

The Complete Bentham: Rationality's Afterlife in Victorian Literature

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation uses Jeremy Bentham—philosopher of the “greatest happiness for the greatest number” and architect of the Panopticon prison—to ask: what happened to rational thought after it no longer seemed capable of explaining human behavior? Literary studies have long critiqued Enlightenment Liberalism’s ideal of the rational individual whose disembodied qualities of mind supposedly allowed him to own property and represent the general interest. A search for alternative models of community has recently led scholars to argue that the Victorians, armed with breakthroughs in biology and psychology, embraced an anti-rationalistic theory that imagined human life as a materially embodied and de-individuated tangle of instincts and sensations. My dissertation uses Bentham to consider the possibility that the Victorians dispensed with the discourse of Enlightenment reason because, taken to its limit in Bentham’s utilitarianism, it becomes illiberal. Utilitarian rationalism, I argue, became a Victorian way of fantasizing about alternatives to liberalism that are variously bureaucratic, queer, and socialist.

The last time literary studies took Bentham seriously, the guiding assumption was that his Panopticon trained individuals in the routines of self-policing that liberal

government required, and that the novel carried that disciplinary training to the reading public. "The Complete Bentham" shows that this argument considers only a small part of Bentham's massive corpus and so misses both the radical reformulation of liberal government that he was proposing and the aesthetic possibilities that his utilitarianism opened up as a result. The Victorians certainly thought there was something caustic in Bentham's system of cost-benefit analysis, a worry expressed in charges that Bentham was an emotionally deficient thinker who would, like Dickens's Mr. Gradgrind, "weigh and measure any parcel of human nature and tell you what it comes to." This critique, I argue, has its basis in the Victorian recognition that Bentham's logic challenges liberalism's normative commitments including the individual's right to own property, the primacy of the family as the fundamental unit of society, and the attainment of high culture as the ideal of good citizenship. When Bentham asserts that the only way to manage a population of rational individuals is to maximize pleasures and minimize pains, no matter their source, he imagined a form of cost-benefit analysis that makes any particular right or social norm expendable in the name of producing "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." Rather than show how the novel appropriates Bentham's panoptical apparatus for purposes of reinforcing the norms of liberal society, I argue that Bentham's excessive reason is the means by which nineteenth-century

literature found its way outside those norms. When Victorian novelists join liberal thinkers in chastising Bentham for translating qualities of life into quantities of pleasure and pain, they also memorably preserve the perverse implications of Bentham's rationalism and imagine new qualities of life. Even so obvious a caricature of Bentham as Mr. Gradgrind offers a vision of a life passionately animated by the compulsion to calculate. In order to see what became of rationality in the Victorian cultural imagination, each chapter of my dissertation considers how a different novelist takes up one aspect of Bentham's multi-faceted theory in order to contemplate its radical consequences. Building from Bentham's procedure for calculating pleasures and pains, I show how his logic drives him to design a new institutional basis for liberal government and how that same creative impulse carries over into the novel as it imagines its own fantastical worlds.

Chapter 1: Calculating Pleasure. My first chapter begins with the formal conundrum contained in Bentham's proposal to calculate "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." In his writings on legal reform, Bentham describes a process where all anticipated pleasures and pains are represented in the present as "weights" to be placed on either side of a scale and measured by a disinterested legislator. In this metaphor

Bentham attempts the paradoxical task of taking the diachronic unfolding of future events and rendering them synchronously present for the purposes of passing rational judgment. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) shows how that procedure for predicting the consequences of future actions actually produces new forms of unpredictability. When Bentham's calculating procedure is taken out of the theory that represents it as a synchronic procedure and reinserted into the diachronic unfolding of events in the novel, we see that very practice of weighing and measuring future pleasures and pains produces new and excessive affects. Bentham had assumed that individuals who imagine future pleasures and pains might be governed by the carefully calibrated threat of future punishment. Shelley shows the reverse: the more Victor and his creature imagine their future pleasures and pains, the more ungovernable they become as their disappointment and hope lead them to antisocial behaviors. I further show how J.S. Mill's *Autobiography* (1873) takes Bentham's theory of calculation and rewrites it in an attempt to imagine a form of utilitarian life that is lived in the diachronic unfolding of events—in other words, a *narrative* life—rather than in the synchronic sums of Bentham's imaginative calculus.

Chapter 2: Expanding Bureaucracy. My second chapter considers the problem that Bentham's procedure for summing up "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" encounters when it meets his assertion that all individuals are self-interested. How could a government made up of such rapacious individuals ever be trusted to serve the general interest? In Bentham's theory of government this suspicion produces an ever-expanding bureaucracy where one layer of officials is added after another until the whole population is involved in the bureaucratic work of monitoring bureaucratic institutions. In *Bleak House* (1853) and *Little Dorrit* (1857), Charles Dickens also insists that individual self-interest fuels an infinitely expanding bureaucracy. Rather than discarding self-interest like other Victorian theorists attempted to do, Dickens recognizes it as a vital form of life capable of provoking alternatives to liberal government. Dickens accomplishes this feat by making utilitarian self-interest into a monstrous spectacle that provokes alternative communities to form around the contrary principle of mutual aid. In Dickens's world the affects of trust and suspicion are interdependent, each animating the other. I see recent re-evaluations of the so-called "hermeneutics of suspicion" as likely to miss this point. Rita Felski has argued that our contemporary literary institutions resemble a stultifying bureaucracy because critique, the very type of suspicious reading, always provokes counter-critiques, resulting in an infinite series of

diminishing returns as each new reading accuses its predecessors of taking the novel at face value. As Felski replicates the logic of Bentham's bureaucracy in her diagnosis, she overlooks the alternative that Dickens offers where trust and mutual aid turn out to depend on shared suspicions around which communities of readers and critics can gather.

Chapter 3: Panoptic Economics. Bentham was not only worried that “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” might fall victim to the depredations of government functionaries; he was also concerned that a desperate surplus population might destroy the institution of private property. As my third chapter shows, Bentham's plan to secure property from this danger paradoxically creates an alternative political economy that dispenses with the institution of private property altogether. Filtered through Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, Bentham's Panopticon has come down to us as the blueprint for institutions that produce self-policing subjects—the modern school, hospital, and prison. But if we return to Bentham's plans, we see that they actually resemble the germ of a socialist state. In order to preserve life and prevent the rebellion of a growing surplus population, Bentham expanded his Panopticon prison into a network of institutions that would contain all unemployed people in a centrally planned subsistence economy

where everyone would be put to work. On the basis of this more complete reading of the Panopticon, I take issue with D.A. Miller's still influential argument that Wilkie Collins's detective fiction schools its readers in self-surveillance. While Miller has argued that *The Moonstone* (1868) is a totalizing panoptic text, a revised understanding of the Panopticon allows us to see that Collins's novel also imagines a condition of full employment where readers and characters join in the work of detection and no one can be dismissed as part of a disposable surplus population. Bentham and Collins, I argue, turn out to have a place in a lineage of socialist utopian thinking that includes William Morris and Edward Bellamy.

Chapter 4: Sexual Irregularities. Never wavering from his commitment to maximizing pleasure, no matter its source, Bentham refuses to accept that the family is a necessary or even a natural source of human fulfillment on the behalf of which other pleasures must be surrendered. Bentham's reasoning begins with the proposition that children are clearly an economic "burthen to their parents," and his writings on sexuality follow this observation through to its logical conclusion. Rational actors, he proposes, might prefer the non-reproductive pleasures of homosexual, bestial, and necrophilic acts. Bentham's utilitarianism thus anticipates what many queer theorists have already identified as the

anti-reproductive politics of *fin de siècle* aestheticism. The critic Walter Pater was among those who insisted that the pleasures of art have nothing to do with sustaining the bourgeois family and instead give only “the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments’ sake.” In this respect both Bentham and Pater can be said to formulate a nineteenth-century version of the position that Lee Edleman stakes out in *No Future* (2004): a queer anti-reproductive politics that refuses to accept that our happiness resides in future generations.

In our own times, the word “utilitarian” often appears in op-eds about the death of the humanities as the catch-all term of derision for a practical, unaesthetic and depoliticized education. My dissertation argues that a return to Bentham’s place in the Victorian cultural imagination shows us just how impractical, aesthetic and political utilitarianism can be. When Karl Marx called Bentham the “genius of bourgeois stupidity,” I want to suggest that we take that judgment dialectically: it is precisely Bentham’s stubborn commitment to rational calculation that contorts his liberalism into new – if grotesque – visions of political life that continue to animate our contemporary theoretical debates.

Dedication

Richard de la Peña

“You have to learn something new every day.”

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Introduction: Bentham's World

During his discussion of the buying and selling of labor power in *Capital*, Marx describes liberalism as an “Eden of the innate rights of man” that is “the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham” (C1 280). In this game of one-of-these-things-is-not-like-the-others, “Bentham” appears as the fourth term that unsettles the whole. Writing between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) is a figure whose work transformed liberal theory by shifting its imagined terrain from an agrarian to an urban society. The first three characteristics of liberalism’s Eden—“Freedom, Equality, Property”—come whole cloth from John Locke’s *Second Treatise* (1689), which encourages its reader to see England as a patchwork of agrarian estates where men of property raise their families and provide for those who work for them. By contrast, Bentham wrote in an age when agricultural labor along with common land was being appropriated by corporate farming and the population thus dislocated poured into cities where few owned land and a multitude of new institutions—factories, hospitals, and schools—competed with the family for the individual’s affiliation and affection. In returning to Bentham, I am not aiming to “recover” him from the critiques that have seen his penal society as a vicious and violent machine. Neither am I particularly concerned with amplifying those already ample critiques of his philosophy. This return to Bentham is motivated instead by the attempt to understand how liberalism changed at the turn of the nineteenth century and became something that it

had never been before: a system for population management.

