CHAPTER SIX

J.S. MILL ON UNIVERSAL HISTORY

I. NECESSITIES AND RELICS

> Political thinkers, who at one time may have been over-confident in their power of deducing systems of social truth from abstract human nature, have now for some time shown a tendency to the far worse extreme, of postponing the universal exigencies of man as man, to the beliefs and tendencies of particular portions of mankind as manifested in their history…[we must therefore ask] which of them are grounded in *permanent necessities of humanity*, and which are but *relics of facts and ideas of the past*, not applicable to the present.[1]
>
> J.S. Mill, 1871

In a review of Henry Maine's *Village Communities in the East and West* (1871), an ageing Mill expressed ambivalence about the historical method with which the nineteenth century was now associated.[2] Whereas once he had lamented the Cimmerian darkness that shrouded the past and its study, he turned now to the 'far worse extreme' in which the 'exigencies of man' were as much occluded as revealed by history. One year later, he complained to John Elliot Cairnes (1823-1875) that Freeman's *The Growth of the English Constitution* (1872) had 'perverted' the 'historical school' into 'an attack on the use of reason in matters of politics and social arrangements'.[3] It is ironic, therefore, that shortly after Mill's death the political economist Thomas Leslie (1825-1882) associated him with a strand of historicism that he had seemingly come to reject.[4] This undoubtedly said more about the intellectual mood of the 1870s than Mill's intentions in the *Logic*, whose audience he took to be almost wholly ignorant of history. By 1855, however, F.D. Maurice could proclaim 'a cry for history in our day such as there has not been in any other', while John Seeley (1834-1895) looked back on history's 'new importance' as 'the possible basis of a science'.[5] But the

[1] 'Maine on village communities': *CW*, XXX, p. 215. My emphasis. Sidgwick in the same year argued to Alfred Marshall (1842-1924) that Benthamism could be supplemented by 'historical sociology' but that it was unlikely to become 'over-historical': Sidgwick to Marshall, August 1871 in A. Marshall (ed. J.K. Whitaker), *The correspondence of Alfred Marshall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), I, p. 13.

[2] For a contemporary account, see F. Harrison, *The meaning of history* (London: Trübner & Co., 1862).

[3] Mill to Cairnes, 2 August 1872: *CW*, XVII, p. 1903. The discussion was of E.A. Freeman's *The growth of the English constitution from the earliest times* (London: Macmillan, 1872).

[4] T.E.C. Leslie, *Essays in political and moral philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co, 1879), p. vi.

[5] Maurice to Charles Kingsley, 26 December 1855: F.D. Maurice (ed. F. Maurice), *The life of Frederick Denison Maurice chiefly told in his own letters* (London: Macmillan, 1885), II, p. 276; J. R. Seeley, *Classical studies as an introduction to the moral sciences* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1864), p. 19.

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fashion for historical-mindedness was not embraced by all. Sidgwick and A.V. Dicey (1835-1922) were late-century sceptics, while Mill after his death was invoked as both a champion and foe of this new historical mood.[6]

Mill's views on history did not change significantly beyond the 1840s but the contexts in which he expressed them did. His remarks in 1871 addressed a new enthusiasm for history whose growth in the 1850s and 1860s had reduced political science to a quest for institutional beginnings. Its proponents, he argued, were unable to separate accidental factors from universal tendencies because they studied only 'particular portions of mankind as manifested in their history'.[7] The science of history, as an accessory of political science and the science of society, was possible only as universal history, stripped of national accidents and particularities. In his address to St. Andrews four years earlier, he argued that all 'true political science is, in one sense of the phrase, *a priori*, being deduced from the tendencies of things, tendencies known either through our general experience of human nature, or as the result of an analysis of the course of history, considered as a progressive evolution'.[8] The 'worse extreme' of political science, he argued in 1871, was a Trojan horse for Tory cant. It insulated a 'large class of conservative prejudices, by pointing out the historical origin not only of institutions, but of ideas'.[9]

It is tempting to read this 'worse extreme' as a softening of Mill's historicism, but continuities between his arguments in the 1840s and early 1870s should not be overlooked. He never held, even at the height of his eclecticism, that the foundations of political science resided in 'particular portions of mankind', or that societies should accommodate national characteristics which slowed or counteracted progress. We have already seen that the intellectual boundaries between utilitarianism and historicism were slacker than previously supposed, and that many historicists commended the use of historically informed principles to navigate their evidence. These connections also help to explain certain continuities within utilitarianism. In a letter to Ricardo from 1817, Mill's father, James, lauded Millar's *Historical View of the English Government* (1787) for demonstrating on a 'great scale' the fundamental developments of 'human affairs', just as Stewart in his commentary on Smith emphasised 'simple' over accidental progress.[10] John's historical

[6] See A.V. Dicey, *Introduction to the study of the law of the constitution* [1885] (London: Macmillan, 1931), p. 14.
[7] *CW*, XXX, p. 215.
[8] Ibid., XXI, p. 237.
[9] Ibid., XXX, p. 215.
[10] James Mill as quoted in Collini, Winch, and Burrow, *That noble science of politics*, p. 116; Smith (ed. Stewart), *Essays on philosophical subjects*, p. lviii. On the idea of natural progress in the Scottish Enlightenment, see S. Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: race, gender, and the limits of progress* (London: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 45-73. Vico's idea of natural progress

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method was closer to James's 'real business of philosophy' than perhaps he was willing to admit, and his indebtedness to Bacon, Hume, and the eighteenth-century Scots was not entirely superseded by contemporary French and German influences.[11]

Mill's distinction between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tended to mask these continuities, in the same way that Romantic, historicist, and positivist writers inveighed against their own polemical constructions of Enlightenment.[12] Despite sympathising with his father's 'philosophic' method of induction, he reserved his praise for modern French historians who showed that 'the human mind has a certain order of possible progress, in which some things must precede, others, an order which governments and public instructors can modify to some, but not to an unlimited extent'.[13] Longer sequences revealed more effectively than shorter ones the trends of natural progress, hence his attempt in the review of Michelet to separate 'disturbing causes' from 'universal tendencies'.[14] If history was to have even a limited prognostic use, it could not be as Freeman and others had conceived it: an exposition of national characteristics within a relatively short period. Social dynamics assumed a level of abstraction in which the arbitrary actions of individuals and nations dissolved into the theoretical unities of universal history, and it was precisely those unities to which Grote objected in the letter to Cornewall Lewis.

Mill in 1871 placed the rhetorical weight of his argument on 'permanent necessities', but this had more to do with perversions of the historical method than with history *per se*. Four years earlier, in *Comte and Positivism* (1865), he had argued that the 'vulgar mistake of supposing that the course of history has no tendencies of its own, and that great events usually proceed from small causes, or that kings, or conquerors, or the founders of philosophies and religions, can do with society what they please' had been 'tellingly exposed' by Comte.[15] The 'worse extreme' of political science privileged special over general causes: general causes laid bare the great facts of progress minus their local particularities, while special causes showed that societies developed in different ways

had a profound effect on the French historians whom Mill admired: L. Pompa, *Vico: a study of the 'new science'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 86.

[11] By 1869 he seemed to regard Scottish philosophical history as tentative first steps in the discipline's scientific transformation: Collini, Winch, and Burrow, *That noble science of politics*, p. 144.

[12] Leslie Stephen in a biography of Alexander Pope documented the 'tyrannising' of eighteenth-century 'common sense' over the 'romantic' imagination that succeeded it: *Alexander Pope* (London: Macmillan, 1880), p. 28.

[13] *CW*, I, p. 169.

[14] From the review of Michelet's *Histoire de France*: *CW*, XX, p. 230. This is one crucial difference between Mill and the eighteenth-century Scots, whose fascination with historical accidents is well known: C. Smith, 'The Scottish Enlightenment, unintended consequences, and the science of man', *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 7.1 (2009), pp. 9-28. Comteans in England and France were more concerned with 'successions' and 'a long series of events': Harrison, *The meaning of history*, p. 17.

[15] *CW*, X, p. 322.

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and at different rates, and why, therefore, progress was neither uniform nor steady but prone to stagnation and decline. One of Mill's self-appointed tasks, therefore, was to ascertain general causes without raising the spectre of necessity, to show, in other words, that many 'of those effects which it is of most importance to render amenable to human foresight' are determined 'in an incomparably greater degree by general causes, than by all partial causes taken together'.[16] As he put it in 1862, the science of history proved that 'regularity *en masse*' was compatible with 'extreme irregularity in the cases composing the mass', and that the past could be both irreducibly distinct and uniform in its development.[17]

The publication of Henry Buckle's *History of Civilisation in England* (1857-1861) brought to a head the conceptual tensions between free will and a law-giving science of history. Goldwin Smith (1823-1910), Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), J.A. Froude (1818-1894), and others criticised Buckle for abrogating individual agency within a 'scheme of universal order'.[18] Mill defended Buckle in 1862 but conceded in 1865 that he had ascribed too much to 'general causes'.[19] However, the genie of necessity was not easily put back and Mill's readers have periodically accused him of determinism. From Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957) to Kurer's *The Politics of Progress* (1993), there are many who see Mill as engaged in a liberal civilising mission, behind which lay a normative account of natural progress that resembled, in form if not in substance, Smith's four stages of historical development.[20] Mill, according to Kurer, saw the progress of backwards societies as footsteps on the beaten path to civility.[21] Political agents in this scenario could not meaningfully alter the laws of progress that governed which kind of regime was appropriate to which kind of society, even though Mill denied that civilisations shared out of historical or metaphysical necessity a common destination arrived at by universal means.[22]

Alan Ryan has argued persuasively for a different Mill, one whose predictions were not absolute but approximate and provisional.[23] The universal tendencies on which he relied for prediction,

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[16] Ibid., VIII, p. 847.
[17] Ibid., p. 932.
[18] H. Buckle, *History of civilisation in England* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861), I, p. 28. For a contemporary summary of the debate that Mill himself endorsed, see J. Stephen, 'The study of history', *The Cornhill Magazine* 4 (1861), pp. 25-43. See also R. Smith, *Free will and the human sciences in Britain, 1870-1910* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 133-159; R. Jann, *The art and science of Victorian history* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985), p. 212.
[19] *CW*, X, p. 322.
[20] Popper, *The poverty of historicism*, p. 111; O. Kurer, *John Stuart Mill: the politics of progress* (London: Garland, 1991), pp. 11, 27-31.
[21] Kurer, *Politics of progress*, p. 31. See also Zakaras, *Individuality and mass democracy*, p. 125.
[22] See *CW*, VIII, p. 836.
[23] Much of the confusion, Ryan argued, stems Mill's definition of a causal law, the proof of which derived not from the consistency of its deductions but from its consilience with the laws of human nature: *J.S. Mill*, p. 93.

