Research Article

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Jeremy Bentham on David Hume: "Having Enter'd into Metaphysics," but "Having Lost His Way"

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Abstract: This article argues that Bentham's metaphysics has until recently been unfairly belittled, and that it in fact built on and surpassed that of David Hume, of whom Bentham was both an attentive student and a fierce critic. Bentham's logic is metaphysically based, multi-levelled, and comprehensive. First, taking Hume's empiricism as a starting point, Bentham developed the additional mechanism of "reflection" to facilitate a utilitarian pragmatic resolution to Hume's skepticism. Second, unlike Hume, Bentham aspired to encyclopedic knowledge, especially of the human mind, which he believed allowed him to place his thought on a more solid and broader foundation. Third, whereas Hume focused on the passive understanding, Bentham captured the interaction between understanding and volition. Fourth, in relation to moral approbation, Hume adopted an approach which highlighted benevolence, whereas Bentham sought to reconcile self-preference with benevolence. Fifth, Hume's common sense moral philosophy pushed him to associate justice with social convention, and helped to make him a conservative. Bentham developed the principle of utility to direct and push forward social reform for a better world.

Keywords: Bentham, Hume, ontology, skepticism, understanding, volition

1 Introduction

For a long time, scholars have recognized that, in developing the principle of utility, Bentham borrowed something critical from Hume's doctrine of utility, basing their view on a well-known passage in Bentham's *A Fragment on Government*:

> For my own part, I well remember, no sooner had I read that part of the work which touches on this subject, than I felt as if scales had fallen from my eyes. I then, for the first time, learnt to call the cause of the people the cause of Virtue.[1]

Frederick Rosen observed that Bentham was a "careful" and "close student of Hume" in numerous respects, on such issues as Epicureanism, virtue, the social contract, rationality, and the logic of the will.[2] For Rosen, there are some differences between them, but for the most part "these differences are ones of emphasis or style rather than substance."[3] Rosen's study is helpful and insightful, but there remains much to do in terms of

1 Bentham, *Comment on the Commentaries*, 440–2n.
2 Rosen, *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill*, 48–53.
3 See Ibid., 54–7.

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further investigation of the relationship between Bentham and Hume, especially at a metaphysical level.[4] It has been widely asserted that Bentham is a superficial philosopher, and Mary Mack observed that, "Bentham and his doctrines have been notorious. He has been attacked with every verbal weapon from sarcasm to kindly correction, from wit to plodding exegeses, from irascible explosions to urbane point-by-point dismissals."[5] This article follows Mack in arguing that in reality Bentham's "work has a massiveness, depth, and architectural beauty that those who flip impatiently through the first few pages of *The Principles of Morals* will never see." The reason for the almost uniform failure to perceive this lies in the fact that "Bentham has been stretched on so many Procrustean beds that it is hard to discover his original shape."[6] J. S. Mill asserted that Hume was "the profoundest negative thinker on record," but Bentham "was far inferior to Hume in Hume's qualities, and was in no respect fitted to excel as a metaphysician. We must not look for subtlety, or the power of recondite analysis, among his intellectual characteristics,"[7] and concluded that in the aforementioned quality few great thinkers have ever been so deficient.[8]

The argument of this article is that far from being a shallow logician, Bentham developed a metaphysics which echoed that of David Hume in its empirical foundations, but which surpassed that of Hume in several respects, most centrally in developing a systematic and sophisticated ontology. It was this ontology which, guided by the additional mechanism of "reflection," facilitated an original pragmatic utilitarian resolution to the impasse delivered by Hume's skepticism and established the metaphysical basis for utilitarian philosophy and ethics. Section 2 argues that Bentham was much more than "a close student of Hume," and in that in terms of their foundational metaphysics, the agreement between Bentham and Hume is much closer than Rosen perceived. In his empiricism, Bentham is a most loyal and most profound student of Hume, going so far as to align himself with Hume against Locke on the distinction between impressions and ideas[9] as well as the distinction between is and ought.[10] Section 3 unfolds Bentham's critique of Hume to reveal the way in which the former went beyond the latter, and thus took a major step forward not only in metaphysics (3.1, 3.2, 3.3) but also in morals (3.4, 3.5, 3.6). Thus for Bentham, Hume might be criticized not for "having enter'd into Metaphysics," but for "having lost his way,"[11] in that his "Moral Sense" was a "vague idea" and "a fiction of ipse dixitism,"[12] which only contributed to his oscillation between the principle of utility and "the Ipse dixit principle."[13]

2 Bentham's Acknowledgement of Hume's Metaphysics

Metaphysics was always a major concern of Bentham, who always asserted the importance of metaphysical investigations. Set against some of the most renowned metaphysicians, such as Hume and Kant,[14] whom Mill

4 In recent years, several scholars working from diverse perspectives have made substantial contributions to an overdue re-evaluation of Bentham's debt to, and criticisms of, Hume: see, for instance, DeChamps, *Enlightenment and Utility*; Malcolm, "Jeremy Bentham on Liberty of Taste;" and Shanafelt, *Uncommon Sense,* 11, 17–9, 23, 53, 63, 69.

5 Mack, *Jeremy Bentham,* 2.

6 Ibid., 20.

7 Mill, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill,* vol. x, 80. Mill confirmed this estimation in his autobiography, written in about 1872, just before the end of his life. see Mill, i. 206.

8 Ibid.

9 "For the distinction between impressions and ideas we are, it is believed, indebted to David Hume." Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, (Henceforth Bowring), viii. 320; Bentham, *Chrestomathia*, 234–5. See also Schofield, "The Epicurean Universe of Jeremy Bentham," 42.

