# John Stuart Mill on International Legitimacy

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**Abstract.** This article locates the perceived antipathy that Mill thought inherent to representative government and liberty in his contributions to debates surrounding nineteenth century international crises, and seeks to address an emerging interpretation which casts Mill's IR philosophy as inherently imperial. Additional themes to be explored are the centrality of a 'philosophy of history' in Mill's political thought and the extent to which Mill can legitimately be considered the intellectual precursor of modern liberal international thought.

Though John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) is a dominant figure in political theory, his work has been alternately neglected or scorned by IR scholars.[1] In fact, Immanuel Kant, rather than Mill, is considered the true progenitor of the liberal tradition, which is exemplified most successfully in contemporary IR theory by Rawls and Doyle.[2] Where Mill has been considered his work has been dismissed as embodying, in Uday Mehta's words (1999, 20), 'an imperial urge to dominate the world'. Following Mehta, Jahn (2005a, 196) claims that Mill's paternalistic attitude towards 'nonliberal states' 'provides the principle on which the whole of Mill's theory of international relations rests'. Mill's international thought is 'inextricably linked to imperialism' and is a 'perfect match' for contemporary liberalism, which 'shares its aims, justifications, and means with imperialism' (Jahn, 2005a, 197, 194; 2005b, 204).

This paper makes two claims: firstly, Mill's imperialism has been much overstated. To read Mill as an imperialist is a significant misrepresentation of the implications of his political thought for international theory. Secondly, that Mill's international thought warrants a more extensive treatment, as it provides an alternative liberal theory of international relations to that of Kant and his followers.

**Liberalism and Imperialism**

Where Mill is discussed in IR scholarship he is often assimilated into the liberal tradition, where the tendency towards imperialism and intervention is often considered inexorable (i.e., Mehta 1999; Jahn, 2005a, 2005b; Souffrant, 2000; Parekh, 1994). Jahn (2005b, 618; 2005a, 204) sees a linear progression from Mill to Iraq and

[1] There is no serious treatment of Mill in many of the formative works of IR theory, such as E.H. Carr's, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1958); Hedley Bull's, *The Anarchical Society* (1977); Martin Wight's *International Theory: The Three Traditions* (1994) or *Systems of States* (1977); Kenneth Waltz's, *Theory of International Politics* (1979); or F.H. Hinsley's *Sovereignty* (1966). It is indicative of this trend that Miller (1961, 509, 511, 513) should conclude that '[Mill] so modifies the principle of non-intervention previously set up that it is exceedingly complicated and perhaps meaningless as a guide... he starts from a principle which tends to become meaningless *qua* principle in its further elaboration and explanation.'

[2] Jahn (2005a, 178-9, 183) acknowledges Kant's supremacy in contemporary liberal international thought, and his influence on Beitz and Rawls.

the erosion of civil liberties in 'liberal states'.[3] Similarly, Mehta (1999, 103-4, 214) compares Mill to Fukuyama, and, despite elsewhere lambasting Mill for his obsession with 'progress' and aversion to 'stasis', considers the former (and Bentham) 'intellectual precursors' to the latter's 'end of history' thesis and forerunners to western intolerance of states such as Iran and Cuba.[4] 'Mill and contemporary liberals [such as Rawls, Beitz, and Linklater] deny equal rights to nonliberal or noncivilised states on exactly the same grounds' (Jahn, 2005a, 197). 'Nonliberal' is merely the updated form of Mill's 'barbarous'. For these reasons, and because modern liberalism is allegedly created in Mill's image, 'not all interventions are interventionist, but all liberal justifications of interventions are.' Such absolutism warrants immediate attention.

Scholars have identified serious problems with this linear intellectual history. As Bell (2006; 2007) and Buyoucannis (2007) argue, liberalism as a tradition has been misinterpreted in IR. Bell, for example, warns against 'conceiv[ing] of "liberalism" as a homogenous body of thought stretching from the seventeenth century into the present and speaking with one dominant voice', most frequently that of Mill or Locke (2006, 285; 2007, 267-8 n. 14). On the question of lineage, Boucoyannis has pointed out the divergence of utilitarian liberalism, furthered by Mill, Bentham, Herbert Spencer (to an extent), and the Manchester School, and the 'classical version of Liberalism', represented by Smith, Locke, and Machiavelli. The mistake in contemporary IR discourse, she argues, is the conflation of idealism and

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[3] For the link between Mill and Fukuyama, Huntington, and 'modern liberalism, which restricts nonintervention to 'just states' see Jahn (2005b, 616-7; 2005a, 203-4). '[T]he political consequences unfolding from liberal imperialism show an uncanny resemblance through the ages. From the involvement of Victorian Britain in India, through liberal foreign policies during the Cold War and since its end, the tendency toward interventionism in inseparable from general liberal beliefs in the nature of nonliberal societies (Jahn, 2005a, 180).'

[4] For a summary of some similar views see Schultz (2007, 108). Jahn (2005b, 616) also considers Fukuyama 'perfectly in line with Mill's argument'.

utilitarianism with classical Liberalism, which 'reflect two separate traditions' of 'opposing philosophical foundations' (2007, 703, 705, 709).

In agreement with this interpretation, Mill's interpreters (Ryan, 1998, 507; Skorupski, 2006, 103; Morales, 1996, 181; Boucoyannis, 2007, 708-9; Bell, 2006, 285-6) have made a point of noting just how awkwardly Mill, let alone others such as Locke, fits into the liberal tradition:

> It is a matter for regret that commentators have been so eager to assimilate Mill's ideas to those of mainstream twentieth-century liberalism that they have not seen what a very awkward ally of twentieth century liberals he is (Ryan, 1998, 507).

If liberalism is defined by an affirmation of natural rights, or belief in a social contract, or the glorification of individualism then Mill is immediately excluded as an exponent. Like Bentham, he rejects natural rights theory (Mill, 1843, 889; 1859b, 224);[5] his epistemology cannot support the 'circular' contractarianism of Hobbes and Locke (Mill, 1843, 827, 889; 1859b, 276; 1832, 10); he considered himself a socialist (1873, 239); and his defence of individual liberty is based on utilitarian ethics (Mill, 1859b, 224, 260-75; 1843, 951-2; Skorupski, 1989, 45; Gray, 1983, 67, 125). Rawls, arguably the most influential of the contemporary liberals, takes the rejection of one of Mill's most fundamental philosophical commitments—that utilitarian ethics ought to guide political organisation—as his starting point in *A Theory of Justice*. In fact, Rawls (1999, xviii, 20) declares it 'my aim' to resurrect 'the traditional theory of the social contract as represented by Locke, Rousseau, and Kant' so that it 'represents an alternative to utilitarian thought generally', which, he argues in contrast to Bouycannis, is represented by Hume, Smith, Bentham and Mill. Bell's conclusion is that the idea of a homogenous or coherent liberal tradition is dubious at

[5] Indeed, rights are 'non-foundational' in Mill's thought. For an acknowledgement of this see Raz (1986, 250-1)

best (2006, 285). It is indeed a suspiciously capacious intellectual history which considers comparable the ‘moral geography’ and political goals of Mill, Rawls, Beitz, Doyle, Linklater, Fukuyama, and Huntington, all of whom are said to ‘rely implicitly on a philosophy of history’ (Jahn, 2005b, 616). Mill’s utilitarianism is almost certainly incompatible with the distinct political programmes of all these thinkers, as Rawls himself makes clear (1999, 20).

