



# CIVILIZATION: GUIZOT AND MILL

*Posted on July 1, 2020 by Jacob Duggan*



## Introduction

At the turn of the nineteenth-century, political thought underwent a revolution of its own. The purpose of this being not only to make sense of the obscenities that had so recently occurred in France and the colonies, but also to plan accordingly for the new order of the day.

The guise of the new order may result from intentional, consciously construed machinations, otherwise, it manifests spontaneously and by default. Imperial rule was probably most fit for antique societies one-tenth, or even one-twentieth the population size of contemporary Europe, who had a firm establishment of hierarchy and values, the basis of which was mainly religious.

But from the death of Christ to 1820, population estimates suggest a leap from 34 to 224 million in Europe's population, while between 1820 and today that number has more than tripled; "hierarchy" and consequently "privileged society" are today met with disgust, and any position which seeks to reintroduce them is perceived as a regression to the archaic.

Following the revolutions of the late eighteenth-century, we needed to contextualize the extreme disorder present in western society, and in so doing, our best thinkers were required promptly to answer what type of order is fit and necessary for our day—given that monarchy and empire were increasingly held to be outdated orders of "yesterday."

Said revolution in thought, though accompanied by others of differing concerns, began with [François Guizot](#). Being, as John Stuart Mill states, the first to develop a philosophy of history, and that so soon before he would do the same, Guizot is ultimately the prime mover of this intellectual movement, to whom we must accredit all attempts to relate general histories, and this in order to approach the problem of their progression.

By the time of Guizot's days of industry, specific histories had been written *ad nauseam* since as early as [Herodotus](#), each focusing on some particular innovation or calamity, sequences of wars or natural crises. Never did we receive a synopsis of an age, a detailed iteration and interpretation of a phase in humanity's development that was not confined to a mere decade or century.

The following essay will detail specifically the interpretations of Europe's general history arrived at by both Guizot and Mill. Their methods of historical analysis are quite different: Guizot presented his ideas through spoken presentation, Mill in essay format; Guizot took greater care to enumerate a plethora of specific historical facts, while Mill took the liberty of using a select few historical facts to substantiate his thorough, thoughtful critiques, typically of western principles.

The two converge on the need for human progress, not its necessity. We will see, on the one hand, that progress is conditional, and can only occur when a super-natural corrective and clear system of values are present in a culture; on the other, we see that the human tendency to progress is perfectly natural and innate, that insofar as healthy society is contingent upon definite values, these values are a product of nature and therefore undergo their own evolution. Like Emperor Constantine, Guizot thought Christianity the prime vehicle for Europe's civilization, only he was well aware of its vulnerability against an Enlightened age. Departure from the revealed religion seemed to Mill an accomplishment, and he considered any deterioration of culture as a result of this to be temporary, a bridge to a new height of civilization.

The discordancy between the two thinkers seems to illustrate perfectly an intellectual debate seen more and more frequently: naturalistic determinism versus the super-natural free-will, the idea of necessity versus that of right and wrong, the ingenuity of living cells versus the mercy of God. This debate, of course, is not the focus of either Mill or Guizot, but is rather revealed to the reader today who explores their conceptions of civilization.

In other words, it was not in the agenda of Guizot to assert the need for Christianity so that human progress may occur, nor was it Mill's mission to assert that civilization is a purely biological process: however, Guizot's partiality toward divine law, and Mill's toward the laws of nature must be considered if we are to understand their ideas of human progress, for they suggest the personalities from which these ideas emerged, and are thus precursors to the ideas themselves.

### **Guizot's Portrayal Of Post-Rome European History**

The first and most indispensable similarity between Guizot and Mill, their philosophies of history, is the use of the word civilization. To them, it is verb, not noun—it is a coming together of once disparate and opposed phenomena: civilization, to them, is an active principle of social unification, and of man's increasing faculties.

Mill's criterion for civilization leans much more strongly toward unity, whether he call it "combination" or "cooperation," at the expense of the high-mindedness of humanity, though he relinquishes culture not without due depression. Guizot, though he, too, emphasizes the essentiality of mass cohesion in the idea of civilization, rather gives the Providential unfolding of man's "godlike qualities" a central position in his thought. In this regard, but not only in this regard, Guizot is more aristocratic than Mill, who never tires of denouncing the coteries.

In his *General History of Civilization in Modern Europe*, Guizot takes on the overtly complicated task of detailing the history of roughly 1,300 years over the course of fourteen lectures. In so doing, more or less insuperably, he ventures to illustrate his general thesis about civilization that is provided at the outset: "It seems to me that the first idea comprised in the word civilization... is the notion of progress, of development. It calls up within us the notion of a people advancing, of a people in a course of improvement and amelioration."