10 Bentham, *Chrestomathia,* 275.

11 Bentham, *Preparatory Principles*, 197.

12 See Bentham, *Deontology*, 1–115, 285, 289, 291.

13 Ibid., 27n. See also Bowring, vi. 314.

14 In Bentham's voluminous output, references to Kant are very rare in comparison with, for instance, mentions of Locke, Hume, Burke, Beccaria, and Montesquieu. In his writings on logic, however, Bentham did offer a comment on Kant's philosophy, which he dismissed as neither useful nor intelligible: see, UC cvi. 162 (31 July 1814).

admired greatly, Bentham produced a comparable volume of purely metaphysical writings. And it seems that Bentham's metaphysics pervades almost all of his works, and the exploration and elaboration of metaphysics pervaded the whole of Bentham's intellectual life.[15] Given that for Bentham metaphysics is simply the science of meaning, and that perhaps his most pressing problem as a young man was precisely the literal meaninglessness of much of legal and political discussion, he felt obliged to develop his own logic and metaphysics from scratch,[16] of course he was an extremely enthusiastic advocate of metaphysics. He wrote that: "every intelligent and honest man does love, the clearness and certainty that are the fruits of" metaphysics,[17] and went on to state emphatically that "Every science, then, has its Metaphysics,"[18] "and in the improvement of" every science, "experience and metaphysics must go hand in hand."[19] Metaphysics is the path leading to "truth and thence of right reason,"[20] so that "[w]hen reason is against a man, a man will be against reason."[21] Bentham fiercely criticized opponents of metaphysics,[22] especially mentioning Burke: "I hate Metaphysics, said Burke. So *Cacus* hated day-light."[23]

However, in Bentham's eyes, the "'Vantage-ground' of Metaphysics" remained unexplored, for the "field of Ontology, or as it may otherwise be termed, the field of supremely abstract entities, is a yet untrodden labyrinth – a wilderness never hitherto explored."[24]

> Metaphysics is descended of creditable parents, Experience and Reflection. The precise date of her birth, she never could recollect. The first event she remembers is that at a very early age she found herself in the arms of one Aristotle, a man of an acute understanding and of an inventive genius, from whose conversation, had he lived long enough, she was in fair way of gaining improvement.[25]

Bentham made a distinction between "modern Metaphysics, genuine Metaphysics,"[26] and the old and false metaphysics which "fell into the hands of a whimsical crack-pated but smooth-tongued journeyman of his [i.e. Aristotle's], one Plato, who begat on her a …race of Chimaeras."[27] "In defining many a moral or metaphysical term," men of those old and false metaphysics "have met" "ill success."[28]

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15 In the early 1770s, before the publication of *A Fragment on Government* (1776), Bentham wrote over 600 folios on pure metaphysics, only recently published as *Preparatory Principles*, which runs to 454 pages, around 1,400 paragraphs: see, Bentham, *Preparatory Principles*. Another important resource originally is the first 357 pages of Bowring viii (1843), comprising "Chrestomathia," "A Fragment on Ontology," "Essay on Logic," "Essay on Language," and "Fragment on Universal Grammar." The authoritative edition of *Chrestomathia* was published in 1983 in Collected Works. "A Fragment on Ontology" has been re-edited by Philip Schofield and appears in as a new bilingual (English–French) edition, published as Bentham, *De l'ontologie et autres textes sur les fictions*, Texte anglais établi par Philip Schofield, Traduction et commentaires par Jean-Pierre Cléro et Christian Laval, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1997. Besides these, many other of Bentham's works are also highly metaphysical, such as *A Table of Springs of Action*, *Deontology*, and "Nomography, or the art of inditing laws" (Bowring, iii. 285–95). The anonymous author of the 'General Preface to *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*' also mentioned *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Rationale of Judicial Evidence,* and the twin *Rationales* of Reward and Punishment, respectively, as "the most important" among works which are "Preliminary investigations of a metaphysical character, intended to elucidate and defend the doctrines of his practical or constructive works": see, W.W. [Anonymous author], Bowring, i. xi.

16 See Quinn, *Bentham*, 16.

17 Bentham, *Preparatory Principles*, 265.

18 Ibid., 197.

19 Ibid., 265–6.

20 UC ci. 104 (5 August 1814).

21 Bentham, *Preparatory Principles*, 265.

22 Ibid.; see also Bowring, viii. 221.

23 *Preparatory Principles*, 165. In *Preparatory Principles* and *Essay on Logic* alone, Bentham expressed strong disapproval of Burke's emphatic statement that "I hate metaphysics" on at least seven occasions.

24 Bowring, viii. 195.

25 Bentham, *Preparatory Principles*, 329.

26 Ibid., 265.

27 Ibid., 329. "It's perplexing that Bentham reverses the chronology here, and puts Aristotle before Plato. That seems an odd mistake for him to make." Personal email from Philip Schofield, 27 April 2022.

28 Ibid., 97–8.

In relation to Hume, however, Bentham asserted that he was an exception, "having enter'd into Metaphysics,"[29] and applauded him as a "penetrating and acute metaphysician."[30] Hume was almost alone as a philosopher in receiving a positive assessment from Bentham.[31] There is little doubt that Bentham read Hume seriously. It is clear from Bentham's references and allusions that he studied almost all of Hume's works, including *Treatise of Human Nature*, which he applauded as a celebrated book,[32] *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*,[33] and *History of England*.[34]

To what extent, in areas besides those noted by Rosen, did Bentham follow Hume? Let me first offer an outline of Bentham's logic: The core of Bentham's metaphysics is "Experience and Reflection";[35] consistently based on empiricism, taking language as the instrument of thought, Bentham developed a systematic and sophisticated ontology which comprises names of immediate real entities (perceptions), names of inferential real entities (external bodies), and names of fictitious entities (things that do not exist in reality, but are a necessity in language). Names of fictitious entities must be based on real entities, otherwise statements containing the entity in question will become "falsehood or nonsense," and the entity itself a non-entity. Besides real and fictitious entities, all the remaining nouns in any language are names of non-entities which are produced by some exercise of idiosyncratic or even whimsical imagination.[36] Pleasure and pain are the two most immediate real entities that govern human beings. Given the predominance of self-preference in the human constitution, and the competition of interests between individuals to which it gives rise, the greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the guiding principle of morals and legislation.[37]

First, Bentham followed Hume's view that perception is the basis upon which to establish the existence of all entities. In terms of the essential spirit of empiricism, both Hume and Bentham admired Locke, Hume calling Locke "a great philosopher,"[38] and Bentham calling him the "the inventor" of "modern Metaphysics, genuine Metaphysics."[39] Both Hume and Bentham took perception as the most immediate and reliable evidence of existence. Hume stated that "the idea of existence must either be derived from a distinct impression, conjoined with every perception or object of our thought, or must be the very same with the idea of the perception or object." "The idea of existence … is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent." "All our perceptions may exist separately and have no need of anything to support their existence."[40] Impressions and ideas are the most real of entities. In Bentham, perceptions are the most immediate real entities, and "the persuasion" of "the existence of" perceptions "is produced by sense without reasoning, i.e. without reflection."[41]

