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BOOK REVIEWS

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*The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: Writings on the Poor Laws*. Volume 11. Edited by MICHAEL QUINN. Oxford. Oxford University Press. 2010. v + 813 (incl. Index). Hardback. £128. ISBN 978 0 19 955963 3.

This is the second and final volume of Bentham's writings on the Poor Laws for the *Collected Works*, completing the publication of Bentham's remedies for the relief of those living in poverty in late eighteenth-century England. The first volume, published in 2001, contained five essays written between 1796 and 1797, which Bentham had undertaken with encouragement from his friend, the philanthropist William Wilberforce. These constituted Bentham's analysis of the causes of poverty and his investigation of 'basic principles' for the provision of public-funded relief. To reiterate, in these essays Bentham distinguished between poverty, which is the common condition of most of mankind struggling for subsistence, and indigence, which is the condition of those who either cannot work or whose work fails to provide subsistence. He argued that the proper object of any national system of poor relief should be to relieve indigence. Volume 11, ably edited by Michael Quinn, contains Bentham's own writings on practical remedies for a national system for the relief of indigence which he began in February 1797. Despite his earlier assertion, Bentham included many remedies to assist the poverty of the independent poor too.

Bentham found fault with William Pitt's Poor Bill of 1795, which planned to supplement outdoor relief supplied to the poor from Parish rates by providing capital to buy a cow; condemning Pitt's 'cow-money' clause, Bentham argued that in order to survive the poor needed income not capital. Nor, for him, was the solution the combination of outdoor relief, workhouses and contracted-out labour characterised by the newly adopted Speenhamland System, but rather a new, national system which would supersede the existing Parish-based administration. This national system would achieve two desired aims: relieve the poverty of the indigent and help the independent poor to remain independent.

Quinn's edition of this second, weighty, volume of Bentham's writings on the Poor laws holds, in some 696 pages, Bentham's two major, related works entitled 'Pauper Management Improved' and 'Outline of a Work Entitled Pauper Management Improved'. The first of these works outlined Bentham's plans for a National Charity Company which would undertake to manage the provision of poor relief for the whole of England, so ending the ancient Parish-based system. Bentham had made significant progress with his writings on this work when he received an invitation from the President of the Board of Trade, Sir John Sinclair, to present a précis of it which would then be considered along with other papers on poor law reform. Bentham drew on and criticised the work of Gilbert, Eden and others.

All Bentham's writings on the Poor Laws in this second volume must be considered in the context of contemporary public concern and writings about the operation of the existing Poor Law amid the crisis caused by poor harvests, escalating food prices and inadequate wages, all of which led to an increase in the poor rates to be met by Parish ratepayers. Also during these years Bentham still hoped that his plan for practical prison reform, his Panopticon scheme, would be accepted by

Parliament – a hope that was not finally ended until 1811. Some of Bentham's ideas find a place in both his writings on the Panopticon and the National Charity Company. In 1797 Bentham accepted Sinclair's invitation and then proceeded to work on both 'Pauper Management Improved' and the 'Outline' at the same time. The two works are therefore closely related but the latter does not supersede the former because in the event Bentham completed neither. 'Pauper Management Improved' is now published here for the first time together with several appendices, but substantial parts of the 'Outline' were published by Arthur Young in serial form in the *Annals of Agriculture* in 1797 and 1798.

In 'Pauper Management Improved', Bentham drafted plans for setting up a joint-stock company for which he proposed the name of either the 'National Charity Company' or the 'English Charity Company'. Under the heading 'Plan for a Company, for the Management of the Concerns of the Poor all over England', Bentham set out the purposes and the constitution of his Company, which would operate through the medium of a Board of Management consisting of either twelve or twenty-four Directors under a Governor and Deputy Governor. He adopted the legal rules of the East India Company on the number of Company shares required to be held by his directors (a minimum of £2000 worth) and for the election of directors and the rules for shareholder voting in Company meetings, or 'General Court'. The value of shares was to be kept low to allow the general public to purchase them. Bentham explained that this would promote 'frugality among the self-maintaining poor' by providing them with a safe place to invest their savings to their advantage. The National Charity Company would thus operate as a 'Poor Man's Bank' and at the same time ownership of shares would give the self-maintaining poor an interest in the economic management of the Company and so an interest in government itself. In a footnote Bentham drew a parallel here with a series of Acts of Parliament in 1688 which authorised loans from subscribers to the government in return for the granting of annuities giving subscribers an interest in government. The Company was to be funded in part by monies raised from the sale of shares, in part by the work done by the poor in the Industry House, but the greatest part of funding for the Company's operations consisted of the Annual Poor Rates, which would be raised as before from ratepayers but paid directly to the National Charity Company which would take over the administration of all Poor Relief.