As Leslie Stephen characterized it, Bentham's utilitarianism was developed in response to the problem of "the 'masterless man' who had strayed from his legitimate place or has become a superfluity in his own circle" (90). This superfluous man was not at all like Locke's land-owning gentleman whose capacity to reason would make him capable of transcending his own interest and concerning himself with the interests of the English people as a whole. Lacking the education needed to understand the general interest, as well as the property necessary to elevate that understanding above his own self-interest, this man was ineligible to participate in government. He needed to *be* governed. Bentham's exemplary subject not only belonged to the surplus population that Marx identified as the condition of possibility for industrial capitalism; he also belonged to the disease-bearing and trade-union forming multitude that inspired Edwin Chadwick's sanitation system. With the problem of this "masterless man" in mind, Bentham began with the proposition that a system of government must provide "the greatest happiness for the greatest number," a principle that stressed the aggregate pleasures of the many rather than the rights that accrued to those few who were capable of curbing their self-interest in the name of reason.

Bentham's proposed method for managing this population of surplus people offers a version of liberalism that departs radically from the obsession with self-discipline that commentators from J. S. Mill to Michel Foucault have attributed to him.

Whether they see it as a model for contemporary progressive thought, or as a largely played-out project of benevolent brainwashing, critics of Victorian culture have generally agreed that self-discipline was a dominant mode of subject production.¹ This well-established view of Victorian “repression” acquired theoretical heft in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975), which reformulates Bentham’s plans for the Panopticon as the paradigmatic social institution of nineteenth-century Europe. According to Foucault, Bentham’s famous prison would train individuals to become their own supervisors by subjecting them to the possibility of constant surveillance. Whether or not individuals were actually being watched at any given moment, they learned to think and act as if they were and thus gained power over their desires as they adjusted their behavior to

¹ Scholars of nineteenth-century liberalism have examined how writers of the period tried to reimagine the individual’s capacity for disinterested reason in a modern urban setting. In *The Powers of Distance* (2001) Amanda Anderson uses the term “detachment” to encompass a range of intellectual pursuits that nineteenth-century individuals might take up that includes “not only science, critical reason, disinterestedness, and realism, but also a set of practices of the self, ranging from stoicism to cosmopolitanism to dandyism” (7). As Anderson sees it, the modern city and its cosmopolitan entanglements forced writers to confront, however ambivalently, the necessity for forms of thought that could reach across time and place. In *The Way We Argue Now* (2005), Anderson insists that the cognitive techniques of nineteenth-century liberalism both offer a positive model for contemporary thought and inform those practices of critique that has been used to call out nineteenth-century liberalism for its imperial tendencies. More skeptical of this project, Elaine Hadley’s *Living Liberalism* (2010) argues that the great problem of liberal government in the mid-nineteenth century was how to reconcile the capacity of disinterested reason that Locke’s system required with the age of mass government brought into being with the expanding franchise after the 1832 and 1867 Reform Acts. Hadley contends that practitioners of liberal government attempted to use new institutions like the secret ballot and the signed newspaper review to habituate a growing citizenry the exercise of cognitive virtues like “objectivity, reticence, conviction, impersonality, and sincerity” (9). Elsewhere Hadley has called this peculiar mixture of reason and habit the equivalent of “offer[ing] up duct tape and plastic sheeting as a response to the unknown agents and unpredictable consequences of the new world order” (“Darkling” 97).

conform to institutional norms. More than just a model for managing inmates, this practice of discipline also became an ethos of self-control that authorized growing political and economic power of the middle class. Rather than return to this well-trodden critical ground, I will show that Bentham's managerial system was so much more than a scheme for inculcating discipline: the liberalism which supposedly reinforced the norms of bourgeois self-cultivation also harbors, in utilitarianism, a biopolitics ultimately hostile to natural rights, property, and family. The inward-looking subject who worries about the process of his own thought may assume the stature of the Victorian protagonist, as in J.S. Mill's *Autobiography* (1873), but it is nowhere to be found in Bentham's corpus.² While Mill describes his youthful mental crisis in fulsome detail, Bentham dismisses all such concerns in his description of the Panopticon, when he raises the question of whether "the liberal spirit and energy of a free citizen would not be exchanged [in my prison] for the mechanical discipline of a soldier, or the austerity of a monk?" To this question he quickly answers, "call them soldiers, call them monks, call them machines: so they were but happy ones, I should not care" (PW 88-89). If we read Bentham rather than Foucault, I am suggesting, we would see that Bentham is primarily concerned with the question of how to manage a mass of people who do not have Mill's cognitive capacity for introspection. The surplus population cannot be managed by

² On this score, I completely agree with Elaine Hadley that Foucault perhaps "inaccurately anticipates in [Bentham's] utilitarianism a disciplinary subject of cognition" (8).

inculcating self-discipline in one person at a time. For Bentham, the problem would require a new political philosophy and a new institutional infrastructure.

To understand Bentham's centrality in the nineteenth-century discourse of population management, we have to situate him within recent discussions of how novelists and social theorists imagined the multitude during the nineteenth century.³

The Victorian concept of the "population" contains a schism. On one hand, there was the urban crowd that seemed to think, feel, and act as one even as individuals jostle for position on the streets. This is what we see in the opening pages of Dickens's *Bleak House* where "a general infection of ill temper" makes its way through the pedestrians as they trip over each other in the mud outside Chancery Court (13). On the other hand, fiction would always hold out the (admittedly feeble) hope that the members of this population might go inside their homes, shut the door, and become individuals again in the private

³ As Emily Steinlight argues in her article on "The Biopolitical Imagination of Victorian Fiction" (2010), the aesthetic program of the novel develops alongside a growing concern among sanitary reformers and demographers about how to count the inhabitants of the modern city when there always seem to be more people than can actually be counted—"the paradox of a total in excess of the total" (239). Turning from the problem of the population in the social body to the becoming-many of the individual body, Benjamin Morgan's *The Outward Mind* (2017) argues that the Victorians no longer thought of aesthetic categories in terms of the individual judgment of beauty delivered by Kant's rational man. Rather, aesthetics for the Victorians was the product of a material psychology that distributes their response to aesthetic objects across a decentralized network of nerves and organs. In *The Ploy of Instinct* (2014) Kathleen Fredrickson argues that nineteenth-century biology discovers an individual not governed by reason at all, but rather subject to instincts inherited from ancestors. In this evolutionary anthropology, the individual is his collective racial heritage. For all these studies, the Victorian individual is not one but many: a tangle of embodied affects, organs, racial histories and habits accumulated over the course of evolutionary time. This is the population aesthetic that allows Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll to "hazard the guess that man will ultimately be known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous, and independent denizens" (79).

sphere of the family. The folly of this promise comes through, again, in *Bleak House* when smallpox is carried in from the streets to contaminate Esther and her friends. Bentham's political philosophy lives in this schism: in his utilitarian calculations, individual pleasures and pains never stay with the private bodies that experience them, but rather are summed up in the aggregate for the purposes of determining "the greatest happiness for the greatest number."

The Victorians obviously thought that this potentially uncountable human aggregate was something that needed to be harnessed productively, and they developed new methodological and conceptual tools for just this purpose. The disciplines of statistics, epidemiology, biology, material psychology, and sociology rose in response to the need to explain how sexual reproduction, disease, and affect circulated along with goods, services, and information through the social body. A return to Bentham's writings offers a unique opportunity for scholars interested these new forms of knowledge because his archive spans several domains of inquiry that would later develop their own specialized terminology and methods. Already interdisciplinary, Bentham's work considers questions of law, aesthetics, psychology, political economy, human sexuality, architecture, public health, and even cookery. Taken together, his massive archive offers something that no later theorist of population does: a social system reimagined from the ground up for the purpose of population management. From his utilitarian philosophical treatises to the architectural plans that would make

his principles a reality, everything Bentham wrote was obsessively choreographed by its underlying principle of government: to ensure the greatest good for the greatest number.

In attempting to imagine a liberalism that could operate in the crowded world of the city, Bentham joined a generation of nineteenth-century intellectuals bent on formulating new concepts of social order. For Bentham's reformist contemporaries there was no going back to the agrarian society of the eighteenth century; they all saw the nineteenth century, in the words of Thomas Malthus, as "a period big with the most important changes, changes that would in some measure be decisive for the future fate of mankind" (16). While Bentham was at work on his panopticon prison, other thinkers returned to first principles in order to reimagine the body politic for nations that were increasingly dependent on manufacturing and the international trade. Kant entertained the possibility that an international law of hospitality might maintain national autonomy while allowing for the circulation of goods and people (1795); Condorcet prognosticated about how developments in trade and manufacturing were part of "The Future Progress of the Human Mind" (1795); even Edmund Burke was stirred by the events of the French Revolution to write impassioned "Reflections" (1790) on custom as a conservative force that might hold a national population together. For his part, Bentham professed deep skepticism about the progressive nature of revolutionary philosophical programs that sought to reorder civil society from the ground up. In his writings on the French

Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789), he insisted that its authors had “sow[n] the seeds of anarchy broadcast: in justifying the demolition of existing authorities, they undermine[d] all future ones, their own consequently in the number” (RRR 320). Bentham made no bones about the fact that his own plan was a matter of radical reform, not of revolution, and his preferred tactic was to enact change within an already-existing system of law.⁴ But when considered in full, Bentham’s proposed program is arguably far more revolutionary than any undertaken by the French. Bentham thought the tradition of English Common Law should be replaced with a *Constitutional Code* of his own composition; he thought it would be beneficial to replace the Church of England’s traditional system of pastoral management with a network of Panoptic institutions; and he thought that people in general would be much happier if the institution of marriage were replaced by set of temporary non-binding sexual contracts. Working in their separate disciplines of anthropology, sexology, political economy and biology, no other Victorian theorist of population, unless Marx is to be counted, recommended such a thoroughgoing overthrow of the prevailing social order.