Ryan claimed, were not the divinations of an absolute science. They were statements of probability which approximated but never achieved certainty, because 'we cannot say how people *will* behave in certain circumstances, only how they *would* behave in the absence of (unforeseen) modifying factors'.[24] Mill in Book VI of the *Logic* was clear that predictions 'of phenomena in the concrete are for the most part only approximately true'.[25] The sociologist furnished from the historical data a set of trends with which to predict what *might* happen in the future, assuming those trends continued without major interference. In his reviews of Tocqueville, for instance, Mill presented the increasing equality of conditions as something that resembled – but was not in fact – a law of nature, precisely so that we might make 'the best of it when it does come'. We cannot halt 'a progress which has continued with interrupted steadiness for so many centuries' but we can mitigate its weaknesses and cultivate its benefits.[26] Democracy may be inevitable but our responses to it are not.[27] As he put it in his article on 'Civilisation' from 1836:

> Those advantages which civilisation cannot give—which in its uncorrected influence it has even a tendency to destroy—may yet coexist with civilisation; and it is only when joined to civilisation that they can produce their fairest fruits. All that we are in danger of losing we may preserve, all that we have lost we may regain, and bring to a perfection hitherto unknown; but not by slumbering, and leaving things to themselves, no more than by ridiculously trying our strength against their irresistible tendencies: only by establishing counter-tendencies, which may combine with those tendencies, and modify them…[28]

Years later, in 1856, Mill praised Tocqueville's *L'Ancien régime et la Révolution* as 'un chapitre d'histoire universelle' whose lessons were not France's but humanity's.[29] This demonstrative use of the nation underpinned Mill's science of history, whose intendedness to universal history I address below. I begin with his writings on French history from the 1830s and 1840s before examining a neglected chapter of the *Logic*, 'Additional Elucidations of the Science of History', which he added in 1862 to defend Buckle predominantly from religious detractors. Mill in that chapter absolved Buckle from charges of historical determinism, first, by articulating a science of history in which universal tendencies prevailed over special causes without downplaying them, and, second, by demonstrating a consilience between universal history and the actual course of events. This can be read as an attempt to logically bridge historical events and their theoretical

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[24] Ryan then reproached Mill for mistaking 'rational explanation' for causal laws: *Philosophy of John Stuart Mill,* pp. 152, 163.
[25] *CW*, VIII, p. 848. He remarked in his review of Tocqueville that we 'must guard…against attaching to these conclusions…a character of scientific certainty that can never belong to them': *CW*, XVIII, p. 190.
[26] Ibid., pp. 50, 51.
[27] See H. Mitchell, *Individual choice and the structures of history: Alex de Tocqueville as historian reappraised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 43-46.
[28] *CW*, XVIII, pp. 135-136.
[29] Mill to Tocqueville, 15 December 1856: *CW*, XV, p. 518.

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expression, or to reconcile an individualising with a progressive historicism whose laws were not national but universal. I end by asking whether Mill's conception of universal history sheds light on what he called 'the region of ultimate aims', that is, on what kind of society might plausibly emerge from the trends of Europe's past. I call this Mill's timely politics.

II. UNIVERSALISING FRANCE'S PAST

Ranke in 1859 argued that the waning decades of the eighteenth century had witnessed a rise in the historiography of nationality, whose ambitions ran contrary to those of a universal or even cosmopolitan Enlightenment.[30] Scholars are generally agreed that political developments in Prussia and the dissolution in France of the *ancien régime* encouraged historians to conceptualise the past in national as opposed to universal terms.[31] Stuart Macintyre, Juan Maiguashca, and Attila Pók have argued 'the universal history associated with the eighteenth century European Enlightenment gave way to restricted, state-oriented histories that served national objectives', while Michael Bentley has pointed to its displacement by a Hegelian *Weltgeschichte* and the late-century historicisms which blossomed in universities across Western Europe.[32] However, the definitions of – and thus the distinctions between – universal and national history were more varied than is often acknowledged. Cornewall Lewis, for example, contrasted the synthetic unities of *Weltgeschichte* with universal history proper, which arranged national histories into 'a series of parallel lines'.[33] Others conferred on universal history the scientific credibility it previously lacked. Victor Cousin (1792-1867) in his *Histoire de philosophie* (1828) acknowledged 'toutes les difficultés d'une histoire universelle' and the failures of Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), Vico, Voltaire, Herder, Ferguson, Condorcet, and Turgot to scientifically connect the various 'élémens fondamentaux de l'humanité'; the task of the nineteenth century, therefore, was to look beyond national pasts and elevate to 'la hauteur d'une science positive' the general laws 'qui les engendrent et qui les dominent'.[34]

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[30] See U. Muhlack, 'Universal history and national history: eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German historians and the scholarly community' in Stuchtey and Wende (eds.), *British and German historiography 1750-1950*, p. 26.
[31] Ibid., pp. 35-36.
[32] S. Macintyre, J. Maiguashca, and A. Pók (eds.), *The Oxford history of historical writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), IV, p. 2; M. Bentley, 'Theories of world history since the Enlightenment' in J.H. Bentley (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of world history* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 19-36. See also J. Walch, *Les maîtres de l'histoire 1815-1850: Augustin Thierry, Mignet, Guizot, Thiers, Michelet, Edgar Quinet* (Paris: Champion-Slatkine, 1986), p. 13. C. Crossley, 'History as a principle of legitimation in France (1820-48)' in S. Berger, M. Donovan and K. Passmore (eds.), *Writing national histories: Western Europe since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 49.
[33] Cornewall Lewis, *A treatise on the methods of observation and reasoning in politics*, II, p. 438. Cornewall Lewis, as a devotee of Niebuhr, fiercely criticised Karl von Rotteck's (1775-1840) *Weltgeschichte* in *Allgemeine Geschichte* (1813–1827) for transcending national history: *A treatise on the methods of observation and reasoning in politics*, I, p. 303n.
[34] V. Cousin, *Cours de philosophie* (Paris: Pichon et Didier, 1828), leçon 11, pp. 5-6. Mill was familiar with Cousin's work and they exchanged letters: *CW*, XII, pp. 198-199, 232-234. On universal history in this period, see T. Griggs, 'Universal history from the Counter-Reformation to Enlightenment', *Modern Intellectual History* 4.2 (2007), pp. 219-247;

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Mill's writings on French history deliberately blurred the boundaries between national and universal history. His striking thought, which he borrowed from the Romantic historiographies of François Mignet (1796-1884), Jacques-Antoine Dulaure (1755-1835), Augustin Thierry, Jules Michelet, and François Guizot, was that some national histories illustrated better than others the natural course of European progress.[35] Here the shadow of 1789 loomed large as an event not just in French but in global or even cosmic history.[36] According to Ceri Crossley, these Romantic historians located the Revolution within a vast historical topography whose central feature was the decline of arbitrary rule and the rise of liberty. This allowed them to preserve the integrity of 1789 – or at least the underlying forces which gave rise to it – whilst setting to one side the violent republicanisms of the Terror.[37] History would have its momentary lapses, but it tended overall towards the liberation of the species from various forms of constraint, that is, from the political constraints of despotism and the physical constraints of nature. 'Je suis convaincu', Guizot remarked in 1828, 'qu'il y a, en effet, une destinée générale de l'humanité, une transmission du dépôt de la civilisation, et, par conséquent, une histoire universelle de la civilisation à écrire'.[38]

Mill's conception of universal history was shaped by French encounters with its ancient feudal and recent revolutionary pasts. He spoke often of a French philosophy or school whose ideas were 'scattered' among 'many minds'.[39] What this philosophy was, exactly, is difficult to describe in anything other than general terms because its construction was as polemical as it was descriptive; his conception of French 'Liberalism', for instance, served as a baton with which to beat the parochial English, who tended to judge 'universal questions' by a 'merely English standard'.[40] But there are clues. In a letter to Comte from May 1842, for example, he praised Guizot's *Cours d'histoire* as a groundwork of positive sociology whose 'capacité speculative plus générale' mirrored Comte's in its ambition to connect general facts to general laws, and to sustain a spirit of 'speculation historique' which had entered only fitfully into the minds of Mill's compatriots.[41] Likewise, Mill

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J. Pitts, 'The global in Enlightenment historical thought' in P. Duara, V. Murthy, and A. Sartori (eds.), *A companion to global historical thought* (Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 184-197.

[35] As Varouxakis, Kawana, and Marion Filipiuk have argued, Mill believed that France was a site of intellectual experimentation that resonated if not universally, then at least within the progressive societies of Western Europe: Varouxakis, *Mill on nationality*, p. 95; Kawana, *Logic and society*, p. 107; M. Filipiuk, 'John Stuart Mill and France' in M. Laine (ed.), *A cultivated mind: essays on J.S. Mill presented to John M. Robson* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991), p. 96.

[36] Mill in 1828 claimed that 1789 was a moment that belonged to the entire world: *CW*, XX, pp. 58-60.

[37] Crossley, *French historians and romanticism*, pp. 4-7.

[38] F. Guizot, *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe, depuis la chute de l'empire romain jusqu'a la Révolution Français* [1828] (Bruxelles: J. Jamar, 1839), p. 9.

[39] From 'Armand Carrel' (1837): *CW*, XX, p. 184.

[40] *CW*, I, p. 63.

[41] Comte to Mill, 6 May 1842: *CW*, XIII, p. 510.

saw Tocqueville as Guizot's natural successor because he situated American democracy within the broader conditions of progress, thus opening up its experiences to a global theatre.[42] The French were more alive to history's general tendencies, hence his hope in 1840 that Guizot's residence in London would encourage 'our stupid incurious people' to finally 'read his books'.[43]

Mill in the 1830s and 1840s wrote essays and reviews in praise of the school that he constructed.[44] His essay on 'Civilisation' (1836), for example, drew reverently on 'the tendencies of civilisation' with which Guizot and Tocqueville had rationalised the sweep of European history.[45] But he feared that these tendencies would read to an English audience as dangerously speculative. As he put it in his second review of Tocqueville from 1840,

> [t]he opinion that there is this irresistible tendency to equality of conditions, is, perhaps, of all the leading doctrines of the book, that which most stands in need of confirmation to English readers. M. de Tocqueville devotes but little space to the elucidation of it. To French readers, the historical retrospect upon which it rests is familiar: and facts known to every one establish its truth, so far as relates to that country. But to the English public, who have less faith in irresistible tendencies, and who, while they require for every political theory an historical basis, are far less accustomed to link together the events of history in a connected chain, the proposition will hardly seem to be sufficiently made out. Our author's historical argument is, however, deserving of their attention.[46]

Mill, like Tocqueville, mobilised the philosophy of history against a politics of specific experience. Universal history provided a narrative framework in which to 'link' the disparate 'events of history', and to defend a timely politics in which institutional regimes were made to reflect and progressively transform *l'état social*. If America provided Tocqueville with a specimen of democratic society, then France provided Mill and the Romantic historians with a specimen of European society whose progress was a hinge on which humanity turned. As Michelet remarked in his *Introduction à l'histoire universelle* (1831), '[c]e petit livre pourrait aussi bien être intitulé: *Introduction à l'histoire de France*; c'est à la France qu'il aboutit'.[47] But these conflations – between France and Europe, and between Europe and the world – require further unpacking. Why did Mill see France as a laboratory and

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[42] On Tocqueville's relationship with Guizot, see A. Kahan, *Tocqueville, democracy, and religion: checks and balances for democratic souls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 40-43.