Once the joint-stock company was set up, the National Charity Company had two immediate tasks: to erect buildings (on the model of the Panopticon Inspection House) and then to provide maintenance and employment to all indigent persons who either applied for relief or who were brought before the Company as proven indigent. Any maintenance given was to be at the discretion of the Company but on the condition that the recipient must subsequently repay the cost by working for the benefit of the Company. In addition to the immediate relief given to the indigent poor, the National Charity Company must provide certain 'Collateral' services for the independent poor. For example, the Company must set up and run Poor-Man's Loan Offices, Savings Banks and Superannuation Annuity Banks, employment offices, medical dispensaries, midwifery services and also Maritime Schools.

There is much else of interest in Bentham's National Charity Company but the great extent and detail of his work means only a limited view can be given here. For modern readers by far the most controversial aspect of Bentham's plans was the coercive power to be given to the Company by Parliament to round up and 'detain' the indigent in an Industry House. It was this that led Charles F. Bahmueller in 1981 to describe Bentham's plans as so repressive and soul-destroying, and with so little regard for either the civil liberties or emotional sensitivities of those he set out to help, that any administrative benefit paled in comparison. Bentham would no doubt have been appalled at Bahmueller's judgement, which assumes administrative reform was Bentham's priority rather than the immediate amelioration of the sufferings of the indigent. Not all readers would reach this conclusion. Whether governments can or should use compulsion to force citizens to accept help of whatever kind, and however well-intentioned, remains much debated. Bentham's list of those who would be forced into an Industry House was extensive and included anyone without visible property, or without honest employment, or who was unskilled and unused to any employment for whom no responsible person would bind himself to find employment for a short period of time. Such persons included beggars, gypsies, reputed thieves, the fathers of illegitimate children who had failed to maintain them, and unsupported mothers of illegitimate children. In return for maintenance beggars (and fathers of illegitimate children) were required to work until they had paid for the relief given them, while unsupported mothers received relief until their own child (and one other needy baby too) were weaned. Bentham excluded prostitutes (whom he considered more wronged against than wronging) and also vagrants from forced entry to an Industry House, explaining that the term vagrant was without meaning. A lack of permanent abode did not make a man dishonest, and he required the abolition of contemporary punishments for vagrancy, which included whipping.

Certain unfortunate children too were to be coerced into the Industry House. These were orphans without guardians and abandoned illegitimate children. In some circumstances a father (or a mother in default) was able to consign their child to the Industry House voluntarily where they would be educated and serve an apprenticeship in a trade. For example, a mother of children under fifteen years of age abandoned by their father, or whose father was imprisoned or banished, or whose father's whereabouts was unknown could place her children in the Industry House. The education received by the children was surprisingly liberal and included reading, music and swimming. Bentham excluded 'dead languages' and grammar, including English, as useless. He remarked that one of the advantages of his plan was that 'these blessings' of education 'may be administered universally' and begin earlier than in the houses of the rich. The incarceration of needy children in the Industry House would last until adulthood, which was to be twenty-one in males or nineteen in females. Bentham thought that this last possibility would particularly benefit married servants, widows left with small children and seamen in both the King's and private service. His plans here for public support of abandoned infants should be seen alongside those of Thomas Coram whose Foundling Hospital in London had been set up in 1741, and Dr. Barnardo by the late nineteenth century. In Bentham's day most abandoned or orphaned children would have been provided

for by Parish rates or charity. Bentham particularly criticised reliance on the uncertainties of private charity for the relief of children and the indigent poor in general under the existing system, not least because he maintained that lack of public accountability left funds exposed to 'depredation'. But voluntary charity would be encouraged by the new National Charity Company because it could relieve relative indigence.

Bentham planned the care of the sick, disabled and insane in Industry Houses too. The latter were to be gathered into one institution in each area of the country which would give them the benefit of experienced help in 'this important department of medical care'. This may be so, but some of Bentham's ideas cause disquiet. For example, his conviction that the disabled deaf could live alongside raving lunatics or the blind alongside the physically deformed seems unlikely to bring great happiness to anyone at all. All inmates were expected to perform some form of work, if at all possible, to meet the expense of their keep. Even the sick and aged, classified as 'feeble hands', could perform valuable tasks by caring for infants which would bring joy to all concerned. For example, by operating one specially designed machine a single aged person could rock 'a multitude' of babies. Under the existing system, Bentham pointed out, lunatics, the sick and the aged must either work or beg. In fact idleness was rewarded as the 'Summit of Gratitude' by the Chelsea and Greenwich Hospitals for old soldiers and seamen.

Once removed to an Industry House the inmate would find Bentham had planned every aspect of his day-to-day living, from housing to the food he was to eat (cheapest but plentiful) and bedding and clothing. All was to be provided on the basis of the 'neighbour's-fare' or, 'suitable-fare' principle which was that 'charity maintenance' was not to be more desirable than that available to the self-maintaining poor. Finally, Bentham provided for a number of what he termed 'Pauper Comforts', which included some association with the opposite sex, including double 'bed-stages' or cells for married couples, and the right of apprentices to marry.

The dense scholarly introduction to this volume of Bentham's Poor Law writings by Michael Quinn calls for close and repeated reading which more than rewards the effort.

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