

# Jeremy Bentham's Works

# Bentham Project

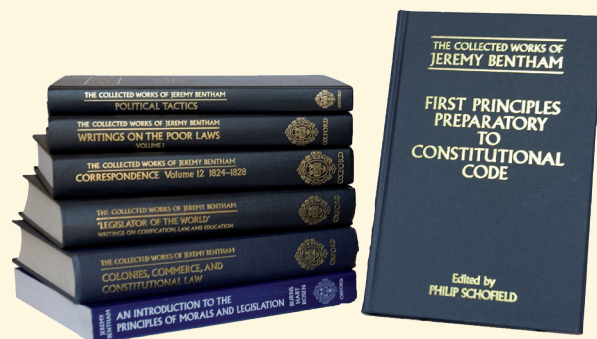
UCL FACULTY OF LAWS  
THE BENTHAM PROJECT



## 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.

The new edition of his works 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. A number of volumes of Bentham's works have been published on the principles of legislation, constitutional law, politics, judicial procedure, economics and society, philosophy, and education.



Bentham wrote letters throughout his long life. The Bentham Project has produced twelve of the planned fourteen volumes of correspondence, which will include over 4,000 letters—those Bentham received as well as those he sent—and provide a unique record of the times in which he lived. His correspondents included Alexander I of Russia, John Quincy Adams, Simón Bolívar, General La Fayette, Jean Baptiste Say, Bernardino Rivadavia, James Madison, James and John Stuart Mill, Francisco de Miranda, Robert Owen, Joseph Priestley, David Ricardo, Samuel Romilly, and William Wilberforce.

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](http://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.

**Bentham Project**  
**UCL Faculty of Laws**  
**University College London**  
**Bentham House**

**4-8 Endsleigh Gardens**  
**London WC1H 0EG**

**Tel: +44 (0)20 7679 3610**

**Fax: +44 (0)20 7679 3933**

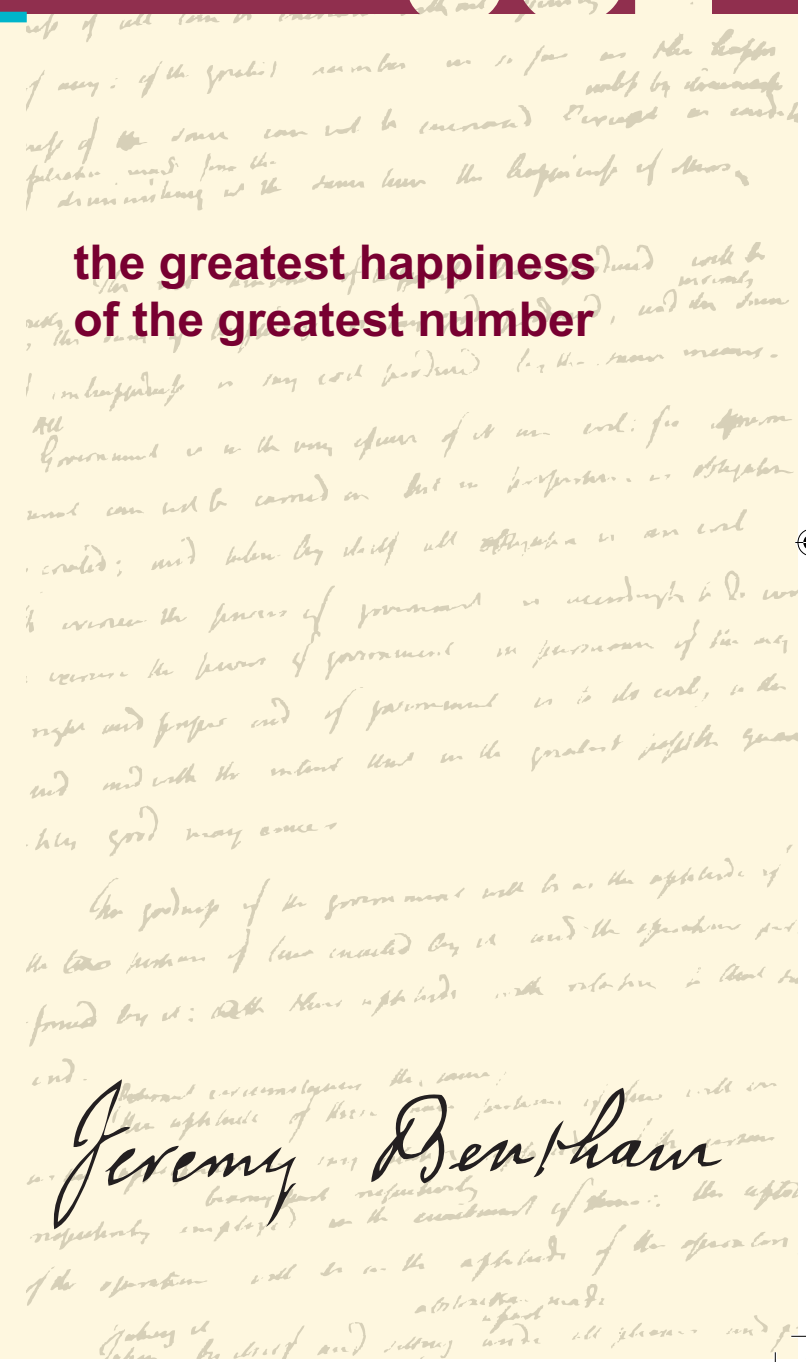
**Email: [bentham.project@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:bentham.project@ucl.ac.uk)**

