

John Stuart Mill on Universal History

Dr Callum Barrell
New College of the Humanities

The author:

Callum read History at Cambridge, after which he studied for an MPhil in Political Thought and Intellectual History, also at Cambridge. His PhD, supervised by Profs. Georgios Varouxakis and Gareth Stedman Jones, was submitted in March 2015 at Queen Mary University of London. In it he examined the roles of history and historiography in classical utilitarianism, focusing specifically on the writings of Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, George Grote, and John Stuart Mill, and with an emphasis also on the thought of Auguste Comte and François Guizot. He is currently turning his PhD into a book for Cambridge University Press and is Lecturer in Political Thought at New College of the Humanities in London.

The paper:

This paper makes three claims in an ascending order of significance. The first is that, contrary to received wisdom, J.S. Mill was a deeply historical thinker whose reputation as a philosopher of history has been obscured by nineteenth-century critics of utilitarian logic. The second is that Mill in the wake of his mental crisis (1826-7) outlined a doctrine of historical relativism, with which he revised longstanding utilitarian assumptions about the logical foundations of politics. The third and final claim is that Mill in the 1830s and 1840s sketched out a framework of universal history but only articulated it fully in 1862 in an emendated edition of *A System of Logic* (first published in 1843). The combination of these two historical perspectives, relative and universal, signified to some of Mill's readers an unstable, muddled eclecticism that undermined the coherence of his political views. In contrast to these readers, I argue that Mill thought extensively about the relationship between the two and addressed in the process the past's role in practical political reasoning; the problem of free will; and history's emerging status as a science.