James Mill, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Problem of Civil Religion

James Mill is remembered as a writer who lived in the shadow of two intellectual giants: much of his claim to fame rests on the extraordinary educational regime he inflicted on his son John Stuart Mill, as well as on his role as Jeremy Bentham's collaborator and propagandist. But Mill's personal and intellectual connections to celebrated writers have proven a double-edged sword. They have afforded him relative posthumous fame, but the comparisons have rarely worked in his favor – arguably for good reason. When historians have examined his intellectual contributions in their own right, they have described him as someone who took his Enlightenment-inherited faith in the powers of human reason to the point of dogmatic illiberality. Indeed, the received wisdom about Mill is that he betrayed the spirit of tolerant moderation of the Scottish Enlightenment writers who shaped his early education, by rewriting their stadial histories into a linear account of human development that held up European rationality as the standard for his teleological view of societal progress.[1] Neither is his intellectual contribution to utilitarianism considered particularly noteworthy: the importance of his role primarily lay in his ability to publicize Bentham's philosophy, attract followers and transform utilitarianism into an organized and influential movement. Perhaps he remains best known for the strictly utilitarian educational regime he inflicted upon his son, but this also serves to highlight that John Stuart Mill eventually reacted against Benthamite utilitarianism by searching for richer, more meaningful ways to theorize human life and society. The younger Mill's account of his upbringing has largely contributed to establishing the reputation of his father as someone who embodied a caricaturized version of Enlightenment thought: the cold, sterile and intolerant rationalism that nineteenth-century writers were pushing back against when they celebrated emotion and individual liberty.[2]

There are, however, hints that this may be an incomplete (if not entirely unfair) assessment of Mill's intellectual contributions. By highlighting his affinities with

[1] This is what Haakonssen has called Mill's "emasculation of the Smith-Millar tradition." Knud Haakonssen, "James Mill and Scottish Moral Philosophy," *Political Studies* 33/4 (1985), 628.
[2] Leslie Stephen's history of utilitarianism also played a large role in establishing Mill's image as Bentham's "lieutenant". Leslie Stephen, *The English Utilitarians*, 3 vols. (London, 1900), 2: 7-25.

evangelical Dissent, or the central importance of the freedom of the press in his political philosophy, researchers have started to trace a richer, more textured intellectual portrait of Mill.[3] This article also argues for a reassessment of James Mill's intellectual trajectory, by recasting our understanding of his anticlerical, and possibly atheistic, brand of secularism.

Throughout his career, Mill displayed consistently strident anticlericalism, specifically expressed through his criticism of the Church of England. His anticlerical stance, while unusually forceful, can reasonably be assumed to have found its roots in three distinct yet mutually reinforcing intellectual traditions: his personal experience as a Noncomformist hailing from Presbyterian Scotland, the secular approach to society and politics developed in the Scottish Enlightenment, and Bentham's utilitarian denunciation of the "sinister interests" that ruled the Church of England. Mill's critique of religious establishment spanned his entire career, and it was at the heart of his arguments for free speech, the liberty of the press, and educational reform.

Commentators have therefore found it puzzling that at the very end of his life James Mill published a curious essay entitled "The Church, and its Reform", which advocated the establishment of a state religion that looked very much like a civil religion.[4] This was a utopian vision of a reformed Christian religion that would work in conjunction with the political sphere; an alliance of Church and State that would serve to improve the morals of the population. As such it would appear to directly contradict his long-held and well-publicized anticlericalism.

This article contends, however, that this text is not an oddity, but rather the logical end point of Mill's entire career. It does so by reassessing the roots and purpose of Mill's discourse on religion. Accounts of Mill's anticlericalism have usually focused on Mill's links with Bentham and the campaign for educational reform, with the *History of British India* (1817) providing additional evidence for his intolerant views on extra-European cultures and religions.[5] Here I propose an alternative reading of Mill based on a wider selection of texts, including early writings produced before his meeting with Bentham as

[3] Kris Grint, "The Freedom of the Press in James Mill's Political Thought," *The Historical Journal* 60/2 (2017), 363-383; Anna Plassart, "James Mill's Treatment of Religion and the History of British India," *Journal of the History of European Ideas* 4/34 (2008), 526–34.

[4] James Mill, "The Church, and Its Reform," *The London Review* 1/2 (1835), 257–95. See Alexander Bain, *James Mill: A Biography* (New York, 1967), 388; Terence Ball, "The Survivor and the Savant: Two Schemes for Civil Religion Compared," in *Reappraising Political Theory: Revisionist Studies in the History of Political Thought* (Oxford, 1995), 131-57, at 142.

[5] For Mill on India see in particular William Thomas, "Editor's Introduction," in William Thomas, ed., *The History of British India* (Chicago, 1975), xi–xli; Duncan Forbes, "James Mill and India," *Cambridge Journal* 5 (1951), 19–33.

well as his private Common Place Books. It was the eighteenth-century Scottish enquiries into human manners and religious progress, I suggest, that directly inspired his lifelong ambition to use religion as a tool to reform manners, and create the educated public opinion he believed was indispensable to the enactment of his democratic and utilitarian program.

In Part 1, I examine the intellectual background in which Mill's early views on religion were formed, focusing on Scottish discussions of the dynamic links that connect manners, religion and progress. In Part 2, I show how Mill's Scottish background informed his discussion of religious and societal progress in his first major publication, an annotated translation of Charles Villers' *Essay on the Spirit and Influence of the Reformation of Luther* published in1805. In Part 3, I discuss the impact of Bentham on Mill's views of religion and religious establishments in the 1810s and 1820s. In Part 4, I show that the essay "The Church, and its Reform" (1835) was entirely consistent with Mill's lifelong concerns and represented the culmination of his argument that religion could and should be used as a tool to reform manners and accelerate societal progress.

I.

No doubt Mill was anticlerical, and he may even have been an atheist (the question will be addressed later on). But, this article argues, his well-known anticlericalism and religious skepticism have tended to obscure his otherwise dispassionate assessment of religion as a social phenomenon. In this regard Mill differed from Bentham, who never gave sustained attention to religion as a historical or psychological phenomenon, preferring instead to focus on the irrationality of religious belief and its destructive effects on human happiness. Rather, Mill understood religion as an intrinsic part of the natural history of mankind. He viewed both religious beliefs and religious institutions as reflecting the state of societal progress. Conversely, he also envisioned religion as a tool that could inflect the development of society, and could potentially have as great an influence upon society as governmental and legislative systems. These were views directly inherited from his education in the Scottish Enlightenment of 1790s Edinburgh.

It was Montesquieu's enquiry into the "spirit" of modern nations that had provided the impetus for the Scottish Enlightenment writers' interest in analyzing religion as a social phenomenon with psychological causes, and social and political consequences. *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) inscribed a natural history of religion within a secularized analysis of

societal progress, and offered an evolutionary and naturalistic account of the emergence of religious sentiments. In addition, it openly claimed its ambition to discuss religion from a solely utilitarian perspective.[6] Religion, Montesquieu concluded, was a "useful" thing, because it civilized and softened human manners – and this was particularly true of Christianity.[7] In a comparative study developed over several years, from the *Persian Letters* (1721) to the *Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu demonstrated that Christianity had civilizing effects that Islam, as the religion of despotism, lacked. Therefore, Montesquieu concluded that Christianity could usefully serve as a civil religion that would attach citizens to the laws and their country.[8]

In contrast to their English contemporaries, who retained a broadly Christian interpretation of history, Scottish writers followed Montesquieu in inscribing natural histories of religion within a secularized analysis of societal progress.[9] Ten years after *Spirit of the Laws*, Hume offered a naturalistic account of the emergence of religious sentiments in the essay "The Natural History of Religion" (1757).[10] In spite of Montesquieu's earlier attempts to sketch the premises of a natural history of religion, it was Hume who effected a clear break with previous conceptions of "natural religion" as universal agreement over a handful of basic natural and necessary beliefs, in order to present religious sentiments as originating in the passions, and to argue for the necessity to ground the history of religion in the observation of human nature.[11] In his ambition to formulate a natural history of religion, Hume was moving away from an approach framed in terms of truth and rationality which saw "natural religion" as the common kernel of truth shared by all existing religions, towards a genealogical approach based upon the psychological origins of supernatural belief, which was less interested in the truth than in the social function of religious faith.[12]

In "The Natural History of Religion", Hume laid out the mechanisms that gave rise to religious sentiments, and found the origin of religion in universal human nature. In his account, religion first arose in all rude societies as "polytheism, the primitive religion of

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[6] Charles Louis Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), ed. Anne Cohler, Basia Miller and Harold Stone (Cambridge, 1989), 459. Bk 24, Ch. 1.

[7] Ibid, 460. Bk 24, Ch. 2.

[8] Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2010), 193.

[9] For English accounts of religious progress, see David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, 1990), 370.

[10] David Hume, "The Natural History of Religion," in *Four Dissertations* (London, 1757), 1–117.

[11] For a detailed account of Montesquieu's attempts to formulate a natural history of religion, see Céline Spector, "Naturalisation des croyances, religion naturelle et histoire naturelle de la religion: le statut du fait religieux dans l'Esprit des Lois," in *Montesquieu, l'Etat et La Religion*, ed. J. Ehrard (Sofia, 2007), 40-109, at 48–70.