There are, however, categorically ‘liberal’ elements in Mill’s international thought. Chris Brown (2002, 62-3, 77) points out that Mill was an early advocate of national self-determination, which is characteristic of liberal internationalism after 1918.[6] Furthermore, it is argued (Miller, 1961, 500; Williams, 2006, 23) that Mill, like Adam Smith, was a believer in what E. H. Carr (1958, 45, 50) called the ‘*laissez-faire* doctrine of the harmony of interests’; that the strengthening of trade relationships and economic integration would contribute to peaceful relations.

But even if Mill is to be considered a representative of the liberal international tradition, it is far from clear that an imperial ‘urge’ is inherent to it or to Mill’s particular brand of liberalism. According to Bell (2006, 286), this is at odds with the contextual evidence; Richard Cobden and Herbert Spencer, two of Mill’s ‘liberal’ contemporaries, were ‘scathing’ and ‘vitriolic’ critics of empire. ‘It was also the case that heated opposition to imperialism (although rarely to all facets of the empire) continued to emanate from within the liberal ranks’ (Bell, 2007, 268). Bell argues this reflects a late-Victorian shift in opinion about the legitimacy and efficacy of Empire:

> [t]he standard mid-Victorian liberal line was sceptical of what came to be known during the 1870s as “imperialism”, a mode of aggressive and militaristic adventurism associated traditionally with Caesarist tendencies in France, but also increasingly with Disraeli’s Eastern policy... Just as there

[6] See also, Miller (1961, 497, 512). On nationality and self-determination Miller thinks Mill ‘adhered to the position prevalent among nineteenth century Liberals,’ but that he was far from visionary compared to some of his contemporaries. Williams (2006, 25) describes Mill as a member of a liberal internationalist ‘tradition’, which, among others, includes Woodrow Wilson and Jeremy Bentham.

> was no imperial logic to liberalism, so the relationship between utilitarianism and empire is more ambiguous than is sometimes recognized... [T]here was no necessary connection between the philosophy and the political project (2006, 286-7).

In the last five years of his life, Mill too (1869c, 1599; 1869b, 1560) exhibits ‘the most deep rooted distrust’ of the motives and capabilities of overseas English officials and settlers, whose ‘insolence’ towards ‘the native populations’ he considered a ‘disgrace’. Influenced by the happenings of the Governor Eyre affair, and in particular the failure of the Jamaica Committee (which he chaired) in bringing Eyre to justice for his brutal suppression of the Morant Bay Rebellion (an ‘abomination’, 1865b, 1126), Mill’s final position on Empire was one of suspicion and scepticism:

> But the common English abroad—I do not know if in this they are worse than other people—are intensely contemptuous of what they consider inferior races, & seldom willingly practise any other mode of attaining their ends with them than bullying and blows (1869c, 1599).
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> Nothing can be more laudable than your purpose in writing the book[7] - that of inspiring greater respect for the people of India in the minds of those who are appointed to govern them. That respect for the most part exists in the experienced men who know the natives from a long course of service India; but nothing can be more disgusting than the feelings & demeanour towards them of numbers of the raw young Englishmen who go out & I am afraid this is an increasing evil’ (Mill, 1870b, 1686).

This hardly amounted to penitence or a serious revision of his position, however. Jennifer Pitts (2005, 151) rightly argues that while Mill (1866b, 1205) now wrote of the ‘overbearing and insolent [English] settlers’ and that the Eyre controversy ‘deepened Mill’s concern about [the] persistent injustices of colonial rule’, his ‘response fell short of a thoroughgoing interrogation of the premises and systematic failures of British rule over populations that Mill, like most of his

[7] The letter is addressed to Charlotte Speer Manning and refers to her *Ancient and Medieval India*, published in 1869.

countrymen, considered civilisationally inferior.' In a letter to David Urquhart written in 1866 Mill is clear on the nature of his disillusionment and the focus of his efforts:

> You approve of my speech [in Parliament] because you see that I am not on this occasion standing up for the negroes, or for liberty, deeply as both are interested in the subject – but for the first necessity of human society, law (1866b, 1205).

Nevertheless, the waning of Mill's belief in the efficacy and practicability of colonial rule during and after his experiences in the Jamaica Committee (1865-1869) squares with Bell's position that liberal thought generally is marked by its changing attitude towards empire late in the nineteenth century.

One final problem with Jahn's and Mehta's interpretations is that their focus on Mill's defence of the East India Company—his life-long employer—and his defence of colonial rule distorts Mill's conceptions of legitimacy and sovereignty and obscures the logical disconnection in his thought between 'international' politics, and matters of state. As inadequate as his position is, Mill never considered colonial rule a truly 'international' matter, and as such what he has to say about empire is somewhat irrelevant to his 'international' philosophy. For Mill questions about the existing colonial structure and debates about future interventions required different approaches. Writing two hundred and sixty years after Queen Elizabeth I gave the EIC its Royal Charter (in 1600), the question for Mill, the utilitarian, was whether the colonies benefited by the existing arrangements.[8] The issue of intervention, for whatever end, was, politically and morally, of a different order.

As such, in Mill's work International Relations and the governance of the empire are wholly discreet topics. The foci of the large proportion of Mill's international thought, and, as he professed, of his essay *A Few Words on Non-*

[8] Though 'he was not intellectually a wholehearted supporter of empire' (Prager, 2005, 630). Also, 'Mill was never an unequivocal supporter of its [the EIC] various policies' (Levin, 2004, 41). For further evidence of Mill's lukewarm and inconsistent defence of the EIC see Ryan (1998, 531).