> […] the attribute of reality, i.e. of existence, every object belonging to the class of *perceptions* will be found to possess, in still higher degree, a title established by more immediate evidence [….]
>
> Of *Ideas,* our perception is still more direct and immediate than that which we have of corporeal substances: of their existence our persuasion is more necessary and irresistible than that which we have of the existence of corporeal substances.[42]

29 Ibid., 197.
30 Bentham, *Comment on the Commentaries*, 317, 439.
31 The other exception is Locke.
32 Bentham, *Comment on the Commentaries*, 439n.
33 Bentham, *Deontology*, 350.
34 See Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, (henceforth *IPML*), 30n, 63n. 87n; *Comment on the Commentaries*, 317.
35 Bentham, *Preparatory Principles*, 329.
36 Bentham, Bowring, viii. 197.
37 See Bentham, *First Principles*, 234–5.
38 Hume, *Human Nature*, 35.
39 Bentham, *Preparatory Principles*, 265.
40 Hume, *Human Nature*, 232.
41 Bowring, viii. 195; UC cii. 13 (26 September 1814).
42 Bowring, viii. 196; UC cii. 15 (25 September 1814).

Hume stated that a thing such as a line or a point "without length, without breadth, or without depth" could not "exist" at all, and "is perfectly unintelligible."[43] Bentham stated that "A surface without depth – a line without thickness, was never seen by any man. No: nor can any conception be seriously formed of its existence."[44] As to "space," Hume stated that:

> *the idea of space or extension is nothing but the idea of visible or tangible points distributed in a certain order*; it follows, that we can form no idea of a vacuum, or space, where there is nothing visible or tangible.[45]

In the same vein, Bentham held that "Space is the negation or absence of body."[46]

In Hume, beyond perception, any other existence must be established either "by an inference from… a present impression, or by an inference from their causes, and so on."[47] Bentham adopted the same inferential rationale, as exhibited in his notion of inferential real entities.

> The body itself, *i.e.* the existence of it, is but in a secondary and comparatively remote way the object or subject of perception. Of this supposed source of the perceptions that are experienced, the existence is, strictly speaking, rather a subject of *inference* than of perception.[48]

On original impressions, original ideas, and new ideas produced by imagination, Bentham completely agreed with Hume, who stated that:

> An impression first strikes upon the senses, and makes us perceive heat or cold, thirst or hunger, pleasure or pain of some kind or other. Of this impression there is a copy taken by the mind, which remains after the impression ceases; and this we call an idea. This idea of pleasure or pain, when it returns upon the soul, produces the new impressions of desire and aversion, hope and fear, which may properly be called impressions of reflection, because derived from it. These again are copied by the memory and imagination, and become ideas; which perhaps in their turn give rise to other impressions and ideas. So that the impressions of reflexion are only antecedent to their correspondent ideas; but posterior to those of sensation, and derived from them.[49]

Thus acknowledging perception as real, and as the best evidence of the existence of other entities, both Hume and Bentham could take pleasure and pain as original and fundamental realities.

Second, as noted already, Bentham has followed Hume on the distinction between impressions and ideas. For Hume, "simple impressions are prior to their correspondent ideas," and what "we call an idea" is "a copy taken by the mind, which remains after the impression ceases."[50] "[A]ll ideas are derived from impressions, and are nothing but copies and representations of them."[51] Bentham employed the same term "copy" to define the relation between impressions and ideas, stating that: "All our psychological ideas are copies of our physical ones."[52] "[A] particular impression is the exercise or exemplification of the *memory,* the correspondent idea, *i.e.* the copy of that same impression as taken by and preserved in the mind."[53] Bentham acknowledged his debt to Hume, stating that "For the distinction between impressions and ideas we are, it is believed, indebted to David Hume."[54] Bentham went on to say that "Hume made a most important distinction between impressions and ideas. I do not know what people did before this distinction. It was a great discovery."[55] Moreover,

43 Hume, *Human Nature*, 42.
44 UC cii, 37 (26 September 1814); Bowring, viii. 202.
45 Hume, *Human Nature*, 53.
46 UC cii, 38 (26 September 1814); Bowring, viii. 202.
47 Hume, *Human Nature*, 82–3.
48 Bowring, viii. 224.
49 Hume, *Human Nature*, 7–8.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 19.
52 Bentham, *Deontology*, 350.
53 Bowring, viii. 320.
54 Ibid.
55 Bentham, *Deontology*, 350.

Bentham even went further to echo Hume on the fluid character of ideas. Hume stated that "a bundle or collection of different perceptions succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement."[56] Bentham stated that "Some ideas are in, some out, some about, some go in, some go out."[57]

Third, Bentham also shared Hume's view that impressions and ideas are susceptible of the distinction between simple and complex ones.[58] Both held that the existence of external bodies is an inference based on perceptions.[59] Bentham held that: "Of this description of beings, the reality, not being in any instance attested by *perception*, can not, therefore, be considered any otherwise than as matter of *inference*."[60]

> Whatsoever claim an object belonging to the class of bodies may be considered as possessing to the attribute of reality, i.e. of existence, every object belonging to the class of *perceptions* will be found to possess a still better title—a title established by still more immediate evidence. Of the reality of perceptions, they are themselves their own evidence: it is only by the evidence afforded by perceptions that the reality of a body of any kind can be established.[61]

Fourth, Bentham echoed Hume's position on the idea of "relation." Hume listed seven forms of relation: 1. Resemblance, 2. Identity, 3. Space and time, 4. Quantity or number, 5. Quality, 6. Contrariety, and 7. Cause–effect. These seven relations did not exist in reality, but only in the comparison of ideas.[62] All of Hume's seven relations feature in Bentham's discussions of "relation," or, to be more precise, physical fictitious entities.[63] Three of Hume's relations – i.e. 1. Resemblance, 6. Contrariety, and 7. Cause–effect – appear in the following passage by Bentham: "Of judgment, the *subjects* are, 1. Points of similitude between object and object. 2. Points of dissimilitude between object and object. 3. Existence or non-existence of the relation of cause and effect as between object and object."[64] As to the other relations of Hume, let me just illustrate space in Bentham:

