

Michael Quinn, ed. *Writings on the Poor Laws, Vol. 2 (The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010. 800 pp. \$220.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-955963-3.



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This volume comprises a superb editorial achievement and furnishes an important contribution to British debate concerning pauperism and government policy during the era of the French Revolutionary wars. Jeremy Bentham's varied writings on poor law reform critically engaged many of the leading Hanoverian authorities on poverty and its amelioration—such contemporary figures as Frederick Morton Eden, William Morton Pitt, Thomas Ruggles, Joseph Townsend, Benjamin Thompson (Count Rumford), Patrick Colquhoun, and Arthur Young. And it included Bentham's own constructive and wildly ambitious scheme for poor relief, advertised under the title, "Pauper Management Improved."

Writings on the Poor Laws Volume II completes the modern publication of materials Bentham composed in the late 1790s in which he sought to contribute to and take advantage of the public and Parliamentary attention to the then-current crisis in poor law relief. As with many other volumes in the new edition of the Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham series, *Writings on the Poor Laws* rescues from manuscript materials which Bentham himself failed to complete and for which earlier published versions supplied woefully inadequate accounts of his reform program. In the period of their composition, the principal outlet for Bentham's plan was a series of pa-

pers that appeared in 1797-98 in Arthur Young's *Annals of Agriculture*, which in turn provided the sources for a French translation of 1802 and a London edition of 1812. After Bentham's death in 1832, Edwin Chadwick added to the corpus of publications, and all of these items then found their way into the nineteenth-century edition of *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (Edinburgh, 1838-43). The scale of the new edition's contribution in *Writings on the Poor Laws* can be crudely gauged in quantitative terms. Whereas the nineteenth-century edition offered just over a hundred pages of double-columned text, we now have two hefty volumes that together comprise 981 pages of text, supplemented by 155 pages of editorial introduction and another 184 pages of detailed, analytical index.

Less easily indicated is the uniform excellence of the editorial achievement. The volume's editor, Michael Quinn, is a model of learning, insight, and scholarly rigor, and is now an important interpreter of these writings.[1] His editorial introductions carefully elucidate the circumstances and complexities of Bentham's intensive, though characteristically fitful writing on poor law topics. His annotations expertly clarify Bentham's purposes and often opaque references and elaborate Bentham's frequently tendentious references to rival approaches. (Quinn is particularly diligent in correcting

Bentham's errant references and characterizations of others's positions.) As a result, we now are furnished with an outstanding excavation of previously buried materials through which to consider Bentham's distinctive response to the challenge of poverty and the place of indigence relief in his wider project of public welfare.

The centerpiece of Bentham's solution was the construction of 250 pauper industry houses, housing an anticipated population of 500,000, designed according to inspection-house (panopticon) architectural principles, and centrally operated by a joint-stock enterprise Bentham dubbed the National Charity Company. In his classic 1963 study *Society and Pauperism*, J. R. Poynter treated Bentham's proposal as a familiar, if idiosyncratic industry house scheme: the poor were to labor profitably as the price of their maintenance. But Bentham developed this established and already contested institutional approach in self-consciously innovative terms. The program was grounded in a forthright ethical argument in support of the poor that explicitly repudiated established norms, while the National Charity Company was assigned a large number of collateral responsibilities that rendered the scheme a quite radical reform project. The plan rested on a set of utilitarian commitments that, for Bentham, established indigence relief firmly as a matter of public and national responsibility, rather than a challenge to be left to the contingencies of private charity or the uneven resources of local government. The industry houses would operate according to a uniform system of management and rescue the indigent from the hardships of the market and from their own improvidence. Eligibility rules discarded the familiar categories of deserving and undeserving poor: need, rather than desert was the key qualification. Others who did not seek relief—such as vagrants and beggars—would be coercively required to enter and contribute their labor to the company's production. In its full network of responsibilities, the National Charity Company's operations would not only replace the current system of poor laws, but also supplant the better part of established rules governing settlement, vagrancy, apprenticeship, and employment. Public functions currently undertaken by the parish and the church would instead fall within the orbit of a joint-stock company enterprise.

One obvious and important point of interest in these writings is the "inspection-house" or panopticon architecture Bentham specified for the pauper industry houses. Owing to the deep impact of Michel Foucault's discussion in *Discipline and Punish* (1979), for many scholars Bentham remains above all associated

