The Nature of Governmentality

*The Vitalistic Naturalism of J.S. Mill in Fukuzawa Yukichi’s Japan*

Introduction

Michel Foucault’s history of neoliberal thought, as it appears in his lectures to the College de France in 1975-8, charts a number of critical conceptual developments which were essential to the emergence of what we would now call “modern” government. At the heart of these changes in thinking was a radical reconfiguration of the concept of “nature” and the relationship of human societies to the natural course of events. Although Mill was far from the first critic of natural law philosophies, his innovation was to replace it with a qualitative vitalism central to subsequent liberal thought. This vitalism, noted by Foucault in his analyses of governmentality and biopower, is at the heart of our understanding of what it means to be a “developed” society today.

My central claim is that although John Stuart Mill provided one of the earliest most influential philosophical articulations of this vitalistic turn in nature discourse, it is little remarked upon given its role in shaping both classical liberal and neoliberal thought. Not only is he highly representative of the linguistic and conceptual shifts that Foucault describes, but his concrete political influence was important in establishing this vitalism as a core principle of contemporary liberalism. The vitalistic language Mill employs sees political economy as the site of a vigorous, active cultivation of forces organized for the sake of an increasingly efficient harnessing and taming of an external natural world. Mill’s intervention in the language of nature is characteristically new, and represents a critical moment of discontinuity in thinking about nature and government.

In order to understand the critical legitimating function that this discursive shift played in the emergence of modern liberal and now neoliberal institutions, I examine the role of Mill’s vitalistic naturalism in the wave of political-economic modernization associated with the 1868 Meiji restoration in Japan. I argue that Fukuzawa Yukichi, the preeminent intellectual of the restoration (Craig 2009, 124), makes a critical contribution to the legitimation of the new institutions of biopolitics and governmentality being constructed in Japan. Because these institutions were modeled on European forms, Fukuzawa sought to introduce of a new conception of nature, set in direct opposition to the hegemonic neo-Confucian worldview of the Tokugawa era, to support these new practices. Fukuzawa was not only a close reader of Mill, but the finest popularizer of Millian political-economic thought in Japan. More importantly, as I will show, Fukuzawa was a primary vector for the critical changes in the language of nature which Mill represented. Fukuzawa cannot be taken to simply be introducing a classically conceived “Western” view of nature, which operates on a dualism separating the human and the physical worlds. Rather, Fukuzawa needs Mill’s novel turn to a vitalistic nature to bring “civilization” to Japan. The successful institutionalization of this vitalistic conception of nature, I will contend, was not only an important precondition for the emergence of a European-style modernity in Japan, but speaks to the importance of this conceptual shift for the process of modernization in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere.

In order to show the depth and significance of the shift of the language of nature from a unified physical-moral order towards a utilitarian vitalism, I proceed in four stages. First, using Foucault as a historical guide, I briefly survey the political-economic transformations which characterize the 19th century moves in Europe towards what one interpretation of what we now understand as “modernity”. Second, in order to understand the philosophical underpinnings of these moves, I provide an analysis of Mill’s vitalistic naturalism which reveals its critical distinctions from the nature discourses of Baconian science and natural law which preceded it. Third, I turn to Japan to illustrate the relationships between vital naturalism, utility, and modernity. I begin by presenting an analysis of the neo-Confucian worldview to show the psychological orientation the Fukuzawa’s Millian nature discourse was meant to combat. Finally, I examine Fukuzawa’s attempt to engage the “spirit of civilization” to show that the vitalism he appropriates from Mill is an essential precondition for the emergence of biopolitics and governmental societal management. I conclude that J.S. Mill’s role in legitimizing and popularizing modern social and political institutions goes deeper than just providing a logical defense of individuality or representative government.

Governmentality, Biopolitics, and Modern Liberalisms

At the end of the 18th century, Foucault observes the birth of what will become two new articulations of power created in the shift away from Hobbesian sovereignty. These two articulations of power resonate with the core justifications of a “modern” liberal political order, and their emergence reflects a shift in the meaning of naturalness. The first new articulation of power that Foucault describes is what comes to be known as “biopower”. Biopower is the condition in which political economy comes to bring under its list of competences the management and cultivation of populations in their biological essence (Foucault 1990 [1978], 139). Biopolitics emerges when what is at stake in politics and the economy is the biological existence of a population as a political subject, and it focuses on the arrangement of knowledges about the natural world for the sake of the health of that population. It describes the situation in which “…power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large scale-phenomena of population” (Foucault 1990 [1978], 137). This type of power, which conceives of the population as a coherent entity, ensures order by “…working to incite reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it: a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them” (Foucault 1990 [1978], 136).

