

Barbarian thoughts: Imperialism in the philosophy of John Stuart Mill

Article (Published Version)

Jahn, Beate (2005) Barbarian thoughts: Imperialism in the philosophy of John Stuart Mill. Review of International Studies, 31 (3). pp. 599-618. ISSN 0260-2105

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/12416/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Review of International Studies

<http://journals.cambridge.org/RIS>

Additional services for *Review of International Studies*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



Barbarian thoughts: imperialism in the philosophy of John Stuart Mill

BEATE JAHN

Review of International Studies / Volume 31 / Issue 03 / July 2005, pp 599 - 618

DOI: 10.1017/S0260210505006650, Published online: 13 June 2005

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0260210505006650

How to cite this article:

BEATE JAHN (2005). Barbarian thoughts: imperialism in the philosophy of John Stuart Mill. Review of International Studies, 31, pp 599-618 doi:10.1017/S0260210505006650

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

Barbarian thoughts: imperialism in the philosophy of John Stuart Mill

BEATE JAHN*

Abstract. Mill's political and his international theory rest on a philosophy of history drawn in turn from the experience of nineteenth century imperialism. And yet, this philosophy of history remains unexamined in Political Theory and International Relations (IR) alike, largely because of the peculiar division of labour between the two disciplines. In this article I will argue that this omission results not just in a misconception of those aspects of Mill's thought with which Political Theory and IR directly engage; in addition, and more seriously, it has led in both disciplines to an unreflected perpetuation of Mill's justification of imperialism.

John Stuart Mill occupies an eminent position in Political Theory traditionally associated with the support of liberty and free speech. Recently, however, this reading of Mill has come under critical scrutiny. Mill's liberalism, it is argued, is inextricably linked to imperialism which, in turn, is reproduced through liberal practices in the contemporary world.¹ Imperialism, however, as a concept and a practice, falls squarely into the disciplinary domain of IR, especially so in a time in which the concept of empire 'has made what can only be described as a dramatic intellectual comeback'.²

And yet, despite the fact that Mill worked in India House for 35 years and, thus, was directly involved in international politics in the form of governing the Indian subcontinent (as well as writing extensively about international affairs in his newspaper articles and in his philosophical texts), he is rarely invoked in the IR literature. And when he is mentioned, it is usually with reference to an extract from his short essay *A Few Words on Non-Intervention*.³ This effectively confines Mill's

* I would like to thank the two anonymous referees for their encouraging comments and suggestions of further enquiry as well as David Boucher and his colleagues and students at Cardiff for the opportunity to present my interpretation of Mill to 'proper' Political Theorists. Their reflections helped to strengthen the article. Thanks are also due to Barry Hindess for his comments and suggestions and to Justin Rosenberg, as always, for helping with structure, grammar, and style.

¹ Paul A. Passavant, *No Escape: Freedom of Speech and the Paradox of Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1999); Eddy M. Souffrant, *Formal Transgressions: John Stuart Mill's Philosophy of International Affairs* (Lanham: Roman and Littlefield, 2000); Bikhu Parekh, 'Decolonizing Liberalism', in Aleksandras Shtromas (ed.), *The End of 'Isms'!* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) pp. 85–103; Barry Hindess, 'Liberalism – What's in a Name?', in Wendy Warner and William Walters (eds.), *Global Governmentality* (London: Routledge, 2004); Jennifer Pitts, 'Legislator of the World?' in *Political Theory*, 31 (2003).

² Michael Cox, 'The Empire's Back in Town: or America's Imperial Temptation – Again', in *Millennium*, 32 (2003), p. 5.

³ John Stuart Mill, 'A Few Words on Non-Intervention' in John M. Robson (ed.), *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), vol. XXI, pp. 109–24. See, for example, Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 251f; Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), especially Part II, chs. 2 and 3; John Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 54–6; Michael Walzer,

relevance to the debate over foreign intervention in those states which were recognised as equal and sovereign members of the society of states – mainly European states and European settler states.

Traditionally, Political Theory has neglected the role of the international in Mill's philosophy.⁴ Conversely, IR has neglected the importance of Mill's political theory. And both have avoided an engagement with the role of imperialism in Mill's political and international theory. Mill's justification of imperialism rests on a philosophy of history which underlies both his political and his international theory. And yet, this philosophy of history, so central to Mill's thought, remains unexamined in Political Theory and IR alike, largely because of the peculiar division of labour between the two disciplines. In this article I will argue that this omission results not just in a misconception of those aspects of Mill's thought with which Political Theory and IR directly engage; in addition, and more seriously, it has led in both disciplines to an unreflected perpetuation of Mill's philosophy of history itself. And this philosophy is rooted in a need to justify the political inequality of humanity on cultural grounds.

Contra IR, I will argue, Mill's argument about non-intervention among civilised states is an organic component of a wider theory of international relations in which

Just and Unjust Wars (New York: Basic Books, 1992), pp. 87–96; Georgios Varouxakis, 'John Stuart Mill on Intervention and Non-Intervention', *Millennium*, 26 (1997), pp. 57–76; Robert Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Jackson engages quite extensively with Mill's arguments and also quotes *Utilitarianism* and *On Liberty*, but the discussion itself revolves around questions of sovereignty and intervention. A shortened version of *A Few Words on Non-Intervention* has also been included in a recent anthology edited by Chris Brown, Terry Nardin and Nicholas Rengger, *International Relations in Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), which again does not make reference to any other of John Stuart Mill's writings. At the same time, John Stuart Mill is not mentioned, for instance, in Gerrit Gong's *The Standard of 'Civilization' in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) despite the fact that the book addresses the emergence of culturally based international theory and practice in the 19th century for which Mill must count as an outstanding representative.

⁴ In Political Theory *A Few Words on Non-Intervention* is hardly ever mentioned. Instead, leading among the texts which attract the attention of political philosophers is *On Liberty* edited by David Spitz (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975) followed, in no particular order, by 'Considerations on Representative Government' in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, edited by John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 203–467; *Principles of Political Economy*, edited by Jonathan Riley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); 'The Subjection of Women' in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, pp. 469–582; 'Utilitarianism' in *John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham* (London: Penguin, 1987), pp. 272–338; 'Coleridge' in *Mill and Bentham*, pp. 177–226; and 'Bentham' in *Mill and Bentham*, pp. 132–75. For discussions of Mill's epistemological position, 'A System of Logic' in *Collected Works*, vols. VII and VIII, is important and his *Autobiography* edited by John M. Robson (London: Penguin, 1998) is frequently cited in support of interpretations of his motivations. But although Mill's work at India House (as well as his father's involvement with India House, Bentham and the Utilitarians) is often mentioned, the question of Mill's position on international affairs as such does not play a role. A good indication of the general perception of Mill is found in *The Cambridge Companion to Mill* edited by John Skorupski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) in which only Robson's chapter, one among fourteen, addresses Mill's position on civilisation and culture without, however, investigating their importance for his international theory. As always, there are a few exceptions, some of which, however, tend to prove the rule. F. R. Flounoy, 'British Liberal Theories of International Relations 1848–1898', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 7 (1946), pp. 195–217, and K. E. Miller, 'John Stuart Mill's Theory of International Relations', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 22 (1961), pp. 493–514, are interested in Mill's status amongst British liberal internationalists of the 19th century. Lynn Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994) and Eileen Sullivan, 'Liberalism and Empire: J. S. Mill's Defense of the British Empire', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44 (1983), pp. 599–617, investigate the impact of Mill's India experience on his domestic writings, while A. L. Harris, 'John Stuart Mill: Servant of the East India Company', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 30 (1964), pp. 185–202, and Souffrant, 'Liberalism', directly address Mill's defence of colonialism.

the same premises are used to construct a systematic justification of European imperialism. The take up of Mill in IR has thus superficially sanitised his writings at the price of avoiding an engagement with their real underlying logic – a logic, however, which continues to inform liberal international theories today. Meanwhile, contra Political Theory, the international dimension of Mill's thought cannot be excluded without running the risk of reproducing the very justifications for imperialism which underlie his thought.

