Liberalism is full of strange paradoxes and reveals different faces depending on one's angle of vision. It offers one of the most inspiring statements of human equality, yet some of the greatest liberal philosophers justified colonialism with a clear conscience. Liberals condemned racist prejudices and misuse of political power in the colonies, but endorsed both the economic exploitation of the colonies and arrogant assertions of cultural superiority. They insisted on protection of the material interests of the colonial subjects, but thought little of destroying their ways of life. John Stuart Mill led a most creditable campaign against the brutality of Governor Eyre of Jamaica, but saw nothing wrong with the colonial context that made such things possible.

Nearer home, liberals stressed the virtues of individuality, autonomy and moral self-development, but they vigorously supported the nineteenth-century capitalism that made these virtues unrealizable for masses of men and women, and they often resented attempts by the state to regulate the evils capitalism produced. They advocated freedom of choice, civil liberties and an inviolable area of privacy, yet many of the liberal architects of the New Poor Law of 1834 wanted the workhouses to become 'objects of terror' and to enforce strict segregation of the sexes. Liberalism claims to be sceptical of all claims to absolute truth, yet for decades liberal economists and politicians entertained no doubts about their laissez-faire economic theories, even when the havoc they caused at home and in the colonies, including Ireland, was too stark and horrendous to be missed.

More recent liberal thought and practice have revealed similar paradoxes and contradictions. American liberals opposed the McCarthyite witchhunts, but many of them, including such distinguished liberals as Sidney Hook, Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell, insisted that their communist fellow citizens could be legitimately barred from teaching on the grounds that communism was not an 'opinion' but a 'fanatical conspiracy' and that its academic supporter had 'engaged his intellect to servility'. The Vietnam War was in some of its crucial phases a liberal's war, started and supported by liberals and powered by a missionary liberal ideology. Even as late as 1989, British intellectuals of impeccable liberal credentials were unhinged when a small
group of British Muslims burned a copy of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and supported Khomeini's death threat against the author. Liberals who had a good record of fighting racism and promoting black, including Muslim, interests became fiercely anti-Muslim. Even Roy Jenkins, father of the Race Relations Act 1976, lamented that 'we might have been more cautious about allowing the creation in the 1950s of a substantial Muslim community here'. He went further and reached the most bizarre conclusion that the Muslim book-burners' behaviour had strengthened 'my reluctance to have Turkey in the European community'. Apparently all Muslims, like the proverbial Chinese, looked the same to him, and a threatened misdeed by a section of them was enough to damn the lot. It was depressing to note how the legitimate liberal rage against the Ayatollah Khomeini's murderous impertinence and the outrageous Muslim support for it escalated step by step to a wholly mindless anger at first against all Bradford Muslims, then against all British Muslims, then against all Muslims, and ultimately against Islam itself. Some liberal commentators, a few of them with a leftist past, became instant experts on the Koran, attacked its 'bloodthirsty' conception of Allah, and compared it unfavourably to the Bible and its 'loving God', in the process offering most valuable insights into the tensions and contradictions of the structure of liberal self-consciousness.

Even this brief and sketchy account is enough to indicate that liberalism contains contradictory impulses. The contradiction is not just between liberal thought and liberal practice, but within liberal thought itself. Liberalism is both egalitarian and inequitable, it stresses both the unity of mankind and the hierarchy of cultures, it is both tolerant and intolerant, peaceful and violent, pragmatic and dogmatic, sceptical and self-righteous. The origins of its contradictory impulses, the way it accommodates and reconciles them in different contexts, the tensions they create in liberal thought and practice, and so on, raise fascinating questions. Since I cannot pursue all of them in this short chapter, I shall concentrate on one of them, namely the liberal attitude to colonialism. For analytical convenience I shall examine this question through the writings of John Locke and John Stuart Mill, two of the greatest liberal philosophers, who lived during the two distinct phases of colonial expansion and reflected, articulated and deepened the prevailing liberal discourse on the subject.

**Locke's savages**

When England began to colonize the so-called New World in the seventeenth century, its actions provoked a muted but fascinating debate. As William Strachey, First Secretary to the Colony of Virginia, put it:

> Of the clayme which we make to this part of America ... I have observed more in commend than at any tyme in force, to cry out still upon yt, calling yt, an unnatual and unlawfull undertaking ... Why? Because

Critics of English colonization argued that it violated the rights of the American Indians to their property and territorial integrity. The Indians had cultivated and lived on their land for centuries and it was their 'rightful inheritance'. They had also established stable societies which, like their counterparts elsewhere, were entitled to non-interference by outsiders. England had no 'right or warrant' to 'enter into', let alone 'go and live in the heathen's country', and was acting in an immoral and un-Christian manner. The Revd. Roger Williams, the minister of Salem, criticized the British king because he had 'no right to grant the lands on which the colony was founded since they belonged to the Indian tribes'. He was arrested, put on trial, and eventually banished.

