



John Stuart Mill on Education and Progress

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ABSTRACT

John Stuart Mill, a supporter of state provision of popular and secular education at a national scale in Victorian England, believed education was a means to foster human mind development, accounting also for the future progress of mankind. Unlike other utilitarian thinkers, like Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill believed that the state, in specific circumstances, should supervise education, therefore guaranteeing its quality and not only quantity. The reforms in popular and general education throughout the nineteenth century accompanied the discussion of what should be included in the curriculum of school or university studies, and of the terms defining compulsory attendance. In this context, this paper intends to explore Mill's position on education and progress in line with his approach to liberalism and to the problems of his time. We will argue that his concept of liberal education transcended formal instruction in schools. Instead, it should continuously strive for the moral and mental well-being of humankind. By largely delving into periodicals and other writings produced during the Victorian era, we shall describe the changes popular education suffered under the sway of political reform and utilitarianism, bearing witness to the spirit of the age and to Mill's approach to education.

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On March 24, 1866, *The Illustrated London News* (ILN) dedicated two pages to John Stuart Mill,¹ praising his recent adventure as Member of Parliament, elected by Westminster, and anticipating his consensual and highly regarded value to the House of Commons. As the periodical put it: “He is welcomed there by the wisest and most thoughtful men of all parties – conservatives as well as Reformers – and trust the argument in its discussions may be improved by one of the greatest masters of the art of thinking.” (ILN 280). This periodical also emphasised his undisputable intellectual reputation, either as a political thinker, economist, moralist or mental philosopher, just to name a few of the areas in which he played a remarkable influence:

Mill is not only an economist who has treated – with the most refined scientific analysis, and in a most comprehensive discussion – of the laws of the production and diffusion of wealth, yet regarding them as subordinate to the improvement of humanity. He is not only a moralist, who has enlarged, elevated, and purified the meagre Utilitarianism of Bentham, and while vindicating the ethical principle of the greatest happiness, show how it may be reconciled with the aspirations of heroic virtue and devotion. He is also a mental philosopher, allied most nearly to Locke (...). (ILN 280)

As a member of Parliament (MP), Mill supported the Second Reform Act passed in Parliament in 1867, being most notoriously known for the vindication of the vote for women, which he failed to achieve as propertied women over 30 would only get the suffrage in 1918. Mill also became a fervent supporter of reform in education, not only as regards popular education, state-supported, as well as education in general, which Mill looked upon as either scientific or moral. Aware of the deplorable social, moral and intellectual condition of the bulk of the population, and conscious of the inevitable plunge by the government into a more democratic outlook, Mill believed education was key to the progress of people’s mind and, consequently, to the progress of the country. This belief was substantiated in the utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Mill’s devotion to education also filled newspapers and periodical pages of the time, being the title ‘Mr. Mill on Education’ commonly read in the press of the 1860s and early 1870s,² which reported Mill’s speeches and ideas on the state of education and the need for a change during that crucial reform period. Even simple and straightforward, this heading carries with it a strong resonance due to Mill’s intellectual influence, being his opinion very much appreciated.

The Victorian age (1837–1901) witnessed overarching reforms that affected all areas of society. Education was one of them. The late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century had already announced times of change and a need for political and social reform. The American and the French revolutions anticipated a future of improvement, intellectual progress, human happiness, equality, and liberty driven by the Enlightenment ideas of justice and reason. Those were auspicious and eventful times for the ones who were also claiming for reform in Britain’s Parliament, such as Richard Price, Thomas Paine, Joseph Priestley, and Mary Wollstonecraft, known as Radical dissenters, or by the Romantics Wordsworth and Coleridge. According to Morgan, these Revolution enthusiasts believed that “At worst, it [the revolution] would weaken the old enemy; at best it would create another constitutional state” (Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain* 485). Nonetheless, it would ultimately result in a period of terror and anarchy (1793–4) in France, foreseen by Edmund Burke in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

In addition to the acute defense of the rights of man, industrialisation and urbanisation transformed perceptions and approaches to the economy and people’s needs. Adam Smith’s endorsement of capitalism and the *laissez-faire* theory, Malthus’s influential *Essay on the Principle of Population as It affects the Future Improvements of Society* (1798) and Jeremy Bentham’s plea of utilitarian and social reforms resonated the changes that Britain was undergoing. Utilitarianism was hence a product of the ‘age of machinery’, as Thomas Carlyle put it in 1829 in *Signs of the Times*. Carlyle was indeed very critical of Bentham’s utility principle, which lacked morality and subjectivity, a criticism also set forth by the Romantics. The following extract represents a good example of Carlyle’s acute and direct disapproval:

1 Hereafter also referred to as Mill.

2 For example, *The London Evening Standard*, 10 November 1870 2; *Tower Hamlets Independent*, 2 April 1870.

The deep, strong cry of all civilised nations,—a cry which, every one now sees, must and will be answered, is: Give us a reform of Government! A good structure of legislation, a proper check upon the executive, a wise arrangement of the judiciary, is all that is wanting for human happiness. The Philosopher of this age is not a Socrates, a Plato, a Hooker, or Taylor, who inculcates on men the necessity and infinite worth of moral goodness, the great truth that our happiness depends on the mind which is within us, and not on the circumstances which are without us; but a Smith, a De Lolme, a Bentham, who chiefly inculcates the reverse of this,—that our happiness depends entirely on external circumstances. (Carlyle, *Signs of the Times* 18)

Notwithstanding these counter arguments, political reform was on its way and paved the way for discussion enveloped by a Christian ethos, “rational organization, meritocratic conduct and moral aims” (Black 231) and a free-trade policy (Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain* 528). Such were the goals of the Victorian reformers. If, in the first half of the 19th century, England witnessed many concerns over the ‘Condition of England question’, raised by Carlyle in *Chartism* (1839) (Hilton 572), as well as gradual but, nonetheless, violent, vindications of suffrage extension,³ in the 1850s it “was thus increasingly urban, perhaps increasingly secular, certainly increasingly non-Anglican in tone. Mid-Victorian politics reflected these tendencies, all of which pointed towards Liberalism”, as Morgan (*The Oxford History of Britain* 521) underlined.