I will first reconstruct Mill's philosophy of history and demonstrate its centrality for his international theory (in the second part of this article), and for his political theory (in the third). The critical analysis of the roots of Mill's philosophy of history in colonialism and its theoretical as well as political consequences for IR and Political Theory will follow in the final section.

Mill's philosophy of history

Mill sets out his philosophy of history in each of his major writings to some extent.⁵ The most detailed and systematic exposition, however, we find in *Considerations on Representative Government*. Here Mill argues that representative government is the best form of government – but only for civilised nations. He begins by stating that 'political machinery does not act of itself. As it is first made, so it has to be worked, by men, and even by ordinary men. It needs, not their simple acquiescence, but their active participation; and must be adjusted to the capacities and qualities of such men as are available.'⁶

Some nations, Mill goes on to argue, will never accept the restraints of a regular and civilised government – such as North American Indians or the barbarians who overran the Roman Empire. Some peoples will not accept a monarchy, others a republic. Thus, it is essential to determine the particular stage of development of a people in order to be able to determine the most appropriate form of government. International or world history, the history of humankind, is essentially a history of cultural – or, in his words, civilisational – development. Mill does not clearly define the stages of civilisational development, but we can reconstruct a broad outline. The first two stages, savagery and slavery, are fairly well described. The stage of savagery is characterised by personal independence, by the absence of a developed social life, and a lack of discipline either for unexciting work or for the submission to laws.⁷ All civilised life, says Mill, depends on 'continuous labour of an unexciting kind'. If savages are to be civilised, therefore, they must be compelled to change their ways. And for this reason 'even personal slavery, by giving a commencement to industrial life, and enforcing it as the exclusive occupation of the most numerous portion of the community, may accelerate the transition to a better freedom than that of fighting and rapine'. First and foremost, then, savages have to learn to obey and this can only

⁵ For the remainder of this article, references without an author's name refer to writings of John Stuart Mill. 'Liberty', pp. 11, 57, 66, 86; 'Considerations', especially chapter IV; 'Bentham', pp. 159, 164; 'Coleridge', pp. 193f; 'Utilitarianism', pp. 303f.

⁶ 'Considerations', p. 207.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 232, 260; John Stuart Mill, 'Civilization' in John M. Robson (ed.), *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), vol. XVIII, p. 120.

be achieved by force. Despotism and slavery are therefore the appropriate form of government for savages and history shows that almost all peoples now civilised have gone through this stage.⁸

Slavery and despotism, then, constitute the second stage of civilisational development. But:

a people in that condition require to raise them out of it a very different polity from a nation of savages. . . . The step which they have to take, and their only path to improvement, is to be raised from a government of will to one of law. . . . What they require is not a government of force, but one of guidance. Being, however, in too low a state to yield to the guidance of any but those to whom they look up as the possessors of force, the sort of government fittest for them is one which possesses force, but seldom uses it'.⁹

Mill also calls this kind of government the government of 'leading-strings' and compares it with the St. Simonian form of Socialism as well as, in history, with the government of the Incas of Peru and the Jesuits in Paraguay.

After these first two clearly distinguished stages of development, Mill's exposition with regard to the terms he uses as well as with regard to the descriptions and examples is much less clear. Only the highest stage of development is clearly termed and described: it is modern civilisation and the most appropriate form of government for this stage is representative government. Among the modern civilised nations England occupies the highest stage.¹⁰ Between the stage of slavery and that of modern civilisation we find terms such as barbarians, semi-barbarous, semi-civilised, but Mill does not distinguish clearly between them. We can, thus, only reconstruct the meaning of this stage/these stages (for it is by no means clear whether they are several stages or just various cultural forms all belonging to one stage) by looking at the arguments and examples he provides.

Civilisation, and therefore also representative government, require certain kinds of material preconditions. One characteristic of civilised government is its extension over a certain area. As long as public opinion depends on people being able to get together within the confines of a city this form of government cannot stretch over greater parts.¹¹ Infrastructure and, in particular, roads were quite widely considered a clear indicator of civilisation.¹² But, generally, Mill is much more interested in what he calls the moral preconditions for civilisation and representative government. Thus, an inveterate spirit of locality stands in the way of extending the principles of self-government over a wider realm – and this is true even of communities who have had extensive experience of self-government such as Asian villages. If a people is very passive they will not fight for their freedom when attacked and would choose tyrants as their representatives. And only despotic rule or a general massacre could have emancipated the serfs of Russia. If a people is ignorant and lacks mental cultivation, if it is gullible, it may be cheated out of its freedom. If a people is too rude to control its passions, to forgo private conflict, too proud not to avenge wrongs done to them directly, it is not ready for self-government. The existence of prejudices, adherence to old habits and a general incapacity to adapt to and accept constant changes are

⁸ 'Considerations', pp. 232, 233.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 233f.

¹⁰ 'Non-Intervention', pp. 111ff; 'Civilization', pp. 120f.

¹¹ 'Considerations', p. 210.

¹² James Mill, *The History of British India* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1990), p. 479.

hindrances to self-government; and, generally, not clearly specified 'positive defects of national character'.¹³

Though Mill does not spell out clearly which stage or stages we find between that of slavery and civilisation, he clearly sees a host of characteristics which do not either belong to the stage of savagery or slavery but still prevent representative government from being appropriate. He reconstructs the history of humankind as a history of cultural or civilisational development with, broadly four stages: savagism, slavery, barbarism and, finally, modern civilisation. And this history is not just speculative; it is based on concrete historical examples for all stages of development as well as for the modes of government which fit those stages.