Second, if biopolitics is the point where the biological sciences meet the management of populations, “governmentality” is the set of political technologies which make the management of populations in biopolitical terms possible (Foucault 2007 [1978], 35). He argues that what is critical for the present is management of forces which are essential to the survival of the of the state-economy complex. This system adjusts its scope to and limits to maintain itself homeostatically, redefining what does and does not fall within the state’s domain of competence and control (Foucault 2007 [1977], 109). The technologies of homeostasis govern economic flows, the arrangement and disposition of territory, and the defense of the population as a unit through programming the environment constituted by the multiplicity of individuals. The manipulation of the “milieu”, or the “natural” environment in which individuals function politically and economically, is the primary tool by which security is provided for a population within a defined territorial domain (Foucault 2007 [1977], 22).

The cultivation of forces, the viewing of population as a “natural” feature of reality, and the scientific grid through which human beings came to govern themselves rely on a particular orientation towards nature at every turn. Indeed, the liberalism most compatible with biopolitical and governmental power is grounded linguistically in the identity of use of the terms liberalism and “naturalism” (Foucault 2008, 61-63). Foucault identifies two particular moments of rupture in the meaning of nature critical for the emergence of this naturalistic liberalism. First, he posits a break between the medieval nature filled “prodigies, marvels, and signs” (Foucault 2007 [1978], 236) in which the fundamental question of governing by kings was whether they governed “…in proper conformity to moral, natural, or divine laws” Foucault 2008 [1979], 18-19). He then identifies a new, 17th-century logic of nature tied up with what he calls “*raison d’état”.* *Raison d’Etat* is a new logic of the state in which the question of the cultivation of the state’s economic and social forces for maximum power first arises. *Raison d’état* demystifies the world and imposes a nature in which scientific knowledge and rationality are linked to political power. This mode of government is mechanical, however, and does not treat human societies as vital entities which grow, evolve, and perfect themselves when placed in the correct environmental conditions. It is static, rigid, and the population is ignorant of its own status as a political subject.

Second, Foucault traces another shift, in which he claims that the “non-naturalness” of *Raison d’état* is transmuted with the rise of the new proto-liberal thought of the late 18th century. In other words, the dualism of the demystified, scientific nature characteristic of *Raison d’Etat* persists along with its goal of developing the power of the state. The emergence of 19th century liberal thinking is marked by the discovery of an analog to the dynamics of the physical world in the world of human relations. The discovery of this new universe makes it possible to perceive society as a subject in itself. In this way, society becomes a site for cultivation, and it can be made to live through the correct techniques of husbandry and management. The problematic of security is recast in terms of the health and vitality of society. In this way, the correct understanding of nature is therefore an essential precondition for the emergence of governmentality and biopolitics, as well as the liberal political order with which they are most consistent. Foucault shows that given these deep connections between biology and the structuring of the environment, liberalism is at pains to distinguish itself from a broader conception of “naturalism” which treats both human and physical natural dynamics as the domain of political rule.

The naturalism at the heart of liberalism means that for the state to function in terms of governmental power, it must respect the “spontaneous mechanisms of the economy”, and to understand the complexity of the spontaneously emergent social mechanisms which parallel those in physical nature. The standard becomes the success or failure of institutions with respect to their productive or unproductive harnessing of the underlying spontaneity of the world. Success requires understanding that underlying nature. Foucault asks what leads a liberal government to disrupt the natural order that governs the circulation of wealth, knowledge, and power within the system. His answer is that what causes the state to violate the natural order is ignorance of the natural laws or mechanisms underlying the natural function of the state. “In other words, governments can be mistaken. And the greatest evil of government, what makes it a bad government is not that the prince is wicked, but that he is ignorant” (Foucault 2008 [1979], 17). In this way, the art of liberal government becomes de-moralized and inextricably linked to the practice of science, both natural and social.

In this way, the relationship between art and nature, which lies at the heart of liberal governmentality, is clearly articulated by John Stuart Mill, who quietly reconfigured the traditional, oppositional, “Western” discourse of nature. Pattberg (2007, 2) argues that the traditional vision of nature as something external to be dominated was a necessary precondition for the distinguishing of “society” as a separate sphere. Mill’s language of nature radically alters this basic distinction marks a new stage in the technologies of government by transforming society into something to be understood in terms of its vitality.

Mill’s Liberal Nature

Mill was deeply concerned with the confusion in the use of the terms “nature, natural, and the group of words derived from them” (Mill 1998 [1874], 3). His posthumously published essay, “Nature” takes aim at this confusion and introduces an essential new liberal language for speaking about the intersection between the physical and human worlds. This attempt at clarification, however, ultimately produces a very new understanding of the relationship between individuals, “society”, and the physical milieu they inhabit. Mill’s argument makes the vitalistic cultivation of forces for the sake of “well-being” the primary goal of politics and economy, and the critical ground on which this change is effected is the idea of nature.

Mill makes a radical argument insofar as he isolates human vital energy as a special phenomenon in nature. The relations of human beings with one another allows for meaning creation, self-reflection, and ultimately mastery over the nature of those relations themselves. Mill argues that in this context, reason can be directed to the service of cultivating and developing that characteristically human vital energy.