with "panopticonism." Foucault's treatment drew on a very limited set of texts, drawn from Bentham's earliest plan for a panopticon prison. Foucault ignored Bentham's own lengthy revisions and elaborations of the prison project. And the subsequent discussion of "panopticonism" (at least in English) has largely and unfortunately ignored the case of pauper panopticons. As an exercise in inspection-house architecture, "Pauper Management Improved" dwarfed the prison project and demands attention in any consideration of this element of Bentham's thought. Panopticon technology—locating the pauper inmates in a space that placed their conduct at any moment under the "inspection" or surveillance of others—was critical. "Without the benefit of inspection," Bentham maintained, "I would not be responsible for the conduct or condition of a single individual" (p. 105). But in this setting, Bentham made more emphatic than in the prison project both the range of persons whose actions he placed under inspection and the limits of architecture as an instrument of control. With regard to range, Bentham emphasized how much his technologies of inspection were directed at the company managers rather than the pauper inmates alone. The inspection-house design exposed to external view the conduct of the National Charity Company's personnel, and this transparency would provide a powerful restraint against potential abuses. At the same time, architecture served as but one of several technologies needed to secure the plan's goals to ensure reliable performance. As in his later program for the administration of the democratic state, Bentham emphasized how often written records would supplant architecture as the instrument of choice for institutional transparency and systematic inspection. The operations of the National Charity Company were to be equipped with a new system of comprehensive record-keeping. Whereas traditional bookkeeping provided an account of revenues and expenditures, the National Charity Company's required "system of book-keeping will be neither more nor less than the history of the system of management in all its points" (p. 541).

Bentham's concern with written records and compilation of "useful information" formed a vital connective tissue throughout the labored planning of "Pauper Management Improved." The pauper panopticons were extolled as human laboratories for the production of information that would improve numerous fields (medicine, education, husbandry, manufactures). The scheme itself, as he recognized from the start, depended on a set of critical calculations for which Bentham struggled to secure adequate data. The National Charity Company's busi-

ness plan relied on the labor of pauper apprentices to support the maintenance of less productive paupers (such as the disabled and the elderly) and to generate the company's profits. Apprentices who entered the company's care at birth or infancy would begin laboring as soon as it was healthy to do so (Bentham suggested that some productive contributions could begin as early as age 4), and were bound to remain apprenticed to the company until age nineteen for females and age twenty-one for males. For the plan to be viable, Bentham needed—and never actually secured—basic demographic information concerning the total pool of indigent who would receive relief and even more, the age distribution of this population. Some of the most imaginative and characteristic features of the scheme were Bentham's design of statistical surveys, such as the "Pauper Population Table" and "Table of Cases Calling for Relief," which promised to supply the comprehensive "stock of information" and "indispensable groundwork" upon which the scheme depended (p. 471).

Bentham's case for National Charity Company came to involve so many functions and potential benefits that it is perhaps unsurprising that no single finished proposal ever emerged out of all the plans and discussions. This is especially striking in the case of those features of the scheme that held competing goals in a demanding balance. Take, for example, the question of how the pauper industry houses were to relate to the larger society whose indigent they housed. One of the leading principles of Bentham's general approach was that the public care of the poor should do nothing to undermine the situation and wages of the self-maintaining poor. His principle of "self-supply" was designed to insure that as much as possible of the industry within the pauper panopticons went to support the paupers themselves, an arrangement designed to insulate the industry houses from the outside economy. Yet at the same time, Bentham sought decisively to reduce the sources of low wages and indigence through the creation of a genuinely national market of trained and mobile laborers. Here the National Charity Company was tasked to produce, in the form of widely distributed employment gazettes, regular and detailed information concerning employment opportunities throughout England and the employment qualifications of those it housed. At the same time, the indus-

try houses themselves would provide cheap accommodation and transit stations for the independent poor seeking employment opportunities beyond their home locations. The National Charity Company was further tasked with responsibilities for providing basic banking facilities and small loans to the independent poor to help them avoid indigence and dependence. The elaboration of these collateral functions thus pushed in a different direction from the logic of "self-supply" and revealed the manner in which Bentham's pauper program would stretch expansively and decisively into the lives and economy of the laboring population in general.

Bentham maintained that support within the pauper industry houses was always "a makeshift—a dernier resort," since "free employment" remained "the primary and preferable object" (p. 561). Nonetheless, this was a "dernier resort" whose planning and advocacy reveals much about Bentham's approach and developing ideas concerning government, management, economy, and human agency well beyond the specific, dire economic needs that stimulated these writings on the poor laws. The authoritarian and behaviorist elements of his program have received appropriate emphasis by critics of his thought.[2] At the same, in these neoliberal times, it is well to be reminded of Bentham's emphatic case for the claims of the weak and dependent. "The title of the Poor to a superior share of attention on the part of government" is beyond dispute," he explained. "It rests upon two grounds: superiority in point of numbers, and superiority in point of need. The poor are the materials of which the greater part of the fabric of society is composed" (p. 168).

Notes

[1]. See Michael Quinn, "Failure to Reconcile the Irreconcilable? Security, Subsistence and Equality in Bentham's Writings on the Civil Code and on the Poor Laws," *History of Political Thought* 39 (2008): 320-348.

[2]. See Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Victorian Minds: A Study of Intellectuals in Crisis and Ideologies in Transition* (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 1968), chapter 2; and Charles F. Bahmueller, *The National Charity Company: Jeremy Bentham's Silent Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

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