

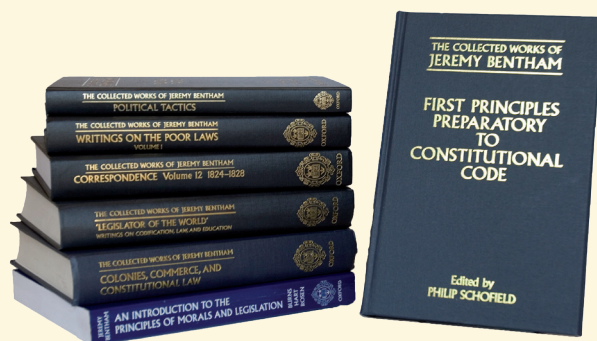
Recommended reading on democracy

Ross Harrison, *Bentham*, London, 1983.

J. H. Burns, 'From Radical Enlightenment to Philosophic Radicalism', *Bentham Newsletter*, available at: www.ucl.ac.uk/Bentham-Project/journal/newsletter

Frederick Rosen, *Jeremy Bentham and Representative Democracy: a Study of the Constitutional Code*, Oxford, 1983.

Philip Schofield, *Utility and Democracy: The Political Thought of Jeremy Bentham*, Oxford, 2006.



The new edition of Bentham's works

A new, authoritative edition of *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham* is being produced by the Bentham Project, under the supervision of the Bentham Committee, UCL.

This new edition is based on two main sources: first, texts which Bentham printed or published himself; and second, the collection of 60,000 manuscript folios deposited in the UCL Library. Fifteen volumes of Bentham's works on the principles of legislation, constitutional law, politics, judicial procedure, economics and society, philosophy, and education, and twelve volumes of correspondence have been published so far.

The Bentham Project, the global centre for Bentham studies, attracts a constant stream of academic visitors from countries around the world. It maintains an informative website, which includes a Bentham bibliography and the e-Journal of Bentham Studies. It has produced an online database catalogue of the Bentham Papers at UCL Library (www.benthampapers.ucl.ac.uk), to make the collection accessible to all.

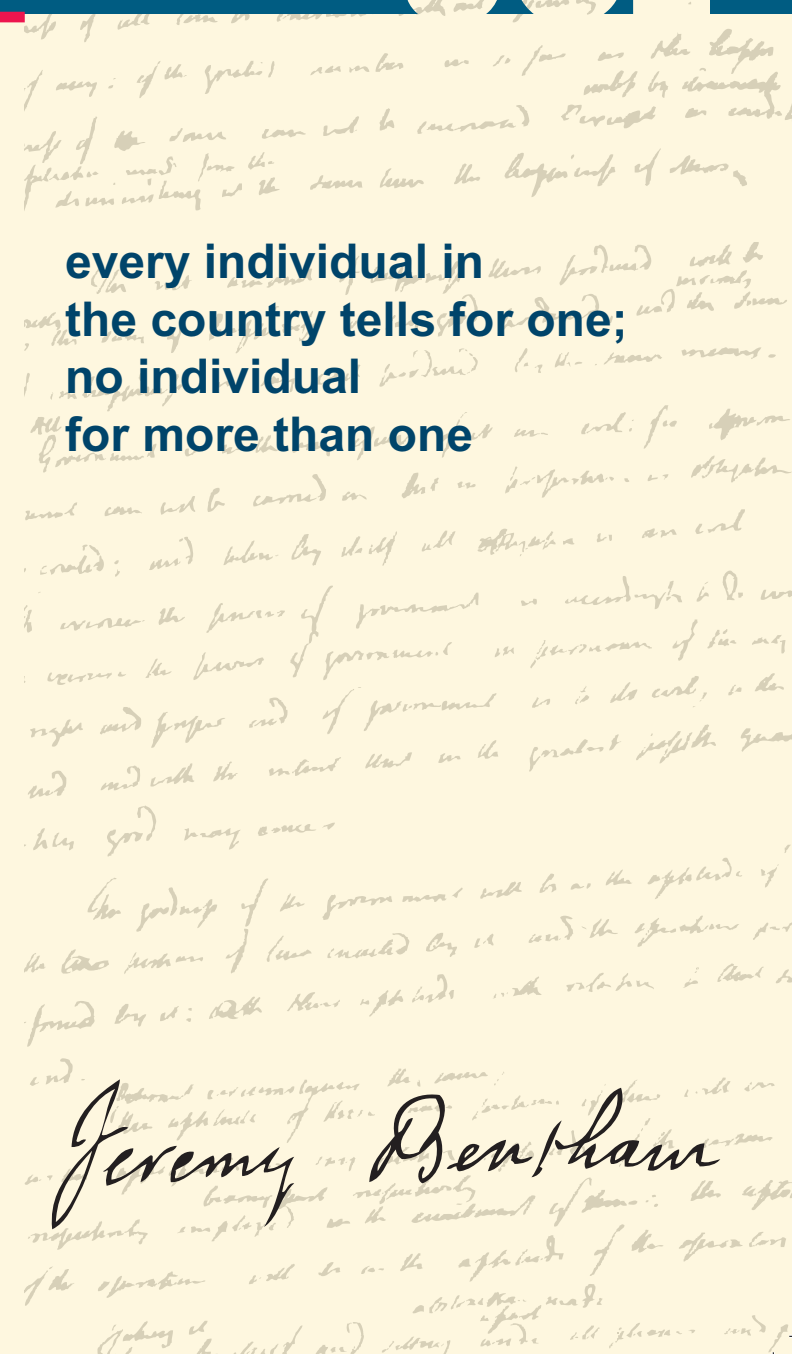
It administers the International Society for Utilitarian Studies, which organizes major conferences, colloquia, and seminars, and promotes the internationally-renowned journal *Utilitas*.