Locke, who had both a philosophical and a financial interest in the Americas, was greatly interested in the controversy. He asked the English settlers for information about the Indian way of life, and built up an impressive collection of books dealing with the European exploration of the Americas. His philosophical interest sprang from the fact that unlike Hobbes's largely imaginary state of nature, the Indian way of life offered a realistic contrast to, and provided most valuable insights into, the nature and structure of political society. Locke's interest was not entirely intellectual. His patron the Earl of Shaftesbury had strong financial interests in the New World and, in the words of Locke's distinguished biographer Maurice Cranston, shared Locke's 'zeal for commercial imperialism ... and the possibilities it offered for personal and national enrichment'. Locke was also secretary to the Lords Proprietors of Carolina (1668-75) and to the Council of Trade and Plantations (1673-76). In both these capacities Locke played an important part in formulating colonial policies. He was in no doubt that English colonization of North America was fully justified, and provided its most articulate and influential philosophical defence.

For Locke, reason was man's natural, highest and unique faculty. It was a natural capacity because man was born with it. Society did, of course, develop and cultivate it, but it did not create it. Reason was also the highest human faculty because it alone enabled man to know and control the natural and the social worlds. And it was unique to man in the sense that no other species in the world possessed it. Although Locke's analysis of the nature of reason was complex and inconsistent, by and large he thought that it analysed and reflected on the sense impressions, perceived similarities and dissimilarities between different events and entities, traced their causes, and formed universally valid generalizations. Though it was susceptible to the influences of the passions, prejudices and superstitions of the wider society, it was in principle capable of transcending them all and delivering a universally valid body of knowledge about the nature of man and the world, morality, politics, the truly good life, and so on. Being
trained to reason correctly and rigorously and to rise above the distorting influences of personal passions and popular prejudices, philosophers were particularly equipped to exercise reason and guide mankind. They not only discovered the true principles of moral and political life but also demonstrated their validity, and played a vital cultural role.

Locke advanced a set of what he regarded as universally valid propositions about man and society. God created men and gave them the world in common. By this Locke meant not positive but negative communism, that is, the world was not a collective human property to be used for collective well-being, but rather it belonged to no one and was available to all for their individual use. God's gift entailed both rights and duties. Every man had a right to mix his labour with nature, and to use its fruits to satisfy his needs consistently with a due regard for others. Since God wanted men 'to be fruitful and multiply', every man also had a duty to develop the earth's resources to the full and maximize the conveniences of life. As Locke put it, 'God gave the world to man in common, but ... it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the Industrious and Rational.'

Locke's juxtaposition of 'Industrious' and 'Rational' is striking.

Since all men had identical faculties including and especially reason, and since they were all ontologically dependent on their creator and hence independent of one another, they were all equal. For Locke, equality was one of the most basic features of human relationship, and had several important implications. It implied that all human beings had equal dignity and rights, that they were entitled to the equal protection of their basic interests, that no authority was legitimate unless it was based on their uncoerced consent, that no one had a right to injure another in the pursuit of his interests, that each should exercise his rights with a due regard for others, and so on. As rational beings, humans were expected to govern their affairs rationally; Since the use of force signified rejection of reason, whoever used it without due authorization opted out of the human community and could be punished and treated like an animal.

Locke had no doubts as to how a truly rational man should live and how a truly rational society should be organized. The former exhibited such qualities of character as industry, energy, enterprise, self-discipline, acknowledgement of others as his equals and all that followed from it: control of passions, obedience to the law, and reasonableness. A truly rational society established the institution of private property and provided incentives for industry and the accumulation of wealth, without both of which men could not discharge their duty to develop the earth's resources and create a prosperous society. Locke was deeply haunted by the idea of waste and wanted all the material potentialities of the earth to be fully realized. The duty to be fruitful and multiply 'contains in it the improvement too of arts and sciences', and hence a truly rational society encouraged these as well. As for its political structure, it had a clearly defined territorial boundary, a cohesive, centralized and unified structure of authority entitled in peace and in war to speak and act in the name of the community in all matters of collective importance (which Locke called sovereignty, 'decisive power' or 'one supreme government'), and a will to persist as an independent polity that made it 'too hard' for its neighbours to attack and overrun it. A truly rational society was governed not by customs and traditional practices, but by general and 'positive laws' enacted by the supreme legislature and clearly specifying who owned what and how transgressions were to be punished. Political power in it was institutionalized, subject to clearly stated procedures and checks, and separated into legislature, executive and judiciary.

Locke analysed English colonialism in America in terms of his theory of man and society. He argued that since the American Indians roamed freely over the land and did not enclose it, it was not 'their' land; they used it as one would use a common land, but they had no property in it. The land was therefore free, empty, vacant, wild, and could be taken over without their consent. This was odd for, although the Indians did not build fences or barriers to demarcate their land, they knew what land was theirs and what belonged to their neighbours, and had thus enclosed it in a manner intelligible to them. That was not acceptable to Locke, who only recognized the European sense of enclosure. Even then, Locke faced a difficulty. Whilst some Indians did not enclose their land in Locke's sense, the coastal Indians who lived in villages and engaged in nonsedentary agriculture did. English settlers were covetous of these lands, and sought to take them over to avoid the hard labour of clearing land themselves. They had argued that although the Indians enclosed and owned the land, their practice of letting it rot and compost every three years for soil enrichment demonstrated that they did not make rational use of it. Locke agreed that enclosure was not enough. He observed:

... if either the Grass or his Inclosure rotted on the ground, or the Fruit of his planting perished without gathering, and laying up, this part of Earth, notwithstanding his Inclosure, was still to be looked on as Waste, and might be the Possession of any other.

