THE DIALECTIC OF HUMAN LIBERTY IN THOMAS CARLYLE'S PAST AND PRESENT AND J.S. MILL'S ON LIBERTY

Kyle Belanger

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THE DIALECTIC OF HUMAN LIBERTY IN THOMAS CARLYLE'S

PAST AND PRESENT AND J.S. MILL'S ON LIBERTY

by

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THE DIALECTIC OF HUMAN LIBERTY IN THOMAS CARLYLE'S
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This thesis explores the divergent arguments that Thomas Carlyle and J.S. Mill make on the subject of liberty in their most influential works, Past and Present (1843) and On Liberty (1859), respectively. Whereas Carlyle presents a corporate vision of liberty, deriving from the visionary capabilities of heroic leaders, Mill defines liberty as fundamentally rooted in individual rights and, in the third chapter of his long essay, directly critiques Carlyle in a section of On Liberty, with striking evidence that Mill responds to rhetoric found in Past and Present. Understanding their theoretical divergences provides a new vantage point with which to approach Mill and Carlyle's famous political disagreements on such issues as slavery, Ireland, and democratic reform, and it also helps explicate the epistemological differences between these two men.
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Ad maiorem Dei gloriam
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I. Introduction: The Mormon Question—A Case Study in the Limits of Liberty

At one junction in his serial volume, *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1865), Charles Dickens finds himself aboard the *Amazon*, an emigrant ship departing from the London docks in 1863 that was carrying eight hundred Latter-Day Saints. Dickens had heard previously about the extraordinary Mormon effort to help all their converts migrate to the United States, and his curiosity demanded further investigation. Initially perplexed by the people he saw on the ship, Dickens's persona could not help but call them "the pick and flower of England" for their moral rectitude and cleanliness.\(^1\) The Mormon emigrants significantly exceeded the Uncommercial Traveller's prior skepticism towards the faith: the company was healthy and comely, the Mormon 'agents' took good care of all travel logistics, and Dickens admired their well-mannered conduct. Indeed, Dickens notes that the Uncommercial Traveller "went on board their ship to bear testimony against [the Mormons]," but "to [his] great astonishment, they did not deserve it."\(^2\)

The intended effect of Dickens's investigative journalism was to challenge common prejudice and misinformation that had become commonplace against Mormons in 19th Century Britain. Despite Dickens' general disliking for the fanaticism of Dissenting churches, Richard Dunn notes that Dickens had resonated previously with James Hannay's moderate analysis that Mormonism was "a combination of two of Joseph Smith's personal qualities—'immense practical industry, and pitiable superstitious delusion.'"\(^3\) That Hannay distinguished Mormon industry from its religious beliefs

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2 Dickens, 230.
3 Richard J. Dunn, "Dickens and the Mormons," *Brigham Young University Studies* 8, no. 3 (Spring 1968), 329.
channels into Dickens' later admiration for the Mormon emigrants aboard the *Amazon*. Their strange religious beliefs set aside, the Mormons exemplified the best of England, and their practical virtues were deserving of greater recognition.

Tolerance for Mormons was an unpopular demand in 19th Century Anglo-American intellectual life, and attitudes towards Mormons assumed many postures beyond Dickens's travel writing. Sebastian Lecourt notes both Richard Burton's 1862 travel exposé, *The City of the Saints*, documenting his time spent in the exotic locale of Salt Lake City, as well as George Eliot's denunciation of Mormonism as "the absurd terminus of Anglo-American Dissenting Culture."4 Further figures such as historians Klaus Hansen and Robert Lively championed the 'modernity' of Mormon settlements in Utah, which speaks to the view of some Victorians that the Mormons were "the Western vanguard of...Greater Britain,"5 a successful arm of the colonial project to spread English civilization worldwide. From this vantage point, Mormonism is not only the comely orderliness Dickens observes upon *Amazon*: the new American faith enacts an Anglo-Saxon political ideal that champions labor, hierarchy, culture, and collective action.

No Victorian writer echoes this attitude towards Mormonism more than Thomas Carlyle in his unpublished *Draft Essay on the Mormons* (1854). Carlyle's writing repeatedly notes his own disillusion with organized religion in such works as *Past and Present* (1843), criticizing the perceived naivete of those who turn to a 'brown-leafing' Christianity with 'Puseyisms', 'Dissentenerisms', and 'Churchisms' for solutions to the

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5 Lecourt, 93, 95.
problems of modern life. Yet Carlyle finds something praiseworthy in the Latter-Day Saints that eclipses "incommensurably...all other forms of religion now extant."\(^6\) Mormonism, Carlyle continues, is devoid of that "fatal thing so all-prevalent in these sad epochs...the thing called Hypocrisy."\(^7\) To Carlyle, the Mormons are free precisely because their faith secures for them prosperity and plenty, is practically applied in daily life, and—most importantly—provides "a good illustration of...what the perfect Form of Gov[ernment] may be which men are so universally groping after at present."\(^8\) The genius of the Mormon government, Carlyle continues, is in its mixing of despotism and liberty. He also identifies closely with the political Mormonism that its adherents were building in the Rocky Mountains. Indeed, in his Draft Essay Carlyle achieves a case study, brief and incisive, that underscores what Paul Kerry calls "the nexus of Carlyle's thought during the mid-nineteenth century," as the Mormon translation of sincere belief into concrete action "resonated with Carlyle's deepest personal philosophy."\(^9\) Moreover, the political hierarchy of Mormonism centered around a prophetic hero mirrors his own ideal for leadership in government.

Carlyle's essay was rediscovered among miscellanies nearly thirty years ago by the late Clyde de L. Ryals in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, and in it Carlyle's attitudes toward the American faith are strongly consonant with his general attitudes towards liberty and government. His skepticism towards


\(^8\) Ibid.

\(^9\) Ibid., 51.

democracy and his confidence in the magnanimous leadership of great men are confirmed in the process of selecting Joseph Smith's successor, whom Carlyle declares more absolute in power than the Czar of Russia since the Mormons place all their conviction and loyalty in the "beneficent Despotism" of their 'King'. Moreover, the Mormons hold the fear of God with utmost sincerity, believing "that it will be a sin, nay, the chief fountain of sins, if the Fittest Mormon is not got to the top of Mormonism: sin which God will assuredly punish...." For Carlyle, regardless if his understanding of the faith is limited, the important political outcome of his articulation of Mormonism is ultimate liberty: no one is obliged to stay within the faith, yet sincere conviction and fruitful prosperity, stemming from effective leadership, draws free citizens to join the flock and stay. Mormonism draws in the faithful due to its harmony with eternal principles that champion sincere commitment to labor and heroism, those two central tenets of Carlylean thought. The heroic leadership, in turn, fills the standards and expectations of the aristocratic—the rule of the best.

Only few Victorian intellectuals could be called Thomas Carlyle's equals, with Eliot, Dickens and Disraeli among the contenders. Indeed, George Eliot conceded in 1855 that "there has hardly been an active mind of this generation that has not been modified by Carlyle's writings [and] there has hardly been an English book written for the last ten or twelve years that would not have been if Carlyle had not lived." Even so, no contemporary stands so eminently yet so sharply in relief to Carlyle as John Stuart Mill,

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11 de L. Ryals, 51-2.
12 Ibid., 52.
13 See de L. Ryals, 49, who suggests that Carlyle probably encountered Mormonism "only at second hand... from Henry Mayhew's book on Joseph Smith and the Mormons published in 1851" and also potentially from his mother.
the father of modern liberalism. Both Carlyle and Mill reveal their political philosophies in their respective responses to Mormonism, which reflects in turn their relevance as social critics of their generation.

Where Carlyle praises the Mormon clarity of vision to yoke themselves freely to virtuous leaders, Mill demonstrates the great elasticity of his own articulation of human liberty to allow for difference. According to the general view of Millian ethics of individual autonomy, no state actor should intervene in these affairs *so long as no harm is committed, barring consent*. To this end, Mill notes of religious freedom that "the notion that it is one man's duty that another should be religious, was the foundation of all the religious persecutions ever perpetrated."15 Building upon this subject, Mill thus censures "the language of downright persecution which breaks out from the press of this country, whenever it feels called on to notice the remarkable phenomenon of Mormonism,"16 whether for the novelty of its origins, for the incredulity of its tenets of faith, or for the repulsive 'atavism' of Mormon polygamy.17 Unbending in his consistency, Mill defends the heterodox tenets of Mormonism even as he professes of polygamy—the most controversial component of the faith—that no other person "has a deeper disapprobation than I have of this Mormon institution."18 Indeed, Mill notes in an earlier letter that Mormonism is evidence of everything wrong with religion, that Joseph Smith was "in no way imposing or even respectable by his moral qualities" and that he was baffled by the

16 Ibid.
17 See Lecourt. 86, 90, 92, etc. Lecourt argues that the charge of atavism—that Mormonism revived antique or barbaric practices such as polygamy that ran counter to civilizational progress—was central to anti-Mormon attitudes in Victorian England. Mill's critique of a 'civilizade' targeting Mormons highlights this discourse (92).
18 Mill, 91.
hundreds of thousands of proselytes who follow "a known cheat and liar." Yet Mill argues that the individual right to free conscience and association trumps Mill's own personal prejudices, a concession he freely makes within the more general framework of his theory of human liberty even as he would hope that an 'age of credulity' would call into question the tenacity of its claims. Even if the Mormons do not meet his standards for excellence, so long as they "commit no aggression on other nations, and allow perfect freedom of departure to those who are dissatisfied with their ways," Mill concedes to them their rights in what Bruce Baum calls "a striking attempt to reconcile tensions between liberalism's commitments both to individual autonomy and to religious and cultural pluralism."