Seminal works such as Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species* (1859) and social evolutionism played an important role in the secularisation of thought, despite the prevailing Christian character of Victorian society. Reform, free-trade, individualism, economic self-regulation, self-help, and self-development permeated every aspect of Victorian life. Liberal political thinkers, such as J. S. Mill, Samuel Smiles, T. H. Huxley, Matthew Arnold, just to name a few, were animated by the spirit of liberalism, striving for more social justice and education in a time of inevitable social, cultural and political change.

Reforms were thus the backbone of social and political transformation. The three Reform Acts of 1832, 1867 and 1884, even though only the two last ones reached a wider suffrage extension, represented nonetheless a wake-up call for the need to educate not only the poor, but also lower middle-class people, and to revise the role of the state in popular, state-funded education, but also public education (overseen and regulated by the Clarendon Commission in 1862 and the Public Schools Act of 1868). The transition from a voluntary scheme to the establishment of a compulsory scheme found many obstacles and was enveloped by much controversy regarding elementary education major guidelines, namely syllabi, the quality of teaching and certification of teachers, the need to create training schools, school funding, among others. It was not until 1870 that the Elementary Education Act was approved, and state provision became an accomplishment, despite its many deficiencies. For example, attendance was not compulsory, and poor children were still seen as cheap labour, notwithstanding the different Acts enforced throughout the century to regulate children and women’s working hours, such as the Factory Acts (1833, 1844, 1847) and The Mines Act (1842).

Popular education also represented one of the key answers to fight the ignorance of the bulk of the population, instructing them so that they could cultivate their inner self as well as soothing their manners in a time full of contrasts, hypocrisy, doubts, and expectations towards the future. That is why the approval of The Second Reform Act in 1867 or the Elementary Education Act of 1870 gain so much significance as they echoed winds of change regarding a growing awareness in the need to educate the masses and make their voices be heard in Parliament through the extension of the suffrage.

This abridged description of reform and education-related issues in nineteenth-century England provides thenceforth the context for our paper. We shall describe how popular education became progressively part of the political agenda, secular, non-denominational, free or fee-paying and mandatory. Concerns over the curriculum and the role of the state regarding education also generated acute discussion among defenders and opponents of a more or less interventionist state. The condition of education, and reform in education, in Victorian England shall be dealt with in the first part, addressing our study primarily to the decades 1850–1870. Next, in parts two and three, we shall focus on Mill’s position on progress and education (popular

3 Visible, for instance, in the approval of the Great Reform Act of 1832 or the hungry forties and the Chartism movement.

and general) to understand the author's approach to liberalism and to the problems of his time in the wake of important reforms such as the Second Reform Act (1867) or the Elementary Education Act of 1870. In addition to analysing Mill's writings on the subject of education, special attention is also given to some Victorian periodicals and Parliamentary documents. Through them, one can better capture and understand the opinions, fears, perceptions and expectations the Victorians voiced about the extension of popular education in England during their time.

THE CONDITION OF POPULAR EDUCATION IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND: THE NEED FOR REFORM

Access to education amongst English society was more blatantly dissimilar at least until the first decades of the nineteenth century. The sons of the well-off and the clergy "would attend fee-paying schools, namely the public schools Eton and Harrow, or the universities of Cambridge and Oxford", which only catered for a minority of people. The middle classes would send their children to Grammar schools (Morgan, *The Birth of Industrial Britain* 51).

Even though elementary schools, supported by voluntary patronages, already existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, state provision of elementary education was non-existent in England until the 1830s. The condition of popular education in Victorian England was very deficient as it was a highly disregarded area to which the government had paid scant attention before the early Victorian age. Nonetheless, the claims for popular education were growing despite its slow development.

The most recurrent and pervasive reasons for the existence of an educational setting throughout the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century rested on several assumptions. Education, or some educational activity, was believed to be the cure for social problems so that society could enjoy the happiness of a "sober, industrious" (Wardle 23) and morally established life. If the upper classes considered ignorance as the great ally of social oppression (Wardle 25), the "bourgeois reformers" believed elementary education could be "an instrument of social regeneration" (Wardle 24), and a means to promote social control, as the lower classes needed to be taught discipline and kept away from idleness. Elementary education would then teach them the virtues of a decent life, such as "sobriety, orderliness, punctuality, thriftiness, godliness, and obedience to authority" (Morgan, *The Birth of Industrial Britain* 61). In addition to these reasons, there was another argument equally decisive in the claim for popular education, the idea that parents were not doing their duty of educating their children properly and, as such, that role should be given to the state (Morgan, *The Birth of Industrial Britain* 61).

Workhouse schools, which already dated back to Elizabethan and Stuart times, had been created to pay heed to potential youth idle scoundrels with the express purpose of getting them accustomed to labour and avoid becoming criminals. Therefore, charity schools, ragged schools, factory schools, Poor Law schools, and the like, provided children with food, shelter, and an apprenticeship. Religious evangelisation of education also took shape on Sunday schools (Morgan, *The Birth of Industrial Britain* 52–56). In fact, education to the lower middle classes and working classes was essentially under the control of the Anglican church in the first half of the nineteenth century in Britain. These schools were run by the "National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor" in the Principles of the Established Church of England and Wales, established in 1811 (Morgan, *The Birth of Industrial Britain* 53).

Other denominational sects and friendly societies or individual benefactors had also claimed to themselves the right and the duty to assist the ones in need, be it with food, shelter or some sort of training and religious instruction, but at their own expense. The British and Foreign School Society (founded in 1808) catered for students coming from Nonconformist religious groups. Nonetheless, a heavy dose of religious knowledge (Picard 291) was also injected into the curriculum. Other schools worthy of mention were the Jews' Free Schools which "by 1870 had 2.400 pupils" (Picard 296). There were private schools for the working classes which were paid by the parents and not by the state (Gardner).

Apart from all the schools mentioned, parents were also given the responsibility for their children's education. Even if the government introduced grants in 1833 to assist elementary schools, a large sum of the money still went directly to Anglican schools (Aldrich xvi). It wasn't until 1860

that children of dissenters could attend “endowed grammar schools” (Aldrich xvi). Richard Aldrich justifies the predominance of the Anglican Church over education and state grants because: “between 1843 and 1867 some Protestant Dissenters, mainly Congregationalists (...) refused government money for their schools as fear of state control” (Aldrich xvi).