Even when Indians enclosed and cultivated land, they were not industrious and advanced enough to make the best possible use of it and produce as much as the English could. Indeed, since they produced not even one-hundredth of what the latter could, they were for all practical purposes guilty of wasting the land. In Locke's view, the trouble with the Indians was that they had very few desires and were easily contented. Since they lacked the desire to accumulate wealth, engage in commerce, produce for an international market, and so on, they had no interest in exploiting the earth's potential to the fullest. In this regard the English settlers were vastly superior and had a much better claim to the land. After all, since God Himself had imposed on man the duty to maximize the conveniences of life, the English had both a right and a duty to replace the Indians. Locke acknowledged that the principle of equality required that the Indians
should not starve or be denied their share of the earth's proceeds. Since the English colonization increased the conveniences of life, lowered prices, created employment and so on, and thus benefited the Indians as well, Locke thought that it did not violate the principle of equality.

But even this was not the end of the problem. Locke had hitherto discussed America as if it were no more than a mass of land, and the Indian tribes as if they were no more than a collection of individuals. Vacant lands in Locke's sense existed in several parts of Europe as well, but he would not allow their colonization because they fell within the boundaries of specific political societies, whose independence and territorial integrity had to be respected under international law. As Locke put it, vacant lands in a political society were under the jurisdiction of the law of the land and not available to 'all mankind'. Could this not be true of the Indians as well? And could not their vacant lands be seen as part of their territory, and hence unavailable for colonization? Locke did not think so. He acknowledged that the Indians called themselves nations and were ruled by elected kings, but argued that that was a misleading way of describing their society, which was not really a political society at all.

First, they lacked sovereignty, that is, a single, unified and centralized system of authority. Their structure of authority was fragmented and chaotic because the right to make peace and war resided 'either in the people or in a council', whereas the responsibility to conduct the war rested on the kings. In a properly constituted political society, such a vital right as the right to make peace and war ought to be vested in a king or a 'federative' authority. To locate it in the people implied that they had not yet developed a structure of authority entitled to speak in their collective name, and were thus in a state of nature. And to locate it in a council, which had no other functions, implied that the society in question was divided up into different centres of authority, lacked centralization, and thus again was not a political society. As for the Indian kings, Locke contended that they were 'little more than generals of their armies' who, although active and absolute during war, normally exercised 'very little dominion' and possessed 'but a very moderate sovereignty'.

Second, as we saw, Locke maintained that political authority in a political society should be institutionalized, exercised through general positive laws, and be divided into legislature, executive and judiciary. In his view all these were missing among the Indians. He admitted that since they had 'no temptation to enlarge their possessions of land, or contest for wider extent of ground', and since there were therefore 'few trespasses and few offenders' among them, they had 'no need' for these institutions. Such few and relatively trivial disputes as occurred among them were settled on an informal basis by turning to their neighbours or to arbitrators chosen by the parties concerned. In Locke's view that only showed that the Indians did not need and therefore did not possess a political society.

Third, Locke argued that the Indians were not 'one people' and lacked a sense of collective identity. They did not speak 'one language', had not developed arts, sciences and a distinct culture, neither asserted their independence against outsiders nor insisted on a clearly demarcated territorial identity, lacked internal solidarity and were therefore a soft target for their neighbours, and so on. Locke could not see how a people devoid of all this could be said to constitute 'one society'. Since he had a specific notion of its oneness or singularity, he insisted that a political society must be unified in terms of a single and unified system of authority culminating in a 'decisive power' located in a single and clearly identifiable centre.

Locke summed up his view as follows:

Let me ask you, Whether it be not possible that men, to whom the rivers and woods afforded the spontaneous provisions of life, and so with no private possessions of land, had no enlarged desires after riches or power, should live in one society, make one people of one language under one Chieftain, who shall have not other power to command them in time of common war against their common enemies, without any municipal laws, judges, or any person with superiority established amongst them, but ended all their private differences, if any arose, by the extemporary determination of their neighbours, or of arbitrators chosen by the parties.\(^6\)

Having shown to his satisfaction that Indians lacked a political society, Locke argued that they were not entitled to have their territorial integrity respected by others. Theirs was a porous and unstructured society devoid of a clearly established political boundary and without settled ideas on who were insiders and who were outsiders.\(^9\) He admitted that they were not just a collection of isolated individuals and had developed a society with at least an elementary structure of authority, but insisted that this only placed them at an advanced stage of the state of nature. The insistence that they were in some kind of state of nature was vitally important for his defence of English colonialism. It enabled him to draw a qualitative distinction between Indian and English societies, to argue that the relations between the two could only be governed by the individually oriented law of nature, and to maintain that the English conflict with Indians, not being a case of war, was not subject to the laws regulating wars between nations.

For Locke, Indians were 'wild', 'like savages', and devoid of the capacity to raise themselves unaided to the level of the 'civilised part of mankind'. Since they lacked the basic drive to accumulate wealth and engage in international commerce, without which property, the arts and sciences and political society were impossible, they would, if left to themselves, for ever remain in the state of nature. The English guardianship was indispensable for their historical transition to civility and civilization.