> Place. Of the species of relation designated by the word *place*, the most perfect conception may easily be formed, without taking into the account the species of relation designated by the word *time*.
>
> Necessary altogether is the relation which the species of fictitious entity called *place* has on the one hand to the species of fictitious entity called *body*, on the other hand to the fictitious entity called *Space*.[65]

It should be noted that in Bentham, "Once introduced upon the carpet, the fictitious entity called relation swells into an extent such as to swallow up all the others. Every other fictitious entity is seen to be but a mode of this."[66]

Both Hume and Bentham denied the existence of mysterious things, with Hume's denial of angels[67] and Bentham's denial of devils.[68] Both traced the error in inference to faulty reflection, attributing it to fancy or imagination.

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56 Hume, *Human Nature*, 252.

57 Bentham, *Deontology*, 350.

58 For Hume's view, see Hume, *Human Nature*, 2, 4, 10–3, 16, 23, 85. For Bentham's, see Bowring, viii. 26, 224, 256; Bentham, *Deontology*, 96–7.

59 For Hume's opinion, see Hume, *Human Nature*, 66–8.

60 UC cii, 9 (27 September 1814); Bowring, viii. 196.

61 Ibid.

62 See Hume, *Human Nature*, 13–5.

63 Physical fictitious entities: "To this class belong all those entities which will be found included in Aristotle's list – included in his Ten Predicaments, the first excepted." Bowring, i. 199. Bentham provided a different exposition and arranged them in a more sophisticated order. Physical fictitious entities can be classified into absolute fictitious entities, non-absolute fictitious entities, and simple fictitious entities. The absolute fictitious entities of the first order comprise 1. Matter. 2. Form. 3. Quantity. 4. Space, and those of the second order comprise 1. Quality. 2. Modification. See UC cii, 40–42. 27–8 September 1814; and also Bowring, viii. 199–201.

64 Bowring, viii. 320.

65 UC cii. 45 (28 September 1814).

66 See Bowring viii. 199–201. As to other relations, see UC cii. 44 (28 September 1814). On Bentham's attitude to ghosts and angels, Miran Božovič held a different opinion, see Božovič, "An Utterly Dark Spot."

67 Hume, *Human Nature*, 267.

68 Bowring viii. 198.

3 Bentham's Critique and Further Development of Hume

As demonstrated earlier, on many issues, Bentham admired and shared much with Hume. However, at the same time Bentham criticized Hume, asserting that, in metaphysics, Hume had "lost his way," and that in moral philosophy, the doctrine of "moral sense" developed by Hume was a "vague idea"[69] and "a fiction of *Ipse dixitism*."[70] The latter gives rise to Bentham's blunt castigation of Hume as "the Genius of Nonsense."[71] Let us, then, examine the particular fallacies in Hume which Bentham identified, his departures from Hume, and his further development of Hume's ideas.

3.1 Skepticism and Inferential Real Entities

While Hume remained suspicious of the existence of external bodies, Bentham emphatically accepted their existence. On this issue, Hume admired Berkeley, calling him "a great philosopher."[72] In contrast, Bentham rejected Berkeley, stating that he had effectively sought "to out-scepticize the sceptics,"[73] by denying the existence of matter. Among sceptics Berkeley "if not the first in point of time, is, at any rate, the most illustrious partisan."[74] Bentham adopted a pragmatic utilitarian solution to skepticism:

> Suppose the non-existence of corporeal substances, of any hard corporeal substance that stands opposite to you, make this supposition, and as soon as you have made it, act upon it, pain, the perception of pain, will at once bear witness against you; and that by your punishment, your condign punishment. Suppose the non-existence of any inferential incorporeal substances, of any one of them, or of all of them, and the supposition made, act upon it accordingly,—be the supposition conformable or not conformable to the truth of the case, at any rate no such immediate counter-evidence, no such immediate punishment will follow.[75]

In Bentham's ontology, external bodies are inferential real entities, whose reality is derived from a chain of reasoning from perceptions:

> An *inferential* entity, is an entity which, in these times at least, is not made known to human beings in general, by the testimony of sense, but of the existence of which the persuasion is produced by reflection—is inferred from a chain of reasoning.[76]

3.2 Relations and Fictitious Entities

As to relations, unlike Hume, Bentham acknowledged their existence in language, but not in reality. He categorized them as fictitious entities. "A fictitious entity, being as this its name imports – being, by the very supposition, a mere nothing,"[77] its existence lies only in language: "To language then – to language

69 Bentham, *Deontology*, 285, 289–91.
70 Ibid., 57.
71 Bentham, *Deontology*, 314.
72 Hume, *Human Nature*, 17.
73 Bowring, viii. 119n; Bentham, *Chrestomathia*, 257n.
74 Bowring, viii. 197.
75 Ibid. Elsewhere, Bentham provided another illustration: "According to those who agree with Bishop Berkeley, matter belongs to the class of those entities of which the existence is inferential; impressions and ideas being, in that case, the only perceptible entities. But, in the case of matter, the justness of the inference is determinable, at all times determinable by experimental proof: if of the wall opposite me, I infer the non-existence, and run that way as if there were no wall, the erroneousness of the inference will be but too plainly perceptible on my forehead; which is not the case in any one of these other instances." Bowring, viii. 189; Bentham, *Chrestomathia*, 402.
76 Bowring, viii. 195.
77 Bowring, viii. 246; UC ci, 217 (26 August 1814).

alone – it is that fictitious entities owe their existence – their impossible, yet indispensable existence."[78] "To be spoken of at all, every fictitious entity must be spoken of as if it were real."[79] Fictitious entities are the contrivance of human language, and they are superior to original brute language in multiplying exponentially the range and complexity of discourse.[80] The particular contrivances which bring about the "nominal existence" of fictitious entities are "abstraction and denomination." [81]

The uses of the distinction between names of real and names of fictitious entities are "attaching… clear ideas to the several all-comprehensive and leading terms in question" and "obviating and excluding the multitudinous errors and disputes."[82]