With this, Guizot may chronicle the sequence of Modern Europe, painting, as it were, precisely this image for the listener. Modern Europe of course means Post-Ancient-Greece and Post-Roman-Empire, after Athens had flown with Icarus too near the sun, and Rome in its unguarded perplexity had been conquered by Germanic barbarians. The individualism of the Goths was for a time *contra humanitas*, rude and uncreative, egoistic and dimly subject to rules. How sorrowful this condition, in contrast to the melodic combination evidenced in the Greeks' Apollonian-Dionysian aesthetics, followed by their incisive dialecticians and evocative orators.

Paying mind to this, we wonder how it is that personality climbed so high in the Grecian climate centuries before Rome's decline, and yet stooped so low to propel the Medieval epoch? Does not this transition (i.e. decadence) prove civilization to be at least partially a process of regression? Guizot, however, makes the claim that this barbarity was the kernel, the hideous and uncertain precursor to Modern Europe, to which we are indebted for the characteristic that makes it worthwhile and great.

It was the stubbornness of the Germans, their unwillingness to succumb to any one ruling system, that brought variety to Western Civilization. The Roman nobility and the Christian Church nurtured the virtue of submissiveness in the citizenry prior to this stage, and while remnants of Romish rule remained, it is here alongside an altogether new virtue in its infancy, namely independence:

"Still, notwithstanding this alloy of brutal and stupid selfishness, there is, if we look more profoundly into

the matter, something of a noble and moral character, in this taste for independence... It is the pleasure of feeling oneself a man; the sentiment of personality; of human spontaneity in its unrestricted development: "It was the rude barbarians of Germany who introduced this sentiment of personal independence, this love of individual liberty, into European civilization; it was unknown among the Romans, it was unknown in the Christian Church, it was unknown in nearly all the civilizations of antiquity."

By this, Guizot means strictly "political," or relational liberty. One was no longer bound to any absolute dominion, and thus Europe broke off from theocratic and municipal monism into a political pluralism, free of any singular ruling power. All was broken up, divided, though the people were not altogether unconscious; the verbal civilization process could, and in fact did prevail in this state of confused barbarism. United in spirituality, guided by their one and only God, the barbarians coalesced, the once opposed men were reconciled and christened by a common order.

The libertine and the autocratic, the gentle and the severe, seem to have shared the common need for religious communion. The assimilation and development of European Civilization, therefore, is to be regarded as the accomplishment of the Christian Church after the fall of Rome, if only she required time to gain her own independence without the Empire. This blending of religious conformity and temperamental diversity, the one affording stability and the other novelty, has, as Guizot would have it, given us a Europe that Providentially reaches for "eternal truth... [which] moves in the way God has prescribed."

So it was, that as the various temporal powers attained to sovereignty—the boorish stagnancy of feudalism, the depraved misapplication of Christianity in worldly totalitarianism, the various monarchies throughout the Medieval period—Christian feeling meanwhile eventuated the development of western man's consciousness, growing more refined across time, compensating for the tragic descent into unconsciousness which finalized Ancient Europe.

To understand Guizot's use of the term civilization, one must be familiar with Providence, as he uses these words more or less interchangeably. Rather than impose a violent Grecian fate onto civilization, rendering Europe a victim of its own **ἁμαρτία** (*hamartia*), blinded by its own hand for ignoring the oracle, Guizot, being a Christian, infuses fate with compassion and intent, with the freedom to alter the future for better or worse; accordingly, God in his mercy gives fullness of life to man if he will but use his gift of freedom for faith and baptism, all while delimiting those ungodly uses of freedom indicated in

the Bible. In other words, our unfolding is not set in stone, there is no predestined ruin of man: so long as a people has a sincere love for God in its heart, the Almighty will draw the minds and spirits of His children closer to Heaven.

With this deistic precedent, Guizot has about as firm a conception of the civilizational process as can be posited: As an integral component of Western Civilization, Christianity brings mankind, over the course of time, to ever higher states of culture, "nearer to God," so to speak. The atonement achievable by aid of Christianity alone can ameliorate our eschatology (i.e. to what end civilization is directed, hellish or heavenly).

### **Mill's Civilization Of Reason And Necessity**

The God and the freedom of civilization are rather nonexistent in Mill's adaption. The process seems to Mill much more fated, automatic, inevitable, deterministic. Nonetheless, Mill is a progressivist; he sees the improvement and progression of mankind as self-evident, even as necessary (and this is a crucial point on which he and Guizot are radically opposed). Guizot would probably say that civilization never had to develop towards unity and perfection, but that either man in his freedom could have diverted from the will of God, or aligned with it as has generally been done, which is evidenced by civilization's continuation and upward progression.

Mill, on the other hand, abides by a naturalistic interpretation of human development: human nature generated Christianity to the effect of self-moralization, and once moralized, humanity began to transcend the Christian doctrine, owing to its increase in "intelligence" and "information."

Over the years, more materials became available to man from which knowledge and wisdom could be extracted, all while "discussion" gained a prominence that former stages of civilization either forbade or were otherwise unequipped for.