[43] Mill to d'Eichthal, 17 June 1840: *CW*, XIII, pp. 438-439. According to Kent Wright, Guizot was an heir to various historicist inheritances, from Scottish philosophical history to Montesquieu and Herder: 'Historicism and history', p. 123.

[44] In a letter to R.B. Fox from 1840, he claimed, rather immodestly, that 'but for me' nobody in England would have read Guizot: *CW*, XIII, p. 427. See G. Varouxakis, 'Guizot's historical works and J.S. Mill's reception of Tocqueville', *History of Political Thought* 20.2 (1999), pp. 292-312.

[45] *CW*, XVIII, p. 126.

[46] Ibid., p. 159

[47] J. Michelet, *Introduction à l'histoire universelle* [1831] (Paris: Libraire Classique de L. Hachette, 1834), p. v.

crucible of progress, and how, if at all, did these universal histories of France shape his political views and rhetoric?

Mill in 1826 took stock of 'modern French historical works' and France's exemplary status, declaring in a review of Jacques-Antoine Dulaure's (1755-1835) *Histoire physique, civile et morale de Paris* (1825-7) that 'the history of civilisation in France' was, 'to a great degree, the history of civilisation in Europe'.[48] This assimilative logic was prevalent in Doctrinaire, liberal, and Romantic histories from the 1830s, but its roots can be traced to the Restoration and revolutionary periods.[49] While Mill's analysis lacked the sophistication of later essays, he praised Dulaure for taking an interest in human nature as history revealed it. The 'vulgar histories' of English *littérateurs*, by contrast, showed scant interest in the life of man *as man*.[50] When they told the story of English feudalism, for instance, they did so without referring to the natural course of progress, whereas Dulaure showed that France up to the 1790s told the story of Europe's ascent from feudalism into a post-feudal modernity, and which brought together the composite elements of a distinctly European progress.[51] Feudalism in England had 'never existed in its original purity'. Its kings had exercised an unprecedented level of discretionary power, while continental monarchs had remained in thrall to the nobility and other municipal powers, leaving France as the only 'theatre on which to exhibit feudality and its train of effects'.[52]

It was Guizot, however, who provided Mill with a definitive version of the argument.[53] Despite his involvement with the Orléanists and the 'profoundly immoral, as well as despotic *régime* which France is now enduring', Mill shared Guizot's interest in the lineaments of European progress.[54] His appointment in 1812 to the Chair of Modern History at Sorbonne; his lectures on European history; and his institution in 1833 of the *Société de l'histoire de France* gave him the authority of a

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[48] *CW*, XX, p. 18.

[49] The Revolution, according to Matthias Middell, set out to 'universalise' its ideas: 'The French Revolution in the global world of the eighteenth century' in A. Forest and M. Middell (eds.), *The Routledge companion to the French Revolution in world history* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 23.

[50] *CW*, XX, p. 18.

[51] Guizot in 1828 proposed to focus on the nation that was 'la plus complète, la plus vraie, la plus civilisée': *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe*, p. 133. There is evidence that Mill occasionally saw the need to refer to non-European history. In his review of Guizot from 1845, he remarked that ideally (but unrealistically) universal histories looked beyond 'modern' and 'European experience', 'so far as possible': *CW*, XX, p. 262.

[52] Ibid., p. 26. France after 1791 was a different matter. Napoleon's capricious rule afforded 'little or nothing' to the historian except 'ordinary characters and ordinary events': 'Scott's Life of Napoleon' (1828), *CW*, XX, pp. 57-58.

[53] Scholars are increasingly mindful of their relationship, whereas traditionally Tocqueville and Comte are seen as dominant authorities behind Mill's turn in the 1830s and 1840s to a science of society. See Varouxakis, 'Guizot's historical works and J.S. Mill's reception of Tocqueville', pp. 292-312.

[54] *CW*, XX, p. 370. On the relationship between Guizot's idiosyncratic liberalism and his use of history, see A. Craiutu, *Liberalism under siege: the political thought of the French Doctrinaires* (Oxford: Lexington, 2003), pp. 101-102, 172-185.

professional historian who grounded his 'speculations' in the 'true sources of history', combining two superficially conflicting aims: a rigorous criticism of the evidence and the discovery of 'natural laws'.[55] As Mill put it in 1845, his *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe* was among 'the most valuable contributions yet made to universal history' and, by implication, to the third stage of historical enquiry.[56] While Guizot drew 'his details and exemplifications from France', his principles were 'universal' because the 'social conditions and changes' he described 'were not French, but European'.[57] Besides holding a normative interest in European history, Guizot acknowledged its practical benefits. The historian, he argued, 'doit limiter son ambition; tout en ayant conscience que l'Europe n'est qu'une partie, la civilisation européenne qu'un fragment d'un tout…[et] à propos de laquelle les documents abondent'.[58]

Mill reviewed Guizot on two occasions, first in 1836 – in a collaboration with Joseph Blanco White (1755-1841) – and again in 1845.[59] Both dates are significant. The first was written after his initial review of Tocqueville and shortly before the publication in April 1836 of his essay on civilisation. James died in June.[60] The second was published approximately two years after the *Logic* and one year after the review of Michelet, in which he sketched the three stages of historical enquiry. In the article from 1836, he returned to the idea that France was a model of European progress. Since 'the sources of civilisation' – Roman, Christian, and Barbarian – were 'the same among the whole European family, the philosophical historian may choose any of the nations where the growth of civilisation has been continuous and vigorous, as an example, applicable to all the rest, under certain modifications which must be learnt from the detailed history of each'. It was 'natural', he continued, 'that M. Guizot should prefer France', not because of his 'national predilections', but because he 'considers the general progress of European civilisation to be more faithfully imaged in the history of France than in that of any other country'.[61] It was, simply, the country 'best suited to illustrate the general character and growth of European civilisation'.[62] 'Il est évident', Guizot remarked, 'qu'une certaine unité éclate dans la civilisation des divers Etats de l'Europe; que, malgré de grandes diversités de temps, de lieux, de circonstances, partout cette civilisation découle de faits

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55 *CW*, XX, p. 264.
56 Ibid., pp. 259, 228.
57 Ibid., p. 231.
58 Guizot, *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe*, p. 133.
59 Mill was initially unhappy with Blanco's contributions, which he amended to reflect his own position. See a letter from Mill to H.S. Chapman, November 1835: *CW*, XII, p. 284.
60 James, according to John, read and 'approved' of the essay on civilisation shortly before his death: *CW*, I, p. 211.
61 Ibid., XX, pp. 373-374.
62 Ibid., p. 378.

DRAFT

à peu près semblables, se rattache aux mêmes principes et tend à amener à peu près partout des résultats analogues'.[63]

The systematic antagonisms under which Europe had steadily progressed – which combined elements of theocracy, monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy – were better exemplified in France than anywhere else. Whereas China had stagnated under the dominance of a single political principle, Europe over time had combined pagan self-assertion with Christian self-denial, encouraging a progressive conflict of ideas, institutions, and classes.[64] France was the most progressive nation in Europe, while Europe was the only civilisation in which these fragile coexistences had been successfully maintained. In the review of Michelet from 1844, Mill claimed that the 'stream of civilisation' was 'identical in all the western nations' until the Reformation, which meant that 'any one country, therefore, may, in some measure, stand for all the rest. But France is the best type, as representing best the average circumstances of Europe'.[65] The English had suffered a double conquest at the hands of the Romans and Normans, while 'secondary and modifying agencies' had complicated the histories of Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, and Spain. In France, by contrast, 'no disturbing forces, of anything like equal potency, can be traced; and the universal tendencies, having prevailed more completely, are more obviously discernible'. It was only when the 'subordination of the Church to the State' was 'fully established', and the 'struggles between the king and the barons' intensified, that France ceased to represent 'the history of Europe and of civilisation'.[66]

Universal history provided a framework in which to connect progress with politics. Michelet in his *Introduction à l'histoire universelle* (1831), for example, narrated a tragic conflict between freedom and necessity, in which he distinguished between an emancipated *être collectif* and an unfree world of disaggregated individuals. The local fatalisms of language, climate, and geography were to be overcome by a heroic struggle stretching across time and space.[67] Once again France's history was key. Whereas the English pursued a 'politique égoïste et matérielle', the '[l]'assimilation universelle à laquelle tend la France…[est] l'assimilation des intelligences, la conquête des volontés: qui jusqu'ici y a mieux réussi que nous?'[68] The argument hit home. Mill regarded Michelet as 'a pupil

[63] Guizot, *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe*, p. 8.
[64] This argument is forcefully presented in *On Liberty*: *CW*, XVIII, p. 266. For analysis see V. Guillin, 'The French Influence' in Macleod and Miller (eds.), *A companion to Mill*, pp. 136-137.
[65] *CW*, XX, p. 230. On Guizot's influential definition of civilisation, see P. Rosanvallon, *Le moment Guizot* (Paris: Bibliotheque des Sciences Humaines, 1985), pp. 191-193.
[66] *CW*, XX, p. 254.
[67] S. Kippur, *Jules Michelet: a study of mind and sensibility* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), p. 64.
[68] Michelet, *Introduction à l'histoire universelle*, p. 79.