What is the relationship between fictitious entities and real entities? "Every fictitious entity bears some relation to some real entity, and can no otherwise be understood than in so far as that relation is perceived, – a conception of that relation is obtained."[83] Fictitious entities must be based on real entities, otherwise the entity in question will become "falsehood or nonsense," that is a non-entity.[84] According to the distance between a fictitious entity and its correspondent source, the real entity, it may belong to "the first remove" or "the second remove and so on."[85] Fictitious entities are generally classified into three groups: 1. Physical Fictitious Entities; 2. Psychological Fictitious Entities;[86] and 3. Political and Quasi-Political Fictitious Entities.[87] "All these [the aforementioned political and quasi-Political fictitious entities] have for their efficient causes pleasure and pain, but principally pain, in whatsoever shape."[88] Paraphrasis is "the only instructive mode" that helps to find the real-entity basis for the fictitious entity,[89] for definition *per genus et differentiam* fails to do so.[90] For fictitious entities, Bentham designated real entities as the "*real source*, *efficient cause*, or *connecting principle*."[91]

The theory of fictitious entities is the most innovative and abstract part of Bentham's logic, and this reductionist mode of analytical linguistics also enabled Bentham to identify the disastrous abuse of language in the psychology and politics.[92]

3.3 Passion, Pleasure, and Pain

Hume developed the doctrine that the passions are the masters over the slave of reason. In the same vein, Bentham developed the doctrine that pain and pleasure are the two sovereign masters of human beings, but rejected Hume's theory of passions, and chose pain and pleasure instead.

78 Bowring, viii. 198; UC cii, 23 (23 September 1814).
79 Bowring, viii. 197.
80 Ibid., 198; UC cii, 23 (23 September 1814).
81 Bowring, viii. 203; UC cii, 43 (29 September 1814).
82 Ibid., 198.
83 Ibid., 197.
84 Bentham, *Deontology,* 5–6.
85 Bowring viii. 197.
86 In "A Table of the Springs of Action," Bentham listed more than 300 noun substantives as names of psychological fictitious entities. See Bentham, *Deontology*, 79–86.
87 Political and Quasi-Political fictitious Entities comprise three sub-groups: I. Effects – 1. Obligation; 2. Right; 3. Exemption; 4. Power; 5. Privilege; 6. Prerogative; 7. Possession – physical; 8. Possession – legal; 9. Property; and a second sub-group: II. Causes. – 1. Command; 2. Prohibition, Inhibition, etc.; 3. Punishment; 4. Pardon; 5. License; 6. Warrant; 7. Judgment; 8. Division. See Bentham, "Fragment on Ontology," Bowring, viii. P. 206. Bentham also offered a second set of terms: "1. Somatic or Somatological fictitious entities: 2. Noological fictitious entities: 3. Ethical fictitious entities." See Bentham, *Chrestomathia*, 398.
88 Bowring, viii. 206; UC cii, 78 (25 September 1814).
89 Bowring, viii. 246; UC ci, 217 (26 August 1814).
90 Bentham, *Deontology,* 6.
91 Ibid.
92 Besides "abuse of language," Bentham also employed such phrases as "abuse of words" and "misuse of words". See, for instance, Bowring, ii. 497, 522, 524, 527, 531; Bentham, *Book of Fallacies*, 2, 298; Bowring, ii. 548, 598.

Hume took passions and emotions to be real entities:[93] "Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions: and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul."[94] Hume went on to place passions and emotions after sensations as "secondary, or reflective impressions": "Of the first kind are all the impressions of the senses, and all bodily pains and pleasures: Of the second are the passions, and other emotions resembling them."[95] Hume divided passions into "DIRECT and INDIRECT."

> [U]nder the indirect passions I comprehend pride, humility, ambition, vanity, love, hatred, envy, pity, malice, generosity, with their dependants. And under the direct passions, desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, fear, despair and security.[96]

For his part, first, Bentham would not regard those passions as really existing entities, but instead as fictitious entities, i.e. unreal entities. Bentham argued that

> Hume does not see the connection between passion, and pleasure and pain .... Passion is a fictitious entity generated by emotion.
>
> ...
>
> Hume frequently makes distinctions with[out] a difference. When he gives no examples, it is fiddle-de-dee.[97]

For Bentham, the passions offered by Hume were complex ideas, or "compound pleasures." On one occasion, Bentham gave four examples of complex pleasures and pains: "1. Pleasures of the bottle. 2. Love (the sexual) considered as a motive. 3. Love of justice. 4. Love of liberty."[98] Let me discuss Bentham's treatment of the passion of "love." In "*A Table of Springs of Action*," he noted:

> Love (the passion). Elements: 1. Sexual desire; 2. Ditto enhanced by beauty; 3. Desire of good-will; 4. Good-will; 5. Sympathy from contemplation of the agreeable qualities, intellectual or moral, ascribed to the object.[99]

In the classification of pleasures, Bentham exhibited his exhaustive method of analysis. In Hume, there was only general bodily pain and pleasure. In contrast, Bentham listed dozens of kinds of simple pleasures and simple pains as springs of action,[100] and three kinds of inert pleasure.[101]

The goal of this review of Bentham's analysis of the phenomena of the human mind has been to adduce evidence that, compared with Hume, Bentham followed the implications of his own empiricism and reductionism more thoroughly and more consistently. Both thinkers argued that complex ideas might successfully be expounded as aggregations of simple ones, but Bentham's ontology of real and fictitious entities and his