In this view, a revealed religion is ultimately a testament to the ingenuity of Nature, which will cause mankind to delude itself if delusion is requisite for the first stages of progress; as for the following stages, it becomes a sign of regression, and therefore anti-natural to cling to the ideals of generations past, who were not as knowledgeable or civilized as we.

Mill himself, as can be safely expected of the Père du Libéralisme, is at bottom irreligious, and in brief moments expressly anti-Christian. His presumption consists in the general supremacy of the Good over the Evil in man—in secular terms, the better over the worse—and this he attributes to the ratio de homo sapiens.

Not as spirit does man ascend to new heights of culture, but as a strange and somehow wise animal, predisposed to greater communication and conduct because Nature's intelligence recognizes a sort of necessity in so doing.

Adhering to the voice of Nature, Mill [makes it his mission](#) to raise man's intelligence, that all may supersede the desires and impulses through conscious self-regulation: "There is not one of the passions which by a well-regulated education may not be converted into an auxiliary of the moral principle; there is not one of the passions which may not be as fully and much more permanently gratified, by a course of virtuous conduct than by vice."

If Mill were forced to regard anything as super-natural, a corrective to the coercive forces of nature, it would be education. Without it, he recognizes man's innate, animalistic and immoral tendency toward disorder; but that ratio has a presence at all, is enough for him to conclude that, through the ages, man is prone to overcome his destructive dynamism in favor of common civility, to become more reasonable through education because nature gave us reason enough to progress, and to refuse education would be unreasonable.

It should be noted that Mill does not consider the most intelligent to be, for that reason, the most moral; only that those who are morally educated, no matter their intellectual fortitude, are better suited for [Benthamitic](#) actions of the "greatest good for the greatest number."

Though Mill was confident in man's capacity for reason, there are to be found in his essays numerous slights against upperclassmen for their cowardice, intellectual laziness, and unreason in the use of authority. To Mill, reason equalizes men, but it can also cause the lower-class to usurp the upper-class: this is what he refers to as the "transition stage" of civilization.

The "natural stage," rather, is when those generally fittest to rule do so, while in the transition stage, the ruled by and large feel themselves better equipped to rule than those who do. A confusion in the

morality and hierarchical order of a people occurs until a *nouveau* normal is established, whereby the unfit are divorced from ruling power and the new fittest are given that power.

That Mill devised these stages of history points to the necessity embedded in his idea of civilization, something we do not find in Guizot.

### **A Point of Agreement: The Dawn Of Public Opinion**

Guizot never enters thoroughly into the subject of education throughout his lecture series. He may mention it in passing, but his focus is shifted primarily toward Europe's growing diversity, the coexistence of diverse perspectives without the bloodshed that primitives would treat alien sentiments with. One issue, however, where Mill and Guizot plainly converge, is the arrival of mass society in Modernity, and the consequent sovereignty of a new despot, invisible and all-encompassing: public opinion, or *opinion publique*.

"It must have been observed by all that there exists a power which no law can comprise or suppress, and which, in times of need, goes even further than institutions. Call it the spirit of the age, public intelligence, opinion, or what you will, you cannot doubt its existence. In France, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this public opinion was more powerful than at any other epoch; and, though it was deprived of the legal means of acting upon the government, yet it acted indirectly, by the force of ideas common to the governing and the governed, by the absolute necessity under which the governing found themselves of attending to the opinions of the governed."

Here is Mill's description: "The triumph of democracy, or, in other words, of the government of public opinion, does not depend upon the opinion of any individual or set of individuals that it ought to triumph, but upon the natural laws of the progress of wealth, upon the diffusion of reading, and the increase of the facilities of human intercourse... He must be a poor politician who does not know, that whatever is the growing power in society will force its way into the government, by means fair or foul... Nor, if the institutions which impede the progress of democracy could be by any miracle preserved, could even they do more than render that progress a little slower. Were the Constitution of Great Britain to remain henceforth unaltered, we are not less under the dominion, becoming every day more irresistible, of public opinion."



Note that the excerpt from Mill has by no means been cherry-picked. Indeed, he uses the phrase “public opinion” exhaustively and always under the same connotation of irresistibility (a characterization used by both Guizot and Tocqueville). This should be borne in mind as we continue to analyze the likeness of the two authors' notions of civilization.

Mill, of course, sees the dawn of public opinion, the rule of the demos, as in accordance with the “natural laws of progress,” and so, rather than fight an unbeatable beast, treats it with the care of a passing illness—taming, as it were, the immature, uncanny and unruly democracy of his day. Though he thought it grotesque, we find no indication that he believed popular rule to be temporary; he knew it to be an unprecedented reality, and should it be a lasting one as well, he wished it to be minimally ignorant. T

o ennoble democracy, he sought to awaken the age to its transitional existence (i.e. to its turbulent, temporary condition that must eventually make way for a new order and normalcy). Always, J.S. Mill is after the general education of the people, not unlike the education given him by James Mill, in order that the *demos* might better combine and desist from tyranny. Opinion *publique et sa force irresistible* seemed only to be gaining prominence; contrary to Tocqueville, for Mill, we can only infer that public opinion marks the hideous beginning of a new order, a seed that will not flourish without the sun and water of education.