Beyond the particular considerations of Mormonism in 19th Century England, the individual responses of Thomas Carlyle and J.S. Mill to Mormonism are symptomatic of what each considers to be essential to human liberty more generally. Where Carlyle centers upon the magnanimity of Joseph Smith's successor and the sincere devotion of his followers, which both combine in orderly Mormon industriousness and submission to authority, J.S. Mill atomizes the group identity of Mormons into a loose collective of consenting individuals who deserve no less respect in public opinion nor protection under the law than anyone else does. No two approaches could be so strikingly different from each other in their approach to human liberty.

This thesis aims to understand more closely the divergence between Carlyle and Mill on the subject of human liberty through their works Past and Present (1843) and On

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Liberty (1859) by first examining how Carlyle defines liberty through his creative synthesis of social criticism and historical narrative and then establishing Mill's critique of Carlyle's view. Carlyle himself insists near the end of Past and Present that "liberty requires new definitions,"\textsuperscript{21} taking the given understanding to be insufficient for a modern world captivated with Atheism and mechanistic thinking that has resulted in an incompetent generation of leaders. Carlyle imagines liberty as a corporate project directed under the leadership of heroic men that help ordinary people see past the 'cataracts' of modern life and respond meaningfully to the social problems of the day. Mill directly responds to Carlyle's illiberalism in On Liberty. For Mill, the fact that Carlyle centralizes authority in 'hero-worship' poses an abuse of power that will invariably compromise liberty via abnegation and compulsion. Mill instead advocates for liberating human genius from the shackles of public opinion and convention as promulgated by the middle classes, which he views has led to a general mediocrity in Britain. In particular, Mill constructs his argument in the third chapter of On Liberty with Carlyle's alleged excesses in mind, using rhetoric that suggests Past and Present was his source. By understanding the theoretical views of these two men on the subject of liberty, this thesis aims to better approximate the epistemological differences between Mill and Carlyle that undergird their well-noted disagreements on the political issues of their day.

II. Thomas Carlyle and the Optics of Corporate Liberty in Past and Present

To understand Carlyle's theory of human liberty in Past and Present, it is essential to first place Carlylean scholarship in conversation with both his writing context and his

\textsuperscript{21} Past and Present, 211.
influence in Victorian England. Carlyle studies has seen renewed scholarly interest since the late 20th Century, prompting a reappraisal of the controversial 'Sage of Chelsea'. Due to his keen propagation of German idealism and his criticism of liberalism and democracy, such scholars as Salwyn Shapiro considered Carlyle a harbinger of 20th-Century fascism during the aftermath of World War II. Shapiro asserts that Carlyle's "views on social and political problems, divested of their moral appeal by the march of time, are revealed to be those of a fascist in their essential implications." Remarking on Carlyle's political views, the same historian notes that he was neither an 'aristocratic' liberal, nor a 'bourgeoisie' liberal, nor a 'socialist' liberal, but was rather "a lone figure on the intellectual landscape of the England of his day." Shapiro thus identifies Carlyle as among the likely culprits for a legacy of violence due to his authoritarianism—rooted in his concept of hero-worship and his avowed 'Prussianism'—made him suspect.

However lone he may have been, Carlyle was certainly a preeminent intellectual in his day, and the aforementioned praise of George Eliot and his rich correspondence with Ralph Waldo Emerson represent only the surface of his influence. Elisa Tamarkin, for instance, notes Henry James's appraisal that Carlyle's "defects are not felt as defects," stemming from "an inimitable use of language" that places Carlyle "among the very first" of English writers—a sentiment that James echoes in his novel, *The Bostonians*, in the character of Basil Ransom, a likeable if troubling man "whose 'ill-starred views',"

24 Ibid., 99.
Tamarkin notes, "proceed from a direct comparison with Carlyle" in his dislike of popular freedom and democracy.\textsuperscript{26} Such a mimicry of Carlyle (a trend that extends beyond Henry James only) hints at his broader resonance within Victorian political discourse.\textsuperscript{27}

The conservative young-England movement is an example of Carlyle's political clout, as he greatly influenced their writings while also criticizing their romanticization of the past. John Ulrich and Robert O'Kell are among the scholars to situate Carlyle within the 'young-England' movement, whose politics advocated for a return to medieval values and institutions as a solution to the condition-of-England question.\textsuperscript{28} Carlyle's relationship to young-England is complicated: his medievalist writings—especially \textit{Past and Present}—resonate greatly with Disraeli's tracts and novels, especially in what O'Kell calls their shared "emphasis upon the division between mechanical and organic theories of society, the rejection of materialism, the doctrine of noble hero worship, and the fear of unregulated human nature."\textsuperscript{29} Carlyle's organicism—his faith that human genius, governance, and culture ought not to suffocate in rational and mechanistic reductions—highlights Isaiah Berlin's association of Carlyle among the 'charlatans' of counter-Enlightenment such as Coleridge, Goethe, and other 'anti-rationalist' thinkers.\textsuperscript{30}

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\textsuperscript{27} Other figures such as Mark Twain (\textit{Shooting Niagara}, 1869), Anthony Trollope (\textit{The Warden}, 1859), and James Joyce (\textit{Ulysses}, 1922) parody Carlyle's perceived pessimism and illiberalism.


Yet Carlyle adamantly rejects young-England's nostalgia for the Church and for the 'forms' of the past. Whereas he acknowledges in Book Three of Past and Present that "all great Peoples are conservative," he condemns Hurd and Warburton and the subsequent generation of Puseyites as merely possessing "dreary Cant with a *reminiscence* of things noble and divine" that has "sunk into the sere and yellow leaf ... [soon] already dead and brown-leaved."\(^{31}\) The glorification of the medieval in Past and Present nevertheless underscores what Eloise Behnken calls Carlyle's "divided allegiance" between the medieval and the modern, praising the past without romanticizing it.\(^{32}\) Carlyle is certainly not convinced that Christian revival—especially in the Tractarian renewal of Catholic ritual—is the answer to the condition-of-England question, since these forms lack a resonating *substance* with the demands of modern life. Moreover, Carlyle's "residual Presbyterianism," in the words of Brian Young, "made him allergic to Catholicism, however constituted or imagined," which influenced Carlyle's contention that social and political renewal must not be located in foreign and archaic past traditions.\(^{33}\) Instead, Carlyle envisions a new moral compass to solve Britain's problems.

It was in this spirit that Carlyle wrote *Past and Present* in 1843 within the context of young-England's medievalist critique of the burgeoning industrialization that defined the Victorian debate over the condition-of-England, a conversation in which Carlyle's *Past and Present* was a seminal text. While the late Oxford historian Hugh Trevor-Roper does not include it among Carlyle's most substantial works, yet *Past and Present* has

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\(^{31}\) Carlyle, 164; 167–9.


\(^{33}\) Young, 196.
attracted considerable scholarly attention in Carlyle studies. Indeed, Chris R. Vanden Bossche—the editor of the most recent scholarly edition of Past and Present—notably disagrees with Trevor-Roper's estimation of Past and Present, who happens to mention it only once in his long essay on Carlyle.34 Bold in his alternate claim, Vanden Bossche writes,

*Past and Present* is arguably Carlyle's most influential work, and it is certainly equal of his other masterpieces, *Sartor Resartus* and *The French Revolution*. What sets *Past and Present* apart from these works is the prominent place it occupied in the Victorian debates about an increasingly industrial and commercial economy, ... produc[ing] in *Past and Present* a trenchant analysis of the present and a prophetic vision of the future. The result is his most moving and optimistic piece of social criticism.35

That *Past and Present* was an influential work is firmly established in other sources as well. According to Froud's *Life of Carlyle*, the Sage of Chelsea wrote *Past and Present* during the first seven weeks of 1843, and despite its typical Carlylean 'awkwardness', Froude writes that "... as a whole, [*Past and Present*] made a more immediate mark than anything which Carlyle had hitherto written."36 Indeed, the reading public was deemed so familiar with *Past and Present* that Froude found it unnecessary "... to review or criticise further a work which has been read so universally."37 The American public alone received more than sufficient endorsement in Emerson's review of *Past and Present*, which he also helped to publish in the states. Emerson publicly praised Carlyle for his "new poem, his Iliad of English woes," written with language "which has

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34 Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914–2003), "Thomas Carlyle's Historical Philosophy," in *History and the Enlightenment*, ed. John Robertson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 223, 33–4. Trevor-Roper considered *The French Revolution* (1837), *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (1845), and *The Life of Frederick the Great* (1858–65) to be Carlyle's masterpieces and his notable works. NOTE: This anthology was published posthumously.