A full reconstruction of Mill's philosophy of history, however, must also entail a discussion of the dynamics which, in his opinion, drive these developments. Mill did not believe that this progression from one stage to the next is in any way an automatic process and he warns that there is always the possibility of the tide turning 'towards the worse, consisting of all the follies, all the vices, all the negligences, indolences and supineness of mankind . . . until it reached a state often seen in history, and in which many large portions of mankind even now grovel'. This danger of stagnation or even backward development is what we learn if 'the whole testimony of history is worth anything'.¹⁴

Again, Mill cites historical examples to illustrate the tendency towards stagnation or backward development which he considers

among the most melancholy facts in history. The Egyptian hierarchy, the paternal despotism of China, were very fit instruments for carrying those nations up to the point of civilisation which they attained. But having reached that point, they were brought to a permanent halt, for want of mental liberty and individuality; requisites of improvement which the institutions that had carried them thus far, entirely incapacitated them from acquiring, and as the institutions did not break down and give place to others, further improvement stopped.¹⁵

The reason for this tendency towards stagnation is that indigenous rule, as the examples of Asia show, cannot generally be expected to adapt to the next level of civilisation, because the rulers will not be exempt from the 'general weakness of the people or of the state of civilisation'. Only in very rare cases will a people be lucky enough to find a monarch of extraordinary genius, like Charlemagne or Peter the Great, who will be able to lead them to the next stage. Civilisational development is therefore not to be expected as a matter of course but must be pursued consciously. The most potent means, Mill argues, of preparing people for the next stage of civilisational development is the form of government.¹⁶

Historically, therefore, two different roads to civilisational development can be identified. The first is the exception, namely government through an indigenous leader of extraordinary genius; the second is the rule, namely government through a culturally superior power carrying the people 'rapidly through several stages of progress, and clearing away obstacles to improvement which might have lasted indefinitely if the subject population had been left unassisted to its native tendencies and chances'.¹⁷

¹³ 'Considerations', pp. 262, 261, 264, 212.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 224, 241.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 234f.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 264, 231.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

To complete the picture of Mill's philosophy of history, we need to mention that forward movement along this line of civilisational development is *de rigueur*. Though Mill argues in his philosophical writings that human beings have to fulfil their developmental potential, that, indeed, the latter is what distinguishes human beings from other species,¹⁸ he also puts forward a political argument based on historical experience. A stationary condition like the Oriental state 'does not mean stupid tranquillity, with security against change for the worse; it often means being overrun, conquered and reduced to domestic slavery, either by a stronger despot, or by the nearest barbarous people who retain along with their savage rudeness the energies of freedom'.¹⁹ The stationary condition is therefore not a practical choice because it turns the people into easy prey for conquerors and this, in turn, means slavery and backward development.

Mill's philosophy of history, then, contains the four broad stages of civilisational development – savagism, slavery, barbarism and civilisation – and he identifies the force which drives this development, namely the mode of government. Since development along civilisational lines is not automatic, and since stagnation entails the grave danger of conquest and backward development, human beings have to strive for the next level of development by establishing the appropriate form of government for this purpose. This philosophy of history is the basis of Mill's theory of international relations.

Mill's theory of international relations

John Stuart Mill, I will argue, developed a distinctive theory of international relations on the basis of his philosophy of history. Triggered by events 'generated by my Indian experience and others by the international questions which then greatly occupied the European public', Mill wrote *A Few Words on Non-Intervention* setting out 'the true principles of international morality'.²⁰ His theory of international relations, as set out in *A Few Words on Non-Intervention* but also in *Considerations on Representative Government* is clearly a moral theory. Not only does the civilisational stage of a people determine the most appropriate form of government, the government itself is an institution for moralising and improving the people. For this reason, Mill argues that the government appropriate for a particular stage of development is the one which enables the people to move on to the next stage. This moral task, this responsibility towards the people is, however, not the final criterion, for 'the influence of government' he says, 'on the well-being of society can be considered or estimated in reference to nothing less than the whole of the interests of humanity'.²¹ It is this universal principle – the whole of the interests of humanity – which determine the quality of any given government as well as the criteria for ordering international affairs in general.

¹⁸ John M. Robson, 'Rational Animals and Others', in John M. Robson and Michael Laine (eds.), *James and John Stuart Mill Papers of the Centenary Conference* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 159.

¹⁹ 'Considerations', p. 241.

²⁰ 'Autobiography', p. 195.

²¹ 'Considerations', p. 217.

The whole of the interests of humanity lie in improvement, progress, development along civilisational lines. Thus, Mill's theory of international relations is based on a distinction between culturally superior and inferior peoples. In their practical application, the four stages of civilisational development are reduced to two: barbarians (used interchangeably with savages) and civilised nations. 'To suppose that the same international customs, and the same rules of international morality, can obtain between one civilised nation and another, and between civilised nations and barbarians, is a grave error, and one which no statesman can fall into'. Mill gives two main reasons for this distinction:

In the first place, the rules of ordinary international morality imply reciprocity. But barbarians will not reciprocate. They cannot be depended on for observing any rules. . . . In the next place, nations which are still barbarous have not got beyond the period during which it is likely to be for their benefit that they should be conquered and held in subjection by foreigners'.²²

A further difference between barbarism and civilisation is the absence or presence of nationalism. Mill defines nationality as a community of people with common sympathies who cooperate better with each other than with outsiders and who like to be under the same government.²³ Although he holds that human beings are social by nature, this tendency becomes stronger with advancing civilisation.²⁴ Savages live singly or in small groups, do not enjoy each other's company, and do not cooperate (except in war) whereas one of the distinguishing features of modern civilisation is sociality and cooperation.²⁵ Hence, nationalism is itself a clear characteristic of civilisation and 'barbarians have no rights as a *nation*, except a right to such treatment as may, at the earliest possible period, fit them for becoming one'.²⁶

Thus having divided humanity into culturally superior – civilised – and culturally inferior – barbarian – peoples, Mill sets out the principles which ought to rule international relations. The relations between civilised nations are generally governed by the principle of equality. Mill supports the principle of free trade and of equal opportunities in this free trade. He also suggests that international law and an International Tribunal is 'now one of the most prominent wants of civilised society, a real International Tribunal'²⁷ along the lines of the American Supreme Court, which in his opinion made international law, should operate between these civilised nation states. 'Among civilised peoples, members of an equal community of nations, like Christian Europe', aggressive war, conquest and annexation are out of the question; what needs to be decided in this relationship between civilised nations is the question of interference. In general, Mill argues for a principle of non-intervention because 'a government which needs foreign support to enforce the obedience of its own citizens, is one which ought not to exist'. Similarly, a people whose desire for, and capability of achieving, freedom against its own government is not strong enough to be able to retain the freedom given to it by foreign intervention.²⁸

He makes two exceptions to the rule of non-intervention. In cases in which foreign intervention has already taken place, counter-intervention is admissible to even the

²² 'Non-Intervention', p. 118.

²³ 'Considerations', pp. 427f; 'Coleridge', p. 195.

²⁴ 'Utilitarianism', p. 303.

²⁵ 'Civilization', p. 120.

²⁶ 'Non-Intervention', p. 119.

²⁷ 'Considerations', p. 441.