Since Indians were in a state of nature, their relations with the civilized Europeans were to be governed by the law of nature and not by the law of nations which presupposed equality between those subject to it. The law of nature enjoined that, as human beings, Indians had rights to life,
liberty and property, which the English settlers had a natural duty to respect. They were not therefore at liberty to hunt and kill Indians as if they were animals, or to enslave them, or to deprive them of the fruits of their labour. Beyond that, the English settlers had no obligations to them. Since Indians had no property in land, the English were fully entitled to compel them to live closer together and to acquire the 'surplus' land. Locke also hoped that once the economy was monetized, English settlers would be able to buy up Indian lands and turn the erstwhile owners into their employees. He was in no doubt that these arrangements were in the interests of all concerned. He was prepared to admit that Indians might not see things this way, but was convinced that in the long run they would ‘think themselves beholden’ to the English. In Locke's view, English colonization not only did them no harm, but also respected their natural rights and conferred on them great economic, moral, cultural, scientific and political benefits. If the obstinate Indians resisted the settlers, they would have behaved irrationally, and ‘[might] be destroyed as a lion or tiger, one of those wild savage beasts’. Locke distinguished two modes of colonization, one based on ‘conquest by sword’ and represented by the Spanish, the other based on commerce and represented by the English. He unreservedly condemned the former and welcomed the latter. Spanish colonialism violated the natural rights of the natives, and additionally failed to establish a civilized way of life in the colonies. In Locke’s view it was also self-contradictory, for the colonial expansion was motivated by a desire for economic gain, whereas the right of conquest on which it rested ‘extends only to the lives of the conquered’ and did not give the conqueror a right over the latter’s property. English colonialism was open to these objections. It respected the natural equality of Indians, it was relatively peaceful, it used force only when they did not voluntarily part with their vacant and wasted lands, it civilized or morally uplifted them and drew them into an economically interdependent world, and it furthered the interests of mankind. Locke had no doubt at all that in colonizing America, the English performed the remarkable moral miracle of serving God, mankind, Indians and themselves.

Why Locke went wrong

Locke stressed human equality yet justified the English subjugation of Indians, including annexation of their land. How could an egalitarian premise yield such patently inegalitarian conclusions? Only two explanations are possible. Either his reasoning was faulty and involved illicit steps, or it rested on assumptions with inegalitarian implications. As we saw, by and large his reasoning was impeccable. The fault lay with his assumptions which, despite his confidence, were anything but self-evident and morally innocent.

First, Locke’s thought rested on a narrow view of human nature. For him, man was essentially rational; reason had a natural and uniform structure and mode of operation; reason was detachable from, and functioning best when insulated from, feelings and passions; man had a natural desire to accumulate wealth and enjoy a life of plentiful material comforts; and so on. Judged by such a view of man, Indians appeared defective and not fully human. Locke was not wrong to assume that human beings shared several basic capacities, needs and desires in common. His mistake was twofold. First, his list of universal human capacities and desires was narrow, and uncritically universalized those characteristic of the Englishmen of his time. The desires to accumulate wealth, enjoy maximum comforts and master nature are historically contingent, and there is no obvious reason why all human beings should develop them or why these desires should be given the importance that Locke gave them. Again, Locke was right to stress human rationality, but wrong to think that reason is inherently calculating, utilitarian, result-oriented or concerned to obtain the maximum possible advantages from a given unit of human effort. Second, Locke did not appreciate that even the universally shared human capacities and desires are shaped, structured, related and valued differently in different societies. All men reason, but they do not do so in an identical manner, nor do they all dissociate reason from feelings and sentiments, nor do they all give reason the same importance. Locke was wrong to think that just because Indians did not give reason as much importance as he did or exercise it the way he thought proper, they were subrational. Like many other liberal philosophers after him, he had great difficulty coping with difference and equated it with deficiency.

Locke’s second assumption related to his monistic vision of the good life. He derived this vision from his view of human nature and, since the latter was taken to be universally common and used to ground his moral theory, he assumed that only one form of individual and collective life was worthy of human beings. He judged the Indian way of life by these standards and found them wanting. Locke’s moral imagination was characterized by a simple-minded dualism. All ways of life were either civilized or primitive, and those falling within each category were in turn homogeneous and differed at best only in degrees. He never asked if the Indian way of life might not be good in its own way, represent a different view of human flourishing, and contain elements missing in his own way of life and from which he might learn something. Even when Locke noticed that Indians led peaceful and contented lives, were ‘free of hurry and worry’ as a contemporary missionary put it, did not quarrel over property, settled disputes peacefully, avoided litigation and generally did not commit offences, the qualities he himself admired in other contexts, he did not ask how these qualities were developed and nurtured by the Indian way of life and whether it might have useful lessons for him. Instead he dismissed them as deficiencies born out of lack of ambition and drive. Since he considered Indians savage, he was convinced that they could not have anything good about them, and since their way of life was treated as an undifferentiated and homogenous whole, Locke did not think it necessary
to approach it with sensitivity and discrimination and distinguish its good
and bad features. Convinced of the absolute superiority of the civilized
way of life, he was unable to view the Indian society with critical sympathy
and use it to interrogate his own. In Locke's naively dualist framework,
the Indian way of life was the 'absolute other' and had no moral claims
to his respect.

