

Tapescript:

John Stuart Mill was probably the most widely studied British philosopher of the nineteenth century. He was a member of British Parliament as well as a colonial administrator, and followed in his father's footsteps in becoming Chief Examiner at the East India Company; this was a privately owned company which controlled vast regions of Britain's largest colony. His academic interests were vast and complex, and have been of critical importance to Western philosophy over the past 150 years. In particular, his acclaimed work *On Liberty* is often considered the 'manifesto' for modern liberal thought. It is widely acknowledged that Mill was a 'public' thinker; he was actively engaged in the debates of his time and place, and his writing sought to explain and defend what he believed to be the fundamental philosophical, moral and political principles by which modern society should be organised. If we examine his work for the East India Company, we gain great insights into his attitude towards colonial rule and British Empire.

Mill's tenure in the Examiners Office at the East India Company began in 1823 and ended when the company was dissolved following the Sepoy Rebellion in 1858. This period provides a useful context to study his views on the 'mission' of the East India company and the state of Indian society; it also elucidates the consistency between his liberal principles and his support for colonial rule. Mill was of the opinion that British control over Indian society was in the long-term interests of the Indian people. He also saw little value in Indian culture; in fact, he used these words to describe it: 'despotic', 'stagnant', 'backward' and 'barbaric'. So, colonial rule was not a moral concern for John Stuart Mill in that he believed it was good and just because it advanced civilization and promoted the general welfare of the colonized population. Mill constantly defended the role of the East India Company before Britain's Parliament and went to great lengths to describe the multitude of ways in which Indian society had benefitted from British rule, for example in its public services and the establishment of political and social institutions. Mill believed it was the mission of the East India Company to help provide Indian society with the stimulus it needed for development and progress; without this they would remain a backward and stagnant race. At the basis of Mill's defence of colonialism, and this is also a key to understanding his life's work in general, is his unwavering belief in the importance of human growth, human development, human progress

Possible summary:

In this lecture, Prof. Miller speaks about John Stuart Mill and his views on colonialism. He begins by stating that Mill is perhaps the most renowned British philosopher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. **Not only did he have a range of academic interests, but he was deeply involved in the public debates of his time.** His most important work was "On Liberty", which **is considered to be** a 'manifesto' for modern liberal ideology.

Miller then goes on to state that Mill was also active politically, **serving both as a member of parliament and as Chief Examiner for the East India Company**, as his father had done before him. Mill held the latter position from 1823 to 1858, when the Sepoy Rebellion ultimately led to the dissolution of the East India Company. During this time, Mill expanded his views on colonialism, seeing it as essential in contrasting what he considered to be the 'backward', 'stagnant' and 'despotic' nature of the country. Miller concludes by arguing that Mill saw colonization, with its social and political institutions, as being a catalyst for development and progress, **concepts which are said to be** at the very heart of Mill's ideology.