²⁸ 'Non-Intervention', p. 120–2.

balance. And in the case of a protracted civil war a powerful neighbour can demand that the conflict cease and that reconciliation take place 'on equitable terms of compromise'. Mill argues that this kind of intervention has taken place fairly frequently without raising major complaints, so that one has to assume 'that its legitimacy may be considered to have passed into a maxim of what is called international law'.²⁹

The relations between sovereign states and dependencies are also governed by the level of cultural development. Mill divides dependencies into two classes: one is composed of people of similar civilisation as the mother country and fit for institutions of representative government, such as British possessions in America and Australia; the other is composed of much less advanced people, such as India. For the colonies of European race Mill argues for the widest possible measure of internal self-government. There are some inequalities still in the system since Britain retains the powers of a Federal Government which means that the former colonies have no sovereignty over their foreign policy and have to join Britain in war without being consulted. Mill argues that the bonds between Britain and the settler colonies have to be severed if the settler colonies desire this. However, these bonds are, in his opinion, very valuable because they can be considered a step 'towards universal peace, and general friendly co-operation among nations'. On the one hand, it makes war between the members of the Commonwealth impossible, on the other, it prevents any member being incorporated into a foreign state as well as from becoming an aggressive power in their own right. Furthermore, these bonds provide an open market at least for its members and the connection adds weight to the moral influence of Great Britain in the councils of the world, that is, to the 'Power which, of all in existence, best understands liberty . . . and has attained to more of conscience and moral principle in its dealings with foreigners, than any other great nation seems either to conceive as possible, or recognise as desirable'.³⁰

While relations between civilised nations – whether independent states or not – are governed by the principle of equality, relations between civilised and barbarian peoples ought to take the form of a hierarchy. Again, these unequal relations we encounter either in the form of interaction between independent communities or in the form of dependencies or multinational countries. While Mill holds that 'free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities', he also considers the merging of different nationalities a possibility. Hence, the decisive question for a multinational state is whether the culturally superior group is in the majority. If so, as is often the case in European countries, the incorporation of the backward minority is not only justified but must be considered in its interest.³¹

Different rules, however, must apply if the culturally inferior population is in the majority or powerful enough to conquer a culturally superior nation. The latter, exemplified historically by the Macedonian conquest of Greece or a hypothetical ascendancy of Russia over Europe 'is a sheer mischief to the human race, and one which civilised humanity with one accord should rise in arms to prevent'. In the former case, exemplified historically by the Greeks in Asia and more contemporaneously by the British in India, 'the conquerors and the conquered cannot . . . live

²⁹ 'Non-Intervention', pp. 123, 121. See Varouxakis 'Intervention' for a detailed discussion of the development of Mill's position on intervention between European states.

³⁰ 'Considerations', pp. 447, 449, 451.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 428, 431, 433f.

together under the same free institutions' because the absorption of a culturally superior people into an inferior civilisational stage would be an evil. The conquered have to be governed by despotism, 'a mode of government . . . as legitimate as any other, if it is the one which in the existing state of civilisation of the subject people, most facilitates their transition to a higher stage of improvement' – not only that, 'such is the ideal rule of a free people over a barbarous or semi-barbarous one'.³²

Though it is clear that the civilising mission which Mill supports is the moral and political legitimisation of this despotism, he does not call it anything else but despotism. He makes it abundantly clear that this kind of rule *is* despotism and the only choice the governing nation has is over the kind of despotism it wants to exert. In line with his defence of the rule of India through the EIC, Mill continues to argue that the despotism of one people over another – that is, of the English people represented through their parliament over India – is not better but in fact worse than the despotism of its most competent governors. For Mill the government of one people by another is an impossibility: 'One people may keep another as a warren or preserve for its own use, a place to make money in, a human cattle farm to be worked for the profit of its own inhabitants. But if the good of the governed is the proper business of a government, it is utterly impossible that a people should directly attend to it.' For Mill, then, the best the English can do for India is to give it good governors and British ministers are the worst possible governors, for they think about English, not Indian, politics; they don't stay in office long enough to acquire any proper knowledge of the country; they are susceptible to English public opinion and do not have the training to form their own opinion on such a complex issue as Indian politics.³³

It is clear, then, that John Stuart Mill did not just utter *A Few Words on Non-Intervention* pertaining to sovereign European states, as his commentators in IR suggest – rather he provided a full blown theory of international relations. The principle which governs non-intervention *and* intervention – or the selective application of the right to sovereignty/liberty – is the stage of civilisational development set out in his philosophy of history. The attempt, therefore, in IR to separate *A Few Words on Non-Intervention* from Mill's 'eurocentrism', which Brown, Nardin and Rengger relativise by pointing out that it only expressed the common prejudice of his time,³⁴ overlooks that precisely this 'prejudice' lies at the heart of Mill's philosophy of history and provides the principle on which the whole of Mill's theory of international relations rests. Mill systematically applies the principle of civilisational development to international affairs on a global scale. Accordingly, the civilisational stage of every community has to be ascertained and the world divided up into civilised and non-civilised peoples. In principle, non-civilised peoples ought to be ruled by civilised peoples and equality and non-intervention characterise the relations between civilised nations.

Mill's political theory

Mill's philosophy of history centred around culture also provides the basis for his most important writings on domestic politics. Mill defines civilisation either as

³² Ibid., pp. 432, 453, 454.

³³ Ibid., pp. 455, 456, 461.

³⁴ Brown et al., 'International Relations', p. 465.

progress or improvement in general, as a state in which man and society are 'happier, nobler, wiser' or as 'that kind of improvement only, which distinguishes a wealthy and powerful nation from savages or barbarians'. And it is the second definition – with reference to barbarians and, thus, his philosophy of history – which provides the basis for his thought on domestic politics and the one which he chooses as a starting point for the discussion in *Civilisation*. For only in this sense, he says, may one speak about the 'vices or the miseries of civilisation'.³⁵ And, it will be argued here, that his entire political theory is an attempt to counteract the vices and miseries of civilisation.³⁶

Civilisation in this sense is not just defined in the necessary context of, or opposition to, barbarism; Mill actually defines civilisation as the negation of barbarism. 'We shall on the present occasion use the word civilisation only in the restricted sense: . . . in which it is the direct converse or contrary of rudeness or barbarism. Whatever be the characteristics of what we call savage life, the contrary of these, or the qualities which society puts on as it throws off these, constitute civilisation.' And he follows this method in his substantive definition of civilisation, that is, he sets out the characteristics of barbarism and then deduces the characteristics of civilisation from their negation. 'Thus, a savage tribe 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'. And he continues that savage life has no commerce, no manufacture, no agriculture, that savages do not cooperate and don't enjoy each other's company, there is no law, no justice, and no protection of property or people. The opposite, of course, characterises civilisation, that is, commerce, manufacture and agriculture, cooperation and social intercourse, law, justice and protection of people and property. These elements of civilisation exist in modern Europe and especially in Great Britain.³⁷

Mill's political theory arises out of an analysis of this civilisation. He argues that there are two elements of importance among mankind, namely property and the power of the mind. One of the outstanding characteristics of civilisation, he contends, is the diffusion of property and education to the masses which were formerly held by a tiny minority of individuals. And this diffusion has the effect that 'the portion of either of these which can belong to an individual must have a tendency to become less and less influential, and all results must more and more be decided by the movements of masses; provided that the power of combination among the masses keeps pace with the progress of their resources'. Cooperation is, then, in his opinion the third distinguishing characteristic of civilisation and he goes on to show that the downfall of savage, barbarian, enslaved or semi-civilised societies in history has been their incapacity to cooperate, especially in war.³⁸

The problem, however, which civilisation faces, is that the mass society which gives more wealth and education to the individual than ever before in history is in danger of losing the genius which individuals can give to society. The upper classes lose their cultural advantage and with it the ability to lead society in the direction of

³⁵ 'Civilization', p. 119.

³⁶ Nadia Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 179; Passavant, 'No Escape', pp. 101, 109.

