

## James Mill

James Mill (April 6, 1773- June 23, 1836), British political philosopher, economist, and historian, born in Scotland. He was educated at University of Edinburgh through the patronage of Sir John Stuart, where he attended the lectures of Dugald Stewart, and specialized in philosophy (Bain, 1882). Mill moved to London in 1802 to pursue a career as a journalist, writing for several periodicals. He became closely associated with Jeremy Bentham, and was an ardent advocate of utilitarianism, and of the Benthamite objective of achieving ‘the greatest happiness of the greater number,’ (Stephen, 1900). The group of Radicals around Bentham and Mill shared a set of policy objectives that included the abolition of the Poor and Corn Laws, the extension of the franchise, and religious tolerance.

James Mill wrote a pamphlet in 1804 in which he reviewed the history of the Corn Laws, calling for the removal of all export bounties and import duties on grains and criticizing Malthus, among others, for defending them. Mill’s *Commerce Defended* (1808) reiterated his arguments against the Corn Laws, and is credited with providing the first version in English of Say’s Law of Markets, according to which ‘supply creates its own demand’ (Sowell, 1972). Baumol (1977) points out that, for Mill, Say’s Law was not fundamentally about the impossibility of overproduction, but rather about the notion that productive consumption (investment), rather than consumption of luxuries, was the effective means to promote growth. Ricardo, who became Mill’s close friend, in part as a result of Mill’s influence, adopted Say’s Law.

Mill’s extended the utility principle to the science of politics in his essay on *Government* (1820) for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The end of government was to increase human happiness, and only individuals could make the utilitarian calculation of pleasure and pain. Thus, Mill concluded that only representative democracy was compatible with the principle of utility, since it would prevent those in power of acting for their own advantage. The requirement for voting was the individual’s capacity to judge his own interest, that is, knowledge rather than birth or property were at the center of his political theory (Milgate and Stimson, 1993). In his *History of British India* (1817), that helped secure a permanent position with the East India Company, he defended British rule in India, in contradiction with his own theory of political representation. In addition, his Eurocentric views on colonial rule reveal contempt for other cultures and societies.

Mill’s *Elements of Political Economy* (1821) – written as lessons for his son John Stuart Mill – were central in popularizing a certain version of Ricardian economics, that included elements like the ‘wage fund’ theory, that were extraneous to Ricardo’s ideas (Cremaschi, 2004). De Marchi (1983) contrasts the dogmatic Mill of the *Elements* that simplifies and deduces everything from first principles, with the more open minded thinker of previous works. Mill’s defense of Ricardian economics and his commitment to Utilitarianism would lead to a confluence of both strands of his thought that would eventually come together within the marginalist school.

## References

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