*intervention*, are relations between what he calls 'the community of nations,' which is 'essentially a republic of equals' (Mill, 1870a, 346; 1873, 263). In contrast to his defence of unequal colonial relations, such a community 'know[s] no distinction of grades, no rights or privileges enjoyed by some and refused to others. The basis of International law... is, that the smallest and least powerful nation, in its capacity of a nation, is the equal of the strongest. Whatever rights belong to one belong to all' (Mill 1870a, 346). Though Duncan Bell (2006, 293) warns against the assumption 'that Victorian society was infused with an imperial spirit', it is nevertheless characteristic of Mill's period, and unacceptable to ours, that Mill never considered colonised states international 'equals', and that he never considered British colonial rule a truly 'international' matter (Vincent, 1974, 55; c.f. Pitts, 2003, 201-2, 2005; Mehta, 1999; Levin, 2004, 42). The empire already existed and Mill's concern was with what should be done with it, rather than with the justness of the initial territorial expansion. In a different context, Mill is employing the Kantian distinction between '*mode of acquisition*' and '*fact of possession*' (Kant, 1795, 116).

This conceptual discretion between 'international' politics and empire is central to Mill's construction of a theory of legitimacy, a model of just intervention, and to his search for a practical method with which to negotiate, or at least to confront, the 'moral entanglements' these subjects inevitably present (Mill, 1870a, 343). It is not my intention to defend Mill here, much less is it my aim to exculpate him. Mill's position on empire is unimpressive, untenable, and, compared to his progressive domestic radicalism, uncritical. Wendy Donner (1991, 171) rightly describes his infamous likening of 'backward states' to children as 'not just false, it is embarrassingly false'. However, an exegesis of Mill's dichotomous model of non-intervention reveals considerable textual holes in interpretation which conflates

legitimacy and empire in Mill's thought. Firstly, the role of history in Mill's political thought has been severely misunderstood by his critics. This is crucial because it is Mill's 'largely implicit philosophy of history' that is considered the source of his imperial 'urge' and the worm, unknowingly reproduced, at the heart of modern liberal internationalism. Mill's allegedly inherent imperialism is of immense importance to contemporary IR because Jahn and Mehta use their interpretations of him to generalise about 'contemporary liberalism', for which Mill's thought is considered a 'perfect match'. This debate over whether liberalism is inherently imperial is fuelling an emerging body of work (Bell, 2006, 2007; Hall, 2008, Prager, 2005; Jahn, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Souffrant, 2000). This article seeks to add to this literature by showing that Mill never imagined that history or historical science ought to be, or could, be the proper guide for political action. Mill provides several logical and political objections to such a proposition, which are ignored or undetected by some of his most prominent critics.

**A 'philosophy of history' and the emerging IR interpretation**

Some scholars have argued not only that Mill has an historicised view of social and political 'progress', but also that this element of his international thought is proto-neoconservative.[9] Mill's alleged commitment to intervention in the affairs of 'nonliberal' states, it is argued (Mehta, 1999, 102; Jahn, 2005b, 610-11; 2005a, 202-3), relies on an 'implicit philosophy of history' which is a central underlying assumption of his international thought. As such, it is necessary briefly to explore this alleged centrality before Mill's understanding of legitimacy can be explored.

Suspicion and concern over Mill's allegedly 'implicit philosophy of history' are not new. Although his focus was not imperialism, Karl Popper (1971, 87-8; 2005,

[9] See Schultz, (2007, 112, 108). Andrew Williams (2006, 4) contrasts 'the mobilization of "liberalism" in a cause which has come to be called "neoconservatism"' with those who 'opposed war in the terms of the liberalism of John Stuart Mill'.

65) argued that Mill was as much an historicist as Marx. According to Popper (2005, 45-6; 1971, 322), common to both thinkers is a commitment to a 'staged' view of progress, in which a social engineer could succumb to all manner of political evils in an attempt to 'shorten and lessen ... [the] birth pangs' of inevitable social movement (Marx) or 'to accelerate the natural progress so far as it is beneficial' (Mill).[10]

The emerging IR interpretation takes this further. It has been alleged (Jahn 2005b, 599, 610-11) that Mill's entire philosophy—'political', 'international', and 'domestic'—services his need to justify the imperial conquest and subjugation of peoples considered noncivilised. Extending the argument of Mehta's *Liberalism and Empire*, Jahn (2005b, 610) argues that Mill's thought is 'inextricably bound up with his philosophy of history in general and barbarians in particular.' The two central contentions are: that Mill's international thought is limited by a crude and implicit 'philosophy of history,' which relies upon 'stages of civilisation', 'underlies... his international and political theory' and explicitly authorises conquest and subjugation in order to accelerate or administer a nineteenth century idea of 'progress' (Jahn, 2005b, 610-11; 2006, 192-4). Secondly, this 'philosophy of history' informs his political thought in its entirety (2005b, 610-11). The conclusion is that Mill's international thought is inherently interventionist, 'inextricably linked to imperialism' and 'best understood while analysing his attempted justification of colonization.'[11]

This interpretation is at odds with Mill's own account in his professed statement of epistemology, *A System of Logic* (1843), which was revised and reissued seven times in his lifetime. In the chapter on the "Inverse Deductive or Historical Method", Mill proclaims that the search for a general law of 'progress' in history is a

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[10] The quote is from Mill's *System of Logic*: (1843, 929).

[11] See also Souffrant (2000, 3). Contradictory interpretations of the source of Mill's political philosophy, and of its purpose, can be found in the following: Morales (1996); Ryan (1990); Donner (1991); and Skorupski (1989).

‘fundamental misconception’ of social science. Mill is adamant that ‘it is an imperative rule never to introduce any generalization from history into the social science’ (1843, 915).[12] Mill does indicate that there may be uniformities in the causes for radical societal and political change, but he believes this to be a matter of empirical investigation of unique events (linking specific effects to their causes), rather than an hypothesis of natural or universal law (Ryan, 1974, 92-3). Furthermore, even if such a law exists, it ‘could not possibly be computed by human faculties’ (Mill, 1843, 906; 1836, 126). There is no method with which ‘to determine a priori the order in which human development must take place, and to predict, consequently, the general facts of history up to the present time’ (Mill, 1843, 915).[13] Thus, the innumerable causes of social change render historical science a matter of empirical fact-finding, and prohibit any possibility of predicting the nature of future states based upon the past (Skorupski, 1989, 264-266). This bears some resemblance to Kant’s position, which, according to Jahn (2005a, 187), acknowledges ‘the limitations of human interpretations of history.’

Mill also variously reports that

> it is my decided opinion formed on mature consideration, that the importance of history as a source of political knowledge has been greatly overrated ... [and is] inconsiderable (1827, 392, 394).
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> Not only is history not the source of political philosophy, but the profoundest political philosophy is requisite to explain history... History is not the foundation, but the verification, of the social science ... the usefulness of history depends upon its being kept in second place (1835a, 44-5; c.f. 1843, 929-30).

[12] The sentence ends, ‘unless sufficient grounds for it can be pointed out in human nature.’ Mill (1843, 914-15) thinks this impossible. Elsewhere (1874, 402), he emphatically rejects any appeal to Nature or natural processes as a guide for action.