35 Chris R. Vanden Bossche, "Introduction." See (6) for full citation.


37 Ibid., 416.
no rival in the tourney play of these times."\textsuperscript{38} The high praise that Emerson grants is strengthened by John Ruskin, who wrote of the book that "it had become a part of [himself]," marked on the fleshy tables of his heart.\textsuperscript{39} Such unabashed commendations as these, which are hardly exhaustive, inform both Froude's and Vanden Bossche's high acclaim for Carlyle's 'Iliad of English Woes' as his most seminal work.

Writing about the book's tone and tenor, Emery Neff calls \textit{Past and Present} "the greatest of Carlyle's sermons" with subtle sarcasm, and it is with a particularly prophetic tone that Carlyle proclaims his gospel of English liberty and liberation, preferring the 'archaic diction' of the pulpit and the King James Bible to that of Victorian political discourse.\textsuperscript{40} Carlyle structures his long sermon into four books that shift between a diagnostic of present ills in Books One and Three with a historical interlude in Book Two about the twelfth-century figure Abbott Samson, whose strong leadership and loyal following resuscitate the decaying St. Edmund's monastery. Book Four, aptly entitled \textit{Horoscope}, is a call to action for the future of England. Carlyle utilizes historical narrative didactically to comment upon the England of his day, seamlessly weaving past, present, and future such that "myth and fiction, the timeless and the topical, go hand-in-hand" in Carlyle's writing toward empowering the English public to liberate themselves from the political and economic disarray of liberalism through corporate action under competent and heroic leadership.\textsuperscript{41} Carlyle's argument about the nature of human liberty

is directly articulated in his later chapter, "Democracy" (III.13), yet the logic of his argument is well-anticipated throughout Past and Present as Carlyle establishes his reasoning for a corporatist vision of human liberty in which the wiser and stronger—the heroic—are empowered to govern the people.

Book One of Past and Present is a polemic about the political, economic, and spiritual woes that beset the troubled condition of England in the 1840s: "England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want in every kind; yet England is dying of inanition."42 By inanition, Carlyle speaks of both physical and spiritual hunger, a void that has produced "a kind of horrid enchantment," or a paralysis that stymied all efforts towards addressing the plight of the poor and the misallocation of resources.43 The political inaction that Carlyle observes is what frustrates England's collective response to the problems of industrialization, which indicates political and economic mismanagement—for no matter how great England's industrial wealth is, the masses continued to suffer in "scenes of woe and destitution and desolation, such as, one may hope, the Sun never saw before in the most barbarous regions where men dwelt."44 In lamenting the sufferings of the working classes, Carlyle embarks in Past and Present upon a literary pursuit of economic justice for the poor, which John Ulrich writes "testifies to Carlyle's acute awareness of class difference," even as collective political inaction "elides and transcends this difference" and impacts persons of all classes. Yet Carlyle alleges that no one in England possessed the clarity of vision to see what had caused these injustices to foment.45

42 Past and Present, 5.
44 Ibid.
45 Ulrich, 81–82.
For its acute sensitivity to the plight of the working classes Frederick Engels praised Carlyle's publication of *Past and Present*, singling it among "all the fat books and thin pamphlets which have appeared in England in the past year" that are worth the time reading.\(^{46}\) In his review Engels applauds Carlyle for his pro-labor politics and for his antipathy towards the bourgeois Whigs while also criticizing Carlyle's romantic and 'theistic' inclinations and his inability to take "*only one more step*" toward the logic of socialism—a position Engels readily admits that Carlyle does not take in *Past and Present*.\(^{47}\) Rather than following Marxian materialism and class politics, Carlyle cites as causes of English poverty and labor alienation the fundamental discordance of English society with the Laws of God and Nature. Landowning, Parliament, Aristocracy, and even Christianity are only venerable to Carlyle if they accord with the "Adamant Tablet," that ancient law of nature, that immutable "inner circle of Fact" which must invariably outweigh "the outer sphere and the spheres of semblance."\(^{48}\) Carlyle dualizes reality in highly Platonic terms, assigning to the unseen realm the characteristics of God and the authority of Nature and to the phenomenological world an inferior status in the extent to which it deviates from its ideal form.

Stemming from his dualistic metaphysics, which grounds his epistemological framework, Carlyle considers the plight and rebellion of the English poor "a mere announcement of the disease," and pillaging does little to remedy a much deeper


\(^{47}\) Engels, 447, 67.

\(^{48}\) *Past and Present*, 13, 16.
problem.\textsuperscript{49} These surface-level inequalities—inhumane injustices though they are—indicate a much deeper deficit in the moral health of English politics and culture. Carlyle locates the problem in the deficiencies of enlightened rationalism and secularism, since these influence the mechanistic and atheistic explanations for political and economic structures that calculate 'ways and means' without regard for what is invariably right or wrong. Instead, Carlyle aims to reclaim what Ralph Jessop calls "the mysterious, vast realm of the unquantifiable: what cannot be investigated and understood mechanically, cannot be investigated and understood at all."\textsuperscript{50} In other words, Carlyle suggests that the inner logic of the world is indiscernible, hidden from its very foundations, and efforts to articulate a key to all mythologies, to quantify all of reality into a positive model, will inevitably fail.

Carlyle thus assumes his pulpit with his good-news at hand to decry the failure of liberal Enlightenment reasoning to successfully reduce all reality to modulable explanation based upon empirical observation, all the while paralyzing England with an incapacity to respond meaningfully to the social plight among the working classes that motivates the condition-of-England debate. One clear example for Carlyle of this political inertia is free-market political economy. He argues that liberal political economy has failed in its just obligation to realize "a fair day's wages for a day's work"\textsuperscript{51} and does nothing to try to alleviate the problem of poverty:

The world, with its Wealth of Nations, Supply-and-demand and such like, has of late days been terribly inattentive to that question of work and wages. We will not say the poor world has retrograded even here: we will say rather, the world has been rushing on with such fiery animation to get work and ever more work done, it has had no time to think of

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 19
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 21.
dividing the wages, and has merely left them to be scrambled for by the Law of the Stronger, law of Supply-and-demand, law of Laissez-faire, and other idle Laws and Un-laws, saying, in its dire haste to get the work done, That is well enough!52

The alleged inattentiveness of Carlyle's contemporaries in political economy reflects further England's moral incompetence as it cedes action and responsibility to free-market determinism. Rather than deferring to the outcomes of the market, Carlyle suggests that political leaders—of whom he conveniently was never counted among the ranks—ought to enact 'inner Fact' into the realm of 'outer semblance' to ensure correspondence between the two. By ascribing to the 'inner-workings' of Nature the name of God, whom he regards as absent from free market economics, Carlyle condemns the English political class for its incapability to respond to social ills due to its preference for inaction.

Atheism and mechanistic thinking thus hold England captive, a sentiment Carlyle elaborates further at the beginning of Book Three. England's misery, he contends, stems from the fact that she has abandoned God, that "God's Laws are become a Greatest-Happiness Principle, a Parliamentary Expediency;" that Carlyle's generation "[has] quietly closed [its] eyes to the eternal Substance of things, and opened them only to the Shews and Shams of things ... [believing] this Universe to be intrinsically a great unintelligible perhaps."53 That each ideological 'Morrison Pill' professes this great perhaps, whether it be a 'Churchism' or 'Anti-Churchism', reform or counter-reform, a young-England impulse to romanticize the Medieval or a Utilitarian itch to reject all things superstitious, underlies its implicit Atheism. Central to *Past and Present* is Carlyle's conviction that in its cacophony of a disharmonious perhaps England had

52 Ibid., 24.
53 Ibid., 139.
rejected God, ushering in the "two Atheistic centuries" that commenced with the restoration of the Monarchy in 1660.\textsuperscript{54} As Vanden Bossche writes, Carlyle's analysis of the condition-of-England question centers "on the ethical void created by the destruction of religious faith," that at the center of his world the Sage of Chelsea finds a "negation of belief, and from the negation of belief follows the negation of social order."\textsuperscript{55} The same continues: "The atheism discussed in \textit{Past and Present}, then, is not so much a theological question as a question of moral order ... that government operating on the 'No-God hypothesis' cannot infuse justice and truth into the social order." The moral compass of England is likewise dead so long as atheism—the collapse of theistic 'Reality' into a wavering \textit{perhaps}—governs England through a morally-neutral system of laissez-faire economics divested of the claims of Justice that ought to govern the nation. England is thus robbed of her liberty until she liberates herself from the curse of an atheistic 'perhaps'.

