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JOHN STUART MILL'S 'ON THE UNIVERSITIES' IN AUTOGRAPH MANUSCRIPT

On 7 April 1826, the nineteen-year-old John Stuart Mill spoke at the London Debating Society. He was the fifth speaker to argue against the proposition 'that the System pursued at our Universities is adapted to the Ends of Education'. His side prevailed, winning the evening's vote 24-13. He appears to have drafted two versions of his speech for the occasion; John M. Robson prints both of these speeches in Mill's Collected Works, from carbon copies of typescripts made from his autograph manuscripts.¹ While Robson had chased down the original manuscripts of many of Mill's other early speeches, the whereabouts of these 'On the Universities' manuscripts, speeches no. 17 and 18 in Robson's ordering, were unknown to him.²

I have since found Mill's autograph manuscripts of 'On the Universities' in the collections of the University of Chicago Library. They had been catalogued under the title 'Speech, the latter part of which was spoken at the London Debating Society in the spring of 1826, on the universities', and unattributed to an author.³ Both speeches are written in Mill's hand. The speech printed as Robson's no. 17 is written on the recto and verso of 9 unpaginated folios, consisting of three folded sheets of 23 x 36.3 cm, and three torn half-

¹ John Stuart Mill, Collected Works of John Stuart Mill: Journals and Debating Speeches, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto, 1988), vol. XXVI, 348-58.

² For Robson's physical descriptions of those manuscripts known to him, see *ibid.*, vol. XXVII, Appendix A, pp. 673-8.

³ They were formerly assigned the shelfmark Codex MS 1670; in light of this new attribution to Mill, MS 1670 will soon be reclassified as two items in the Historical Manuscripts series, and the unbound pages will be reordered and paginated. I am grateful to the archivists and librarians at the University of Chicago Special Collections Research Center for their advice, assistance and patience: Jessica Seet, Barbara Gilbert, Elizabeth Frengel, Catherine Uecker, Eileen Ielmini, and Daniel Meyer.

sheets of the same paperstock. The paper is watermarked 'J. Whatman / Balston & Co. / 1825'. On the final page, Mill writes the title sideways in the bottom margin: 'Speech / the latter / part of which / was spoken / at the L. D. S. / in the spring on 1827 / on the / Universities'. No. 18 is written recto and verso on 5 folios, on unfolded sheets of slightly varying size (between 20 x 32 cm to 20 x 37 cm). These are watermarked 'J. Whatman / Balston & Co. / 1824' and 'J. Whatman / 1824'. Other surviving manuscripts of Mill's speeches at the Society are likewise written on J. Whatman paper of 1824-5.⁴ Corrections made to the texts in manuscript are reflected in the typescript copies as printed in the Collected Works. No. 18 warranted more correction than no. 17, which Robson had supposed to be the earlier draft. On the recto and verso of the final leaf of no. 18, a more compact hand (very possibly Mill's) has recorded a list of names in four columns (two on each side), in running alphabetical order. Among them are J.S. Mill, as well as Octavius Greene, who proposed the Society's topic of debate for that evening. This list may be a roll call for the 7 April 1826 meeting. Or perhaps more likely, it is the roll call of a prior one; Mill writes his speech 'On the Universities' in the spare space left by the roster, suggesting it was there first. The manuscripts do nothing to refute Robson's supposition that no. 18 'replaced the early part of [no. 17]' directly. Yet they do raise the possibility that no. 17 was actually a later revision of no. 18, the speech as delivered to the Society.

How did these Mill manuscripts find their way into the collection of the University of Chicago Library without authorial attribution? It appears that two of its most recent owners were better social scientists than they were archivists. The first was Harold Laski

⁴ See no. 14, 'The Influence of the Aristocracy', (London School of Economics Library, Mill-Taylor Collection, II/1/5), no. 16, 'Catiline's Conspiracy', written on Whatman 1825 paper (University of Toronto Rare Book Library, MSS 04212). These MSS are described in Robson, vol. XXVII, pp. 675.

