consent

[A] Greek observing such a culture: he would perceive that for modern man “educated” and “historically educated” seem to belong together as to mean one and the same thing. . . . If he then said that one can be very educated and yet at the same time altogether uneducated historically, modern men would think they had failed to hear him aright and would shake their heads.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, “On the Uses and Disadvantages
of History for Life”

[A] thought must be crude to come into its own in action.

WALTER BENJAMIN, review of *Dreigroschenroman*

History and progress are an unremitting preoccupation of nineteenth-century British liberalism. Yet the political vision that governed that liberalism was, as it were, already firmly universal. Philosophically there is a dilemma here. Either the validity of that political vision could not be swayed by historical considerations or the liberal agenda was in some central way directed at the “reform” and modification of the various histories it encountered, so as to make them conform to that universalistic vision. Because if the particularities and trajectories of the histories and lives to which the empire exposed liberals did not somehow already align themselves with that vision, then either that vision had to be acknowledged as limited in its reach or those recalcitrant and deviant histories had to be realigned to comport with it. Liberals consistently opted for the latter—that is to say, “reform” was indeed central to the liberal agenda and mind-set. To that end they deployed a particular conception of what really constituted history along with a related view of what counted as progress. Moreover, they articulated reasons why such a process of realignment of other extant life forms was consistent with their broader vision. Those reasons and the practices that followed from them make it clear that the commitment to democracy and pluralism were, at best, only provisional motives that allowed—indeed required—enormous temporizing in the face of the “backward” and the unfamiliar.

This chapter considers the ideas regarding progress and historical development that inform the broad political structure within which liberals conceived of India in the nineteenth century. Its focus is on James and John Stuart Mill, who successively influenced imperial policy in the two halves of the century. As examiners of Indian dispatches in the East India Company, they were both intimately involved with the minutiae of the government and the company's policies on Indian matters.¹ My focus is less on the policies that they effected and more on how they conceptualized India and its past within the broader terms of their political thought.

As I hope will become clear the conceptualization of India within this framework is itself only an instance of a larger problematic that turns on a commitment to progress. This conceptualization requires an identification of those whose past and present did not align themselves with the expectations of that view of progress,—that is, those who were deemed to be “backward”—and consequently the need and justification of a power to bring about such a progressive alignment.

This is the ambit within which liberal power did, and perhaps must, operate. To call this ambit political is simply to refer to it by the name through which liberalism has chosen to express the imperative nature of its own specific energy. After all, notwithstanding the various specific limitations that are placed on its deployment, ever since Hobbes and Locke the use of political power was conceptually justified the instant it satisfied what were then deemed the directives of progress, namely a concern with the security of corporeal life, the preservation of property, and the maintenance of public order. Whether it be through Locke's understanding of the uses of the “prerogative” or the broad latitude he allows for matters that might involve national security,² or simply through a more general Schmittian notion, which liberalism also allows room for, of the sovereign determining the exception, liberals have always associated political power with that capacious imperative for the betterment of life. It is not that this imperative univocally directs liber-

1. The richest account of the policy impact that the Mills had in India, which is also aware of the theoretical position that informed their outlooks, remains, I think, Stokes, *English Utilitarians in India*. The more recent book by Lynn Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), brings to light some of the vast archival material pertaining to Mill's involvement with India and chronicles the significant changes in Mill's thinking. See also Eileen Sullivan, “Liberalism and Imperialism: John Stuart Mill's Defence of the British Empire,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, no. 4 (1983): 599–617.

2. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, chaps. 12–16.

alism's programmatic and practical energies. There is after all a tradition of equal longevity and emphasis in which liberals have sought to limit the role of political power from specific issues or "zones," such as the family, religious belief, self-regarding actions, including of course the various specific rights and constitutional protections that liberals have championed as debarred from the interference of the state.

Historically there has been an enduring and pressing tension between these two liberal impulses. The stronger the claims for a particular intervention being progressive, or bettering life, the more it has pressed against the existing norms limiting the use of political power. And in that sense such claims have served to expand, and justify the expansion of, the domain of the political. The important point is that in determining the specific tilt between these two impulses at any given moment the arguments for the betterment of life or progress have always held a strong if not trumping suit.³ Indeed, the common cant "everything is political," which is not exclusive to liberalism, has served as a powerful engine of progress within the history of liberal practice precisely because the claims of progress have a presumptive appeal on the liberal conception of the political.

I have said in the introduction that the posture of liberal thought toward the world is judgmental. It is a corollary, if not a concrete implication, of this idea that it is also an evangelical posture in which the burning spirit has been that of politics and the eschatology that of progress.⁴ What is latent in the liberal conception of the political is a deep impulse to reform the world, and not simply, as is suggested for example by Mill's principle of liberty or the spectrum of rights that are com-

3. While referring to the nineteenth century, Michel Foucault makes the following comment:

It was life more than the law that became the issue of political struggles, even if the latter were formulated through affirmations concerning rights. The "right" to life, to one's body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs, . . . the "right"—which the classical juridical system was utterly incapable of comprehending—was the political response to all these new procedures of power which did not derive, either, from the traditional right of sovereignty. (*History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley [New York: Pantheon Books, 1978], 145)

4. This formulation is not meant to glide over the important differences that divide eschatology, or Christian eschatology, from a largely secular conception of progress. The former typically refers to a transcendent and anticipated event breaking into history while the latter is an extrapolation in history of a structure already found in it. See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 27–37.

monly defended, to free individual lives from the unwarranted interference of the world. This view of course diminishes the customary distinction that is drawn between liberalism and other expressions of modern political thought such as Marxism. But here Marxism and liberalism share in a transformative energy and in a view of the world as something malleable through political effort. Their distinctiveness does not vitiate this similarity by virtue of which both are exemplars of a distinctive modern turn of thought.

Given the constitutive nature of this impulse to better the world, there is a necessary tension with other liberal notions such as tolerance, the right to representation, equality, and, crucially for the purposes of this chapter, consent and the sovereignty of the people. In the empire, this latent impulse—this urge to reform and progress—which otherwise so often remains obscured and contested behind a concern with rights and individual freedom, becomes virtually determinative and singular. Here one sees with stark clarity the sense in which the liberal imperialist project was paradigmatically political in the capacious sense, and not as an instance of the various ways that liberals have sought to limit the domain of the political. It has been said of utopian projections that they are attempts to compensate for a deficit of political opportunities so that the imagined becomes a surrogate for what is not immanent.⁵ By the mid-nineteenth century, and especially in the context of the empire, this thought assumes a strangely inverted truth such that the utopian comes to be expressed as inexhaustible political opportunity, made possible by a projection on the progressive plane of the future.

The contrast to this perspective, which links the political with the restlessness of progressive activity and where the progressive is itself associated with a broad notion of whatever better life, is not simply a view that accepts regress, tragedy, evil, or suffering as facts about the world, which it is therefore pointless to try and change. That is to say, the contrast is not simply with the fatalism of Epicurean *ataraxia* (quietude) with its fundamental indifference to the world stemming from the essential inscrutability of its *ratio creandi* (reason for creation). Such a perspective is only one possible contrasting view. But there is at least one other alternative that limits the reach of the political, or, more precisely, is substantially indifferent to the political, but does this by emphasizing the ethical as the more decisive feature of life. But within this perspective there is no a priori limit placed on change nor even the bet-

5. Reinhart Koselleck, *Kritik und Krise: Ein Beitrag zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1959), 9.

terment of the world. What is limited is the political as the principal or exclusive instrument to achieve such results. I flag this alternative because, as I hope to make clear at the end of this chapter, it is one that gathers enormous weight, primarily through the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, in dislodging the liberal argument that was grounded on the political conditionalities of historical progress, writ large in terms of civilizational typologies. When Gandhi speaks of progress it is invariably as an ethical relationship that an individual or a community has with itself, with others, and with its deities.⁶ Whatever else this does, it cuts through any reliance on history as the register from which alone progress can be read, evaluated, and directed. As an aside it must be pointed out that despite his stature and his influence, Gandhi's voice is the minor key of Indian and most other nationalisms—in part because he was never exclusively or even primarily concerned with nationalism. Nevertheless, it represents a profound and deeply thought response to and critique of the liberal emphasis on history and the primacy of political action, both of which were alloyed in the liberal justification of the empire.

What this chapter seeks to illustrate is the following. For nineteenth-century British liberalism, of which I take J. S. Mill to be the leading exemplar and James Mill a supporting advocate, political institutions such as representative democracy are dependent on societies having reached a particular historical maturation or level of civilization. But such maturation, according to the historiography that the Mills establish and subscribe to, is differentially achieved. That is to say, progress in history itself occurs differentially. Hence, those societies in which the higher accomplishments of civilization have not occurred plainly do not satisfy the conditions for representative government. Under such conditions liberalism in the form of the empire services the deficiencies of the past for societies that have been stunted through history.

