

Recommended reading on Panopticon

Lea Campos Boralevi, *Bentham and the Oppressed*, New York, 1984.

Janet Semple, *Bentham's Prison: A Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary*, Oxford, 1993.

Janet Semple, 'Foucault and Bentham: A Defence of Panopticism', *Utilitas*, 4 (1992), 35-44.

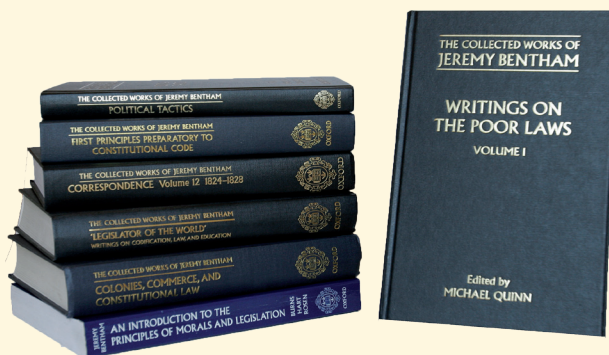
Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan, Harmondsworth, 1985.

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*.

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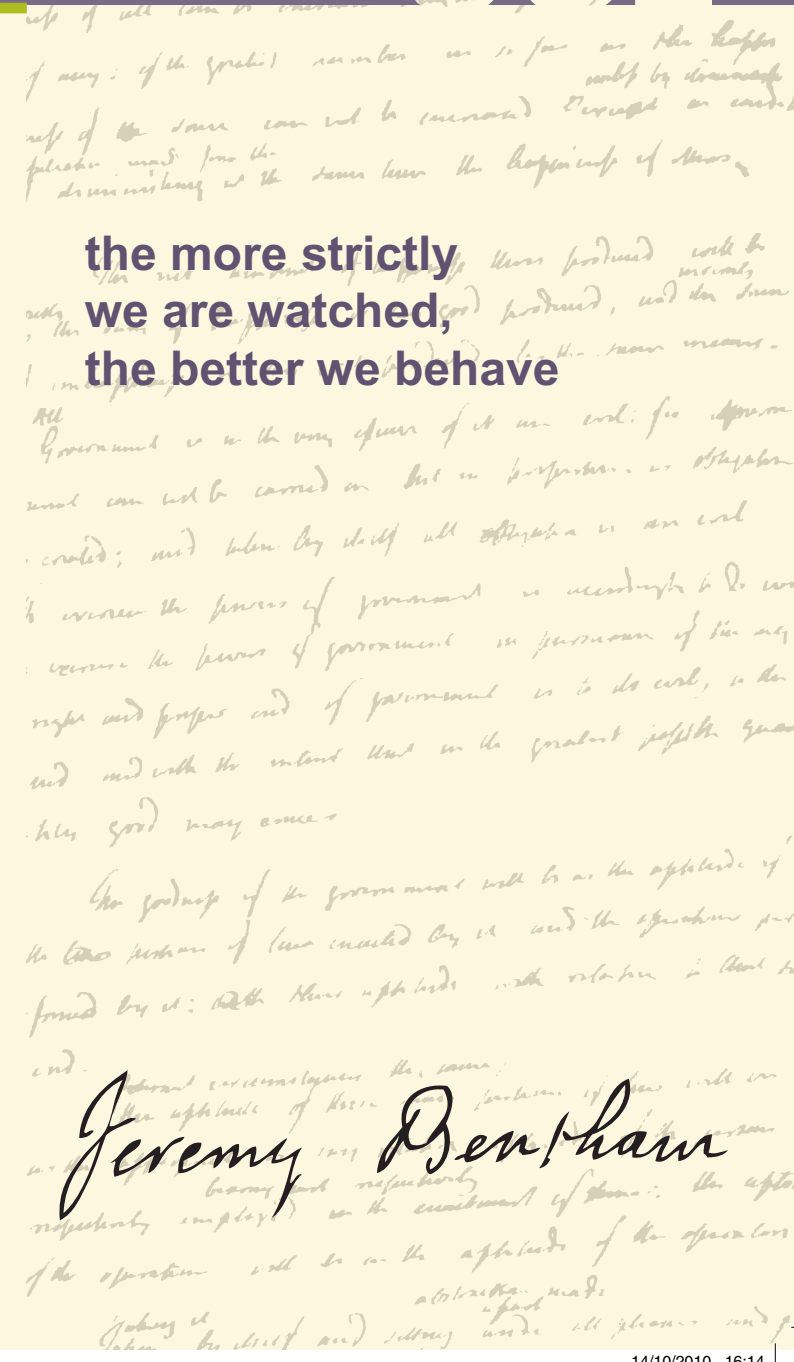
The new edition of Bentham's works

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.

