Bentham’s Religious Writings: A Bibliographic Chronology

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Bentham's Religious Writings: A Bibliographic Chronology* 

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The religious writings of Jeremy Bentham have rarely been thought to be of much interest. Where they illuminate particular areas of his thought, scholars have enlisted their support, but their concern can hardly be described as anything but incidental. Moreover, it has generally been supposed that Bentham's interest in religious matters was merely occasional and peripheral to the main themes of his thought. Yet if the amount of time and ink he expended on the subject is an indication of his interest, this assessment will require substantial revision. It is my purpose in this chronological survey of Bentham's published and unpublished writings on religion to lay the essential groundwork for such a revision; to indicate the precise extent and depth of his interest in the subject throughout the course of his long and industrious life.

When Bentham first wrote upon religious matters in 1773 it was fitting that his central theme should be the controversial topic of compulsory subscription to articles of faith. The "Subscription Controversy", which began among the dissatisfied masters of Cambridge in 1766 and subsequently engaged the pens of several eminent dergency over the following eight years, would unquestionably have recalled to his mind his own qualms over subscription at Oxford. Graduation from the University at that time required that students subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Church. Being properly raised in religious observances one might have expected the young Bentham, like the rest of his university contemporaries, to take the Articles on trust and to subscribe without question. Instead he set out to examine that which he was being asked to believe. 'The examination', he recalled in later life, 'was unfortunate'. He could find little or no meaning at all in several of the articles, and obtained no satisfaction in settling his doubts from the master responsible for such matters. Bentham signed but there is no question that the experience left an indelible mark upon him, and the compulsory imposition of oaths was a
subject to which he was to return again and again throughout his long life. As he was to say on many future occasions, by imposing the practice of subscription, the Church made peripherals of its congregation. The beginning of Bentham's disaffection with official or organised religion dates from his subscription experience at Oxford, but it was to be another ten years before he attempted anything systematic on the subject. Sometime in 1773 he broke off from his work on Blackstone to jot down his thoughts on subscription, and though these have never been published, the substance of what he had to say found its way in later life on to the pages of *Swear Not At All* (1817). These early jotting by no means constitute a cohesively worked subject of subscription is interwoven with other related topics, the whole amounting to a series of disjointed thoughts and reflections. The manuscripts are to be found in UC v. 1-32 and xvi. 263-341. The dating is uncertain since Bentham rarely dated his papers before 1800, but on at least one of the sheets (UC v. 26) there appears the date ‘5th August 1773’. The agitation for a relaxation of the terms of subscription to articles of faith, which came to a head with the ‘Feathers Tavern’ petition of 1771 and continued until 1774, and what we know of Bentham’s writing on jurisprudence of the time (UC xvi. 1-116) would seem to support this date. The manuscripts on subscription in UC xvi are to be found amidst other writings on such topics as legislation (promulgation, appeal, prelude, evidence, certainty, indirect), gin drinking, penal laws for religious belief, and miscellaneous remarks under the heading ‘Sabbath’. That Bentham had abolition, or at the very least a major reform of the practice of subscription in mind in 1773, is clearly implied by his musings that his structures may be ‘out of Season’ and might better serve another parliament, or another Age’ (UC xvi. 260). There may have been several reasons for Bentham’s reticence in completing the work, not the least of which could have been his desire to get on with his work on Blackstone; or this may be another example of his annoying life-long habit of leaving projects unfinished to be reconsidered and revised at a later date. A more interesting reason, however, may well have been his discovery of Joseph Addison’s article on religion in volume V of *The Spectator*, No. 459 (Saturday 16 August, 1712). Bentham claimed that this left ‘nothing for me to add’, his reference appearing on a sheet containing a list of suggested chapter or topic headings relating to subscriptions and oaths, under the general title ‘INTRO. Sancion Religious. Abuses deprivative of the Religious Sanction. Catalogue of’ (xvi. 130). But his critique is much broader than that set forth in Addison’s brief four page analysis and it is doubtful whether his remark should be taken seriously. Certainly his own experience at Oxford and his comments on the University practice of subscription would have made interesting reading, and ‘Swear Not At All’ is surely a witness to this. Moreover, the matter had recently occasioned a heated public dispute and for a young man keen to make his mark in the world, this would appear to have offered an excellent opportunity to unite controversy with the sincere belief that there was a wrong to be righted. Nor, when so much had been published by clergymen on the subject and when so many had signed the petition for relaxation of the terms of subscription to articles of faith, would Bentham have had much to fear from the courts. However, whatever the reason he abandoned the subject and returned to his work on jurisprudence and to his study of Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-69).