The argument that education would morally improve people’s minds was defended by meritocrats and moralists of early nineteenth-century England. Thomas Arnold is worth mentioning due to his role in education and society in England. According to Simon Heffer, Thomas Arnold “believed in the expansion of education and his quest for the moral improvement of society, his influence set the tone of the reforming classes of Victorian Britain” (Heffer 2). Being headmaster of the Rugby School (a public school) from 1828 until 1842, T. Arnold instilled into the pupils’ minds a sense of duty, order and Christianity, preparing them to become respectable and distinct men of society. The more fortunate Christians should strive to improve the lives of the underprivileged of society. Education should thus be extended to them so that their condition could be improved (Heffer 8, 15).

The Socratic Method promoted in his school challenged students to think critically about the questions asked, a method which opposed rote learning. Apart from the Classics, which was a central field of studies in the public schools’ curriculum (Heffer 8), Thomas Arnold already attempted the introduction in the curriculum of subjects like modern languages, mathematics, geology and modern history (Heffer 8–9). Nonetheless, the material aspects of civilisation should be taken into account as long as faith and moral were continually promoted. This formula – faith plus civilisation – meant perfection, and this strive for individual perfection was founded upon a sense of duty. This predicament would later influence the writing of works such as Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859) and *Culture and Anarchy* by Matthew Arnold, in 1868. Even if Thomas Arnold’s experience was mainly restricted to the private system only affordable to the privileged classes, he was a supporter of the Reform Bill of 1832 and believed the condition of the poor ought to be improved and “the poor who went to schools should receive education rather than simply enduring rote-learning” (Heffer 15). Therefore, society would become more civilised.

The problem was then identified, and, under the aegis of moralism and civilisation, a number of attempts was enforced to provide a solution for a social disadvantage deep rooted in a transforming society.

The reforms in education during Victorian times were already announcing times of change. Nonetheless, money-getting, mechanical progress and human happiness lay at the basis of a utilitarian conception of education in industrial Victorian Britain. “The Benthamic or utilitarian propagandism of that time” (Mill, *Autobiography* 105) accounted for the happiness of people of the greatest number possible, even if it implied an automated and inadequate instruction.

According to Isaiah Berlin, Victorian England was sick due to a claustrophobic environment that coerced free-thinking, and gifted men of that time, such as Mill, Carlyle, Nietzsche and Ibsen. As such, they “demanded more air and more light” (Berlin, “John Stuart Mill and the ends of life” 273). The times had not been auspicious for the “Science of Mind” nor had they been beneficial for the moral and metaphysical sciences which were falling into decay because they were being replaced by a utilitarian and mechanical approach to society and life, as Carlyle had anticipated in *The Signs of the Times*: “The science of the age, in short, is physical, chemical, physiological; in all shapes mechanical.” (Carlyle 16). The situation would not get any better, as industrialisation reached its peak in the mid-nineteenth century. Henceforth, a few years later, in 1867, a crucial time for the extension of the suffrage, Matthew Arnold, also very critical about this idea of decay and lack of light in all sectors of British society, defended that culture should thus be the collective and harmonious means to achieve the light and perfection so much needed in a time of mechanisation, fierce individualism, economic opportunism, and social exploitation (Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* 80–81).

Therefore, educating the populace, i.e. the bulk of the population, became a duty in a period of unavoidable mass democracy. If these people were to be trusted the right to vote, some light had to be shed on them. However, as we shall put forth further ahead, opinions on how and why to educate the masses were varied and divisive.

As regards the curriculum and teaching approaches, learning by rote was the normal method of popular education in Britain during most of the nineteenth century. The curriculum was

based on the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) together with religious instruction. Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster's monitorial and the Madras system of education, where older, abler students were instructed to teach the other pupils (Morgan, *The Birth of Industrial Britain* 55; Aldrich 5–6), resembled the factory system as it laid emphasis on the division of labour and mechanical organisation (Wardle 18). Carlyle criticised this educational system in a rather mocking way:

Thus we have machines for Education: Lancastrian Machines; Hamiltonian machines; monitors, maps, and emblems. Instruction, that mysterious communing of Wisdom with ignorance, is no longer an indefinable tentative process, requiring a study of individual aptitudes, and a perpetual variation of means and methods, to attain the same end; but a secure, universal, straightforward business, to be conducted in the gross, by proper mechanism, with such intellect as comes to hand. (Carlyle 14)

Nonetheless, it is not surprising to find this utilitarian educational approach in Gradgrind's rational instruction method depicted in Dickens' *Hard Times*, published in 1854. Subjectivity and ingenuity were left out of the equation for the sake of a more rational educational approach in line with the progressive and scientific era England was living through. The popular introductory lines "Teach these boys and girls nothing but facts. Facts alone are wanted in life" (Dickens 1) would immediately set the critical tone of the work itself as the message conveyed would be one of exposing the frailties of the educational system as well as the social injustices of those hard times for the poor.

Besides the teaching of the three Rs, great emphasis started to be laid on the scientific approach. Chemistry, mathematics, mechanics, or natural philosophy composed the set of courses offered by the Arts and Mechanics' institutes (Morgan 62–63, Picard 300). The opening of the School of Arts of Edinburgh in 1821, the Glasgow Mechanics' Institute in 1823, or the London Mechanics' Institution, the same year, paid heed to technical instruction and catered for many adult artisans and lower-middle class workers who could improve their technical skills and increase their "sociability" prospects. During the 1850s there was an increase in the opening of educational institutes where working class people could attend evening classes and have a chance of learning "practical science" (Picard 301), which could increase their job prospects. Science would not get the support of English universities, Oxford and Cambridge included, until the 1850s, as Susie Steinbach notes: "English universities were not only socially exclusive but were dismissive of and distinct from the worlds of industry, science and medicine (Steinbach 281). The Great Exhibition of 1851 helped to foster that interest in science and technology.