Mill’s critical moves are in the reconfiguration of the definition of usefulness around the concept of “well-being”, and the connection he identifies between the individual, society, and nature as the site where the production of well-being can be managed. This focus on the management of well-being is what I characterize as the “vitalistic” move Mill makes, and it is this vitalism which makes Millian nature a characteristically “liberal” nature. This articulation of well-being requires an understanding of a nature severed from the obstinate moral claims of the natural law tradition. Mill’s vitalism replaces the notion of natural moral harmony with the pursuit of “making live” as an end in itself. Crucially, this vision appears to run consistently throughout much of Mill’s *oeuvre*, notably *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism.*

Mill offers two correct uses of the terms “nature” and “natural”. First, there is nature in the sense of the “nature” of a particular object, by which they mean “…[that object’s] entire capacity of exhibiting phenomena.” (Mill 1998 [1874], 5). The important move that Mill makes in positing this definition is that the phenomena that a thing exhibits are the same in all circumstances, and can be posited as the “laws” of that thing’s being. Mill in this way develops a particular ontological position with regard to objects in the world, and credits them with a crucial, independent objectivity that defines them. This objectivity paves the way for positivistic science to generate factual knowledge about the external, “natural” world. Although this is not new, it is the central piece of the classical “Western” view of nature, and the foundation for the shift that Mill does introduce.

This leads to a second, “correct” sense of the word Nature in which it means not everything which happens, but only that which takes place “…without the agency, or without the voluntary and intentional agency, of man” (Mill 1998 [1874], 8). Mill believes that this sense is the source of the most pernicious attempts to justify moral, political, or economic policies because it disengages human agency and human utility from conduct. This definition makes clear that nature can only be a description of what is, and that it is a serious confusion to treat it as a justification for what ought to be. In other words, appealing to a universe of laws which operate outside of human agency for moral guidance can only ever be static. There is no ground on which utility can be increased if naturalness is treated as an end and not a means. Mill’s refutation of natural law is liberatory in that it frees human ingenuity to improve the dynamic world in ways incomprehensible to one who looks at the world through the static moral-natural grid.

Mill then makes a distinction between nature and art, insofar as; “Art is but the employment of the powers of nature as an end”. The powers of nature operate according to defined, knowable rules. As Mill points out, we do not make the natural world just as we want it to be. In fact; “We can only take advantage for our purposes of the properties which we find” (Mill 1998 [1874], 7). That is, human beings survive in the natural world by harnessing, re-directing, and appropriating the given mechanisms of the universe as we come to know them. This harnessing is dependent on our knowing the world in certain ways. As Foucault argues, this harnessing and redirecting of forces on the basis of knowledge is key to governmentality, and is an essential condition for the emergence of liberal institutions.

Mill asserts that “Though we cannot emancipate ourselves from the laws of nature as a whole, we can escape from any particular law of nature if we are able to withdraw ourselves from the circumstances in which it acts. Though we can do nothing except through laws of nature, we can use one law to counteract another. According to Bacon’s maxim “…we can obey nature in such a manner as to command it” (Mill 1998 [1874], 17). Mill thereby turns the question from one of moral conformation to one of amoral knowledge acquisition. Thus, “If…the useless precept to follow nature were changed into a precept to study nature…we should have arrived at the first principle of all intelligent action, or rather, at the definition of intelligent action itself” (Mill 1998 [1874], 17). Mill holds that the main reason why human beings suffer in this world is because they lack cultivation in the use of reason (Mill 1979 [1861], 13). This argument is not new, but Mill ties it to a broader conception of vitality and agency as applied to the redirection of the forces of nature.

This redirection of forces through the application of knowledge is critical for Mill’s concept of “well-being”. Well-being amounts to the “…perfecting and beautifying…” of both nature and “...man himself” (Mill 1989 [1859], 59). The desire to perfect and to flourish, Mill argues, is what makes human society distinct and separate from the both the inanimate physical universe and the realm of all other living things. It is grounded in a unique vital energy which, while not the *élan vital* of Bergson, is nonetheless at the heart of what it means to be human. Although Aristotle also understands perfecting and beautifying as the essential end of human life, Mill is important in making the perfection of human beings as a coherent subject (in the form of “society”) the objective of politics. Mill’s vitalism is more clearly articulated than in other “liberal” thought of the period, and is critical for the development of modern biopolitical and governmental society in Foucault’s terms.

Mill holds that “human nature is not a machine…but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing” (Mill 1989 [1859], 60). The language Mill uses to describe this cultivation is that of re-direction and management. He contends that individuals’ energetic natures should be “turned” from bad use, and that vital energy should be redirected for progressive ends. The cultivation and management of this vitality by society as its own political subject is the means by which it “does its duty and protects its interest” (Mill 1989 [1859], 60). Well-being, for Mill, is the state of living in such a way as forces, both individual and social, can be continually directed and channeled towards ends which further alleviate suffering conditioned by the natural position of human beings.