[13] Mill does indicate, however, that he ‘believes’ that human society tends to improve its welfare over time. This admission is the target of Popper’s attacks, though his objections are distinct from those of Jahn and Mehta.

These statements raise questions over the validity of Mehta's claims (1999, 88-9) that Mill saw normative value in history and Jahn's claims about the primacy of history in Mill's political thought. While Mill did argue (1843, 931) that 'the collective series of social phenomena, in other words the course of history, is subject to general laws, which philosophy may possibly detect' it does not follow that he thought these subsequently incomputable laws an appropriate guide for political action. In fact, Mill explicitly suggests otherwise. I do not propose to suggest that Mill was not a progressivist. My aim is merely to question the prevailing view that there is in Mill's thought a direct link between a philosophy of history and political action, and that this provides the foundation upon which Mill's international philosophy is built.

**Legitimacy and Sovereignty: 'Prime Requisites of a Stable Political Union'**

Mill's doctrine of non-intervention, if it can be called such, is based on his idea of legitimacy and the view that democracy and liberty are not necessarily complementary, rather than any philosophy of history. So what is Mill's understanding of international legitimacy? Mill, like Walzer (1980, 214), considers internal legitimacy discreet from external legitimacy. By internal legitimacy is meant that a government has a moral right to exist, which for Mill means that it *secures the interests of the people* and does not govern exclusively for itself. Internal legitimacy is thus not simply the presence of a 'final and absolute authority in the political community' (Hinsley, 1966, 1). It is quantifiable in terms of power and submission only to the extent to which the people are satisfied that their interests are being furthered by the sovereign. Sovereignty, then, is a measure of respect a government justly solicits from its citizens, whose obedience is a civic duty. Thus internal sovereignty is the prize of legitimate government. External sovereignty is purely

negative; it is the right not to be interfered with. Mill permits, in fact, he implores, revolution with two stipulations: the government is acting regardless of the desires and needs of its citizens (this indicates illegitimacy), and success in revolution is likely.

Mill’s position, in which both his conception of individual freedom and his utilitarianism are crucial, is that internal legitimacy is ineffable to foreign states. Only the people concerned can determine whether its government is legitimate. Therefore for Mill there is no logical connection between internal legitimacy and external sovereignty. Walzer’s maxim (1980, 214) is overtly Millian in sentiment and in logic: ‘states can be presumptively legitimate in international society and actually illegitimate at home.’ This position is implicit in the following passage, in which Mill most likely intended to defend the French Provisional Government:

> There is much to be said for the doctrine that a nation should be willing to assist its neighbours in throwing off oppression and gaining free institutions. Much also may be said by those who maintain that one nation is incompetent to judge and act for another, and that each should be left to help itself, and seek advantage or submit to disadvantage as it can and will (1859a, 114).

Charles Beitz (1979, 83-4) detects a link between Mill’s conception of internal legitimacy and the anti-paternalism of *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism* (Mill, 1859b, 277, 226, 260-2; 1861, 252). Mill’s prohibition on intervening for an ‘idea’ (1859a, 118) is, in part, based upon the assumption, central not only to his liberalism, but also to his utilitarianism, that the individual is the proper judge of his or her own personal good, or happiness (Mill, 1859b, 277; Prager, 2005, 626-7). This has obvious significance for Mill’s international philosophy because, as Prager argues (2005, 626), he ‘viewed the autonomy of individuals and states through the same prism... [and] used the same justification for ruling out interference with individuals and nations.’

Mill is subsequently led to argue that the good of a collective, the pursuit of which is crucial to legitimacy, like that of an individual, is ineffable to others.

Although Mill never explicitly articulates a theory of sovereignty in its entirety, he does profess certain 'circumstances' to be necessary, but perhaps not sufficient, for external sovereignty. These circumstances 'may be considered... as conditions of the existence of the complex phenomena called a State' (Mill, 1843, 920). In his *System of Logic* (1843, 920-4) Mill develops a quasi-realist conception of sovereignty. He lists what he considers to be the 'prime requisites of a stable political union.' Included, among others, are: a 'system of education', an individual desire to act towards the social good, the rule of law, the ability to enforce the law, obedience to government, loyalty to government, and social cohesion.[14] These properties are irrespective of internal legitimacy; they are, as Mill's phrase suggests, conditions crucial to political 'stability' and 'permanent political society' (Mill, 1843, 922). The absence of these circumstances is signified by the presence of anarchy, disorganisation, selfishness, civil war, and, finally, despotism, the combined force of which renders a society 'the prey of a foreign invader' (Mill, 1843, 922-3). The presence of Mill's 'requisites' also indicates the absence of the three conditions which license intervention—civil war, a 'national crime and scandal to humanity, such as the slave trade', and pre-existing foreign intervention. These are what Walzer, whose criteria are near identical, calls 'the rules of disregard' (Mill 1859a, 111; Walzer 2006, 87; 1980, 217).

In his conditions for statehood, Mill makes no provision for democratic government, individual liberty, individual rights, republicanism, secularism,

[14] By 'social cohesion' Mill does 'not mean nationality in the vulgar sense of the term; a senseless antipathy to foreigners; indifference to the general welfare of the human race, or an unjust preference of the supposed interests of our own country; a cherishing of bad peculiarities because they are national, or a refusal to adopt what has been found good by other countries (1843, 923).'

federalism or any form of equality or egalitarianism. The omission of much of the key components on the agenda of classical or contemporary liberalism is deliberate. It was noted that if a governing body pursues and secures the interests of the citizenry over which it presides, it has a moral claim to internal legitimacy. As Mill infamously, and perhaps contradictorily, argues (1859b, 224), this does not necessarily involve democracy. For example, one of the essential components of a 'stable political union'—loyalty, 'something which people agreed in holding sacred'—'is not confined to any particular form of government... whether in a democracy or in a monarchy, its essence is always the same' (Mill, 1843, 922-3). Therefore, a state can be admitted to the 'community of nations' without acquiring any of the qualities liberal thinkers including Mill consider imperative to the health of civil society and to the 'well-being' of the individual (Mill 1859b, 261).

It is clear from Mill's writings that external sovereignty does not depend on domestic governmental structure or on the liberality or otherwise of social or political institutions. Thus it is beyond, indeed in spite of, the textual evidence to claim with reference to Mill that 'liberal justifications of intervention are based on the nature of nonliberal societies in general, rather than on their actual behavior' (Jahn, 2005a, 203). Mill is erroneously identified with Rawls, who, it is argued, justifies 'unequal law and intervention' with 'the establishment of an ideal liberal domestic regime as the precondition for the constitution of the Law of Peoples' (Jahn, 2005a, 185). If a state is illiberal, the argument goes, it has no claim to international respect of its sovereignty.[15] Here Mill is quoted (Jahn, 2005a, 195-6). 'Barbarians will not reciprocate', he says (1859a, 118), and thus they are not privy to the principle of non-intervention which, by default, ought to govern relations between 'equal' states.