⁴ Foucault is helpful here on the distinction between “radical” and “revolutionary” at the turn of the nineteenth-century. The revolutionary claims a right as an independent individual, while the “radical utilitarian approach” “separates the sphere of intervention of public authorities from that of the individual’s independence” (BB 41). Rather than justifying a political change on the basis of some imagined “natural” right, the utilitarian insists that political change can only be justified when it increases the circulation of goods and services. Even at his most revolutionary, Bentham would insist on an economic rather than a rights-based framework. Late in his career, Bentham planned to spur a revolution in Tripoli by establishing a newspaper that would point out the economic inefficiencies of monarchy (SAM xxxi).

Bentham's utilitarian system offers us a glimpse of the project of population management taken to its limit—a limit that the Victorians would approach only to step back from the brink.

As Emily Steinlight suggests, it wasn't the social scientists who made it possible for the British public to imagine the people of London, much less of England, as a population. It was the novelists. Writers like Dickens would often proclaim horror at the idea of becoming one with the population: the opening pages of *Bleak House* characteristically pair the experience of being jostled amongst a cosmopolitan crowd with the fear of being pulled down into the mud and trampled to death. But that horror was always, at least in part, mixed with fascination at the ways that mass being might open up new domains of experience. Victorian ambivalence about the utilitarian picture of life as a population is nowhere more memorably captured than in Dickens's caricature of Bentham in the figure of Mr. Gradgrind, a man "ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to" (HT 10). Some critical commonplaces would have Dickens claiming that both Bentham and Gradgrind fail in their attempts at social reform because they try to "weigh and measure" human nature without accounting for the qualities of life that the novel reveals.⁵ But Dickens was also obviously excited by the monstrous excesses of

⁵ Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen reference *Hard Times* in support of their argument that any judgment of the human good requires a "rich and complex description of what people are able to

utilitarianism. As Dickens mocks utilitarianism's life-destroying capacities, he situates himself inside a utilitarian world that is full of its own distinctive forms of life. In *Hard Times* Coketown attracts a menagerie of parasites, including union agitators, home-wreckers, traveling circus performers, forgotten wives and disavowed mothers, all of whom appear to break up families and communities and set the city in motion. Moreover, even when the novelist argues against Bentham, he will be turning to Bentham's own positions in order to do so. For Dickens and Bentham, there is no hope of going back to a pre-industrial England where the landed estate and the nuclear family were the model of safety. The countryside surrounding Coketown is not the scene of idyllic retreat, but rather a hellish landscape filled with abandoned mines that swallow people whole. Unlike in Locke's *Second Treatise*, Gradgrind's patriarchal power is not the source of good government but rather a malicious agency that turns his children to thievery and adultery. Seeing the dangers of the family, Dickens even picks up on one of Bentham's favorite arguments: that divorce should be cheap enough for anyone, including the destitute Stephen Blackpool, to afford. Still, for all Dickens's agreement with Bentham, the novelist only takes up utilitarianism in part. Rather than accept the necessity for a centralized and impersonal system of bureaucratic management,

do and to be—a description that may be more readily available to the reader of Dickens's novel than to those who confine their reading to the narrowly technical and financial documents" (8).

Dickens—practical man that he is—imagines a compromise between Bentham’s new system and the eighteenth-century order of home and property that persisted into the Victorian period. Throughout his fiction Dickens conjures up exceptional little administrators like Esther Summerson and Amy Dorrit to prop up otherwise unsustainable households with their managerial expertise. In so combining Bentham’s utilitarianism with the vestiges of eighteenth-century liberalism, Dickens is able to imagine creatures that do not fit neatly into either system. The exceptional “angels of the house” that appear out of the contradiction between Bentham’s anti-familial bureaucracy and Locke’s familial estates are only one of the many new forms of life that he would use utilitarianism to produce.

Dickens was far from the only novelist to use Bentham for the purposes of creating new fiction. As I will show in this dissertation, Mary Shelley, Wilkie Collins and Walter Pater all had their own characteristic ways of taking up Bentham’s system in part in order to imagine a new urban society consumed with the problem of population management. This utilitarian strain goes so deep into nineteenth-century aesthetics that, by the end of the century, Henry James would claim that the problem with the nineteenth-century novel was that its aesthetic economy was not *utilitarian enough*:

A picture without composition slights its most precious chance for beauty, and is, moreover, not composed at all unless the painter knows how that principle of health and safety, working as an absolutely premeditated art, has prevailed. There may in its absence be life, incontestably, as *The Newcomes* has life, as *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, as Tolstoi's *Peace and War*, have it; but what do such large, loose, baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the

arbitrary, artistically mean? We have heard it maintained, we well remember, that such things are "superior to art"; but we understand least of all what that may mean, and we look in vain for the artist, the divine explanatory genius, who will come to our aid and tell us. There is life and life, and as waste is only life sacrificed and thereby prevented from "counting," I delight in a deep-breathing economy and an organic form. (1107-1108)

In applying this criterion of economical "composition," James is measuring the nineteenth-century novelists against a utilitarian standard that he could not have imagined without them. If the nineteenth-century novel appears a "large, loose, baggy monster" that is because it shares with Bentham the problem that there were always some "masterless men" who might be "prevented from 'counting'" in a utilitarian reckoning of total pleasures and pains. Pairing "beauty" with "the principle of health and safety," James is exactly as concerned as Thackeray, Dumas, and Tolstoy that something might be wasted in a world where a proliferation of "life and life" makes effective management both imperative and impossible. James's comment not only suggests that there is a politics in aesthetic form; it also suggests that Bentham's governmental program has an aesthetic component. Having taken the population as his object, and having accepted that the pleasures and pains of every surplus man, woman, and child are part of a vital economy, Bentham would have to invent a new fiction about what life in the aggregate might look like. As his massive archive of works-in-progress indicates, this was not a project that Bentham could have ever completed alone. It would require the resources of fiction to make population management into a plausible end of governmental reason and the benchmark against which fiction itself could be judged.

Indeed, as this introductory chapter will suggest, Bentham's project was as disorganized as it was wide-ranging and required many different intellectuals and authors to make a world out of it. While Bentham dedicated his endless writing project to reforming liberalism, he offered those who followed him a body of writing that would itself require endless reform.

I: Liberal Dialectics: Locke to Bentham

We can better appreciate the literary dimensions of Bentham's governmental theory once we see how self-consciously he takes on the terminology of enlightenment liberalism and adapts it for the purposes of imagining an alternative suited to an urban milieu. The central figure of Bentham's work is the calculating, reasoning, self-interested individual we might recognize from John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). But, as I will show, Bentham transforms this individual by situating him in a very different world. In the eighteenth century, Francis Hutcheson proposed "that Action is best, which procures the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers" (2.3.8). Hutcheson was only stating the principles of disinterested reason that Locke's landowning gentleman was supposed to adopt as he took on responsibility for managing the government established by the social contract. As we will see, when Bentham adapted this slogan for his own use and started calling it "the principle of utility," he would completely transform the governmental logic that undergirds it. No

longer suited for an agrarian society where gentlemen landowners would decide what constituted the general good, Bentham would use his slogan to justify the construction of new urban institutions that would remove the agrarian landowning class from power.

In the opening words to his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), Bentham displaces the founding fiction of liberal society, the social contract:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while. The principle of utility recognises this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law. Systems which attempt to question it deal in sounds instead of sense, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light. (IPML 11) ⁶

When Bentham declares that man has always been “under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure” he cancels out the liberty that had characterized man in the state of nature Locke had imagined in the *Second Treatise*. According to

⁶ Readers, like Vergara, who want to separate Bentham’s plans for population management from his psychology of calculation (and thereby presumably render the former more plausible) often point out that immediately after this paragraph Bentham seems to dismiss its rhetorical force: “But enough of metaphor and declamation: it is not by such means that moral science is to be improved” (11). As Phillippe Mongin and Hanthalie Sigot point out, “Bentham’s rhetorical exaggeration here serves the purpose of introducing a proper definition of the ‘principle of utility,’ after a more literary and somewhat metaphorical explication of the principle had been given. Bentham is simply doing what mathematical social scientists usually do: they motivate their formal statements before making them” (272-273). As I will be showing, Bentham does not just use the techniques of literary invention to provide an initial explication of his system. His exposition is a matter of linguistic invention all the way down to its first principles.