Mill believes that through the increase in knowledge about the physical world, as well as the refinement and perfection of social institutions the causes of human suffering are all capable of being mitigated. Human satisfaction itself partially consists in probing the nature of things that surround us, this progress is achievable provided that individuals are allowed to inhabit the circumstances which allow this natural curiosity and desire to improve to advance (Mill 1979 [1861], 9, 14-15). This formulation constructs a strict division between the human being and the world of external, spontaneous forces that impede human happiness. Dualism is consistent with Bacon’s understanding of science which represents the standard “Western” view of nature, but Mill modifies this notion by insisting that human happiness consists not just in protecting itself against the vicissitudes of an external nature, but in understanding and harnessing natural principles to help human beings in the collective thrive. This dualistic conception of human beings and nature creates a set of normative, but not clearly moral, political principles which best cultivate the human desire to ameliorate the indifferent violence that spontaneous, external nature does to all of us.

Understanding utility in terms of vitality helps clarify the relationship between the individual and society in *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism.* Mill insists that well-being as vitalism be internalized on the level of the individual in order for the liberal institutions which most effectively mediate the well-being of individuals and societies to function. That is, the internalization of a worldview which links society, individuality, and living better than just living is a prerequisite for the emergence of the institutions which coordinate those relationships. Next, he draws attention to the importance of this worldview in the “adjustment” of social order to perturbations. When vital well-being correctly understood is naturalized as the guiding principle or core of “utility”, the management and production of well-being on both the individual and social “presents no extraordinary difficulty” ((Mill 1989 [1859]:57). That is, people orient themselves automatically towards ends which are conducive to their own flourishing and therefore the flourishing of society.

Mill’s vitalism therefore breaks radically different from the various versions of natural law thinking that, while compatible with the Baconian vision of science, set standards and objectives for human action which inhibit well-being conceived of as a dynamic system By showing the absurdity of using “spontaneous” nature as a standard for action, Mill asks society to look inward for its own standards of good and bad, and to cultivate its vitality through the increasingly skillful management of the forces which surround it. Thus, utility, the language of nature, and vitality are linked in ways that are often overlooked in Mill, and are preconditions for the emergence of the institutions of thought and practical management that are characteristic of modern liberal political economy. In order to understand this connection more deeply, I turn to the experience of Meiji Japan and the “spirit of civilization” sought after by Fukuzawa Yukichi.

The Neo-Confucian Discourse of Nature

The new liberal and vitalistic understanding of nature that Mill provides, and the political technology which is it justifies lie at the heart of the changes in government that Foucault observes in Europe in the 19th century. Foucault claims that the “… ‘threshold of modernity’ has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies” (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 143). During the same period, Japan was forced to begin its own confrontation with global modernity after nearly 250 years of economic and cultural isolation. With the arrival of American gunships in Uraga Bay in 1853, Japan was forced to end its “closed country” policy and integrate into the system of global exchange. The price of this integration was the wager of the life newly conceived population of Japan once it could be perceived as a coherent political subject. The thought of Fukuzawa Yukichi, the preeminent intellectual of the 1870’s and 1880’s and the main popularizer of Millian thought in Japan, uses the vitalistic discourse of nature as a tool for restructuring Japanese society on the basis of new, European political subjectivities. Indeed, Clifford (1995) goes so far as to argue that Mill’s *On Liberty* can be read as a manual for Foucauldian subjectification, as Fukuzawa’s theory of civilization demonstrates.

Thomas argues that one of the central political battlefields of modernization in early Meiji period was the meaning of nature and the natural (Thomas 2001, 3). Fukuzawa was a key figure in these struggles, as he aimed to replace the Confucian conception of nature as a static system in which human morality was inseparable from nature with a Millian vitalistic naturalism as the key foundational concept legitimizing politics (Craig 2009:ix; Hane 1969). Millian vitalism was synonymous in Fukuzawa’s mind with what he called “civilization”, and was the essential weapon of resistance against the colonial powers’ attempts to “humiliate” Japan (Fukuzawa 1969 [1876], 16). Just as Mill needed to break with natural law theories specifying a unity between the physical and the ethical in order to unlock the potential of governmental techniques of power, Fukuzawa aimed to sever the Japanese understanding of nature from the neo-Confucian principle of natural harmony, and create a vitalistic utility principle to justify what Foucault would later describe as governmental practices.