Third, Locke not only saw nothing valuable in the Indian way of life
but uncritically analysed it in terms of culturally specific English categories,
and totally misunderstood it. As a result, his analysis of it was unable to
protect him against the understandable European bias. For him land must
be owned, or else it was not property. It never occurred to him that land
might be used but not owned, that it might be owned but not to the
exclusion of others, or that the very idea of owning land may appear odd
and sacrilegious to communities who define their identity in terms of, and
therefore see themselves as an inseparable part of, their land. For Locke,
owning must involve enclosure. It did not occur to him that one might
own land but leave it open to the use of those whose needs are greater or
who require occasional or regular access to it for their survival. Even so
far as enclosure was concerned, Locke insisted that it must be of only one
kind. It had to involve unambiguous and physical demarcation, fencing,
the drawing of a boundary; an informal, notional and relatively permeable
boundary would not do. For Locke, labour too had to be of a specific kind
to qualify as such. It had to involve physical appropriation such as plucking
a fruit or picking up the animal one has killed. He dismissed planting,
hunting, trapping, fishing and nonsedentary agriculture as 'spontaneous
provision's or products of 'unassisted nature' and, except for the very last
step of picking or killing, not forms of labour. Locke said that land must
be used and not wasted, but again he defined 'waste' and 'use' in extremely
narrow and utilitarian terms. Land that was used for hunting, roaming for
fun, or chasing animals was said to be wasted. Cultivation too was narrowly
defined to mean 'improvement', and the latter in turn was taken to mean a
maximum yield of the 'conveniences of life. As a result, the Indian practice
of not exploiting land to the fullest, letting it 'rest and breathe for a while',
and allowing animals their share of access to it was dismissed as irrational
and wasteful. Locke insisted too that claims to property must be based on
labour, be it one's own or one's servants'. This culturally loaded argument
undermined Indians' claims to their land, based as it was on the ground
that they had lived on it for decades, that their Gods and dead spirits
inhabited it, that their customs were interwoven with it, and so on. They
did, of course, labour on it but that was incidental. It was not their land
because they laboured on it; rather, they laboured on it because it was their
land, which they owed it to their ancestors to keep in good condition.

Locke's conception of political society displayed a similar European
bias. He uncritically universalized the emerging European, especially Eng-
lish, state, and he condemned other societies for failing to be like it. For
him, a political society properly so called must have a single seat of
sovereignty, it must clearly distinguish between and institutionalize the
legislative, executive and judicial powers, it must be governed by positive
or deliberately enacted laws, it must feel possessive about its territory, it
must be powerful and cohesive enough to stand up to its neighbours, and
so on. He could not imagine that other societies might organize their
collective life differently. Since he looked for Indian analogues of European
institutions, he totally misunderstood the Indian way of life. He did not
notice that even though the exercise of power was not formally institution-
alized among Indians, it was governed by an intricate system of procedures
and contained its own checks and balances; he did not appreciate that
disputes appeared to be settled on an individual and ad hoc basis,
the settlement was embedded in and sanctioned by the authority of the
wider way of life; and he did not notice either that although the Indian
'laws' were not formally enacted and written down, there was a clear
consensus on what counted as 'laws', how they derived their authority and
who was entitled to interpret and enforce them. Some European travellers,
and even English settlers, had written reports about the Indian political
system that corrected these and other misunderstandings. Locke chose to
believe only those that confirmed his preconceptions.

Fourth, for Locke humanity was a status, a rank, with its own dignity
and corresponding rights and obligations. Man occupied a middling rank
within the universe. Infinitely inferior to God, he was the equal of his
fellow humans and vastly superior to the animals. It was because he was
human, that is, a being endowed with reason, that he was entitled not to
be treated like an animal and to enjoy equality with other men. But precisely
because he was human, he had a duty to lead a certain kind of life. For
Locke, humanity was not a state of being to be accepted with gratitude,
and human capacities were not faculties to be exercised and enjoyed as
one preferred. Human life had a purpose, an overarching goal, namely to
understand and master the world, and human capacities were a means to
that goal's realization. Life therefore was a task to be diligently executed,
a responsibility to be conscientiously discharged. The misguided Indians
treated life as fun and as a festival, and lacked the kind of moral seriousness
Locke expected of human beings. Since they failed to live up to the full
demands of their human dignity, status or rank, they were not yet fully
equal to the English and could be legitimately subjected to the process of
civilization.

Given these and related assumptions, it is easy to see how Locke
deduced his defence of English colonialism from an egalitarian premiss.
Indians were human beings, and, like the rest, entitled to protection of
their basic rights and interests. This is why Locke condemned in the
strongest possible terms the outrageous Spanish treatment of the Indians,
and took great pains to show that English colonization was in their ultimate
interest. Precisely because Indians were human beings, they were expected
to live up to the rational and moral imperatives of their human status.
Since they had not fully yet developed their rational capacity and lacked
an adequate understanding of what it was to be human, they were not
equipped to define their interests themselves and could not be allowed to
lead their self-chosen way of life. Locke's principle of equality accepted
them and other 'savage' people as equal objects of concern, but not as self-
defining subjects entitled to full and equal self-determination. The manner
in which Locke defined and defended equality thus had both egalitarian
and inegalitarian implications, and both justified colonialism and regulated
its excesses. It had an egalitarian form but its inegalitarian assumptions
gave it an inegalitarian content, and it legitimized violence against the
poor at home and the 'savages' abroad provided, of course, that that
violence did not exceed certain limits and served their long-term interests
as defined by their masters.