Locke's origin story, the individual takes his freedom to appropriate common resources and exchanges it for the security of property that he accumulated through labor. The sovereign body of law that will ensure that security comes into being for the first time by means of this exchange. In an apparent break with established liberal theory, Bentham insists that any such contract can justifiably be breached at any moment: when there is "more unhappiness from the observance than from the breach," Bentham asks, "what human being, endowed with feeling self-regarding and sympathetic, would, after due consideration, say—'Let the contract, however, be observed?'" (OAM 347). Far from guaranteeing a secure foundation for civil society, the social contract is a matter of flimsy speculation for Bentham. According to his alternative story, that contract dissolves the moment enough people stop believing in it. Thus we cannot look backwards to a legitimating moment of spontaneous mass consent; there is only the anticipation of future pleasures and pains and a "fabric of felicity" to be reared out of those contingent expectations. Man never had any liberty to give up, only a body susceptible to sensation that might be more or less poorly managed in accordance with the dictate that government try to bring about "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." Putting it more bluntly elsewhere, Bentham insists that "[s]ince the bringing to view of the greatest happiness principle [...] the imaginary *original contract*" has been "terminated" (OAM 346-47).

Bentham's earliest writing against the concept of the social contract appears in his *Fragment on Government* (1776), which takes on the transcription of Locke's theory of the social contract that appears in Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws in England* (1765-69).⁷ The explicit project of Blackstone's commentaries was to condense English case law so that a landed gentry could retain familiarity with the growing body of case law that they had already consented to uphold under the "social contract." As Blackstone put it, these representative gentlemen were "the guardians of the English constitution; the makers, repealers, and interpreters of the English law" (8). Bentham's contention was that Blackstone had failed to understand his task: according to the utilitarian, Blackstone's *Commentaries* drifts between describing the law as it *is* and the law as it *ought to be*, with Blackstone serving most often as the mouthpiece for an unjust system that cares more for the preservation of tradition than administering the "greatest happiness of the greatest number." In penning this critique of Blackstone, Bentham is attacking thinkers like Edmund Burke who would defend the accumulation of English case law as a pliable and evolving tradition, valuable precisely because it was "carefully formed upon analogical precedent, authority, and example" (31). For Bentham, by

⁷ Blackstone's *Commentaries* was itself an attempt to summarize and organize English case law for the landed aristocracy at a moment when Blackstone feared that the accumulation of cases was getting too great for the average landholding Lord to manage. However much Bentham critiqued it for being too "descriptive," other eighteenth century critics of Blackstone's project would attack him for attempting to give definitive shape to the flexible and adaptive system of English case law. The continuing importance of Blackstone's work can be seen in *Bleak House* where Richard Carestone is "peg[ging] away at Blackstone" as he studies for the bar (271).

contrast, such appeals to precedent amount to nothing more than “*ipsedixitism*” or “because-I-said-so-ism”: a hollow appeal to authority born of old legal orders crafted for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many (D 304-305). Bentham’s own project of legal reform begins with the search for a form of authority that had not descended from the traditions of a self-interested landed gentry.

Rather than discarding the tradition of the social contract in its entirety, Bentham develops an alternative system from the common-sense perception that individuals feel pleasure and pain, a notion that Locke had made foundational to the faculty of reason that motivates individuals to form the social contract. For Bentham, man’s embodied experience leads to an alternative form of reason that ceaselessly speculates about the pleasures and pains an individual might enjoy or suffer.⁸ Bentham makes this perfectly clear in a chapter called “The Value of a Lot of Pleasure or Pain, How to be Measured” (IPML 38). In this Gradgrindian attempt to “weigh and measure” human experience, Bentham imagines a “lot” of pleasure or pain up for the bidding at an auction house. In this game, the individual tries to estimate the value of as-of-yet unfelt sensations and considers what he would be willing to give up in order to either gain the pleasure or avoid the pain. Bentham refers to this reasoning process as “calculation.” To calculate

⁸ As Stephen Englemann has recently argued, when Bentham talks about pleasures and pains, he is not referring to immediate sensations but rather to a “sum of expectations and apprehensions for the future” (51). Bentham is not, in other words, part of the discourse of nineteenth-century physiology that recent critics have started to uncover.

accurately, the individual has to consider a range of variables, including the “intensity” and “duration” of the sensation, and the “certainty” that the sensation will arrive (IMPL 39). What directs our action is not the sensation itself, but rather the process of speculation that *imagines* the sensation that is to come. In this utilitarian picture of life, one spends the greater part of his or her existence imagining the costs and benefits of sensations that he has not yet felt. Bentham’s description of a body governed by the operations of a mind fits into the genealogy that Foucault sketches in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). As Foucault suggests, the early-modern sovereign works on the body of the condemned man, displaying his power in a gory scene of drawing and quartering; in contrast, the enlightened governor puts the individual in the Panopticon and teaches him to *expect* punishments, trusting that the prisoner will govern his impulses as he calculates the ratio of imagined future punishments and rewards.

Even as Bentham replaces Locke’s social contract with a social machinery that aims at managing pleasure and pain, he remains true to the concept of motivation Locke explains in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. “The motive to change,” Locke insists, “is always some *uneasiness*” and “[a]ll pain of the body, of what sort soever, and disquiet of the mind, is *uneasiness*” (21.29, 249; 21.31, 251). This “uneasiness” is a pre-Benthamite form of speculation about as-of-yet unfelt pleasures or pains, which Locke calls “*Desire*,” or, “an *uneasiness* of the Mind for want of some absent good” (21.31, 215). As Armstrong and Tennenhouse argue, Locke uses this speculative turn to dismiss the

early-modern discourse of the body and its passions and establish the mind as a mechanism that “receives and orders information gleaned from external sensory experiences” (132).⁹ When the individual becomes “uneasy” it is because he imagines a *future* pain, not because he is afflicted by the passions that upset the balance of contending forces that meet in his body. Writing more than a century after Locke, Bentham follows his Enlightenment predecessor in making the body’s passions subservient to a calculating and speculative reason. In Bentham’s “Table of the Springs of Action” he might at first seem to be returning to the pre-modern world of the passions when he talks of the “Interests of the Gall-Bladder” as corresponding to the “Pleasures of Revenge” and “the Pains of Unsatisfied Vindictiveness” (D 85). But within Bentham’s calculating psychology, the gall-bladder does not initiate a passion that seizes control of the body; rather, the individual’s mind imagines future pleasures and pains that might result from carrying out an act of revenge and then weighs that course of action against other possibilities. Mind governs body.

Locke and Bentham’s discussion of individuals driven by anticipated pleasures and pains is part of a larger change in the theory of motivation that A.O. Hirschman explains in *The Passions and the Interests* (1977). For Hirschman, the great theoretical

⁹ Armstrong and Tennenhouse suggest that in order to register this difference we need only compare Locke description of the individual as mind soberly ordering sensory experience with the discussion of the body that we find in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) where the mind is constantly troubled by its relation to the body that is consumed with “tumult” with “spirits so counfounded,” “bad humours increased, crudities & thicke spirit s engendered with melancholy blood” and “vehement passion” (Part 1, Sec 2, Mem 3, Subsect 1; qtd 135).

accomplishment of eighteenth century liberal theory was its transformation of the unruly passion of “avarice” into the more governable mental faculty of “interest.” In the early modern period, “avarice” was one passion among others (including lust, pride, wrath) that might animate the body. But in the thinking of John Locke and Montesquieu, “avarice” came to be seen as a “calm” passion that operates in a characteristically contemplative manner that requires the faculty of reason. While passions like wrath or lust act impulsively, avarice looks to the future and carefully considers how to gain maximum benefit. In its contemplative, calculating mode, “avarice” was renamed “interest.” Though the self-interested individual may indeed be willing to inflict harm on others for his own benefit, a growing number of theorists began to assert that a society made up of self-interested individuals might conform to a governing principle. Where a society of individuals driven by the passions might rush to war for the sake of honor or revenge, a society of individuals driven by interests might form social contracts and put in place laws that would secure pleasure over the long run. As Hirschman puts it, “in the pursuit of their interests men were expected to be steadfast, single-minded, and methodical, in total contrast to the stereotyped behavior of men buffeted and blinded by their passions” (54). The careful, contemplative faculty of interest is what allows individuals in the state of nature to see that their own best advantage lies in the social contract. For Bentham, it was interest’s speculative quality that caused individuals to modify their actions in accordance with imagined future pleasures and pains. One of

Bentham's great theoretical accomplishments in this story about the transition from the "passions" to the "interests" was taking "pleasure" and "pain" out of the discourse of bodily sensation—where the individual is buffeted about by physiological forces—and putting pleasure and pain squarely in the discourse of calm and calculating reason.¹⁰

For Bentham's individual, pleasure and pain are not sensations but rather notional sums to be weighed and measured in a calm and orderly fashion before they are acted upon.