[12] Here I paraphrase Ibid, 47-48.

uninstructed mankind."[13] Unable to comprehend the rules that govern the natural world, and unable to comprehend the natural world as one vast interconnected system, primitive men explained unusual occurrences by the intervention of "several limited and imperfect deities."[14] Indeed, the idea of an omnipotent, supreme power having created the entire world and all its rule would simply be out of reach for rude humans with no conception of the natural world as "one regular plan or connected system."[15]

Reticent as always to present historical change as a story of linear progress, Hume pointedly refused to portray the transition from poly- to monotheism as the inevitable outcome of the progress of society. In some societies, one god did eventually become elevated above all others, but "the vulgar … are never led into that opinion by any process of argument."[16] Rather, they attempt to flatter their chosen deity by attributing ever-larger powers to it, but this strategy of divine one-upmanship is "merely verbal".[17] The masses are simply led from one type of idolatry and superstition to another, and could just as easily reverse back to polytheism.[18] Hume does acknowledge, however, that in refined societies, the progress of knowledge allows a minority of educated men to establish their theism on a "firmer and more durable foundation," namely the "regularity and uniformity" of the "general laws, by which nature is governed," which offer "the strongest proof of design and of a supreme intelligence."[19] Thus the progress of enlightenment corresponds to the progress of "true religion", at least among the educated classes.[20]

Hume was equally interested in the social and political consequences of religious sentiment. The essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" (1742) was dedicated to detailing the "pernicious effects" of two opposite types of religious sentiments, and offered "reflections concerning their different influences on government and society."[21] The

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[13] Hume, "The Natural History of Religion," 10.

[14] Ibid, 11.

[15] Ibid, 10.

[16] Ibid, 45.

[17] Ibid, 51.

[18] "[M]en have a natural tendency to rise from idolatry to theism, and to sink again from theism into idolatry." Ibid, 54.

[19] Ibid, 44.

[20] Hume's frequent references to a "true religion" have often been viewed as ironic nods towards an empty notion. But this is likely too crude an interpretation. See especially J.C.A. Gaskin and Keith Yandell's views that Hume's religion was an "attenuated deism" or "diaphanous theism", and Andre C. Willis's argument that Hume's "true religion" was characterized by "genuine theism" and "moderate hope". Andre C. Willis, *Towards a Humean True Religion: Genuine Theism, Moderate Hope, and Practical Morality* (University Park, P.A., 2015); J.C.A. Gaskin, "Hume's Attenuated Deism," *Archiv Für Geschichte Der Philosophie* 65/2 (1983), 160–73; Keith E. Yandell, *Hume's "inexplicable Mystery": His Views on Religion* (Philadelphia, 1990).

[21] David Hume, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1987), 73-79, at 73, 75.

essay can be read as an attack on both Catholic superstition and Protestant enthusiasm, whose opposite natures Hume saw as the driving force behind the Reformation.[22] In his account of the English Reformation Hume was at pains to undermine the triumphalist Whig narrative presented in Burnet's *History of the Reformation of the Church of England* (1679-1714). Far from describing the Reformation as the inevitable outcome of historical progress, he highlighted the chance combination of widespread Church corruption with individual greed and lust. He equally refused to present an unquestioning celebration of the benefits of Protestantism, as he highlighted the destructive effects of the wars of religion and described the main immediate positives of the Reformation in the destruction of many of the corrupt aspects of Catholicism.[23]

Hume's lack of enthusiasm in celebrating the benefits of Protestantism did not go unnoticed by his readers. This was why, in an unpublished preface to the second volume of his *History of England* (1756), he defended himself against charges of impiety by arguing that it was not the historian's purpose to illustrate "the beneficent influence of Religion". The "proper Office" of religion, in its true form, was certainly to "reform Men's Lives, to purify their Hearts, to inforce all moral Duties, and to secure Obedience to the laws & civil magistrate."[24] But this role was not naturally or easily highlighted by historical narratives focused on faction, war and revolution. It was also mere potential, which could remain unrealized – not least because of the natural tendency of ecclesiastical establishments to undermine true religion and its potential benefits to society, to "pervert the true, by infusing into it a strong mixture of superstition, folly, and delusion." The best way to check this tendency, Hume suggested, would be for the state to fund and therefore control ecclesiastical institutions, in order to remove the financial necessity to attract followers by preying on the "disorderly affections of the human frame." Religious institutions could then finally fulfill their proper office and "prove in the end advantageous to the political interests of society."[25]

Smith shared Hume's skepticism regarding the supposed benefits of previous and current religions, including Christianity - this was why he held that the modern custom of

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[22] Thomas W. Merrill, *Hume and the Politics of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2015), 145.

[23] He acknowledged that Protestantism had had beneficial consequences on European politics, even if these effects were "perhaps neither foreseen nor intended." For example he highlighted the intolerance of seventeenth-century Puritans, showing that they had been far from willfully paving the ground for a free Whig constitution. David Hume, *The History of England*, 6 vols. (Indianapolis, 1983), 3:207.

[24] Cited in Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Oxford, 1980), 306. A similar argument is presented by Cleanthes in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779). David Hume, "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion," in *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1828), 2:419-548, at 538.

[25] Hume, *The History of England*, 3:136.

allowing conquered people to keep their religion was "a practice much better than the ancient."[26] Like Hume, he distanced himself from the Hutchesonian understanding of "true religion" as defined by "the love of God, and of mankind."[27] Instead he described a cycle of religious progress and decline, driven by competition between different sects.[28] Religious improvement, Smith believed, could be attained if religions were disassociated from state authority, and were allowed to freely multiply and compete. Then a "pure and rational" religion, free from corruption, intolerance and superstition, would naturally emerge out of the competition.[29] Like Hume again, who suspected that such a religion would only appeal to philosophers and not to the masses, Smith held that "popular superstition and enthusiasm" represented a likely insurmountable obstacle to the practical realization of this plan. He did draw some hope, however, from the religious variety and toleration he identified in Pennsylvania, which he believed had fostered "philosophical good temper and moderation."[30]

In any case, Smith held that religious instruction was "no doubt, beneficial to the whole society," and therefore part of "those publick institutions and those publick works, which [are] in the highest degree advantageous to a great society," and should be maintained by "the general contribution of the whole society."[31] In addition, there were "very easy and effectual remedies" by which the state might "correct whatever was unsocial or disagreeably rigorous in the morals of all the little sects into which the country was divided," thereby helping the emergence of "pure and rational religion." First among these was education. It was in the public interest to "encourage, and ... even impose upon almost the whole body of the people" a basic level of education (understood as reading, writing and counting).[32] As for the study of science and philosophy, "the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition," it should be made "almost universal" among the middling ranks of the higher ranks of society,

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[26] Adam Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (Indianapolis, 1982), 550.

[27] Smith does not use the term "true religion", but he dismisses "false notions of religion" as the corruption of "natural principles of religion" or of "natural sentiments". Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis, 1982), 192, 197. D.D. Raphael points out that for Smith, "a theology is unacceptable if it fails to accord with 'all our moral sentiments'." D. D. Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator: Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy* (Oxford, 2007), 104.

[28] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis, 1981), 2:805–6.

[29] "[The propagation of a large number of small sects] might in time probably reduce the doctrine of the greater part of them to that pure and rational religion, free from every mixture of absurdity, imposture, or fanaticism, such as wise men have in all ages of the world wished to see established." Ibid, 2:793.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid, 2:815; Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 1:12, 2:723. In his discussion Smith cites Hume's argument for a state-funded clergy. Ibid, 2:791.

[32] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 2:785.

which in turn would help shield the inferior ranks from harmful ideas.[33] In the end, Smith's version of Humean "true religion" was rather unlikely to rise spontaneously from the progress of society, but it could be encouraged by the state through the legal imposition of both education and complete religious toleration.

Montesquieu, Hume and Smith therefore all appraised religious beliefs and religious establishments in terms of their social utility, or contribution to the public good. In the case of Hume and Smith, this appraisal was supplemented by a reflection on the mechanisms of religious progress, in which intellectual enlightenment was both the path towards, and the criterion that characterized, "true religion". In the following decades, this naturalistic accounts of the origins and development of religion was adopted by the Scottish historians of civil society. While being distinctly more straightforward narratives of religious "progress", their narratives continued to uphold the existence of a "true religion", knowledge of which was gradually built through the development of human reason and knowledge rather than revelation. This formed the basis of their non-providentialist accounts of human and religious history.[34]

The Scottish historians of civil society also all agreed in giving religion (both Christian and pagan) an active role in the progress of society. Robertson, Kames and Ferguson saw religion as possessing a naturally moderating influence on despotic societies. Robertson and Kames, for example, both analyzed the difference between the Inca and Aztec societies in religious terms. The Inca religion was a "mild superstition" that softened the harshness of a despotic political system and "considered in a political light, was excellent" in that it "contributed greatly to improve their morals and manners."[35]

The Christian religion, in these accounts, was a particularly effective tool for molding and softening the morals of rude nations, thus helping them along on the path towards politeness and civilization: the "mild spirit of Christianity," Ferguson wrote, "enjoined meekness and compassion to barbarous ages".[36] This was a perspective clearly in line with Montesquieu's assessment of religion – especially Christianity – as softening

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[33] Ibid, 2:796, 793.