The effect of Carlyle's structure and narrative in \textit{Past and Present} in its indictment of England's moral, political, and economic failings is the reunification of English national identity towards achieving 'true liberty' as a corporatist enterprise. For Carlyle, the Condition-of-England question depends upon reestablishing English corporate identity around strong, competent leaders whose vision guides the corporate body to act. In this vein John Rosenberg argues that what underlies Carlyle's call-to-repentance "is the metaphor of the body-politic, with its ancient and powerful assumption of the interdependence of limbs, heart, and head joined in a common enterprise."\textsuperscript{56} As

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 170.
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Vanden Bossche, \textit{Carlyle and the Search for Authority}, 111.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 122.
\end{itemize}
Rosenberg suggests, Carlyle's sermon constructs liberty as the reinvigoration of the corporate identity of the English body-politic through enumerating its sins and calling the people to collective action under the guidance of heroic leadership—a principle he establishes later in *Past and Present*, wishing with reserved optimism that he, 'the present Editor' could "instruct men how to know Wisdom, Heroism, when they see it, that they might do reverence to it only, and loyalty make it ruler over them." Vision and submission are central to Carlyle's thesis: the liberty of the people depends upon their capacity to both recognize and subsequently obey the Wise and Heroic among them, granting to them alone the prerogative to govern over England with the power and authority only God can grant due to their ability to view the nation's problems as though from the watchman's tower.

With this ambitious message in mind, Carlyle anticipates his readers' subsequent political response to his call for corporatism by means of what Vanden Bossche calls "a dialectical through which [Carlyle] shapes his audience into a new class responsible for the salvation of England." The same continues: "In addition to adopting the role of the prophet, [Carlyle] represents himself as an observer with a unique, but not necessarily transcendent, perspective." *Past and Present* casts Carlyle as a central actor within its dramaturgical restoration of the values and morals that *ought* to define English politics and corporate identity. Carlyle himself is self-conscious of his lofty role: "When a nation is unhappy, the old Prophet was right and not wrong in saying to it: Ye have forgotten God, yet have quitted the ways of God, or ye would not have been unhappy." In writing

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57 *Past and Present*, 40.
58 Vanden Bossche, 108.
*Past and Present*, Carlyle writes social criticism with a scale and gravity that mirrors what he considers the true depths of England's material and spiritual woes, and his theory of human liberty centers upon empowering the corporate identity of the English body-politic to meaningfully seek solutions to the problems of the day. Through his historical narrative about Abbot Samson, whose heroic leadership saves a 12th-Century monastery from decay, Carlyle models his theory of liberty as corporate action, dependent upon both the leader and his subjects.

In Book Two of *Past and Present*, Carlyle's narrator elucidates an obscure chronicle written by Jocelin of Brakelond, whose medieval account of St. Edmund's Abbey Carlyle appropriates to rebuke his own generation for their atheisms, materialisms, and dilettantisms. The tale is hardly romantic *a la* Disraeli: while the Abbey's roots under the ninth-century St. Edmund were legendary, financial mismanagement and inept leadership had brought it into decay by the 12th-Century. The monastery's leader, Abbot Hugo, was heavily indebted to creditors, particularly the "insatiable Jew," to whom Hugo paid very high interest, and the monastery was in disarray upon Hugo's death such that "there was not found one penny to distribute to the Poor that they might pray for his soul!" Hugo's mismanagement mirrors Carlyle's later critique of the mammonite 'millocracy' and the idle aristocracy for calling over-production a problem:

> My lords and gentleman, —why, it was you that were appointed by the fact and by the theory of your position on the Earth, to 'make and administer Laws,'—that is to say, in a world such as ours, to 'guard against gluts;' against honest operatives, who had done their

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60 See Charles Richard Sanders, *Carlyle's Friendships and Other Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1977), 5: Carlyle wrote *Past and Present* to persuade the present to profit from the lessons that the past could teach.

61 *Past and Present*, 62-3; 65. Hugo's interest rate to his Jewish creditor is 25%, as he agrees to a bond of £400 for four years for a £200 loan; Carlyle's anti-Semitic contempt for finance over industry as a means of building wealth is especially apparent in this passage.
work, remaining unfed! I say, you were appointed to preside over the Distribution and Apportionment of the Wages of Work done; and to see well that there went no labourer without his hire, were it of money coins, were it of hemp gallows-ropes: that function was yours, and from time memorial time has been yours, and as yet no other's. These poor shirt spinners ... were set to make shirts. The community with all its voices commanded them, saying 'Make shirts;'—and there the shirts are! Too many shirts? Well, that is a novelty, in this intemperate Earth, with its nine-hundred millions of bare backs.\textsuperscript{62}

Carlyle's accusation of mismanagement against the millocrats of his day directly places responsibility upon the heads of those in charge, rather than upon their subjects, no less than Abbot Hugo's indebtedness was his fault, rather than that of his monks and peasant tenants. Hugo's failings reflected the failings of the narrator's generation, whose Mammonisms and Dilettantisms have led the country astray.\textsuperscript{63} In this vein Rosenberg writes that \textit{Past and Present} 'reflects' itself "like mirrors facing mirrors or magical boxes inside boxes," suggesting with lyrical finesse that Carlyle's excavation and reconstruction of the past is a deep and trenchant irony in its critique of Victorian England.\textsuperscript{64}

Central to what Carlyle writes about St. Edmund's depends upon its state of decline, which at once mirrors the mismanagement of England's ruling class and subverts the romanticization of the past and the historiographical attempt to reconstruct history in positivistic terms. John Ulrich, for instance, emphasizes that Carlyle is highly cognizant of the textuality of history, its artificiality resistant to romanticization or a positivist understanding as a set of facts: "For Carlyle, then, history is always already textual, and therefore not something that may be fully interpreted, represented, or 'revived'."\textsuperscript{65} Rather than attempting to reconstruct the past, Carlyle's account of the 'Ancient Monk' aims to

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 171-2. NOTE: 'Millocracy' refers to mill owners in the Industrial Revolution.
\textsuperscript{63} Chapters two and three of Book Three are entitled "Gospel of Mammonism" and "Gospel of Dilettantism," respectively, the former criticizing the industrial class and the latter the idle aristocracy.
\textsuperscript{64} Rosenberg, 124. The author highlights Samson's excavation and worship of St. Edmund's body (\textit{PP II}.16).
\textsuperscript{65} Ulrich, 63; See also p. 65.
'reanimate' history in vivid form such as to make the past both present and future; it is made present in its retelling and it ushers in the future as prophecy. St. Edmund's Abbey is thus reanimated in its role as metaphor for Carlyle's present-day England, and its subsequent fate is a prophecy of England's own future, if she follows the course of action that the historical account prescribes. The monastery's narrative of historical decline and renewal thus provides a model for England to redeem itself from its own misgovernance.

Abbott Samson is the heroic leader who comes to rescue St. Edmund's from its looming doom. He was elected by a people who, though "superstitious blockheads of the Twelfth Century [having] no telescopes," nevertheless they "had still an eye: not ballot-boxes; only reverence for Worth, abhorrence of Unworth," that gave them optical clarity, the ability to identify a hero and to follow him in whom exists "a heart-abhorrence of whatever is incoherent, pusillanimous, unveracious—that is to say, chaotic, ungoverned; of the Devil, not of God."66 These sort of men, Carlyle continues, "cannot help governing," which Samson does well in his "Herculean Labours ... to institute a strenuous review and radical reform of his economics."67 Despite the challenges he inherits and whatever opposition he faces, Samson possesses such "clear-beaming eyesight ... steadfast, severe, all-penetrating," that he is able to impose order upon the chaos that had held the abbey in the chains of its creditors and of its former incompetent leadership.68

The renewal of St. Edmund's Abbey is rooted in Carlyle's concept of liberty—namely, that the liberty of those inclined to leadership is to lead, whereas the liberty of the people is in their clarity of vision and tenacity of worship willing to submit to the

66 Past and Present, 89; 91.
67 Ibid., 94.
68 Ibid.
genius of heroic men and godly leaders. Carlyle defines liberty is highly active terms, to borrow Isaiah Berlin's concept of 'positive liberty'. As Berlin writes in his *Two Concepts of Liberty*, positive liberty is less concerned with the question 'What am I free to do or be?' than with its counterpart, 'By whom am I ruled?', or 'Who is to say what I am, and what I am not, to be or do?'. Although this may be taken to mean maximal individual freedom, Berlin is careful to note the historic tendency of this attitude towards Platonist or Hegelian notions of human nature, namely that there are better and worse expressions of self. Worse expressions of self tend to be slaves to nature and to unbridled passions, and stubbornly recalcitrant against the influences of collective bodies. The better, higher version of the human self is disciplined and often "conceived as something wider than the individual, as a social 'whole' of which the individual is an element or aspect." Those who understand their relation to higher goods—"inner fact," to borrow the Carlylean equivalent—are thus 'more' free to govern themselves in accordance with some notion of natural law. In the context of Carlyle's views, positive liberty depends upon first recognizing and then magnifying one's position within the corporate body-politic, whether as a captain or a hoplite, since ultimate good derives from a leader's status as 'more enlightened' than the populace, whom Carlyle considers "blind or ignorant or corrupt" and in need of "coercing ... for their own sake," to borrow Berlin's explanation of paternalistic logic. It is with this perspective, so well defined by Berlin, that Carlyle approaches his definition of liberty through his account of St. Edmund's Abbey.