Even though the British and Foreign School Society was established in 1804, which "embraced the Monitorial system and non-denominational elementary schools" (Morgan 53), state provision of education would start to be given more attention with the foundation of The Committee of the Privy Council for Education (CPCE) in 1839. Then, in 1846 the Monitorial system had been replaced by the pupil-teaching system, setting the ground for school inspection. As such, according to Picard:

From 1852 all elementary schools, including those in workhouses and those run by private individuals, were subject to annual inspection by Government-appointed Inspectors. The National Schools, being Church of England, were inspected by ordained clergymen. All the other schools, including those run by the Jews and the Wesleyans, were inspected by laymen such as Matthew Arnold, whose annual reports make fascinating reading. (Picard 292)

In fact, M. Arnold in his *Reports on Elementary Schools* stated in 1852 that Wesleyan schools, private schools for "children of tradesmen, of farmers, and of mechanics of the higher class", should not claim assistance from public funds, which were designed to promote the education of the poor. Instead, these schools should "confer on a wider circle the benefits of their excellent schools" (Arnold, *Reports on Elementary schools* 5). He also emphasized the need for the employment of more monitors and pupil-teachers. Arnold was also critical of how teaching was enforced on pupils based on reading schoolbooks that promoted "dryness and pedantry" instead of being "natural and interesting" (105). Nonetheless, that flaw was noticed and improved, when Arnold reported the following:

The attention which has been drawn by the Revised Code to the elementary subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic has already had the happiest effect in improving the quality of school reading books. At last the compilers of these works seem beginning to understand that the right way of teaching a little boy to read is not by setting him to read such sentences as these (I quote from school works till lately much in vogue): “the crocodile is viviparous,” “quicksilver, antimony, calamine, zinc &c., are metals,” (...). Reading books are now published which reject all such trash as above, and contain nothing but what has really some fitness for reaching the end which reading books were meant to reach. (Arnold 104–105)

Other commissions had been specifically created to analyse and report the state of education, be it private or state-funded. The Newcastle Commission’s findings were discussed in Parliament on 11 July 1861. Apropos this debate, Sir John Pakington emphasised the importance of such a Commission as he had already introduced a Bill in 1855 to deal with an “entirely new mode of conducting the public education of the country” (Hansard, 1861 n. pg) whose schools were highly deficient and inefficient. The Bill was met with great resistance, hence his praising of this commission. Pakington explained the five reasons that he and also Lord Russell believed to sustain the need for legislation:

Firstly, that, notwithstanding the Privy Council system, large masses of the people of this country were in a state of the most deplorable ignorance. They next urged that large districts of the country were supplied either with very inefficient schools or with no schools at all. They urged, thirdly, the early age at which the children left school, thereby preventing them from receiving the full benefit of the instruction. They urged, fourthly, that which they were now also strongly prepared to recommend, and which he was glad to find had been taken up in the last Report—namely, the indispensable necessity for some local agency in aid of the central educational establishment. Fifthly and lastly, they urged the impossibility of the system now administered by the Privy Council ever becoming so extended as to meet the requirements of the country. (Hansard Online, 1861, 11 July)

These reasons were also fully confirmed by the *Report of the Education Commissioners*. They reported that 1 in 7 children attended schools, a fair improvement if one considers that in 1833 1 in 11 children went to school. Unassisted schools, the lack of a national grant and the standards of teaching had been some of the findings of the Commissioners. The need for inspection and local superintendence was considered to be urgent, as the minute of the Parliamentary debate reports:

Then the Commissioners referred to another subject, the importance of which no one could deny—namely, the nature of the teaching given even in the inspected schools. On that subject they stated that they had received with respect to inspected schools overwhelming evidence from the inspectors, proving that not one-fourth of the children received good education; that the education given was too ambitious, and too superficial in its character, and that, except in the best schools, it was too exclusively adapted to the elder scholars to the neglect of the young. The next subject to which he should advert was the absolute necessity of local superintendence and care, without which he did not believe that they should ever have an effective system of education. (Hansard online, “Observations”, 11 July 1861)

At the time, Robert Lowe was the vice-President of CPCE, being responsible for education (Heffer 414). Lowe believed that education should no longer be a religious question but rather a political one. Heavily influenced by Benthamism, Lowe supported a fairly utilitarian approach to education and why and how it should be implemented. Enforcing rote-learning in the greatest possible quantity for the greatest number of people would increase the chances of self-improvement and, therefore, society would also prosper. For Lowe, money should be granted to the schools in the evidence of results of the examinations on these specific areas (Heffer 412–414).

Interference of the government in education remained a shattering issue during the 1860s and 1870s, the period when a more serious debate about parliamentary reform, state provision of elementary education, the national curriculum, and secular versus religious education came to the fore. Regarding parliamentary reform, the Second Reform Act of 1867, which extended

borough and county franchise, as well as male household franchise (Hall, McClelland & Rendall), sparked the debate about the impact of the extension of the franchise. Many working-class men were enfranchised for the first time (Chase). On the one hand, many believed it was urgent to educate the people who would get the vote whereas, on the other, many people were suspicious of this “leap in the dark” (*Punch* 46) and they could not foresee good things resulting from that extension. Once again, Carlyle in his pamphlet “Shooting Niagara – and after?” (1867) accounts for a pessimistic approach to the idea of the suffrage extension. That would mean the plunge of the established, ancient principles of the constitution, which laid the foundations of the balanced functioning of the British society, “into the chaos of democracy” (Saunders 2) or “into a tearful tragedy and an ignominious farce” (Carlyle, *Shooting Niagara* 12).

Prior to the approval of the Elementary Education Act in 1870, the Education Bill of 1868 was introduced in Parliament. The topics of secularisation of education and state provision were again considered. In the minute of the Parliamentary debate on 24 June 1868 one can read about the main proposals of the Bill:

The *Bill* proposed the appointment of a Minister of Education, whose duty it would be to initiate elementary education where it was defective, and also an educational Census, the object evidently being that if large deficiencies were proved to exist in any part of the country Parliament should be asked for powers to supply them.
(Hansard Online, *Bill 64 Reading*, 24 July 1868)

However, a state-funded education would only be more seriously considered in 1869, with the creation of the National Education League, led by Joe Chamberlain. It aimed at fostering elementary education for all children, irrespective of their religious creeds.

The Church opposed to state intervention in education as the liability should be given to the parents and the Church. *The ILN* reported Archbishop Manning’s pastoral reading in the Roman Catholic Churches of London, on Sunday, on the education question. It stated the following: “The state has no commission, either natural or revealed, to educate; and no jurisdiction over the rights of parents or of the church in the education of its children. Here we are at a direct issue with the Erastian and latitudinarian politicians. The wisest policy of the state, for its own sake, is to assist both parents and the Church in the work of education.” (*ILN*, “Education” 3). The Archbishop opposed secular education and hoped that it would not be established in London.