³⁷ 'Civilization', pp. 120f.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

improvement. Morally, civilisation channels the energy of the individual into 'the narrow sphere of money-getting pursuits'. In comparison, 'in a rude state, each man's personal security, the protection of his family, his property, his liberty itself, depend greatly upon his bodily strength and his mental energy or cunning: in a civilised state, all this is secured to him by causes extrinsic to himself'. In addition, 'the individual becomes so lost in the crowd, that though he depends more and more upon opinion, he is apt to depend less and less on well-grounded opinion . . . An established character becomes at once more difficult to gain, and more easily to be dispensed with.'³⁹

Mill states that 'the natural tendency of representative government, as of modern civilisation, is towards collective mediocrity: and this tendency is increased by all reductions and extensions of the franchise, their effect being to place the principal power in the hands of classes more and more below the highest level of instruction in the community'.⁴⁰ The loss of individuality, of genius, of energy and innovation, then, are the 'vices and miseries of civilisation'. Mill's analysis makes it clear that these shortcomings are inherent tendencies of civilisation and neither the product of deviation from the proper course of civilisational development nor marginal side effects. In fact, they are extremely dangerous because 'when society is itself the tyrant – society collectively over the separate individuals who compose it – its means of tyrannising are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries'. This kind of tyranny in civilised society takes the form of a public opinion which endeavours 'to make everyone conform to the approved standard . . . to maim by compression, like a Chinese lady's foot'.⁴¹

The danger which Mill identifies lies in a development which turns culture into custom, that is, which halts the movement towards progress and innovation. 'The despotism of custom is everywhere the standing hindrance to human advancement, being in unceasing antagonism to that disposition to aim at something better than customary, which is called, according to circumstances, the spirit of liberty, or that of progress or improvement'. His prime historical example for the dangers of this development is 'the whole East', but in particular China. The Chinese, Mill emphasises, had actually built a formidable civilisation, but with all their talent and wisdom, instead of leading the world towards progress, 'they have become stationary – have remained so for thousands of years . . . they have succeeded beyond all hope in what English philanthropists are so industriously working at – in making a people all alike'. Unless this tendency of civilisation can be counteracted, Mill argues, Europe 'will tend to become another China'.⁴²

We can see here that the philosophy of history centred on cultural development is not just in the abstract or as a logical part of the definition important for Mill's political theory. It contains, as mentioned above, the crucial belief that cultural development can stop and turn backwards and it provides him with concrete historical examples of the consequences of this. Not only is civilisation the negation of barbarism, but it also has to constantly strive against its internal tendencies to become stationary, to suppress individuality and non-conformism.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 125f, 129, 132.

⁴⁰ 'Considerations', p. 313.

⁴¹ 'Liberty', pp. 6, 65.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 66–8.

Since Mill considers these tendencies as an integral part of civilisation, the question arises whether civilisation is 'on the whole a good or an evil'. Mill leaves no doubt that he considers it a good and although it does not provide for much even of the highest goods it is also not incompatible with any good. Mill's domestic project, then, lies in finding remedies for these negative tendencies, in infusing civilisation with the means to achieve the goods it does not provide for. 'Those advantages which civilization cannot give – which in its uncorrected influence it has even a tendency to destroy – may yet coexist with civilization'.⁴³

In *On Liberty*, Mill sets out the strategies which society should adopt to counteract this mediocritising influence of civilisation. Crucial in his mind is the protection of the private sphere from the pressures of public opinion; the freedom of thought and discussion; the development of individual genius and mental superiority; of free trade as the equivalent to individual freedom; different forms of education, including elite education, since state education puts everybody under conformist influences,⁴⁴ and weighted suffrage. He also propagates tests to ensure the quality of the executive. England, he holds, displays an abominable attitude toward education and can learn a lot from the experiences of the EIC which has introduced tests for those aspiring to serve in it.⁴⁵

One could say that Mill's remedy for the 'vices and miseries of civilisation' is the introduction of as much plurality as possible in society and building up a class of mentally superior people with more influence than others is part of his programme. The logic of his argument in *On Liberty* leads him to profess on the last page – just before he gives some examples of how to apply these principles – that he is not aware 'that any community has a right to force another to be civilised':

If civilisation has got the better of barbarism when barbarism had the world to itself, it is too much to profess to be afraid lest barbarism, after having been fairly got under, should revive and conquer civilisation. A civilisation that can thus succumb to its vanquished enemy, must first have become so degenerate that neither its appointed priests and teachers, nor anybody else, has the capacity, or will take the trouble, to stand up for it. If this be so, the sooner such a civilisation receives notice to quit the better. It can only go on from bad to worse, until destroyed and regenerated (like the Western Empire) by energetic barbarians.⁴⁶

John Stuart Mill's political theory, thus, is inextricably bound up with his philosophy of history in general and barbarians in particular. Just as in the international context, in the political application of this philosophy of history the original four stages are reduced to a simple juxtaposition between civilised and noncivilised. Mill derives his understanding of civilisation from a description of barbarism; he identifies tendencies within civilisation which might result in its slipping back into barbarism exemplified by China; he propagates the fostering of individuality in order to prevent this fate; but should this fail and civilisation deteriorate too far, it were better for it to be 'destroyed and regenerated by energetic barbarians'. There is not a single step in his argument about domestic politics in which his philosophy of history represented through the barbarians does not play a crucial role. Indeed, the barbarian is civilisation's historical self, its contemporary other, its internal other and its future self.

⁴³ 'Civilization', pp. 119, 135.

⁴⁴ 'Liberty', pp. 14, 17f, 53f, 88, 98.

⁴⁵ 'Considerations', pp. 335–8, 406f.

⁴⁶ 'Liberty', p. 86.

Imperialism, political theory, and IR

Mill's philosophy of history underlying both his political and his international theory, however, is itself rooted in the experience and practice of colonialism.⁴⁷ Mill develops the unequal political relationship between colonial power and colonised population into a general philosophy of history which underlies, in turn, his international and political theory.⁴⁸ He shares with other Enlightenment authors the assumption of cultural development for all of humankind and the ranking of existing as well as extinct societies on a scale of civilisation⁴⁹ – a literature with which he was well acquainted.⁵⁰ Such philosophies of history had, moreover, been used for centuries to justify the exclusion of internal as well as external 'barbarians' – that is, women, children, slaves, workers and non-European peoples who were not deemed to have the necessary *qualified* reason to enjoy equal rights of liberty.⁵¹ Yet, there are two aspects which distinguish his theory from those of his predecessors. Firstly, he directly links different stages of development to different forms of government. Consequently, secondly, the principle of liberty is for Mill not universal but only valid for modern civilisation.

That the experience of colonialism lies at the root of Mill's philosophy of history is firstly borne out by his methodological position. As an empiricist Mill believes that all insight depends on experience.⁵² More concretely, he holds, that 'almost all principles which have been durable were first suggested by observation of some

⁴⁷ Souffrant, 'Transgressions', p. 103.

⁴⁸ Mehta, 'Liberalism', p. 93.

⁴⁹ See Beate Jahn, *The Cultural Construction of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), and Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), for an account of the general importance of a philosophy of history based on civilisational stages for Enlightenment thought. This philosophy of history, thus, does not only haunt liberalism but famously Marxism as well. See, for instance, Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1978). While Marxists have tended to criticise capitalist colonial adventures, Marx still considered the destruction of indigenous cultures through European colonialism as a necessary step towards progress and communism. See Karl Marx, 'The British Rule in India' in *Surveys from Exile*, edited by David Fernbach (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973). Neither was Mill the only author who saw the corrupting nature of civilisation. Jean Jacques Rousseau probably took this argument furthest in his 'Discourse on the Origin of Inequality' in *The Social Contract and Discourses* (London: J. M. Dent, 1993). Since civilisation and savagery were defined in relational terms, the ambivalent conception of civilisation was generally matched by an ambivalent conception of savagery as the lowest, natural, rung on the developmental ladder, yet as such simultaneously providing the basic values for an ideal society based on human nature. For a discussion see Jahn, 'Cultural Construction', pp. 122ff.