Guizot, on the other hand, sees in the demos a perversity that men from former ages would look upon with disgust—for this, we shall see, he considered a religious solution the only able remedy. He says this shortly after the French Revolution, during lecture fourteen. Nevertheless, he sees superciliousness in popular authority, a disrespect for laws and institutions that individuals or tribes could never sustain, for which smaller social uproars would soon be extinguished, but that sizable populaces can, by their sheer number, act upon with greater ease and success.

An increasing population, brought by the correspondence between developing free cities and human reproduction, gave peoples from approximately the seventeenth-century onward a sensation of collective power, culminating in 1789, when the French citizenry could not be dissuaded from its conquest of the Absolutes.

### **Bridging the Perspectives: From Guizot's History to the Age of Public Opinion**

To synthesize what has been said hitherto, let us contrast the beginning and endpoints of this Modern process of civilization. In the beginning, the Germanic individualism was invoked to show not merely its crudity, but what Guizot rightly claimed to be the origin of what may be Modern Europe's greatest virtue: the promotion of individuality.

This was the state of Europe, and particularly Rome after the fall of the Empire in 476. Following the decline of imperial and monarchical rule, various systems were implemented, each district severally trying its own governmental configuration: one district might be municipal, another democratic, others theocratic, and so on.

No one system had yet proved itself ultimus, peoples were dispersed into their own distinct sectors, comprising a collection of independent nations rather than a grand, unitary Europe. This came at the close of the Medieval epoch with the rise of free cities, industry, and commerce. Here we see the blending and unification of the people, densely packed as one collective body, no longer fragmented such as they were in the pre-Modern period.

This amalgamation of the people, as thinking men ponder timorously, marks a revolution in human existence itself: the Germanic individualism is annihilated, the voices of the few become inaudible over that of the crowd. Individuality had crossed its summit, the godlike artfulness of, say, the Renaissance painters, impressive as it was, gave way to excessive conformity, group activity and mass production.

The craftsman now appears senseless and wasteful, for, through combination and cooperation with people and technology, more products can be generated at a far faster rate. The industry of the individual is now only secondarily in question (if it is even in question). It is his participation in group industry that dictates his worth.

Whether masses can excel, as individuals sometimes do, remains to be seen. Following the birth of mass society, infantile barbarism of the populace might appear in nationalism, though really it could unite under anything at all that has seized common feeling. Always it subdues the one and the few, in a tremendous way shaping the character even of personal thought, and certainly of interpersonal communication. Both authors notice the uprise of public opinion, and anybody today who seeks to understand the "spirit of the age" cannot dispense with their insight.

Collective identity, the widespread combination of individuals, and the popular rule contingent upon these are the latest developments in the process of civilization. Nobody knows whether a people can anymore achieve the grandeur of the gods, as the Athenians had done so long ago; there, men had the will and climate to create against the highest creations; nowadays, there is little creation worthy of mention and the voice of the western individual has been muzzled.

Guizot says nothing of the growing insignificance of the individual, whereas Mill details this only too acutely. For example: "The most remarkable of those consequences of advancing civilization, which the state of the world is now forcing upon the attention of thinking minds, is this: that power passes more and more from individuals, and small knots of individuals, to masses: that the importance of the masses becomes constantly greater, that of individuals less."

Nor does he attempt to prognosticate the ensuing ebbs and flows of civilization. Where Guizot ends is precisely where Mill begins; Guizot gives to us a retrospective image of a societal metamorphosis, leaving off at the French Revolution. Making known the heroism of a misunderstood King [Louis XIV](#), who was an international success and a template for how to fortify a nation, he speaks about the paradoxical, perplexing spirit of the Revolution: the victory in its yearning for the free intellect, the tragic **ἁμαρτία** (*hamartia*) of its "boldness." He had neither the time nor the gall to foretell any coming developments. Mill, on the other hand, had all of the leisure and temerity necessary to generate a comprehensive philosophy of history, supportable with reference to the past and easily imposable onto the future.

### **More On Mass Society And The Authors' Perspectives**

Mill's essay entitled, "[Civilization](#)" (1836) shows us the amalgamating elements in this blossoming *fructus*; as opposed to his uncivilized predecessors, modern man combines and cooperates with his fellows. The Germanic selfishness which so readily values itself over others transforms into a symbiotic altruism: "I help you, you help me," replaces, "you do your thing, I'll do mine."

Mill posits that as men came into closer proximity with one another, they discovered that far more can be accomplished, to everyone's benefit, if we band together and delegate specific tasks to specific people. A house can be cleaned much more quickly if one person is assigned to each floor simultaneously, than if one man alone were responsible for every floor. (But is speed conducive to art)?