The preservation of the liberal English tradition of liberty of thought and freedom of action represented the main argument regarding the undesirability and repression of the state meddling with parents’ education of their children in agricultural districts. State intervention would thus mean coercion of that liberty (*ILN*, “Education” 3).

Even though imperfect, the Elementary Education Act of 1870,⁴ also known as The Forster’s Act, replaced the private, voluntary, and denominational education system by a national, non-denominational system. In addition, it introduced a novel point, that of state provision in Britain. Furthermore, it also “established a system of ‘school boards’ to build and manage schools in areas where they were needed”.⁵ Nonetheless, attendance for children aged 5 to 10 would only be mandatory in 1880 with the approval of the Elementary Education Act, an extension of the one approved ten years earlier.

The debate on secular education, as opposed to sectarian education, remained at the core of the state provision question. In fact, it was a rather divisive issue. Even though an advocate of secular education, Mill was not against expelling religion from the schools. Nonetheless, he opposed financing denominational schools at the expense of public money. In a meeting held on March 25, 1870, “to support the objections taken by the National Education League to the Government Education Bill”, being one of them the extension of the denominational system, Mill made his point very clear regarding that specific matter:

All we demand is that those who wish religious instruction shall pay for it themselves, instead of taxing other people, so that the conscientious scruple had not to do with the religious instruction, but against paying for it, but the conscience of our

4 For a more complete insight into this Act, check Glen, *The Elementary Education Act, 1870*.

5 “The 1870 Reform Act” Available at <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/school/overview/1870educationact/>.

opponents requires that they should get it paid by other people. (*The Daily Telegraph*, March 26, 1870 3)

Mill goes on to defend that men should be given liberty to follow their own religion and conscience, although religious teaching should be paid for.

In a rather utopian approach, and somehow in contradiction with his utilitarian vision, Mill stood for “equal liberty of all, and not the greatest possible liberty to one and slavery to all the rest” (*The Daily Telegraph*, “The Government Education Bill” 3).

Critical of the permissive character of the Bill, Mill and other members of the meeting, such as Edmond Beales, Anthony Trollope and Leone Levi, decided on the following resolutions which were to be petitioned in Parliament:

School boards elected by ratepayers, with jurisdiction over much larger areas than those proposed by the bill, ought to be established in every district; no measure of national education ought to be accepted by Parliament which does not guarantee education to every child. (*The Daily Telegraph* 3)

The religious question was surely a fracturing concern and it prompted different views. *The Penny Illustrated Paper* published an opinion which, criticising Mill’s defence of secular education, upheld the need for religious instruction as part of a moral education:

The advocates of the secular education, as represented by Mr. John Stuart Mill, cannot themselves discriminate between religious and secular teaching all the time they are condemning the proposed provisions of the bill on the ground that it will favour those who cannot so discriminate. What objection can there be to the reading of the Scriptures at stated times in the schools? (...) The question really is, are we to give up the moral teaching recognised by the general consent of the community, the training that the great majority desire for their children, because of the supposed objections of a few high-and-dry philosophers or aspirants after the sort of freedom that can never be consistent with any other condition than absolute inertiae? (*The Penny Illustrated Paper*, “The Government Education Bill” 210)

Moreover, the Bible could not be excluded from the schools’ curriculum because it

“is so interwoven with the history of human progress and the operation of human affairs that it must be matter for continual reference; and its exclusion would be a deep and degrading superstition under the pretence do advancement and enlightenment.” (*The Penny Illustrated Paper* 210).

However, the belief that the Bible should be read and explained without sectarian teaching was upheld by many, such as Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, M.D., candidate for the Marylebone division of the Metropolitan School Board (*The Daily Telegraph*, November 21, 1870 2).

Being much respected by his peers on his ideas on education and reform, Mill was invited to chair a meeting for the election of the members of Board of Education in London, held on 9 November 1870 at Greenwich, in the Lecture Hall, Royal Hill. In loud cheering, he set forth his own beliefs regarding the profile of the members and their qualifications and the purposes it should serve, shedding light on his own idea of secular education. As reported by the periodicals at the time, Mill maintained the following:

We have got to determine, therefore, each for himself, by what criterion we are to judge who are they who desire education most, and understand it best. And we have only to consider what kind of persons are fit to be entrusted with the control of education, but also what kind of person are not fit.⁶

Indeed, the first claim to refuse a candidate from any support was his or her belief that education for the poor was enough. For Mill, education was “no such thing as too much”. Mill would not support candidates for the members of the Board who believed the education of the poor should be based on rote-learning. Children should leave school with such a high level of mental cultivation and understanding that “they will wish to read and be able to understand the best books of literature and information” (*The London Evening Star*, “Mr. Stuart Mill on Education” 3).

6 *The London Evening Star*, “Mr. Stuart Mill on Education” 3; *The Morning Post*, 10 November 1870 3.

The London School Board would then be established in December 1870. Jerry White defined it as “a new arm of local government”, “a triumph of democratic representation” and a “microcosm of metropolitan talent”. Prominent men and women would sit at the Board, namely T. H. Huxley, Edward Lyulph Stanley, Helen Taylor or Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (White 466).

State Provision of education for the poor represented an exception to Mill’s liberal predicaments as he opposed state interference in people’s liberty and in their conscience. However, in the long run, a better educated society, with improved quality education standards, would then have a positive impact on society and on its progress, which somehow meets his approach to utilitarianism. As regards moral education and religious instruction, Mill did not confuse both nor did he profess a life without religion or not morally driven. Individual and social progress also depended on those assumptions, as we shall explain next in more detail.

JOHN STUART MILL ON INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

Considered one of the topmost advocates of liberalism (Fawcett), Mill played a significant role in the development of the idea of individual liberty. As a utilitarian, Mill believed that individuality was of vital importance to the happiness of human beings and human progress. His empiricist approach to the discovery of truth led him to criticise the intuitive method that was fallaciously followed by some institutions and doctrines (Mill, *Autobiography* 233). Mill valued, first and foremost, individuality, ingenuity and diversity, individual spontaneity and liberty that would safeguard social progress. According to Haddock, Mill treated freedom “as a precious commodity, more likely to be lost through inadvertence than to be brought down by direct political action” (Haddock 175).