Fukuzawa’s intervention can be read in two ways. Either he can be taken to be seeking to impose a version of the classical “Western” view of nature characterized by an emphasis on the Cartesian ontological duality between human beings and the physical world, while also affirming the notion of natural law. Thomas (2001) and Maruyama (1974) take him to be performing this function. Alternatively, as I argue, he can be understood to be introducing a new, specifically “liberal” construction of naturalness necessary for the function of new governmental technologies of political economy capable of matching the productive potential of the West. From this perspective, the analytical distinction between “Western” and “Eastern” views of nature disappears, and a startling similarity appears between “modern” and “premodern” views of nature. The critical changes which took place in the mid-19th century in Europe identified by Foucault and characterized by Mill are reproduced in Japan, pointing to a broader relation between society’s self-awareness and the meaning of “natural” processes. Fukuzawa’s intervention reveals that Mill’s vitalistic reconfiguration of nature is bound to liberal/neoliberal political-economic institutions and their capacities to “make live”.

Fukuzawa Yukichi’s two principal works of the 1870’s, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization* (1875) and *An Encouragement of Learning* (1876) appeared in the early stages of the Meiji restoration with the aim of instilling the deeper social-psychological conditions of what Fukuzawa (borrowing Mill’s term) calls “civilization”. Civilization, for both thinkers, is the psychological/spiritual orientation possessed by a public which make biological “well-being” and the ever-increasing dynamism of society the definitions of “utility”. Modernity means replacing natural/moral harmony with the utility principle as the guide for correct action and good government. *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, in particular, is an attempt to justify the pursuit of European forms of management as a concrete political objective, as well as an argument for how that objective can be reached through the creation of a cohesive Japanese “society”, a reevaluation of the importance of individuality and its relation to that society, and an orientation towards the pursuit of objective knowledge about an external natural world as means to cultivating the vitality of the nation’s population (Hane 1969: 262).

The trope of an intrinsic “Eastern” harmony with nature opposed to the “Western” confrontational attitude papers over very real differences within both traditions as well as similarities between them. Mill shows in his refutation of natural law that there was overlap in East Asian and European thought in terms of the philosophical connection of morality to nature. This connection was highly problematic for both Mill and Fukuzawa in unleashing the vital potential of their societies. Although both traditions emphasize morality’s grounding in nature, “Western” Cartesian or Baconian dualism is nonetheless differentiated from the “Eastern” Confucian belief that nature was a plentiful and beneficent force (Morris-Suzuki 1991, 83, 92). According to Morris-Suzuki, in this view “…nature is not a hostile force, but abundant and benign: there is no place here for the notion that, as John Stuart Mill put it, ‘…all praise of Civilization, or Art, or Contrivance, is so much dispraise of nature’”(1991, 85-6 quoting Mill 1998 [1874], 8). Fukuzawa’s objective, then was to both refute the moral identity with nature and show that civilization, art, and contrivance as distinctly human capacities are the true sources of vitality.

Confucian ethics, philosophy, and politics cannot be separated, meaning that any attempt to intervene in one these fields requires engagement with the others. According to Maruyama, “Tokugawa society was…a feudal political system that froze life [and] deplored all innovations…” (Maruyama 1974 [1944], 10). A critical feature of this period was that not only was Confucian thought dominant among the elite classes, but it was widely accepted by the general public as well (Maruyama 1974 [1944], 13-14). The static nature of Confucian thought lamented by both Maruyama and Mill is revealed in the identity that it draws between nature, ethics, and politics. The “five relationships” which form the core of all Confucian politics and ethics are immutable because “the house and the outside world are harmonious. That is why the Way of Heaven prevails above, and the principles of human relationships are clear below”. Razan Hayashi (1583-1657), the most influential Chu-Hsi (neo-Confucian) scholar of the early Tokugawa period, established the principle that “heaven and man are mutually related” in such a way that many subsequent developments in Tokugawa philosophy were bound to this position (Maruyama 1974 [1944], 196).

Ultimately, Chu-Hsi thought held that all things in heaven and earth are formed from a combination of *ri* (理), or “principle” and *ki* (氣,気) or “energy”. Because *ri* is the ultimate foundation of being which endows all things with universal characteristics that are subsequently differentiated through the influence of *ki*, all things in the world can be understood as are tied together by their relation to the universal *ri*. The Tokugawa vocabulary for the concept of nature, including such words as *tenri* (天理) or *jouri* (定理) reflect this metaphysics. Thus, so long as an immutable nature, which flows from a fixed and eternal principle common to all things, is given as the essential principle harmonizing all possible social relationships, no political change, whether progressive or revolutionary, is possible. Moreover, attempts at change are unequivocally immoral. Going against nature in the Confucian tradition is unambiguously unethical, and stasis was as sought after by the Tokugawa neo-Confucians as progress was for Mill.