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70 Ibid., 179.
Continuing his history, Carlyle praises Samson's generation of monks and peasants for their practical wit and worship, as this allows them to see reality more clearly and, in turn, to select a more competent leader. Even as Samson cannot compel belief and must 'coerce' many of the people to obey, a labor of stress that prevents Samson from ever resting, the people nonetheless understand their relation to Samson and his position in temporal affairs.\textsuperscript{71} For example, Carlyle states during his lecture \textit{The Hero as Divinity} that his philosophy of religion is based upon what a person does, rather than what he professes:

\begin{quote}
It is well said, in every sense, that a man's religion is the chief fact with regard to him. A man's, or a nation of men's. By religion I do not mean here the church-creed which he professes, the articles of faith which he will sign.... We see men of all kinds of professed creeds attain to almost all degrees of worth and worthlessness under each or any of them. This is not what I call religion, this profession and assertion; which is often only a profession and assertion from the outworks of the man, from the mere argumentative region of him, if even so deep as that. But the thing a man does practically believe (and this is often enough without asserting it even to himself, much less to others); the thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain, concerning his vital relations to this mysterious Universe, and his duty and destiny there, that is in all cases the primary thing for him, and creatively determines all the rest. That is his religion ....\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

The religiosity of Carlyle's reanimated St. Edmunds' Abbey models what Carlyle outlines above about the nature of true religion, which he locates squarely in temporal affairs: "Religion is not a diseased self-introspection, an agonising inquiry: their duties are clear to them, the way of supreme good plain, indisputable, and they are travelling on it."\textsuperscript{73} Carlyle adamantly does not advocate for a return to the religious forms of the 12th Century in the same way that the Puseyites do through Catholic revival, nor does he wish to confine 'religion' evermore increasingly to the private sphere. Rather, Carlyle envisions

\begin{footnotes}
\item[71] Vanden Bossche, 116.
\item[73] \textit{Past and Present}, 63-4.
\end{footnotes}
religion as the chief operation of society, evident most apparently in its temporal affairs. In appropriating a Catholic monastery Carlyle suggests that neither its decay nor its revival were rooted in its devotion to Catholic forms, but rather through reforming its economic and political management, which were resuscitated under Samson's leadership. Returning from the medieval past to his Victorian present, Carlyle identifies a similarity between his and Samson's generations in the practical wisdom of each, citing that "[of] all the Nations in the world at present the English are the stupidest in speech, the wisest in action." The wise action of the English stems from their commitment to work and industry, even as mismanagement inverts industrialization into violence against the poor in the form of the many social ills and economic injustices that Carlyle enumerates in Past and Present. Through rescue from the chaos of laissez-faire economics, Carlyle suggests that captains of industry, an industrial aristocracy rooted in the power of Labor, will liberate England no less than Samson's feudal virtuosity saved St. Edmund's. Emery Neff highlights Carlyle's consonance with such opposite figures as Saint-Simon and Nassau Senior, who each commented that "the outward form of feudalism had reproduced itself in the factory system, with its centralization of authority, caste, and discipline" and that "the captains of industry' wielded the power which the enfeebled aristocracy had relinquished." Within this historical outlook, Neff observes further that Carlyle writes in Saint-Simon's vein by calling the industrial barons to "complete their absorption of the feudal lords by receiving the vital spirit of chivalry, which would straightway supersede their childish scramble for pennies by a noble 'war on

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74 Ibid., 161.
75 See Ulrich, "Introduction."
bare backs' insuring permanent employment to their industrial troops." Rather than a surrender of liberty, Carlyle argues throughout *Past and Present* that reestablishing the substance behind the memory of feudalism will reintroduce order into the chaos that defines the industrial age, which ensures little except godless "liberty to die by starvation" under the laissez-faire regime of political economy.77

The future of England for Carlyle thus depends upon channeling the might of "Giant Labour, truest emblem there is of God the World-Worker, Demiurgus, and Eternal Maker" under prudent leadership whose religious devotion in chiefly practiced in worldly affairs.78 In this wise Carlyle recommends Abbot Samson's religious practice for its display of political prowess, its vital commitment to living and acting within the world created and incarnate rather than solely the ethereal:

> No one will accuse our Lord Abbot of wanting worldly wisdom, due interest in worldly things. A skillful man; full of cunning insight, lively interests [that] it might seem, from Jocelin's narrative, as if he had his eye all but exclusively directed on terrestrial matters, and was much too secular for a devout man. But this too if we examine it, was right. For it is in the world that a man, devout or other, has his life to lead, his work waiting to be done. The basis of Abbot Samson's, we shall discover, was truly religion, after all.79

Carlyle's solution to England's plight—as he makes apparent in the character of Samson—is to reconstitute the religious impulse not as the "horrible restless doubt" of "Methodism" and "Cant" but rather as the Gospel of Work, the true substance of human religiosity and the key to human liberty as well in its ability to mobilize labor behind Carlyle's heroes for the modern world, the Captains of Industry. Building upon the perspective that "there is a perennial nobleness and even sacredness in Work," Carlyle identifies in *Past and Present* the solution to his quest to revitalize nineteenth century

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76 Neff, 308–9.  
77 *Past and Present*, 210.  
78 Ib., 170.  
79 Ibid., 117.
England. Even as Carlyle draws heavily upon medievalist themes, John Ulrich notes of Carlylean scholarship that the tendency to view Carlyle as 'galvanizing' a medieval past misunderstands his deep investment in 19th-Century England, for "it is not the past that Carlyle seeks to revive, but the present," deeming the past "as utterly remote and other" and prioritizing labor and modern industry as the path towards a vital present and an optimistic future that ensures the English live in liberty.80

In Book Three, Carlyle defines liberty as contingent upon sociopolitical and economic relations between persons, ordering society neatly into a hierarchy whose virtue and orderliness emanate from the heroes—the Captains of Industry—who understand their religion to be based in their practical labor and wisdom.81 Carlyle rejoices in his gospel, his beatitude for the modern age: "Blessed is he who has found his work: let him ask no other blessedness."82 The liberty of a human being—his freedom and his agency—stems from understanding his or her work and subsequently its relation to the work of others, or the whole corporate body to whom his individuality is subject. He elaborates upon this in a section entitled "Reward," which preaches that work is a revelation of God, a "[bodying] forth the form of Things Unseen," an incision and unearthing of the divine that in which God is made man, incarnate. John Ulrich defines the labor of Carlyle's historical and scholarly 'unearthing' of St. Edmund's Abbey in Book Two as a symbolic type that anticipates his eventual emancipation of both self and nation in Book Three, that even as Rosenberg notes of Past and Present its self-reflecting composition, this must yet anticipate not merely medievalist revival but rather Carlylean

81 Past and Present, 195, 8.
82 Ibid., 196.
liberty for both narrator and audience through his preaching of a Gospel of Labor.\textsuperscript{83} Indeed, the tone with which Carlyle resounds his prophetic trumpet recalls that of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace."\textsuperscript{84} Carlyle's good tidings channel his prophetic tone for reshaping the modern world upon the perennial virtues of work and the demands of its modernity in the form of industrialization.