[15] For the emphasis on the nature of 'nonliberal societies' in 'liberal imperialism' see Jahn, (2005a, 180).

This interpretation is based on a view of legitimacy which Mill rejects. For Mill, a state's claim to sovereignty, and therefore its claim to be admitted to the protection of the principle of non-intervention and international equality, is not determined by the value, however conceived, or the liberality of its social and political institutions; the structure of government is almost irrelevant to external sovereignty. What is important is reciprocity of international treaties, laws, and conventions, which Mill thinks only 'civilised' nations will uphold (1859a, 118-9). 'Barbarism' indicates an absence of the conditions Mill considers imperative to political *stability* and statehood, and thus prohibits membership to the 'republic of equals.' In *Civilization* (1836, 120), Mill describes 'savagery' as the antonym of 'civilization' and as the converse of the 'stable' society described in the *Logic*:

> In savage life there is no commerce, no manufacture, no agriculture... little or no law, or administration of justice; no systematic employment of the collective strength of society to protect individuals against injury from one another; every one trusts to his own strength or cunning.

But life is not always brutish and short; the 'savage' has 'bodily strength', 'enterprise', and, crucially, the individuality which civilization suppresses (1836, 122). In his formulation of 'civilisation' and 'barbarism', rightly identified by Jahn (2006, 201) and others as untenable,[16] 'barbarism' is synonymous with aggression, lack of reciprocation, and the absence of the 'requisites' of political stability, but not with the absence of liberal goods. These goods are certainly absent, but this alone is not a sufficient condition of 'barbarism'. For Mill, it is not the nonliberal nature of 'barbarous societies' that precludes external sovereignty; aggression, 'inability of co-operation' (1836, 122), and failure to reciprocate non-intervention are the crucial conditions. This squares with the account of the requisites for statehood given in Mill's *System of Logic* and in his essay on Coleridge.

[16] Such as Levin (2004).

Here Mill is certainly at his philosophically least impressive, but the emphasis is on *reciprocity*, not proselytation or conversion or, crucially, legitimacy and intervention. As Robert Jackson writes (2005, 171), '[a]dmission to international society did not require religious or ideological conversion... Mill's liberalism requires conformity with the nineteenth-century international law of reciprocity. But it does not call for conversion to Western ideology in domestic affairs.'[17] While it is a hallmark of the liberal internationalism that peacefulness and democratic government are considered complementary, liberality and aggression are wholly discreet qualities, and, according to Mill, of the two only aggression affects external sovereignty.

In perpetuating some of the prejudices of his time, Mill does not exemplify the high standard set in his progressive domestic Radicalism.[18] The language of barbarism and civilisation, and the crude generalisations which produce it, are indeed characteristic to Mill's period, and also to late eighteenth century European philosophy. Consider the following from Kant (1795, 130), writing only thirty-five years before Mill's essay on *Civilisation* was published:

> The attachment of savages to their lawless liberty, the fact that they would rather be at hopeless variance with one another than submit themselves to a legal authority constituted by themselves, that they therefore prefer their senseless freedom to a reason-governed liberty, is regarded by us with profound contempt as barbarism and uncivilisation and the brutal degradation of humanity.

There are many reasons to dismiss Mill on civilisation and barbarism, but that he considered lack of liberality or democracy sufficient reason for intervention is not one of them; this interpretation conflates wholly discreet concepts in Mill's IR thought. 'Are they [English journalists] so ignorant,' Mill asks (1830, 149), 'both of France and of common sense, as not to know that the sovereignty of the people does

[17] Miller agrees (1961, 506).

[18] This, in a slightly different context, is Pitts' point. (2005, 160). The obvious example is his support in Parliament for the Suffragette movement. On Mill's 'Philosophic Radicalism' see Thomas (1979, 200-1). See also Levin (2004, 56).

not mean republicanism?'[19] His point, as has been often noted, is that absolute government can be internally legitimate, though not necessarily desirable. Absolutism is not *necessarily* a violation or illegitimating element of sovereignty, either internal or external. This is certainly not a liberal principle.

This is reiterated in *On Liberty* (1859b, 224), where Mill restricts his principle of liberty to those whom he deems capable of 'benefiting from free and equal discussion.' Mill's Hobbesian qualification on the legitimacy of despotism is that it best serves the interests of the citizens to submit to absolute government. This is the only condition in which political absolutism is acceptable. For reasons to be explored below, even when despotism is obviously self-serving Mill recommends non-intervention, except 'to arrest obstinate civil wars', to prevent mass-murder, or to counter an existing foreign intervention (1859a, 111).[20] His somewhat unsympathetic position is that it is up to the oppressed to 'throw off' their own 'chains'. As he states in *A Few Words*, the rule of nonintervention applies equally to all sovereign governments, whether despotic or 'free.' The arguments of this essay are to be applied to all independent states, regardless of their domestic arrangements or supposed liberality (Mill, 1859a, 123).[21] Aggression and reciprocity of international law may authorise intervention where 'prudence' allows, but not illiberality.

**Legitimacy and Democracy**

One philosophical assumption which informs Mill's conception of legitimacy that has not had an airing in the scholarly literature is his Platonic idea of representative government, where the populace defers its right to legislate for itself to

[19] Kant also warns against conflating democracy (sovereignty of the people) with republicanism ('the political principle of severing the executive power of the government from the legislature.' *Perpetual Peace*, 124-4.

[20] Mill does think this the most likely outcome of a despotic government unless the despot is 'benevolent', presumably he is thinking of Akbar, Marcus Aurelius, and Charlemagne, whom he mentions with admiration throughout his writings.

[21] But Mill does persist with the binary of civilised and barbarous, which are subject to different laws.

the ‘superior knowledge’ of ‘wiser men than themselves.’[22] Almost one hundred years after Mill, Berlin (2002, 177-8) explained that ‘freedom in this sense is not, at any rate logically, connected with democracy or self-government... [T]here is no necessary connection between individual liberty and individual rule... [and] the connection between democracy and individual liberty is a good deal more tenuous than it seemed to many advocates of both.’ Not to Mill. A core assumption informing Mill’s understanding of ‘the true principles of international morality’ is his conviction that representative government and individual liberty share a fragile, discordant, and potentially diminutive relationship. Somewhat ironically, this leads Mill, usually considered the ‘founder of modern liberalism’ (Berlin, 2002a, 219; Plamenatz, 1963, 190), to provide, in many ways, a realist critique of liberal internationalism.