The text that eventually became *A Comment on the Commentaries* in 1728 was begun by Bentham in 1774 and largely completed by him within the year, with a few additions made over the following two years. Not that the subject of religion was completely cast out of his mind during this period. He published a translation of Voltaire’s *Le Taurerous Blanc as The White Bull* (1774) and utilised the preface in order to make a few short but sure shots in Voltairean fashion at the resistance to change of organised religion. Added to this, the important section of *A Comment on Divine Law* occupied much of his time and seems to have caused him some difficulty. Nor had the topic of oaths been forgotten. Always adept at combining current interests with his study of the law, he turned aside from his main theme to score a general point against Blackstone and against Oxford where he had heard him lecture. Blackstone is marked down as typical of those ‘scurried in that Sanctuary of religion where a man steps not across a gutter but to break a Law, nor breaks a Law but he must break an oath...’

The amount of time that Bentham spent on religion during this early period of his life has never been fully appreciated, nor has his attitude towards it and its place within his emerging utilitarian system received sufficient attention. His work on Blackstone, punishment, the penal code, and laws in general naturally led him to consider religion as it touched on these matters. For instance, in *A View of the Hard-Labour Bill* (1778) Bentham’s desire to see an extension of relief for Nonconformists led him to advocate that a provision be made in the bill, allowing believers of all denominations the right to attend services administered by their own priests in the proposed ‘labour-houses’. Shortly after, in a letter of 30 March 1779 to the secretary of the Oeconomical Society of Berne, he indicates an uncertainty as to the appropriateness of including religious topics in his ‘Plan of a Penal Code’. What does emerge during this time, however, is Bentham’s antipathy towards asceticism. Having briefly touched on the subject sometime in 1774 in connection with ‘sexual nonconformity’ (UC lxiii. 90-100; lxiv. i-25), he returned to it in the ‘Crit[ical] Jurisprudence' Crim[inal] manuscripts shortly after to give it a definite religious context (UC bix. 1-42; cx. 1-153; clx. 262-76, ca. 1774-76), and in 1778 he developed some of this material for *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (printed 1789,
published 1789). Whereas previously Bentham's hostility had been directed at particular Church practices and clerical abuses, here for the first time in print he argues that religion per se is responsible for mischief. His exhaustive analysis of the role of the religious sanction in legislation and in morals during the second half of the 1770s undoubtedly brought him to stand against religious asceticism, and in the early 1780s he once again pondered the pernicious as well as useful consequences of religious belief in his writing on 'indirect legislation' (UC lixvii, 17-41).

At this point Bentham's interest in religion waned and from this moment on, miscellaneous fragments aside, there is no sustained commentary on, or critique of, religious matters for almost the next thirty years of his life. In 1785, it is true, he did look again and in more detail than previously at the subject of 'sexual non-conformity' (UC lixii, 187-205; lixv, 26-34), but there is little here regarding religious asceticism that one cannot find in the manuscripts of 1774. Legislation, evidence, civil code, France, economic issues, Panopticon, the Poor Law, Scottish reform: these are Bentham's principal areas of concentration during these years, and references to religion are minimal. He occasionally touched on religious matters in these areas, as when he discussed the arrangements for Sunday service in the Panopticon prisons, or when he considered the use of oaths in courts of law, but these were of only incidental interest to him.