⁵⁰ In *On Liberty* (p. 45) he comments approvingly on Rousseau's disruptive arguments for the 18th century belief in the unfettered and automatic good of civilisation; he has written two extensive reviews of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (*Collected Works*, vol. XVIII, pp. 47–90, 153–204); he knew Montesquieu's writings, even if not commenting on them in 'Montesquieu' (*Collected Works*, vol. XXVI, pp. 443–53); he discusses Locke and Kant, for instance, in 'Coleridge' (p. 186f); and, having read the proof sheets at an early age, he knew the literature his father had used in the *History of British India* which included travel literature, Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), and Voltaire, in addition to a variety of publications on India as well as other non-European and ancient nations (James Mill provides extensive notes and references at the end of each chapter of his *History*). James Mill was deeply influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment and, in particular, by its philosophical history as represented in Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, John Millar and Dugald Stewart. See J. H. Burns, 'The Light of Reason: Philosophical History in the Two Mills' in Robson et al. (eds.), 'James and John Stuart Mill', p. 4.

⁵¹ Mehta, 'Liberalism', pp. 31, 36, 49, 76; Hindess, 'What's in a Name?'

⁵² 'Coleridge', p. 188.

particular case, in which the general laws of nature acted in some new or previously unnoticed combination of circumstances' and in this vein he argues that 'it has been the destiny of the government of the East India Company, to suggest the true theory of the government of a semi-barbarous dependency by a civilised country'.⁵³

Secondly, Mill's biography suggests that imperialism in general and the British rule of India in particular were foundational for his thought. He read the proofsheets of his father's *History of British India* – written in support of, and aiming to improve, British rule in India – as part of his education. James Mill sets out the theory of four stages of civilisational development. Unlike most of his predecessors who widely regarded India as an example of an admirably high civilisation, James Mill takes great pains to demonstrate that the Indians are characterised by 'one of the rudest and weakest states of the human mind'. Clearly, this 'fact' justifies British rule over India but it also explains the shortcomings of British government in India (or, rather, blames the low level of Indian civilisation for it) for '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'.⁵⁴ John Stuart Mill praises the book as contributing largely to his education and, though he does have some criticisms, as 'one of the most instructive histories ever written, and one of the books from which most benefit may be derived by a mind in the course of making up its opinions'. And he held that it was only one of his father's minor merits to have been the 'originator of all sound statesmanship in regard to the subject of his largest work, India'.⁵⁵ John Stuart Mill, thus, encountered the theory of civilisational stages of development, directly linked to the question of government in general and the government of India in particular, very early on in his education.

Subsequently, with his father's help, John Stuart Mill himself is employed at India House and spends the next 35 years, until the abolition of East India Company rule, with the administration of the government of India. He reports in his *Autobiography* that working at India House added a good sense of the difficulties of practical politics to his training as a speculative writer.⁵⁶ And this work, as Sullivan and Zastoupil have demonstrated, strongly influenced Mill's philosophical and political writings.⁵⁷ Furthermore, whatever contradictions or inconsistencies are found in Mill's writings in general,⁵⁸ there can be no such doubt about his position concerning the rule of India through the East India Company; it was in his opinion the best possible rule which he defended to the day it was abolished by parliament.⁵⁹

Institutions need to be radically different, according to the stage of advancement already reached. The recognition of this truth, though for the most part empirically rather than philosophically, may be regarded as the main point of superiority in the political theories of the present above those of the last age; in which it was customary to claim representative

⁵³ 'Considerations', p. 466.

⁵⁴ J. Mill, 'History', pp. 461, 456.

⁵⁵ 'Autobiography', pp. 40, 158.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 80f.

⁵⁷ Sullivan, 'Mill's Defense'; Zastoupil, 'Mill and India'.

⁵⁸ John Gray, 'Introduction' in *On Liberty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. xxi, xxix.

⁵⁹ See 'Autobiography', p. 182; 'Considerations', pp. 396–8, 406f, 466; The Petition of the East India Company and various other documents relating to the abolition of the Company's rule in 1858, published in 'Writings on India' in *Collected Works*, vol. XXX.

democracy for England or France by arguments which would equally have proved it the only fit form of government for Bedouins or Malays.⁶⁰

It is his 'empirical' recognition that the mode of government has to be linked to stages of development with the result that the principle of liberty is not universal but only valid for modern civilisation, which constitutes the superiority of his theory over those of his predecessors.

Mill's philosophy of history is the result of the attempt to provide a moral justification for the empirical experience of unequal power relations between Britain and India, and European and non-European cultures in general. That this is the object of Mill's philosophy of history becomes clear in the attempt he makes to turn the military inequality between Britain and India into moral inequality. Both Mill and his father believed that British rule in India had been established through military superiority. Both argued that 'war is the most serious business of a barbarous people'⁶¹ and that 'rude' nations are 'incessantly harassed by the dangers, or following the gains of war'. From this assumption, James Mill concluded that 'one of the first applications of knowledge is, to improve the military art'.⁶² Therefore, Indian military inferiority – in particular the lack of discipline which both Mill and his father equate with cooperation – is a clear sign of civilisational backwardness.⁶³ Indeed, Mill argues that it is discipline, cooperation as an attribute of civilisation, which explains the outcome not just of wars between civilised and rude, enslaved, semi-civilised nations in history 'from Marathon downwards', but even of contemporary European politics in which 'imperfectly civilised' people like the Spaniards could never win against Napoleon because they were unable to cooperate properly; more generally, and on the international level, 'none but civilised nations have ever been able to form an alliance'.⁶⁴ Thus, political, and in particular military, inequality is Mill's point of departure – and that of other British imperialists at the time.⁶⁵ 'Ironically the facts of history become the basis for establishing a theory of history and governance' in which inequalities of power are turned into moral inequalities.

The justification of imperialism, thus, is an integral part of Millian political and international theory; yet neither Political Theory nor IR have critically engaged with its implications.⁶⁶ The selective reading of Mill in both disciplines – based on an acceptance of the separation of the domestic from the international – hides the roots of Mill's contradictions and perpetuates their political implications in today's world.

Mill's philosophy of history emphatically states that civilisation is morally and politically superior to all the lower stages of development. And on this basis Mill provides a moral justification for the general ordering of international affairs based on the rule of civilised over barbarian peoples. However, in his 'domestic' writings Mill depicts civilisation as a form of society 'which in its uncorrected influence . . . has . . . a tendency to destroy' the highest goods.⁶⁷ In this context, Mill compares barbarism favourably with civilisation:

⁶⁰ 'Considerations', p. 231.

⁶¹ 'Civilization', p. 122.

⁶² J. Mill, 'History', p. 481.

⁶³ 'Civilization', p. 122; J. Mill, 'History', pp. 469, 481.