Confronting the demands of industrial society is thus central to Carlyle's insistence that "liberty requires new definitions," his call for ingenuity and intellectual creativity on the subject beyond the cant of liberalism. At this point Carlyle's narrative reaches his direct articulation of Liberty in his section \textit{Democracy}, near the end of Book Three. Unlike other Romantics, Carlyle does not wish the industrial be 'undone' and England be liberated altogether from "these dark Satanic Mills" that had come to pollute the Northern countryside;\textsuperscript{85} that a 'younger' version of England—"this other Eden"—be restored to its former paradisaical glory.\textsuperscript{86} Nor does he praise the eagerness with which the English have embraced democracy, calling it a sham-liberty as he is baffled by the "extent Democracy has now reached, how it advances irresistible with ominous, ever-increasing speed, ... everywhere the inexorable demand of these ages, swiftly fulfilling itself."\textsuperscript{87} Rather, Carlyle constructs the climax of \textit{Past and Present} around his inversion of human liberty, his denial of conventional liberty in the form of democracy as an

\textsuperscript{83} See (74); (62).
\textsuperscript{84} Isaiah 52:7 (KJV).
\textsuperscript{85} See William Blake, \textit{Jerusalem}: "And did the Countenance Divine, / Shine forth upon our clouded hills? / And was Jerusalem builded here, / Among these dark Satanic Mills?" [in Preface to Milton: A Poem (1810)].
\textsuperscript{86}Shakespeare, \textit{Richard II} Act II.1.47: "This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle, / This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, / This other Eden, demi-paradise...."
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Past and Present}, 213.
invariable social gain. That its course appears inevitable and insurmountable, he doesn't refuse.88 Yet in the vein of his positive liberty, Carlyle insists upon interrogating whether democracy alone can ascertain the fittest for rule and direct the nation towards its teleology in the Gospel of Labor:

The smallest item of human Slavery is the oppression of man by his Mock-Superiors; the palpablest, but I say, at bottom the smallest. Let him shake off such oppression, trample it indignantly under his feet; I blame him not; I pity and commend him. But oppression by your Mock-Superiors well shaken off, the grand problem yet remains to solve: That of finding government by your Real-Superiors! Alas, how shall we ever learn the solution of that, benighted, bewildered, sniffing, sneering, godforgetting unfortunates as we are? It is a work for centuries; to be taught us by tribulations, confusions, insurrections, obstructions; who knows if not by conflagration and despair! It is a lesson inclusive of all other lessons; the hardest of all lessons to learn.89

No less plagued in the 19th Century than in the 12th Century, Carlyle demonstrates throughout Past and Present that the perennial challenges which plague the political process demand the strengths and virtues only heroes—superior men—can promise the people. Thus Carlyle defines "the true liberty of a man" to be "his finding out, or being forced to find out the right path, and to walk thereon," as well as "to learn, or to be taught, what work he actually was able for; and then, by permission, persuasion and even compulsion, to set about doing of the same!"90 The presence of capable leadership—heroes—is central to ensuring that the people know and are capable of doing what is right. Without this form of tutelage, most people can in no wise follow the Gospel of Labour, that great call for all "to know Wisdom, Heroism, when they see it, that they might do reverence to it only, and loyally make it ruler over them," rather than accepting

88 See Past and Present, 217: "Democracy, the chase of Liberty in that direction, shall go its full course..."
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., 211.
sham-Superiors who neither understand what is best nor how to compel their inferiors to follow this.91

Carlyle defines liberty as uniting the corporate body politic behind a heroic leader who, like Samson, directs the people in their work and ensures responsible management of resources, thereby securing public liberty from the despotic chaos of economic anarchy. Articulating a new definition of liberty as corporate action under heroic leadership is central to Carlyle's purpose in Past and Present, his diagnosis and prescription for the troubled condition-of-England in the 1840s. That liberation depends upon first securing and then submitting to strong leadership is reinforced by Carlyle's dialectical aim to arrive at a new Gospel for the modern age by the end of Past and Present, which in turn allows for him to propose specific suggestions for policy reform in Book Four. He calls upon "Captains of Industry" to become a new chivalric order, a ruling class committed to labor and bound by its own noblesse oblige to be first "a noble Master, among noble Workers," before seeking to make a sizeable profit.92 Human liberty is thus secured in the orderliness of the ruling class taking full responsibility for the body-politic in both labor and government, and the working classes are obliged to accept their liberty in the security of employed tutelage, rather than in the chaos of self-determination.

III. J.S. Mill's Critique of the Carlylean View in On Liberty

Thomas Carlyle's definition of liberty adamantly defies the conventional notion of human liberty received through J.S. Mill's On Liberty. For Mill, Carlyle's view of human liberty misapprehends the appropriate response to the mediocrity that characterizes

91 Ibid., 40.
92 Ibid., 266.
England's social plight; it also threatens true human liberty, which Mill believes to be rooted in eccentricity and experimentation rather than in compulsion upon a particular course of action. Mill instead promotes negative liberty that ensures maximal autonomy for individuals from intruding external forces, whether from other people or from ideological or metaphysical notions. As one element of his argument in Chapter Three of *On Liberty*, entitled "Of individuality, as one of the elements of well-being," Mill responds in particular to Carlyle's views about positive, corporate liberty, which run counter to Mill's own estimation for individual rights. Understanding Mill's critique of Carlylean liberty reveals the sharp epistemological differences between these two men who each represent opposite currents of Victorian political thought.

Since its publication in 1859, no work of Mill's has had greater influence than *On Liberty*, greater than perhaps any other work of 19th Century British philosophy. As a recent biographer of Mill notes,

*On Liberty* is Mill's best-known work: everybody who has read Mill has read it. Readers of quality newspapers will stumble across a mention of the essay on a weekly basis. Quotations from it are scattered across public conversations, so that in places, the essay no reads like a collection of aphorisms. Few doubt its status as a masterpiece; as a panegyric for individual liberty and the nobility of a self-governed like it remains unsurpassed.  

Mill's writing testified to his radical advocacy for individual rights, his profound distrust of any and all agents of conformity in society, and his resolute commitment to the ultimate terminus of liberalism—unshackling individuals from the agents of social conformity—has granted Mill the authority of an apostle in the canon of modern political theory.  

Nor was Mill wanting for prescience as to the durability of his argument in *On

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94 See Reeves, 264: "Love or loathe it, *On Liberty* is the New Testament of liberalism."
Library. In his Autobiography, Mill notes that On Liberty "is likely to survive longer than anything else I have written."\(^95\) To explain his reasoning, Mill suggests that On Liberty achieves the epistemological feat of understanding how new ideas replace outmoded ones during periods of transition, as was the case in the modernity of Victorian life that was suppressing individuality and difference in favor of equality and sameness, which compromises social innovation and growth over time. In this vein Mill writes of "the importance, to man and society, of a large variety in types of character, and of giving full freedom to human nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting directions ... lest the inevitable growth of social equality and of the government of public opinion should impose of mankind an oppressive yoke of uniformity in opinion and practice."\(^96\) Fearing that such homogeneity of thought will stunt society as a whole, Mill advocates for liberating the most creative individuals from inhibitions upon their creativity, which establishes Mill, according to Gertrude Himmelfarb, as a "romantic rebel" among rebels, "standing alone against the overwhelming pressures of society, deriving his strength from his inner resources, and confident of his intellectual and moral superiority."\(^97\)

The genius of On Liberty, its intellectual inception, Mill attributes to Harriet Taylor Mill, his late wife, who had died in France the year prior to the publication of their magnum opus. As Mill's chief intellectual companion, his devotion to his wife was unparalleled, noted in his annual pilgrimages to her grave in Avignon, France, where she died an untimely death. He even purchased a house overlooking the cemetery and

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\(^95\) Mill, Autobiography, ed. Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 141. Mill's memoirs were originally published in 1873, following his death.
\(^96\) Ibid.
furnished it with items from the room where she had died, details that columnist David Brooks notes in his long essay on Mill, liberalism, and assisted suicide in *The Atlantic*.  

In the preface to *On Liberty*, Mill dedicates the essay chiefly "to the beloved and deplored memory of her who was the inspirer, and in part author, of all that is best in my writings—the friend and wife whose exalted sense of truth and right was my strongest incitement, and whose approbation was my chief reward." He writes further in his autobiography of why she deserves such attribution for her work, noting that "the whole mode of thinking of which the book was the expression, was emphatically hers," and the marriage of Harriet's mind with his made *On Liberty* successful.

Another key component to understanding Mill's background in writing *On Liberty* (especially as a foil to Carlyle) is his political career. Rather than solely theorizing, Mill entered the arena of politics through his election to parliament, where he represented the constituency of Westminster from 1865–1868 as a Liberal. Central to his tenure in parliament was the passage of the 1867 Reform Bill, the appropriate venue for Mill to implement his views on political democracy as expressed in *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861). Much longer than *On Liberty*, Mill writes in *Considerations* his argument for pro-democratic reforms to the British political system such as expanding suffrage, even as his skepticism of democracy as permission for tyranny of the majority is apparent throughout *On Liberty*. Ever the devotee of Alexis de Tocqueville, Mill notes from *Democracy in America* that the right to vote has invigorated the minds of the American public, noting with transatlantic enthusiasm that travelers to

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100 *Autobiography*, 142.
America are almost always "struck by the fact that every American is in some sense both a patriot and a person of cultivated intelligence."\textsuperscript{101} Mill suggests that enfranchisement would have a similar impact in Britain, barring that there should be minimum standards of age and education to grant voting rights, an example of Mill's faith in popular improvement through engagement in the political process that he exhibits in his support for the Reform Bill. A committed feminist, Mill also advocated for female suffrage during the parliamentary debates for electoral and political reform in 1866, yet his proposal, known as the "John Stuart Mill Amendment," was defeated by an astounding margin of 194 against to 73 in favor. This marks one of the notable moments of his short time as a member of Parliament in the years following Harriet's death and the publication of \textit{On Liberty}, the legacy of which overshadows Mill's other achievements due to its influence upon such important 20th Century philosophers as Friedrich Hayek, Bertram Russell, Milton Friedman, Isaiah Berlin, and John Rawls, all of whom enriched the canon of liberalism by developing further the ideas Mill espouses in his writings.