L.J. Hume suggests that Bentham began again to look critically at the Church in the last decade of the century, and that in this he may have been inspired by the anti-clerical measures of the French Revolution or possibly by the agitation of the Dissenters for repeal of the Test Acts in the years 1787-90 (a campaign to which his friend James Traill had drawn his attention in early 1787 while he was in Russia).4 However, there is little to establish that Bentham took more than a passing interest in ecclesiastical affairs during these years. There are a few jottings on 'Church Establishments' (UC evii, 108, ea. 1790-8) with reference to Edmund Burke's _Reflections on the Revolution in France_ (1790), and there exists a single intriguing sheet of manuscript 'On Toleration' dated May 1789 (UC chxx, 152) which indicates some interest in the plight of the Dissenters. But it is difficult to find evidence of a more substantial nature testifying to an interest in religion at that time. The material cited by Hume (UC v. 33-9) seems to be closely related to most of the other manuscripts in the same box (UC v. 63-316) which date from 1812-13. Headed 'Church' or 'Church Content' they include jottings on a wide range of topics, especially clerical abuses, Church liturgy, tithes, and the expense of maintaining a religious establishment, as well as on religious tests and penal laws designed to exclude Dissenters from public life. One sheet has the sub-heading 'Principles of Ecclesiastical Polity' (UC v. 33), and Bentham appears to have intended a section of this work on the Church to be a 'Plan for an Ecclesiastical reform in England' (UC v. 35). It is likely, therefore,
both with Bentham's early complaints about the Church and with his writings on evidence in the first decade of the nineteenth century. As we have seen, his first jottings on the subject of subscription to articles of faith occurred in 1773. Sometime between 1803 and 1811 he had occasion to return to the subject again when writing about judicial oaths for the *Rationale of Judicial Evidence* (completed in 1811, but not published till 1827), and *Swear Not At All* was a product of this. The title-page to the published tract of 1817 claims that it was 'Pre-detached from an Introduction to the "Rationale of Evidence"'. It appears that Bentham extracted it from the material for Chapter IX of this work because it broke the thread of his discussion of the use of oaths in courts of law.14 But if the date when this pamphlet was written remains uncertain, it seems likely that Bentham's interest in the subject was revived by the passing of the Toleration Act of 1812. Though he had little to say about the Act itself his dissatisfaction with its limited nature can be assumed. It is clear, at least, that he was not satisfied with the retention of the oaths required for the certification of Dissenting ministers, for in February of 1813 he was busy collecting information regarding the subscriptions demanded of clergymen (UC ix. 26–7).12 The passing of the Unitarian Toleration Act in July 1813 only served to sharpen Bentham's interest. This he thought a most unsatisfactory measure, the imperfections of which, he claimed, were due to the sinister interests of the Church Bishops who 'refuse to relinquish the power they have over the people'.13 It failed to annul all previous statutes imposing penalties against 'impugners of the Trinity', did not extend its terms of relief to Ireland, and did nothing to alter the law regarding 'blasphemy'.14 The delay in the publication of *Swear Not At All*, some six years or more, has not been accounted for. In the Advertisement Bentham says that he was induced to publish because of the addition so lately made of the scourge of religious persecution to the yoke of despotism: — for a pretence for punishment as for blasphemy ...; and, by men by whom the profession of piety has been converted into an instrument of power, the exactions so lately made, to bolster up by the force of their punishments the imbecility of their arguments'. Recent prosecutions for 'blasphemy', then, a 'catch-all' method commonly used by government to suppress literature deemed to be of a seditions or libellous nature as well as tracts aimed directly at the Church and Christian beliefs, would appear to have stirred Bentham to publish his attack on the laws requiring oaths and subscriptions. But why the gap of four years between the printing and the publication of *Swear Not At All*? It may have been that Bentham intended to incorporate his arguments against oaths into *Church-of-Englandism* upon which he was engaged during these years, and the possible duplication of what he had to say may have stayed his hand. The 'Church's' manuscripts in UC v. 94–316 (1813) contain lengthy sections on the causes and forms of intolerance and the problems posed by oaths. In the event the work on the Church dragged on and some provocative prosecutions by the Attorney-General encouraged Bentham to publish his long-held views on the practice of oath-taking.15

*Church-of-Englandism* had its birth in Bentham's more general disquietment with the Established Church. As early as 1809, when engaged on what was to become the *Plan of Parliamentary Reform* (1817), he had a work on the Church in mind (UC xxviii. 1–45).16 According to a note dated July 1818 this work was 'written before Church of Englandism' but was 'not published or finished' (UC vi. 27). What remain are an outline (UC vi. 28–83) and the related text of Chapters II–VI (UC v. 94–316) under the title 'Church Party II Doctrines' which date from 1812–13. Some of this material made its way into *Church-of-Englandism*, but as the outline confirms it was planned as much more extensive work than that which Bentham managed to produce in draft.17 It was the Church's involvement in education that persuaded him to set about rearranging his material and to alter the focus of the work. Convinced that the Church had only founded the National Schools Society (1811) in order to thwart the efforts of the Dissenter Joseph Lancaster and others, including himself, to establish non-sectarian schools for educating the poor,18 Bentham embarked on an expansive critique of the pernicious role of the Church in education and coupled this with his more general criticisms of the Anglican Establishment. The result was *Church-of-Englandism and its Catechism Examined*, a more scathing and far-reaching analysis of official religion than had initially been planned, but a work clearly rooted in the earlier manuscripts of 1813. That the published volume is a synthesis of two distinct bodies of work — the unfinished work on the Church and the later tracts on the National Schools Society, principally dating from 1814–16 — is to some extent revealed by its format. There are two Prefaces, a Plan of the Work, and two separate parts to the main text — 'Strictures on the Exclusionary System as pursued in the National Society's Schools' and 'The Church of England Catechism' — which in turn has five appendices.19 There are four different series of pagination and footnotes which occasionally run on for several pages. These nearly 800 pages are, as L.J. Hume has remarked, 'perhaps the most chaotically arranged of all Bentham's publications'.20