Though Bentham and Locke share the Enlightenment idea of a calculating individual no longer governed by unruly passions, they have very different ideas about what a society of "interested individuals" would look like. For Locke, it is because men of property feel "unsafe and uneasy" about the security of their households that they authorize "indifferent and upright judges" who are "bound to govern by established standing laws, promulgated and known to people, and not by extemporary decrees" (ST 353). Where can such disinterested judges be found? Locke, quoting Hooker, contends that a representative government dedicated to protecting property will allow individuals to accumulate a "competent store of things, needful for such a life as our nature doth desire" (ST 277-78). On being so comfortably situated, Locke imagines, the man of property will have no reason to impinge on the property of other men. Arriving at this state of disinterest, the reasonable man can serve as a judge who rules in favor of

¹⁰ As Englemann argues in *Imagining Interest*, Hirschman's discussion of "interest" does not include the specifically speculative and imaginative dimensions that Bentham adds to the theory of "self-interest."

protecting the rule of law that secures both his own property and that of others. While Bentham agrees with Locke that individuals are motivated by the pursuit of imagined future pleasures and pains, he diverged sharply from Locke's claim that self-interest would give way to the disinterest that qualifies an individual to represent the general interest. According to Bentham, there is no reason to think that the easing of uneasiness can put an end to acquisitive desire: "in the breast of each individual" Bentham insists, "is the propensity to sacrifice all other interests to that which at each moment appears to him to be his own preponderant interest" (FP 13). This avaricious individual cannot be trusted to use his power for any interest but his own. Bentham assumed that government functionaries would join together to create a massive bureaucracy dedicated to "maximize[ing] delay, vexation, and expense, in judicial and other modes of procedure, for the sake of the profit extractable out of the expense" (IPML 15).¹¹ Because there are no "indifferent and upright judges" to be found in his society, Bentham formulated an alternative. In his *Constitutional Code* he insists that government officials must be subjected to endless supervision if they are going to serve the public interest, first in the form of a growing bureaucracy and then in the form of newspapers that would regularly publish government documents for a literate population to review.

Bentham's reflections on the corruption of the current legal system are matched

¹¹ The same language of "delay, vexation, and expense" reappears in Bentham's *Constitutional Code* (438).

by his suspicion of the individual's right to own property. Reflecting on Locke, Bentham claims that in "holding up to view *property* Locke showed that on that occasion he had missed sight of so many other valuable subject matters of possession" and imagined a system built for "the opulent, ruling and influential few" where "the people, the purely subject many, had not yet fallen in the sphere of observation" (D 314-15). As far as Bentham was concerned, the optics of Locke's theory were skewed: it holds property up to view and fails to see those who have no possessions to secure (and little security to gain from the rule of law put in place under the social contract). The force of Bentham's critique is most evident when we consider Locke's discussion of robbery. In what would seem a contradiction, Locke asserts that "a thief, whom I cannot harm, but by appeal to the law, for having stolen all that I am worth, I may kill, when he sets on me to rob me but of my horse or coat" (ST sec 19). The riddle is resolved once we understand that Locke is distinguishing between two different kinds of thievery. When Locke talks about the thief he cannot harm "for having stolen all that I am worth," he is describing a property dispute between gentlemen over legal possession of an estate. This dispute can be solved in the court because all parties have something at stake in maintaining the rule of law. But in the physical immediacy of being "set on" by a poor man desperate enough to attempt highway robbery, Locke insists that he might kill a thief whose aggression "allows not time to appeal to our common judge" (ST 280-81).¹²

¹² This reading is directly inspired by Warren Montag's "The Commons is No Use."

Bentham would not find it so easy to justify an extra-judicial killing on the highway. His *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* insists that a system of law dedicated to the greatest happiness of the greatest number must consider the pleasures of victims and perpetrators alike, including the “particular merits or useful qualities of any particular offender, in case of punishment which might deprive the community of the benefit of them” (IPML 173-73). Bentham asks his readers to consider criminals as individuals embedded in their own communities. The pains that the thief’s family and friends might feel at his loss must be weighed alongside the gentlemen’s sense of uneasiness about his coat. Bentham’s plans for the Panopticon take seriously the idea that the mass of vagrants and potential thieves could not just be disposed of the moment they threaten a gentleman’s property. Instead, this mass was a collection of bodies who needed to be put under what Bentham called the “sphere of observation” and counted as part of society’s potential labor power and wealth. Expanding his scheme for a prison beyond the task of disciplining individual thieves, he later proposed a network of Panoptic industry houses that would contain all unemployed people and provide food and shelter while also compelling them to labor. For Bentham, the figure of “a” thief is not a generalized threat to property but rather part of a population to be managed.

As Bentham questions the role of private property in providing the “greatest happiness for the greatest number,” so he will also question the role of the family in

supporting the rule of law. For Locke, the family is the fundamental unit of civil society which “inform[s]” the mind of children in their “yet ignorant Nonage, till Reason shall take its place,” thus creating the next generation of property-holding gentlemen who will continue to develop their estates and sustain the rule of law (306).¹³ In contrast, Bentham (who never married) thought the family failed to distribute resources, people, and information effectively to the population. This failure became most evident in the city where the homeless individuals and orphans that populate Dickens’s novels raised the question of whether some other system of social organization might be necessary. On this basis, Bentham entertained the possibility that the institution of the family might curtail rather than increase our collective happiness. He had a hard time imagining why an individual’s pursuit of sexual pleasure should be restricted by the bonds of marriage, or what good would come to linking the family’s reproductive future to the cultivation of a landed estate: “When the marriage is a marriage not between persons,” he says, “but between families or estates, let the families or the estates (if it must be so) remain united, but let the persons be at liberty” (UC 71.95.4). When Bentham argues in defense of such “sexual irregularities” as homosexual, bestial, and necrophilic acts he is only continuing to imagine the diversity of ways self-interested individuals might seek pleasure outside the marriage contract. Pushing this alternative to the limit, Bentham

¹³ The family itself is supposed to act as a kind of holding pen that detains any child who fails to attain proper reason. “*Lunaticks and Ideots*” Locke informs us, “are never set free from the Government of their Parents” (308).

even pondered the case of the “newly discover'd Islands in the South Seas” where “there is no such thing as marriage: and yet to external appearances felicity is still greater in Otaheite than in France [and England]” (UC 71.96.1).

When Bentham claims that utilitarian government will be “anchored on the *terra firma* by means of its relation to that of the words pain and pleasure,” he is replacing one *terra firma* with another: a government grounded on the agrarian estate is exchanged for a government grounded on airy speculations about future sensations (OAM 350). This shift does not just occur in Bentham’s utilitarian theory. We need only look at the arc of Jane Austen’s fiction, from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) to *Sanditon* (~1817), in order to see the gradual unwinding of the estate and the family as the primary means of organizing bodies and information in an urbanizing society. Ian Watt’s classic study, *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), ends with Jane Austen as the culmination of the eighteenth century’s enlightenment reason, where free-indirect discourse takes the reader into the minds of the individuals who exercise their judgment in immaculately assembled sentences. But as I want to suggest here, the utilitarian problem of managing a population seeps into Austen’s fiction and unsettles the ground on which her reasoning individuals stand. *Pride and Prejudice* might seem to offer its readers a Lockean fantasy as Elizabeth learns to read Darcy’s true character in his estate where “natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste” (185). The income from this estate in turn secures a future for Elizabeth’s parents and unmarried sisters. However, as we know from the

novel's first sentence, there are not enough men of property to go around. Austen's model societies are always on the brink of coming undone because property cannot quite provide for the surplus people who move through the countryside. The wandering gypsies who disrupt the picnic in *Emma* are never far off. In one novel and then another Austen imagines an alternative to the landed estate that might be better suited to this world of circulating populations and information. In *Persuasion* the newly formed Wentworth family sells up the landed estate and instead takes up residence in a ship. "[N]othing can exceed the accommodations of a man of war," Mrs. Croft tells us, where "reasonable women" can travel alongside their husbands in safety and security to all kinds of different climates (61). But on a ship the family is no longer tied to the land and can thus no longer serve its old governing function. Away at sea, Captain Wentworth cannot play the role of that Blackstone imagined property owners must play: keeping up with the accumulated tradition of English case law, and managing a collection of tenants and paupers in the surrounding territory. Landed property is further unsettled in Austen's incomplete novel, *Sanditon*, where the estate no longer secures a steady income of so-many-thousand-a-year but rather takes the form of a health spa with an uncertain financial future that must be "planned and built, and praised and puffed, and raised [...] to a Something of young Renown" (301). As Austen's world of estates becomes modern, she begins to render the novelistic outlines of a new form of biopolitics that leaves behind the agrarian system Locke imagined and goes in search of an alternative.

As I have been arguing, Bentham, like Austen, was endlessly preoccupied with trying to imagine an alternative means of managing the population that dispensed with the country estate and the reproductive family. We can catch a glimpse of Bentham's alternative by looking at how he organized his own estate at Queen's Square Place. Bentham never married: his household was organized for the circulation of information rather than the reproduction of the family. Instead of children, he kept a rotating cast of secretaries and amanuenses who would help him organize his manuscripts. One such visitor, George Wheatley, remarked that the halls of Queen's Square Place were "strewn over with printed papers" and that even the dinner table functioned as an ink-stained writing desk between meals (8). There was no hearth in Bentham's residence where a family might meet to exchange affections: he was an early adaptor of the modern steam heating system that distributes warm air evenly to all rooms by way of metal pipes. Though Wheatley at first suffers a headache from the warmth and remarks that "to those used to a fireside it seems cheerless," he soon comes to admire the freedom of movement it allows, dubbing it the "*ne plus ultra* mode of warming apartments" (12). With this heating system in place, Bentham and his secretaries might comfortably move around the house at all hours of the day to continue their labors and studies. The organization of this household is only a preview of the plan that Bentham had for the redesign of society on utilitarianism's biopolitical terms.