[34] Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 370. See Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Cambridge, 1996), 89–90. John Millar, *An Historical View of the English Government, from the Settlement of the Saxons in Britain to the Revolution in 1688* (Indianapolis, 2006), 403. Henry Home (Lord Kames), *Sketches of the History of Man*, ed. James A. Harris, 3 vols. (Indianapolis, 2007), 3:813–14.

[35] Robertson's *History of America* (1777), cited in Nicholas Phillipson, "Providence and Progress: An Introduction to the Historical Thought of William Robertson," in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, ed. Stewart J. Brown (Cambridge, 1997), 55-73, at 68. On Kames see Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, trans. Jeremy Carden (New York, 2013), 96–97.

[36] Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 192. See also Kames's account of the Indians of Hispaniola, who "embraced the Christian religion, and assumed by degrees the manners and customs of their masters." Home (Lord Kames), *Sketches of the History of Man*, 3:73.

manners, and as a potential support for republican virtue and political liberty.[37] More specific to the Scottish Enlightenment, however, was the discussion of the particular role of Protestantism in the progress of civilization.

The social and political impact of the Reformation, and especially of the Scottish Reformation, was a fraught subject in eighteenth-century Scottish historiography. Robertson's *History of Scotland* (1759) was the standard Moderate counter-narrative to the national and exceptionalist accounts of the Scottish Reformation that had thrived since George Buchanan in the sixteenth century. The *History of Scotland* treated the Scottish Reformation as the product of a broad political and intellectual context, including the revival of classical learning, the political ambitions of Scottish nobility, and the dynamics of the European system of rival monarchies. In doing so it severed the direct link between Calvinist theology and early modern Scottish liberty.[38] Following Robertson, Scottish Moderate historians reinvented a Scottish historiography that denied the ancient origin of Scottish constitutional liberties, and instead placed the rise of Scotland's civil liberties within a larger Whig narrative of British liberty.

Yet this was not incompatible with the celebration of the happy tendencies of Protestantism on the general progress of European society. Gilbert Burnet's *History of the Reformation* (1681-1714), the standard work on the topic that provided much of the material used by Hume, Robertson and Millar, had justified the 1688 settlement by portraying Catholicism as the religion of tyranny, and Protestantism as the religion of English liberty. From the later Scottish historians' perspective, the work's providentialist perspective could easily be adapted into a celebration of Protestantism as a tool in the progress of British-wide civilization, which was also fully compatible with their position as Presbyterian Whigs.[39] Indeed, this was the approach adopted by Robertson in his *History of Charles V* (1769), which celebrated the Reformation's "bold and innovating spirit"[40] as a "revolution in the sentiments of mankind," which contributed to "increased purity of manners, to diffuse science, and to inspire humanity."[41] Millar and Kames

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[37] Spector, "Naturalisation des croyances," 42. See Ferguson's praise of Montesquieu in Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 66.

[38] Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689-c.1830* (Cambridge, 1993), 192–94.

[39] For examples of Burnet's providentialism, see for instance Gilbert Burnet, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England: The Second Part, of the Progress Made in It till the Settlement of It in the Beginning of Q. Elizabeths Reign* (London, 1681), 421.

[40] William Robertson, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V. With a View of the Progress of Society in Europe, from the Subversion of the Roman Empire, to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century.*, 3 vols. (London, 1769), 2:258.

[41] Ibid, 2:348, 2:451, 2:78.

echoed similar sentiments about "the spirit of inquiry introduced at the reformation, and the diffusion of knowledge which followed it,"[42] and the Reformation's general effect "in sweetening manners, and promoting the interests of society."[43]

The destruction of the myths of Presbyterian historiography initiated by Robertson therefore took the form of a historicization and contextualization of religious change and its consequences. This was how Robertson rejoined Hume's self-consciously secular perspective on narratives of religious history.[44] Yet Robertson's account of religion was also a qualified exception to the previously-described efforts to secularize historical and religious progress. As a prominent member of Scotland's Moderate Enlightenment, Robertson was only marginally less committed than Hume and Smith to rescuing the study of history, society and politics from the sacred realm. But he also took their historical accounts in a less relativistic and less generically Christian direction, towards praise of Protestantism as a providentialist vehicle for social progress.

Like Hume, Robertson saw the origin of religious belief not in Revelation, but rather in human psychology – namely, the human tendency to ascribe supernatural origins to mysterious natural phenomena. But he also sought to reconcile natural philosophy with the language of providentialism, by arguing that the material and moral progress of humankind paved the way for the rise of the true Christian religion, through a gradual process of revelation.[45] In a sermon preached in 1755 before the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, he suggested that Revelation had been delayed until humankind had reached a sufficient material and intellectual state of development. Even then, he argued, "the light of revelation was not poured upon mankind all at once, and with its full splendor," but adjusted to mankind's ability to receive it. It was then to unfold further "in proportion as the situation of the world made it necessary."[46] This argument informed Robertson's account of the progress of Reformation in his *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (1769): early Christianity had remained a rough draft, still marred by idolatry, superstition and the authority of the Church, but by the sixteenth century the progress of society and subsequent "bold spirit of enquiry," as well as the increasing corruption of the Church, had made it possible for the Word to be further

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[42] Millar, *Historical View*, 537, 642.

[43] Home (Lord Kames), *Sketches of the History of Man*, 3:185.

[44] Hume, *The History of England*, 3:134. See also Millar, *Historical View*, 470; Robertson, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, 2:120.

[45] Joshua Ehrlich, "William Robertson and Scientific Theism," *Modern Intellectual History*, 10/3 (2013), 519-542.

[46] William Robertson, *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance, and Its Connexion with the Success of His Religion, Considered* (Edinburgh, 1755), 7–8.

revealed. The Reformation was "the natural effect of many powerful causes, prepared by peculiar providence, and happily conspiring to that end."[47]

As previously explained, the enlightened Scottish historians celebrated Protestantism's role in bringing about societal progress, but this was emphatically not a celebration of Protestantism as identified with an English, Scottish or British national identity. They offered, instead, a universalist assessment of the benefits associated with a religion that encouraged free enquiry.[48] But in the case of Robertson, his account of Revelation also implied European exceptionalism and therefore a unique role for European nations in spreading the universal benefits of Christianity: the natural mechanisms of progress would improve both religion and society to a certain degree, but only Christian nations could communicate the Word to non-European peoples.[49]

Nevertheless, Robertson did share with Hume, Smith, Millar and others a self-consciously secular approach to studying religion not as a vector or truth, but as a social and political phenomenon. This was not unique to the Scottish Enlightenment; in particular it is clear that Montesquieu provided the impetus for such a study. The distinctiveness of the Scottish approach came from its focus on religious change and its impact on societal progress (by comparison with Montesquieu's static assessment of Protestantism as suited to republics and to the spirit of freedom of Northern nations), as well as in its specific interest in the social and political role of the Reformation (as distinct from Christianity) in the progress of civilization.

The Scots' naturalistic, evolutionary view of religion as both a product and tool of the progress of society did suggest, however, that Protestantism in its current form was unlikely to be the end of religious history. What would, therefore, modern religion look like in the future? Montesquieu's answer had been consistent with his general message: his hope was not for a society free from religion, nor even for the rise of a purely rational kind of Christianity. Rather, a modern and civilized religion would be freed from the prejudices and violent tendencies to intolerance that had until now characterized all

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[47] Robertson, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, 2:117, 120. For an account of Robertson's providentialist narrative of religion see Phillipson, "Providence and Progress," 61–73. For a more secular interpretation of Robertson's historical thought see Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 374–77.

[48] This contrasts with Linda Colley's analysis of Protestantism as a source of British national identity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On the question see Colin Kidd, "North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotisms," *The Historical Journal* 39:2 (1996), 361–82.

[49] Robertson's account of progress relied on the role of superior civilizations to civilize the world. His sermon *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance* and his *History of America* presented the Roman and Spanish Empires as the instruments of Providence in civilizing Europe and South American, and his planned history of British America cast Britain as another divine agent of progress. See Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, 96–100.

revealed religions, and would serve to soften the *moeurs* of its practitioners. As argued above, Hume and Smith's best-case scenarios for the future development of religion were not remarkably different: their negative understanding of "true religion" as religion freed from superstition and prejudice certainly echoed one aspect of Montesquieu's views. Yet it was Robertson who most clearly pushed forward Montesquieu's vision of a tolerant, peaceful and softening religion, albeit from a distinctly providentialist perspective that was not Montesquieu's: his account of a Revelation slowly unfolding with the progress of society suggested that the state of religion in post-reformation Europe remained far from perfect, and that the ongoing progress of civilization may yet be preparing the world for further revelation.[50] In the meantime, Europe would be the instrument of Providence in expanding Christianity (and therefore civilization) throughout the world.

II.