On this occasion Bentham did not employ an editor to relieve him of the toil of arranging his material. We can only wish that he had found someone to perform this task. Samuel Romilly was approached but his reluctance in even undertaking to proof-read the text, 'to note as he read such passages as to him should present themselves as dangerous' and to suggest amendments 'as he thought might ensure safety', is perhaps understandable. Bentham, however, did not think so. Romilly, he wrote, 'has broken his word to me'. It was his opinion that Romilly baulked at the section on sacerdotes and the over-payment of offices which, as a Whig and an expectant of position, 'he has to bear his share in the disposal of, and
then foreseeing the direction of the work read no more.\textsuperscript{21} Though a friend and an admirer for many years, Romilly had a history of caution where Bentham’s more radical and potentially offensive works were concerned. In 1793 he advised him not to publish Truth Versus Ashurst because it contained some praise of the French, and it did not appear until 1823.\textsuperscript{22} In 1802, after reading Bentham’s criticisms of the role of the Duke of Portland’s ministry in the Panopticon affair, he warned him that to publish was to risk a charge of libel.\textsuperscript{23} Again it was Romilly who persuaded him not to publish The Elements of the Art of Packing in 1810 for fear of prosecution by the Attorney-General, and Bentham agreed to delay publication until a more tranquil day should offer itself.\textsuperscript{24} It eventually appeared in 1821. Already regretting the publication of the Plan of Parliamentary Reform\textsuperscript{25} and believing that it could ‘not fail to shock all persons who have any sense of religion’, Romilly was quick to advise that Church-of-Englandism be suppressed. Bentham ignored this and also refused to listen to later requests that the work not be distributed.\textsuperscript{26}

Francis Place shared none of Romilly’s reticence where radical politics or the propagation of unbelief was concerned, and he readily busied himself looking for a publisher.\textsuperscript{27} This proved to be no easy task. In the effort to suppress literature of a radical nature booksellers and publishers of anonymous tracts, declared ‘blasphemous’ or ‘libellous’ by the magistrate, were liable to prosecution under English Common Law. This may well have forced Bentham to abandon his original plan to publish Church-of-Englandism as the work of ‘An Oxford Graduate’.\textsuperscript{28} For a time, however, he was under the impression that the inclusion of his correspondence with the respected Unitarian M.P. William Smith on the subject of the Unitarian Toleration Act of 1813, in the form of a preface to the work, would be sufficient to lessen the risk of prosecution for a bookseller.\textsuperscript{29} In the end, only the author’s name on the title page would do.\textsuperscript{30}

Bentham was able to avoid such risks with the apparently less threatening Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind, given to the world under the pseudonym of ‘Philip Beauchamp’. It was begun in 1815 and completed in 1821, but there is an outline dating from as early as 1811 (BL, Add. MS 26087, fo. 2) which shows that Bentham had the overall plan clear in his mind at the outset of his attack on the Church and its doctrines.\textsuperscript{31} Moreover, its subject—the perniciousness of the belief in an after-life of rewards and punishments—was not new to Bentham. Whenever he wrote of law and the role of sanctions, from the early 1770s on, he added to the stockpile of his displeasure the mischief perpetrated by the religious sanction, and looked forward to the day when the legislator would no longer have to take the religious sensibilities of the people into account. The Analysis represents the systematic gathering together of all Bentham’s previously stated grievances over the influence of the religious sanction in the temporal concerns of society. In fact there is no other piece of sustained writing, published or unpublished, in which he is more emphatic that individuals and communities in general would be happier if they could find a way of living without religion. In this respect the Analysis rounds off the political critique of the Church Establishment, its institutions and modes of instruction, mounted in Church-of-Englandism.

There has been some controversy regarding the responsibility for the finished work. That the book is based on Bentham’s manuscripts is not in dispute. The British Library has four volumes of manuscripts which were sent by Bentham to George Grote in November and December of 1821.\textsuperscript{32} In the main they are in the hand of John Collins, Bentham’s amanuensis of the time, or in the hand of Bentham himself. These were the manuscripts used by Grote to produce the Analysis. The DNB article on Grote records that a comparison between the finished work and these manuscripts ‘shows the enormous amount of labour required to bring them into form. Grote had practically to write the essay leaving aside the greater part of the materials before him and giving to the remnant a shape that was his rather than Bentham’s’. Sir Leslie Stephen concurs with this view: ‘to me it seems clear that it owes so much to the editor, Grote, that it may more fitly be discussed hereafter’.\textsuperscript{33} Such observations, however, are apt to mislead more than they inform. In a letter of 9 December 1821 Bentham introduces the manuscripts for Grote’s ‘tactical powers’ to ‘make good use of’, and refers to them as ‘a garden of good fruits’. The remainder of the letter then proceeds to give a general outline as to how Grote might set about his task.\textsuperscript{34} In a second letter Bentham offered to look the manuscripts over and see whether he ‘could do anything more towards rendering the work more methodical, correct, clear, concise and comprehensive’. To which he adds: ‘Should it be found necessary grudge not the trouble of recomposing ...’ If any considerable additions be found requisite, nobody can be better qualified for making them than yourself’.\textsuperscript{35} In such manner Bentham authorised Grote to rewrite and, if necessary, to make additions to his original material. In the event, as a reading of the finished work proves, Bentham’s directions of 9 December were very closely followed by Grote. In other words, he used the manuscripts according to the plan set out by Bentham. However important Grote’s editorial duties, and these should not be underestimated given the bulk of material he was asked to deal with (Bentham’s manuscripts were intended for a much larger study than the published work represents), we can be sure that the book truly reflects Bentham’s opinions on the topic of the influence of the religious sanction on temporal happiness.