**[www.ucl.ac.uk/Bentham-Project](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/Bentham-Project)**

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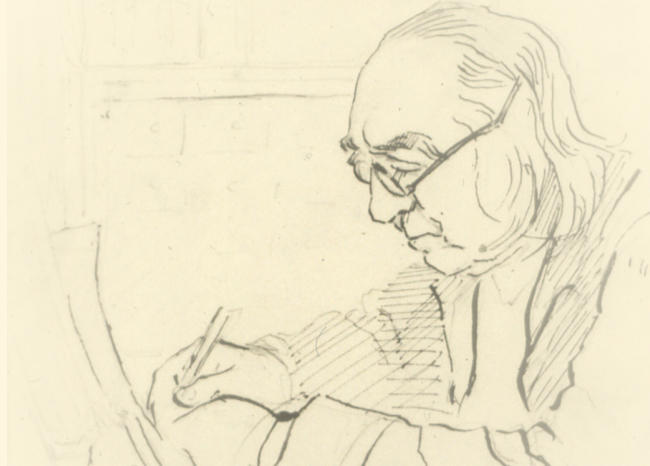
GREATEST HAPPINESS PRINCIPLE

the greatest happiness  
of the greatest number



## Bentham's Life

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) trained as a barrister, but rather than practising law, he realized that he had 'a genius for legislation', and devoted himself to the promotion of reform. The proper purpose of law, as of all human action, was to promote utility, or to use the more famous formulation – the greatest happiness of the greatest number. This statement appeared in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* in 1789. Bentham used the principle of utility as a critical tool by which the value of laws, institutions, practices, and beliefs could be tested, and if found wanting, improved.



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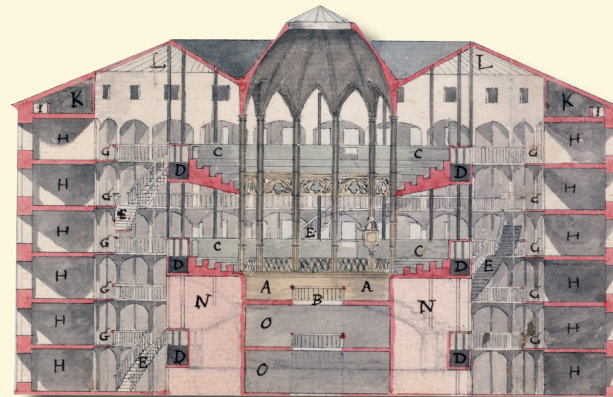
BENTHAM BY ROBERT MATTHEW SULLY, 1827

In the 1790s Bentham attempted to persuade the British government to build a panopticon prison, with himself as governor. When the scheme collapsed in 1803 he became increasingly committed to radical politics. He began writing on parliamentary reform in 1809, and went on to call for the 'euthanasia' of the Church of England and the abolition of the monarchy and aristocracy. Impressed by the political system of the United States, he adopted an overtly republican and democratic stance in the 1820s, culminating in *Constitutional Code* (1830).

## Bentham's Writings

Works published in his lifetime include: –

- 1776 *A Fragment on Government*
- 1787 *Defence of Usury*
- 1789 *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*
- 1791 *Panopticon: or, The Inspection-House*
- 1802 *Traité de législation civile et pénale*
- 1808 *Scotch Reform*
- 1811 *Théorie des peines et des récompenses*
- 1816 *Chrestomathia*
- 1816 *Tactique des assemblées législatives*
- 1817 *Plan of Parliamentary Reform*
- 1818 *Church-of-Englandism*
- 1822 *Codification Proposal*
- 1825 *Indications respecting Lord Eldon*
- 1827 *Rationale of Judicial Evidence*
- 1830 *Constitutional Code*



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PLAN OF THE PANOPTICON BY WILLEY REVELEY

## Bentham's Legacy

**Democracy** Bentham laid the theoretical foundations for a secular, rational, democratic society.

**Philosophy** Classical utilitarianism, founded by Bentham, inspired the movement known as philosophical radicalism whose doctrines have continued to exercise great influence in political philosophy.

**Law** Distinguishing sharply between law as it is and law as it ought to be, he inspired the proponents of the doctrine of legal positivism. In his extensive and detailed writings on judicial procedure, he elaborated the most comprehensive theory of evidence in the Anglo-American tradition.

**Politics** He produced both the earliest utilitarian defence of political equality, and a sophisticated and detailed blueprint for representative democracy.

**Economics** He developed a method of calculating the potential utility of actions which forms the basis of cost benefit analysis.

**Welfare state** His proposals for dealing with poverty provided the intellectual basis for the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, and for the welfare state more generally.

**Education** His educational ideas, based on 'useful learning' and access for all regardless of religion or gender, inspired the founders of the University of London in the mid-1820s. By contrast the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge were open only to Anglican men.

**Surveillance** His panopticon prison scheme is the starting-point for modern theories of surveillance.

**Peace** His scheme to promote peace between nations advocated an international court of arbitration and a proportional reduction of armed forces. The word 'international' was coined by Bentham.