When Bentham talks about adding up the pleasures and pains of each individual in order to determine society's aggregate happiness, his leap from the individual to the social whole pointedly skips over smaller corporate structures like the family, the parish, or the guild. These local paternal institutions were part of the agrarian model of government that Bentham was trying to replace. In his view, small administrative units contained in households and rectories restricted the flow of information and nurtured corruption due to a lack of oversight. His plans for a new Constitutional Code, his scheme to build a network of Panoptic prison-factories, his designs for a modern and centralized government bureaucracy: these reforms were supposed to create a world which separated individuals from small communal attachments and reconfigure them as fungible units of pleasure and pain. As Bentham filled his estate with papers, he created the enormous problem of getting the plans for this new society in order.

II: Bentham's Ungovernable Archive

Bentham wanted to replace one form of biopolitical management (the familial estate) with another (modern urban infrastructure). Young men with reformist sympathies like George Wheatley may have eagerly anticipated this change, but Bentham's agenda was constantly blocked by the persistent power of the agrarian estate that he hoped to abolish, a struggle best illustrated by Bentham's twenty-year odyssey to

secure funding an a site for his Panopticon prison.¹⁴ In 1792, Jeremiah Bentham (a practicing lawyer whose primary source of income was rent from tenants on his estate) died and left his eldest son, Jeremy, a fortune. The young Bentham hoped to use this fortune harvested from an agrarian system for the purposes of establishing his utilitarian alternative. All through the 1790s, Bentham invested a considerable sum of this money in a vigorous campaign to get his plan for a modern prison approved by Parliament. At every step, he was thwarted by what he increasingly came to see as a corrupt and morally bankrupt agrarian order that prioritized the comfort of landowning elites over the care of the population. Bentham's first attempt to secure a site at Battersea Rise in 1794 was opposed by Lord Spencer who worried that pollution from the prison would lower the property values of his salubrious countryside (Semple 170). Bentham's second attempt to secure a site at Hanging Woods was defeated by Lord Arden, a Member of Parliament whose mother-in-law thought the prison would ruin her view (Semple 196).¹⁵ Bentham's third attempt led him to Tothill fields—a swampy “waste” used for rubbish disposal—about which Bentham remarked “I can descend no lower”

¹⁴ According to Elaine Hadley, the idea of the agrarian estate kept its hold on the Victorian imagination—and the Victorian political institutions—well into the middle of the century: “By midcentury most estates earned their income from other sources than agriculture,” she notes, “but the ideal of an agrarian, deferential society and the allure of real property ownership persisted” (264).

¹⁵ The idea that the Panopticon would have been erected in the “Hanging Woods” (present day Maryon Park)—so called because highway robbers were often hung there—must have appealed to Bentham's sense that his modern mechanism for training the population might cover over land where criminal bodies were formerly just disposed.

(Semple 197). But Bentham soon learned that the old agrarian regime had a use for wastes too: the powerful Bishop Horsely protested on the behalf of the schoolchildren from his district who used Totehill fields as a cricket pitch (Semple 199). Everywhere Bentham turned, it seemed, the ground on which he would build his new governmental infrastructure was already occupied by an entrenched agrarian order.

Every time Bentham's efforts at reform were thwarted, he was forced to return to his papers and rewrite his plans. The result was an interminable writing project animated and sustained by its opposition to the system of landed estates and country houses. Bentham provides a sense of how his constant defeats at practical reform gave life to his archive when he remarked—after more than two decades of floundered effort—"I cannot look among Panopticon papers, it is like opening a drawer where devils are locked up—it is breaking into a haunted house" (qdt. Atkinson 87). Though Bentham's plan for building his prison in England never materialized, he does not see his Panoptic project as properly dead or entirely immaterial. Rather, he is quite precisely describing his project as trapped in and vitalized by a "haunted house," a transparent metaphor for the gothic manors that continued to be centers of power and privilege even as Britain's economy moved away from agriculture and into the growing urban centers. Although Bentham wanted nothing more than to replace the old with the new, he fully recognized that the afterlife of Locke's agrarian liberalism was not about to vanish quietly into the past. As I will be arguing in this section, the persistence of the past in the

present created a bedeviled archive that would outlive Bentham himself. By the time he died in 1832, Bentham's manuscripts totaled an astounding seventy-five thousand folio pages, mostly of works-in-progress. These papers discuss legal reform, political economy, sexuality, children's education, natural rights, pauper management, recipes for cooking in bulk, designs for new exercise machines, and a wide range of other topics—each new endeavor spurred by opposition from the agrarian estates. Although Bentham would never succeed in describing his biopolitical system in full, his incomplete archive creates a field of information that would keep generations of editors and acolytes busy. In Bentham's archive the insuperable problem of population management creates the problem of information management.

The class of landholding gentlemen not only blocked the construction of Bentham's Panopticon; the concepts left over from of their old biopolitical order would also create problems in Bentham's theoretical work that kept him from finishing any of his manuscripts. The result was the piles of scattered paper that Wheatley discovered when he visited Bentham at the ripe age of eighty-three.¹⁶ Bentham launched his writing career at the age of twenty-eight with his *Fragment on Government* (1776): a sentence-by-

¹⁶ As J.S. Mill notes (with an evident spleen): Bentham "never knew prosperity and adversity, passion nor satiety: he never had even the experiences which sickness gives; he lived from childhood to the age of eighty-five in boyish health. He knew no dejection, no heaviness of heart. He never felt life a sore and weary burthen. He was a boy to the last" (B 62). In Wheatley's account, we learn about an eighty-three-year-old Bentham's regular practices of daily reading and writing, interspersed with exercise in the form of vigorous walks and holding out water jugs at arm's length (15-16).

sentence critique of one section of Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-69). Even in this early effort, the endlessly expansive potential of Bentham's writing practice is on display: as he castigates each of Blackstone's clauses, he produces a critique that is longer than its object of criticism. Any hope of completing such a critique is further defeated by the fact that Bentham's object is the body of English case law itself, a collection writing that accumulates and adjusts itself with each new precedent. The alternative that Bentham came up with for his next major writing project, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), was to leave aside the business of sentence-by-sentence critique and instead lay out the principles for a new system of government. But this *Introduction* remains as just that: an introduction to a larger body of legal theory still to be written. The problem that kept Bentham from being able to finish this project is a problem that comes with the concept of the rational, self-interested individual that he carried over from Locke: if all potential governors among the land-holding classes would use the levers of power for their own advantage, where could Bentham find governors capable of caring for the general interest? Bentham returns to this problem again and again in subsequent editions of the *Introduction*, adding an increasing number of lengthy footnotes decrying the opportunism of sinecured functionaries and a judicial system designed to "maximize delay, vexation, and expense, in judicial and other modes of procedure, for the sake of the profit extractable out of the expense" (IPML 15). Bentham's last major project, his *Constitutional*

Code (~1830), is an attempt to manage these self-interested functionaries with a massive bureaucratic apparatus that would subject all government officials to constant supervision. But as Bentham imagined one layer of supervision, and then another (to supervise the supervisors), the pages of his *Constitutional Code* expand to three projected volumes, only the first of which Bentham was able to write before dying. Confronted with the contradiction between England's agrarian economy and his new urban infrastructure, Bentham could only keep on writing.

Bentham's endless writing project was motivated in large part by his attempt to create a wholly rational language for the discussion of the collective good. One of his most frequent complaints was that Britain's legal language was freighted with non-utilitarian value judgments carried over from former times. In his *Table of the Springs of Action* (1817), Bentham argues that religious moralizers have bequeathed him a language that saddles descriptions of sexual desire with false negative connotations. According to Bentham, words like "venery," "lewdness," and "salaciousness" all suggest that sexual desire is morally reprehensible, but Bentham counters that inasmuch as sexual desire is the desire for pleasure (which is good) that desire cannot be bad in itself (D 80). For Bentham, a desire only becomes morally bad when it spurs the individual to actions that cause more pain than pleasure. In order to create a new language shorn of obsolete moral judgments, he embarked on a career-long battle to make new words. Bentham's oft-noted tendency to coin neologisms is thus not just an attempt to add a few technical

terms but rather a crucial part of his larger project to invent a language suited to modern biopolitics.¹⁷

Even if he could have created a new – distinctively utilitarian – language to replace the moral discourse that stands in the way of maximizing harmless pleasure, Bentham’s utilitarian theory of language is wrapped around a paradox that ensures this task could never be completed. In his “Theory of Fiction,” Bentham makes much of the distinction between “real entities” – words that can be shown to have some basis in the world of pleasures and pains – and mere fables, which do not correspond to that real material world (TF 123). Though Bentham assures his readers that most of these fables are harmless, he almost immediately starts to erode the distinction between “real entities” and mere fabrications because, as it turns out, these fables are capable of creating *real* pleasures: “The fictions of the poet,” Bentham suggests, “are pure of insincerity, and neither for their object nor for their effect have anything but to amuse” (TF 127). But this “amusement” is hardly innocent. In Bentham’s system, fictions steer individuals from one course of action to another by creating anticipation for imagined pleasures and pains. The poet’s fictions can be used “in some cases to excite to action – to action in this or that particular direction for this or that particular purpose” (TF 127-

¹⁷ Some of Bentham’s new words actually remain in common usage (like international, maximize, and minimize) while others which remain obscure (pisteutics, cryptodynamic, swallowable). A complete list of Benthamite neologisms can be found at the University College London’s Bentham Project website.