Despite his mental crisis in 1826, as a reaction to his utilitarian education, Mill nurtured deeply rooted moral values learnt from his father, James Mill, like justice, perseverance and the concern with the public good. Bentham’s utility principle – the greatest happiness of the greatest number – also influenced Mill in the early years of his life, giving shape and opinion to his existence (Mill, *Autobiography*). However, Mill’s qualitative hedonism differs from Bentham’s mere quantity principle in the different levels of human happiness. Bentham supported his utilitarian theory on the idea that there was a set of permanent goods or interests that could be quantified and measured, aiming at the greatest welfare of the population (Riley 15). Therefore, institutions existed to account for the growth of people’s happiness, based on the assumption that everyone’s sense of pleasure and self-interest was levelled up and conformed to the same type of feelings. In his reaction to Benthamite radicalism, Mill confessed that “in the melancholy winter of 1826–7”, “neither selfish nor unselfish pleasures were pleasures” to him. It proved then impossible to “create in a mind irretrievably analytic, fresh associations of pleasure with any of the objects of human desire.” (Mill, *Autobiography* 143). As such, according to Wendy Donner:

In his utilitarianism, happiness is the end that is realized and attained through the habitual exercise of the intellectual and moral virtues. His utilitarianism is more centered on character and ways of life than that of his predecessors and less exclusively focused on moral obligations. (Donner 254)

We understand why in 1859, in his work *On Liberty*, Mill is critical of the “tyranny of opinion”, “collective mediocrity” and “despotism of custom” (Mill, *On Liberty* 92–93) in opposition to the spirit of liberty, individuality and “plurality of paths” (Mill 97).

For Mill, the utility principle should be used only to justify the permanent interests of man as a progressive being (Mill, *On Liberty* 49). To understand Mill’s political theory we have to consider two sets of ideas which he tried to put into practice. On the one hand, sustained by the eighteenth-century classical liberalism and the *laissez-faire* theory, Mill defended the expansion and protection of individual liberty. On the other, his utilitarian belief made him endorse the actions of the state for the sake of individual progress. It is only based on this assumption that we somehow come to understand his controversial defence of a vigorous despotism regarding British colonial possessions. In this respect, the principle of non-interference was only justifiable amongst civilised countries.

The relations of the British with the native states of India was one of military despotism and conquest, going beyond a defensive position and imposing their authority over them.

Nonetheless, even if Mill considered the British “morally responsible for all evil it allows them to do”, the Indian states were “assured of the protection of a civilized power, and freed from the fear of internal rebellion or foreign conquest” (Mill, *A Few Words on Non-Intervention* 119). However, there is much to it, the goal of giving the colonised countries a “tolerable government” and reform the administration “in conformity to the advice of the British government” for their protection, undermined what Mill called “barbarous neighbours”. Even though it meets much of the utility principle, this position contradicts his individuality principle. Moreover, it puts at stake the idea of liberal toleration, as civilisation was divided into two: civilised countries, i.e. members of an equal community of nations, like Christian Europe, and barbarian peoples who were not able to reciprocate “ordinary international morality” because:

They cannot be depended on for observing any rules. Their minds are not capable of so great an effort (...). In the next place, nations which are still barbarous have not got beyond the period during which it is likely to be for their benefit that they should be conquered and held in subjection by foreigners. (Mill, “A Few Words on Non-Intervention” 118)

The worth of the state should, in the long run, be the worth of the individuals composing it, so Mill claimed in *On Liberty* (131). Human cultivation would thus foster the improvement of the individual mind.

Based on the maxims that “individuals are the best judges of their own interest” (Mill, *The Principles of Political Economy* (PPE) 960) and “the individual is not accountable to society for his action, in so far these concern the interests of no person but himself” (Mill, *On Liberty* 114), Mill objected to governmental intervention as it would endanger these guiding principles. Centralising the power into one governing body would be despotic, paternalistic and would most certainly drift towards uniformity of the mind. It would gradually destroy the “mental activity and progressiveness of the body itself” (*On Liberty* 129). Consequently, the diversity of opinion and individuality, which Mill so much appealed to, would be lost in the crowd.

Despite the combination of these two ideals, the utility principle became more important as the intervention principle could not be legitimised by classical liberalism (for example in the colonies). Furthermore, under the auspices of utilitarianism, Mill favoured a stationary state in what we believe to be a rather utopian, socialist and (maybe naïve) approach, however humanitarian (PPE 945). In an era of progress of capital and population, the idea of a stationary state of wealth and population was “dreaded and deprecated” by many, as Mill put forth. However, he did not regard it as totally undesirable. Instead, Mill supported the idea that once the progressive state reaches a very advanced level, what the country needs is a better distribution of wealth in which “no one is poor, no one desires to be richer, nor has any reason to fear being thrust back, by the efforts of others to push themselves forward” (PPE 774). Population should therefore be restrained to “enable mankind to obtain, in the greatest degree, all the advantages both of co-operation and of social intercourse” (PPE 776). Nonetheless, human improvement could not be coerced by this stationary condition of capital and population; moral and social progress should be nurtured at all times, seizing the benefits of science, industry and “just” institutions. Only when “the increase of the mankind shall be under the deliberate guidance of judicious foresight” (PPE 757) can humankind improve.

Basically, Mill kept his belief in the fact that prosperity, underpinned by private property and free trade, led to prosperity. However, according to Edmund Fawcett, “he did not confuse both” (96–97). Mill believed that social balance was needed in a time of mechanical inventions that have created deep social inequalities; for some [they] generated “a life of drudgery and imprisonment” and for others allowed them “to make fortunes and increased the comforts of the middle classes” (PPE 756–757).

To avoid tyranny, “desire and ambition of political domination” (PPE 944), *laissez-faire* should be the general practice. However, government intervention was only justified to increase human happiness and if “required by some great good” (945). Therefore, government interference in the areas of state education, regulation of labour hours, public provision for the poor, and disposal of colonial lands were some of Mill’s large exceptions to *laissez-faire*, in the name of the utility principle, as already mentioned above. Curiously, the maxim that individuals are the best judges of their own interest does not apply as regards the support of Poor Laws, vigilance over private charity associations and systematic arrangements provided by the state.

Mill strayed from classical liberalism in the sense that he went beyond the defence of private property rights or free trade. Mill introduces the idea of the self-regarding sphere where the individual should be the master of his own decisions. Every individual is entitled to have their individuality and must promote it to the maximum, as long as it does not harm others. Riley emphasizes this idea of Mill's utilitarian liberalism which makes it "distinct within the liberal family" (Riley 52).