This deep-seated conviction that democracy does not *necessarily* enhance individuality nor protect individual liberty is crucial to explaining why Mill seems ambivalent and even indifferent to the international growth of liberal institutions and is crucial to his conception of legitimacy. In a passage omitted from the published version of his *Autobiography*, Mill observes that by 1835 he had ‘ceased to consider representative government as an absolute principle & regarded it as a question of time, place, & circumstance’ (Mill in Stillinger, 1961, 142). These sentiments coincide with Mill’s first reading of Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, also in 1835. What is important is ‘not that people themselves govern, but that they have *security* for good government’ (1835b, 71).[23] Mill argues that the people must retain

[22] See Urbinati, (2002, 7, 42-54). Urbinati argues this may be superficial and warns against emphasizing Mill’s Platonism. Plato, to be sure, is only one of many influences on Mill’s theory of democracy.
[23] Mill’s italics. In keeping with his commitment to empiricism, Mill thinks his concerns are vindicated by real political events. Mill variously uses the examples of Socrates’ execution (condemned by popular judgement), and the ascension to Emperor of Napoleon III (established with popular consent). From this Mill infers that sometimes the wisest and most prescient decision is oblivious to or perverted by popular government.

the ultimate power to dissolve the parliament, but they should not govern *directly*.[24] That the populace should be able to dismiss the government in cases where its collective interests are not pursued is 'the only purpose for which it is good to intrust power to the people' (Mill, 1835b, 72). Though it is an exaggeration to label Mill a Platonist, his insistent recommendations for 'rational democracy' and government by 'the wise' (for the interests of the people) do owe much to *The Republic* (Duncan, 1977, 261-2).[25] For example, standing before the voters of Westminster in July 1865, Mill (1865a, 20) frankly informed them of their 'duty' to elect the 'fittest' and 'wisest' candidate to pursue their interests in parliament. That candidate, Mill proclaimed, was himself.

> Provided good intentions can be secured, the best government, (need it be said?) must be the government of the wisest, and these must always be a few. The people ought to be the masters, but they are masters who must employ servants more skilful than themselves' (1835b, 72; c.f., 1865a).
>
> A man's control over his physician is not nugatory, although he does not direct which medicine to administer. He either obeys the prescription of the physician, or, if dissatisfied with him, takes another. In that consists his security. In that consists also the people's security; and with that it is in their wisdom to be satisfied (1865a, 72; c.f., Plato, 2003, 210-11, 488b-489a).

It is common to Mill's electioneering in 1865 and his reviews of *Democracy in America* that submission to the leadership of the 'wisest' and most apt at the 'art of governing' is *in the interest of the people*. Mill expresses this as a social 'duty'. Once the 'wisest' and 'fittest' candidate is identified, the people must be content to allow

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[24] Mill thinks this guards against corruption and self-interested governance.

[25] 'Were Mill a Platonist... he would not have advocated a variety of voices in the deliberative setting, nor would he have needed to make politicians accountable to the people... As for Mill's politics, Mill's model was Socrates, not Plato.' '[A] deliberative conception of politics cannot be accommodated with an ideal of democracy that incorporates a Platonist view of competence (Urbinati (2002, 7, 43).'. Mill was in practice a committed and radical democrat and was committed to the process of public, unrestricted, and robust deliberation and universal participation (and suffrage). This is of course a central theme of *On Liberty*. See also Urbinati (2002, 44). '[Mill has an] anti rationalist (in the sense of anti-Platonist) conception of politics, whose inspiration is the Socratic premise that knowledge is an investigative enterprise with no guarantees of infallibility. Mill valued the process of debating and investigation over and above the "true outcome"'.

him or her to govern free from interference, unless he or she is suspected of acting regardless of general utility:

> The interest of the people is, to choose for their rulers the most instructed and the ablest persons who can be found, and having done so, to allow them to exercise their knowledge and ability for the good of the people freely, or with the least possible control—as long as it *is* the good of the people, and not some private end, that they are aiming at.
>
> ... the omnipotence of the majority would be exercised through the agency and at the discretion of an enlightened minority, accountable to the majority in the last resort (1865a, 72).[26]

The animating concern, formulated first in the essay *Civilisation* (1836, 126), but expressed more eloquently two decades later in *On Liberty* (1859b, 272-3), is that 'the weight and importance of an individual, as compared with the mass, sink into greater and greater insignificance.' The individual, Mill observed (1836, 132; 1843, 924-5; 1859b, 272, 219), was 'lost in the crowd,' no match for the omnipresent 'despotism of custom.' For this reason—and that popular government cannot be trusted always to produce the 'wisest' decision—Mill can give only qualified support to the principle of representative government.

These concerns leave Mill with a decidedly anti-utopian and non-idealist international philosophy in which his commitment to utilitarian ethics—the 'ultimate principle of teleology' (1843, 951)—is clearly evident. Non-intervention ought to be the default position because it is the least likely to produce the most disastrous outcome: a devastating international war.

**Legitimacy and Democracy in Mill's model of Non-intervention**

The logical disparity between liberal government and international legitimacy is explicitly expressed in Mill's doctrine of non-intervention. Mill's self-professed motives for writing *A Few Words on Non-intervention*—his only direct contribution

[26] Mill's italics. Note that Mill indicates the people are the judges of their leaders' fitness. It is the people who ultimately 'choose.'

to International Relations theory—are: Lord Palmerston's conduct in the Suez Canal Company crisis of 1858; Continental misperceptions of the aims of English foreign policy; and a desire to elucidate the 'true principles of international morality,' on which he had mused briefly in his defence of the French Provisional Government of 1848 (Mill, 1873, 263; Vincent, 1974, 54-5). In any case, the question addressed in *A Few Words* is

> that of interfering in the regulation of another country's internal concerns; the question whether a nation is justified in taking part, on either side, in the civil wars or party contests of another: and chiefly, whether it may justifiably aid the people of another country in struggling for liberty; or may impose on a country any particular government or institutions, wither as being best for the country itself, or as necessary for the security of its neighbours (Mill, 1859a, 121).

Upon first impressions, Mill proceeds with a superficially realist defence of non-intervention with respect to sovereign entities. The general rule governing relations between independent nations ought to be non-interference. Mill does, however, offer what can be described as a dichotomous model of non-intervention, which has as a prerequisite for intervention or assistance of any kind some form of domestic 'struggle' for liberation. Presumably, where no struggle between government and governed exists, there is *prima facie* a case for non-intervention, not just on grounds of self-determination, but also in keeping with Mill's individual-centric conception of the good.

First, it must be determined whether the 'contest is only with native rulers,' or whether it is a rebellion against a foreign despotism.[27] The 'general' rule applicable to the former is non-intervention. A state must not assist nor retard foreign revolution, irrespective of the perceived justness of the revolution, or of a feeling of solidarity

[27] Note that both situations presuppose a struggle between a people and its government.

with the goals of the revolutionaries.[28] The reason is that free institutions and respect for individual liberty cannot be transplanted or gifted; they must be *earned*. Mill offers two forms of argument in support of this position, one appeals to the logical impossibility of such an exportation, the other to practical considerations.