128). In this capacity, the poet's delivery system for promised happiness is in direct competition with Bentham's own and is indistinguishable from the agrarian order of priests and lawyers that Bentham was battling against:

By the priest and the lawyer, in whatsoever shape fiction has been employed, it has had for this object or effect, or both, to deceive, and, by deception, to govern, and by governing, to promote the interest, real or supposed, of the party addressing, at the expense of the party addressed. (127-8)

As self-interested fabricators of language, priests and lawyers are just as capable of inventing new words, new narratives, and new fictions. Such fabricators have their progenitor in the figures of Moses and Bramah who, in imagining vengeful gods and codes of religious prohibitions, were able to create "something out of nothing" and spin a vast tapestry of law (SI 12). As Bentham scorns Moses for using a fictitious moral language to further his own self-interest ends, one senses a tinge of jealousy in his observation that the proclamations of religious leaders could use nothing more than words to keep followers in a "shivering fit" (SI 12). Like those of Moses, the proclamations of lawyers and priests not only threaten punishment but also offer distinctive forms of pleasure. With its Latin phrases and rhythmic cadence, legal jargon has its own way of seducing listeners with what Bentham calls the "Music of the Office": "Search indictments, pleadings, proceedings in chancery, conveyances, whatever trespass you may find against truth or common sense, you will find none against the

laws of harmony” (IPML 23-24).¹⁸ Here, Bentham expresses the paradox shaping his own theory of language. On one hand, pleasure and pain are supposed to be the basis for the “real entities” on which the foundation of utilitarian government is built. On the other hand, the fictions of the poets, priests, and lawyers acquire a reality in their own right by way of their capacity to coax, cajole, or frighten a population. For Bentham and Moses alike, the task of managing a population requires the invention of new words and new turns of phrase that generate imaginary future pleasures and pains.

As Bentham’s archive expanded to create an all-encompassing governmental fiction, he created an opportunity for a growing number of dedicated readers to live in the world he produced in serial fashion over the course of his career. Bentham firmly believed that after he had established his utilitarian framework, a group of editors would follow in his footsteps and fill in the gaps. In the “Introduction” to his *Constitutional Code*, Bentham remarked that if he were “to drop into his last sleep” before publishing the second and third volumes, “the task of laying the work before the public would receive its completion” from “able hands” (CC 3). While it may be argued that Bentham was, in Elie Halvéy’s words, “too lazy to edit his own work” (75), a more

¹⁸ One of the phrases that Bentham singled out as meaningless was “*Delegatus non potest delegare*” [“One to whom power is delegated cannot himself further delegate that power”]. Bentham’s specific quibble with it seems to be that, if adhered to, it would ruin his design for an administrative system that relied on a densely layered bureaucracy where tasks would have to pass through many different hands in order to be completed. For an argument that attempts to reconcile this maxim with Bentham’s concerns, see Ehmke.

charitable description of Bentham's creative process comes from his nineteenth-century acolyte, John Hill Burton:

It will perhaps serve, in some measure, farther to account for the peculiar aspect of some of Bentham's later works, to explain, that he never prepared any of them for the press. This task he left to others, in the belief that the produce of his labours had intrinsic value, and would, through the assistance of editors, be adapted to the uses of society. Actuated by this feeling, when he had laid out his subject for the day, he labored continuously on, filling page after page of MS. To the sheets thus filled he gave titles, marginal rubrics, and other facilities for reference; and then he set them aside in his repositories, never touching or seeing them again. (x)

Burton makes a virtue of Bentham's habitual sloppiness by locating the "intrinsic value" of the manuscripts in their lack of editorial attention. If Bentham had been more studious in the preparation of his papers for publication that effort would unquestionably have been counter-productive in advancing the political project of utilitarian reform. The few of Bentham's works that did make it to publication rarely received any wide readership.¹⁹ His most dedicated students were not those who read his published works but rather the ambitious secretaries who spent their time researching legal theory under Bentham's guidance during residencies at Queen's

¹⁹ The few exceptions to this rule are not Bentham's major works of system but rather his commentaries on other well-known texts. His anonymously published critique of Blackstone in *Fragment on Government* sold well until his father (who had grudgingly provided financial support after Bentham abandoned a promising legal career), in a fit of pride, started to say that his son was the author. As Bentham bitterly noted: "concealment [of the authorship of *Fragment*] had been the plan, how advantageous, has been already visible. Promise of secrecy had accordingly been expected; parental weakness broke it" (qtd. Atkinson 42). Bentham's only other widely circulated piece seems to have been his "Defense of Usury," which argues that Adam Smith had not gone far enough in applying his defense of the free market to defending the repeal of usury laws.

Square Place. These included such intellectual luminaries as James Mill and his son J.S. Mill, the legal philosopher John Austen, the sanitary reformer Edwin Chadwick, and the utopian socialist Robert Owen. Indeed, almost two centuries after Bentham's death, this editorial practice continues at the University College London's "Bentham Project," where a corps of editors have dedicated their scholarly careers to decoding Bentham's cramped script and publishing a new edition of Bentham's *Collected Works*.²⁰ Since 2010, the college's "Transcribe Bentham" initiative has taken this project to the next level by creating thousands of high-resolution images of Bentham's writings and posting them online, offering still more volunteers the opportunity to participate in the process of editing Bentham.²¹ UCL's transcription project has taken Bentham's phrase, "Many hands make light work. Many hands together make *merry work*" as its motto and principle of organization (Causer, n.p). Bentham came up with the phrase in his account of how the Panopticon prison might create new pleasures by coordinating various individuals with different capacities in a collective human machine. By adopting this motto for themselves, the Bentham Project's stewards recognize that the editorial project

²⁰ Since 1970, this modern attempt to organize Bentham's writings has resulted in the publication of twenty-five heavy volumes, including a new edition of Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (in 1970); Bentham's writings on religious skepticism and the Church of England (in 2011); and Bentham's writings on political economy and finance (in 2016).

²¹ Among the gems still awaiting a dedicated transcriber are Bentham's plans for a "Colonization Society" and his argument that all marriages should be temporary, rather than permanent, contracts. There is still much more work to be done before the complete scope of Bentham's incomplete writings is easily accessible. Anyone can sign up to help at <transcribe-bentham.da.ulcc.ac.uk>

called for by Bentham's manuscripts is an extension of Bentham's own project of population management.

But perhaps the most remarkable feature of Bentham's archive is that it could remain an assemblage of incomplete works while also producing the conviction that there is a whole system to be found within it. This accomplishment is, at least in part, the product of Bentham's peculiar style, which repeatedly inserts qualifications and clarifications lest the meaning be even temporarily mistaken. Coming to Bentham's defense again, John Hill Burton provides an account of how Bentham's complex sentences train their readers to imagine a whole when presented with only a collection of parts:

So anxious is [Bentham] that the mind should not, even for a passing moment, adopt a different understanding from which he wishes to impress on it, that he introduces into the body of his sentences, all the limitations, restrictions, and exceptions which he thinks may apply to the proposition broadly stated. It may be difficult for the mind to trace all the intricate windings of the sentence: still more difficult to have it in all its proportions clearly viewed at one moment; but when this *has* been accomplished, it is at once clear, that all the apparent prolixity arises from the skill with which the author has made provision, that no man shall have a doubt of what he means to say. (x)

As Burton describes it, the pile-up of "limitations, restrictions, and exceptions" precedes a moment where the meaning becomes "at once clear" even if it is delayed by "the intricate windings of the sentence." These delays are not just necessary clarifications that serve to make Bentham's meaning precise: they also generate suspense that produces gratification. Moving between one clarification and minor point and another, Bentham's

reader can begin to expect the appearance of the sentence's whole sense *in advance* of its arrival. Making a similar point about Bentham's style, J.S. Mill explains that because of these endless clarifications, the "sense" of Bentham's writings is "so long suspended" that "it became difficult, without some practice, to make out the train of thought" (B 97).²² For both Mill and Burton, Bentham's clarifications are the sign of a precision in thought that promises the full meaning is always forthcoming—but only to the reader who has spent enough time studying Bentham's works. This training at the level of the sentence prepares readers to make the leap from Bentham's fragmentary writings to imagining what the complete system might look like after the accumulated clarifications are finally at their end. Given that Bentham did not finish any of his major works, this is an astounding stylistic accomplishment. His prose style trains his readers to imagine in full the system he could never complete.

²² A representative sentence from Bentham's *Constitutional Code* lays bare its stylistic paradox: when Bentham considers "the applicability of the work to the use of the British Empire" he quickly moves to qualify:

In saying *the work*, I meant the whole of it, considered as a *whole*: for, as to *parts* of it, in no small quantity, if applicable to any one form of government, so are they to every other; and this, without any diminution of the proportions of power at present possessed by the several constituted authorities. (CC 4)

The point that Bentham is making here is that the British Empire could take up parts of his *Constitutional Code* while still keeping in place the corrupt power structure of the landholding elite. Only an embrace of his *complete* system of governance would bring about the structural reforms necessary to secure good government. As Mill suggests, it is precisely Bentham's need to explain the meaning of a word like "work" that keeps the "whole" of that work from ever materializing.