⁶⁴ 'Civilization', p. 123.

⁶⁵ Mehta, 'Liberalism', 91, 78, 76, 89; Parekh, 'Decolonizing Liberalism', p. 92f.

⁶⁶ Mehta, 'Liberalism', pp. 93, 5f.

⁶⁷ 'Civilization', p. 135.

Take for instance the question how far mankind have gained by civilisation. One observer is forcibly struck by the multiplication of physical comforts; the advancement and diffusion of knowledge; the decay of superstition; the facilities of mutual intercourse; the softening of manners; the decline of war and personal conflict; the progressive limitation of the tyranny of the strong over the weak; the great works accomplished throughout the globe by the co-operation of multitudes: and he becomes that very common character, the worshipper of 'our enlightened age'. Another fixes his attention, not upon the value of these advantages, but upon the high price which is paid for them; the relaxation of individual energy and courage; the loss of proud and self-relying independence; the slavery of so large a portion of mankind to artificial wants; their effeminate shrinking from even a shadow of pain; the dull unexciting monotony of their lives, and the passionless insipidity, and absence of any marked individuality, in their characters; the contrast between the narrow mechanical understanding, produced by a life spent in executing by fixed rules a fixed task, and the varied powers of the man of the woods, whose subsistence and safety depend at each instant upon his capacity of extemporarily adapting means to ends; the demoralising effect of great inequalities in wealth and social rank; and the sufferings of the great mass of the people of civilised countries, whose wants are scarcely better provided for than those of the savage, while they are bound by a thousand fetters in lieu of the freedom and excitement which are his compensations.⁶⁸

In fact, Mill insists that all the inventions of which civilisation is so proud have not 'lightened the day's toil of any human being'.⁶⁹ In effect, in his analysis of civilisation, Mill not only demonstrates that moral progress has not taken place, he even doubts that it can boast of having initiated material progress for the benefit of human beings. In the domestic context, civilisation is lacking in the very characteristics – development of individuality, liberty, creativity – which supposedly make it superior to barbarism in the international context. And barbarism, in the domestic context, offers noble manifestations of human cultural development – including individuality, liberty, creativity – the lack of which in the international context make it inferior to civilisation.⁷⁰

Mill may have taken the separation of the domestic from the international for granted. Indeed, if he considered the greater part of 'civilised' populations together with their 'barbarian' contemporaries as in need of 'education' or 'development' as a precondition for the enjoyment of full rights of liberty and equality, this may not stand in contradiction to the claim that modern civilisation itself was vastly superior to 'barbarian' cultures. However, when we turn to Mill's political strategies, we find that he has to draw on the sphere of the 'other'. Taken up with his domestic project of counteracting the negative tendencies of civilisation, Mill finds the solution in the cultural diversity of the international sphere. He prescribes a study of the 'opinions of mankind in all ages and nations'⁷¹ and argues that:

the culture of the human being had been carried to no ordinary height, and human nature had exhibited many of its noblest manifestations, not in Christian countries only, but in the ancient world, in Athens, Sparta, Rome; nay, even barbarians, as the Germans, or still more unmitigated savages, the wild Indians, and again the Chinese, the Egyptians, the Arabs, all had their own education, their own culture; a culture which, whatever might be its tendency on the whole, had been successful in some respect or other. Every form of polity, every condition of society, whatever else it had done, had formed its type of national character.⁷²

⁶⁸ 'Coleridge', p. 182.

⁶⁹ 'Principles', p. 129.

⁷⁰ Mehta, 'Liberalism', p. 100.

⁷¹ 'Bentham', p. 148.

⁷² 'Coleridge', p. 200.

The noble manifestations of other cultures are to be recognised and studied in order to diversify and enrich the narrow and limited tendencies of modern civilisation. Similarly, the unlimited increase of wealth and population resulting in the destruction of the earth's 'pleasantness' for the mere purpose of enabling the support of a larger 'but not a better or happier population' leads him to recommend the stationary state.⁷³

Mill imports the means to save modern civilisation from the international sphere. For here we find cultural diversity, coexistence, and stationary conditions. When dealing with the international sphere, however, the same values of cultural diversity, coexistence, and stagnation stand in the way of the improvement of humankind and Mill exports the characteristics of domestic society – cultural homogeneity, political hierarchy, and assimilation/progress – in order to deal with them. It is the domestic context of *On Liberty* which leads Mill to argue that there is no right to civilise others, and the international context of *Considerations on Representative Government* and *A Few Words on Non-Intervention* which demands the civilising mission as a moral duty.

In fact, it is because Mill defines civilisation as a negation of barbarism that this civilisation cannot exist without barbarism. And for this reason, too, the rights of that civilisation – liberty, sovereignty, free speech – are not universally valid but continually reconstituted as particular rights. Millian liberalism is not only coeval with imperialism but also with nationalism; rather than constituting rights of the individual against the community – as the liberal-communitarian debate suggests – it actually constitutes the civilised community itself in opposition to internal and external 'barbarians'.⁷⁴ The unfamiliar and backward represents a threat to this liberalism and the relationship between the two can therefore only be a struggle 'in which power and not understanding must be deployed'.⁷⁵

Accordingly, the international sphere plays an enormous role in defining that barbarian enemy of liberalism at any given time. During the Cold War, communism provided that threat and since its end 'religious, especially Muslim fundamentalism, has become the new liberal nightmare'.⁷⁶ In the context of American legal discourse on free speech, Passavant demonstrates that the Millian paradigm provides 'a moral geography of civilisation and barbarism that describes and delimits who merits liberty' or, more concretely, it offers 'a frame of inclusion and exclusion for identifying a people for whom freedom of speech is appropriate and those for whom it is not'. On the basis of this moral geography American members of Al Qaeda are tried before civil courts while the 'rest' are held in Guantanamo Bay and tried before military commissions – just as this same moral geography defines the positions meriting the right to free speech in the domestic American discourse and those who do not.⁷⁷

The influence of this Millian paradigm, however, is not restricted to practical politics but exerts its influence similarly in the academic sphere. Thus, liberals like Joseph Raz and Brian Barry – whether they consider themselves Millian or not – reproduce the major steps of Mill's argument. Immigrant, especially Muslim,

⁷³ 'Principles', pp. 126, 129.

⁷⁴ Passavant, 'No Escape', p. 2; Mehta, 'Liberalism', pp. 101, 104; Parekh, 'Decolonizing Liberalism', p. 98.

⁷⁵ Mehta, 'Liberalism', p. 104; Parekh, 'Decolonizing Liberalism', p. 99.

⁷⁶ Parekh, 'Decolonizing Liberalism', p. 94; Passavant, 'No Escape', p. 108.