Firstly, it is impossible to force an individual to be free. This, Mill considers a 'solecism in terms'; coercion cannot increase freedom.[29] Whatever else is gained by intervening on behalf of an individual or of a people, it is not, in any sense of the concept, 'liberty.'[30] Berlin (2002, 172) puts it bluntly, 'Everything is what it is: liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice'.

Secondly, Mill propounds the practical impossibility of exporting 'freedom' (either personal autonomy or political liberty) at the institutional level:

> The only test possessing any real value, of a people's having become fit for popular institutions, is that they or a sufficient portion of them to prevail in the contest, are willing to brave labour and danger for their liberation. [If a people has] not sufficient love of liberty [then] the liberty which is bestowed on them by hands other than their own, will have nothing real, nothing permanent. [U]nless the spirit of liberty is strong in a people, those who have the executive in their hands easily work any institutions to the purposes of despotism (1859a, 122).

Mill is clear that where a people revolts against its government, and that government is not upheld by foreign arms, the only legitimate cause for a foreign state to intervene, in aid of the state or of the rebellion, is self-defence.

This is crucial to Mill's understanding of national self-determination. By definition, it is not self-determination to be assisted in a domestic struggle (Walzer, 2006, 87). Although it is claimed otherwise,[31] for Mill the nature of government and the arrangement of institutions are not logically connected either to the idea that

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[28] Walzer (1980, 226) makes a similar argument.

[29] There is some doubt whether Mill is the author of these words. See Miller (1961, 505).

[30] See also Prager (2005, 629).

[31] Jahn (2005a, 202). 'It is this moral superiority of liberalism that provides the grounds not only for denying similar moral worth to nonliberals, but also for denying them equal rights of sovereignty and nonintervention.'

common communities are entitled to unite for protection and be represented as one (self-determination) or to external state sovereignty. As Walzer summarises (2006, 87), 'a state is self-determining even if its citizens struggle and fail to establish free institutions, but it has been deprived of self-determination if such institutions are established by an intrusive neighbour.'

The second situation Mill considers (1859a, 123) is that of 'a people struggling against a foreign yoke, or against a native tyranny upheld by foreign arms.' In this case, 'the reasons [for non-intervention] themselves do not exist.' Intervention in this situation is to 'redress the balance when it is already unfairly and violently disturbed.' Here, Mill develops the idea of counter-intervention:

> Intervention to enforce non-intervention is always rightful, always moral, if not always *prudent*. Though it be a mistake to *give* freedom to a people who do not value the boon, it cannot but be right to insist that if they do value it, they shall not be hindered from the pursuit of it by foreign coercion (1859a, 123-4).

This is perhaps the most familiar element of Mill's IR philosophy; it had obvious resonance during in the Cold War period (Mayall, 1991, 423). Vincent (1974, 173) argues that Mill 'could have approved' a Soviet led-counter intervention in Vietnam in the early 1960s, first against the French and then against the US.[32]

The insertion of the qualifier 'prudence' in Mill's theorising about intervention, as well as counter-intervention, is significant. Mill is careful to divorce the morally justifiable from the 'prudent'. His contributions to international philosophy from "The Errors of the Spanish Government" (1823) to "Treaty Obligations" (1870) are all imbued with a fear of, and a desire to prevent at whatever cost, total war between the European powers. Even when intervention is morally justifiable, as Mill argues it was to support the Polish insurrections of 1831 and 1863 and the Hungarians in 1848, the

[32] Vincent (1974, 225) indicates also that Mill's understanding of counter-intervention might also defend US involvement. The emphasis here is on pre-emptive self defence, however, rather than counter-intervention.

principle of non-intervention must be upheld for two reasons. Firstly, intervention on behalf of a belligerent whose cause is considered 'just' or 'moral' might result in total war (as indeed it did in 1914 and in 1939). Here, Mill's realist emphasis on security is paramount. Second, a revolution must be allowed to run its course, whether the cause is just or not. If the principle of non-intervention is disregarded, popular revolutions like those of France in 1848, which Mill 'vindicated' and defended, could be put down with foreign assistance according to the particular international alliances of the time.

The idea of 'prudence' is a dominating theoretical device in Mill's principle of non-intervention. Mill offers an ostensibly realist position when he argues that violations of sovereignty will lead to chaos, disrespect for 'international morality,' and, when careful diplomacy was crucial to preventing conflict between the rapidly industrialising mid-nineteenth century European powers, total war. For this reason, he introduces the notion of 'prudence,' which involves preventing such a conflict at all costs, even if the cost is loss of free institutions and individual liberty generally.[33] Any clause requiring or permitting British intervention to promote liberal institutions would have authorised war on behalf of the subjugated populations (the Hungarians in 1848, the Polish in 1831 and 1863, for example) of either or all of the 'three robber powers', Austria, Prussia, and Russia. This kind of intervention 'for an idea,' even if the idea is liberal government, is what Mill opposes.

Though Mill's reasoning appeals to the collective good, rather that state self-interest, his imperative is realist in orientation: respect the domestic arrangements of sovereign states. A state must not intervene in the domestic affairs of another on

[33] This consequentialism is also evident in the following passage: 'If a lawless act, then, has been committed in the present instance, it does not entitle those who imposed the conditions to consider lawlessness only, and to dismiss the more important consideration, whether, even it is was wrong to throw off the obligation, it would not be still more wrong to persist in enforcing it (1870a, 347).'

behalf of the well-being of the other state's citizens (Mill, 1859a, 121). Mill jettisons these realist positions, however, when he chides British statesmen for 'pretending' to espouse the 'meanest and worst' of positions on intervention: 'not to move a finger for others unless he sees his private interest in it... to profess that it interferes only when it can serve its own objects by it' (1859a, 114). He also declares that a nation's interest must be compatible with the collective good, and proclaims that acting in self-interest to the detriment of the collective a 'wicked principle' (1859a, 114). Any state thus disposed, Mill thinks (1859a, 117; Miller, 1961, 499), should expect other powerful nations to 'unite in league against it, and never to make peace until they had, if not reduced it to insignificance, at least sufficiently broken its power to disable it from ever again placing its own self-interest before the general prosperity of mankind.' These sentiments animate Mill's opposition to Palmerston's stance on the Suez Crisis of 1858-9. Mill appeals to the collective good to argue that the canal project should proceed and that Palmerston should surrender his opposition. Tellingly, Palmerston is 'parading to the world a belief that our interest is inconsistent with its good' (1859a, 117).