DRAFT

of M. Guizot, or at least an admiring auditor', and commended the way in which he combined Romantic subjectivities with speculative insight; brought to the forefront of his account a 'consideration of races'; and forensically revised the histories of Rome and the Middle Ages.[69] One of his greatest strengths, however, was to examine individuals only as 'specimens, on a larger scale, of what was in the general heart of their age. His chief interest is for the collective mind…as if mankind or Christendom were one being, the single and indivisible hero of a tale.[70] Humanity was its own Prometheus whose struggle for liberty would unlock the gates to 'la cité de la Providence'.[71]

The theme of heroic universalism ran through Vico's *Scienza Nuova*, which Michelet translated in 1827.[72] Indeed, it was Vico who taught Michelet to separate universal from accidental tendencies and providentially reveal the *storia ideale eterna*:

> Dégager les phénomènes réguliers des accidentels, et déterminer les lois générales qui régissent les premiers; tracer l'histoire universelle, éternelle, qui se produit dans le temps sous la forme des histoires particulières, décrire le cercle idéal dans lequel tourne le monde réel, voilà l'objet de la nouvelle science. Elle est tout à-la-fois la philosophie et l'histoire de l'humanité.[73]

Mill in his article on Michelet agreed that universal history related society's natural tendencies in conformity with the laws of human nature. This, he argued, was the real purpose of historical enquiry in its final form: to discriminate scientifically between universal and special causes, and to make possible a new kind of politics in which humanity's progressive tendencies trumped the accidents of wars, policies, and individuals. Its leading practitioners were Guizot and, of course, Comte:

> The great universal results must be first accounted for, not only because they are the most important, but because they depend on the simplest laws. Taking place on so large a scale as to neutralise the operation of local and partial agents, it is in them alone that we see in undisguised action the inherent tendencies of the human race…while it would be impossible to give a full analysis of the innumerable causes which influenced the local or temporary development of some section of mankind; and even a distant approximation to it supposes a previous understanding of the general laws, to which these local causes stand in the relation of modifying circumstances.[74]

[69] *CW*, XX, pp. 231, 235.
[70] Ibid., pp. 231-232.
[71] J. Michelet, *Oeuvres de M. Michelet* (Bruxelles: Meline, Cans et Compagnie, 1840), III, p. 201.
[72] See McCalla, 'Romantic Vicos', pp. 389-408.
[73] Michelet, *Oeuvres*, I p. 71.
[74] *CW*, XX, p. 228.

DRAFT

Mill went further in his review of Guizot in 1845 by claiming that 'the time must come' when all doctrines which aspired 'to direct the consciences of mankind, or their political and social arrangements, will be required to show not only that they are consistent with universal history, but that they afford a more reasonable explanation of it than any other system'. An attempt must be made, he continued, 'to disentangle the complications of those [historical] phenomena, to detect the order of their causation, and exhibit any portion of them in an unbroken series, each link cemented by natural laws with those which precede and follow it'.[75] This inevitably raised questions about free will, a matter made more complex by that 'ordinary artifice of modern French composition', namely, the 'personification of abstractions'.[76] Guizot, in particular, offered metaphysical rather than scientific or positive explanations of history, and he wrote privately about 'l'empreinte de la fatalité' and the ontological limits to freedom, a Calvinist tick which became more pronounced in his later years.[77] Mill had no time for these views, but he did address – in 1843 and again in 1862 – the relationship between free will and a law-giving science of history. If the 'order of causation' could be modified only to a limited extent, and even then in the most exceptional of circumstances, then how should we account for the 'local and partial agents' which co-existed with 'great universal results'?

III. THE COLLECTIVE EXPERIMENT

> It is dishonest in Mr. Buckle, because he must be aware that he is using the words *law* and *necessity* in a sense quite different from that intended by ordinary mortals.[78]
>
> Lord Acton, 1858

Mill revised the *Logic* periodically until his death in 1873. One edition, published in 1862, added a new chapter entitled 'Additional Elucidations on the Science of History'. In it he challenged the assumption that the law of universal causation implied a form of philosophical necessity, and that the science of history undermined individual agency precisely because it was a science, a tool with which to generalise and predict social behaviour. The puzzle is that he had addressed the subject before, in Book VI, Chapter 2 of the *Logic*. He even confessed in the added chapter from 1862

[75] Ibid., pp. 261-262.
[76] Ibid., p. 255.
[77] F. Guizot (ed. H. de Witt), *Lettres de m. Guizot à sa famille et à ses amis, recueillies par Mme de Witt* (Paris: Hachette, 1884), p. 47. See also F. Guizot, *L'histoire de France: depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'en 1789* (Paris: Hachette, 1870), I, p. i. On Michelet and providence, see Kippur, *Jules Michelet: a study of mind and sensibility*, p. 77; J.R. Williams, *Jules Michelet: historian as critic of French literature* (Alabama: Summa, 1987), p. 20; C. Crossley, *Edgar Quinet: a study in romantic thought* (Lexington: French Forum, 1983), p. 120.
[78] J.D. Acton, 'Mr Buckle's thesis and method', *The Rambler* 10 (1858), p. 36.

DRAFT

that he intended to 'repeat' his earlier position, and to sketch broad equivalences between the laws of human nature and history.[79] His reasoning was that individual freedom translated into collective freedom: if human beings were not ruled by necessity, then neither was history. The pressing question, then, is why did Mill feel the need to revisit a problem to which he had already provided an answer, especially one that he regarded as clear and authoritative? Since the secondary literature provides little guidance in this respect, I propose, first, to reconstitute the intellectual contexts in which Mill spelled out his original position, and, second, to identify his intended audience in 1862.

Any discussion of liberty and necessity must begin with Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) because Mill in the *Logic* retraced its steps.[80] In that work, Hume offered the notorious and frequently misunderstood claim that mankind is 'so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular', except to point out the 'varieties of circumstances and situations' in which human beings find themselves.[81] The uniformity to which he referred was psychological. His evidence was historical: '[a]mbition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, public spirit: these passions, mixed in various degrees, and distributed through society, have been, from the beginning of the world, and still are, the source of all the actions and enterprises, which have ever been observed among mankind'.[82] The Enlightenment project of a *science de l'homme* – as *the* social science from which others were derived – was seen by many of its detractors as *fatalisme historique*, a problem compounded by the dissemination in Germany, and then in England and France, of histories which emphasised the past's distinctness over its underlying structures and uniformities.[83] Duncan Forbes in *Hume's Philosophical Politics* stated the problem thus: 'on the one hand, there is the principle of the uniformity of human nature' based on a reading of history as 'a psychological monochrome', and, on the other, a 'sociological relativism' with which it cannot be reconciled.[84]

Forbes attempted to clear up the issue by showing that, for Hume at least, the law of invariable causation did not imply that human beings were in any sense predetermined, only that their actions had causes, and, moreover, that those causes could be explained without contradiction at both the

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[79] *CW*, VIII, p. 932.
[80] See T.W. Merrill, *Hume and the politics of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 45, 84-89.
[81] Hume, *An enquiry concerning human understanding*, p. 55.
[82] Ibid.
[83] See Frazer, *The enlightenment of sympathy*, pp. 142-150. The debates in the 1780s surrounding Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* are a case in point: A. Vartanian, *Science and humanism in the French Enlightenment* (Charlotesville: Rockwood, 1999), pp. 153-157.
[84] D. Forbes, *Hume's philosophical politics*, p. 115. Popper accused Mill of a similar confusion: *The poverty of historicism*, p. 111.

DRAFT

general and local level. The problem was purely verbal. Any account of freedom must imply or at least take into account the fact of causation, because it would be absurd to claim that true freedom is freedom from causality, or that our liberty is somehow threatened if we cannot deny the effects of causal or antecedent forces.[85] Hume's point, therefore, was that social phenomena could be explained at different levels of uniformity, ranging from the general and universal to the accidental and local, with no expectation that one would explain or cause the other. The 'local patterns of expected and predictable behaviour', Forbes concluded, sat alongside 'the general principle of the uniformity of human behaviour'.[86] On the one hand, there is universal man, whose actions can be deduced from the laws of human nature; on the other, there is social man, who, in addition to those psychological laws, acts within the uniformities of custom.

Mill in the first edition of *Logic* followed on explicitly from Hume. He argued that the 'word [necessity], in its other acceptations, involves much more than mere uniformity of sequence: it implies irresistibleness'.[87] The culprit here was the utopian socialist Robert Owen (1771-1858), who had attacked the Christian doctrine of free will because it made the poor responsible for their poverty, the implication being that character was formed *by* society *for* the individual, and that we must consequently rethink our notions of accountability. For instance, Malthus in *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) had identified sexual promiscuity as a cause of the poor's distress, whereas Owen pointed to factors beyond their control.[88] The 'doctrines which have been taught to every known sect, combined with the external circumstances by which they have been surrounded…could not fail', Owen argued, 'to produce the characters which have existed'.[89] Mill in the *Logic* compressively rejected this position. The issue, he explained, boiled down to 'the application of so improper a term as necessity to the doctrine of cause and effect in the matter of human character'.[90] The solution was to abandon the language of necessity. Whereas Hume had insisted that necessity was inseparable from the idea of cause and effect – a view reinforced by Owen – Mill believed that the connection was psychological, a product of the mind's associations.

> The causes, therefore, on which action depends, are never uncontrollable; and any given effect is only necessary provided that the causes tending to produce it are not controlled. That whatever happens, could not have happened otherwise unless something had taken place which was capable of preventing it, no one surely needs hesitate to admit. But to call

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[85] Forbes, *Hume's philosophical politics*, p. 112.
[86] Ibid., p. 116.
[87] *CW*, VIII, p. 839.
[88] See G. Claeys, *Citizens and saints: politics and anti-politics in early British socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 115-119.
[89] R. Owen, *A new view of society* [1813] (London: Longman, Hurts, Rees, & Co, 1817), p. 106.
[90] *CW*, VIII, p. 841.

DRAFT

> this by the name necessity is to use the term in a sense so different from its primitive and familiar meaning, from that which it bears in the common occasions of life, as to amount almost to a play upon words.[91]

Shortly after completing the *Logic* in 1843, Mill argued to Robert Barclay Fox (1817-1855) that the 'sixth book on Liberty & Necessity' is 'in short & in my judgement the best chapter in the two volumes'.[92] Why, then, did he revisit the theme in the 1862 edition of the *Logic*, to which he made further emendations in 1865 and 1868? The problem becomes even more complex when we consider, first, that Mill's argument was essentially the same as before, and, second, that the chapter appeared in the same book in which he responded to Hume, which rules out the possibility that he intended to restate or popularise his position. The answer must be historical, a reflection of changed circumstances rather than serious intellectual revision. His new chapter on the science of history was, first and foremost, an intervention into a series of debates which had become increasingly fraught after the publication in 1857 of Buckle's *History of Civilisation in England*. One of Buckle's more contentious points, or so his detractors claimed, was that 'to those who have a steady conception of the regularity of events', it is clear that 'the actions of men, being guided by their antecedents, are in reality never inconsistent'.[93] Here Buckle was fleshing out in tangible historical terms Comte's theory of social dynamics, and Mill, as someone who was more than passingly sympathetic to Comte's science of history, saw the need to unpack and defend Buckle's position.[94]

The backlash against Buckle tapped into existing anxieties about the reduction of moral agency to scientific laws. In the decades after the publication of the *Logic*, a statistical revolution had taken place in municipal, national, and academic societies, bringing ever closer into view a predictive science of society and, with it, new concerns about the regularity and predictability of social phenomena.[95] Immediately after the publication of Buckle's *History*, the likes of R.B. Drummond (1833-1920), Goldwin Smith, Stubbs, Kinglsey , Froude, Acton (1834-1902), and James Fitzjames

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[91] Ibid., p. 839.
[92] Mill to R.B. Fox, 14 February 1843: *CW*, XIII, p. 569.
[93] Buckle, *History of civilisation in England*, I, p. 28.
[94] Mill in a letter lamented Buckle's premature death and praised him for 'stimulating the desire to apply general principles to the explanation and prediction of social facts', notwithstanding 'the undue breadth of many of his conclusions'. Mill to Samuel Henry Chapman (1803-1881), 24 February 1863: *CW*, XV, p. 845.
[95] Mill in the 1862 edition of the *Logic* observed that the 'facts of statistics, since they have been made a subject of careful recordation and study, have yielded conclusions, some of which have been very startling to persons not accustomed to regard moral actions as subject to uniform laws': *CW*, VIII, p. 932. On the statistical revolution, see L. Goldman, 'Victorian social science: from singular to plural' in M. Daunton (ed.), *The organisation of knowledge in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 87-115; T.M. Porter, *The rise of statistical thinking 1820-1900* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 160-177.