The book was eventually published in 1822 by Richard Carlile, who was already serving a six year sentence in Dorchester for publishing ‘blasphemous’ literature and unlikely to be prosecuted further for this, his latest affront to the religious beliefs of the English people. Though Bentham’s
authorship was not long a secret, Grote’s hand in the work was not revealed till after his death. His wife makes no mention of the book in her life of her husband, but the reviewer of this biography let the secret out in the *Edinburgh Review*. The 1817 edition of the *Analytik* and the French translation of the same year both make clear Grote’s involvement, the latter describing it as ‘d’après les papiers de Jér. B., par G. Grote’.26 Similar editorial questions surround the production of *Not Paul, but Jesus*, published in 1823 under the erroneous name de plaine ‘Ganamed Smith’, Ganamed being the name of the master under whom Paul studied the Judaic Law. According to a note by Place in his copy of the work ‘the matter of this book was put together by me at Mr. Bentham’s request in the months of August and September 1817 – during my residence with him at Ford Abbey, Devonshire’.27 But as Graham Wallis, Place’s biographer, has pointed out, while the manuscripts are mostly dated 1817 in Place’s hand there are some dated as late as 1818.28 Entries in the diary of John Colis reveal that the manuscripts were passed to Place via Bowring in January of 1821, and the *Summary View of Not Paul, but Jesus*, published later that same year, announced that the work would be speedily published. Yet on 25 January 1823 Bentham was still enquiring of Place how the work was progressing (UC cxxxiii. 92). Wallis claims that the manuscripts had ‘been rearranged, condensed and “pulled together” in making the book’,29 and perhaps Place had some hand in this. But it is difficult to substantiate that this is what actually occurred, since only a relatively small portion of the manuscripts upon which the published work is based are extant (UC cxxxiii. 212-331). Most of the remaining manuscripts that go by the title ‘Not Paul’ contain material suppressed by Bentham or which he hoped would appear at some future date. This material includes *The Church History from Jesus’ Ascension to Paul’s Conversion* (UC cxxxiv. 445–531); an unpublished appendix with the title ‘Paul’s Inducements’ (UC cxxxiv. 332-444); suppressed material on the doctrinal differences between Paul and Jesus (UC clxiv. 141-214); the intended second volume or part to *Not Paul, but Jesus* entitled ‘Sextus’, which is a discussion of asceticism (UC clxxv. 25-222) and harks back to the early fragments on sexual nonconformity of ca. 1774 and 1785; and, finally, the planned third part of *Not Paul, but Jesus*, a continuation of part two entitled ‘Asceticism: its repugnancy to the religion of Jesus’, which was intended to prove by an analysis of the sayings and life of Christ that he was opposed to the doctrine of asceticism (UC clxxix. 215-523). What remains of the material used in the published work accounts for only a few of its many sections; consequently, it is difficult to say precisely how much of a hand Place had in the book. In his *Autobiography* he explicitly attributes the work to Bentham and, even taking modesty into account, there is no reason to doubt him.30 In a contrasting vein to the more rigorously argued *Analytik* the case against Paul is almost comic. The levity with which the subjects of Scripture, miracles, Paul’s conversion, his motives and character are approached is beyond Place’s capacity to produce lively prose.31 As a confessed atheist he welcomed the publication of anti-religious literature and would have eagerly assisted in any such enterprise. But there seems little doubt that he played only a minor role as an editor.32