James Mill was very much a product of his Scottish education, if only in the sense that the question of his religious faith, or lack thereof, is largely irrelevant to his views on history, society and politics. The son of a shoemaker and of an ambitious mother, Mill was a promising student who was sent by benefactors to the University of Edinburgh, where he trained to become a minister. He enrolled in 1790, in the last years of William Robertson's Principalship, and attended the University until 1798. Evidence from this time in his life is scant, but we do know that he attended Dugald Stewart's classes and read key Scottish Enlightenment texts, including by Reid, Hume, Smith, Kames and Ferguson.[51] Later he recollected his attendance of Stewart's lectures as a "high treat", and his early articles amply testify to his close familiarity with the writings of the Scottish historians.[52]

Mill's subsequent move to London and attempts to embark on a journalistic career seems to have been triggered by his failure to secure a position as a minister.[53] His original choice of career tells us little, however, about his personal beliefs – it could reasonably be viewed as Mill seizing the opportunity to devote his life to intellectual pursuits. Clearly he

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[50] Phillipson, "Providence and Progress," 71.

[51] Bain, *James Mill*, 51.

[52] Haakonssen, "James Mill and Scottish Moral Philosophy," 629–30; Arthur Laurence Lazenby, "James Mill: The Formation of a Scottish Émigré Writer." (Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 1972), 9.

[53] Bain, *James Mill*, 33.

was no active believer in his later life, but it is not clear whether he held, as suggested by his son, that "concerning the origin of things nothing whatever can be known," or whether his first biographer Alexander Bain was closer to the truth when he described his position as "negation, pure and simple."[54] His private notes show that he entertained the intellectual possibility of a divine creator, but also display a pointed disdain for any belief not based upon evidence.[55] They also convey his conviction that lack of active atheism was commonly confused for religious faith: he ascribed to Montesquieu the notion that "men may profess a religion, and with a sort of good faith without believing it."[56]

Mill displayed, in fact, a striking lack of interest for the Scottish Enlightenment's pervasive preoccupation with natural theology. Indeed, the secular enquiries into the links between religion and society developed in eighteenth-century Scotland were far from incompatible with Moderate Calvinism. Thomas Ahnert has shown that Scotland's enlightened clerical writers were generally "more skeptical about a natural religion of reason" than has often been argued, and in his Edinburgh lectures Stewart claimed that post-Baconian natural science would reveal increasing evidence of design in nature, thus providing a "bulwark against atheism."[57] But the same was not true of Mill, whose rationalist worldview left little room for natural theology or even deism. It is not clear when his skeptical approach developed, or what role (if any) Bentham played in shaping it.[58] What is clear, however, is that from the start he consistently approached the question of religion from the same "sociological" angle as Montesquieu, Hume, Smith, Millar and Robertson. Taken together, their accounts offered a natural history of religion whose most innovative quality was its treatment of religion as a social and psychological phenomenon that was both an agent, and a product of the progress of society: religious institutions and beliefs were shaped by human psychology as embedded in a specific society, and in turned helped shaped human manners and human history. In a positive feedback loop, Protestantism was both the product of pre-Enlightenment concerns for

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[54] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (London, 1989), v. Bain, *James Mill*, 90.

[55] "This no better proof that there is a God, than the universal pursuit of pleasure is, that pleasure is the supreme good;" "To believe there is any merit in believing is a thing wholly immoral. If there is a merit in any thing, connected with belief, it is the merit of attending to evidence." "Religion", in James Mill, *Common Place Books* (<http://intellectualhistory.net/mill>, 2010), vol. 3, Ch. 8.

[56] Bentham is also cited as entertaining the opinion that most men "rather do not disbelieve,   than … believe." Ibid.

[57] Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690-1805* (New Haven, 2015), 13. Dugald Stewart, "Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, Vol. II," in *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, ed. Sir William Hamilton, 11 vols. (London, 1994), 3: 338.

[58] Bain cites General Miranda as "the instrument of his final transformation," but there is no evidence to back up his claim. Bain, *James Mill*, 89.

knowledge and individual liberty, and the ferment that had precipitated the progress of ideas and politics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A logical consequence of this account was that religion would continue to evolve, and possibly improve along with society. While Hume considered this a remote possibility, Robertson's providentialist perspective assured him that the Word would be further revealed through the progress of society, and ensure the establishment of a more tolerant and less dogmatic form of Protestantism.

These accounts were easily adaptable to the perfectibilist theory of progress taught by Dugald Stewart in 1790s Edinburgh. Stewart's own account of the social utility of the Protestant reformation was very similar to that of Millar and Robertson, and drawn from the same Scottish sources.[59] His narrative of religious change, however, was reframed within a Reidian, perfectibilist theory of progress. It combined earlier Scottish narratives of societal and religious progress with a strong sense of divine providence derived from Reid's Christian moral philosophy. From Stewart's optimistic and teleological standpoint, society, religion and human happiness would improve as knowledge was gradually revealed by scientists and philosophers, working as "*fellow-workers with God* in forwarding the gracious purpose of his government."[60]

This was the approach initially adopted by a young James Mill in the early 1800s, as he started out a new life in London following the completion of his studies at the University of Edinburgh. From Reid and Stewart, Mill had taken on the ideas that all philosophical knowledge must be based on principles of moral philosophy common to all men, and that there existed a "tendency in the condition of the human species toward improvement." [61] But in the context of the post-revolutionary upheavals that had engulfed Europe in war, the promise of a long-term "tendency" was no longer good enough. Smith's recommendation of scientific education for the middling ranks as the antidote to enthusiasm and superstition also now appeared clearly insufficient. For many reformists in Britain as in France, the failure of France's democratic experiment in the

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[59] See for instance Stewart's identification of Burnet's *History* as the source of the idea that the Reformation had wielded far-reaching intellectual, social and political consequences, and his characterization of the Reformation as both an "effect" and a "cause" of the revival of letters. Dugald Stewart, "Dissertation Exhibiting the Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical, and Political Philosophy, Since the Revival of Letters in Europe," in *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, ed. Sir William Hamilton, 11 vols. (London, 1994), 1:39n, 1:28.

[60] Ibid, 1:492.

[61] James Mill, in *An Essay on the Spirit and Influence of the Reformation of Luther*, trans. James Mill (London, 1805), 25n.

early 1790s highlighted the need to reform popular manners and educate the masses as a prerequisite to democratic reform.[62]

It was at this juncture that Mill came across a strand of thought imported from Germany, which connected Protestantism to freedom and progress. In 1804, he decided to translate and annotate Charles de Villers' prize-winning essay "An Essay on the Spirit and Influence of the Reformation of Luther," written as an entry in a competition sponsored by the *Institut de France*. Until then best known for his work in translating Kant's philosophy, Villers had seized the opportunity to further disseminate German concerns in France, and his prize-winning essay can be read as an early example of the narrative of Protestant supremacy that later became a well-known trope in nineteenth-century political thought. The links between Protestantism and freedom, famously drawn by Hegel in 1807, were in fact inscribed in a German Protestant discussion about the links between Reformation and Enlightenment that had been underway since the 1770s. In the wake of Kantian philosophy, both Karl Leonhard Reinhold and Johann Gottlieb Fichte presented their philosophical projects as continuations of Protestantim. [63] Villers particularly drew on Reinhold's Kant-inspired account of religion history, which saw the union of reason and morality instituted by Christ as having been forgotten in medieval Europe, then gradually restored by the Reformation, until Kantian philosophy finally reunified reason with revelation. Reinhold had presented Kantian philosophy within a protestant narrative, but Villers pushed this further by linking Protestantism and the birth of the Enlightenment in a "clear and compelling narrative synthesis," and urged France to adopt Kantian philosophy as a way out of the intellectual rut of empiricism.[64]

It is unclear why Mill, then a young émigré in search of journalistic success, chose Villers' text as his first foray into book publication. He appears to have been unaware of the German discourses that emphasized the role of the religion in the Enlightenment, and did not identify Villers' argument as the German import that it was. Indeed in his introduction to the translation he misread the broader political context for the Institute's question and Villers' response to it. Instead of presenting the Institute's competition in the context of opposition to Napoleon's Concordat of 1801 and to the reinstatement of the Catholic Church's status in France, Mill believed it illustrated the "progress of reason

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[62] J. G. A. Pocock, "Virtues, Rights, and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought," *Political Theory* 9/3 (1981), 353–68. See for instance the many educational schemes formulated in France under the Directory. Andrew Jainchill, *Reimagining Politics after the Terror: The Republican Origins of French Liberalism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2008), 75–88.

[63] Here I rely on Michael Printy, "Protestantism and Progress in the Year XII: Charles Villers's 'Essay on the Spirit and Influence of the Luther's Reformation (1804)'," *Modern Intellectual History* 9/2 (2012), 312.

[64] Ibid, 314.

and liberality" in a traditionally Catholic country finally opening its eyes to the depth of Church corruption.[65] Fresh off his studies in Presbyterian enlightened Scotland, Mill interpreted Villers' text as complementing the Scottish historical narratives he was familiar with (Hume, Smith, Robertson and Millar are abundantly cited in his notes), and as a modern French retelling of Scottish natural histories of religion that considered Protestantism as both a consequence and a cause of modern society's progress towards civilization and enlightenment.[66] Most importantly, he read Villers as offering a possible answer to the problem of the reform of popular manners: religion, and especially Protestantism, could provide a powerful tool for such social engineering.