(1893-1950), a professor of political science at London School of Economics, who purchased a batch of Mill manuscripts at auction in 1922 (Sotheby's lot 719, 29 March 1922).⁵ The house catalogue describes the lot as 'Auto[graph] drafts of Speeches on Lord Byron's Writings, Wordsworth, Co-operation, Education, Parliamentary Reform, Population, Influence of the Aristocracy, etc., etc. a large parcel'. Laski snapped it up, calling it his 'best find... in the last few years' in a letter to his friend Oliver Wendell Holmes; 'What exactly I shall do with them I don't quite know yet', he went on to admit. Laski never did make up his mind, and haphazardly lent out and disbursed his haul of Mill manuscripts over the course of years. He gave one manuscript to Trinity College, Cambridge, straight off. For a time, he lent the rest of the lot to the socialist Fabian Society (Laski sat on its executive committee), intending that they print a collection of Mill's early speeches. The Society produced those typescripts, with carbon copies to that end in 1924.⁶ Over the next few decades, Laski unsystematically published from—and gave away—his collection of Mill manuscripts at his whim and convenience. One manuscript went to Harvard economist Oliver M.W. Sprague (which one is now unknown); he donated two to Connecticut College in 1938, where his student Marjorie Dilley taught government.⁷ He left a number of them on the desk of his unsuspecting colleague at LSE, the economist Lionel Robbins.

These manuscripts of 'On the Universities [1 & 2]' once in Laski's hands were eventually donated to the University of Chicago by Melchior Palyi (1892-1970). Palyi was a Hungarian-born economist, who was appointed a visiting professor and research

⁵ For Robson's account of Laski's purchase and curious stewardship of Mill's manuscripts, see *Collected Works*, vol. XXVI, lviii-lxii.

⁶ Carbon copies of the Fabian Society typescripts are held at Nuffield College, Oxford, and the University of Toronto.

⁷ Connecticut College Library, Misc. MSS-Mill.

economist at the University of Chicago in 1933, and lived in the city for the rest of his life. I can find no firm evidence of professional or personal links between Laski and Palyi.⁸ Palyi spent a short period of time in London as a newspaper correspondent beginning in 1945, where he may have met Laski. But Laski, an outspoken Marxist on the Labour Party's hard left, had little in common politically with Palyi, who made a book out of his suspicions about the postwar British welfare state.⁹ Perhaps the manuscripts passed through the hands of an intermediate owner between Laski and Palyi. One very likely candidate is the Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek, who had been Laski's colleague at the London School of Economics before he moved to Chicago in 1950. Their interactions were friendly enough and rather frequent, which seemed to surprise Hayek: 'curiously enough, Laski and I had a good deal of contact because we were both passionate book collectors'.¹⁰ These essays might have been a gift from the one collector to the other bound for Chicago, a collegial gesture traversing the broad ideological range of LSE at the time. It would have made the perfect gift for Hayek, who collected Mill's correspondence and wrote extensively on Mill's life and works.¹¹ In an unpublished 1994 essay, 'The Dispersal of the Books and Papers of John Stuart Mill', Hayek acknowledges Laski's ownership of unspecified Mill 'material'.¹² Perhaps these speeches passed through Hayek's hands before Palyi's.

⁸ I found no correspondence between them in the Melchior Palyi Papers at Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. No correspondence between the two is indicated in the catalogue of the Papers of Harold and Frida Laski in the Hull University Archives.

⁹ Palyi, *Compulsory Medical Care and the Welfare State*, Chicago, 1949.

¹⁰ Interview with Leo Rosten, qtd. in Alan Ebenstein, *Friedrich Hayek: A Biography*, New York, 2001, 56. Hayek questions Laski's sanity along with his colleague's many tall tales as a book collector in a letter to *Encounter*, published in June 1984.

¹¹ Sandra J. Peart, ed., *Hayek on Mill*, vol. 16 of *The Collected Works of F.A. Hayek*, Chicago, 2015, xxvi.

¹² *Ibid.*, 296.

Whatever the precise route, the manuscripts' association with John Stuart Mill went unmentioned, or had been forgotten, by the time Palyi donated them to Chicago. With authorial attribution restored, these autograph copies of his speeches on the universities might newly illumine the development of Mill's early ideas on education and free enquiry in the earliest days of London University and its successors.

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