For one of Bentham’s radical lieutenants, however, involvement in his writings on religion could not comfortably be assented to. Bowring’s acquaintance with Bentham began in 1820 and for the last ten years of the life of the old sage they were constant companions: the one reminiscing and reflecting on the events of his long life, and the other jotting everything down and gathering together correspondence for a memoir of his master. His final tribute to Bentham was the publication of the *Works*, a significant portion of which are based on unpublished manuscripts. Bowring has been much criticised for the manner in which he assembled the volumes which go by the name of Bentham’s *Works*, and rightly so. Perhaps more reprehensible still, however, is Bowring’s complete disregard of Bentham’s wishes in suppressing the admittidly vast collection of material on religious subjects, and particularly his refusal to include that which was already in a finished state and did not involve the time of an editor. It is true that Bentham had said on several occasions that it would be better if certain material was not published on the grounds that it would threaten any good that his other efforts might produce, but he also indicated that the unpublished religious writings should appear at some future date (UC clxxi. 4). Why did Bowring not fulfil these wishes? John Colis’s inference that he refused to publish the religious works because earlier editions remained unsold is hardly convincing.33 This could be said of more than a few of Bentham’s other tracts which were included in the *Works*. Surely the truth is that, though a radical in politics and a firm adherent of the utilitarian doctrine, Bowring could not find it within himself to apply the test of utility to Christianity itself. He saw that ‘Swell Not At All’ was an attack on Church authority and a blow in the cause of toleration, but the other religious works went too far down the road to infidelity for his liking. As a Unitarian, a founder member of the Non-Con Club (1817) established to promote the principles of truth and liberty, and of the Unitarian Association (1818) devoted to protecting the civil rights of Unitarians, he could not possibly follow Bentham down this particularly blasphemous path. Sadly there is no record in the *Works* or in Bowring’s disappointing autobiography of any exchanges between the two on religious matters.34 Yet Bentham must have been aware of his young friend’s beliefs. Sir Leslie Stephen is probably correct that Bowring judiciously agreed to avoid discussions upon religious topics with his master.35 Even so it seems extraordinary that while Bentham was planning to re-publish parts of *Church-of-Englandism* in 1825, Bowring was busy on a volume of hymns and prayers.36 Yet this man of religion, this author of hymns and prayers,
was the man to whom Bentham consigned writings which could not but be offensive to him. Just how offensive the neglect of the religious works during the past 150 years sufficiently indicates.

Certainly Bowing does not seem to have dampened Bentham's enthusiasm for attacking religion wherever the opportunity arose, and he never left off pondering religious questions right up to the end of his days. In 1830 he was still considering the problem of the 'utility of religion' (UC xxxviii. 161–60). But Bentham's intentions vis-à-vis religion had been clear at least from the time he wrote the *Introduction* – in a society organized according to the dictates of utility it would have no place either in morals or legislation.

With the publication of the religious works in later life the world could no longer be in any doubt as to Bentham's animosity towards religion, or the depth of his conviction that it should be abolished both as an institution and as a source of psychological influences working on the human mind. In the *Constitutional Code*, for example, he mentions religion hardly at all.

*AUTO-ICON*; or, *Further Uses of the Dead to the Living*, written in 1831 and printed for private circulation in 1842, provides a more unusual perspective on the place of religion in the secular Utilitarian society. Rarely noticed by scholars in the past, it is an odd tract rich in allusions of a religious nature, but designed, in part at least, to show the irrelevance of religion to mankind.64 Being an unbeliever and a rigorous utilitarian, at some point in his life Bentham was almost bound to consider the question 'Of what use is a dead man to the living? 'That this question should foster an entire thesis about the uselessness to be derived from corpses, particularly if they are the remains of men of some achievement and intellect, is also typical of Bentham. One of the more curious possibilities he suggests is the use of embalmed bodies or 'auto-icons' in a religious manner. 'On certain days', he writes, 'the Auto-icons might be exhibited, and their exhibition associated with religious observances. Every sect would choose its own exhibition day'.65 Bentham envisages Temples of Fame 'filled with a population of illustrious Auto-Icons', and Temples of Honour and Dishonour with the transference of auto-icons from one to another depending on the current state of public opinion.66 Auto-icons, rich, poor, famous and infamous, are to replace the monuments of conventional religion in the churches, realising the Christian equality which escapes mankind in real life: all are 'on the same level' and 'the beautiful commandment of Jesus was to be obeyed; they would indeed 'meet together' ...'67 Finally, pilgrimages to the shrines of dead philosophers are suggested as fitting substitutes for the pilgrimages to the shrines of saints and martyrs.68 For Bentham, however, such observances are purely secular; auto-icons serve a useful function entirely divorced from any spiritual or mystical considerations. They inspire, disgust, and are aids to instruction, but they cannot do any more than this. From the stories of their lives, their failings and achievements, their contributions to the public good and their crimes against the community, we can learn how best to conduct our own lives. But there is no use in our praying at their feet for guidance or forgiveness, for grace or salvation. In this they are impotent. 'Has religion anything to do with the matter?' asks Bentham. 'Nothing at all. Fear as air does religion leave the disposal of the dead'.69

In Bentham's *Memorandum Book* for 21 June 1831 there is the query '1. Be to draw up a plan for Church Reform?'70 Nor was this entirely fanciful thinking, at least not so for Bentham. Amongst his proposals for that year for the establishment of a Colonisation Society, are interspersed several sheets on which ideas for a *Book of Church Reform* are set forth (UC viii. 149–73). Though these were intended to be the beginnings of a critique of Robert Southey's *Book of the Church* (UC viii. 153), first published in 1824, it seems that Bentham ran out of steam and published in their place a collection of extracts from *Church-of-Englandism*.71 No more on religion was to come from the hand of 'the Hermit of Queen's Square Place'.

