

J.S.Mill's Religious Thought and the Benthamite Tradition of the Critique of Religion

For those who are outside Christendom it is sometimes quite hard to understand theistic idea with a teleological way of thinking. Instead, secular world-based utilitarianism is more acceptable for them than any other moral standard such as derived from the idea of invisible omnipotence, or a God. So is the case of the critique of religion by Hume or Bentham. Then, how is J.S.Mill's religious thought? This paper will examine the characteristics of J.S.Mill's religious thought by reviewing his religious writings on religion from methodological point of view. It will also try to measure the distance of his position from the Benthamite tradition of the critique of religion.

I will firstly provide the essence of Mill's views on revealed religion and natural religion mainly from his Three Essays together with his fragmental comments on religion in Autobiography and other writings. Secondly, I will assess it to what extent it was in the Benthamite tradition of the critique of religion and show the uniqueness of Mill's idea of Religion of Humanity. As a case study, thirdly, I will also give some comments on recent two major books on the matter written by Linda C Reader (John Stuart Mill and the Religion of Humanity, 2002) and Alan P F Sell (Mill on God: The Pervasiveness and Elusiveness of Mill's Religious Thought, 2004) who seem to excessively find religiosity in Mill's accounts on religion.

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