This in brief is the liberal justification of the empire. The tutorial

6. There is something quite Hegelian and Wittgensteinian in Gandhi's critique of liberal historicism and in his privileging of the ethical. Gandhi's and Hegel's universalistic ethics stems from an endorsement of a way of life. It is only, as Charles Larmore puts it when referring to Hegel, "by virtue of belonging to this way of life [that] we reason in ethics as we do and judge social practices in the name of universalistic principles." Charles Larmore, *The Romantic Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 55. This link between Gandhi and Hegel does not close the enormous gap between them when it comes to nationalism. Hegel famously tried to squeeze the moral community into a national frame. This is something that Gandhi fairly consistently resists.

and pedagogic obsession of the empire and especially of liberal imperialists are all part of the effort to move societies along the ascending gradient of historical progress. The empire, one might say, is an engine that tows societies stalled in their past into contemporary time and history. But the conception on the basis of which progress is itself established as a *summum bonum*, and which allows for this particular reading of history, derives centrally from premises about reason as the appropriate yardstick for judging individual and collective lives.

What is significant in this account is that for both the Mills civilizational achievement, which is paradigmatically the work of collectivities, is the necessary condition for the realization of the progressive purposes immanent in history, and hence of its continued progress. Notwithstanding the expressed commitment, both as an ideal and as a process, to the idea of man-made history and to individual choice, it is the “stage of civilization” that is taken as the relevant marker of the progressive possibilities within “the reach” of a given community at any point in time. The unit of analysis for accessing backwardness and progress is plainly some understanding of the achievements of a community or collectivity. Within this orientation individual lives, their pains and joys, the meanings they attach to particular things and events, in short, the integrity of their life forms, are completely read out of the civilization or collectivity of which they are deemed to be a part and its standing within a preestablished scale.

UNIVERSAL HISTORIES

The period from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century is the high noon of European historiography. It is the century in which the great, usually multivolume, histories by Gibbon, Ferguson, Hume, Condorcet, Guizot, Herder, Ranke, Hallam, James Mill, Macaulay, and Comte were written and published. In their various distinct purposes, they served the imperatives of nationalism, secularism, the defense of particular classes, sects, political parties, and imperialism. Despite the plurality of ends that these grand exemplars vouch for, the underlying perspective of this tradition is cosmopolitan and global. Even the Romantic movement, especially in its German expression, which has so often been accused of being parochial in its German *Historismus* and national in its commitment, evinces a global sweep in the comparisons that it makes. The same is true for James Mill’s *History of British India*, where the comparisons and contrasts with China, Roman Britain, the Arabs, and Persia are constant and self-conscious. At least in the writing

of it, and more often than not in the choice of subject matter, by the mid-nineteenth century, European history is firmly global in its orientation.⁷ What makes possible and undergirds this orientation is not simply the expanded exposure brought on by increases in trade, travel, wars, and the reach of empires. After all, the singular, the bounded, or the parochial have never had difficulties acknowledging what lay beyond their boundaries. A global orientation, such as that evinced in nineteenth-century historiography and philosophy, requires a global perspective. That perspective, as was discussed in the introduction, derived from an epistemological view that allowed the world to be read abstracted from its concrete aesthetic and emotive particulars and nevertheless issued in a firmness of judgment with respect to those particulars. That perspective draws on, and endorses, what Hans Blumenberg has rightly called a “unity of methodically regulated theory as a coherent entity developing independently of individuals and generations.”⁸ In the development of that view of theory, Descartes is the crucial figure, and his influence is no less evident in the thought of a group of thinkers commonly designated as empiricists. It is this theoretical orientation that is “usable in any possible world [that] provides the criterion for the elementary exertions of the modern age: The *mathematizing* and the *materializing* of nature.”⁹

History, of course, is never merely the narration of the past. By the eighteenth century, and with unveiled clarity in the nineteenth, it is also a chosen battleground on which the Enlightenment carries out its multi-pronged mission against religion, superstition, and ignorance and affirms its conception of progress. For this project, in which the writing of history plays a conspicuous role, education, as an instrument of progress, is a central component. It is not, however, merely the education of the

7. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1955). For the English tradition see T. P. Peardon, *The Transition in English Historical Writing, 1760–1830* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933).

The claim of a global or universal orientation does not of course settle the issue of universal understanding. The great twentieth-century German historian Friedrich Meinecke with his penetrating understanding of political ideologies was, I think, prescient in claiming that the Enlightenment had “eine Richtung auf das Universale, die ganze Menschheit Umfassende an, aber ergriff . . . mehr den Stoff als das Innenleben der geschichtlichen Gebilde.” Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*.

8. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 31.

9. Ibid., 164. See also Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry*, esp. chap. 1.

single individual, the protagonist, for example, of the *bildungsroman*, but of societies in toto.¹⁰ History and education work in tandem. In the former, one detects the plan of progress for which the latter is the catalytic motor and extension. Even when as with Kant's "An Idea for a Universal History from the Cosmopolitan Point of View" the plan or the teleology can never be affirmed as a scientific law, the idea of a plan to history and the conviction in its progressiveness are never surrendered.

Both notions, namely that of history as having a plan and of that plan representing progress, are combined in the almost compulsive obsession of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historiography with the pedagogic analogy linking grades in schooling with "stages" of historical development. It is the special achievement of Turgot, Condorcet, and Comte—the first two being profound influences on James Mill, the last on John Stuart Mill—to have mapped the idea of historical progress onto the notion of the stages of human development.¹¹ By the late nineteenth century, there are of course a plurality of grand narratives, such as evolutionism, utilitarianism, and evangelicalism, that undergird the universalism of the century's historiography. This cosmopolitanism, which is anchored in the problematic of universal history, decisively breaks with the ancient world, where, even when the ideal of cosmopolitanism is present, as with the Stoics, it is not understood within the framework of universal history.¹² Cosmopolitanism without the problematic of universal history generates and aspires to an ethics, but it does not issue in a program of paternalism and interventionist collective action.¹³

It is within this broad framework, committed both to cosmopolitanism and to progress, that late nineteenth-century European political thought also expresses itself. All the major streams of this thought were explicitly and emphatically reliant on history as the ground for their various normative visions. Hegel's articulation of the State as the em-

10. See Louis Dumont, *German Ideology: From France to Germany and Back* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 69–145.

11. Halevy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, 251–82.

12. Karl Lowith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Presuppositions of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), chap. 1.

13. Here again, as I discuss in the conclusion to this chapter, there is a striking similarity to Gandhi's views. His cosmopolitanism is ethical in a way that neither allows for a reliance on history nor leans on political action as the primary deliverer of progress. Political action, including mass action, such as in the noncooperation movement of the early 1920s, was countenanced only when it remained within a strictly ethical framework anchored, for Gandhi, in a commitment to truth and non-violence.

bodiment of a concrete ethical rationality represents the realization of a journey of Reason that originated in the distant recesses of “the East.”¹⁴ Marx’s vision of a proletarian future has its explanatory and political credence in overcoming the contrarian forces that bedevil and spur history. John Stuart Mill’s ideal of a liberalism that secures the conditions for the flourishing of individuality, and in doing so maximizes utility, explicitly rests on having reached a point of civilizational progress “when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion.” “Liberty, as a principle,” Mill says, “has no application to any state of things anterior to [that] time.”¹⁵ By way of contrast, it is worth noting the change this points to with respect to liberalism’s own theoretical origins. Talk of history and civilizational development as a ground for the individualistic foundations of political power and liberal institutions is conspicuously absent in the thought of Hobbes and Locke. Their thought is no doubt universalistic, but despite that, it is substantially indifferent to pressing its judgments on the world. The universalism of this earlier liberalism remains abstract, and the political judgments implicit in it exist as a latent potential.

For Hegel, Marx, and Mill, history is both the condition for the possibility of progress and the evidentiary basis of what that progress should be. As Hans Blumenberg puts it, “[T]he idea of progress extrapolates from a structure present in every moment to a future that is immanent in history.”¹⁶ Both the immanence of the future that is present in history and the structure that is exemplified by the present are themselves given the cast of progress by a prior commitment to a rationality that identifies in the past and in the present the progressive extension into the future.

Numerous aspects inform the conception of rationality and the attendant notion of progress. Here I mention only two whose importance is conspicuous to Marx and to Mill, and in a more complex manner evident in Hegel, too. The first is the notion of a history as something that is man-made. Obviously this view informs the Marxian notion of praxis and the liberal commitment to individual choice and consent. The second, which is closely linked with the idea of history as man-made, is that of history’s predictability. Both notions attenuate without firmly contradicting the Judeo-Christian notion of a Providence as something superintended by divine purposes, in which human actions

14. Of course because philosophy always “comes too late,” in contrast to Marx and Mill, Hegel’s reliance on history does not generate a program of action.