**Applications: Poland 1830**

Through his engagement with nineteenth century international crises, Mill subjected to practical application the assumptions underlying his concept of legitimacy and his doctrine of non-intervention. For example, through various mediums Mill discusses the conflicts between Turkey and Greece, Holland and Belgium, England and Portugal, and the rebellions in France, Poland, and Hungary. Here, he was forced simultaneously to incorporate the delicate moral dimensions of a suppressed people struggling for free institutions and the myriad uncertainties

associated with the consequences of forceful assistance in a divided and politically unstable Europe.[34]

The emphasis on political action, upon testing and modifying theoretical perspectives, is a feature of Mill's political ethos. He complained that international politics as a discipline had no established rules or laws, and that the reformer, diplomat, or politician had virtually no generally accepted norms for guidance. In engaging with the most troublesome and vexing political realities of his time, Mill tied theory to practice. As he reflected in 1870:

> [T]here exists very generally a cowardly reluctance to look the fact in the face, and make provision for it, as one of the unavoidable inconveniences of an imperfect condition. People are afraid lest the force of recognised duties should be weakened, by admitting the liability of one duty to be overruled by another; and, though well knowing that this does happen, they prefer to be excused from giving their approbation beforehand to so unpleasant-looking a fact. The consequence is, that those who, having the responsibility of action, are forced to make for themselves some path through these moral entanglements, finding no rules or principles laid down for them but such as ignore instead of meeting the difficulties of the case, decide according to the dictate either of their selfish interests, or of some prevailing sentiment, which, if more disinterested, is not necessarily a truer guide (1870a, 343).

The Congress of Vienna (1815) partitioned Poland between the empires of Prussia, Austria-Hungary, and Russia. In 1830 there was rioting against Russian rule in Warsaw. Britain and France considered assisting the beleaguered Poles. By 1830, Mill had been reporting on French politics in the *Westminster Review* and other publications for some time. When the Polish uprising broke out in November, predicting that it would lead to war between the powers Mill was 'shocked and disgusted' that the French were considering intervening. According to Mill (1860, 215), they had 'scattered to the winds ... the most sacred rights of independent

[34] For example, in the essay *Treaty Obligations* (1870a, 347), Mill states, 'If a lawless act, then, has been committed in the present instance, it does not entitle those who imposed the conditions to consider the lawlessness only, and to dismiss the *more important consideration*, whether, even if it was wrong to throw off the obligation, it would not be still more wrong to persist in enforcing it.' Emphasis added.

nations'—that of non-intervention.[35] Mill sees this 'unheard of disregard of every principle of international morality' as a direct threat to self-determination and counterproductive to its goals:

> When once the sword shall be drawn, and the five hundred thousand French soldiers, now under arms, shall, with a successful general at their head, be overrunning Europe, it is quite impossible to foresee how long a period the progress of civilisation, and that of good institutions all over the world may be stopped, or even for how large a space it may be thrown back (1831b, 260).

It is this argument which animates *A Few Words*. Intervention for the sake of free institutions simply (or, rather, logically) cannot work and will, Mill argues, produce disastrous consequences. Mill was equally disgusted by the result of non-intervention in Poland (the uprising was suppressed and Poland remained subjugated). He commented bitterly (1832b, 423) that England and France had 'allowed Russia to swallow up Poland.' But as he warns (1870a, 344), even when foreign aggression threatens free institutions, it is not always just to resort to war:

> Europe did not interpose when Russia annihilated Poland; when Prussia, Austria, and Russia extinguished the Republic of Cracow; or when a second Bonaparte mounted the throne of France.

**Conclusion**

There are several problems with the interpretation that Mill's liberalism tends towards intervention or even imperialism. As Mill argued (1859a, 118), intervention to promote liberal principles is 'criminal.' Mill's argument was that 'to go to war for an idea, if the war is aggressive, not defensive, is as criminal as to go to war for territory or revenue; for it is as little justifiable to force our ideas on other people, as to compel them to submit to our will in any other respect' (1859a, 118). This might be

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[35] His argument was that the French government was simply looking for an excuse to intervene for territorial gain. See also Varouxakis (1997, 63).

an objectionable position, but it is not interventionist, nor is it based on a conception of liberality.

In addition to the contextual evidence already presented, one contemporary example can further elucidate these problems. ‘Representing the Millian perspective’ (Prager, 2005) months before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Michael Walzer (2003, 5) wrote, ‘I would not support a U.S. war for “regime change” (though I don’t deny that the Iraqi regime needs changing).’[36] Walzer (2003, 5) also ‘believe[s] strongly in the need to oppose the “National Security Strategy” of the Bush administration and its doctrine of preemptive war.’[37] This position resonates with Mill’s model of non-intervention (Prager, 2005, 634; Varouxakis, 1997, 58). The forced democratisation of Iraq, if it alone is to be considered sufficient grounds for intervention, violates Mill’s ‘principles of international morality’ and is a marked divergence from the example of non-intervention, at times at the cost of free institutions and respect for national self-determination, set by Mill in his engagement with nineteenth century international crises. It is probably true that Mill would have detested the brutality and illiberality of Saddam Hussein’s regime. It is also reasonable to assume that Mill, like Walzer, would have argued that ‘the Iraqi regime needs changing.’ However, ‘moral support’ for insurrection and revolution is one thing, actively agitating for foreign intervention in the name of liberalism is another, and it is one directive which Mill explicitly forbids, which he thinks conceptually incoherent and practically impossible, and for which he never argued.

[36] For additional recognition of Mill’s influence on Walzer see Varouxakis (1997, 58); Williams, (2006, 30). Walzer ‘follow[ed] Mill’ and that he ‘owes many of his best points to John Stuart Mill’ (Brown, 2002, 93-4, 247).

[37] Walzer’s declared he would support a war to ‘enforce inspections,’ but it would have to be a ‘UN war’, not an extrajudicial US war. He also ‘could not support a peace movement whose purpose or effect is the appeasement of Saddam Hussein.’

This article has argued that the claim that liberal international theory contains an inherent and imperial 'urge' to intervene is textually inaccurate *if Mill is to be considered the archetypal liberal representative*. This is not to deny that liberals have been or could be imperialists or that liberalism, as represented by another thinker, may indeed tend towards interventionism. But this study has focused exclusively on Mill's international thought, and it is doubtful that it is directly compatible with that of twentieth century liberals such as Rawls or Beitz. Whether or not Mill can provide a useful or insightful model with which we might think about intervention is another question, and it is one which is not explored here. Considering that Mill thought assiduously about intervention, that he exerted a significant if sometimes inconspicuous influence on twentieth century international relations,[38] and that the problems associated with interventionist foreign policy continue to occupy IR scholars, this question warrants further scholarship which is not focused exclusively on empire.

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[38] Gilbert Murray (1948) called Mill his 'special saint and prophet'. I am grateful to Ian Hall for this point.

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