Modernity, then, is marked by the relinquishment of the potentially crude, potentially artistic individual will, allowing for the development of handy, albeit less meticulous group-wills. The visions of the sculptor and the musings of the poet are ever less likely to occur; indeed, are squashed by the indomitable collective will which continues to strengthen.

The Franco-English wars, of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the nationalism that it cultivated in France, exemplify the growing ensemble of man; the Crusades above all reveal the newly arrived societal collaboration, here assembled in the name of a common heavenly reward. Combination and cooperation, it would seem, were first provoked by war: when civilization reached this stage—where, rather than demonize his neighbor, man would consider him, as neighbor, also an ally—this connection intensified the moment that each had a common enemy in view. War has always brought patriotism, which is a wholly codependent phenomenon; it cannot exist without a national identity, the principles that constitute it, or outsiders and enemies.

This congealment of the individual and collective-will is integral to Mill's theory; in Guizot's *General History*, group correspondence is everywhere invoked, but we find nothing of the horror-show whereby the individual man becomes an instrument of the collective, which Mill unambiguously provides.

If we should analogize their fundamental messages, our best comparison is this: on the one hand, Guizot posits that civilization is the sequence containing "the progress of society" and "the progress of individuals," while Mill affects a similar image: his civilization points to increasing "combination" and "cooperation," along with increasing "knowledge" and "discussion." On both counts, we are led to the same understanding: civilization is the innovation of what is internal and external to the existing man. If Mill consciously built off of Guizot's idea of progress, we ought to applaud him for his subtle, almost undetectable alteration of terminology.

There is, however, a fundamental disagreement between them on the conditions of man's inner and outer development. Guizot deems individual and societal progress basically combined and inseparable: the external conditions of man could never improve without a reciprocal change of the inner man and vice versa.

Mill, however, has no problem with the idea that progress could occur within a people without men severally and positively becoming greater persons. To show this, he has littered many an essay with bitter remarks about the uneducated—the needlessly uneducated—and has devoted entire essays to

this subject. We cannot fail to share a certain distaste for the lazy-minded, would-be and could-be intellects, and especially those untrained in common sense. Mill [protested](#) against speed-readers and careless-writers. Like Thoreau, he detested mainstream media, and therefore anyone who had no sentiment to speak of other than those offered by "Harper & Brothers" and "Redding & Co."

In passing, let us attest to the fact that Mill picked up on the internal-external distinction inherent in civilization during his reading of Guizot; but what is more important is the clash between the authors' principles, made apparent by the loving hostility of Mill's pen. (NB: Mill revered Guizot for his contribution of general history; he despised him for his later affiliation with the [July Monarchy](#)).

That clash is this: between Combination and Christianity; or rather, between the postulate that the two have a synergy which renders their attachment superior to their detachment, and the conflicting postulate that Combination need not the crutch of Christianity in order to occur, however true it may be that the latter served an important anthropological function for archaic man, and thus for his posterity as well. Guizot sides with the first position—that "an intellectual union is the only true society"—and Mill with the second, perhaps out of an especial fondness for the Germanic individualism.

### **Does Civilization Need God?**

Despite Guizot's appetite for variety in character, there is a certain issue regarding which he sees a need for homogeneity. Mill, conversely, loves diversity unconditionally, conceding no ground to any antiquae fidei as an incontrovertible, healthy conviction fitted for all men. Simply put, Guizot sees Christianity as the foundation, the meeting ground by virtue of which all classes and temperaments of men may not only cooperate, but also connect with one another: civilization only occurs when a population can agree on this, as the barbarians slowly but surely did.

Mill, in his ardent will to truth, refuses to accept this notion, considering the traditional dogma to be simply an accessory to civilization, even a valuable one, but by no means a condition of it; it should not be considered absolutely true, and even less should the individual be compelled to lay his soul into the arms of religious ideology against his will.

Insofar as Guizot was idolized by Mill for being the first to attempt a general history of Europe, we also find Mill tense and regretful on his behalf. As aforesaid, Guizot's alliance with Louis Philippe found no

support from Mill, but rather outspoken hostility; the basis of his frustration is of course to be explained by their politics. This does not explain Mill's regret, however. For all of Guizot's industry, his innovation of philosophy and exacting historical research, Mill could not deceive himself concerning what he considered to be definite cognitive errors in Guizot, whose roots are to be found in his faulty convictions.