Mill wrote \textit{On Liberty} primarily to explain the relationship between an individual and society, as his entire essay is dedicated to understanding in sharp prose what is 'civil' liberty, or "the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual."\textsuperscript{102} His treatise moreover responds to a perennial malaise of social tyranny that represses individual autonomy and expression, to the question that asks what are the benefits of free speech and opinion and "whether ... men should be free to act upon their opinions – to carry these out in their lives, without hindrance..."\textsuperscript{103} To

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{On Liberty}, 5.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 56.
\end{flushright}
each of these questions, Mill takes a maximalist stance in favor of individual liberty, even at the expense of democracy, for as Carlos Braun writes, "Mill believed democracy could become oppressive, and he proposed severe limits to keep it from restricting freedom."\(^{104}\) Rather than equating democracy with liberalism, Mill sees in democratic culture and its middle-class prejudices and biases the threat of oppression through forced conformity, a "strong permanent leaven of intolerance ... [that] needs but little to provoke them into actively persecuting those whom they have never ceased to think proper objects of persecution."\(^{105}\) In his hostility to the popular and democratic, Mill struggles to reconcile his liberal commitment to eccentricity with his utilitarianism and his adamant support for democratic reform, marrying the liberal with the illiberal in what Braun characterizes as "an imprecise eclectic aiming simultaneously at the supremacy of the individual and the greatest happiness of the greatest number."\(^{106}\)

Despite his apparent contradictions on liberty, Mill aims chiefly to resurrect the individual from the increasing sameness of the masses, whose locality and cultural diversity and individuality were being swallowed up in the twin-revolutions of politics and industry. By delineating a very limited role not only for the state but for society writ large, Mill resuscitates the status of plurality within increasingly homogenous structures. Maurice Cranston notes of Mill's rich departure from the liberal tradition of Locke and Milton that, whereas the former two "had depicted freedom as something to be secured against the constraints of government, Mill represents freedom as something to be secured primarily against the constraints of other people." Cranston continues: "Mill does

\(^{105}\) *On Liberty*, 33.
\(^{106}\) Braun, 600.
not say much about political rulers" but rather "dwell on the domination of the individual by unwritten laws, conventional ideas, social rules, and public opinion."\(^{107}\)

That the public is a tyrant, that the majority of people tend to prefer conformity, Mill concedes. Yet Mill outlines human liberty not in favor of the majority, but of the minority whose relative genius and individuality "can only breathe freely in an atmosphere of freedom," for these persons possess greater self-assurance than the majority and are "less capable, consequently, of fitting themselves, without hurtful compression, into any of the small number of moulds which society provides in order to save its members the trouble of forming their own character."\(^{108}\) It is thus imperative "to preserve the ground" in which genius grows.\(^{109}\) Liberty has little to do with those who do not utilize it, but rather with empowering those who are original, whose capacity for imagination and invention defy the bounds of convention and author the vanguard of social progress.

It is within the context of his remarks about individual genius as articulated in Chapter Three of \textit{On Liberty} that Mill's views so sharply censure Carlyle's definition of liberty in \textit{Past and Present}. His disagreement with Carlyle about liberty is twofold: Mill sees fundamental problems with defining liberty along the lines of abnegation and compulsion. As for abnegation, this refers to the negation of will in deference to the will of another, higher being. In terms of compulsion, Mill regards as tyrannical any notion that a supposedly stronger person can impose their will by force upon another, and his favor for individual autonomy foils his distrust of corporatism and centralized power. Mill thus does not merely not countenance hero-worship, but openly condemns it.\(^{110}\) To

\(^{109}\) Ibid.
\(^{110}\) Ibid., 66.
this end he censures any claim that compulsion could be justifiable with such strong intertextuality that it suggests Carlyle's section "Democracy" in *Past and Present* was a direct source of Mill's in *On Liberty*. Mill writes,

> The initiation of all wise or noble things, comes and must come from individuals; generally at first from some one individual. The *honour and glory* of the average man is that he is *capable of following* that initiative; that he can respond internally to wise and noble things, and be led to them *with his eyes open*. I am not countenancing the sort of 'hero-worship' which applauds the strong man of genius for *forcibly seizing* on the government of the world and making it do his bidding in spite of itself. All he can claim is, *freedom to point out the way*. The power of *compelling* others into it, is not only inconsistent with the freedom and development of all the rest, but corrupting to the strong man himself.¹¹¹

To set up the comparison between Mill and Carlyle and to suggest *Past and Present* as the particular source for this passage, the entirety of Carlyle's selected text proceeds as follows:

> Liberty? The true liberty of a man, you would say, consisted in his finding out, or being forced to *find out the right path*, and to *walk thereon*. *To learn, or to be taught*, what work he actually was able for; and then, *by permission, persuasion, and even compulsion*, to set about doing of the same! That is his true blessedness, honour, 'liberty' and maximum of wellbeing: if liberty be not that, I for one have small care about liberty. ... O if thou really art my Senior, Seigneur, my Elder, Presbyter or Priest,—if thou art in very deed my Wiser, may a beneficent instinct lead and impel thee to 'conquer' me, to command me! If thou do know better than I what is good and right, I conjure thee in the name of God, force me to do it.¹¹²

Present in both passages is language is language of compulsion, instruction, journeying a way, and wisdom of the Wiser. Mill censures what he considers to be the excesses of Carlyle's prescription in which pointing out 'the right path' devolves into "being forced" upon the right path, indeed, even welcoming genius to violently compel the people to obey its will. Even though he welcomes guidance from the wiser as to what may be better, he resists Carlyle's view that there is one singularly right path, which one

¹¹¹ Ibid., 67.
¹¹² *Past and Present*, 210–11. Emphases added to both passages to highlight intertextual elements.
person has the prerogative to force upon others, rather than letting a relative few conjure many alternate paths that the majority of people may decide to follow of their own free will and volition.

For Mill and Carlyle, the respective categories of genius and heroism, which each champions, resonate somewhat in terms of the magnanimity that they both suggest geniuses and heroes embody. Mill envisions genius in his emancipation of eccentric individuals from the demands of conformity to social convention, as noted previously, which stems from his notions of the ancient triage of the Good, Beautiful, and True:

If it be any part of religion to believe that man was made by a good Being, it is more consistent with that faith to believe, that this Being gave all human faculties that they might be cultivated and unfolded, not rooted out and consumed, and that he takes delight in every nearer approach made by his creatures to the ideal conception embodied in them, every increase in ny of their capabilities of comprehension, of action, or of enjoyment.\textsuperscript{113}

Romantic notions of individual genius significantly altered Mill's worldview from his radical utilitarian father, James Mill, which allowed Mill to nuance his philosophical views to prioritize the individual against the Utilitarian commitment to 'the greatest good for the greatest number'. Speaking of Mill's primer in romanticism, Charles Sanders notes that he "learned much from Coleridge's transcendental philosophy and liberalism, from Carlyle, and despite the secular, unreligious cast of his mind, from F.D. Maurice's profound and subtle studies in Christian theology and the other religions of the world."\textsuperscript{114}

Mill rejects the coldly rationalistic ethics of his upbringing in his earlier writings from the 1830s, which brought him into conversation with Coleridge and Wordsworth and shaped his view that there can be immaterial and non-synchronous explanations for phenomena and for human genius. For instance, Mill departs in his early writings on poetry and art

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{114} Sanders, 284.
from his father's insistence upon the synchronicity of all human reasoning, recognizing that this constricts an individual's imaginative capacity. He writes of those who think exclusively in sequences of cause-and-effect that "their narrative [in recounting events] must follow the exact order in which the events took place: dodge them, and the thread of association is broken; they cannot go on."\(^{115}\) Commenting upon the consequences of this line of thinking, Robert Stewart notes of Mill's critique of pure reason that "thinking in such fashion leads to weak, unstable, and easily disrupted trains of thought," which in turn is an impediment to full intellectual development that can only be learned in non-linear thinking such as poetics.\(^{116}\)