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93 Hume, *Human Nature*, 275.
94 Ibid., 1.
95 Ibid., 275.
96 Ibid., 276–7.
97 Bentham, *Deontology*, 350.
98 Ibid., 11.
99 Ibid. For related and contrasting discussions, see Gere, *Pain, Pleasure, and the Greater Good*; Sandford, "Envy Accompanied with Antipathy."
100 The simple pleasures and pains are: 1. Taste; 2. Sex; 3. Sense; 4. Wealth; 5. Power; 6. Curiosity; 7. Amity; 8. Moral; 9. Religious; 10. Sympathy; 11. Antipathy; 12. Labor; 13. Death. 14. Self-regarding. See Bentham, *Deontology*, 79–86. In IPML, for comparison, p. 42, Bentham lists 14 simple pleasures and 12 simple pains.
101 "Pleasures which in their very nature are inert are: 1. All pleasures of mere recollection; 2. All pleasures of mere imagination; 3. Even pleasures of expectation, when the expected pleasure is regarded as certain, and not capable of being by action either brought nearer or increased." Inert pleasures cannot operate as a spring of action, and they can only produce action in a remote way: "In a remote way, indeed, it may happen to any such pleasure, howsoever in itself *inert*, to give birth to action: but then it is only by means of some different pleasure, which it happens to bring to view. ... In itself, the pleasure derived, for example, from a recollected landscape, is an inert one. An effect of it may indeed be the sending a man again to the place to take another view. But, in that case, the operating pleasure – the actuating motive – is a different one: vis. The pleasurable idea of the pleasurable sensation expected from that other view." Bentham, *Deontology*, 89–90.

exhaustive analysis allowed him to go beyond Hume in recognizing pain and pleasure as the two master sovereigns of human beings, which play the key role in motivating not only action but also thought. In the next section, I will show how they also helped him identify the fallacy of Hume's "moral sense."

3.4 Virtue, Moral Sense and the Greatest Happiness

Bentham unleashed a fierce attack on Hume's theory of virtue and moral sense. Hume stated that "It is only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil."[102] "Self-interest is the original motive to the establishment of justice: but a sympathy with public interest is the source of the moral approbation, which attends that virtue."[103] At the same time, Hume noticed the consequential tension between particular interest and virtue: "It is true, those sentiments, from interest and morals, are apt to be confounded, and naturally run into one another."[104] Thus, on moral approbation, Hume adopted what might be viewed as a benevolence approach.

In addition, Hume insisted on founding virtue on an internal motive, saying that "We must look within to find the moral quality …and the ultimate object of our praise and approbation is the motive."[105] Hume emphatically asserted that "Morality …is more properly felt than judg'd of; tho' this feeling or sentiment is commonly so soft and gentle."[106] "[M]oral distinctions" were "derived from a moral sense,"[107] and "the sentiments of morality… are … rooted in our constitution and temper."[108] Therefore, "the external performance has no merit,"[109] and consequently, based on moral sense, virtue becomes associated with impartiality and general public utility. Hume went on to provide a catalogue of virtues.[110] How then, could Bentham castigate Hume's "moral sense" as a "vague idea"[111] and "a fiction of *Ipse dixitism*,"[112] and consequently regard Hume as "the Genius of Nonsense"? [113]

Bentham insightfully noted the contradiction between particular interest and public utility within Hume's moral theory. Indeed, Bentham, like Hume, recognized impartiality, but Bentham's rationale of impartiality is quite different, in that the "impartial arbiter" is a special figure in a special situation, namely when the agent in question in legislation is following the guidance of the principle of utility in the public sphere.[114] Although Bentham would not deny the possibility of impartiality, because of the presence of some benevolence in the human constitution, he would certainly deny the strength of it, because natural benevolence only occupies a minor place, as opposed to self-preference, which is ubiquitous and predominant. "In the general tenor of life, in every human breast, self-regarding interest is predominant over all other interests put together. More shortly thus, – Self-regard is predominant, – or thus, – Self-preference has place everywhere." And "the proof of this position may be referred to particular experience, as brought to view by the history of all nations." "For further proof, reference may be made to the general, indeed the all-comprehensive, principle of human nature. The position which takes this fact for its subject, may be termed an axiom."[115]

102 Hume, *Human Nature*, 472.
103 Ibid., 499–500.
104 Ibid., 472.
105 Ibid., 477.
106 Ibid., 470.
107 Ibid., 473.
108 Ibid., 474.
109 Ibid., 477.
110 Hume, *Human Nature*, 477–621.
111 Bentham, *Deontology,* 285, 289–91.
112 Ibid., 57.
113 Ibid., 314.
114 Bentham, *First Principles,* 235.
115 Ibid., 232.

> By the principle of self-preference, understand that propensity in human nature, by which, on the occasion of every act he exercises, every human being is led to pursue that line of conduct which, according to his view of the case, taken by him at the moment, will be in the highest degree contributory to his own greatest happiness, whatsoever be the effect of it, in relation to the happiness of other similar beings, any or all of them taken together.[116]

Bentham argued that the discussion of virtues made no sense without consideration of particular interests. He equated interest with the experience of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, as exemplified in *Table of the Springs of Action*.[117] All men's acts are motivated by pleasure and avoidance of pain, and consequently, "no act" could be, "properly speaking, disinterested."[118]

Bentham categorized actions according to their intended effects as follows: All men are motivated to action by the desire for pleasure and the aversion to pain, and actions are either inert actions or active actions. Inert actions comprise recollections, imaginations, and expectations, which are purely self-regarding in terms of their intended effects. In terms of their intended effects, active actions comprise three kinds: self-regarding, semi-social, and extra-regarding. Both inert actions and self-regarding active actions belong to the self-regarding group. If someone can obtain pleasure from self-regarding inert actions or active actions, then those actions will add to the general happiness, whether or not the agent has the desire to increase the general happiness.

Bentham stated that without reference to pain and pleasure, words such as "virtue," "vice," "justice," "duty," and "obligation" were just "empty sounds."[119]

> Destitute of reference to the ideas of pain and pleasure, whatever ideas are annexed to the words 'virtue' and 'vice' amount to nothing more than that of groundless approbation or disapprobation. All language in which these appellatives are employed is no better than empty declamation.[120]

Thus, in Bentham's eyes, virtue is necessarily interest-laden. In evaluating actions as virtuous or vicious, the proper criterion is the greatest happiness of the greatest number, so that even an act intended solely for the benefit of the agent, if it does no harm to others, is regarded as virtuous by Bentham, because it adds to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. That is why Bentham identified "contradiction," "paradoxes," and "falsehood" in the doctrine of private vice and public benefit developed by moralists such as Rochefoucault, Mandeville, Helvétius, and Hobbes, in that, although they were "ingenious moralists" and expressed "many original and bold truths," due to "this imperfection of language," they confined themselves to the "phraseology" "most in use" "only in a bad sense" to designate motives. In consequence, their propositions were "on the one hand, repugnant to truth; and on the other hand, adverse to utility."[121] Hence, Bentham straightforwardly took "prudence," i.e., pursuing one's own greatest happiness, as a fundamental virtue, and man's disposition to produce benefits to others was regarded as another fundamental virtue, in Bentham's terminology "benevolence," and benevolence "in so far as effective, beneficence." "All other virtues, howsoever denominated, are but so many modifications of prudence or beneficence or both together."[122] However, the aforementioned only concerns Bentham's private ethics. He had drawn the "limits between private ethics and public ethics, i.e. the art of legislation," in *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.[123]