Mill was a reformist, a democrat and radical in some of his political proposals, namely proportional representation and the defence of women's right to vote. His main goal was that everyone is entitled to ascertain and promote their own individuality. Consequently, the State had an important role in the sense that it was a regulating institution for the sake of the best interests of society. Nonetheless, the State should not need to interfere in family relations, in its "direct influence on human happiness" (*On Liberty* 123), but its intervention should be considered an obligation when despotism rules over women and children. Education should then be highly regarded as a means to the improvement of children and women.

Victorians believed in self-improvement and through education they could achieve it more effectively and pragmatically. That is why the Mechanics' Institutes, referred to above, accounted for a more useful way of acquiring the skills "the artisan classes" needed to thrive in an increasingly technological world (Graham 10). According to Wendy Donner, Mill's model of democracy should function as a "means of improvement, in promoting self-development", having thus greater reach than that of Bentham's and James Mill's "model of protective democracy" (Donner 251).

MILL IN DEFENCE OF LIBERAL EDUCATION

Mill's approach to liberalism was based on the assumption that education was also a means to the progress of the mind and hence to foster man's individuality. Therefore, diversity of education was much desirable for Mill. Elementary education should be implemented, but "a general State education" could also endanger people's ingenuity as it could mould them "to be exactly like one another" (*On Liberty* 124).

A believer in Enlightenment ideals, which catered for the defence of individual freedom, progress, toleration, and reason, only to name a few, Mill asserted the view that Education was the area which rendered the individuals "nearer to the perfection of their 'nature'". Mill defended the idea of liberal education, diverse and to "be considered by various minds and from a variety of points of view" (Mill, "Inaugural Address" 217). It was the father's duty to secure proper education for his child, as they were the best judges of their actions and had the moral obligation not only of "providing food for its body, but also instruction and training for its mind" (*On Liberty* 123). State education intervention was only deemed necessary as long as the state did not monopolise education. The parents should be given liberty "to obtain the education where and how they pleased" (*On Liberty* 123). State education should only exist under the condition of being one more experiment among many competing others "carried on for the stimulus, to keep the others up to a certain standard of excellence" (*On Liberty* 123). As such, the State should "make itself a central depository, and an active circulator and diffuser, of the experience resulting from many trials" (*On Liberty* 127).

Nonetheless, Mill considered education a "commodity ill-judged" by the Victorian people. Being born in Victorian times could mean either a "blessing or a curse" (*On Liberty* 124). If people fell under the latter category, the chances of being able to afford an education either at home or in any public school were pretty much unattainable. When the parents of "unfortunate offspring" "didn't fulfil this obligation, then the State ought to see it fulfilled at the charge", whenever possible "of the parent", so Mill argued (*On Liberty* 124). Mill believed the State must interfere to assist the ones who needed educational endowments, aiming, of course, at the mental and moral training and instruction for the improvement of the mind. Following his liberal predicaments, sustained on a democratic stance, Mill believed that "Education should not be provided gratuitously for the classes that could afford to pay" (Mill, "Educational Endowments" 210).

Education would then provide the bulk of the population with the necessary competences and tools that would allow them to improve, morally and professionally (Mill, "Inaugural Address"

218). Without education the weakest would be enslaved and crushed (Berlin, “John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life” 259).

However, Mill was a critic of the state of education in England, claiming for the imposition of quality in teaching. Teachers lacked knowledge and teaching methods to teach their pupils efficiently. Already in 1834, long before elementary education was established, Mill argued that the government was a means to an end, and it should be animated by a number of goals: “schools for all, without distinction of sect, and without imposing upon any sect the creed or observances of another (...) and finally, schools for teachers” (Mill, “Reform in education” 63). In fact, Mill showed his discontent regarding quality of the schools and of the teachers, as Arnold’s *Reports on elementary schools* would later confirm. Quality in education needed the urgent “amending hand of the government” (Mill, “Reform in education” 64).

Therefore, Mill considered the establishment of training schools for teachers of the utmost importance as there they would be taught the “art of teaching” (“Educational Endowments” 214). Educational grants should be strictly supervised so that money was not duly wasted. For example, schoolmasters should be paid according to the results obtained by their students. This represented a motivation for success and therefore quality in state schools. Pupils with the same degree of advancement should be taught together and the more sizeable classes schools had, the better. That way a larger number of students would benefit from an improved and substantive teaching. Once more, the utility principle is to be considered here, as it is corroborated in the following lines:

I would propose that all the educational endowments of the district, together with all other charitable endowments within the same local limits which are now applied, ostensibly or really, to the relief of the poor in modes which are useless and hurtful, should be brought into a single fund, to be devoted to maintain one or a few large schools in convenient situations, in preference to a greater number of small ones. (“Educational Endowments” 213)

Mill also favoured competitive examination and merit. The state should financially support the brightest pupils of elementary school, allowing them “to advance to a higher grade of education” (“Educational Endowments” 210). To prevent the monopoly of education and the despotism of opinion by the State, Mill defended public examinations to every child at an early age, under the hypothetical scenario of the existence of “a law rendering education compulsory” (*On Liberty* 124). Those examinations should be “confined to facts and positive science exclusively” so that the State was prevented “from exercising (...) an improper influence over opinion” (*On Liberty*, 125). A minimum of general knowledge was required. Mill also contends that examinations covering other “higher branches of knowledge” (*On Liberty* 125) should be voluntary. Religious instruction should also be voluntary and fee-paying, as already mentioned in part one.

Mill was also worried about the subjects that should be taught mainly at higher education level, of course only affordable to a minority. Mill pointed out that a university was not a place of professional education. It was instead a place to make “capable and cultivated human beings”. “Men are men before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants, or manufacturers; and if you make them capable and sensible men, they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers or physicians” (“Inaugural Address” 218). The universities would “bring the light of general culture to illuminate the technicalities of a special pursuit.” (“Inaugural Address” 218). Contrary to the Benthamite utilitarian doctrine, Mill believed the arts and literature should also have a place in liberal education aiming at “the improvement of the individual mind” and at “the strengthening, exalting, purifying, and beautifying of our common nature” (Mill, “Inaugural Address” 220). Feelings were as important as rationality in the educational process. As Donner contends: “the process of moral development, equally central in childhood education, teaches children to feel sympathetic connection with others and take pleasure in their happiness” (Donner 256).