DRAFT

Stephen argued that Buckle's statistical method pointed to invariable causal laws, the consequences of which were roughly threefold: first, that human history was fatalistic; second, that this fatalism undermined individuals' moral responsibility; and, finally, that individuals and acts of government had little to no influence on the course of history.[96] Stephen pithily summed up Buckle's hostile reception: 'Englishmen, in general, are startled and offended by speculations which appear to deny individual freedom'.[97] Drummond, meanwhile, captured the spirit of the Christian response: '[it] is possible', he argued, 'for men to yield themselves indolently to the disposal of forces outside them, to resign that freedom which God has committed to them…But such is not the part of the Christian who knows himself the servant of God, and feels that it is given to him to choose, if he will, the right before the pleasant'.[98]

The debate about necessity had changed significantly between 1843 and 1862, but Mill's views had not. The differences were of degree rather than kind, and, in a way, his methodological individualism allowed him to resolve the problem in the same way as before. Working upwards from individuals to society, Mill suggested that 'if this principle [the denial of fatalism] is true of individual man, it must be true of collective man. If it is the law of human life, the law must be realised in history' – a fact brought out 'triumphantly…by Mr Buckle'. While Mill was aware that some 'defenders of the theory' had overemphasised 'the influence of general causes at the expense of special', he welcomed Buckle's emphasis the universal laws of causation because the influences 'special to the individual' – character, custom, physical environment, the state of civilisation, and so on – could not form the basis of a scientific theory.[99] It was only by studying history on a vast scale, so vast, in fact, that the influence of anomalies was reduced effectively to nil, that we might establish propositions about humanity's progressive tendencies.

> [If] we now take the whole of the instances which occur within a sufficiently large field to exhaust all the combinations of these special influences, or, in other words, to eliminate chance…[then] we may be certain that if human actions are governed by invariable laws, the aggregate result will be something like a constant quantity.[100]

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[96] See Hesketh, *The science of history in Victorian Britain*, p. 36; Smith, *Free will and the human sciences in Britain, 1870-1910* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 133-159; C. Parker, 'English historians and the opposition to positivism', *History and theory* 22.2 (1983), pp. 120-145.

[97] J. Stephen, 'Buckle's History of civilisation in England', *The Edinburgh Review* 107 (1858), p. 241.

[98] R.B. Drummond, *Free will in relation to statistics. A lecture containing some suggestions in way of reply to certain objections advanced to the doctrine of free will, by Mr Buckle, in his History of civilisation in England* (London: E.T. Whitefield, 1860), p. 20.

[99] *CW*, VIII, p. 934.

[100] Ibid., p. 933.

These special influences were not to be trifled with because they accounted for differences in national character and the historical conditions of progress. Mill in chapter sixteen of the *Considerations* listed race, descent, language, religion, geography, 'political antecedents', and, above all, 'the possession of a national history and consequent community of recollections' as the materials of national character, and which determined the likelihood of its progress, stagnation, or decline.[101] These variables, moreover, explained why history rarely followed its natural course, and why some nations were more civilised than others. By winnowing out as many special influences as possible, a story began to emerge about the progress not just of this or that society, but of civilisation in the aggregate. Mill in his chapter on the science of history called this 'the collective experiment'.

> [The] collective experiment, as it may be termed exactly separates the effect of the general from that of the special causes, and shows the net result of the former; but it declares nothing at all respecting the amount of influence of the special causes, be it greater or smaller, since the scale of the experiment extends to the number of cases within which the effects of the special causes balance one another, and disappear in that of the general causes.[102]

Mill's point was that human actions are conjointly the result of general laws, the circumstances in which they are performed, and the performer's character, that character again being a consequence of the circumstances of their education, amongst which he included their own conscious efforts. Although the laws of progress were regular and invariable, they were not in themselves a power in history.[103] The mistake was to assume that historical laws were similar in kind to mechanical or chemical laws, which, for obvious reasons, could not account for our ability to form ideas and act on them. While human beings were shaped by the laws of social development and the 'physical agencies of nature', they distinguished themselves from animals by converting them into 'instruments' of their design, and 'the extent to which…[they do so] makes the chief difference between savages and the most highly civilised people.[104] The law of invariable causation, he concluded, does not require us to surrender blithely to our fate, but only to acknowledge the subjection of 'historical facts to historical laws' and to reduce to a 'canon of regularity' the 'human volitions' on which they depend.[105] The 'doctrine of the causation of human actions' thus affirmed

[101] Ibid., XIX, p. 546. See Vaoruxakis, *Mill on nationality*, p. 14.
[102] *CW*, VIII, p. 934.
[103] In an article on Tocqueville from 1840, he suggested that 'economic and social changes', though among the greatest, were 'not the only forces which shape the course of our species; ideas are not always the mere signs and effects of social circumstances, they are themselves a power in history': *CW*, XVIII, p. 197-8.
[104] Ibid., VIII, pp. 936-937.
[105] Ibid., pp. 931-932.

DRAFT

'no mysterious *nexus* or overruling fatality: it asserts only that men's actions are the joint result of the general laws and circumstances of human nature'.[106]

In a further attempt to pre-empt objections to a science of history based on the doctrine of free will, Mill claimed that while 'the results of progress, except as to the celerity of their production, can be, *to a certain extent*, reduced to regularity and law', the 'belief that they can be so is equally consistent with assigning very great, or very little efficacy, to the influence of exceptional men, or of the acts of governments. And the same may be said of all other accidents and disturbing causes'.[107] Individuals' place in history had long been the subject of debate.[108] Carlyle in 1840 began his lecture on hero-worship with the salvo that 'Universal History…[is] the History of the Great Men who have worked here', while Archibald Alison, whose history of the French Revolution Mill had derided in 1833, criticised Guizot for viewing human affairs 'not from year to year but from century to century; and when considered in that view, it is astonishing how much the importance of individual agency disappears'. History's 'tide' was pulled 'to and fro' by the genius of world-historical figures.[109] Kingsley in *The Limits of Exact Science as Applied to History* (1860) provided a more sober analysis, declaring to his Cambridge audience that the 'history of mankind' was not the 'history of its masses' but rather the 'history of its great men'.[110] A 'true philosophy of history', he concluded, 'ought to declare the laws…by which great minds have been produced into the world'.[111]

That, ironically, was precisely what Mill and Buckle were attempting to do.[112] Kingsley's argument became snarled when he insisted that individuals' actions were both irreducibly theirs and subject to uniform laws. Mill and Buckle freely admitted to the role of eminent individuals, but they refused to see them as the underlying cause of historical change.[113] If we can reduce to a sufficient level of regularity the conditions in which great individuals are produced, then history assumes a regularity that Kingsley was otherwise keen to deny. That history threw up the occasional Caesar was significant only to the extent that it demonstrated society's transformative effect on character. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) in his essay *The Social Organism* (1860) agreed that '[t]hose who regard

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[106] Ibid., p. 932.
[107] Ibid., p. 939. My emphasis.
[108] Mill said so himself: *CW*, VIII, p. 937.
[109] T. Carlyle (ed. H.D. Traill), *The works of Thomas Carlyle* [1896] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), V, p. 1; A. Alison, 'Guizot and the philosophy of history', *The Eclectic Magazine* 4 (1845), p. 184.
[110] C. Kingsley, *The limits of exact science as applied to history* (Cambridge: Macmillan & Co., 1860), p. 44.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Mill offered precisely this argument in the chapter on the science of history: *CW*, VIII, p. 939.
[113] Of the Greeks' victory at Salamis, Mill remarked that had 'there had been no Themistocles there would have been no victory of Salamis; and had there not, where would have been all our civilisation?': *CW*, VIII, p. 941.

the histories of societies as the histories of their great men…overlook the truth that such great men are the products of their societies', a theme which he resumed in 1873 in his canonical *The Study of Sociology*.[114] In it, Spencer defended Buckle from Kingsley, Froude, and others who denied 'the doctrine of averages' without understanding what, exactly, that doctrine tried to explain.[115]

Another way of thinking about the problem is to pursue Alison's analogy between history and the tide. Mill in the *Logic* made a similar comparison between the science of human nature and 'tidology', a term he attributed to Whewell in the *Novum Organon Renovatum* (1858). His purpose in doing so was to model social prediction on an inexact science, and to strike a balance, therefore, between the general causes we can account for and the special causes we cannot.

> Inasmuch, however, as many of those which it is of most importance to render amenable to human foresight and control are determined like the tides, in an incomparably greater degree by general causes, than by all partial causes taken together; depending in the main on those circumstances and qualities which are common to all mankind, or at least to large bodies of them, and only in a small degree on the idiosyncrasies of organisation or the peculiar history of individuals; it is evidently possible with regard to all such effects, to make predictions which will *almost* always be verified, and general propositions which are almost always true.[116]

These approximations were causal in a requisite rather than literal sense.[117] When it came to predicting what will happen in the future, Mill acknowledged the practical difficulties of knowing what will happen in each individual case, especially when special causes were likely to affect the outcome. Even if human nature could be made as plain as the road from Charing Cross to St. Pauls, as his father had hoped, it would still struggle to neutralise the impact of special factors. We can only make our observations 'in a rough way, and *en masse*', and by examining the circumstances which '*oftenest*' exist.[118] It may well be impossible, as Stephen Turner has argued, to resolve into a deductive compositional analysis the effects of both general and special causes, but for Mill this did not mean that we ought to abandon the task, however difficult, of inferring the future from past events.[119] He was optimistic that the task would become easier as time wore on. In the early stages of civilisation, when political communities were relatively small and isolated, events were

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[114] H. Spencer, *Essays: scientific, political, speculative* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), p. 146. See J. Offer, *Herbert Spencer and social theory* (London: Palgrave, 2010), p. 69. On Spencer's relationship with Mill, Grote, and Buckle, see H. Spencer, *An autobiography* (New York: Appleton, 1905), II, pp. 4, 22.
[115] H. Spencer, *The study of sociology* [1873] (New York: Appleton & Co., 1874), pp. 45-46.
[116] *CW*, VIII, p. 847.
[117] Turner, *The search for a methodology of social science*, p. 47.
[118] *CW*, VIII, p. 866. Mill's emphasis.
[119] Turner, *The search for a methodology of social science*, p. 49.