Whilst Locke's principle of equality offered at least some moral pro-
tection to Indians, it offered them no political protection. Indians were
entitled to equality as individuals, but not as an organized society. As
individuals their basic rights and interests were to be fully protected.
However since, in Locke's view, they had failed to establish political
societies and were not nations, their ways of life and territorial integrity
had no moral claims on outsiders and could be dismantled. As Locke
defined equality, it obtained only between the civilized nations and placed
the non-civilized societies outside the pale of international law and morality.
Interpersonal relations between all men were subject to the laws of nature,
but not international relations. The distinction between an egalitarian
interpersonal morality and an inegalitarian political and international morality
is central to Locke's thought, and indeed to most of the liberal tradition.

Mill and the Indians

During the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, European
colonialism entered a second phase. Hitherto the 'empty spaces' of such
areas as North America, Australia and New Zealand had been subject to
colonization. Now it was the turn of the heavily populated countries of
Asia and later of Africa. Europeans were interested primarily not so much
in unburdening their surplus population and settling in these countries as
in trade, commerce and political control. This new phase of colonialism,
usually called imperialism, needed a philosophical defence. Although Lock-
ean arguments were not without value, they needed to be revised to suit
the new circumstances. Among the many liberal writers who provided
such a defence, John Stuart Mill was the most influential. Just as Locke
was closely associated with English colonization in North America, J.S.
Mill was closely associated with the East India Company. He entered its
service in 1823, was eventually promoted to the highly influential post of
examiner, and remained one until 1838, the year the British government
abolished the company and took direct control of India.

For Mill, man was a progressive being whose ultimate destiny was to
secure the fullest development of his intellectual, moral, aesthetic and
other faculties. 'Among the works of man, which human life is rightly
employed in perfecting and beautifying, the first in importance surely is
man himself'. As a self-creating being, his 'comparative worth as a human
being' consisted in becoming 'the best thing' it was possible for him to
become. He was constantly to improve himself, develop new powers,
cultivate a 'striving and go-ahead character', and evolve a life best suited
to his 'natural constitution'. For Mill only such an autonomous and self-
determining being had 'character' or 'individuality'. 'One whose desires
and impulses are not his own has no character, no more than a steam-
engine has a character.'

For Mill, as for other nineteenth-century liberals, individuality was an
extremely difficult and precarious achievement. It required the courage to
be different, the willingness to make choices and to accept responsibility
for their consequences, thinking for oneself, and so on, which most human
beings found painful. In Mill's view, human beings had both a natural
and a historically acquired tendency towards conformity, which only a few
were able to fight successfully on their own. The tendency to conformity
was for obvious reasons reinforced by vested interests, including not only
rulers and religious establishments but also corporate and self-reproducing
institutional structures. For Mill as for most other liberals, individuality
represented human destiny, but it was not underwritten by and even went
against some of the deepest tendencies of human nature. There was a
profound tension between human nature and human destiny, between
what human beings tended to do and what they ought to do. The liberal
way of life required them to rebel against themselves, and only a few, the
'salt of the earth' as Mill called them, were capable of it. The rest had to
be educated into it and, until such time as they were ready, held in check.

Like Locke, Mill divided human societies into two, but his principle of
classification was different. In some societies, which he called civilized,
human beings were in the 'maturity of their faculties' and had 'attained
the capacity of being guided to their own improvement by conviction or
persuasion'. In his view most European societies had 'long since reached'
that stage. By contrast all non-European societies were 'backward', and
human beings there were in a state of 'nonage' or 'infancy'. Mill did not
think much of Africa, a 'continent without a history'. And although he
thought that India, China and 'the whole East' had begun well, he was
convinced that they had been 'stationary for thousands of years'.

Such backward societies were incapable of being improved by 'free and
equal discussion' and lacked the resources for self-regeneration. Like Locke,
he argued that if they are ever to be farther improved, it must be by
foreigners'. He did not think much of the likely objection that all societies,
including the backward, had a right to territorial integrity. Like Locke, he
argued that the right to nonintervention, like the right to individual liberty,
only belonged to those capable of making good use of it, that is, to those
'mature' enough to think and judge for themselves and to develop unaided.
Since backward societies lacked that capacity and were basically like
children, the right to nonintervention was 'either a certain evil or at best a questionable good for them' and only perpetuated their peoples' primitive and subhuman existences. For Mill, as for Locke, the right to nonintervention only applied to the relations between civilized societies.

Mill's defence of colonialism was based on his theory of man sketched above. Since, according to this theory, non-Europeans were moral and political infants, and thus below the age of consent, a 'parental despotism' by a 'superior people' was perfectly 'legitimate' and in their own long-term interest. It facilitated their transition to a 'higher stage of development' and trained them in 'what is specifically wanting to render them capable of a higher civilisation'. As human beings, such backward individuals had equal moral claims to the pursuit and protection of their interests with the members of civilized societies, but as collectivities they had no political claims to independence and self-determination. This is precisely the argument Locke had made in relation to American Indians.