The Bentham Project, part of UCL's prestigious Faculty of Laws, is recognized as a British Academy Research Project, and receives financial support from University College London, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council and the British Academy.

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DEMOCRACY

**every individual in
the country tells for one;
no individual
for more than one**



Jeremy Bentham

'The right and proper end of government in every political community is the greatest happiness of all the individuals of which it is composed.'
First Principles preparatory to Constitutional Code, written 1822

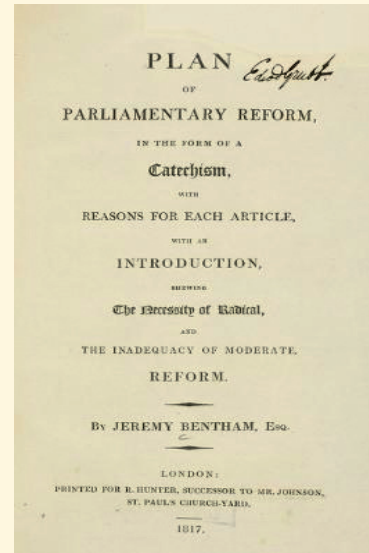
Bentham the democrat

Bentham did not begin his career as a democrat. It was only when he came to realize that rulers had no interest in promoting the greatest happiness, but rather a sinister interest in promoting

their own happiness – whatever the consequences for the greatest happiness – that he became a democrat.

The turning-point appears to have been the treatment he received at the hands of the British government in relation to the panopticon prison.

Even though he proposed what he regarded as an immensely beneficial project, and even received Parliamentary approval for it, the ministry



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hindered him at every stage, and by 1803 had effectively quashed the scheme.

Bitterly upset and disappointed, Bentham concluded that the ministry had been motivated by sinister interest. Between 1803 and 1809 Bentham extended his analysis of sinister interest, first to the legal system, and then to the political system.

In 1809 he began to write the work eventually published as *Plan of Parliamentary Reform* (1817), in which he called for 'democratic ascendancy' in the British Constitution. The House of Commons should be elected by all literate males over the age of 21, voting should be secret, elections should be annual, and there should be equal electoral districts.

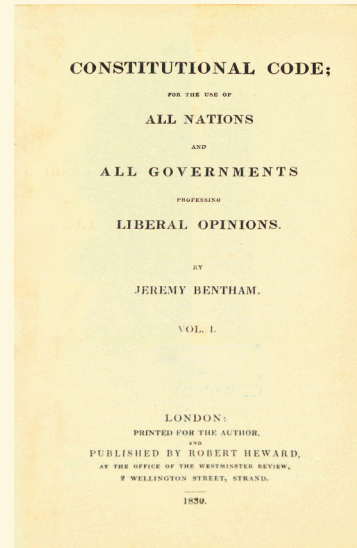
Bentham the republican

Within a few months of the publication of *Plan of Parliamentary Reform*, Bentham had gone a step further, and committed himself to republicanism,

by which he meant representative democracy without a monarch and aristocracy.

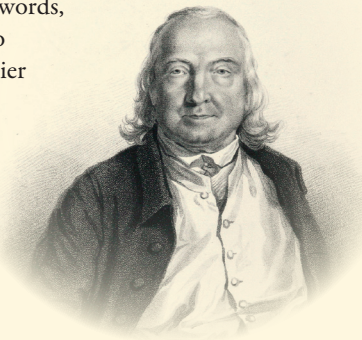
He developed his ideas in the massive *Constitutional Code*, on which he worked from 1822 until his death in 1832.

Bentham had come to understand that representative democracy was the solution – the only solution – to the problem of sinister interest.



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Under representative democracy, it was possible to create an 'identification of interests' between rulers and subjects. In other words, rulers would be able to make themselves happier if, at the same time, they increased the happiness of the community.



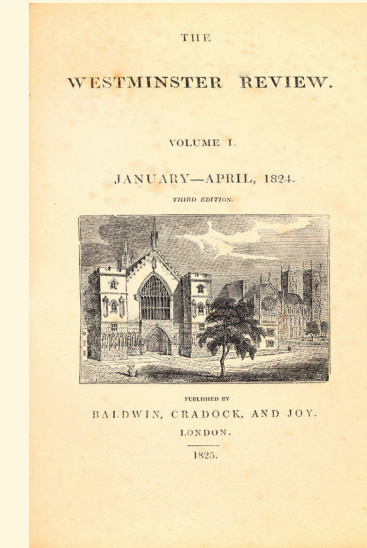
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JEREMY BENTHAM 1823, BY JAMES THOMSON AFTER WILLIAM DERBY

Bentham a key figure in modern liberalism

The electorate consisted of literate adult males (and eventually females as well, when public opinion had become sufficiently enlightened).

Their delegates, elected annually, sat in a single-chamber legislature, which itself controlled the administrative and judicial departments. The whole structure would be characterized by openness and publicity. Hence, the public, through what Bentham termed the Public Opinion Tribunal, were to be given every opportunity to watch their officials, both elected and appointed.



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Bentham's importance to democratic politics is immense. He regarded himself as the founder of the 'Radical Party', in opposition to both Whigs and Tories, and in 1824 established the *Westminster Review* as the mouthpiece of the party, with the aim of promoting democracy. Contributors included James and John Stuart Mill, Thomas Southwood Smith, Charles Austin, and Bentham himself. After Bentham's death in 1832 the *Westminster Review* merged with other journals, and continued publication until 1914. Bentham was the first, and most influential, thinker to provide a utilitarian justification for democracy. He was, therefore, a key figure in the foundation of modern liberalism, and we still have much to learn from him.

'The actual end of government is in every political community the greatest happiness of those, whether one or many, by whom the powers of government are exercised.'
First Principles preparatory to Constitutional Code, written 1822