DRAFT

often determined by special causes, but as civilisation progressed events were determined increasingly by 'the collective agency of the species'.

> The longer our species lasts, and the more civilised it becomes, the more, as Comte remarks, does the influence of past generations over the present, and of mankind *en masse* over every individual in it, predominate over other forces: and though the course of affairs never ceases to be susceptible of alteration both by accidents and by personal qualities, the increasing preponderance of the collective agency of the species over all minor causes, is constantly bringing the general evolution of the race into something which deviates less from a certain and preappointed track. Historical science, therefore, is always becoming more possible: not solely because it is better studied, but because, in every generation, it becomes better adapted for study.[120]

What, exactly, did Mill mean by the course of affairs? I have discussed at length the logical apparatuses with which he examined historical change, but I have said comparatively little about their substantive political contents.[121] My purpose in the final section, therefore, is to delve more deeply into the trends with which he anticipated the future, and to examine their influence on (what I call) his timely politics. I focus on Mill's writings on the empowerment of masses, a social, economic, and political theme that became increasingly prominent after the passing of the Reform Act in 1832 and his introduction in 1835 to Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. His journalism from this period was fevered and historical. As he put it in 1832, the people stood before a new 'epoch in English history' and it was 'time to mount and journey onward'. The 'machine' was now in 'the people's hands, but how to work it skilfully is the question'.[122]

IV. TIMELY POLITICS

> [G]overnment is always either in the hands, or passing into the hands, of whatever is the strongest power in society, and that what this power is, does not depend on institutions, but institutions on it: [so] that any general theory or philosophy of politics supposes a previous theory of human progress, and that this is the same thing with a philosophy of history.[123]
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> J.S. Mill, *Autobiography*

Isaiah Berlin once likened Mill to Hegel's owl of Minerva, who could not see past the 'circumstances of his age'.[124] In this and the preceding two chapters I have argued for the opposite view. Spurred on by Saint-Simon, Comte, Coleridge, Guizot, and Tocqueville, timeliness became

[120] *CW*, VIII, p. 942.
[121] Ibid., p. 791.
[122] Ibid., XXIII, p. 489.
[123] Ibid., I, p. 169.
[124] Berlin, 'John Stuart Mill and the ends of life', p. 198.

DRAFT

the fulcrum on which Mill levered a new philosophical politics. His commitment to representative democracy transformed into a historically dynamic account of 'political institutions' whose capacity for 'further progress' was made a condition of their utility.[125] If Mill is to be believed, this new progressiveness did not alter his 'practical political creed as to the requirements' of his 'own time and country'.[126] It would be easy, then, to see this transformation as one of form over substance – a position that has attracted many – but this would require us to gloss over his conception of political timeliness, which sought to either slow down or speed up inexorable social change, and to determine accordingly the strategy and pace of reform. In the *Autobiography*, for instance, he distinguished between the 'region of ultimate aims' and the region of the 'immediately useful and practically attainable'; the latter strove gradually for achievable reforms, while the former looked beyond the present age to possible futures beyond, to a time when human beings had increased their moral and intellectual capacities.[127] His own strength, he asserted, 'lay wholly in the uncertain and slippery intermediate region [between the two], that of theory…whether as political economy, analytic psychology, logic, [or the] philosophy of history'.[128]

Mill, as ever, saw himself as an umpire of extremes. He argued to Tocqueville in 1840 that political science must reconcile the 'microscopic' philosophy of the English – i.e., the 'stricter & closer deductions' of political economy – with the 'telescopic' philosophy of the French.[129] He stated the case more polemically in 1833, observing in an open letter to Duveyrier that the English were 'unmoved by Utopian schemes'. Reformers must 'tell them only of the next step they have to take, keeping back all mention of any subsequent step'. But 'progressive science' held that 'none of the great questions of social organisation can receive their true answer, except by being considered in connexion with views which ascend high into the past, and stretch far into the future'.[130] The English evinced less faith in irresistible trends, but that did not prevent Mill from telling political time by the 'clock of history'.[131] The point of doing so, he reasoned, was to manage the effects of universal tendencies, either by slowing down or speeding up political time, and to decide whether or not society was sufficiently prepared for the change to come[132]. In his essay on 'Civilisation', for

[125] *CW*, I, p. 177.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., p. 197.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Mill to Tocqueville, 30 December 1840: *CW*, XIII, p. 458.
[130] Ibid., XXIII, pp. 445-446. Likewise, he reasoned in 1831 that even if the Saint-Simonians' 'social organisation' was to become 'the final and permanent condition of the human race', it would 'require many, or at least several, ages, to bring mankind into a state in which they will be capable of it': Mill to d'Eichthal, 30 November 1831, *CW*, XII, pp. 88-89.
[131] This phrase belongs to Collini, Winch, and Burrow: *That noble science of politics*, p. 119.
[132] James Mill in the *Fragment on Mackintosh* had alluded to the timely 'spirit of law reform' and the harvest 'ripe for the sickle': p. 153.

DRAFT

instance, he argued that if a 'rational person' thinks the masses 'unprepared for complete control over their government…he will exert his utmost efforts in contributing to prepare them…[and] might think that, in order to give more time for the performance of them, it were well if the current of democracy, which can in no sort be stayed, could be prevailed upon for a time to flow less impetuously'.[133]

John Robson, Dennis Thompson, and Oscar Kurer are among the few to have appreciated Mill's use of historical trends, the purpose of which, Robson argued, was to enable 'prediction and control through understanding'.[134] This is especially evident in his newspaper writings from the 1830s, which drew on historical analysis to guide reform and guard against potential dangers.[135] His political intent was twofold; first, to reprimand Mackintosh and other philosophic Whigs for confounding 'the authority of time' with the timeliness or untimeliness of political reform, and, second, to show that reform was at once inevitable and undetermined; inevitable, because the spirit of the age demanded it; undetermined, because we must decide on the nature and intensity of the reform, as well as the moment at which to propose and enact it.[136] In some states of society, he argued, sweeping reform would do more harm than good, in which case the reformer must take into account the limits of the age, approaching her task piece-by-piece, until such a time when society is able to overcome those endogenous limits and sustain new forms of political community. As he put it in 1833, the present required the kind of politician

> who, taking the reins of office in a period of transition, a period which is called, according to the opinions of the speaker, an age of reform, of destruction, or of renovation, should deem it his chief duty and his chief wisdom to moderate the shock: to mediate between adverse interests; to make no compromise of *opinions,* except by avoiding any ill-timed declaration of them…to reform bit-by-bit, when more rapid progress is impracticable, but always with a comprehensive and well-digested plan of thorough reform placed before him as a guide.[137]

One year earlier, in an article on pledges, he reproached John Black (1783-1855) for suggesting 'that our [Radical] doctrine is untimely', while in 1831 he argued that extensive reform would take

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[133] *CW*, XVIII, p. 127. There are some who see these years as Mill's conservative moment: Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill*, pp. 120, 156.

[134] Robson, *The improvement of mankind*, pp. 160, 106-107. See Thompson, *John Stuart Mill and representative government*, pp. 158-170; Kurer, *The politics of progress*, p. 10.

[135] Mill in 1831 argued that the concern with the spirit of the age was scarcely 'fifty years in antiquity': *CW*, XXII, p. 228. See R.A. Vieira, *Time and politics: parliament and the culture of modernity in Britain and the British world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 47-84.

[136] From 'Rationale of representation' (1835): *CW*, XVIII, p. 42. James Mill had attacked Mackintosh on precisely these grounds: *Fragment on Mackintosh*, p. 147.

[137] *CW*, XXIII, pp. 598-599. He praised Guizot in 1840 for letting 'some of his maxims go to sleep while the time is unpropitious for asserting them': Mill to Robert Barclay Fox, 23 December 1840: *CW*, XIII, p. 455.

place only after the 'idlest fears' have been given 'time…to wear off'.[138] This was especially the case in newly established democracies and free governments, whose survival depended on the salutary effects of 'time and habit'.[139] This did not mean, *contra* Mackintosh, that time's palliative effects provided the grounds on which to moderate or suspend reform, the logic being that the longer an institution lasts, the more evidence we have of its pliancy and progressiveness.[140] It simply meant that the 'wrongful partialities' of class, which shored up aristocratic privilege, would give way only gradually to 'the feelings proper to a free government'.[141] This was not in itself a reason to moderate or postpone reform.[142] As he put it in May 1832, shortly before the passage of the first Reform Act, France showed that the present age was one of uncertainty and transition, a period in which the new regime of public opinion will gradually replace aristocratic privilege, because 'she [France] has…got forward into another phasis of the change which all Europe is passing through, and of which we ourselves are in the earlier stages'. But the process in any case could not be rushed. For reform to take root 'time is required; and it must be given'.[143]

Mill's timely politics were emboldened by the publication in 1835 and 1840 of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.[144] He credited Tocqueville for inaugurating a new era of political science, combining 'deduction with induction' and the principles of 'human nature' with the examples of America and France.[145] Collini, Winch, and Burrow have dismissed these comments as 'generous puff', while Stuart Jones has argued persuasively for the opposite case.[146] Tocqueville's absence from the *Logic* is certainly conspicuous, but it is also true that Mill in the *Autobiography* praised him for pursuing a method 'wholly inductive and analytical' rather than 'purely ratiocinative'.[147] As he put it in 1840, Tocqueville employed the true 'Baconian and Newtonian method' by examining the effects of democracy as they existed 'in those countries in which the state of society is democratic', connecting them 'with democracy by deductions *à priori,* tending to show that such would naturally be its influences upon beings constituted as mankind are'.[148] The equalisation of conditions was

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[138] *CW*, XXIII, pp. 503, 340. See Black's critique in *The Morning Chronicle*, 10 July 1832, pp. 2-3.
[139] *CW*, XXIII, p. 498.
[140] Mackintosh was fond of Montesquieu's conception of time as 'the great innovator': J. Mackintosh, *The miscellaneous works of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851), p. 178.
[141] *CW*, XXIII, p. 498.
[142] 'Timely reform' was a catchphrase of those who, like Lord Grey, believed it 'prevents Revolution': *The Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 16 November 1832, p. 1; *The Morning Chronicle*, 6 April 1832, p. 2.
[143] *CW*, XXIII, pp. 457-458.
[144] See H.O. Pappé, 'Mill and Tocqueville', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25.2 (1964), pp. 217-234.
[145] *CW*, XVIII, p. 157.
[146] Collini, Winch, and Burrow, *That noble science of politics*, p. 132. Mill, according to Jones, commended Tocqueville's use of 'the Baconian and Newtonian' method in the study of 'society and government': Jones, '"The true Baconian and Newtonian method"', pp. 154-155.
[147] *CW*, I, p. 211.
[148] Ibid., XVIIII, p. 157.