This foundational political-moral unity was directly connected to the concept and language of nature reflected in Tokugawa state documents. Thomas (2001, 33-4) provides a survey of words current prior to the restoration which translate as the English “nature”. Frequent use was made of the words *kaibutsu* (開物), which reflects a sense of the opening up or revealing of all things in terms of *ri*, or *manbutsu* (万物), which was imported from China and suggested “the totality of the physical and moral universe” (Thomas 2001, 33). Furthermore, the political cosmology of neo-Confucian discourse is reflected in concept of *ten* (天), or “heaven”. Spatial representations of nature were common, such as *tenchi* (天地), composed of the characters for heaven and earth, and signifying all that is in, on, and between them. Similarly, *tenka* (天下) meaning “all beneath heaven” defines nature this way. This language of natural spatiality was more explicitly tied to moral action in phrases such as *tenten* (天槇 the truth of heaven), *tenri* (天理 heaven’s law), or *tendou* (天道 the way of heaven) (Thomas 2001, 34). The idea of the “principle of nature” is reflected in the terms *tenchi shizen no michi* (天地自然の道) or *tenchi no jouri* (天地の定理). The concept of *ten* implies a natural order which human beings are not separate from and are morally implicated in. This in stark contrast to the vitalistic nature of Mill and Foucault. The linkages between heaven, earth, and virtue meant that the object of neo-Confucian government was neither “society” as it is understood in the framework of governmentality, nor population as a biological concept. Rather, the Confucian state’s focus on individual self-government and rule through exemplarity precluded the modern notion of an abstract, yet “natural” entity such as society. Underpinning and justifying all of the Tokugawa institutions and beliefs was this unitary concept of nature and morality.

Fukuzawa and Civilization

Fukuzawa and Mill’s understandings of “civilization” are antithetical to this worldview. In Japan, the question of civilization was particularly important, insofar as the country as a whole was deeply concerned about the “appalling fate” suffered by China in the Opium War (Howland 2005, 62). Fukuzawa was adamant that the security and independence of the new Japanese state had to be the central goal government. The dismemberment of China, the belligerent demands for unequal trade treaties that Perry brought, and the constant threat of superior military force were all signs that Japan, once conceived of as a cohesive political unit, was extraordinarily vulnerable. Fukuzawa’s participation in the first two State embassies abroad (in 1859 to the United States and as a translator with the first embassy to Europe in 1862) solidified his understanding of Japan as a nation-state in the Western sense, and familiarized him with the techniques of managing populations emerging in the West at the time. He characterized the spirit which gave Western societies so much technical and governmental prowess “civilization” (Fukuzawa 2008 [1878]: 21). In the early 1870’s Fukuzawa expressed great concern because although he considered most Japanese scholars of Western learning to be the key figures in cultivating this spirit, they themselves had not understood Western “civilization” correctly and took them to “…have Chinese bodies dressed up in Western clothes” (Fukuzawa 1969 [1876], 24). Ultimately “…the cornerstone of modern civilization will be laid only when national sentiment has thus been revolutionized, and government institutions with it” (Fukuzawa 2008 [1875], 24).

Fukuzawa and Mill both construct the spirit of civilization in two dimensions. First, civilization is ontologically grounded on a distinction between human beings and an external nature. Second, both insist that the true core of civilization is the broader pursuit of an ever more efficient “making live”, or a belief in a vital naturalism which coordinates the relations between the individual and the society as ends in themselves. Fukuzawa’s appropriation of the new move that Mill makes towards vital naturalism shows how this second dimension of the spirit of civilization is truly the critical one for the construction of a state capable of resisting the West on its own terms.

The first dimension of civilization follows from the adversarial understanding of nature characteristic of the stereotypical “Western” worldview. At the core of this vision of nature is a radical de-mystification, growing from the 16th century in Europe traced by Foucault and evident in Mill (Foucault 2007 [1978], 236). The demystification of nature is antithetical to Confucian thought and is critical for technological progress to occur insofar as it establishes the physical world as a field of resources which can both be objectively known and harnessed to serve human ends through that knowledge.

One tactic deployed by Fukuzawa and his contemporaries in their attack on this Confucian worldview by was the reconfiguration of the large and diverse vocabulary of nature based on the morphemes *ten* and *ri* into one single term, the modern noun s*hizen* (自然). *Shizen* is a direct translation of the English noun nature, and not a re-adaption of an existing Japanese term meaning something close (Fukuda 2004). It was an altogether new concept introduced into the Japanese language necessary for conveying the correct dualism between human beings and nature that did not exist in the Confucian vocabulary. Modern *shizen* is spontaneous in that it captures precisely Mill’s second sense of the word nature, or that which occurs “…without the voluntary and intentional agency, of man” (Mill 1998 [1874], 8)”. By 1890, *shizen* had essentially replaced all of the language based around concepts of *ten* or *ri* (Thomas 2001, 32).

Changes in language were perceived by Fukuzawa and his peers as essential to the modernization of Japan, as language carried with it the spirit of “civilization and enlightenment” This leads directly to the second dimension of Fukuzawa’s intervention in the language of nature. The novelty of Mill’s attempt to clarify nature discourse lies in his vitalistic interpretation of the idea of utility in relation to nature. He shows how the spirit of civilization which makes Europe so powerful stem not only from the adversarial relationship with the external world, but from the harnessing of the spontaneous order of nature to conceive of and to govern human systems for the sake of “making live”.