⁷⁷ Passavant, 'No Escape', pp. 93, 86, xiif.

communities are depicted as a potential threat to the liberal way of life. Hence, liberalism has the right to defend itself against that threat by means of interventionist policies which either aim at the assimilation or the exclusion of these communities.⁷⁸ Just as for Mill, neither the individual member of such a 'nonliberal' community nor the community itself has a voice in these matters. Hence, Rawls excludes not just 'outlaw states' and 'burdened societies' but also every single one of their individual members from all the original positions in which the Law of Peoples is being decided.⁷⁹ 'Despite the expressed liberal commitment to the primacy of the individual, the person who is a member of the 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.'⁸⁰

The same principle operates in the international sphere. It is widely and uncritically accepted that modern civilisation – the West – embodies Mill's principles of liberty, individuality and progress resulting in a selective application of the principle of sovereignty in the international sphere. Perfectly in line with Mill's argument, Western states are accorded the right to non-intervention while the rest can be intervened against. Charles Beitz, for instance, argues for a right to intervention in unjust states and a recognition of sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention for just states.⁸¹ The same holds true for Andrew Linklater's division of the world into pluralist, solidarist and post-Westphalian societies of states in ascending order, in which those states which exhibit a higher form of cultural and moral development have the right to intervene in states of a lower stage of development, but not the other way around.⁸²

We find a similar division of the world in Michael Doyle's 'zone of peace' made up of democratic Western states confronted with the 'zone of war' made up of the rest; or in Francis Fukuyama's division of the world between 'post-historical' Western democratic capitalist states and the rest which still finds itself embroiled in 'history';⁸³ and, of course, in Huntington's 'West versus the rest'.⁸⁴ All these divisions of humanity rely implicitly or explicitly on a philosophy of history which accords an unequal moral status – and unequal rights – to different cultures. Thus, Mill's justification of colonialism is of continuing relevance today, as Eddy Souffrant has argued, because it provides the basis for 'the implementation of a foreign policy of intervention (which) constitutes the fundamental nature of imperialism'.⁸⁵

This continuing influence of Mill on contemporary politics – domestic and international – requires a serious and critical engagement with his work. Such an engagement, however, is only possible if the disciplinary separation between Political Theory and IR is overcome. For it is this separation which constitutes a systematic barrier for the engagement of both disciplines with Mill's philosophy of history and

⁷⁸ Parekh, 'Decolonizing Liberalism', p. 95ff.

⁷⁹ John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 81, 106.

⁸⁰ Mehta, 'Liberalism', p. 112.

⁸¹ Beitz, 'Political Theory', pp. 91f.

⁸² Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), p. 167.

⁸³ Michael Doyle, 'Kant, Liberal Legacies, and International Affairs', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 12 (1983), pp. 217, 344; Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History', *The National Interest* (1989).

⁸⁴ Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (1993).

⁸⁵ Souffrant, 'Transgressions', p. 136.

the 'imperatives of imperial governance' from which it arises.⁸⁶ And it is this separation, too, which hides the systematic nature of the exclusionary politics of the Millian paradigm.

Political Theorists have identified the contradictions in Mill's work, indeed, these contradictions provide them with their puzzles: is he a systematic or an unsystematic thinker;⁸⁷ does he believe that 'society is the work of man or man . . . the work of society';⁸⁸ how does he reconcile the elements of permanence and progression in his writings;⁸⁹ what is methodologically dominant, the abstract utilitarian principles or his philosophy of history?⁹⁰ The most prominent puzzle in Mill's thought for Political theorists is the relationship between individual liberty on the one hand and the good of society and/or state intervention on the other. The terms of the discussion differ – self-regarding versus other-regarding actions,⁹¹ liberty versus enforcement of morality/state-intervention⁹² – and they lead to further problems in Mill's thought – regarding the constitution of the individual and its potential for development.⁹³

Yet, the attempt to overcome this contradiction fails in the absence of an engagement with Mill's international thought and his philosophy of history. In this vein, Nadia Urbinati presents Mill as a philosopher of deliberative democracy and overlooks entirely that the moral and political contents of this deliberation is drawn from a philosophy of history based on the distinction between civilisation and barbarism which, as Passavant has shown, is constantly reproduced in the legal discourse on free speech. According to Urbinati, 'Mill's denunciation of despotism' is based on the fact that it is 'such a great evil because it obstructs the path toward independence and aims at keeping individuals in a status of *perennial* paternalism so as to make them mentally and practically subaltern'.⁹⁴ Not paying attention to Mill's international thought,⁹⁵ however, she does not realise that this denunciator of despotism in the domestic context considered despotism 'the ideal rule of a free people over a barbarous or semi-barbarous one'.⁹⁶ In the international context, he advocated exactly that form of government which aims – if unconsciously – at keeping people perennially in a subaltern state. Urbinati, thus, reproduces the core contradiction in Mill's work: if despotism produces subaltern rather than autonomous beings, then it cannot be employed temporarily with the aim of enabling

⁸⁶ Mehta, 'Liberalism', p. 91.

⁸⁷ Gray, 'Introduction', pp. xxi, xxix; G. W. Smith, 'The Logic of J. S. Mill on Freedom', *Political Studies* (1980), pp. 238–52.

⁸⁸ Robson, 'Rational Animals', p. 146.

⁸⁹ Edward Alexander, 'The Principles of Permanence and Progression in the Thought of J. S. Mill' in Robson et al. (eds.), 'James and John Stuart Mill', pp. 126–42.

⁹⁰ Burns, 'Light of Reason', pp. 3–20.

⁹¹ R. J. Halliday, 'Some Recent Interpretations of John Stuart Mill', *Philosophy*, 43 (1968), pp. 1–17.

⁹² M. Hollis, 'J. S. Mill's Political Philosophy of Mind', *Philosophy*, 47 (1972), pp. 334–47; D. G. Brown, 'Mill on Liberty and Morality', *Philosophical Review Quarterly*, LXXXI (1972), pp. 133–58; C. L. Ten, 'Mill and Liberty', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 30 (1969), pp. 47–68; T. Honderich, 'The Worth of J. S. Mill "On Liberty"', *Political Studies*, XXII (1974), pp. 463–70.

⁹³ R. F. Ladenson, 'Mill's Conception of Individuality', *Social Theory and Practice*, 4 (1977), pp. 167–82; G. L. Williams, 'Mill's Principle of Liberty', *Political Studies*, XXIV (1976), pp. 132–40.

⁹⁴ Urbinati, 'Democracy', pp. 178f.

⁹⁵ In her entire study, Urbinati does not mention India, colonialism, imperialism or Mill's philosophy of history once. She represents Mill's position on 'backward peoples' as 'egalitarian and participatory in principle' because they are not considered 'nonhuman' and their enjoyment of equal rights is only 'temporarily' suspended ('Democracy', p. 177).

⁹⁶ 'Considerations', p. 454.

people to more autonomy. Theoretically and politically, domestically and internationally, Millian discourses exclude liberalism's 'others' from that highly praised deliberation because they are defined as 'others' in a philosophy of history which underlies and is *prior* to his political and international theory. And, as we have seen, Mill's domestic and international writings are directly linked, as are the rights of free speech, of immigrant communities, and nonliberal states.

Yet, while Political Theorists like Mehta, Passavant, Parekh and others have started to explore the foundational nature of the international in general and imperialism in particular for Mill's thought and its continuing influence in the contemporary world, IR has remained entirely oblivious to both. If empire and imperialism are now so widely discussed in IR, a thorough understanding of these concepts and their continuing influence in the contemporary world may well require a serious engagement with John Stuart Mill. This engagement, however, must dispense with the idea that Mill wrote just *A Few Words on Non-Intervention* between sovereign states. If the freedom of individual citizens of liberal states, of immigrant communities and of nonliberal states is systematically curtailed in the name of the 'war on terror', IR may well be advised to take notice of Mill's philosophical and political writings as well.