15. Mill, *On Liberty*, 16.

16. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 30.

and human perceptions are only contingently secure in serving the ends of progress. It is of course possible that the plan of Providence corresponds perfectly with the imperatives of human rationality and the motivations that spur human actions. But such a correspondence would be merely a contingent happenstance of divine ordering. The disjuncture that Enlightenment rationality and historiography introduces into this Judeo-Christian conception is best elaborated by Kant when he speaks of an “a priori possible description of the events that should come to pass” in the future, because the “soothsaying historical narration of what is impending in the future” is theoretically informed by a subject who is at the same time the practical origin of that future—“But how is an a priori history possible? Answer: When the soothsayer himself causes and contrives the events that he proclaims in advance.”¹⁷

The idea that human history is man-made and predictable is itself no guarantee of its being progressive. Nor is the fact that progress is allegedly anchored in history evidence of progress, or of what should count as progress. Notwithstanding the Hegelian, the Marxian, and the liberal attempts to inscribe in the logic of historical development the precise progressive telos of history, and thus as it were read it off from the surface of events, the account of progress must be normatively justified on its own terms. Put differently, one must approach the issue of progress with suspicion, precisely because in the nineteenth century the plurality of agendas that it embodies and of which it is so often a surrogate are naturalized by the powerful and seductive emollient of history, by now wrapped in the paraphernalia of scientific “laws,” “rules” of evidence, and the necessary “logic” of development. Whatever one might think of Nietzsche’s general derogation of the “excess of history,” one cannot, at least provisionally, doubt the suspicion he casts on “that admiration for the ‘power of history’ which in practice transforms every moment into a naked admiration for success and leads to idolatry of the factual” and in which “talk of a ‘world process’ [only] justify their age as the necessary result of a ‘world process.’”¹⁸ Nietzsche’s view implies—and this is easy to overlook given what he is typically associated with—that the world is also made for losers or, at any rate, those who might live within life forms that get designated with losers. To them the excess

17. Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, 2:2, quoted in Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 34.

18. Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 103–4.

of history, indeed the very reliance on history as a marker of progress or even of what is fated, might very well have been experienced as a ruse that merely denied a life form within which they lived.

Perhaps nowhere is the suspicion for a naked admiration of success, couched in the language of historical necessity, or at any rate of historically sanctioned guidance, more necessary than in the context of the empire. By the nineteenth century every major justification of the raj rests on the dual props of progress for India and a history that makes evident the need for such progress, along with the accompanying claim that such progress can be brought about only through the political interdictions of the empire. If notions such as the legitimacy of conquest, the primacy of the economic self-interest of Britain, or even the imperial right of Britain on account of its rivalries with other European powers undergird Britain's imperial policies, they are expressed in the closed and hushed councils of power, or in the concealed psychological depths of individual men and women. When on occasion, as with Lord Curzon, the viceroy of India, the empire was justified in terms of the bravado of British imperial destiny, it resulted in embarrassment and the tainting of a distinguished career.¹⁹ The dynamism of the empire is so thoroughly wedded to the betterment of the world that it is easy to see why the deployment of power despite its acknowledged and sustained abuses (as for example in the cases of Robert Clive and Warren Hastings), and the often wholesale erasure of extant life forms, could have been countenanced as justified by a higher purpose. The same reason also goes some way to explaining why in a figure like Burke, who has the profoundest suspicions regarding the very project of bettering the world through the radical interventions of political power, the empire finds its severest critic. It is Burke's puzzlement and, ultimately, his humility in the face of the present, and not his reverence for the past, that give him pause in lending his hand to a political optimism that has been a central tenet of liberalism from its very inception.

JAMES MILL AND *THE HISTORY OF BRITISH INDIA*

By the late eighteenth century the empire was a serious matter, politically and morally, and not merely economically. In the numerous public and parliamentary debates regarding the precise relationship of the East India Company to the crown, the issue of the broader historical and

19. See Nicolson, *Curzon: The Last Phase*.

edificatory role of the company is never absent. By the nineteenth century, and conspicuously with both the Mills and Macaulay, the British Empire in India is understood squarely from within the normative framework of liberal thought, along with its reliance on history and civilizational standing, where both were understood as linked to the imperatives of progress.²⁰ When, as is often the case, as for instance with J. S. Mill, India is singled out for distinctive treatment relative to other outposts of the empire or to Britain itself, it is on account of a distinctiveness again allegedly internal to this broad historical and progressive liberal vision and its reading of India's past.²¹ Indeed, the primary and explicit obsession of James Mill's *History* is to establish the civilizational stage to which India's extant condition corresponded. John Stuart Mill, because he did not write a history of India, is less preoccupied with the precise logistics of establishing or presenting the details of such a civilizational hierarchy. Nevertheless, the normative commitments of his thought make it clear that he believed in the existence of such a hierarchy and that it played a crucial role in determining his political outlook on the various parts of the empire; indeed, it played a crucial role in his assessment of political life in Britain and elsewhere.

The concern with civilizational stages is, as I have suggested, the particular form through which the preoccupation with history and progress gets expressed. In the case of the younger Mill, the conception of progress is clear. With respect to the individual it refers to a life in which the "higher quality faculties," which themselves define the fullness of individuality, get expressed. Politically and socially, it refers to the conditions under which individuality finds expression, and these conditions include, barring those that are explicitly excepted and on which I focus, the commitment to representative democracy and other egalitarian institutional arrangements.²² The combination of a concern

20. John Plamenatz, *On Alien Rule and Self-Government* (London: Longmans, 1960), 102–4.

21. For example in J. S. Mill's discussion in the chapter on "Government of Dependencies" in *Considerations*. Perhaps the most articulate nineteenth-century statement of this broad view is that of Walter Bagehot in *Physics and Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956). See esp. chap. 2, "The Use of Conflict."

22. Isaiah Berlin, "John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life" in *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); Richard Wollheim, "John Stuart Mill and Isaiah Berlin: Ends of Life and the Preliminaries of Morality," in *The Idea of Freedom*, ed. Alan Ryan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 253–69; Wendy Donner, *The Liberal Self* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); John Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill* (London: Routledge, 1989), 248–388; John and Lane Robson, eds.,

with individuality, the choice of life plans, all nested within a democracy realizes the progressive purpose of maximizing utility.²³

The specific context in which James Mill's *History* was written, and to which it made a decisive and transforming contribution, was an atmosphere of growing admiration for the civilizations of the East. With respect to India, Sir William Jones, the pioneer and champion of Sanskrit studies and India's civilizational richness, was the leading protagonist of this point of view and of the partisans called the Orientalists, who were opposed by the Anglicists. In the early stages of the conflict between the Orientalists and Anglicists, Jones and his epigones had considerable influence on the policies of the company.²⁴ For example, the company supported Hindu and Muslim places of worship, its troops paraded in honor of Hindu deities, and company offices were often open on Sundays and closed on Indian holidays.²⁵

It was this Orientalist view toward Indian civilization and the policies that followed from it that James Mill along with Macaulay decisively revised in the first third of the nineteenth century. They were supported by the powerful Governor General Lord William Bentinck, himself a self-avowed follower of Mill, whose disparagement of India's historical legacy went so far as seriously to consider demolishing the Taj Mahal for the sale of its marble.²⁶ James Mill's influence in bringing about this sea change, primarily through the publication of his *History*, was enormous. The *History* became the standard and mandatory manual for officials of the company and eventually a required textbook for candidates for the elite corps of senior administrators in the Indian Civil Service. The editor of the 1840 edition of the *History*, H. H. Wilson, in his preface, passed the following judgment: "there is reason to fear that . . . a harsh and illiberal spirit has of late years prevailed in the conduct

James and John Stuart Mill: Papers of the Centenary Conference (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

23. See Mill, *On Liberty*; and Mill, *Utilitarianism*, in Mill and Bentham, *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*.

24. See Stokes, *English Utilitarians in India*, chaps. 1, 2.

25. Duncan Forbes, "James Mill and India," *Cambridge Journal*, no. 5 (1951): 22. See also Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Origins of the Bengal Renaissance*; and Stokes, *English Utilitarians in India*, xi–80.

26. The plan was finally abandoned because the "test auction" of marble from the palace in Agra proved to be unsatisfactory. See E. Thompson and G. T. Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India* (London, 1934), for a discussion of Anglicist attitudes toward India in the 1820s and 1830s.

and councils of the rising service in India, which owes its origin to impressions imbibed in early life from the *History* of Mr. Mill.”²⁷ Indeed, even Macaulay, who despite his scathing review of James Mill’s *Essay on Government*, and who had referred to Mill as “my old enemy,” praised the *History* in Parliament as “on the whole the greatest historical work which has appeared in our language since that of Gibbon.”²⁸

As is clear from the statement quoted above by H. H. Wilson, even by the mid-nineteenth century, the severity of James Mill’s prejudices against India and especially against the Hindus (in book 2 of the *History*) were recognized. Even by the standards of the times, Mill’s views were, to put it mildly, extreme. An entire civilization, with its ancient religious moorings, its artistic and cultural production, its complex legal system, its cosmology, and its science, are dismissed as representing the “rudest and weakest state of the human mind.”²⁹ Mill considers with great seriousness, and no doubt through taxing effort, the ancient scriptures of Hindu mythology, only to conclude that “[t]his is precisely the course which a wild and ignorant mind, regarding only the wonder which it has it in view to excite, naturally, in such cases, and almost universally, pursues.”³⁰ Mill’s emphasis on the backwardness of the Indian “mind” anticipates and prepares the way for what becomes the Indian response to this claim. It is to associate the modern not with the social or the political, but rather to index it to thought, especially philosophic thought. In the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries Indians often complimented themselves in language that resonates with a frequent refrain of Marx when he says that the Germans have done in thought what the British have done in fact.