Both the ancient languages and the modern sciences and arts should be part of the university curricula. In fact, the introduction of science into the educational programme coincided with the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species* in 1859 leaving open ground for an acute debate between, on the one hand, classical scholars, defenders of liberal education, and, on the other, scientific educators in the decades that followed. Matthew Arnold, for example, even though a defender of literature, did not shun science from the curriculum as it was part

of culture (Arnold, “Literature and Science”). He was mainly concerned about the possibility of science straying from the path of the humanities. With a different viewpoint, T. H. Huxley criticised the restrictive outlook of the curriculum based only on the Classics, in his lecture “Science and Culture” delivered in 1880.⁷

In his inaugural address delivered to the University of St. Andrews in 1867, Mill also gave attention to this issue, anticipating the most acute discussion of the following decades. Mill defended that a good education must include literature and science. On the one hand, literature would provide scientific men with “poetic feeling and artistic cultivation” (“Inaugural Address” 221). On the other, Mill believed education was not an abstract thing, and science also shaped knowledge. Scientific education (i.e. factual information) foresees the knowledge of the laws of the world that govern us and allow us to account for “the proper study of mankind” (“Inaugural Address” 241). Observation, experiment and reasoning – Enlightenment legacies – should be roads to be trekked in the quest for truth and knowledge. However, human nature and human predispositions are “infinitely various, indefinitely modifiable by art or accident (...) seldom capable of being isolated observed separately.” (“Inaugural Address” 241) Scientific education, with particular emphasis on physiology, introduces the individual to the understanding of conceptions that are part of the moral and social sciences and allows him to realise common facts of history and social life. Mill gives the example of physiology, as being “the most serviceable of subjects” (241) regarding the knowledge of man and his idiosyncrasies because it helps to explain the evolution of man (“Inaugural Address” 241–242). Other subjects were also worthy of mention such as Psychology or the Philosophy of the mind which study “the laws of human nature”.

Scientific education represents a means to intellectual development and therefore to a liberal conception of education. Nonetheless, Mill does not include the study of these subjects in general education “when we embark upon the sea of metaphysics, (...) and enquire”, arguing that those who do not want to devote to such intellectual enterprise should not “employ much time in attempting to get to the bottom of these questions.” (243) Still, it is “part of liberal education” to become aware of the existence of such speculations and controversies, of open, unresolved questions that result from human inquiries. The metaphysical study of mankind is done by the thinkers who “stand forth as thinkers above the multitude” (“Inaugural Address” 243).

As such, education for Mill went beyond the mere instructional approach to provide the necessary tools to succeed in an increasingly competing world. His liberal conception of education included continual enforcement of intellectual knowledge, substantiated by morality and limitless individual liberty, which should be sought after by the individual and not by the institutions. The latter were simply a means of facilitating the whole process. As Zakaras stated: “Part of the lesson of *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women* is that the success of a democracy depends heavily on the agency of ordinary citizens” (Zakaras 219). Individuals should thus strive for mental and moral improvement. When this revealed difficult, Mill contended that the state should interfere with its supervisory machinery in order to assure more social justice and equal education opportunities.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Education is normally associated with progress and an important vehicle for the dissemination of political, social and even religious ideas but it has not always been a social and political concern shared both by the states and by the society. Despite the countless number of changes, popular education in Britain has faced many obstacles and adaptations over the last two centuries. Focusing our study on the state of education in England during the nineteenth century, and on some specific reform events and the acts resulting from them, we realise that setting the foundations of the national state education in England has been a complex and controversial process.

The state’s moves to tackle real and identified problems related to the instruction of the less privileged only became more effective in the context of other favourable and prompting conditions that made that intervention possible. Political reform aiming at suffrage extension and regulation, and improvement of the working and living conditions of poor people, hastened

⁷ Thomas H. Huxley. “Science and Culture”. 1880. Electronic edition by by Ian Lancashire. Available at <http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~ian/huxley1.htm>

the need for change and adaptation to a new social life, to new philosophical approaches to life and a new moral ethos that the Victorians had created. The idea of private charity and self-help was part of this moral code. It was a duty to help the underprivileged members of society.

There is a common belief (Wardle 18) that what characterises the nineteenth century is the gradual transition from *laissez-faire* and individualism into collectivism. However, in our viewpoint, the transition from a *laissez-faire* approach to a more collectivist liberal stance that took shape in the late nineteenth century should not be seen in radical terms. Victorians would never abandon their faith in self-help, private charity, and local enterprise. Poverty was a serious concern that would not be eradicated through legislation, so they believed. Nonetheless, Mill, just like Bentham, upheld the belief in the useful and practical value of the law in the promotion of the general welfare. From that perspective, we understand Mill's support of the state's interference in education as this needed to be improved and regulated. With the ultimate aim of cultivating people's minds, Mill favoured the creation of a national state education system visible in his work developed in the London School Board, for example.

With the benefit of hindsight, we dare say that Mill was a man ahead of his time, as he set forth what at the time were considered radical solutions to the problems of his days, namely women's rights to vote, the defence of proportional representation or state-supported elementary education. Mill threw down the gauntlet of parliamentary representation and education, never abandoning his liberal principles. Like Arnold and other liberal thinkers, Mill was also critical of rote learning which coerced critical thinking and annulled the improvement of the mind and mental education. Like many liberals, he was neither unable to become indifferent to the social injustice of Victorian society nor was he oblivious of the mechanical progress and social and economic ambitions of the Victorian era.

The liberal education he professed was much in line with his liberal predicaments. The road to happiness was the one that combined both rational and utilitarian conceptions of education and life, though adding an emotional drive to it, assumption that distanced him from Bentham's idea of happiness. That is why Mill valued the integration of both the humanities and sciences in the curriculum of schools and universities. However, Mill's utilitarian approach to human (intellectual and moral) development rested on a fallacious principle, the idea that human perfection could be attained. This theory would later be challenged by other liberals, such as Isaiah Berlin, who acknowledged the flawed feature of human nature by recalling the Kantian's statement: "the crooked timber of humanity" (Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal" 19).

To conclude, the many issues and solutions to the social and educational problems that Mill pointed out still generally bear some resemblance to the present condition of education in democratic countries. The balance between state control over education and the possibility of choice and of being the best judge of one's actions continue to be acutely and widely debated nowadays. Paying tribute to Mill, education was and is a pre-condition for the elevation of humankind.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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