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PANOPTICON



**the more strictly
we are watched,
the better we behave**

Jeremy Bentham

'There can now be little doubt of the plan's possessing the fundamental advantages I have been attributing to it: I mean, the apparent omnipresence of the inspector combined with the extreme facility of his real presence.'
Panopticon, or the Inspection-House, 1786

The inventor of the panopticon – the all-seeing place – was not Jeremy Bentham, but his younger brother Samuel, the naval architect, when working in Russia in the 1780s for Prince Potemkin. Samuel needed to supervise an inexperienced workforce, and decided that this could best be done by placing himself at the centre of a circular building, and arranging his workmen around him, where he could constantly monitor their activities.



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WILLEY REVELEY, 1791

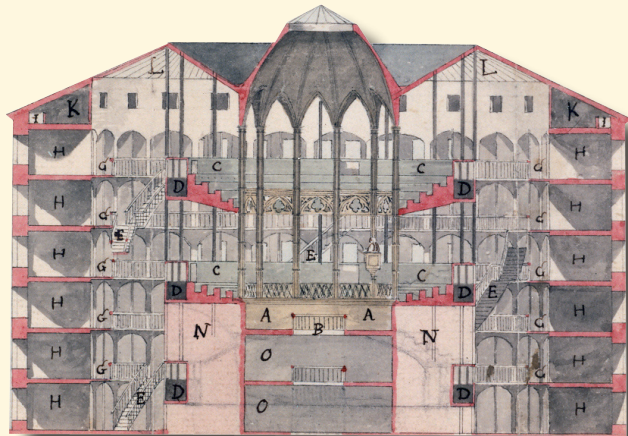
Bentham's emblem of the all-seeing eye, framed by the words 'Mercy, Justice, Vigilance', is here encircled by Reveley with the outer walls of the panopticon prison.

Jeremy visited his brother in Russia in 1786, and enthusiastically adopted the idea of the panopticon as 'a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind'. He recognized its applicability to a wide variety of institutions linked by a common theme, namely the need to keep individuals under inspection: the principle could be applied to hospitals and schools, as well as to commercial concerns, and was most famously developed by Bentham as a prison.

The panopticon prison was to be roughly circular, with five or six storeys of cells arranged around the circumference. In the centre the inspector would occupy a lodge from where, by an ingenious combination of windows, blinds, and lights, he would be able to see the inmates. They, however, would not be able to see him.

Bentham argued that people behaved better if they believed they were being watched. The beauty of the panopticon was that the inmates would come to assume that they were under observation even when they were not.

Bentham proposed private management of the panopticon, seeing pecuniary reward as the best way to unite the duty of the contractor with his interest. The welfare of prisoners was to be assured by financial penalties on the contractor: £100 for every death in custody, fines for escapees and those convicted of a new offence after discharge.

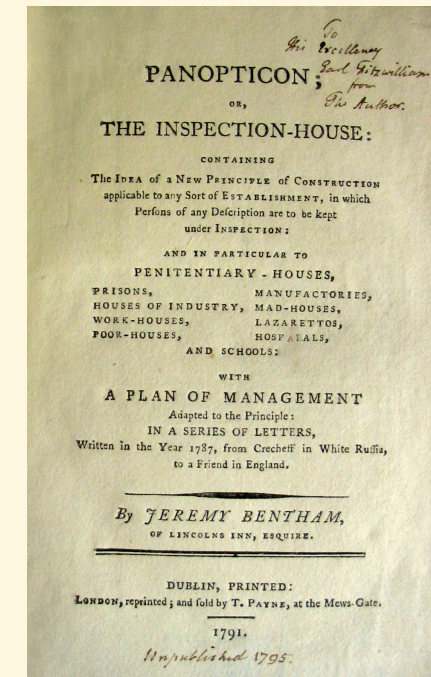


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PLAN OF THE PANOPTICON BY WILLEY REVELEY, 1791

The present site of the Tate Gallery was proposed, among others, as a location for the panopticon, but the prison was never built. Bentham eventually received £23,000 compensation for the years of frustration and expenditure of his own fortune.

While expecting one panopticon prison to be built, Bentham proposed housing several hundred thousand people receiving poor relief in 250 panopticon Industry-Houses, where they would be obliged to work in return for relief. Elements of his proposals, ignored at the time, resurfaced in the New Poor Law of 1834.



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The panopticon has in recent times received a great deal of interest, in large part due to Michel Foucault's identification of it as the paradigm of the modern state which watches its citizens, gathers information about them, and thereby exercises power over them.

In fact, Bentham's ideal state would have been a panopticon in reverse. Rather than officials being able to watch the people, Bentham wanted open and accountable government, in which the people watched, and commented upon, the actions of officials. Furthermore, it was, arguably, the failure of the British government to honour its commitment to build the panopticon that propelled Bentham into political radicalism, and into producing a detailed and comprehensive onslaught on the political, legal, and religious establishments of the country.

'The essence of it consists, then, in the centrality of the inspector's situation, combined with the well-known and most effectual contrivances for seeing without being seen.'
Panopticon, or the Inspection-House, 1786