Mill’s views regarding India, its past and its present, are so unremittingly dark, often so pathetically foolish in their lack of nuance, that it is hard to believe that even he would have spent over ten years of his life gathering them had he not been motivated by a more serious purpose. It is similarly difficult at this distance, and with the advantage of the postcolonial experience, to imagine how his narrative could have acquired the enormous influence that it did. In this context one should remind oneself that imperial narratives, perhaps all narratives, especially those of power, lose their effectivity in proportion to how complex they become. James Mill’s *History* is a vivid example of the truth of Walter

27. Preface to *History of British India*, 4th ed. (1840), 1:viii–ix.

28. Quoted in Forbes, “James Mill and India,” 23.

29. Mill, *History of British India*, 1:115.

30. *Ibid.*, 118.

Benjamin's remark that "a thought must be crude to come into its own in action."³¹

Nevertheless, Mill was in fact motivated by a more philosophically serious purpose, and that was to establish on rational grounds a clear scale of civilizational hierarchies. This is how Mill introduces the important and wide-ranging chapter entitled "General Reflections" in book 2 of the *History*:

To ascertain the true state of the Hindus in the scale of civilization, is not only an object of curiosity in the history of human nature; but to the people of Great Britain, charged as they are with the government of that great portion of the human species, it is an object of the highest practical importance. No scheme of government can happily conduce to the ends of government, unless it is adapted to the state of the people for whose use it is intended. In those diversities in the state of civilization, which approach the extremes, this truth is universally acknowledged. Should anyone propose, for a band of roving Tartars, the regulations adapted to the happiness of a regular and polished society, he would meet with neglect or derision. The inconveniences are only more concealed, and more or less diminished, when the error relates to states of society which more nearly resemble one another. If the mistake in regard to Hindu society, committed by the British nation, and the British government, be very great; if they have conceived the Hindus to be a people of high civilization, while they have, in reality, made but a few of the earliest steps in the progress to civilization, it is impossible that in many of the measures pursued for the government of that people, the mark aimed at should not have been wrong.³²

Whatever satisfaction ethnographic "curiosity" may get from knowing the precise location of Hindus in the scale of civilization, it is the imperatives of imperial governance that motivate and give urgency to this project. But those imperatives are themselves revealingly presented in impersonal terms, because they are driven by an abstract conception of "usefulness" and "happiness." Mill's sensitivity to the appropriateness of

31. Walter Benjamin, review of *Dreigroschenroman*, quoted in Hannah Arendt, introduction to *Illuminations*, by Benjamin, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 15.

32. Mill, *History of British India*, 2:107.

forms of governance to the forms of society stems from a prior commitment to a univocal conception of progress. In fact, even though it is tempting to read the above passage as merely an apologia for British imperial interests, Mill's ultimate interest is neither with the British nor with the Hindus, but rather with a "civilized" life that represents progress. This is precisely what Mill goes on to make clear:

The preceding induction of particulars, embracing the religion, the laws, the government, the manners, the arts, the sciences, the literature, of the Hindus, affords, it is presumed, the materials, from which a correct judgment may, at last, be formed of their progress towards the high attainments of civilised life.³³

The reference to induction is very important, and is a clue to a broader problem that Mill was attempting to solve through his *History*. The problem was inherited from Bentham. For the latter, the establishing of the science of legislation had always faced the awkward issue of the effect of prejudices and customs on legislation. Bentham in his *Essay on the Influence of Time and Place in Legislation* had attempted to address the issue by considering the case of Bengal: "To a law-giver, who having been brought up with English notions, shall have learned how to accommodate his laws to the circumstances of Bengal, no other part of the globe can present a difficulty."³⁴ Even though Bentham acknowledged that "he who attacks prejudice wantonly and without necessity and he who suffers himself to be led blindfolded a slave to it, equally miss the line of reason."³⁵ Benthamite legislators had to "be possessed fully of the facts, to be informed of the local situation, the climate, the bodily constitution, the manners, the legal customs, the religion of those with whom they have to deal."³⁶ From Bentham's point of view, customs, prejudices, indeed the entire array of ethnographic conditions, were relevant to the science of legislation. Their presence constituted a problem that had to be "humored," because there was no getting around customs or the particular facts of a legislative situation. It is therefore not at all clear that the particulars of a situation were a source of great worry or embarrassment to Bentham, the father of the science of legislation. But for Mill, in contrast, local conditions, that is, the very facts

33. Ibid., 107–8.

34. Jeremy Bentham, *Essay on the Influence of Time and Place in Legislation*, in *Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. Bowring, 1:172.

35. Ibid., 180.

36. Ibid.

of history, placed a limit on the scientific aspirations of legislation and theory in general. To this problem of history, Mill offered a philosophy of history as the solution. Following his labors in writing the *History of British India* there would, in a real sense, be no need to engage with the murky facts of history.

This is the problem Mill was attempting to solve and that he believed he had solved.³⁷ If, in fact, a firm line of civilizational progress, or the “scale of nations,” could be inductively established, then the Benthamite legislator-scientist would not have to humor customs or engage with local conditions. A clear scale of civilizational development would tell the legislator precisely what was below and what was above for any civilization under consideration. There would be no need, for example, to get weighed down—as Bentham had, following his study of Montesquieu’s theory of climatic relevance—by the consideration of Bengal’s climate. For once it had been established that “the savage is listless and indolent under every climate,” the issue could conveniently be factored out of the relevant considerations.³⁸ Ironically the facts of history become the basis for establishing a theory of history and governance, which in turn obviates the need to engage with the facts of history.

As it was, the “induction of particulars” played no role in Mill’s scale of civilization. The standard of valuation was not crafted from a view of the particulars of Hindu or any other civilization. It was found ready-made in the commitment to the simplicity valorized by Newtonian science, in the principles of laissez-faire economics, in the abhorrence of anything other than deist religiosity, and in the general convictions of utilitarianism. In fact, in his *Essay on Government*, Mill had rejected the “experience test,” i.e., induction, and following the lead of Ricardo had expressed a strong preference for deduction as the basis of arriving at an evaluative standard. Halevy is, I think, quite right in claiming that the *History* was in fact part of the Scottish tradition of writing “conjectural history.”³⁹ This form of history had strictly been applied to places, periods, or situations where evidence or documents were lacking, where, in a sense, experience was not at issue, and that therefore allowed and required conjecture to fill in the gaps and to offer an explanatory narrative. It was therefore widely used in geology and archaeology. Mill’s conjectures are not on account of the absence of evidence regarding

37. Elie Halevy has suggested that it was Bentham’s treatise that in fact led Mill to conceive the project of writing the *History*. Halevy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, 277.

38. Mill, *History of British India*, 1:313.

39. Halevy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, 274.

Hindu society; rather, they are to service the needs of a science, which on his reckoning would have a minimal reliance on such forms of evidence and which alone could lay claim to a clear and firm law of progress.⁴⁰

The standard for historical development that Mill has in mind has both an endpoint and an engine to move along those who have not got to that point. Regarding the former, he is bluntly Eurocentric:

[T]he Europeans [of the feudal ages] were superior [to the Hindus of the present] notwithstanding the vices of the papacy, in religion, and defects of the schoolmen, in philosophy. . . . In fine it cannot be doubted that, upon the whole, the gothic nations, as soon as they became settled people, exhibit the marks of a superior character and civilisation to those of the Hindus.⁴¹

What is more interesting than this predictable claim is that Mill sees in the histories of backward civilizations a potentiality on account of which they can in fact progress. But the actualization of this potentiality typically turns on a force external to those civilizations. Here the elder Mill anticipates an argument that the younger Mill would also use. To repeat an earlier image, progress for Mill is like having a stalled car towed by one that is more powerful and can therefore carry the burden of an ascendant gradient. Kipling's well-known poetic flourish about the white man's burden in the East had its philosophic analogue in the thought of both the Mills and Macaulay. Hindu civilization, for Mill, epitomizes this condition of being stalled in the past. But various aspects of Hindu civilization had prepared it for progressive transformation. Its internally divisive and fractured social and political structure make it ready for unification, its ignorance elicits a yearning for the fruits of knowledge, and even its long association with regressive and repressive tyrants has the salutary consequence of making it receptive to beneficent and progressive successors:

To retain any considerable number of countries in subjection, preserving their own government, and their own sovereigns, would be really arduous, even where the signs of government were the best understood. To suppose it possible in a country

40. Duncan Forbes graphically expresses this in claiming, "The law of progress, like gravitation, did not admit exceptions, and Mill 'blackened the chimney' not, like Macaulay, for artistic effect, but in the name of science." Forbes, "James Mill and India," *Cambridge Journal*, no. 5 (1951): 29.

41. Mill, *History of British India*, 1:466–67.

where the signs of government is [*sic*] in the state indicated by the laws and institutions of the Hindus, would be in the highest degree extravagant.⁴²

This is part of Mill's argument as to why any form of federalism among the various principalities and states in India is an extravagant and retrograde possibility. Mill concludes the argument by pointing to the progressive effects already evinced by Hindu civilization when it has had the benefit of foreign rulers:

They, who affirm the high state of civilisation among the Hindus previous to their subjugation to foreigners, precede so directly in opposition to evidence, that wherever the Hindus have been always exempt from a domination of foreigners, there they are uniformly found in a state of civilisation inferior to those who have long been the subjects of a Mahomedan throne.⁴³

Here Mill closes the circle by deploying the former Muslim rulers as the precursors who establish the evidence for the progressive nature of foreign rule, thus laying the ground for the British, whose superiority, as Europeans, is established over that of the Muslims themselves. For Mill, Hindu civilization is plainly in need of a double tow.