The following quotation is Guizot's, though it has been included by Mill in his [essay](#), "Guizot's Lectures on European Civilization." The quote below the following is Mill's response to Guizot, who says: "[Guizot]: 'Community of sentiment, community of belief—whatsoever the sentiment or belief may be—constitute the basis of a social state. It is only upon the truth, or what men conceive to be the truth, that they can ground a society. It has been truly said that there is no society but between minds, in other words, that an intellectual union is the only true society, and the basis of all others; or, what is the same thing, men cannot act together unless they have a clearly understood end in view; and they cannot live together unless they all partake of one and the same feeling, arising from one or more facts, so that the single fact, or if there be many, each of them, may be agreed upon as truth by all. As there is but one universal truth, so a society which has that truth for its basis must be one. There cannot be two spiritual societies. This is the abstract notion of the Church Unity. But how can men's minds be united in the truth, unless they themselves recognize it as truth? This was sadly overlooked by Christians at all times.'"

Religious faith displays unique powers when it comes to orienting the individual's actions and perceptions. There is a reason that the "conversion experience" is widely discussed, as [William James](#) had done in [\*The Varieties of Religious Experience\*](#).

The person before and after conversion are not the same; the after-person, it is commonly reported, achieves feelings of clarity and wholeness: before, one was a stranger in an arbitrary, chance universe, knowing not what this life is about, where it comes from or where it leads, and so life itself was a senseless burden.

Following conversion, however, order and love are restored, there are now definite right and wrong ways of thinking and acting, there is a definite goal (i.e. Heaven) and one has all his life to work toward it. Suffering is no longer unnecessary, but explainable by God's will, full trust and devotion to which make holy.

For all of the arguments against religion being too dogmatic and anti-intellectual, Guizot knew, like

James, that the religious faith carries vast implications for the lived experience of individuals, which consequently affects their culture as well: according to Guizot, when the people of a nation share devotion to "one universal truth," then character, camaraderie, and love are afforded that nation.

Here is Mill's response to Guizot from the same essay: "Were it not for a few of the concluding lines, the passage just quoted might be supposed to be from the pen of the most mystical and puzzle-headed divine on this side of the Channel. What could M. Guizot mean by the assertion that 'an intellectual union is the only true society'; that 'men cannot live together unless they all partake of one and the same feeling, arising from one or more facts, so that the single fact, or if there be many, each of them may be agreed upon as truth by all?' Of what facts does he assert all this? Are they physical, political, or historical facts? Does he maintain the notion of the Church of Rome, and indeed of the Protestant churches which still cherish an essential part of its spirit—the notion that Christianity, as an historic belief, is the basis of true society? Does he forget the testimony of universal history to the fact that the social nature of man will avail itself of the merest trifles to form and maintain associations for power and defense?... He complains that 'in almost all Protestant countries there is something wanting—something imperfect in the organization of the intellectual society, so that the regular action of the established and ancient opinions is impeded. The rights of tradition have not been reconciled with those of liberty.' What, in the name of wonder, are the Rights of Tradition? How is the regular action of established and ancient opinions to be encouraged by any organization, without encouraging the mischievous activity of established errors? Such indeed are the contradictory wishes of men who see the truth, but cannot make it part and parcel of their souls. This is what some men call moderation—namely, the assertion of a principle, combined with practical views and conduct in direct opposition to it... M. Guizot's inconsistencies, admiring his works as we do, raise more of regret than anger in our heart."

The issues of Christianity's incontrovertibility, as well as its indispensability in the western Ethos, have proved enigmatic in the age of skepticism. Guizot, as we have established, holds Christianity to be integral to western culture and civilization, and thus not to be abrogated. Mill asserts, with a liberty of conscience even Guizot might deny, that truth prevails independently of Christianity; Truth does not need to be rooted in a theological fairytale, and society may prosper without an absolute, common truth, in an existence void of traditional mythology, doctrine, and custom. In lieu of the truthfulness hailed by religious believers, Mill offers greater optimism with regard to personal honesty, the free development of the individual with as little intervention as circumstance allows.

To understand Mill's frustration with the Christian influence, we must consider what ordinarily

characterizes the believer: a certain parlance is used, attire maybe more formal, particular habits and abstentions, a manner of checking thought from its excesses, a shared set of values with fellow Christians, and so on. The homogenizing function of Christianity causes in Mill, as it does in many a Liberal under his wing, a frustration which proceeds from the observation of what appears to be mental enslavement.

The specific values, appearances, norms; the sort of common-personality, shared aesthetic and mode of conduct that issue from an esteemed tradition anger the Liberal immensely, who recognizes in and of himself a sort of innocence which doctrinal institutions—the case in point being Christianity—can only serve to corrupt. Thus where Mill sees mental enslavement of the individual and popular mind, Guizot sees Love, Freedom, and Truth Itself.

Again, the philosophers are fighting an extant battle: the *a priori* Christian Truth versus the *a posteriori*, empirical approach of science. Guizot's Truth is concentrated before phenomena, while Mill's places greater trust in what is bound by space and time.

The divide between the Christian and the scientific mindset has serious implications for the trajectory of civilization: how do these opposing postures toward Truth affect Combination and Cooperation? Does a people combine and cooperate more readily with or without the commonly assumed truthfulness of the Gospels? Is the spirit of man shackled and stunted by the *antiquae fidei*, or is it rather indebted to this for the heights it has attained, and for those it has yet to reach?