Unlike the Canadians, Australians and other British dominions who were of 'European race' and of 'her own blood', non-Europeans were only fit for a 'government of leading-strings'. Their affairs were best run by a body of carefully selected, well-meaning and professionally trained bureaucrats free from the control of elected politicians who were all bound to be subject to the influence of shifting public opinion. Mill was convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that the colonial bureaucracy should not be accountable to the 'second and third class' of elected representatives either in Britain or in the colonies. That was why when the British parliament abolished the East India Company and brought India under direct British rule, Mill chose to take early retirement rather than cooperate with the new arrangement even on an experimental basis. That was also why he kept resisting right until his last working days every parliamentary attempt to give the Indians a measure of self-rule. Even when Ceylon, which was directly under the Colonial Office, was granted considerable local autonomy with no apparent adverse results, Mill continued to argue against its extension to India.

Mill maintained that just as a civilized society had a right to rule over a primitive or semi-civilized society, a more civilized group or nationality within a civilized society had a right to 'absorb' and dominate inferior groups. He had no doubt that the Breton and the Basque stood to benefit greatly if absorbed into the French 'nation' and given the opportunity to share in the latter's dignity, power and civilization. The Scottish Highlanders and the Welsh too would gain if absorbed into the British, by which Mill meant the English, way of life. This view lay at the basis of Mill's approval of Lord Durham's Report on Canada. Lord Durham was hostile to the 'backward' French Canadians' 'vain endeavour' to preserve their cultural identity, and insisted that their true interests lay in being subjected to the 'vigorous rule of an English majority', that 'great race which must ... be predominant over the whole' of North America. Although Lord Durham advocated responsible government for Canada and was genuinely liberal in severe respects, he had very little understanding of the strength of

ethnic loyalties and even less sympathy for the desire to preserve ethnic identities. Nor surprisingly, many Canadian commentators have criticized his cultural 'chauvinism', and some have even accused him of racism. Mill enthusiastically welcomed the Durham Report, calling it an 'imperishable memorial of that nobleman's courage, patriotism and enlightened liberty'. Just as Lord Durham wanted the French Canadians to become English, Macaulay wanted to make the Indians English in all respects save the colour of their skin. Liberals in other parts of the British Empire felt the same way about the indigenous ways of life and thought. Drawing inspiration from Mill they wondered why people should remain attached to their traditions and customs, and why the colonial rulers should not use a subtle mixture of education and coercion to get them to adopt the liberal ways of life and thought.

Although Mill stressed the value of diversity, he defined its nature and permissible range in narrow terms. As we saw, he linked diversity to individuality and choice, and valued the former only in so far as it was grounded in the individualist conception of man. This ruled out several forms of diversity. It ruled out traditional and customary ways of life, as well as those centred on the community. It also ruled out ethnically grounded ways of life as well as those limited to a 'narrow mental orbit' or 'not in tune' with the dominant trend of the age. Although he did not dismiss them, Mill took a low view of ways of life that stressed contentment and weak ambition rather than a go-getting character, or placed little value on worldly success and material abundance. As one would expect, Mill cherished not diversity per se but liberal diversity, that is, diversity confined within the narrow limits of the individualist model of human excellence. In his relation to nonliberal ways of life, Mill displayed considerable intolerance. His intellectual tools were too blunt to allow him to make sense of them, and he thought them inhuman and stifling. He dismissed them as illiberal and sought to dismantle them. If that required a vigorous policy of assimilation, he saw nothing wrong in it. And if some measure of coercion and violence was necessary, he accepted it as morally legitimate. More so than Locke, Mill condemned the racist arrogance of and the misuse of political power by the colonial bureaucrats, so much so that many of his countrymen called him a lover of the blacks and some of his obituarists could not restrain their relief at his death. And yet he had no difficulty sharing the colonial contempt for native cultures and approving of the violence used to dismantle them.

Although Mill is separated from Locke by a century and a half and sometimes speaks in different idioms, there are remarkable similarities between their vocabularies, approaches and assumptions. Both talk of reason, progress (Mill more so than Locke), liberty, autonomy, civilization. Both divide human societies into 'civilized' and 'primitive', and treat each category as homogeneous and undifferentiated. Both treat non-European ways of life with contempt, think that they have nothing to learn from a critical dialogue with them, and make no effort to understand them from
within. Both use educational metaphors to conceptualize colonial rule, and see it as a pedagogical process. This allows them to assimilate colonial violence: to legitimate chastisement, to conceal its true nature, to blame the victims for provoking it, and to justify it in terms of the latter's long-term interests as well as those of the human civilization itself.

Both Locke and Mill shared a firm belief in the equality of men and used it to justify and regulate colonial rule. Unlike the conservative defenders of colonialism, they were concerned (Mill more than Locke) about the well-being of the natives, and condemned the racism, misuse of political power, and violation of basic human rights that accompanied colonial rule. While respecting the demands of equality up to this point, neither writer recognized the natives as self-determining subjects entitled to define their true interests themselves and to lead their preferred ways of life. The transition from the equality of all men to the unequal treatment of some was effected by both writers by means of such steps as belief in the uniformity of human nature, a monistic vision of the good life, contempt for those who differed from the latter and the consequent failure to allow them to speak for themselves, a recurrent tendency to see difference as deviation, and a pervasive mood of cultural narcissism.