For Fukuzawa, civilization is achieved in two steps. First is the recognition of human beings as distinct from spontaneous nature in terms of both their individuality and in a plurality called “society”. Fukuzawa was the first to use the word “society” in Japanese in the same way as it appeared in Western texts. Fukuda (2004, 140) notes that the invention of the word was a necessary precondition of the development of an actual Japanese “society” as an object of knowledge and management. The relationship between individuals and the whole must be configured and managed in such a way as to deliver the maximum productivity from individuals and their concerted interactions. Fukuzawa was instrumental in the debate leading to the creation of the modern Japanese word *shakai* (社会), which fit the meaning deployed by Spencer, Comte, and other early advocates of a science of society.

Second, civilization is the acceptance that the pursuit of knowledge about society and its milieu is an essential part of securing and cultivating the vitality of human beings in both their individuality and as a society. It consists of the political realization society can regulate itself through the use of this knowledge for the purpose of not only securing its biological survival, but living beyond simply living and cultivating well-being. Thus, civilization is not simply confronting nature; it requires a radical new understanding of human systems and their place within nature as well.

The first psychological/spiritual component of civilization was the correct understanding of the relation between personal independence and the social whole. Beyond the invention of society as an object, the invention of the ideas of both individuality and freedom was also essential. It was Fukuzawa and the *Meirokusha* who introduced into the Japanese language the nouns for “individual” (*kojin* 個人) and “liberty” (*jiyuu* 自由), as Japanese had no terms which could adequately capture the meaning these terms possessed in English (Fukuda 2008). More importantly, the meaning of these new nouns corresponds with the English terms as they appeared in Mill. Personal independence, or the production and “consumption of freedom” within a society as Foucault argues, is a necessary part of the “economics, or political-economic analysis that integrates the moment of production, the world market, and, finally, the economic behavior of the population…” (Foucault 2007 [1979], 41). Liberalism is in Fukuzawa’s view the essential political technology of the vital, civilized West because it most successfully articulates individuality when viewed within the context of a cohesive social body.

Critical to establishing the correct relation between this new individuality, the social, and the cultivation of human vitality is the distinction between morality and regulation. According to Foucault, liberal governmentality is a “negative” technology in that its art is in knowing how not to intervene in the lives of individuals or their social contexts unnecessarily (Foucault 2007 [1978], 354). Because Fukuzawa is at pains to confront the Confucian view of unified natural, moral, and political order, he repeatedly distances government from morality, just as he does morality from nature. Ultimately, he embraces the value-free, private-preference based technology of regulation that Mill advocates and which Foucault contends is characteristic of biopolitics and governmental security (Fukuzawa 2008 [1874], 155). The reason that amoral regulation is desirable is not only that it avoids the contradictions inherent in either natural law traditions or in neo-Confucian discourse that Mill points out (Mill 1998 [1874], 9-11), but it creates maximum scope for the “experiments of living” on the part of individuals which benefit the whole (Mill 1989 [1859], 57; 110 ).

The ideal state is, for Fukuzawa (as well as Mill and the neoliberal thinkers Foucault analyzes) one in which regulation is no longer necessary because the utility of regulation has been so thoroughly internalized by the population. This does not mean conformity, however. Confucian morality aims at the same objective, but emphasizes uniformity rather than plurality. Fukuzawa’s ideal state manages based on two central principles. First, it demands the internalization of an ethic of toleration for diverse individual practices. Second, like Mill, Fukuzawa’s understanding of regulation is that it operates on the level of society as opposed to that of individuals. That is, regulation directs itself to the management of mass behaviors which constitute society’s broad productive vitality rather than to targeting the idiosyncratic practices of individuals. This creates the “freedom to be free” that Foucault believes is necessary for programming of the environment to be an effective governing method, and stimulates the innovation that Mill sees as critical to individual cultivation and the enhancement of the social production of well-being.

This mode of regulation is, Fukuzawa believes, part of what makes European political forms vital and so much more potent than Japanese feudalism. Rather than by regulating morality, regulating on the amoral ground of interest is critical. Fukuzawa believes that “there are no better tools in the world today for the progress of civilization…” than amoral regulation insofar as he borrows from Mill’s understanding of the role of unpredictable genius in the development of new paths to well-being.

