

## Govt4105

### J.S. Mill and the Origins of Secular Humanism

#### 1. Govt4105: J.S. Mill and the Origins of Secular Humanism

**Prerequisites:**

**Credits:** 3 hours

**2. Course Description:** The course examines John Stuart Mill's role as a chief founder of secular humanism and explore the quasi-religious character of the allegedly secular liberalism that stems from his work. A further concern will be to examine the conventional interpretation of the process of secularization putatively undergone by ethical and social thought in the West over the past several centuries.

**3. Course Goals:** The course is designed to demonstrate Mill's philosophical legacy was not so dependent upon the common understanding of him as a secularist with little concern for religion. Rather, the course will show that he was a proponent of the religion we term "secular humanism." Students will be able to distinguish between the two bases and apply this distinction to other pseudo-religious philosophies.

**4. Course Outcomes:** This course will explore the religious thought and legacy of John Stuart Mill for the light they shed on that process, as well as on other Anglo-American social and political developments. At the conclusion of the course, students will be able to

1. Following from the discussion topic, begin to assemble the religious and philosophical tenets that Mill's project will have to answer, with the purpose of identifying the logic or the contortions in his argumentation to make the case.
2. Compare and contrast how James Mills and Jeremy Bentham influenced the foundational thinking of John Stuart Mills.
3. Explain Mill's rationale for not disclosing his antipathy for traditional religion and link it to his ability to proselytize through moral "suasion."
4. Explicate how and why Mill cast "nature" as a source of immorality and as such a proof of the immorality of traditional religion.
5. Construct the argument by which Mill justifies the moral superiority of his intramundane "Religion of Humanity" over Christianity.
6. Critique Mill's conclusion of a limited God by using his methodology of the scientific investigation of only phenomena as the sole means of explaining God.
7. Recognition and analysis of Mill's prudential "instinct for closeness" in his writings, especially as it affected his argumentation, such as *On Liberty*.
8. Parse the logical consistencies and inconsistencies in Mill's accounting of justice.
9. Delineate how Mill's cloaked religiosity succeeded in transforming Anglo-American classical liberal tenets, such as Adam Smith and John Locke, into a millennial secular religion, widely accepted as modern liberal social progressivism and less widely recognized as resulting in the ideology inherent in socialism, communism, and fascism.
10. Identify and explicate the logical contradictions that Mill's employs, whether wittingly or not, to impose a particular ideology—an anti-transcendent, anti—tradition, anti-Christian religion—on the basis of "liberty" and "morality."

#### 5. Course Concepts

1. Positivism, secularism, humanitarianism, social religion
2. James Mills, Jeremy Bentham, Benthamite, secularization, Utilitarianism.
3. Auguste Comte, Saint Simon, "Religion of Humanity," "new Christianity," "Religion of Love" Gustave d'Eichthal, Thomas Carlyle, "positive science," "age of transition."
4. Harriet Taylor Mill, deism, nature, natural theology, natural religion, law of nature, Providence, intuitionists, social justice.
5. Religion of Humanity, limited god, ethical motivation, positive religion.

6. Theism, probable or hypothetical god, the law of the three stages, Argument for a First Cause, Argument from the General Consent of Mankind, the Argument from Consciousness, the Argument from Marks of Design in Nature.

7. Alternating critical and organic states, instinct for closeness, pagan morality, duty to the state.

8. Neo-Benthamism, intuitive and inductive sense of ethics, perfectionism.

9. Classical liberalism, millennialism, Comteian altruism, Anglo-American liberal thought, secularization, collective salvation, progressive immanentization of existence, revolt against God.

10. Socialism, rule of law, social justice.

#### **6. Required Texts:**

Lubac, Henri de. *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*. Ft. Collins, CO: Ignatius Press; New Ed edition, October, 1995. ISBN: 999 570 2347).

Mill, John Stuart. *Three Essays on Religion*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, May 1998. ISBN: 15-73-92212-9

Mill, John Stuart. *Autobiography* (selections). London: Penguin Classics, 1989. ISBN: 0-14-0433 16-3

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty and Utilitarianism*. London: Everyman Classics, 2002. ISBN 0-460-11482-4; or Bantam Classics: ISBN: 0553214144).

Raeder, Linda C. *John Stuart Mill and the Religion of Humanity*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2002. ISBN: 0-8262-1387-1. Available free on-line to students enrolled in this course.

#### **7. Recommended Reading:**

Haac, Oscar A., trans and ed. *The Correspondence of Auguste Comte and J. S. Mill* (selections), Transaction Publishers, U.S., 1995, ISBN: 156 000 1488

Mill, John Stuart. *The Spirit of the Age*, introduction by F. A. Hayek. Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1942. Out of print, but perhaps available through Bibliofind.com or ABE.com.

Mill, John Stuart. *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (selections). Available free online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/16833>

Mill, John Stuart. *Principles of Political Economy* (selections). Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, April 2004. ISBN 1591021510