Both Locke and Mill also failed to understand the extremely complex relationship between human beings and their cultures. They rightly insisted that being reflective and self-critical, human beings were able to take a critical view of their cultures and possessed capacities that were not always realized in their cultures. This meant that while cultures could be graded, human beings could not. The separation between human beings and their cultures protected the two writers against racism and gave them the conceptual tools to criticize it. But it also created problems. While rightly stressing that human beings were not prisoners of their cultures, Locke and Mill took the simple-minded view that cultures were like clothes, external to those involved and to be discarded when more fashionable ones became available. This prevented them from noticing that cultures could not be dissociated from their human bearers and judged (let alone graded) in the abstract, and that even if European culture could be shown to be superior to non-European cultures, it was not necessarily better for non-European societies to whose tastes, traditions, temperaments and habits of thought it was ill-suited. This does not mean that cultures could not or should not be criticized and changed, but rather that demands for changes must come from within them, and that changes do not take root unless they are grafted onto the critically teased-out resources of the cultures concerned. The task of civilizing other societies is deeply problematic, and rests on dubious assumptions.

Why liberalism becomes illiberal

I have so far concentrated on showing how and why Locke and Mill, starting with egalitarian premises, reached egalitarian conclusions, of which justification of colonialism was one but not the only expression. Since both writers drew upon and developed the liberal tradition of thought, it is hardly surprising that their assumptions continue to inform that tradition and explain some of the actions and utterances listed at the beginning of this chapter. Liberals believe in equal respect for persons, tolerance, fairness, and so on. They are also convinced, however, that the individualist way of life is the best and even the only rationally defensible one, that those that differ from it are mistaken and in need of education and even perhaps coercion, that liberals can only feel safe in a world that has become thoroughly liberal, that human beings are only contingently related to their cultures, and so on. Although liberalism has mellowed over the years and become self-critical, these and related assumptions still continue to dominate it and emasculate the force of its liberal and egalitarian impulses. Liberals do believe in equal respect for all human beings, but they find it difficult to accord equal respect to those who do not value autonomy, individuality, self-determination, choice, secularism, ambition, competition and the pursuit of wealth. In the liberal view, such men and women are 'failing' to use their 'truly' human capacities, to live up to the 'norms' of their human 'dignity' or 'status', and are thus not 'earning' their right to liberal respect. For reasons of prudence and out of respect for the liberal principle of tolerance, liberals do not generally persecute nonliberals, but they feel uneasy and even threatened in their presence and do all in their power to undermine them, even exerting enormous social and political pressures and using schools as tools of cultural engineering. This explains the liberal attitude to communists in the 1950s and to the ethnic minorities, Muslims and other religious groups, today.

Liberals grant equality to all men on condition that they share and live by the narrowly defined liberal values of choice, autonomy, self-determination, and so forth. Equality as defined by the liberal therefore is a dubious gift and often serves as the ideological means to mould its recipients in the liberal image. The liberal views on tolerance, fairness, justice and personal responsibility have a similar thrust. When critically examined, the central assumptions informing liberal thought turn out to be problematic. As pointed out by critics of liberalism from Hegel onwards, the socially transcendental individual as imagined by the liberals is a fiction; human beings and the cultures they both inherit and re-create are infinitely varied, and their visions of good life are sometimes incomensurable. Unless a theory of man recognizes the legitimacy of deep differences and gives them an ontological status, it cannot avoid setting up narrow norms and throwing up inegalitarian and even imperialist impulses. Obviously, we cannot tolerate all differences, but the determining principle should be dialogically derived and consensually grounded, not arbitrarily imposed by a narrowly defined liberalism. Liberals cannot consistently be dogmatic about their own beliefs and sceptical about others, or talk about an open-minded dialogue yet both exclude some and conduct the dialogue on their own terms. They need to take a sustained critical look at their
basic assumptions that both generate, and prevent them from noticing and restraining, their illiberal and inegalitarian impulses.

Notes

I am grateful to my friend Jan Nederveen Pieterse for his valuable comments. The section on J.S. Mill draws on my 'Decolonising liberalism' in Alessandras Shtromas, The End of 'Isms'? (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994). I am grateful to Will Kymlicka for his many helpful comments on that essay.

5. Ibid., § 38.
6. Ibid., § 107f.
7. Ibid., § 108.
9. That a political society should be 'too hard' for its neighbours is discussed in Second Treatise, § 42. I have so far concentrated on showing that contrary to Locke's assertions, the Indians had established the two vital institutions of property and political society. This challenges his conceptualization of and conclusions about them, but not his premisses. To challenge the latter, one would need to criticize his views on man's relation to the shared earth, the nature of equality, the way he justified private property and limited others' claims on it, and so on. I do not mount such a critique here.
11. The ideas of status and rank occur in almost all of Locke's moral and political writings and are packed with normative implications. Mill's conception of human dignity, with its quasi-aristocratic connotation, bears a close resemblance to it and plays a similar role in his thought. A good deal of the liberal tradition presupposes an unarticulated cosmology and a view of man's status in the universe.
13. Ibid., pp. 117, 118 and 125.
15. Ibid., p. 73.
17. Ibid., pp. 386f and 391f.