From the timid and duteous boy frightened by tales of ghosts and nightmares populated by images of the devil, to the Oxford student of first doubts, to the middle years of quiet unbelief and, finally, the zealous atheist of later life, Bentham's journey was characterised by the growing conviction that religion was not always what it professed to be, until his distaste for the doctrines, practices, and orders of religion became almost fanatical. The religious writings, published and unpublished, and his writings in other fields where they touch on religious matters, provide us with the documentation of this story. For too long, however, Bentham's views on religion have been neglected, and in the process a significant aspect of his thought has been forgotten or thought to be not worth exploring.

Notes

1. I have derived much assistance from the writings of the late James Steiner, especially his Report on the Problems of Editing Bentham's *Writings on Religion*, Appendix B to the Report by the General Editor, 12 June 1967 (unpublished).

2. For a discussion of Bentham's interest in subscription see Crimmins, 'Bentham's Unpublished Manuscripts on Subscription to Articles of Faith', forthcoming in the *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*.


5. Ibid, p. 80.


7. Correspondence (CW), ii. 252.


10. The main argument of 'Swear Not At All' appears in Bowring, vii. 28-9.


13. Ibid., pp. xxvii, xxxvi-xxvii. These issues are discussed in the exchange of letters between Bentham and the Unitarian M.P. William Smith at the front of Church-of-Englandman.

14. In a letter to William Smith (Feb. 1818) Bentham mentions the cases of William Hope and a man called Wright. The first was a notorious case which dragged on for many months in 1817 till Hope was eventually acquitted after three trials.


16. At UC ex. 75, dated 20 Aug. 1810, there is a list of 'Propositions on parish priests, how to improve their education and make them useful'.

17. The 'Church' MSS are without a doubt an early abortive start by Bentham on his great work on organised religion. However, a large proportion of the material is to be found in the finished work, Church-of-Englandman, there are some important differences. For example, in the former writings Bentham intended to include sections on the history of Christianity (UC vi, 31, 35, 71), on the utility of religion (UC vi, 32, 33, 38, 41), on doubts about the divine mission of St. Paul (UC vi, 33, 38, 41), and on the popular anti-papacy to non-Catholicism (UC vi, 62, 63), which were eventually published later in the Analyst. Not Paul, but Jesus, and the related unpublished MSS of these works.

18. In 1813 Bentham had made a start on an outline for a new curriculum, strong in natural science and void of religion, in an educational handbook, which he eventually published as the Chemesthetic, printed 1815, published London, 1819. To those afraid that instruction repugnant to religion would be given at the Chemesthetic School Bentham promised that 'no instruction ... disrespectful to Religion in general, to the Christian Religion in particular, or to any one form of it, shall ever be administered' (Bowring, viii, 40).

19. UC vii. 1-160 are MSS intended for appendices to Church-of-Englandman but which were not included for want of space. Much of their substance is scattered about the body of the published text.


22. Romilly to JB (Jan. 1793), Correspondence (CW), iv. 414-15.

23. Romilly to JB (1 Nov. 1802), Bowring, x. 399-400.


26. See Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, 2 vols., 3rd edn., London, 1841, 489-90. Romilly recorded Bentham's part in the Westminster elections of 1817 in his diary thus: "Among the strange incidents which occurred during the election, the decided part which my excellent friend, Jeremy Bentham, took against me. He did not vote; indeed, but he wrote a handbook, avowed and signed by him, in which he represented me to be a most unfit Member for Westminster as being a lawyer, a Whig, and a friend only to moderate reform". Ibid., 512.

27. See JB to Place (14 Jan. 1818) and JB to Place (6 Feb. 1818), MSS inserted in the British Library copy of Church-of-Englandman, shelf mark 4106.b.b.6.

28. JB to Place (6 Feb. 1818), ibid.


30. JB to Place (6 Feb. 1818), MSS inserted in Church-of-Englandman, BL shelf mark 4106.b.b.6.

31. BL Add. MS 29807, fos. 157-62 is a later and more detailed 'Plan of the Work' for the Analyst, which is reproduced by Steintrager in 'Report on the Problems of Editing Bentham's Writings on Religion', p. 9-10.

