

## **Imperial Ambivalence: John Stuart Mill and the Lessons of Colonial Excess**

The paradox of Mill's defense of liberty and autonomy and his support for imperial rule have been closely examined by recent critics, who have argued that his defense of empire was driven by the very universalist and cosmopolitan assumptions fundamental to liberalism, which rendered it unable to recognize the experience and political identity of subordinated peoples. Mill's theory of civilizational development, it is argued, compromises his refusal of biologically essentialist discourse about race. This paper argues, however, that Mill's later work represents not the culmination of a liberal "turn to empire" in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but rather the beginnings of a shift in liberal views concerning the legitimacy of colonial rule. While Mill justifies imperial rule in his earlier work, in later writings, especially after the Indian Mutiny, he is driven by evidence of settler mistreatment of indigenous peoples to increasing skepticism about colonialism's capacity to secure the progress of colonized peoples, and even about the historical ranking of civilizations. Mill's ambivalence emerges in *Considerations on Representative Government*, and more clearly in his comments on Jamaica, New Zealand and Australia. The paper examines public debate over settler mistreatment of colonized peoples in the mid and late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and its impact upon Mill's and later liberals' attitudes towards race and empire.

Katherine **Smits**