In his introduction to Villers' essay, Mill's own justification for his choice of topic was phrased in both philosophical and practical terms. He seized immediately on the question of the influence of religion on societal progress – "an object of the utmost curiosity and importance." Mankind had a natural propensity to religious sentiment, he argued, which must be channeled toward a "good" or "pure" religion. Villers' work had attracted his interest because it offered an "impartial representation of the happy tendency and effects of the Reformation … upon the political condition of man, and upon his intellectual improvement in Europe."[67] But there were also immediate lessons to be drawn, most notably regarding the Catholics of Ireland, who should not only be emancipated, but also "converted from a system, in its best shape, so much more unfavourable to their progress in reason and virtue, than that embraced by the rest of their fellow subjects."[68] This was the first appearance of a recurring theme in Mill's later writings: improving religion could be an efficient way to reform morals, and therefore to accelerate the progress of society.

Mill's identification of religion as a tool for social engineering was at least partly inspired by Moderate providentialist and missionary views of religious progress. Here one of his direct references was Robertson's former colleague Thomas Hardy, a Moderate minister and Professor of Ecclesiastical History whose sermon "Progress of the Christian Religion" he quoted at length in one of his notes to Villers' text.[69] Four decades after Robertson, Hardy had also preached before the Society in Scotland for Propagating

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[65] Mill, in *An Essay on the Spirit and Influence of the Reformation of Luther*, i.

[66] Mill, however, strongly disapproved of Hume's supposed hatred of "religion and liberty" – although there may have been a degree of posturing on his part concerning the former. Ibid, 108n.

[67] Ibid, i–ii, 5n.

[68] Ibid, v.

[69] Thomas Hardy, *The Progress of the Christian Religion: A Sermon, Preached before the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, at Their Anniversary Meeting in the High Church of Edinburgh, Thursday, May 30, 1793* (Edinburgh, 1794).

Christian Knowledge, and provided a roadmap for the Christianisation of non-European societies. Human beings, Hardy argued against Hume, are naturally attracted to simple truth of religion, and repulsed by complicated rituals and superstition: the early "religion of nature" had been simple and universal, before it became corrupted by superstition.[70] Revelation had restored some of this early simplicity while providing new proof of divine grace. The best way to help Christianity spread outside of Europe was to further improve its doctrines and purify them of all superstition, until it became a universally-accessible "true religion".[71] Like Robertson, Hardy analyzed the Reformation as a mere step in a broader divine plan of religion improvement, but his imagined "true religion" was not Robertson's tolerant and diverse faith: it was a universal doctrine, perhaps closer to Hume and Smith's calls for a religion divested of superstition and enthusiasm.[72] Of course Mill did not share Hardy's aims; for him the universal spread of Christianity was not an end in itself, but rather the means by which social and political improvements could be achieved. Mill divested Hardy's argument of its providentialist and evangelical character, but he did heartily approve of its account of a gradual evolution towards a true, universal religion purified of rituals and superstitions, which would help further along the progress of society.

Like Scotland's enlightened historians, Mill portrayed the Reformation not as the original impetus of the progress of Enlightenment, but rather as one factor in its acceleration, produced by the same general causes and in turn reinforcing them.[73] It did so by transforming the manners of contemporaries, as illustrated by the direct role played by the "spirit" of French Protestantism in the Revolution of 1789.[74] Hardy and Mill's evolutionary assessment of religion and of its role in societal progress was broadly in line with the previously discussed Scottish discourses, and shared with Robertson the ambition to forcibly expand the reach of the more civilized forms of religion. For Hardy, as it had for Robertson, this served a primarily religious purpose - but Mill was already suggesting to instrumentalize religion with an aim to social improvement. This was a theme he would develop in detail in the coming years.

In his 1805 notes to Villers' text Mill discussed the natural progress of religion in the framework of Stewart's perfectibilist view of progress, based on the "natural and fixed"

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[70] Ibid, 5.

[71] Ibid, 46.

[72] Christianity is "calculated for universal reception as the religion of the human race." Ibid, 14.

[73] "The general tendency of things at the time of the Reformation was towards liberty, both in thought and action, but the Reformation was a circumstance which in a most extraordinary manner accelerated that progress." Mill, in *An Essay on the Spirit and Influence of the Reformation of Luther*, 294n.

[74] Ibid, 255n.

human impulse towards improvement and perfection.[75] This allowed him to turn both Robertson's providentialist narrative of religious progress, and Hume and Smith's rational understanding of "true religion", into a secular narrative of progress towards a less superstitious, more rational form of religion. Therefore he offered a triumphalist teleological narrative of religious progress, as a long-term process leading to religion's most advanced form to date, Protestantism. In its most perfect form, Mill was later to argue, religion would eventually be rid of all superstition and would become entirely rational.

III.

That a young Mill interpreted Villers' *Essay* in the light of Scottish narratives of religious progress is significant because it provides an alternative interpretative framework for some of his later historical and political writings. These are usually discussed in relation to Jeremy Bentham and his undoubtedly transformative influence on Mill's life and writings – from the moment the two men met in 1807, Mill became Bentham's friend, associate and propagandist in a collaboration that continued, with various degrees of intensity, until Bentham's death in 1832.

From the 1810s onward, Mill clearly borrowed Benthamite concepts and language in his critique of established religion. In some cases, such as Mill's repeated attacks on all authorities that would have men suppress the use of their reason, Bentham helped him sharpen pre-existing arguments. In others, such as the corruptive effects of religious rewards and punishments on religious beliefs and their ineffectiveness to correct behaviour, Bentham's influence was more direct. Mill's Common Place Books strongly suggest that Bentham's works (especially his *Théorie des peines et des recompenses*, and his *Analysis of Natural Religion* under the pen name Philip Beauchamp) informed much of Mill's public critique of religious authority.[76] It is clear, overall, that Bentham provided

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[75] Mill explicitly ascribed his perfectibilism to Dugald Stewart, quoting lengthy passages from the *Elements*. Ibid, 25n.
[76] Grint, "The Freedom of the Press in James Mill's Political Thought," 197–200.

Mill with a theoretical and linguistic framework that shaped his anticlerical criticism of the Church of England, and indeed of all religious establishments.

Yet the two men held very different views of religion and of its role in society. Bentham's attitude to religion was to treat it as an irrational and invalid criterion of behavior, which needed to be replaced by rationalist utilitarian criteria. Opinions differ as to whether Bentham was an agnostic or an atheist, but either way it is clear that he considered religion to be "a great instrument of terror, oppression and human misery," and a major cause of the unhappiness he sought to minimize.[77] His criticism was not limited to ecclesiastical establishment, or even to Christianity: it was religious belief itself that was harmful, because it focused human attention and energy on a future life, thereby thwarting the rational pursuit of temporal self-interest and "[detracting] from the stockpile of happiness in this world."[78] While some of Bentham's earlier writings in the 1790s occasionally suggested that religious messages and the Church could be instrumentalized to serve secular end, by the 1810s his *Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion* was going against the received wisdom of the times by arguing against the social and moral value of religion, through a critique of the usefulness of religious sanction.[79] The major work that occupied most of his last years, the *Constitutional Code*, made it absolutely clear that not only ecclesiastical establishments, but also religion itself had no place in his utopian utilitarian society.[80] The distinctiveness of Bentham's position among his contemporaries was that he was not merely critiquing Christian beliefs or even religious beliefs, but also any sort of religious or metaphysical sentiment. It was not enough, in his view, to redirect these sentiments towards different objects (as the French revolutionaries had attempted with the Cult of Reason, and as Comte would later

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[77] Philip Schofield, *Jeremy Bentham: Prophet of Secularism* (London, 2012), 56. Schofield sees Bentham as being more agnostic than atheistic. For an argument that Bentham's position was "unmitigated atheism", see James E. Crimmins, *Secular Utilitarianism: Social Science and the Critique of Religion in the Thought of Jeremy Bentham* (Oxford, 1990), 17.

[78] Crimmins, *Secular Utilitarianism*, 283. Some of Bentham's earlier writings in the 1790s occasionally suggested that religious messages and the Church could be instrumentalized to serve secular end, but by the 1810s he was arguing the opposite. James E. Crimmins, "Bentham on Religion: Atheism and the Secular Society," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47/1 (1986), 99, 105.

[79] Crimmins, "Bentham on Religion," 103. See for example Jeremy Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham, Published under the Superintendance of His Executor, John Bowring*, 11 vols. (Edinburgh, 1838), 4: 47, 8: 420, 8:427-431.

