

**The business enterprise as organization and as association in nineteenth century  
Britain: Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, and Auguste Comte**

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Jocelyn Betts was an undergraduate at Cambridge, and then took the Cambridge MPhil in Modern European History, for which he wrote a study of the relationship between German environmental thought, the Chernobyl disaster, and the sociology of Jürgen Habermas, Ulrich Beck, and Niklas Luhmann. He has just submitted a doctoral thesis entitled ‘The business enterprise in mid-Victorian social thought’, which dealt with the history of ideas of the business in political economy, literature, and social theory in Britain from 1840 to 1890. This thesis was funded by the Cambridge Victorian Studies Group, which was made possible by a Leverhulme Trust grant. He is currently becoming interested in exploring the work and reception of the once critically acclaimed but swiftly forgotten philosopher William Henry Smith, and whether it has anything interesting to tell us about the relationship between Victorian mysticism and liberalism, the nature of British intellectual life during a process of academic professionalization, and the relationship between philosophy and literature, which he has an intuitive idea that it does.

This paper represents an attempt to consider John Stuart Mill and Carlyle as engaged in a common exercise to predict the reformation of the business enterprise and thereby changes to the role of work in the political order. It also considers Mill’s relationship with Comte in order to help stress the common Saint-Simonian roots of these projects, and the fact that both represented an attempt to create meritocracy and community in workplaces through a reformation of legal contracts. It suggests that one of the fundamental differences between Mill and Carlyle, (and by implication between the supporters of cooperative production in Mill’s circle of the 1860s, and certain of their opponents including Carlyle, Ruskin, and Frederic Harrison), can be illuminated by considering the conflict between concepts of the ‘capitalist’ and ‘entrepreneur’, and the absence of the latter from Ricardian political economy.

### **Selected Further Reading**

#### **Primary**

Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism and past and present*, (London, 1858)

John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, ed. John M. Robson (London, 1989)

*Principles of political economy*, Book IV, especially chapter VII (*Collected works* III)

- ‘The claims of labour’ (*Collected works* IV)

- ‘Civilization’ (*Collected works* XVIII)

John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte, *The correspondence of John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte*, ed. Oscar A. Haac, trans. Oscar A. Haac (New Brunswick, 1995)

#### **Secondary**

Bruce Baum, ‘J. S. Mill and liberal socialism’, in Nadia Urbinati and Alex Zakaras (eds.), *J. S. Mill’s political thought* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 98-123

Nicholas Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill* (Cambridge, 2004)

Gregory Claeys, ‘Justice, independence, and industrial democracy: the development of John

Stuart Mill's views on socialism', *The Journal of Politics*, 49, 1 (Feb., 1987), 122-147  
Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish thought* (Basingstoke, 1997)  
John Morrow, *Thomas Carlyle* (London and New York, 2006), Chapter 4  
J. M. Robson, *The improvement of mankind* (Toronto and London, 1968)  
Philip Rosenberg, *The seventh hero* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974)  
Donald Winch, *Wealth and life*, (Cambridge, 2009), Chapter 2