116 *Bowring,* ix. 5.
117 Bentham, *Deontology,* 79–86.
118 Ibid., 12.
119 Ibid., 89.
120 Ibid., 99.
121 *IPML*, 102; *Bowring,* x. 73.
122 Bentham, *Deontology,* 180. As to the difference between benevolence and beneficence, Bentham explains that, "Benevolence may be virtue without being accompanied by beneficence, for the desire may exist without any power of carrying it into effect. But benevolence is not a virtue any further than, as occasion serves, it is accompanied with beneficence." Bentham, *Deontology,* 184.
123 *IPML*, 281–300.

> the art of legislation (which may be considered as one branch of the science of jurisprudence) teaches how a multitude of men, composing a community, may be disposed to pursue that course which upon the whole is the most conducive to the happiness of the whole community, by means of motives to be applied by the legislator.[124]

Bentham's rationale is as follows: on personal occasions, where actions which concern primarily or exclusively the interests of the agent are in view, an individual's own greatest happiness is the guiding principle, while on public occasions, where the interests of others are affected, the greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the principle. The pursuit of self-preference on personal occasions is thus entirely compatible with the increase of the happiness of the greatest number.

As opposed to Hume's internal motive approach, Bentham's principle of utility is based on "some external consideration, as a means of warranting and guiding the internal sentiments of approbation and disapprobation."[125] One factor in Bentham's thought is especially critical, namely the faculty of reflection, that is "due and apposite interrogation,"[126] which will help an individual to consider both his own pleasures and pains and other people's pleasures and pains. Reflection will aid an individual in calculating the probable quantities of their own pleasures and pains and those of others, with reference to the seven circumstances listed in *IPML*.[127] It is precisely the principle of utility's reference to "some external consideration," which makes it "capable of being consistently pursued." Hume's moral sense, by contrast, wholly depending on internal sentiment, lacked any external considerations, was unreliable, capricious, and would in fact coincide with the principle of sympathy and antipathy, which was "sometimes opposed to it [the principle of utility], and sometimes not, as it may happen."[128] Bentham's utilitarian rationale is perfectly exemplified in his statement on push-pin and poetry, namely that in relation to in its extent, "everybody can play at push-pin: poetry and music are relished only by a few." In terms of its purity, that is the tendency of sensations not to be followed by sensations of the opposite kind:

> The game of push-pin is always innocent: it were well could the same be always asserted of poetry. Indeed, between poetry and truth there is a natural opposition: false morals, fictitious nature. The poet always stands in need of something false. When he pretends to lay his foundations in truth, the ornaments of his superstructure are fictions; his business consists in stimulating our passions, and exciting our prejudices. Truth, exactitude of every kind, is fatal to poetry. The poet must see everything through coloured media, and strive to make every one else to do the same. It is true, there have been noble spirits, to whom poetry and philosophy have been equally indebted; but these exceptions do not counteract the mischief which have resulted from this magic art.[129]

Hence, the result of the measurement shows that the assertion that we ought to prefer poetry to push-pin is a complete fancy and tainted by underlying prejudice:

> The utility of all these arts and sciences,—I speak both of those of amusement and curiosity,—the value which they possess, is exactly in proportion to the pleasure they yield. Every other species of pre-eminence which may be attempted to be established among them is altogether fanciful. Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry.[130]

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124 Ibid., 293.

125 *IPML*, 25.

126 Bowring, viii. 196; UC cii, 9 (27 September 1814).

127 The general formula of measurement of pleasure or pain was elaborated much earlier in *IPML*, 37–41, which sets out to a person six circumstances for consideration when faced with a possible pleasure or pain: 1. Its intensity; 2. Its duration; 3. Its certainty or uncertainty; 4. Its propinquity or remoteness; 5. Its fecundity; 6. Its purity. A seventh circumstance, namely its extent, concerns its effect on other parties. If to take an exact account of the general tendency of any act, by which the interests of a community are affected, then take an account of every distinguishable pleasure and pain, and get the final balance through calculation.

128 Ibid., 17.

129 Bowring, ii. 253–4.

130 Ibid., 253.

Bentham further stated that, "if poetry and music deserve to be preferred before a game of push-pin, it must be because they are calculated to gratify those individuals who are most difficult to be pleased."[131]

Hume's common sense moral philosophy pushed him to associate justice with social convention, and contributed to making him a conservative thinker, as exemplified in his *History of England.*[132] Bentham, however, never accepted this stance. What Bentham earnestly sought was a criterion for social and legal reform, i. e. what *ought to be*, based on what *is.*[133]

3.5 Understanding and Will

What Hume had tried to do was to confine human thought to its original source, i.e., impressions, always keeping a wary eye on imagination and volition, warning, for instance, that "nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination."[134] In contrast, Bentham paid equal attention to volition and imagination as he did to understanding. Bentham embraced an exhaustive and analytical methodology and induction, but these constitute only one part of his philosophy. As shown earlier in the discussion of abstraction, fictitious entities, judgment, and the inert pleasures of imagination, he did not reject imagination and fiction at all. His emphasis on induction was the result of his desire to base belief and conviction on real entities, that is, to provide an account that would be more accurate in reflecting reality and thus more true. In Bentham's exposition of the "phenomena of the human mind," the mind comprised two general parts, the passive and intellectual part of understanding which comprises perception and sensation, and the active and concupiscible part of will, which included desire, volition, and finally led to action.[135] Perceptions were distinguished into pathematic perceptions and apathematic perceptions, which in turn "may be distinguished into judgment-not-involving, and judgment-involving" perceptions. The pathematic perceptions of pains and pleasures give rise to desire, desire in turn gives rise to will, and will in turn gives rise to action: "no desire can have place, unless when the idea of pleasure or pain, in some shape or degree, has place... take away all pleasure and all pain, and you have no desire."[136] And further, "no act of the will can take place but in consequence of a correspondent desire; in consequence of the action of a *desire* in the character of a motive."[137]