It is of course easy and tempting to dismiss Mill's views on India as utterly driven by a jaundiced set of prejudices that therefore deserve no serious consideration. Apart from the fact that his views were profoundly influential throughout the course of the nineteenth century, and on that account alone should be taken seriously, such a dismissal risks evacuating, on account of Mill's crudity, what is in fact a crucial bedrock of a more sanguine liberalism. It is the perspective, and not so much the details, from which Mill crafts his *History* and the authority he claims for it that matter and which give it its enduring and perturbing relevance. It is a perspective of truth and not of life from which things, beliefs, situations, and ways of being are judged not by reference to the local positivities or the bounded finitude within which experiences occurs. Rather they are judged as forms of knowledge, as truth claims, that when underwritten by Mill's epistemology generate a universal typology in which things must be hierarchical. From this perspective progress is always, even if only implicitly, the only evaluative yardstick.

Mill's *History* is that of things, of people's beliefs, their myths and

42. Ibid., 140.

43. Ibid., 142.

religions, their economic and political institutions and practices. For these things Mill seeks out the laws of their development going back into the recesses of ancient times. Everything is historicized, and everything is part of a general history. Therefore, everything can be compared with everything else. Here all experience is provisional on a future that reveals, only after the fact, and in a sense only to the evaluating historian, the real meaning of an experience. The circumscribed finitude of the present counts for nothing and for that reason sentiments, feelings, the emotive particulars that get experienced in the present, are similarly devalued. Nothing is singular, but everything is an instance of something general, through which alone it acquires its meaning, which amounts to its historical standing.

What Mill's *History* is not is one of human beings and the conditions under which they live their lives. For it denies the conditions for that basic encounter between human beings and societies, that hermeneutic situation, in which the limited view and the narrow perspective—in a word the aesthetics of a situation, as the eighteenth century understood the term—become the filter through which alone human sentiments, in all their nuanced, complex, and experimental fluidity, are appreciated and experienced as real. In such situations rules, laws of development, algorithms of belief, and practice cannot be a substitute for the essential openness suggested by a hermeneutics and perceived predicament. Foucault expresses this eloquently:

In modern thought, historicism and the analytics of finitude confront one another. Historicism is a means of validating for itself the perpetual critical relation at play between History and the human sciences. But it establishes it solely at the level of the positivities: the positive knowledge of man is limited by the historical positivity of the knowing subject, so that the moment the finitude is dissolved in the play of relativity from which it cannot escape, and which itself has value as an absolute. To be finite, then, would simply be to be trapped in the laws of a perspective which, while allowing a certain apprehension—of the type of perception or understanding—prevents it from ever being universal and definitively intellectual. . . . This is why the analysis of finitude never ceases to use, as a weapon against historicism, the part of itself that historicism has neglected.⁴⁴

44. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1994), 368–69.

Among those weapons that the colonial finite, as it were, uses against the cosmopolitanism of imperial historicism are the dense particularities that make up its life forms, not as provisional planks that must be looked at with a backward gaze but as absolute conditions that are capable of sustaining the richness of experiences. Among these conditions are the possibilities of ethical life where such life does not require being confined in the waiting room of history while some other agency has the key to that room. In this sense one prevalent response to imperial historicism is almost by necessity a form of parochialism, because what has to be valorized is a set of conditions whose normative and experiential credence can be justified without reference to a future or a necessary past and prescribed path of development. But here parochialisms, even nostalgic parochialisms, are just stand-ins for vindicating experiences with which the “backward” can associate real and unconditional feelings.

JOHN STUART MILL: PROGRESS AND CONSENT

J. S. Mill acknowledges at various points in his famous *Autobiography* the immensity of his intellectual inheritance from his father. Yet it is plain that he had little of the latter’s programmatic dogmatism and emotional crudeness. In the tradition of nineteenth-century British political thought, it is hard to imagine a figure who could match the breadth of J. S. Mill’s intellectual, political, and emotional sympathies or the vigor of his mind. His liberalism is far more capacious than that of any of his contemporaries, and he has none of the imperial arrogance that taints so many of them. In engaging with his thought, one can be confident that one is doing just that and not, as with his father, being thrust up against unreflective prejudices that masquerade as thought. Even when there are important similarities in their views, as is often the case, in the younger Mill those views bespeak an incomparably deeper sensibility of both thought and feeling.

One such similarity is the conviction of progress. It is J. S. Mill’s view of progress and its link with political order that I shall focus on, thus sidestepping many of the familiar and important features of his thought. But given Mill’s conviction that progress stemmed from a commitment to utilitarianism, attention to the former at least indirectly touches on the utilitarianism with which Mill clearly associated himself to the end of his life.

According to Mill, the principal determinant of progressive change

is “the state of the speculative faculties of mankind, including the nature of the beliefs which by any means they have arrived at concerning themselves and the world by which they are surrounded.”⁴⁵ Thus, for example, he mentions the development of polytheism, Judaism, Christianity, Protestantism, and critical philosophy as “primary agents in making society what it is at each successive period.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, Mill believed that changes in ideas were substantially autonomous. What he meant by this was that ideas were not merely or even primarily the product of existing circumstances, social arrangements, or relations of power. They stemmed instead from a critical reflection on existing beliefs.

The role Mill imagined himself playing was that of “an interpreter of original thinkers and the mediator between them and the public.”⁴⁷ He sought to advance a set of ideas that could serve as a public philosophy and would be attentive to the general facts, such as size, complexity, and religious diversity, that characterized his age. The central core of this public philosophy was, of course, utilitarianism. It was the principle of utility that best served the interests of society. Sidestepping many complex issues pertaining to their philosophic relationship, in general terms, Mill accepted Bentham’s formulations of utility that “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.”⁴⁸ Moreover, again agreeing with Bentham, Mill concurred that “by happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure.”⁴⁹

The principle of utility was the foundation from which Mill derived a number of secondary principles that were to regulate social and political relations. Among these were (1) the principle of liberty, which restricted coercive interference with the beliefs and actions of individuals so long as they did not harm others (*On Liberty*); (2) a norm of equal opportunity requiring that careers be open to talent, without regard, for example, to sex (*Subjection of Women*); (3) a norm of political liberty, implying a broad franchise to participate in politics (*Representative Government*); (4) the development of worker management in the economy (*Political Economy*); and (5) limitations on inequality of wealth and income, including inherited resources (*Political Economy*).

45. J. S. Mill, *Logic*, 6.10.7.

46. *Ibid.*

47. J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 174.

48. J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chap. 2, para. 2.

49. *Ibid.*

In all of these works, though most obviously in *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill introduces a caveat that limits the application of these various secondary principles to advanced stages of civilizational conditions. The limitation is not in contradiction to the principle of utility, but rather the opposite. Mill's point is that it is only under advanced conditions that the secondary principles service the ends of advancing and maximizing utility. Hence under conditions of backwardness or for children, the principle of liberty would sanction behavior that would be contrary to utility maximization. Under such conditions, alternative norms are required to remain consistent with the progress associated with utility. These alternative norms or qualifications simply underline the centrality that Mill places on progress.

The clearest statement Mill offers of what he takes backwardness to be is in his essay called "Civilization." The essay was published in *The Westminster Review* in April 1836. Its focus is Britain, and it deals with Mill's perception of the evisceration of the integuments of British society and the impoverishment of the individuality that emerges from it. The way Mill presents his argument is by offering a running contrast between civilization and barbarism:

Civilization . . . is the direct converse of rudeness or barbarism. Whatever be the characteristics of what we call savage life, the contrary of these, or rather the qualities which society put on as it throws off these, constitute civilization. Thus, a savage consists of a handful of individuals, wandering or thinly scattered over a vast tract of country: a dense population, therefore dwelling in fixed habitations and largely collected together in towns and villages, we term civilized. . . . In savage communities each person shifts for himself; except in war (and even then very imperfectly) we seldom see any joint operations carried on by the union of many; nor do savages find much pleasure in each other's society. Wherever, therefore, we find human beings acting together for common purposes, in large bodies and enjoying the pleasures of social intercourse, we term them civilized.⁵⁰

Mill concludes this binary contrast with the claim that "all these elements [those of civilization] exist in modern Europe, and especially in

50. J. S. Mill, "Civilization," in *Essays on Politics and Culture*, ed. G. Himmelfarb (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973), 46.