The second critical basis of vital naturalism is the acceptance that knowledge production is critical to the project of civilization. Civilization is more than technology; it is the capacity to master nature for vitalistic ends. This means not only using technological instruments, but independently producing increasingly more advanced technologies for the progressive enhancement of well-being. Fukuzawa attacks China’s approach to modernization, which prioritizes the importation of the material embodiments of modernity (notably Western weapons) and ignores the cultivation of the spirit of inquiry which made the development of those weapons possible. He likewise castigates the Japanese government for building Western stone buildings rather than investing in engineering schools which produce the knowledge to build even better buildings than can be imported (Fukuzawa 2008 [1875], 17-18). Fukuzawa claims that “…we cannot rest content with the standard of Western civilization…”, but that Japan should look beyond it. (Fukuzawa 2008 [1875], 20). This parallels Mill’s argument that “the despotism of custom is complete” in the East to the extent that shifts in material forms are not challenges to established, customary thinking (Mill 1979 [1861], 71). Fukuzawa’s critique is that China does nothing to change its customs and values related to knowledge production, and the importation of its modernity results in a culture and which “…properly speaking, [has] no history” (Mill 1979 [1861], 71).

Fukuzawa’s civilization is in this way the psychological/spiritual condition of possibility for the advancement the physical and human sciences in Japan, which Foucault shows are critical components of governmentality and biopower. Mill argues that these the are essential features of the vital naturalism which makes the West strong, and Fukuzawa agrees with him strongly. The social and natural sciences are the foundation of Western power not only in the absolute military sense, but in terms of the “making live” of society which biopolitics and the techniques of governmentality enable. Fukuzawa contends that social conditions are “like a steamship under way”. The job of those in charge of the ship is to maintain its function and manage its progress in the most efficient manner possible. This is only possible, however, when the mechanisms which drive the system forward are thoroughly understood, and it is assumed that it is possible for those mechanisms to be completely understood. Both Foucault and Mill insist that the link between scientific knowledge and management is essential, and utility conceived of as vital well-being can only be served by the improvement of nature enabled by knowledge of natural forces.

In Fukuzawa’s mind the broad problem of “security” was the central challenge of modernity. Security, as Foucault shows, is more than just physical protection, it is fundamentally a biological problem which concerns the meaning of “well-being”. Mill’s linkage of utility to vitalistic nature thereby connects the question of security to utility, and thereby vitality. Fukuzawa’s appropriation of Mill’s vitalism, and its articulation through altogether new language, was therefore essential for providing the security against the West. This meant more than simple military defense. The integration of Japan with the global system of economic circulation guaranteed the domestic circulation in terms of food supplies, the import of materials which Japan was poorly endowed with but were essential for industrial production, and the provision development of scientific discourses necessary for managing this circulation of materials and people. The openness and freedom which this circulation required to function could only be achieved through the cultivation of a vital spirit of civilization. Thus, in a variety of ways, Fukuzawa reveals the Millian concept of nature to be the core principle of “civilization”.

Conclusion

Mill’s importance lies in his re-articulation of the dualism which privileges the vitality of human populations as the core justification for both individual and social action. Mill’s liberal politics are grounded on the premise that in an age where societies and populations can be conscious of themselves, and there is no possible appeal to nature as a standard of right action, the correct application of technologies to these new subjects can secure them for their own sake. The security of both society and population is defined in both political and economic terms, and is best guaranteed by the continual stimulation of the life force that animates both individual and collective endeavor.

The security that this vitalism produces is precisely what Fukuzawa seeks to gain through his engagement with the liberal thought of Europe. He recognized that it was not simply adopting the dualism that characterizes the “Western” view of nature that provided the key to technological development which could aid in resisting the colonial powers. Rather, Fukuzawa recognized that what made the countries of Europe strong was their self-identification as both intellectual societies and physical populations, their epistemological stance which made society and population objects of analysis, and their development of institutions of state and economic security centered around cultivating society’s vital energies. Fukuzawa’s reading of Mill grasped the novelty of his vitalistic naturalism, and the use of the term “civilization” by both thinkers is firmly based on the vitalism that stands behind utility.

Again, critical to both Mill and Fukuzawa was the rejection of any claim to the external spontaneous, non-human nature as a justification for political or ethical action. Mill’s devastating *reductio ad absurdam* of the natural law tradition is echoed by Fukuzawa at the precise point where neo-Confucian thought meets the European doctrine of *jus naturae*. By establishing society and population as an ontologically distinctive entities and discovering their capability to define themselves as their own end, Fukuzawa and Mill both point towards the techniques of governmentality that Foucault traces in his history of neoliberalism.

Fukuzawa used Mill’s thought to shake off the stagnation caused by the Confucian identity between morality and nature. Rather than relying on foreigners to cause the societies of the East to flourish as Mill claimed was necessary, Fukuzawa brought the essence of European modernity, which Mill had distilled in his reconfiguration of nature, to Japan. Understanding the vital, naturalistic “making live” that Mill establishes at the core liberal and neoliberal politics is essential for grappling with the complex relationship between individuals, societies, populations, and nature. Fukuzawa’s use of the little remarked upon vitalistic aspects of Mill’s thought helps us to do just that.

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