Mill's appreciation for the poetic thinking of genius initially inclines him toward Carlyle, with each yearning in post-Christian earnestness "to see the New Jerusalem established on earth."\(^{117}\) A student of Tocqueville, Mill is eager that human life becomes "rich, diversified, and animating," that it resists uniformity in favor of individual genius "by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation."\(^{118}\) He likewise laments what he calls the great 'assimilation', that people from across social classes and locales "much more ... resemble one another, than did those even of the last generation."\(^{119}\) Politics, education, industrialization, commerce, and modern technology all advance this great process of eliding difference across entire nations, and these collide for Mill in the common culture that is rooted in the very middle class ethics and values

\(^{116}\) Ibid.
\(^{117}\) Sanders, 283.
\(^{118}\) On Liberty, 63.
\(^{119}\) Ibid., 72–3.
that Mill considers tyrannical to the interests of individual genius, calling it in his
reflection upon the argument of *On Liberty* a "noxious power" that "cannot be exercised
without stunting and dwarfing human nature."\(^{120}\)

Even as both Mill and Carlyle celebrate individual achievement in their respective
categories of genius and hero, the two depart sharply on the subject of authority and
abnegation. As was mentioned earlier, Carlyle envisions the work of the hero in
organizing society as a 'bodying forth' of the divine, an incarnation of God in the thing
created and a revelation of God in the heroism expressed.\(^{121}\) Mill, in a similar vein,
imagines the Good and Beautiful 'bodied forth' in the form of God-given genius
"cultivated and unfolded ... to the ideal conception embodied in them" as human
beings.\(^{122}\) Yet Mill adamantly condemns the 'Calvinistic' tendency towards abnegation, or
the retreat of moral action to obedience and compliance with the will of another, that
insists upon rooting out sin in human nature. He writes: "To one holding this theory of
life, crushing out any of the human faculties, capacities, and susceptibilities, is no evil:
man needs no capacity, but that of surrendering himself to the will of God."\(^{123}\) Given the
later characterization of Carlyle by scholars as a post-Calvinist, a Calvinist without the
theology, due to his deep roots in Presbyterian Scotland, Mill is implicitly criticizing the
Carlyle's commitment to viewing human liberty as abnegation via submission to the will
and authority of God-ordained leadership. Rather than expecting that the majority be
compelled "by permission, persuasion, and even compulsion" to learn by "finding out, or
being forced to find out the right path, and to walk thereon," under the tutelage of heroic

\(^{120}\) *Autobiography*, 143.
\(^{121}\) See *Past and Present*, 203–4.
\(^{122}\) *On Liberty*, 62.
\(^{123}\) Ibid.
leadership, Mill argues that "to give any fair play to the nature of each, it is essential that different persons should be allowed to lead different lives." Liberty is thus not reclaimed, according to Mill, in finding competent leadership rooted in the fear of God and the demands of order and submission, but rather in allowing individual genius the space to cultivate itself and present its original ideas and customs as alternatives to the normal conventions of the majority of people, the multiplicity of which counters sharply Carlyle's own commitment to the singularity of corporate political organization.

Their disagreement about the nature of liberty typifies Mill and Carlyle's departure and eventual estrangement from each other. For instance, Carlyle writes to his brother baffled upon reading On Liberty that he had "never read a serious, ingenious, clear, logical Essay with more perfect and profound dissent from the basis it rests upon, and most of the conclusions it arrives at ... [as] if it were a sin to control, or coerce into better methods, human swine in any way." On the opposite end, Mill expresses in an 1848 letter his disillusionment with the "Ezekiel of England"—a sarcastic name he grants Carlyle—for his departure from the wisdom of earlier writings, trading the "telling of the sins and errors of English, and warning her of 'wrath to come'" for an unabashed political imperialism that "preaches the divine Messiahship of England, proclaims her the prime minister of Omnipotence on this earth." For Mill, this shift in Carlyle's writing reflects the latter's turn toward high authoritarianism in anticipation of the Latter-Day Pamphlets and Frederick the Great. The sixteen-year gap between the publication of Past and Present, 210–11.

On Liberty, 64.


Present and *On Liberty* allowed for relations between the two men to sour from their earlier days collaborating together on Carlyle's *French Revolution* and *Oliver Cromwell*, for which Mill provided much of Carlyle's reading material and which includes Mill's famous loss of the manuscript of the first chapter of *French Revolution*, a grievous thing for which Carlyle had forgiven him.\footnote{128 See Rosenberg, 5, 137; 15. See also Rachel Cohen, "Can You Forgive Him?" In *The New Yorker*, October 31, 2004. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/11/08/can-you-forgive-him-3.}

Political disagreement defined their relationship from the late 1840s until Mill's death in 1873. One example of their disagreement was the Ireland question and whether the Irish were deserving of political self-determination. Whereas Mill stood firmly in favor granting sovereignty to the Irish, Carlyle's writings on Ireland "reflected the stridently illiberal cast of his social and political criticism," as John Morrow writes.\footnote{129 John Morrow, "Thomas Carlyle, 'Young Ireland', and the 'Condition of Ireland Question'," *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 3 (Sep., 2008), 644.} Morrow argues further that Carlyle's opposition to Irish home rule and his denial of the mystical status of nationhood stems from Ireland's internal mismanagement and its failure to respond at all to the intellectual and economic demands of modern life, its rejection of the 'Gospel of Labour' insisting that the Irish—as well as the Scottish—remain under English occupation. To the contrary, however, Mill blames the condition of Ireland squarely upon English misgovernance, noting of Irish poverty and wretchedness that these "are the work of England's ignorance, of England's prejudice, of England's indifference; they are the effect of a vicious social system, upheld by England."\footnote{130 Mill, "What Is to Be Done with Ireland," in *Essays on England, Ireland, and the Empire*, ed. John M. Robson (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 502.} Mill's cites the French Revolution as an example of where the Irish question might descend if unaddressed meaningfully with the only viable solution of an Irish government, fit to
govern itself according to the best interests of its people. Such questions as Ireland exhibit in practice Carlyle's faith in centralized power and Mill's commitment to local autonomy, two key differences to their approaches to human liberty and flourishing.\textsuperscript{131}

Even as they shared a certain contempt for democracy and an appreciation for the romantic power of human genius, both having awakened, as one scholar puts it, "to the vast collective mediocrity engendered by ... democracy,"\textsuperscript{132} their views on the subject of human liberty were vastly different. In \textit{On Liberty}, Mill directly responds to and criticizes Carlyle's own articulation of human liberty in \textit{Past and Present}. This exchange in turn highlights Carlyle as a relevant voice in the conversation of liberty, as well as situates his views in conversation with Mill, who remains most seminal voice from the nineteenth century on the subject of human freedom.\textsuperscript{133}

\textbf{IV. Conclusion and Further Questions}

This thesis has aimed to bring two seminal figures of Victorian thought into conversation with each other on the subject of human liberty. Beginning with the views of each on the topic of Mormonism allowed for a particular historical moment to introduce the divergences between the two before delving more deeply into the substance of their arguments. While Mill's relevance to the subject is apparent due to the influence of his well-known \textit{On Liberty}, Carlyle's views are less-known and far less studied, yet typify a strong, if forgotten, countervailing current in Victorian society to the ideas that

\begin{footnotes}
\item[131] Such analogous vectors as the French Revolution, race, empire, and slavery (i.e. "The Negro Question") could also be addressed, but would extend beyond the scope of this paper.
\item[133] Cranston writes of Mill that he "has held the attention of the reading public of the Western World longer than any other 19th-Century philosopher, with the notable exception of Karl Marx" (Cranston 82).
\end{footnotes}
represent Millian liberalism. As recent scholarship has highlighted, Carlyle resists easy categorization, rejecting the varied political sentiments of his day such as the young-England movement or socialist Labor politics. He looked for metaphysical explanations and solutions to the problems that beset his generation, and he found in heroism the promise of order that would emancipate England from the shackles of 'enchantment' and secure for her the promise of liberty. For J.S. Mill, the excesses of Carlyle's hero-worship actively inform his more regulated vision for liberating individual genius, leaning less into the romance of strong, heroic leadership than into the rights of eccentric individuals in a liberal society to self-author new lifestyles and modes of thinking, barring that these persons inflict no harm upon others nor compel anyone into submission. Their mutual departure on the subject of liberty furthermore highlights their disillusionment with one another that resulted in their eventual estrangement.

As for further research, the primary direction I would suggest is to consider more rigorously the idea of genius and leadership within the writings of Mill and Carlyle, since individual genius greatly informs what a meaningful definition of human liberty looks like for both men. This would demand extending the scope of the research project beyond *Past and Present* and *On Liberty* to include the respective corpora of each author and identifying other relevant figures who influenced both Mill and Carlyle. Within Carlyle studies more specifically, comparing Samson with Frederick the Great and asking whether Frederick 'corrects' any of Samson's weaknesses or enhances Samson's strengths would be a fruitful inquiry, as well as more closely examining the idea of labor and embodiment in *Past and Present* to understand his idea that labor, heroism, and corporate political organization embody, or "body forth," the divine on Earth.
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