Great Britain, in a more eminent degree . . . than at any other place or time.”⁵¹

The sharpness of the contrast that Mill draws between the savage and the civilized is puzzling and revealing. Because as the essay proceeds, what becomes clear is that it is the savage who has many of the individual qualities that Mill most admires, and which Britons, in his view, are losing. Hence, we are told that it is the savage who has “bodily strength,” “courage,” and “enterprise,” and who is “not without intelligence.” It is the savage who “cannot bear to sacrifice . . . his individual will.” Similarly, it is the savage who displays a noble and “active” “heroism” in his isolation, the precise opposite of the torpidity, cowardice, and passivity of “modern man” lost in “the crowd.”⁵² Even the very identification of the savage as isolated has an ambivalent significance in Mill’s thought. It is after all precisely worries about the crowd, the masses, the stifling conformitarianism and increasing homogeneity of modern Western society, that provoke the worries that Mill shares with Tocqueville and that explicitly animate the need for a principle such as the principle of liberty.⁵³ The purpose of the principle after all is to secure “liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like, subject to such consequences as may follow; without impediment from our fellow creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong.”⁵⁴

Despite the salutary qualities of the savage, the society or civilization of which he is a member is resolutely denoted as backward or barbarous. There is not a touch of irony in Mill’s essay, or in the way he deploys the distinction between the backward and civilized societies. It is this civilizational classification that determines whether or not savages can, for example, be members of independent societies with no need for superintending tutelage; or perhaps even be members of democratic societies, and hence share in the various secondary principles that Mill believed ought to structure such societies. What represents or speaks

51. Ibid., 47.

52. Ibid., 48–59.

53. It is worth noting that a similar ambivalence pervades Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, where the Native American is consistently characterized in terms that suggest aristocratic individuality in contrast with the leveled-out democratic individuality that Tocqueville worries about. See in particular vol. 1, chap. 1, “The Physical Considerations of America,” and vol. 2, chap. 1, “The Three Races that Inhabit America.”

54. J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, 18.

for the savage is the location of the civilization of which he is deemed to be a part, and this in Mill's case turns on a simple binary scale of civilized or backward. Ironically, the very attributes that Mill celebrates in individuals get eclipsed and assigned a negative sign through the civilizational category that Mill encloses individuals within.

The ambivalence that I am pointing to, and which I am arguing gets resolved through the deployment of a philosophy of history or a scale of civilization, is evident in Mill's later work, too. Consider the following well known passage from *On Liberty*:

The object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern *absolutely* the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties, or the moral coercion of public opinion. That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their member, is self-protection.⁵⁵

This principle professes to secure many of the highest aspirations of Mill's life and philosophy. It distinguishes, through its intended consequences, his own utilitarianism from the more mechanical and authoritarian versions supported by his father and Bentham. It is the root notion of his capacious tolerance of difference and eccentricity. It expresses the deeply held convictions of a man who had been moved and restored to health by Romantic poetry—a man, moreover, who in the high noon of Victorian conventionalism dedicated the work of which this principle is a part to his wife, claiming that she was his intellectual superior. The absolutism on behalf of the individual that the above passage highlights must therefore be taken as deeply felt and sincere.

But consider the sentence that immediately follows the passage quoted above: "[T]he only purpose for which power can be exercised over any member of a *civilized community*, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."⁵⁶ The absolutism of the prior quote is instantly qualified by being integrated into an implicit scale of civilizational hierarchies. The forms or expressions of individual life that the principle is intended to secure, facilitate, and champion are now limited by the civilizational standing of the societies of which individuals are members.

55. Ibid. (emphasis added), 14–15.

56. Ibid. (emphasis added).

Mill goes on to elaborate this point by making it clear that “it is, perhaps, hardly necessary to say that this doctrine [i.e., the principle of liberty] is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties.”⁵⁷ The group of such human beings includes children but also “those backward states of societies in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage.”⁵⁸ We now have a principle of liberty whose applicability is limited to those adults who are members of advanced civilizations.

What allows Mill to say that the statement of this limitation or qualification of the principle is “perhaps hardly necessary”? After all, given his express commitments to individuality and the principle he has just articulated, which is meant to secure the most capacious expressions of such individuality, one would least expect that the application of the principle would turn on civilizational and hence on nonindividual criteria. Since Mill has presented the principle as absolute and moreover given the enormous importance of the principle for what he values so dearly, namely well-lived individual lives, the delimitation of the principle by reference to an implicit philosophy of history should, one would have thought, have been a matter of considerable theoretical significance. If, for instance, Mill had limited the reach of the principle to adults, or to those with the capacity to reason (as Locke does), or to those who could meaningfully express themselves, or, more minimally, to those who had a sense of themselves as independent, sentient beings, one could see these limitations as broadly comporting with the aim of the principle, namely to secure the full play of individuality against the intrusion of society. But the limitations that Mill places on the reach of the principle are not narrowly tailored to exclude human beings below a certain threshold that is defined in individual terms. Instead, the exclusion or the limitation operates by explicitly relying on a civilizational, and therefore communal, index. Mill plainly is assuming some version of the objective scale of civilization similar to that crafted by his father, and that, more generally, European historiography of the time presumed.

The delimitation of the principle of liberty by a theory of civilizational hierarchies does not itself constitute a contradiction in Mill’s argument. Mill’s purpose, after all, in articulating the principle of liberty is to specify the conditions under which that principle would facilitate the maximization of utility—utility being his guiding purpose and the

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*

ultimate indicator of progress. If, however, under conditions of backwardness the principle would not lead to the maximization of utility, he is perfectly consistent in denying its applicability and appropriateness. The issue therefore is not one of an inconsistency in Mill's argument. Rather the point is that the particular consistency that Mill gives to his argument is one in which he leans heavily on a civilizational and historical index.

Mill deploys much the same argument in *Considerations on Representative Government*. In that work he makes his commitment to progress even more acute and in the process more narrow. In the second chapter of *Considerations* entitled "Criterion of a Good Form of Government," Mill begins by pointing to those who make a distinction between "Order and Progress (in the phraseology of French Thinkers); Permanence and Progression, in the words of Coleridge."⁵⁹ For the proponents of this distinction, in addition to progress both order and permanence are important qualities in assessing the form of a political society. Both order and permanence refer to those "kinds and amounts of goods which already exist" in a society.⁶⁰ Regarding the meaning of progress, Mill says "there is no difficulty." It refers chiefly to the cultivation of "mental activity, enterprise, and courage." And it culminates in "originality or invention."⁶¹

But Mill strongly objects to any idea that order and permanence are in themselves valuable. Whatever "good" qualities they refer to cannot stand apart from the improvement implied by the term *progress*. Permanence, which especially troubles Mill, represents precisely those virtues, those conditions of life and living, that, as facts that circumscribe experience, may not need any change, and hence improvement. They exhibit, as it were, an internal self-sufficiency, a benign indifference to the future, perhaps to time itself. In this sense they experientially stand outside a historical consciousness because they are rooted in a present, and hence not simply, provisionally in the present. But for Mill the only thing deserving the name *permanence* is progress itself: "progress is permanence and something more."⁶² Mill concludes the discussion of these distinctions with the following remark: "conduciveness to progress, thus understood, includes the whole excellence of a government."

This displacement and jettisoning of the notions of order and permanence is of considerable importance, because it reveals the broad

59. J. S. Mill, *Considerations*, 158.

60. *Ibid.*, 160.

61. *Ibid.*, 159–161.

62. *Ibid.*, 163.

thrust of Mill's philosophy, in which anything that is not aspiring to improvement or in the process of being improved must on account of that be designated as retrograde. This claim creates the intellectual and political space from which Mill can and does demand that the retrograde become progressive. Progress, Mill claims:

is the idea of moving onward, whereas the meaning of it here is quite as much the prevention of falling back. The very same causes—the same beliefs, feelings, institutions, and practices—are as much required to prevent society from retrograding, as produce a further advance. Were there no improvement to be hoped for, life would not be the less an unceasing struggle against causes of deterioration; as it even now is.⁶³

Life for Mill is ascent, and it has as its opposite any form of stasis. Moreover, the normative injunction to move onward, i.e., progress, at times is not even mentioned because the only alternative would be falling backward. We are left with the stark binary of the backward and the progressive, with nothing in between, nothing that can be bounded, nothing that can be present as a totality. It is the image of being on a sharply ascending mountain where one's only alternative is to have a tight grip on the rope that keeps one moving forward, because any loosening of one's grip would result in a fall. There is therefore a strong obligation to move on. The backward is linked to the future, to progress, to life itself, in such a tight embrace that to give it any latitude is to risk life itself. Moreover, this condition in which the in-between cannot be acknowledged points to the impoverishment of the hermeneutic space that Mill imagines in the encounter with the unfamiliar. If the unfamiliar, the backward, represents simply a threat to life, here understood as progress in terms of the familiar, then the relationship between the two can only be a struggle, a deathly struggle, in which power and not understanding must be deployed. In Mill that power takes the form of paternalism, a paternalism that Macaulay recognized as deeply invested in power:

Whoever examines their letters written at that time, will find there many just and humane sentiments . . . an admirable code of political ethics . . . Now these instructions, being inter-

63. *Ibid.*, 164.

puted, means [*sic*] simply, "Be the father and the oppressor of the people; be just and unjust, moderate and rapacious."⁶⁴

But what this power does not recognize is that in the in-between is a relationship that constitutes both the familiar and the unfamiliar, the backward and the progressive. It is what Levinas, while explicating the I-Thou relationship in Martin Buber, explains as follows:

The interval between the I and Thou is inseparable from the adventure in which the individual himself participates; yet is more objective than any other type of objectivity, precisely because of that personal adventure. The *Zwischen* is reconstituted in each fresh meeting. . . . [The] notion of "betweenness" functions as the fundamental category of being. . . . Man must not be construed as a subject constituting reality but rather as the articulation itself of the meeting.⁶⁵

But for Mill the "meeting" between the backward and progressive cannot be an adventure that constantly constitutes a fresh reality because the backward has already, i.e., prior to the meeting, been designated as dead.