[80] Religion has no place in the utopian utilitarian society described in the *Constitutional Code*. Bk 1, Ch. 14 ("Established Religion – None") states that "No power of government ought to be employed in the endeavor to establish any system or article of belief on the subject of religion". See also Bk 2, Ch. 11. Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham,* 9: 92-93, 9:432-33.

attempt with his Religion of Humanity). They needed to be entirely eradicated from society: his ideal utilitarian society was secular rather than tolerant.[81]

James Mill rejoined Bentham on some of these points. He was, most notably, as thoroughly impervious as his friend to the spiritual dimension of the human mind.[82] He also wholeheartedly shared Bentham's anticlericalism, and appropriated and repeated his utilitarian critique of the alliance between Church and government, which he saw as "the alliance of religious abuse and corruption with political abuse and corruption."[83] Yet Mill's discussion of religious belief and of the tenets of Christianity was distinctly more measured than Bentham's. It is always challenging to unravel Mill's genuine opinion from his strategic reliance on religiously orthodox posturing and references, but even in his private papers, his criticism of religion focused squarely on the influence of the clergy.[84]

There were, in fact, major differences between the two men on the question of religion. Mill came from a dissenting intellectual tradition that valued toleration over secularism, and he was happy to maintain at least the appearance of orthodox Christianity. Regardless of his private beliefs, or lack thereof, Mill engaged intellectually with the possibility of religious "truth", and he also saw potential utilitarian value in religion, where Bentham mostly did not. He entertained the idea that religion could help society transition from its current state to Bentham's utilitarian utopia. This was because, regardless of the sincerity of men's religious beliefs, and regardless of the efficacy of religious sanctions, religions shaped the manners of their followers.[85] He approvingly noted in his Common Place Books that Montesquieu was "the precursor of Smith in the doctrine, that the multiplying of sects of religion, by increasing the force of the moral sanction, [is] favourable to good morals."[86]

It seems unlikely that Mill's lifelong interest in religion's potential as a tool for social reform was inspired by Bentham, both for practical reasons of chronology (his interest in the question is apparent from 1805, two years before he met Bentham), and because

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[81] Crimmins, "Bentham on Religion," 108–9. Hence the Elysean Field of auto-icons: it is the specific individuals who are admired for their past accomplishments, not abstract concepts.

[82] See JS Mill's acknowledgement of the human need for spirituality in the posthumous essay "Utility of Religion".

[83] For a discussion of Mill's anticlericalism and an argument that his religious thought was primarily derived from Bentham, see Kris Grint, "James Mill's Common Place Books and Their Intellectual Context, 1773–1836" (PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 2013), Ch. 4. There the argument relies on evidence from Mill's Commonplace Books, which span the period 1806-1820, when Bentham's influence would have been most pronounced.

[84] "The true religion never ought to have a priest." "Religion", in James Mill, *Common Place Books*, vol. 3, Ch. 8.

[85] For Mill on religious sanction, see Ibid, 192.

[86] "Religion", in Mill, *Common Place Books*, vol. 3, Ch. 8.

Bentham, unlike Mill, detested not only all ecclesiastical institutions but also religious belief itself. It is also unlikely that Mill was directly inspired by the classical republican tradition of "civil religion" exemplified by Machiavelli and Rousseau, and more recently by the French revolutionaries' attempts to harness the social utility of religion: Mill's agenda was not to promote notions of virtue or patriotism, but rather to promote civilization and reason, ideally through the influence of the most civilised and rational religion yet - Protestantism. These were ideals most likely to be inherited from his background in Presbyterian, enlightened Scotland.

Mill's assessment of religion as a potential tool to further societal progress was no mere abstract speculation; over the years he explored practical ways to harness religion for his utilitarian ends. Two years after his translation of Villers, and around the time he first met Bentham, he set about writing the *History of British India*, whose first two volumes bestowed considerable interest on Indian religion.[87] This was because religion, according to Mill, had arguably as great an influence "upon the lives of individuals, and the operations of society," as political constitutions and legal systems. Mill's discussion of India's "rude" religions was directly based on Hume's natural history of religion as he traced "the ideas concerning Divine power which the natural faculties of our race suggest to them at the various stages of their career."[88] In the absence of revelation, knowledge of the divine could still be gained from "sound reflection upon the frame and government of the universe."[89] Therefore, as human knowledge of the laws of nature improved, so did religion, which progressed from simple polytheism to superficial monotheism, and finally to a "just and rational" monotheism.[90] But he also turned Hume's account of the natural history of religion into a perfectibilist story of strictly linear religious and societal progress. Religions, Mill concluded, ought to be judged according to the moral and political systems they encouraged. In the case at hand, "religion [depraved] the moral sentiments of the Hindus."[91] Conversely, "high and refined" notions of religion were marked by their ability to inculcate and promote true ideas of justice, "those qualities which render a man amiable, respectable, and useful," as

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[87] For Mill's discussion of religion in the History of British India, see Thomas, "Editor's Introduction," xxviii–xxx; Plassart, "James Mill's Treatment of Religion and the History of British India."

[88] James Mill, *The History of British India*, 6 vols. (London, 1826), 1:150. For the close similarities between Mill and Hume's accounts, compare Hume, "The Natural History of Religion," 5–10, 44–54; Mill, *The History of British India*, 1826, 1:150–56.

[89] Mill, *The History of British India*, 1826, 1:167. Here Mill's stance is closer to Hume's than to Moderate theology, which remained wary of natural or rationalist religion. See Thomas Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment*, 5.

[90] Mill, *The History of British India*, 1:167.

[91] Ibid, 1:175.

well as "wisdom, beneficence, self-command."[92] Most importantly, in refined religious systems, "the production of happiness is steadily and consistently represented as the most acceptable worship of the Creator."[93]

One important practical consequence of this account was that the more advanced religions could wield beneficial influence on neighboring religions, and therefore on neighboring societies. For example Hinduism had benefitted from its proximity with Islam, which was itself intellectually indebted to the superior Judeo-Christian religions.[94] By highlighting the beneficial influence that could be drawn from exposure to more refined religions, Mill was developing further the position already hinted at in his 1805 call for the conversion of Irish Catholics. This was an idea he also advanced in his journalistic writings, as he supported the evangelical effort to convert colonized people in India and America to Christianity, as a means to accelerate the moral, social and political progress of non-European societies.[95]

In the next decades, Mill remained focused on his ambition to improve individual morals and manners in society, as the necessary precondition to utilitarian reform. But religious improvement could best be used as a tool for progress in non-European societies where the natives could be converted. Domestically, he viewed educational reform as the most realistic option, and he campaigned relentlessly in favor of the education of the poor.[96]

Mill's involvement in various educational schemes in the 1810s and 1820s was also very much a product of its time; on the question he collaborated not only with Bentham but also with the *Edinburgh Review* and with a number of prominent Dissenters. The campaign for education was even met with moderate success, when the state finally guaranteed a measure of basic instruction for poor children with the (ill-respected) 1833 Factory Act. But Mill's personal reasons for tirelessly promoting new systems of mass education were his own: he believed that political and legislative reform must preceded by a large-scale reform of popular manners, and Bentham's utilitarian philosophy provided both a language and a useful roadmap to achieve this aim.[97] In the Benthamite language adopted by Mill, the primary objective was to prevent the existence of "sinister

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[92] Ibid, 1:171.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid, 1:167, 2:204.
[95] Plassart, "James Mill's Treatment of Religion and the History of British India," 533–34.
[96] See the pamphlet 'Schools for All' (1812), as well as his involvement in the Chrestomathic school project (1813), the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (1826) and the foundation of University College, London (1826).
[97] See William Thomas's observation that "Mill's radicalism is at bottom a programme of education." William Thomas, "James Mill's Science of Politics," in *The Philosophic Radicals: Nine Studies in Theory and Practice, 1817-1841* (Oxford, 1979), 120.

interests” in government through the vigilance of an informed and educated people. Only when the masses were educated to think rationally and identify their interests instead of blindly deferring to the mistaken or selfish holders of authority, would they resist the abuses of political and religious establishments. In this perspective, the Church of England presented a particularly dangerous obstacle, because it systematically encouraged irrational and harmful opinions, thereby stifling the political education of the masses and the progress of utilitarian government. This was why Mill attacked clericalism relentlessly, in regards to its negative influence on education in “Schools for All” (1812) but also in regards to the alliance of religion and politics embodied by the Church of England's hostility to free press and toleration, in “Ecclesiastical Establishments” (1826). Yet, while Mill's position against established religion was tied to his political ambition for good government striving towards public utility, as well as to his affinities with Dissenting ideas of individual freedom of conscience, it ultimately rested upon an understanding of religious and societal progress inherited from the eighteenth century.

Indeed, the anticlerical case made in both “Schools for All” and “Ecclesiastical Establishments” was based upon a number of well-rehearsed points about the nature of, and path towards true religion. In “Schools for All”, Mill ruthlessly skewered his critics’ inconsistencies. To argue that “non-religious education” of the type offered in Lancastrian schools “threatens Christianity in general,” or the “Church of England in particular,” is to imply that “knowledge undermines religion, which cannot be right if religion is true.”[98] Conversely, given that “religion is founded upon reason; and is no better than superstition as far as it is founded upon anything else,” the cultivation of reason and knowledge must be favorable to true religion, and must be encouraged by true believers in Christianity.[99] The only argument that could counter this reasoning, Mill allowed, would be to assert that the Church of England taught the only creed “conductive to the salvation of men,” yet this is “so very disputed a point, that no practical regulation can with reason or propriety be founded upon it.”[100]

Therefore the only appropriate criterion, regarding religious education, is that of truth: virtue and vice are equally present among the Church of England and Dissenters, and promoting an established religion for political purposes would be to debase and corrupt

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[98] James Mill, “Schools for All, in Preference to Schools for Churchmen Only,” in *James Mill on Education*, ed. W.H. Burston (Cambridge, 1969), 129.