DRAFT

given its freest scope in America, whose citizens were free to exercise their private judgement without the burden of 'traditions' and the 'wisdom of ancestors'.[149] Their contempt for historical 'form', Mill argued, provided the optimum conditions in which to observe democracy's natural progress, which referred not only to the development of democratic institutions and laws, but to the emergence of a democratic society. In Britain, however, the 'the equalisation of conditions' had made the 'least progress'.[150]

Without this process of double verification – the first inductive and empirical and the second deductive and *a priori* – it is unlikely that Mill would have praised Tocqueville so effusively. We know from his marginalia that he found fault with Tocqueville's method – 'on what induction', he asked, 'rests any proposition beginning with "les nations democratique"?' – but he agreed that the best place 'in which to study democracy, must be that where its natural tendencies have the freest scope; where all its peculiarities are most fully developed and most visible'.[151] The absence in America of an established landed élite; its high wages and high profits; and the strength of its municipal institutions were instrumental in developing an egalitarian commercial society.[152] The presence of these special causes, together with the absence of modifying forces, was not, however, enough to make the induction valid. The American experiment in democracy was shown to be consistent, first, with the general course of history, and, second, with the known laws of human nature.[153]

As with Mill in the *Logic*, Tocqueville strove to balance general with special causes, and to find 'le fait générateur dont chaque fait particulier semblait descender'.[154] In the introduction to the first volume, he argued that this 'generating event' was the increasing equality of conditions, which assumed the character of a natural law: '[l]e développement graduel de l'égalité des conditions est donc un fait providentiel, il en a les principaux caractères: il est universel, il est durable, il échappe chaque jour à la puissance humaine; tous les événements, comme tous les hommes, servent à son

[149] Ibid., p. 179.
[150] Ibid., p. 193. However, Mill's definition of equality was not entirely consistent: M. Morales, *Perfect equality: John Stuart Mill on well-constituted communities* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), p. 21.
[151] Mill, 'Verbal margnialia in Alexis de Tocqueville's De la démocratie en Amérique', *MMO*, IV, p. 116; *CW*, XVIII, p. 56.
[152] *CW*, XVIII, p. 63.
[153] One example is Tocqueville's discussion of the democratic courtier-spirit, which Mill considered 'inherent in human nature': *CW*, XVIII, p. 83.
[154] A. de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique* [1835-1840] (Paris: M. Lévy, 1864), I, p. 2. See J. Elster, *Alexis de Tocqueville, the first social scientist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 32-33. As H.C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop put it, Tocqueville's political science 'does not seek to determine exactly what will happen…but it does say what one can expect to happen, unless someone intervenes or something interferes': 'Tocqueville's new political science' in C.B. Welch, *The Cambridge companion to Tocqueville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 101.

développement'.[155] Despite the providential language in which he couched Europe's past – drawing, like Guizot, on a chronologically protracted and comparative history – Tocqueville did not believe that democracy was divinely ordained, or that its effects were immediately apparent.[156] He even wrote to Mill in 1843 to praise the *Logic's* solution to the problem of necessity, which, as we have seen, attempted to reconcile free will with invariable causation.[157] Tocqueville in his analysis of America likewise insisted that, while democracy was an inevitable fact of social relations, its spirit or form was not; it could align itself either with the spirit of freedom or with despotism, depending on whether we take the necessary precautions. The point once again was that democracy's effects will depend largely on our responses to it, and that we must endeavour to counteract its negative tendencies, chief amongst which were mass conformity, stagnation, and the tyranny of masses.[158]

Mill in his review from 1840 argued that Tocqueville 'has bound up in one abstract idea the whole of the tendencies of modern commercial society, and given them one name—Democracy', which meant that he had ascribed to democracy 'several of the effects naturally arising from the mere progress of national prosperity'.[159] Mill then turned to Canada for an example of an egalitarian or democratic but not a commercial or industrious society, which, for all its equalities, lacked the 'restless, impatient eagerness for improvement' which characterised the American middle class. Their rigorous assertion of private judgement and indifference to authority were features of a commercial society acting in tandem with democracy, whereas Tocqueville conflated them with democracy itself.[160] Mill wanted to parse the effects of democracy and commerce whilst acknowledging the connections between them. In his essay on civilisation, for instance, he combined a political economy of progress – or how the 'natural laws of the progress of wealth' had facilitated social 'intercourse' – with a corresponding account of the ways in which political power had passed 'from individuals to masses'.[161] The inevitability of that empowerment made

[155] Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, I, p. 7. The 'movement towards democracy', Mill agreed, 'dates from the dawn of modern civilisation': *CW*, XVIII, p. 50.
[156] 'The universal aim', Mill agreed, 'should be, so to prepare the way for democracy, that when it comes, it may come in this beneficial shape': *CW*, XVIII, p. 57. On Tocqueville's use of history, see S. Henary, 'Tocqueville and the challenge of historicism', *The Review of Politics* 76 (2014), pp. 469-494.
[157] As Mill put it in his reply from 3 November 1843, '[v]otre approbation du point de vue d'où j'ai envisagé la question de la liberté humaine m'est aussi très précieuse': *CW*, XIII, p. 612. Tocqueville's embrace of general causes and his rejection of fatalism had their roots in Montesquieu. See D.W. Carrithers, 'Montesquieu and Tocqueville as philosophical historians' in R.E. Kingston (ed.), *Montesquieu and his legacy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), pp. 149-179.
[158] See Mitchell, *Individual choice and the structures of history*, p. 109.
[159] *CW*, XVIII, p. 191.
[160] Ibid., p. 192.
[161] Ibid., p. 126.

DRAFT

even more urgent the political, social, and economic reforms which could effectively temper or counteract its negative effects.[162]

Mill in the *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) restated his belief that the idea of equality was 'spreading daily' and could 'no longer be checked'.[163] By the mid-1840s, however, he was convinced that existing political economies had failed to manage industrial progress, to the detriment of labourers and society at large. When reformers of various camps – Radical, conservative, liberal, socialist – addressed the social question, they tended to give little thought to workers' intellectual and moral improvement, leaving intact the basic structures of industrialism. The philanthropic movements of the 1840s, many of which had Tractarian or Young England connections, failed to combine the spirit of independence – a hallmark of progressive industrial society – with the 'spirit of equality'.[164] Mill was clear that humanity's ultimate prospects depended on the cultivation of workers' moral, intellectual, and aesthetic faculties, whereas a majority of reformers, including the Saint-Simonians and Comte, wanted to preserve the social structures of industrialism and reconstruct on its basis a new kind of society in which the masses were excluded from spiritual and temporal power.[165] In the case of the Irish famine, Mill proposed to combine 'relief to immediate destitution' with the 'permanent improvement of the social and economic condition of the Irish people', an idea that he regarded as 'new and strange'.[166]

Mill's advocacy for peasant proprietorship in Ireland made sense for a pre-industrial society whose progress depended on the cultivation of a 'new moral atmosphere' and 'national character'.[167] He hoped that in Britain a 'qualified socialism' would have a similar effect on the condition of industrial labourers and employers.[168] As he put it in the *Autobiography*, both he and Harriet Taylor (1807-1858) came to see the 'ideal of ultimate human improvement' as something which 'went far beyond democracy [in the political sense], and would class us decidedly under the general designation of socialists'.[169] Much ink has been spent debating Mill's preferred brand of socialism

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162 Ibid., p. 131.
163 Ibid., III, p. 767.
164 For an analysis of the contexts in which the *Principles* was written, see J. Betts 'John Stuart Mill, Victorian liberalism, and the failure of cooperative production', *The Historical Journal* 59.1 (2016), pp. 153-174.
165 As Mill put it in 1865, Comte's division of political leadership into 'positive thinkers' and 'leaders of industry' was a poor 'historical forecast…for are there not the masses as well as the leaders of industry? and is not theirs also a growing power?': *CW*, X, p. 325.
166 *CW*, I, p. 243. Mill suspended the writing of the *Principles* to engage with the Irish question: *CW*, I, p. 243. See L. Zastoupil, 'Moral government: J.S. Mill on Ireland', *The Historical Journal* 26.3 (1983), pp. 707-717.
167 *CW*, XXIV, p. 955.
168 Ibid., I, p. 199.
169 Ibid., p. 238. Mill in the *Principles* defined socialism as 'any system which requires that the land and instruments of production should be the property, not of individuals, but of communities or associations, or of the government': *CW*, II, p. 203.

DRAFT

and whether or not it can be reconciled with his defence of laissez-faire capitalism and Ricardian economics.[170] The difficulty in doing so can be ascribed, partly, to the diachronic nature of his argument, which posited that certain forms of social organisation were more suited than others to Britain's current stage of progress.[171] He was in little doubt that society tended in the long run towards the equitable distribution of capital and power, whereas in a 'rude and violent state of society' the ownership of capital was usually determined by force.[172] But this did not mean that the time was now ripe for an accelerated socialism; in 1869, for instance, he wrote to the socialist Andrew Reid, then secretary of the Land Tenure Reform Association, to argue that it was not 'timely' to propose 'taking possession of all the land & managing it by the State', since 'we have [not] yet reached such a degree of improvement as would enable' it. The 'general mind of the country', he concluded, 'is as yet totally unprepared to entertain the question'.[173]

Mill presented a similar argument in the third edition of the *Principles* (1852). While socialism was indeed 'an ultimate result of human progress', it was a question which 'must be left…to the people of that [future time] to decide' since those 'of the present' were 'not competent to decide it'.[174] His hope was that education would raise workers' intellectual capacities to make them fit for cooperative production, and less suited, therefore, to the kind of labour that enervated individuality, deadened the mind, and preserved the artificial inequalities of the unfettered market. As Joseph Pesky notes, the transition to a cooperative economy 'would take time and effort' and come about only through intermediary stages, such as profit-sharing and the gradual introduction of cooperative associations.[175] After the revolutions of 1848, however, and the rise in France of

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[170] Some, such as the Fabian Sydney Webb (1859-1947), have argued that Mill in the 1840s and 1850s became a 'convinced socialist', whereas others have emphasised his critical attitudes towards the utopian socialism of Louis Blanc (1811-1882) and Robert Owen, as well as the centralised socialism of Saint-Simon. He has also been portrayed as a liberal democratic socialist; a sympathiser of Fourierism and other decentralised forms of economic co-operation; a syndicalist; and a liberal economist whose defence of market capitalism amounted to a modified form of Ricardianism. See H. McCabe, 'Navigating by the North Star', pp. 291-309; B. Baum, 'J.S. Mill and liberal socialism' in Urbinati and Zakaras (eds.), *J. S. Mill's political thought*, p. 99; J.R. Riley, 'J.S. Mill's liberal utilitarian assessment of capitalism versus socialism', *Utilitas* 8.1 (1996), pp. 39-71.