There is something deeply agitated about this line of thinking. It cannot stay in place without fearing declension. It is for instance difficult to imagine what Mill's view of "home" would be. After all, home is precisely that space that people imagine themselves going "back to" and where they "relax," i.e., literally stop moving. The idea of a homeland carries similar connotations and is therefore often interchanged with kinship metaphors of motherland or fatherland. It designates a space of permanence, imagined or real.

Once Mill has established the normative primacy of progress, the argument for empire, for tutelage, in a word for progressive superintendence, is all but complete. Given the theory of a hierarchical scale of civilizations and given the injunction to progress, Mill can assert:

Thus far, of the dependencies whose population is in a sufficiently advanced state to be fitted for representative government. [Mill has been speaking of Canada and New Zealand]. But there are others which have not attained that state, and

64. T. B. Macaulay, "Warren Hastings," in *Critical and Historical Essays* (London: Methuen, 1903), 3:85–86.

65. Emmanuel Levinas, "Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge," in *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 65–66.

which if held at all, must be governed by the dominant country, or by persons delegated for that purpose by it. This mode of government is as legitimate as any other, if it is the one which in the existing state of civilization of the subject people, most facilitates their transition to a higher state of improvement. There are, as we have already seen, conditions of society in which a vigorous despotism is in itself the best mode of government for training the people in what is specifically wanting to render them capable of a higher civilization.⁶⁶

THE PROBLEMATIC OF PROGRESS: HISTORY, TIME, AND POLITICS

The central axis on which nineteenth-century liberal justifications of the empire operate is time, and its cognate, patience. It is the historical time of the past and the political time of the future.⁶⁷ J. R. Seeley in his influential lectures at Cambridge University, which later were published as *The Expansion of England* (1883), makes this point unmistakable: "The ultimate object of all my teaching here is to establish this fundamental connexion, to show that politics and history are only different aspects of the same study."⁶⁸ He went on to explain his point as follows: "What can be more plainly political than the questions: What ought to be done with India? What ought to be done with our Colonies? But they are questions which need the aid of history."⁶⁹ The confidence and apparent intelligence of Seeley's linking of history and politics as "aspects of the same study" is liable to dull us, as it did his liberal cohort in the nineteenth century, from seeing the radicalness of the change this view represents with respect to the intellectual origins of liberalism. When Locke invokes history he does it either to point to its political irrelevance or—and this for him amounts to the same thing—to the fact that the testimony of history is unanimous in showing that all governments are formed by the consent of the people.⁷⁰ History, that is to say, exposes no special problems that serve as constraints on what is to be done politically. As an aside, it is worth mentioning that some future nationalists would find the thrust and economy of Seeley's and the nineteenth-

66. Mill, *On Liberty*, 408–9.

67. See Homi Bhabha, "Sly Civility," in *The Location of Culture*, 93–101, and "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern," also in *The Location*, 171–97.

68. Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 133, emphasis added.

69. *Ibid.*, 134.

70. Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chap. 8, "Of the Beginning of Political Societies."

century liberal argument, linking the political with the historical, very convenient. In the context of anticolonial struggle it required only that the negative sign attached to the history of the prospective nation be reversed to a positive—"our history makes us ready for political independence"—while in the postindependence context the link between history and the political gave the nationalist state the amplitude of political latitude that was typically sought—"our history requires that the state be powerful and interventionist."⁷¹ What, after all, could give state power, whether imperial or national, greater prestige and room for maneuver than to be responsible for a collective future burdened by a recalcitrant and deviant past?

There is another philosophically more pressing sense in which time plays a crucial role in this broad liberal vision of history. I have suggested that the normative valuations that liberals make, that is of those who are deemed to be "backward" and those who are not, are expressed as historical facts that can be redressed only through the instrument of political intervention and in the register of future time. That is to say, "backwardness" is expressed as a temporal deficit or stasis, which in turn can be made whole, or progressive, only by being hitched to a temporal credit, and through the caboose of politics to the time of the future. Hence even extant examples of "backwardness" get coded as remnants of the past. James Mill's *History* is, for example, replete with instances of practices and beliefs that he acknowledged to be present, that is, as part of the extant life forms of India, but he nevertheless presents them as curious and recalcitrant fossils of the past. The conundrum that this exposes, of a past that is present and a present that is understood as past, is never consciously acknowledged within liberal/imperial historiography. The ideas associated with progress camouflage, as it were, the common meaning of the words that trigger those ideas. Here the evidence lies in the awkwardness that is imposed on language so that neither past nor present mean what they would be understood to mean on a simple temporal reckoning. Instead they represent normative valuations of the backward and the progressive. Here one is reminded of Marx, for he too is left in much the same way—one thinks almost despite himself and despite his account of capitalism—with having to acknowledge those "unconquered remnants"⁷² of the past that curiously resist the "despotism of capital."

71. See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), esp. chap. 5.

72. Karl Marx, introduction, in *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage, 1973), 105.

But what becomes of the contemporaneous in this view that cannot admit the present as present and that, moreover, cannot see in the present an agentiality, a will, a life form that tenaciously exists against the insistence of a theory that has it designated as dead? If the past and the future are sequentially the sources of liberalism's agenda of reformist action and optimism, it is the contemporaneous that points to the limits of the way liberals like the Mills have typically interpreted the challenge of understanding unfamiliar life forms. For the contemporaneity of these unfamiliar life forms cannot be spoken of in the register of historical time, for that register translates them into the linearity of backwardness and thus immediately conceives of them in terms of an already known future. This mapping codes the life forms, beliefs, practices, and thus the space in which experiencing occurs—that is, the space in which the unfamiliar or the “backward” exist—onto a temporal axis in which their life can be understood only as a provisional or remnant form of extraordinary and spectral survival, like shadows that can be seen despite the absence of their substantiality or ghosts of the past that haunt and are merely hosted by the present. But in this form of survival, experience is either exoticized or denied. In either event this maneuver blocks the search for a hermeneutics of spatially contemporaneous life forms whose differences, at least *a priori*, exist on the same ontological plane and must therefore be understood in terms of a relationality of heterogeneous spatial simultaneity and not homogeneous temporal linearity.

The appeal of history for liberalism's universalistic political vision has a lot to do, at least conceptually, with the post-Newtonian algebraic continuity that is intuitively suggested in the notion of a continuous, singular, and therefore nondiscrete time. This is true even though, as I am arguing, the liberal conception of time is not, in fact, one of perfect continuity, because the contemporaneous or the present is in constant need of being realigned with the future through the special effort of political intervention. Absent this effort, the present could always have the potential for a dizzying plenitude that could host a multiplicity of developmental trajectories. If such an eventuality appears consonant with the liberal celebration of choice and a variety of life plans, and therefore might be a source of liberal comfort, it is a comfort that they had the confidence to countenance only in the face of the familiar.⁷³ The

73. What precisely was accepted as the “familiar” is obviously a complex problem and beyond the scope of this work. However, it is important to make clear that the identification of familiarity, like unfamiliarity, did not occur simply through the broad categories of culture, race, religion, or region. The history within Britain of the working-class struggle, women's rights, the status of Jews and Catholics, and, of

language of a progressive history, along with a reliance on a singular and continuous conception of time, serves as an emollient that naturalizes what in fact were often aggressive and violent efforts to suppress multiple and extant temporalities and corresponding life forms.⁷⁴

In contrast to this conception of time, the notion of space—at least after Euler and others challenged the hegemony of the Euclidean version of it, and in doing so returned it to its more experientially self-evident form—is much closer to a vision of discrete and bounded places that can be connected only through the special effort of building bridges—bridges that connect, without the urge to make contiguous or sequential, two or more contemporaneous life forms.⁷⁵ In this vision the world is full of islands in which journeys of connection are always, as Hume and the Greek epics remind us, arduous and without assurance of success. Unlike Euclidean space and progressive and continuous time, in this vision transport is not a synonym for journeying for it does not indicate the faults and obstacles encountered in the latter. Here neither reason, language, nor the *ratio* of history gives us the smooth space in which everything is, as it were, already found to be connected. Instead it is a space in which not everything has common boundaries and therefore one cannot make the slippage, no doubt with genuine unselfconsciousness, that allows James Mill to compass the history of his country

course, the Irish question in some sense testifies to the fact that notions of history and a developmental temporality play a significant role with regard to these issues, too. Nevertheless, as I have suggested in the introduction, there is a sense in which these issues get settled within the familiar terms of liberal discourse and are therefore importantly different from matters raised within the empire. There is obviously an issue of fuzzy boundaries here, namely the question of where the familiar ends and the unfamiliar begins. With respect to this question I rely on the texts with I deal here because, without fully theorizing this problem, they themselves make clear that empire and issues raised within it occur beyond the point where the boundary is fuzzy.

74. My thoughts on history and time have been strongly influenced by Norbert Elias, *Time: An Essay*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Emmanuel Levinas, "Time and the Other," in *The Levinas Reader*, 37–58; and Giorgio Agamben, "Time and History," in *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (New York: Verso, 1993), 91–105. Finally, I am indebted to the various writings that touch on these issues by Homi Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty. See esp. Chakrabarty, "Radical Histories and the Question of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of *Subaltern Studies*," *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 14 (April 1995): 751–59.