Guizot's Christian-Combination possesses a logic which Mill's more plain-Combination lacks; to keep from forming a tradition, Mill refrains from establishing what it is that a people combines under, for he cannot be sure himself. He does not promulgate civilization "in the name of"—only civilization.

In contradistinction, Guizot is unafraid to say that it is in the service of God that people join together and help one another to live fully, that the Father who gave us life calls for our return to Him, which means keeping the Good in heart and abolishing the Evil wherever it stands, working with men rather than against them, sacrificing what is base and overly selfish in oneself to serve a greater truth than is accessible to the unchecked individual.

A case could be made that religion is the only factor that separates Mill's and Guizot's theses about



civilization. Most everything is in agreement—the internal-external progress of the existing man is kept in both of their formulations. The capacity of the Church and Christianity for civilization at the outset (immediately following the fall of Rome) is presented by both philosophers, but at a certain “stage of development,” Mill thinks it well to rid of the training wheels. After *de omnibus dubitandum* had been declared, when Socratic questioning and scientism had arrested the Zeitgeist, the tendency to remain skeptical about religious faiths became ever commoner, hence Mill’s antipathy toward pre-rational assertions and assumptions.

If Guizot encountered skeptics in his day, their doubtfulness being very destructive to myth and religion, he certainly was not fazed: he was a trusting Christian man, and his understanding was that a nation of trusting Christian men, or men who trust whatever their national religion happens to be, bodes much better than a people who have fallen from their God, or who have no God at all in their culture. Thus Guizot’s viewpoint says that once religion is removed from a people, so is the upwardness of civilization, and so, as nothing that lives is motionless, society begins to regress. That is, civilization cannot occur without God.

Mill, however, does not touch on God, Providence, or any seasoned vocabulary, but rather remains maintains his realism. We as humans consider some things good, others bad, and Mill’s civilization progresses toward the good because the bad is dangerous, terrible, and confusing. The living man cannot withstand the “bad,” that which worsens the human experience, because he is self-conscious, and so he naturally does all within his power to deviate from the bad, for to be conscious of one’s own pain is an awful thing.

### **The “Illness” Of The Ancient Doctrines And Our Recovery: A Struggle For New Prejudices**

One need only look at the table of contents in Guizot’s book to see that “the progress of the human mind [is] purely theological.” Mill sees the decline of religiosity, as visible in the nineteenth century as it is today, as something to be celebrated, a height of civilization hitherto unmatched.

However, he is not strictly Cartesian down to the atom, *aware* that too penetrating a doubtfulness can atomize a people and lead to catastrophe: “Now, it is self-evident that no fixed opinions have yet generally established themselves in the place of those which we have abandoned; that no new doctrines, philosophical or social, as yet command, or appear likely soon to command, an assent at all comparable in unanimity to that which the ancient doctrines could boast of while they continued in

vogue. So long as this intellectual anarchy shall endure, we may be warranted in believing that we are in a fair way to become wiser than our forefathers; but it would be premature to affirm that we are already wiser. We have not yet advanced beyond the unsettled state, in which the mind is, when it has recently found itself out in a grievous error, and has not yet satisfied itself of the truth. The men of the present day rather incline to an opinion than embrace it; few, except the very penetrating, or the very presumptuous, have full confidence in their own convictions. This is not a state of health, but, at the best, of *convalescence*. It is a necessary stage in the progress of civilization, but it is attended with numerous evils; as one part of a road may be rougher or more dangerous than another, although every step brings the traveler nearer to his desired end."

In light of Mill's theory of progress, whatever regressions issue from the dissolution of the "ancient doctrines" are akin to the flu-like symptoms that often follow inoculation. The unsettled, uncertain attitude that grips the populus is transitory, and the multitude will strengthen through the struggle for shape. The Old Ways were illness; today we endure the convalescence, the recovery from that illness, the rougher part of the road, suffering the austere cravings that arise within us.

Anybody with an ear for prophesy cannot fail to contemplate the bottommost three lines of the above passage: Mill knows the "desired end," he knows what helps and what hinders its attainment. All that Guizot cherishes, the hierarchical order, the religio et ecclesia, monarchy as the image of divine authority rightly applied to the State: all of it comprises Mill's vision of decadence. Those decadent expressions of authority were flattened, producing a democratic, atheistic (or else New-Age spiritual), egalitarian-type society which has a difficult time of forming new prejudices and norms.

Mill is prejudicial and pro-prejudice; as [he put it](#): "A person may be without a single prejudice, and yet utterly unfit for every purpose in nature. To have erroneous convictions is one evil; but to have no strong or deep-rooted convictions at all, is an enormous one."