[171] According to McCabe, 'Mill felt socialism ought to guide our current efforts at reform, however incremental, and however far we would still remain from an "ultimate" standard which might, in itself, never be reached': 'Navigating by the North Star', p. 292.

[172] *CW*, II, p. 69. Mill learnt from Tocqueville and Guizot that the decline of force as a principle of legitimation was a defining feature of progressive civilisation: *CW*, X, p. 315.

[173] Mill to Andrew Reid, 5 October 1869: *CW*, XVII, p. 1644. Likewise, in his posthumous *Chapters on socialism* (1879), he argued that 'when the time shall be ripe, whatever is right in them [these popular political creeds] may be adopted, and what is wrong rejected by general consent': *CW*, V, p. 707.

[174] *CW*, II, p. xciii. He offered a similar argument in the first volume, suggesting that '[m]ankind are capable of a far greater amount of public spirit than the present age is accustomed to suppose possible': *CW*, II, p. 205.

[175] J. Persky, *The political economy of progress: John Stuart Mill and modern radicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 133. On the role of socialism in Mill's vision of the future, see S. Hollander, *The economics of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1985), II, p. 817; G. Claeys, *Mill and paternalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 127.

DRAFT

worker-owned cooperatives, Mill came to believe that the 'public mind' was slowly being opened to 'novelties in opinion, especially those of a socialist character'.[176] This prompted him to revise his arguments in the *Principles* regarding private property and the 'probable futurity' of the labouring classes.[177] In that third edition from 1852, he declared that the time was now 'ripe' for 'a larger and more rapid extension of association among labourers', whereas before he had accepted the utility of private property and the industrial wage economy (but not primogeniture and entails).[178] The difference, he argued, was between those who wanted labour to be regulated *for* rather than *by* the poor; the latter had never been 'historically realised' because the time had not been ripe.[179]

Mill in the same edition made a distinction between the 'ideal of human society' and the 'practical purposes of [the] present times'.[180] He even argued in the first volume that the 'object to be principally aimed at *in the present stage of human improvement*, is not the subversion of the system of individual property, but the improvement of it'.[181] His argument for the perfection of capitalism and private property rested on a historically situated account of 'industrial progress', the exhaustion of which, he hoped, would lead to a new rationalised form of labour.[182] As 'mankind improve', joint enterprises of 'many kinds, which would now be impracticable, will be successively numbered among possibilities, thus augmenting, to an indefinite extent, the powers of the species'.[183] If, however, the system of private property was destined to last for the foreseeable future, as Mill thought it would, then we must perfect its institutions and more evenly distribute its 'benefits', which included the security of person and property; the establishment of an effective 'power of nature'; and, finally, the 'great increase both of production and of accumulation'.[184] The end of industrial progress, Mill concluded, will be marked by the 'irresistible necessity' of the stationary state, a phase of economic progress at which the population stagnates and the rate of accumulation drops effectively to zero.[185]

DRAFT

[176] *CW*, I, pp. 239-240.
[177] Ibid., II, p. xciii.
[178] Ibid., III, p. 794; I, p. 23.
[179] Ibid., III, p. 760.
[180] Ibid., p. 758.
[181] Ibid, II, p. 214.
[182] Ibid., III, p. 719. Of the historical increase in production and population, he observed that 'there is no reason to doubt, that not only these [civilised] nations will for some time continue so to increase, but that most of the other nations of the world, including some not yet founded, will successively enter upon the same career': *CW*, III, p. 706.
[183] Ibid., p. 987n.
[184] Ibid., pp. 706-707.
[185] Ibid., p. 752.

Mill rejected the classical view, held by Smith and John McCulloch (1789-1864), that the stationary state implied a corresponding stagnation of 'human improvement'.[186] 'The mind', he argued, would be discontented 'with merely tracing the laws of the movement; it cannot but ask the further question, to what goal? Towards what ultimate point is society tending by its industrial progress?'[187] As with the arrival of democracy, the task was to effectively manage the change to come, which in this case involved promoting workers' self-control (i.e., slowing the rate of population and establishing worker-owned cooperatives) and cultivating their moral, intellectual, and social faculties. If the requisite improvements were made, the stationary state would allow individuals to practise the 'art of living' above the 'art of getting on'.[188] Mill's hope was that, as our intellectual and moral capacities advanced, the pursuit of material needs would give way to higher social ones, namely, the extension of individual freedom and public spirit. Progress in this society would be maintained by the clash of antithetical forces, even though economic progress had effectively stagnated; we would seek the maximum amount of liberty that was compatible with the necessity of government, although Mill was reluctant to hazard a guess as to how or when this might be achieved. As he put it in the *Autobiography*, he looked forward

> to a time when society will no longer be divided into the idle and the industrious…when the division of the produce of labour, instead of depending, as in so great a degree it now does, on the accident of birth, will be made by concert, on an acknowledged principle of justice; and when it will no longer either be, or be thought to be, impossible for human beings to exert themselves strenuously in procuring benefits which are not to be exclusively their own, but to be shared with the society they belong to. The social problem of the future we considered to be, how to unite the greatest individual liberty of action, with a common ownership in the raw material of the globe, and an equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labour. We had not the presumption to suppose that we could already foresee, by what precise form of institutions these objects could most effectually be attained, or at how near or how distant a period they would become practicable. We saw clearly that to render any such social transformation either possible or desirable, an equivalent change of character must take place both in the uncultivated herd who now compose the labouring masses, and in the immense majority of their employers.[189]

Mill elsewhere argued that an enlargement of sympathy would irrevocably transform society.[190] He claimed in *Utilitarianism* that the salutary effects of education and co-operation would help individuals to adjudicate more fairly between their own and others' interests, even though 'a long succession of generations will perish in the breach before the conquest is completed, and this

[186] Ibid., p. 756.
[187] Ibid., p. 752.
[188] Ibid., pp. 756, 754.
[189] Ibid., I, p. 239.
[190] See Robson, *The improvement of mankind*, pp. 126, 133-134. Smith had earlier addressed the enlargement of sympathy: D. Winch, *Adam's Smith's politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 96, 114, 180, 187.

DRAFT

world becomes all that, if will and knowledge were not wanting, it might easily be made'.[191] In March 1849, as he prepared the second edition of the *Principles*, he argued to Harriet Taylor that while 'the best people now are necessarily so much cut off from sympathy with the multitudes', a time will soon come when 'the more obvious & coarser obstacles & objections to the community system will have ceased or greatly diminished'. As for the transformation required for such a system, 'I think it quite fair to say to common readers that the present race of mankind (speaking of them collectively) are not competent to it. I cannot persuade myself that you do not greatly overrate the ease of making people unselfish'.[192] Mill's blend of sanguinity and caution characterised many of his writings, leading him in 1863 to argue that

> I do not…take a gloomy view of human prospects. Few persons look forward to the future career of humanity with more brilliant hopes than I do. I see, however, many perils ahead, which unless successfully avoided could blast these prospects, & I am more specially in a position to give warning of them since being in strong sympathy with the general tendencies of the which we are all feeling the effects, I am more likely to be listened to than those who may be suspected of disliking them.[193]

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined Mill's writings on universal history, beginning with his reviews of Michelet, Guizot, and Buckle, and ending with Tocqueville's prophetic account of democracy and the timely socialism of the *Principles*. Building on the work of Robson, McCabe, and others, I have argued that we must take seriously the two historical perspectives from which Mill theorised politics: the first looked to the special causes which determined the timeliness or untimeliness of a given doctrine, reform, or phenomenon, while the latter looked to general causes and the region of ultimate aims.[194] The first depended logically on the second. Any attempt to historicise the study of politics – by making laws relative to time and place, for example – must reckon with civilisation's provisional trends. The debate surrounding Mill's universalism and relativism can be helpfully understood in these terms. Alex Zakaras, for example, has argued that Mill employed 'narratives of progress and decline' only when they suited his argumentative purposes, and that his universalism ultimately trumped his historicism.[195] Mill denied the contradiction, and the

[191] *CW*, X, p. 217.
[192] Ibid., III, p. 1030.
[193] Mill to Charles Cummings, 23 February 1863: *CW*, XV, p. 843.
[194] As he put it in an essay on religion, '[while] individual life is short, the life of the human species is not short; its indefinite duration…[suggests] indefinite capability of improvement': 'The utility of religion' (1874, but written between 1850 and 1858): *CW*, X, p. 420.
[195] Zakaras, *Individuality and mass democracy*, p. 143. See also Robson, *The improvement of mankind*, p. 174; Macleod, 'History', p. 272; Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill*, p. 136.

DRAFT

historicists, as we have seen, held equally bipolar interests in 'large-scale historical development' and 'the particular nature of historical phenomena'.[196]

Mill in the *Logic* argued that the discovery of historical trends helped to shape circumstances 'to the ends we desire', and that those trends were categorically distinct from scientific facts; they 'must not assert that something will always, or certainly, happen', but only that 'such and such will be the effect of a given cause, so far as it operates uncounteracted [sic]'. These propositions, 'being assertive only of tendencies, are not the less universally true because the tendencies may be frustrated'.[197] Mill's argument is difficult to credulously follow, but his intentions were clear: general and special circumstances always coexisted, and because they coexisted the past was both irreducibly distinct and uniform in its development. This position is philosophically confused but historically explicable. It developed out of Saint-Simonianism and Comtean positivism; Germano-Coleridgianism; a variety of German and French historicisms; utilitarian logic; and eighteenth-century Scottish conceptions of natural progress. One additional consequence of this intellectual remapping might be to re-establish continuities between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to consolidate Lorraine Daston's view that the nineteenth-century social sciences were 'continuous but by no means identical' with the eighteenth-century moral sciences.[198] This is certainly in keeping with Mill's self-professed eclecticism and his enduring regard for that 'great century' in which this irreducibly philosophical problem became significant once again.[199]

DRAFT

[196] Kent Wright, 'History and historicism', p. 129.
[197] *CW*, VIII, pp. 869-870.
[198] L. Daston, *Classical probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 298. Palmeri has echoed this view: *State of nature, stages of society*, p. 12.
[199] *CW*, I, p. 169.