[99] Ibid, 151.

[100] Ibid.

religion – here Mill calls upon the authority of Paley to conclude that such political instrumentalization of religion would be no more than "*practical* irreligion".[101]

But in "Schools for All", Mill does not stop at countering the arguments of Lancaster's critics; he also makes a positive case for a new system of schooling that would bring together the different (Christian) creeds of the country. His argument follows logically from his premise that religion is founded upon reason: again following Smith's lead, he argues that the emergence of religious truth requires a free market of religious ideas:

> If any religion is inferior to that of the church in its conformity to reason and scripture, this may be made to appear; and if it is made to appear, men, when well instructed, will be sure to quit the worse religion for the better.[102]

When the members or clergy of a particular church are confronted to a religion which they perceive to be "less conformable than their own to reason and scripture," the correct response is to "exert themselves, by exposition and argument, to make that disconformity appear."[103] This will result either in the betterment of the inferior religion, or in its members joining forces with the superior religion.

Mill argues, then, for a truly catholic religious education, that would "[embrace] in the scheme of instruction only so much of religious doctrine as all Christians are agreed in."[104] Christianity is already, "in its broadest and most liberal acceptation," the religion of the nation, and ought to be recognize as the only "*national* religion".[105] This could be achieved through "a scheme for the embracing of all or almost all sects of Christianity in the same religious worship, merely by abstaining from the mention or inculcation of polemical or distinctive points."[106]

Mill's argument for religious diversity in schools and in worship holds, in his views, two distinct advantages: firstly, religious diversity is a tool towards the purification of Christianity towards the true, rational religion. It is also a necessary defense against religious discord, division and violence. To be educated together does not only "produce unity and harmony of feeling," it also teaches students to "*agree* to differ," "to have

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[101] Ibid, 142.
[102] Ibid, 151.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid, 179. Here again, Mill relies on Paley to support his argument.
[105] Ibid, 168.
[106] Ibid, 180.

different opinions, without quarrelling with one another, or hating one another, on that account."[107] Mill concludes:

> Of a truly enlightened policy, then, it would most certainly be an object, and one of the most highly respected and dear, that, as far as could possibly be done, the different religious classes of the people should be educated *together*[108]

As will soon become clear, Mill was therefore already arguing in 1812 for a scheme that closely resembled the controversial propositions advanced two decades later in "The Church, and Its Reform."

While Mill's argument in "Schools for All" is very much in line with his previous views on religious and societal progress, it is not easy to identify further direct inspiration for the article – its composition falls outside of the period covered by the Common Place Books, and it also illustrates Mill's usual practice of citing authorities that he believe would lend his argument some much-needed respectability (a role filled, in this case, by William Paley). Identifying Mill's sources is easier in the case of "Ecclesiastical Establishments*"* (1826). While the article primarily relies on history, citing Hume's *History of England*, Campbell's *Lectures on Ecclesiastical History*, and others to illustrate the hypocrisy and destructive tendencies of the Church of England, the Common Place Books display the rich philosophical background upon which Mill built his argument.[109]

The article opens with an unapologetic attack on religious establishments, and corresponding defense of religious freedom as best conductive to true Christianity as well as most likely to further the best interests of humanity:

> We think it proper to begin by distinctly stating our opinion, that an ecclesiastical establishment is essentially antichristian; that religion can never be safe or sound, unless where it is left free to every man's choice, wholly uninfluenced by the operation either of punishment or reward on the part of the magistrate. We think it proper to go even further, and declare, that it is not religion only to which an ecclesiastical establishment is hostile: in our opinion, there is not one of the great interests of humanity, on which it does not exercise a baneful influence.[110]

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[107] Ibid, 190–91.
[108] Ibid, 191.
[109] Grint, "James Mill's Common Place Books," 153.
[110] James Mill, "Ecclesiastical Establishments," *The Westminster Review* 5 (1826), 505.

The article offers a negative demonstration of the benefits of religious liberty, by uncovering "two of the evils to which the fatal measure of incorporating a body of clergy gives birth; persecution on account of religion, and hostility to the liberty of the press."[111] Mill's argument follows historical lines, as he details the harmful influence of religious establishments on the progress of religion and society, but the philosophical background for Mill's argument can be identified in his Common Place Books: one recurrent theme is Mill's efforts to collect arguments (and quotations from Bayle, Locke and Hume) upholding the social utility of free discussion and religious disagreement, including deistic and atheistic opinions.[112] In his notes Mill's rehearses his argument that the proper use of one's faculties is more virtuous than faith for faith's sake:

> To believe there is any merit in believing is a thing wholly immoral. If there is a merit in any thing, connected with belief, it is the merit of attending to evidence, using all diligence in collecting evidence, and all the attention and fairness of the mind, in ascertaining its value or weight in the scale of proof.[113]

This is based on Mill's rational conception of religion, which supposes that to please God it to make use of our natural reason: therefore "Deism, or atheism, may even if false, be more agreeable to God almighty, than Christianizing, though true."[114] Following this logic, priests appear to Mill as "the greatest preachers of infidelity", because they reward "blind submission" to irrational belief, and punish the "impartial, vigorous exercise of reason."[115] He cites Robertson's *Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge Which the Ancients Had of* India (1791) in support: in any country where "science and philosophy" are diffused, "opinions spread which imperceptibly diminish [the influence of superstition] over the minds of men. A free and full examination is always favourable to truth, but fatal to error."[116]

To remove the layers of authority and irrational beliefs that cloud the minds of men is, in Mill's view, to establish the conditions for an enlightened public opinion, itself the precondition to enlightened legislation – here Mill echoes his Scottish predecessors on

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[111] Ibid, 548.

[112] See also his note about the lack of social harm caused by atheism: "Hume (Providence and a Future State) contends that Atheism has no evil tendency with regard to the moral or political conduct of men— that we can infer nothing of God beyond what this world testifies—and that the laws of this world render conduct morally and politically good our interest." "Religion", in Mill, *Common Place Books*, vol. 3, Ch. 8.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid, vol. 2, Ch. 5.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid, vol. 3, Ch. 8.

the preeminence of manners over laws, but also collects Burkean quotes in support: "Manners are of more importance than laws. Upon them, in a great measure, the laws depend."[117]

Hence Mill's delight as he observes the slow but significant shift effected by public opinion in Britain in the past few decades. "Ecclesiastical Establishments" opens with a celebration of the "improving spirit of the age," which first made it impossible to outlaw religious difference, and is making it increasingly difficult to maintain the discrimination established by the Test and Corporation acts.[118] Mill predicts their imminent downfall: "For protection against this spirit of persecution, strong and formidable to the present hour, we look to public opinion, daily approaching to the condition of a match for this once gigantic foe". [119] Religious freedom, in Mill's thinking, is central to religious progress, which is itself central to societal progress: this is why he assert that "in the destruction of religious freedom, that of all other freedom is involved."[120] Mill was correctly assessing the changing public mood, as his predictions were realized by the end of the decade: the Test and Corporation acts were repealed in 1828, and Catholic emancipation followed with the Relief Act of 1829.

IV

Mill's lifelong denunciation of the illiberality and hypocrisy of the Church of England, and his critique of ecclesiastical authority, are at the heart of his political thinking. Regardless of his personal beliefs, all commentators agree to see Mill's anticlericalism and secularism (understood as "the liberating of religion from its capture as an engine of the state") as a prominent theme running through all his political writings.[121] Hence the seemingly jarring nature of the message offered in one of his last published texts, "The Church and Its Reform" (1835), which advocated a utilitarian state religion.

The text was written as an article for the second issue of the *London Review*. Mill's commitment to utilitarianism had survived the end of his friendship with Bentham, and Bentham's own death in 1832, and launching this "organ of philosophical radicalism"

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[117] Ibid.
[118] Mill, "Ecclesiastical Establishments," 530.
[119] Ibid, 505.
[120] Ibid, 541.
[121] Grint, "James Mill's Common Place Books," 152. See also for instance Robert A. Fenn, *James Mill's Political Thought* (London, 1987), 53.

occupied much of his final two years.[122] The first issue of the *Review*, published in April 1835, had opened with an article penned by Mill, which accused the Church of slowing the progress of reform through the "chains they had placed on the human mind." In 1834 as in 1805 however, Mill exempted the Reformation from his criticism, hailing Luther as "the most heroic of the sons of men, and the greatest earthly benefactor, beyond compare, of the species to which he belonged."[123] He promised a future article that would outline a path towards religious education and reform: since education and government had "the greatest effect in forming the minds of men," he would explain how to create "a clergy so happily circumstanced as to have an interest in good education."[124]

True to his word, three months later Mill published the article "The Church and Its Reform", which focused on the role of religion in "forming the minds of men." In the article Mill laid out his vision for the next steps of religious progress and the advent of "true religion."[125] The improved religion he described could not be expected to emerge naturally; rather it was to be imposed by a wise legislator, as a tool to drive progress forwards.