The prejudices of old, then, he merely considered incorrect, not because they were prejudicial, but because they were mysteriously generated and imposed by the upper echelons of Europe's society, otherwise by parents and educators. Revelation occurred to the spirit of someone other than he to whom it is prescribed; Mill's philosophy advocates the personal selection of values and prejudices, as opposed to the top-down imposition of them. The individual may abide by his own unique spiritual doctrine insofar as it does not interrupt the survival or satisfaction of other living beings.

Can we expect each individual to contrive his own moral code? Supposing that they do, how can we be sure that what satisfies the doctrine of one individual will not breach or rupture the doctrine of another? Can there be any standards for behavior without a common religion?

Though the ancient doctrines have suffered a loss in votaries, new ones emerge from the collective in their place, whether or not they be rooted in scripture. It is left to the observer to parse out the newest commandments: What are the new prejudices of the Modern demos? Has it a heart or conscience? Will it not "shun us like impure beings?"

The prophetic Mill has confidence in the capacity of the demos to progress, but the thought of the opposite is never really treated: Christianity professes the notorious Day of Judgement, and this is enough for us to consider whether it is not possible for us, as peoples and as individuals, to commit some irreparable wrong that might earn hellfire for the heavens and earth which are now (2 Peter 3:7).

### **Conclusion: Civilization Refuted Or Redeemed?**

We hear of mandatory ideological trainings being instituted in the universities; even more, we hear that the western political climate is polarized. Given the current strides toward multiculturalism and inclusion, it is safe to say that Europe and her daughter America have, to a considerable extent, abandoned Guizot's principle of national devotion to one universal truth; each country and state is its own religious stew, sheltering people of various cultures from all over the globe.

Christianity remains central to the lives of a great many people, but relatively few consider it integral to western civilization: a growing many, and especially the young, set it aside every other religion, admitting no greater devotion to it than to this or the other religious heritage.

This seems to have followed from the conclusion that there is no one universal truth for everybody: "Each culture has its own truth, which is universal only to everyone in the culture, and so let the cultures worship their truths in their own ways within the limits of their own societies." Thus the public opinion of today seems to speak.

We have explored the general history of Europe offered by Guizot, and the essence of that history given by Mill. The Roman Empire fell; an individualism, none too refined, soon prevailed; the *ecclesia*

elevated the minds of the barbarians, spiritual and temporal existence were given their own rights and regulations; men, becoming more sophisticated in thought, tried to bring order to the social world, extolling whichever authorities they thought fittest for governance; initially, none of these authorities prevailed over the others, none availed themselves of national governance, until monarchies began to reign supreme in the Medieval epoch; the French monarchy was torn asunder by the collective dream of a democracy, the achievement of which would render, in theory, each citizen equally elevated and powerful in his reason; Guizot abandons his task here, at the latest, greatest historical shift before his lecture series in 1800 (the French Revolution); Mill agrees with Guizot's account of the history, but denies the essentiality of the ancient doctrines and of civilization's Providential unfolding; Mill projects into the future his predictions and suggestions, the best of his knowledge for how to maximize civilization's development.

Thus we conclude: Guizot says that history alone reveals a progressive character; Mill says that history and futurity, as two categories of a single, continuous process, share in a progressive character. What was said above of their opposing standpoints regarding truth, derived *a priori* on the one hand and *a posteriori* on the other, is therefore reversed when we discuss progression of civilization as a process.

In the former case, we only learned that Mill is opposed to the doctrine of faith, while Guizot is an advocate. Here, we see that Mill holds civilization to be integral to man's progressive nature—not so for Guizot: to him, civilization is Providential, a consequence of God's mercy, which is to be given to man insofar as he exercises his free-will in servitude to the Creator. Again, we observe the naturalism in Mill's thought, such that it is not man's choice to progress or regress: these occur of themselves, they are in his nature, but progress generally wins over decadence, and will do so as long as his nature is not corrupted.

For Guizot, these things are not determined: it is left to the free-willing being, the child of God to decide whether the future shall present growth or decay; the free-will is connected with, if not identical to the soul, one of the most renowned super-natural concepts known to man. Civilization is choice for Guizot, and necessity for Mill.

Guizot makes the *a posteriori* assertion that history has proved progressive in the past because we can resort to documents, to phenomena, to confirm this. Mill's *a priori* philosophy of history states that, while indeed we may infer history's progression from the historical documentation available to us, that progression was present before the documentation ever arose, and so it will continue to bring historical

developments before we can document them; that regardless of any setbacks along the way, history is fundamentally progressive, and as such will continue upward to whatever extent humanity can reach, while all setbacks are inoculative and transitory.

*Jacob Duggan is a student at Towson University, Baltimore. He is the co-editor (with Zbigniew Janowski) of [John Stuart Mill: On Democracy, Freedom and Government & Other Selected Writings](#). His essay, "The Advent of Liberal-Catholicism in a Victorian Age" is forthcoming in [The European Legacy](#).*

*The [image](#) shows, "The Wedding at Cana," by Paolo Veronese, painted ca. 1562-1563.*