Bentham went on to provide an enumeration of 17 "mental faculties": 1. Perception. 2. Judgment. 3. Memory. 4. Deduction. 5. Abstraction. 6. Imagination. 7. Invention. 8. Methodization. 9. Attention; 10. Observation. 11. Communication. 12. Comparison. 13. Synthesis. 14. Generalization. 15. Induction. 16. Analysis. 17. Distribution. Bentham felt it necessary to explore the phenomena of the human mind. Hume, by contrast, left the mental faculties relatively unexplored. This is a significant difference, that might well benefit from a more detailed discussion than is possible here, and which arguably made it possible for Bentham to place his thought on a broader psychological foundation.

131 Ibid., 254.

132 For Hume's conservatism, see Okie, "Ideology and Partiality;" Muller, *Conservatism*.

133 For Bentham's ideas on radical reform, which strongly favored equality and democracy, see Bentham, "Plan of Parliamentary Reform, in the Form of Catechism," "Radical Reform Bill, with Extracts from the Reasons," "Radicalism Not Dangerous," in Bowring iii, 433–622; Bentham, *Constitutional Code Rationale*, in Bentham, *First Principles,* 225–331; Bentham, *Constitutional Code,* 18–41; and for discussion see Rosen, *Jeremy Bentham and Representative Democracy*; Schofield, *Utility and Democracy*; Quinn, *Bentham*, 109–51.

134 Hume, *Human Nature*, 267.

135 Bowring viii. 279–81; UC cii, 456 (15 December 1815).

136 Ibid. 280; UC ci, 412 (25 January 1816).

137 Ibid.

3.6 Belief and Judgment

In relation to belief and judgment, Hume held that: "belief does nothing but vary the manner, in which we conceive any object, it can only bestow on our ideas an additional force and vivacity."[138] Bentham particularly criticized this point, asserting that:

> Expectation is belief of an event to come.
>
> The idea of an event expected to come has the same degree of vivacity as the idea of the same event expected not to come. This is sufficient to prove that Belief is not what M^r^ Hume supposes it to be, a bare degree of vivacity superadded to the idea of the event believed. I may have a very faint idea of your person: and yet believe strongly that you exist. I may have a very vivid idea of your person: and yet believe strongly that you do not exist, or believe very weakly that you do exist. Yes, but I can not have a lively one, without believing that you have existed.
>
> A Belief is an act of the judgment.[139]

In Hume, then, belief seems to be only a passive process of understanding: it is "feeling," not "thinking." [140] But in Bentham, although the judgment in question "is not an act of any other than the judicial faculty,"

> the giving expression to this or to any other act of the judicial faculty is an act of the volitional faculty;—even the applying to the subject or subjects in question the faculty of attention, for the purpose of forming a judgment on, or in relation to them, this is an act of the volitional faculty.[141]

Bentham, moreover, asserted that some kinds of judgments are speculative:

> Occupations of the studious kind, consisting in the acquiring, or endeavouring to acquire, what is called *knowledge*; i.e. the obtaining correct conceptions and judgments in relation to the subject in question but without action in any shape, ... the formations of those judgments, may be called speculative.[142]

4 Concluding Remarks

Both in metaphysics and moral philosophy, Bentham was a fierce critic as well as a close student of Hume. It is a gross error to dismiss Bentham as a superficial philosopher, but sadly the error is all too often repeated. First, Bentham's logic is deeply metaphysically based, multi-leveled, and comprehensive. Although a close student of Hume, taking his empiricism as a starting point, Bentham developed the additional mechanism of "reflection" to facilitate a pragmatic utilitarian resolution to Hume's skepticism, and thus constructed a sophisticated ontology. Reflection is indeed not absent in Hume, but it struggles to go beyond particular perceptions or experiences. In Bentham, by contrast, in alliance with the external criterion of consequences in terms of pains and pleasures experienced by sentient beings, it plays a crucial role in developing a pragmatic utilitarian response and solution to Hume's skepticism. Second, unlike Hume, Bentham felt compelled to pursue encyclopedic knowledge, especially of the phenomena of the human mind, in an attempt to place his thought on a broader foundation. Third, Hume focused on passive understanding, and neglected active volition. In contrast, Bentham, equipped with a broader conception of the faculties of human mind, and able to capture the organic interaction between passive understanding and active volition, emphasized the active faculties of mind. Fourth, on moral approbation, Hume adopted the benevolence approach. In contrast, Bentham recognized

138 Ibid., 96.
139 Bentham, *Preparatory Principles*, 155.
140 Hume, *Human Nature*, 2.
141 Bowring, viii. 225; UC ci, 123 (26 July 1814).
142 Bowring, viii. 240.

for the most part the ubiquity of self-preference, supplemented by benevolence. Fifth, Hume's common sense moral philosophy pushed him to associate justice with social convention, and helped to make him a conservative. Bentham, however, used the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number to advocate and push forward social reform for a better world. In a nutshell, Bentham's philosophy consists in perception, reflection, and the calculation of pains and pleasures, and rejects asceticism and all kinds of arbitrary illusory principles. The first question to be asked is whether an entity can be perceived or not; the second question concerns its consequences in terms of the experience of pains and pleasures by sensitive beings.

Bentham has been misunderstood to an outrageous degree. Fortunately, most of Bentham's manuscripts have been preserved, and are gradually being made known at last. In 1932, C. K. Ogden said that Bentham's thought was 200 years ahead of his age,[143] and the time is now just ripe.

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143 Ogden, *Jeremy Bentham: 1832-2032*. It is interesting to note that John Dewey's thought, at a general level, has remarkable parallels to Bentham's, in that he shared with Bentham in so many characteristics and interests such as empiricism, reflection, creativity, virtue and desire, consequentialism, public opinion, religion, staunch support for democracy, and even voluminous output and efforts in education reform. See Dewey, *The Essential Dewey*.

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