> Assuredly, the best means of carrying on the moral culture of the people will not speedily present themselves to the people, if they are not aided; and if the influence of those whom they are always ready to follow is not employed to put them in the right path, and urge them forward in it.[126]

The implication was that the many harmful effects of the Church of England were due to the nature of its organization and creed, rather than to its nature as a state religion. Once reformed, "the Church of England might be converted from an instrument of evil into an instrument of much good."[127] A "well-ordered and well-conducted clergy" could render "a service of unspeakable importance," in "raising the moral and intellectual character of the people."[128]

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[122] Mill, *Autobiography*, 154.
[123] James Mill, "The State of the Nation," *The London Review* 1/1 (1834): 8–9.
[124] Ibid, 23.
[125] Mill, "The Church, and Its Reform," 295.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid, 274.
[128] Ibid, 258, 260.

Mill's plan of action comported two sides. One focused on the practical reorganization of ecclesiastical institutions and of worship, from the selection of well-educated and morally sound ministers by a Minister of Public Instruction, paid by the state "for teaching the people to live well," to the use of dominical sermons for the scientific, political and practical education of the masses, including chemistry, health, and political economy, and including the invention of "social amusements" that would both improve the minds of participants and help to bind the community together.[129]

The other consisted in a reform of the official creed of the Church of England. Its central tenet was to become the assertion of the existence of an "*Almighty Being of perfect wisdom and goodness.*" According to Mill this was the most central of all religious notions, and "a matter of infinite importance," because it placed human search for rational knowledge at the heart of religion.[130]

> It is according to the perfections of the Divine nature to approve in his rational
> creatures the love of truth. But the love of truth leads a man to search for
> evidence, and to place his belief on that side, whatsoever it be, on which the
> evidence appears to him to preponderate.[131]

This allowed Mill to erase from religion "the atrocity of giving men inducements to make a belief, which they have not derived from evidence." Instead "love of truth", as enacted through the rational search for knowledge, was to become the central tenet of Mill's State religion. All peripheral tenets and institutional forms were dismissed as harmful superstition: Mill's vision for his reformed religion was that of a "church without dogmas and ceremonies," whose universal central message and pared-down doctrine would spell the end of religious divisions and welcome all Christian creeds:

> It would be truly a catholic church. Its ministers would be ministers of good, in
> the highest of all sense of the word, to men of all religious denominations. …
> *This is the true idea of a State religion*; and there is no other. It ought to be stripped of
> all which is separating; of all that divides men from one another; and to present a

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[129] Ibid, 280. See Hume's argument for a clergy salaried by the state, in a passage cited by Smith. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 1981, 2:791; Hume, *The History of England*, 3:136.
[130] Mill, "The Church, and Its Reform," 288, 267.
[131] Ibid, 280–81.

point whereon, in the true spirit of reverence to the perfect being, and love to one another, they may all unite. [132]

The role of the State was to provide to all its citizens this core, uncontroversial religion, which would preserve religious liberty by remaining compatible with all existing sects:[133]

> So long as there are men who think dogmas and ceremonies a necessary part of religion, those who agree about such dogmas and ceremonies may have their separate and respective institutions of their own providing, for their inculcation and performance. But this is extraneous to the provisions which alone it is proper for the State to make, and which ought to be so contrived as to embrace, if it were possible, the whole population.[134]

Mill's plan can be analyzed as an expanded and radicalized version of Smith's argument that state-sponsored education and toleration would provide a path to "true religion". Echoing both Smith's account of competing religious sects and Hardy's belief in people's natural attraction towards simplicity, he predicted that such a state religion would give its members the tool to reject nefarious influences and unsound reasonings, and would eventually absorb all other religions:

> All would belong to this church; and after a short time would belong to no other. Familiarized with the true worship of the Divine Being, they would throw off the pseudo worship, dogmas and ceremonies. This is the true plan for converting Dissenters.[135]

Mill's plan for a utilitarian state religion was – rather unsurprisingly – not well received, and the article's criticism of the Church damaged the circulation and reputation of the *London Review*.[136] It has been put aside by his commentators as an oddity, a late, out-of-

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[132] Ibid, 288. The emphasis is mine.
[133] "There is no class of Christians, who could not join in the labours of love of one who was going about continually doing good; whose more solemn addresses to his assembled parishioners would never have any other object than to assimilate them more and more in heart and mind to Him who is the author of all good, and the perfection of wisdom and benevolence." Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Bain, *James Mill*, 389.

character U-turn on his consistently anticlerical discourse.[137] Ball accurately describes Mill as a "practical theist," in the sense that he took religious beliefs and their negative effects seriously, and believed they needed to be corrected by education.[138] What remains to be explained, however, is why Mill believed that a state church was the best way to provide such an education, or indeed the central assumption by Mill that religion could and should be used to shape politics and society.

But here it has been argued that Mill's final call for a "true religion" that would improve the manners of the masses was entirely consistent with his lifelong understanding of religion as a natural phenomenon, shaped by human psychology and the state of society, and in turn a major driving force of historical progress. The philosophical roots of "The Church, and Its Reform" can be identified as early as 1805.[139] Then, Mill's attempts to publicize the Scottish and German narratives linking Protestantism to progress had already established that his interest in religion lay not in theological truths, but rather in its instrumental role in shaping the progress of society. Bentham's utilitarian philosophy had later inflected this view towards an openly instrumental consideration of religion as one of the instruments available to the legislator to impose utilitarian progress. By the end of his life, Mill apparently decided it was time to widen the evangelical tactics he had always supported outside of Europe as a way to accelerate the natural progress of non-European societies. "The Church and Its Reform" was merely adapting these same tactics for Britain.

In the end, James Mill's plan for a state religion rather defies classification. It was neither a classical defense of civil religion, nor a mere liberal call for toleration. His state religion was conceived (like Rousseau's) as a way to educate citizens into using their critical faculties, but it was not about "virtue" (unless "virtue" is understood as "the proper use of one's rational faculties"), and neither was it about republican ideas of social cohesion. It was purely about educating citizens in rational thinking and behavior, in the rationalist credo of utilitarianism.

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[137] Ball acknowledges that "call for state-supported church and civil religion is at first sight surprising," and credits Plato for inspiring the scheme. Ball, "The Survivor and the Savant," 142. Interestingly, Mill's first biographer Alexander Bain was most puzzled by Mill's plan for "a religion of Natural Theism" in view of his well-known mastery of theology and biblical exegesis. Bain, *James Mill*, 388.
[138] Ball, 153.
[139] Grint also observes that some of the article's points (especially on clerical salaries) were noted in Mill's Common Place Books around 1813-1815. Grint, "James Mill's Common Place Books," 154.

This was also far from a traditionally "liberal" way to approach the relationship between church and state. His defense of toleration was central to his political thinking, but it was grounded in social utility and his belief that religious plurality was a necessary condition for the improvement of religious ideas towards "true religion". His state religion was compatible with religious freedom, but his clearly-stated ambition remained to attract all worshippers under the umbrella of his rationalist, utilitarian religion. This was, in some ways, less "liberal" that Montesquieu's defense of Christianity as a perfectly serviceable civil religion: Montesquieu accepted the possibility that different societies may be better suited for different civil religions, while Mill saw Humean rational "true religion" as the answer to Rousseau's search for a universal and perfect civil religion.[140]

Of course, it is possible to argue that Mill's state religion was in fact no religion at all, but rather an empty rhetorical device conceived as a Trojan horse for his agenda of rational education. There is certainly a good case to be made that Mill was only paying lip service to Christianity, and his state religion lacked even the transcendental faith in altruism that would later characterize Comte's Religion of Humanity.[141] Nevertheless, Mill took religion seriously, in the sense that he believed that it was a natural tendency of the human mind, and one that needed to be channeled by the legislator for the good of society. His consistent interest in the question throughout his career suggest that he was entirely sincere when he argued that religion could reform manners and therefore accelerate social progress, and that this was an ability he genuinely wanted to harness.

But it is certainly true that Mill represents an extreme limit to Montesquieuan and Humean attempts to apprehend religion as a natural phenomenon embedded in society, in his determined stance to look at religion purely from the perspective of social utility. Mill argued for an entirely rationalist and utilitarian approach to religion, which was one logical end point for this line of discourse. His claim to innovation was to advocate civil religion as a mere shell that would replicate the psychological effects of religious worship, but contain no actual transcendental faith and be purely rationalist in its assumptions and aims. One can see how this would have triggered anxieties in his son about the human need for a higher purpose in life.[142] Yet Mill was also indebted to a Moderate strand of Scottish enlightened thought that stressed the limitations of reason and the need for

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[140] In fact Rousseau even flirted with the idea that Protestantism could provide a satisfying civic religion. Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 31.

[141] For parallels and differences between Mill's civil religion and Comte's, see Ball, "The Survivor and the Savant," 150.

[142] See Beiner's assessment of JS Mill's approach to religion as a cross between Hume's (and the need to replace superstition with reason) and Tocqueville's (and the need for religion to give depth and meaning to human life). Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 267.

Revelation: the Scottish Enlightenment inspired Mill's rationalist perspective not because it dismissed religion, but rather because it analyzed religious feeling as a natural phenomenon that was also a force driving the progress of society. Perhaps strangely, it was not only through Smith's stadial history, but also through Robertson's natural providentialism and Stewart's Christian moral philosophy that Hume's skeptical approach to religion was reinterpreted to inform the democratic, rationalist and secular discourse of nineteenth-century utilitarian radicalism.