75. See Michel Serres, "Language and Space," in *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 39–53, for an extremely suggestive reading, primarily of the Greek epics, that explores the notion of spatial discontinuity.

and go on to write the history of India. This is how he introduces his *History*:

In the course of reading and investigation, necessary for acquiring that measure of knowledge which I was anxious to possess, respecting my country, its people, its government, its interests, its policy, and its laws, I was met, and in some degree surprised, by extraordinary difficulties when I arrived at that part of my inquiries which related to India.⁷⁶

The “extraordinary difficulties” encountered by Mill are those of satisfying the rigorous requirements of writing history—the reading, the investigations, the difficulties of meeting the epistemological standards of producing knowledge. But this standard presumes on a pattern of invariability, an itinerary that history and the historian follow and record. Neither the surprise nor the difficulties that Mill refers to include the recognition of having entered a different space when he arrives at that portion of his inquiries that relate to India. He is, as the single sentence of his prose suggests, simply transported there. In the course of that transposition he comes upon nothing that is closed or only partially open, nothing with an exterior but perhaps an obscured interior, nothing that has a limit or a boundary, in brief, nothing that has a variegated and challenging topology. A few sentences later Mill announces the challenge that he, the historian, the philosopher, and administrator, faces: “[the] knowledge, requisite for attaining an adequate conception of that great scene of British action [i.e., India], was collected no where.”⁷⁷ The challenge, for Mill, remains squarely epistemological. It is one of finding the right sources, choosing between the multiplicity of conflicting documents, judiciously selecting one’s informants: in short, being sure that one is producing knowledge.

What Mill does not recognize, what simply does not strike him, is that this knowledge could refer to a different experiential field, to a different aesthetic, literally to a different perceptual realm and the connections that get made within it.⁷⁸ Indeed, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, Mill is self-conscious and insistent on the taint that such perceptual and linguistic contact with India can have on the craft of the historian. The slippage that is evident in the opening passage of Mill’s *History* also sets the tone for much that follows in the course of its six

76. Mill, *History of British India*, 1:xv.

77. Ibid.

78. The word *aesthetic* has its etymological origin in the Greek *aisthēsthai*, meaning to perceive.

volumes. Mill does not recognize that a culture or society constructs in and by its own history what Michel Serres has called “an original intersection between . . . spatial varieties, a node of very precise and particular connections.”⁷⁹ It is in the particularity of the connections and relays that a society makes, and blocks, that its singularity becomes a datum of experience. But Mill will not—in a sense, he must not—for the sake of the history he is writing, come into contact with the singularity of India. That conception of history, as I have suggested, is anchored in a vision of universal history that is itself tethered to an eschatology of progress. In that vision it is not the singularity of India (or anywhere else), or the experiences that are made possible by and that are internal to this singularity, that are significant. Instead, both India and experience have a provisional status that turns on the value accorded to them in a preestablished schema by virtue of their specificity—that is, as instances of this schema—and not on account of their singularity. Within this framework the task of history is to “record” so that it can compare without entering the experience of the backward. For Mill, and for many of his cohort, history is that chosen field that allowed them to imagine the world as a connected and smooth surface, uniformly available to a fixed grid of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

There are many ironic implications of the liberal argument. First, by making the expression of consent conditional on having reached a stage of historical maturation, liberal imperialism never sees, much less acknowledges, its own coercive efforts. As Mill blithely suggests in *On Liberty*, even the despotism of “an Akbar or a Charlemagne” can be a privilege for some societies “if they are fortunate to find” such agents of history to lead them. Because Indians have not reached the point at which they know how to consent or govern themselves, they cannot know or experience coercion or the absence of self-government, which is, after all, nothing other than the frustration of consent. The relativism of this argument allows for an indefinite temporizing so long as such efforts remain within the scaffolding of progress. For liberals, the empire aligns the plural vagaries of history under a singular conception of progress. In a sense this redeems, at least as a possibility, the liberal vision of a cosmopolitan future. Thus it is the past and the future that are the temporalities to which liberalism is most committed. The past,

79. Serres, *Hermes*, 45.

when viewed from the present, always shows its deficiencies; the future, again when viewed from the present, always holds out the promise of realizing Descartes's dream of infinite progress.

A second irony is that despite the expressed liberal commitment to the primacy of the individual, the person who is a member of a backward society or community cannot vouch for him- or herself. He or she is spoken for by the society of which he or she is a member, and that society is itself spoken for by the historiography that establishes the particular stage of historical maturation that that society is deemed to have achieved. The very idea of civilization, as R. G. Collingwood points out, and as both the Mills clearly would have concurred, "is something which happens to a community."⁸⁰ This underscores the argument made in the next chapter, namely that notwithstanding the claim that individual consent is the basis of political community, some conception of community must be presupposed or taken for granted as existing prior to the consensual justification of the political community. The moral and political standing of that prior or concealed community—concealed, that is, in liberal thought—makes all the difference to the potentialities associated with the willfully formed community. In effect, the differentials of historical development become the justificatory grounds for the differential rights and privileges granted to individuals. It is indeed curious that John Stuart Mill, who in the context of nineteenth-century European liberalism advocates the most capacious bounds for the play of individuality and eccentricity, should in the context of the empire self-consciously offer arguments whose implications are that we are all confined within the narrow compass of our communal historical pasts and from which we can break out only by attaching ourselves to "the leading strings" of the empire. It is only one of the many revealing ambivalences of Mill's thought that as a committed individualist he should have taken collective histories, rather than individual "case histories," as seriously as he did.

Both of these arguments are challenged in a single blow by nationalism. In denying the differentials of history, nationalism denies the liberal justification of the empire, announces the coercion of the empire as something experienced, and simultaneously makes the new member of the nation a full legal citizen. What nationalism does is repudiate the developmental chronologies of the empire by announcing that the preparatory work for self-governance was done by history long, long ago.

80. R. G. Collingwood, *The New Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 283.

In fact, it displaces history in the name of culture and geography and makes them the evidentiary basis for the readiness of the nation.⁸¹

In the Indian context, there is the special and almost unique (within nationalist discourse) argument made by Mahatma Gandhi. The terms of the argument have a familiar resonance with the liberal emphasis on civilization as a condition for the possibility of individual and collective self-development. But where liberals associate the term *civilization* with history and the trajectory of its development, for Gandhi the term has a purely ethical and moral meaning. In his 1909 work *Hind Swaraj*, which he himself translated into English, he defines civilization as follows:

Civilization is that mode of conduct which points to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and passions.⁸²

As is true of so much about Gandhi, this definition is deceptively simple and almost conceals its own effectivity and relevance vis-à-vis both the empire and the more familiar expressions of nationalism. It accepts the centrality that the liberal argument placed on civilization as a condition of progress and independence. But Gandhi understands the term in ways that make it impossible to rely on history, politics, the tutelage of one community by another, and more generally the work of power as engines and instruments of civilization. Instead, Gandhi's civilization is purely individualistic. It turns on human beings being able to follow the dictates of their duty and their morality. And this Gandhi suggests individuals can do only through enormous effort and self-control. But they can do this—they can, that is, be civilized—even in the earliest and most primitive stages of human development; the fact of greater development, and the history that evidences it, no more or less inclines them to be civilized. Here Gandhi reminds liberals of a value and a truth that he shares with them, but that in his view liberals had lost sight of through the emphasis they came to place on politics and power to the neglect of the ethical—the capacity for moral action of individuals, not some individuals but all individuals.

This in effect was the ethical cosmopolitanism with which Gandhi challenged the political and historical cosmopolitanism of the empire. It allowed Gandhi to countenance the possibility that Indian civilization

81. See chapter 4 below.

82. M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, 67.

makes it possible for independent India to grant the full legal rights of democratic citizenship and franchise to 350 million illiterate, substantially impoverished, deeply religious, and markedly diverse individuals. What prepared them for this moment of self-rule were capacities that they had by virtue of being human beings who could act in conformance to their duty. (Of course, and ironically, all this is true only prior to the triumph of the nation, for in the very instance of its success the nation-state typically reappropriates, as Ashis Nandy has argued, the tutelary and developmental language of the empire.)⁸³

As a final aside one can see how, at least in part, it is the work of this nationalism that supports and underlies many of the contemporary challenges that multiculturalism stands for. For what the various cultural groups today deny and what nineteenth-century liberalism, in contrast to contemporary liberalism, could assert is the claim of historical and civilizational differentials. The motto of present-day multicultural claims might very well be "We are present in contemporary time and the rights we demand stem from that temporal equality." The "now" that Mill could presume on was a copresence of many differential times, which represented many differential histories, and which it was the work of empire patiently to equalize. Nationalism, which would not "wait," has done that, at least at an enunciatory level. In doing so it has shattered, at least on an international level and perhaps mainly at that level, the pedagogic assumptions on which Lockean and Millian liberalism relied. It is after all only in the last thirty-five-odd years that liberalism has abjured the language of historical backwardness and hesitates even when speaking of a univocal conception of progress.⁸⁴

83. Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

84. It is striking, for example, that in a broad-minded and capacious liberal such as John Plamenatz, who at least took the empire problem seriously, writing in 1960, the language of backwardness is still confidently asserted. See Plamenatz, *On Alien Rule and Self-Government*.