32. BL Add. MS 29806-9.


34. BL Add. MS 29806, fo. 1.

35. Ibid., 29807, fo. 12-13.


37. This copy is now in the Library at University College. It is inscribed 'From Mr. Bentham Sep 29, 1823, F.F. The Ogilvie Collection at U.C. London Library also contains another copy of Not Paul, but Jesus with copies annotations believed to be in the hand of S.T. Coleridge. It is indicative of the neglect of Bentham's religious views that these annotations by a noted opponent of Unitarianism have neither been transcribed nor analyzed.

38. See the note attached to Place's copy of Not Paul, but Jesus at U.C. Library.

39. Ibid.


41. That Place's own writing is uniformly dull and humourless is testified by all hands. See the DNB article on Place, Thrale's introduction, and Graham Wallis, The Life of Francis Place 1771-1854, 1898: 4th edn., London, 1951, p. 89.

42. 'Grose' had no doubt that Bentham was the author of Not Paul, but Jesus. A Reply to Two Deistical Works, pp. 1 and 173.


44. Davis, Dissent in Politics, pp. 202-3.

45. Bowring's autobiography reveals little about his relations with Bentham and nothing about their differences over religion. The following is his only comment about the vast quantity of Bentham's unpublished material: 'Many of his writings I have not deemed it safe to give to the world, even after his death, so bold and adventurous were some of his speculations...'. Autobiographical Recollections of Sir John Bowring, London, 1877, p. 330.

46. Stephen, The English Utilitarians, i. 223.

47. John Bowring, Matins and Vespers: With Hymns and Occasional Devotional Pieces, London, 1825; Bentham, Meath Church Reformed by Blending Vices and...
Jeremy Bentham

Reminders extracted from Bentham’s Church of, etc..., 1823: 2nd edn., London, 1825. The latter is a reprint of sections 9 and 10 of Appendix IV of Church-of-Englandism, in a letter to Place (29 Jan. 1823) headed ‘Mother Church relieved by bleeding’. Bentham asked his advice about reprinting the political part of Church of Englandism. His purpose, he says, is that it might be useful to those interested in Joseph Hume’s notions in parliament regarding Irish titles. Church-of-Englandism, III, shelf mark 4106.bb.6.

48. For a discussion of the context in which this tract was written, verification of its authenticity, and other details concerning its printing and the execution of the terms of Bentham’s will regarding his remains, see C.F.A. Mamey, The “Auto-Icon” of Jeremy Bentham at University College, London: Medical History, II, No. 2, April 1958.

49. Auto-Icon: or, Further Uses of the Dead to the Living, written 1831, printed but not published 1842, p. 3.

50. Ibid., pp. 4, 6 and 7.

51. Ibid., p. 3.

52. Ibid., p. 15.

53. Ibid., p. 16.

54. Bowring, xi. 69.

55. The Book of Church Reform, containing the most essential part of Mr. Bentham’s Church of Englandism Examined, edited by one of his Disciples, London, 1831.

36

Jeremy Bentham and the Nature of Psychological Concepts

P. McReynolds


Prone as is the human mind to the making of hasty and imperfectly-grounded inductions on the field of physical science, it cannot but be much more so in the fields of psychology and ethics. . . .

Bentham, A fragment on ontology.

This paper will deal with some of the questions and issues associated with the generation and use of concepts in psychology. There is, I dare say, no problem that is more permanently crucial in our science than that of how to develop meaningful and communicable technical concepts. This is true, of course, in all of the sciences, but it seems to be especially notable in psychology. Ever since Aristotle (12) noted the difficulty in arriving at an adequate definition of happiness (Nicomachean ethics, Bk. I, 1097), psychologists have wrestled with the twin problems of how to make more explicit the concepts that they consider most central, and how to make more central the concepts that they can make most explicit.

About 25 years ago, during the period that I may call rampant operationism, a great many psychologists were misled into believing that here at last—in the prescriptions of operationism—was the long-needed panacea for guaranteeing useful scientific terms. It has for some time been evident, however, that this was not the case (8,9); and it seems now that the situation was not just that operationism and related orientations, such as the verifiability theory of meaning, were, as such, inadequate or in some respects wrong, but rather that the very goal, or hope of developing any simple formulae for achieving conceptual clarity was inherently misguided. There is no fixed method for deriving useful scientific concepts, and indeed there cannot be, since the scientific enterprise is by its very nature not fixed, but rather is open-ended, unpredictable, and creative.

This paper, then, will offer no new programs for developing sound and fruitful psychological concepts. Rather, my purpose is to make certain