Once one is prepared to see a “complete” system in Bentham’s manuscript fragments, it becomes possible to start seeing the “complete” Bentham in the biographical fragments that have been passed down by his editors. For most Victorians, Bentham was perhaps best known through a collection of anecdotes that his literary executor, John Bowring, assembled in the in the final volumes of the nineteenth-century edition of Bentham’s *Collected Works* (1838-1843). Serving as a kind of experimental biography-in-fragments, Bowring gives us a vision of Bentham in pieces, telling us of the utilitarian sage’s life-long fear of ghosts, of his insistence that one should never say “to move” but rather “to give movement to,” and of his keeping a loaf of bread that one his amanuenses had given him until it turned green (MC 587, 569, 573). Bowring’s collection of anecdotes does not argue along the lines of a modernist biography that Bentham is a fragmented and contradictory figure. Instead, as in the rest of Bentham’s writings, the suggestion is always that these disconnected pieces might be assembled into a whole. Out of this jumble, it is always possible to catch glimpses of the “complete Bentham.” In Bentham’s fear of ghosts, we see his worry that unreal fictions might puncture the world of “real entities” that supposedly establish the foundation for his utilitarian theory. Bentham’s insistence on using a substantive like “to give movement to” where others might use the verb “to move” is part of his attempt to create a consistent system of language because “[a] verb slips through your fingers like an eel,—it is evanescent: it cannot be made the subject of predication” (MC 569). Even the story about Bentham’s

holding a piece of bread as a souvenir from one of his former pupils turns out to be, in part, about his incredulity that anyone could start with his presuppositions about the nature of pleasure and pain and then reach different conclusions about how society ought to be governed. On meeting that pupil again, Bentham's former student scolded the aging utilitarian for endorsing democratic principles: "He talked with the utmost respect and affection for what I *was*," Bentham reflects, with evident bitterness, "but said I had sadly fallen off" (MC 573). Bowring offers his readers the chance to reassemble the complete Bentham out of these fragmentary recollections, just as his editors had to shuffle through manuscripts to compose modern editions of Bentham's work.

Let it be noted that in creating this little tableau of Bentham's life out of Bowring's eclectic assortment of anecdotes, I am participating in exactly the kind of imaginative maneuver that Bentham's archive is designed to produce and following in the editorial task he left behind. As I've argued above, Bentham's collected papers not only presents its readers with a vast field of information; it also constantly suggest that there is a "whole" to be found in its accumulated fragments. This leap from part to whole is also the imaginative maneuver that is at the core of Bentham's biopolitical project of population management. When Bentham calculates the "greatest happiness for the greatest number," he describes a procedure where the pleasures and pains of one individual are added to the pleasures and pains of another individual, and then another, and so on. This accumulation of individual parts is supposed to culminate in an analysis

of society. But the leap from a collection of parts to an analysis of the whole always requires an act of imagination. To be convinced, as John Hill Burton was, that the sense of Bentham's system could become "at once clear" after we've sorted through its clarifications and qualifications, we have to believe that we really do have all its pieces. Similarly, to be convinced that we have arrived at the sum that represents "the greatest happiness for the greatest number," we must be sure that there are no more pleasures and pains to be counted. But as the contradictions in Bentham's biopolitical project create an archive that cannot be completed, the clarity that readers like Burton see is necessarily a product of his, and our own, imaginative elaboration.

III: The Afterlife of Utility

According to J.S. Mill, when Bentham's utilitarianism "broke the spell" of eighteenth-century liberal theory, it "was not Bentham by his own writings" that accomplished that feat; "it was Bentham through the minds and pens which those writings fed—through the men in more direct contact with the world, into whom his spirit passed" (B 42). In this spiritualist account of Bentham's influence, the utilitarian project is not exactly "completed" by Bentham's secretaries but rather materialized, or, brought into "more direct contact with the world." This distinction was important to Mill because he recognized that to be useful as something more than a fiction, Bentham's incomplete system had to be transformed. All of Bentham's followers faced much the

same problem: how to implement a system that would dispense with natural rights in an established liberal order that presupposed the rights-bearing individual as its fundamental unit? This would require revolutionary pressures that a nineteenth-century radical like Mill would consider counter-revolutionary and contrary to any reasonable concept of progress. In this section, I want to show how three of Bentham's prominent Victorian interpreters—J.S. Mill, Edwin Chadwick, and Stanley Jevons—took up and popularized Bentham's system in a form that did not openly contradict the theory of the rights-bearing individual. As self-styled practical men, Mill, Chadwick, and Jevons recognized that concessions would have to be made to the eighteenth-century liberalism that they actually wanted to reform. In making these concessions, Mill, Chadwick, and Jevons would transform both the utilitarian and liberal discourses they inherited. According to the nineteenth-century liberalism inflected by Bentham's utilitarianism, the individual was part of a population, unmoored from estate and family and connected to a larger system of circulating labor, goods, information and disease.

Thus when J.S. Mill carves out a space for individual liberties in a utilitarian socio-political order, he justifies this space in Bentham's biopolitical terms. For Mill, "liberty" is not a natural right; rather, liberty is useful for maintaining a healthy population. Mill's adaptation of Bentham begins with a familiar critique of the principle of utility: in Bentham's procedure for weighing and measuring the pleasures and pains for the whole population it is always possible to imagine a scenario where the rights of

any one particular individual—or even any group of individuals—might always be voided when it becomes expedient to redistribute pleasures and pains throughout the population.²³ In Mill’s words, Bentham “exhausted all the resources of ingenuity” in “excluding every possibility of the exercise of the slightest or most temporary influence either by a minority, or by the [government] functionary’s own notion of right” (B 87-88). Mill’s essay, “On Liberty,” is an attempt to split the difference between Bentham’s utilitarianism and this classic liberal critique. There, Mill argues that individuals ought to be allowed to pursue “different experiments in living” even when the majority may not approve (OL 63). Mill’s argument on this score does not rely on the idea that we have an inborn right to pursue “our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it” (OL 17). Instead, he insists that liberty is good for public health. Without being confronted with different modes of living, Mill insists that the “mental and moral, like the muscular powers” of the population will become “inert and torpid, instead of active and energetic” (OL 65). The population naturally tends towards slothful thinking unless men are confronted by the spectacle of eccentric individuals pursuing what he called “different experiments of

²³ In a particularly vivid example of this logic, C.S. Smart discusses the problem of the “utility monster”: the individual whose sensory capacity far outstrips others. Arguably, Bentham addresses this critique by insisting that it is worse to lose a pleasure than to gain a pleasure (IPML 3). But this “axiom” of mental psychopathology only makes the bar to clear for violating individual rights very high, and it still preserves the possibility that pleasures and pains might rightly be transmitted between individuals regardless of what their “rights” might be to the security of their persons or property

living” (OL 63). In this speculative biopolitics, Mill finds a way to describe a multitude of individual differences as having a single vitalizing effect: variation between individuals, regardless of the particular form those variations take, makes for a more energetic and active society.

By adapting Bentham’s biopolitical terms for his defense of individual liberties, Mill’s conception of the individual as a social stimulant ends up being not all that different from that of his utilitarian forbearer who also had some ideas about how an eccentric might animate a population. Bentham considered Moses’s uniquely “fertile brain” the enabling factor behind his invention of a monotheistic religion that kept his followers guessing as to what the next prohibition mandated by divine law might be (SI 13). Where Bentham imagines that an experimentalist like Moses might be capable of forging fictions powerful enough to move the multitude in a new direction, by contrast, Mill sees the confrontation with multiple charismatic forms of eccentricity as the means of combatting ignorance and dogma, making men “many-sided” in their thinking (OL 52).²⁴ For both Bentham and Mill, individuals are not Locke’s landowning gentlemen who cultivate their separate estates, only coming together to make a social contract and govern in accordance with the law. Rather, in the utilitarian biopolitical imaginary, the

²⁴ In *Cultivating Victorians* (2003) David Wayne Thomas argues that there is a disjunction between Mill’s ideal of the eccentric individual who seems to consume his life in a single project, and the ideal “many-sided” thinker who is able to digest and appreciate a wide variety of eccentric individuals. For Thomas’s reading, Mill uses this disjunction to argue that one part of liberalism’s regime necessarily includes a place for single-minded thinkers, but that those thinkers must be utilized for the purposes of cultivating a many-sided aesthetic appreciation for difference.

health of the whole population might be helped or harmed by the appearance of a single individual variation, a new “fertile brain” or individual eccentricity.

The concern that Bentham and Mill share with maintaining the health of the population is nowhere better represented than in the work of another of Bentham’s secretaries, the sanitary reformer Edwin Chadwick. Picking up where Bentham’s argument left off, Chadwick’s *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842) insists that the problem of sanitation cannot be grasped by looking at individual cases of sickness, but rather must be analyzed at the level of the population as a whole. Following Bentham’s method of summing up individual cases for the purpose of coming to a complete analysis, Chadwick’s report takes advantage of statistical tables that accumulate information on wages, birth rates, and incidence of sickness across Britain’s industrializing landscape. In one of the *Report’s* many examples of aggregate analysis, Chadwick quotes a local church official, the Reverend G. Lewis, on the economic damage that bad sanitation wreaks on the booming Scottish textile city of Dundee. Lewis notes that the scope of the problem escapes the grasp of individual citizens, as the whole city will “pay” for the lack of proper sanitary infrastructure “in ways its inhabitants think not of” (209). Lewis makes his case by pairing accounts of hardships felt by individual families as the result of sickness with a calculation that shows the total wages lost to *all* families in Dunedee totals 25,096*l.* 13 *s.* per year (209). Lewis’s account of Dundee is just one of the many reports that Chadwick aggregates,

including excerpts from similar accounts of Manchester, Glasgow, Chippenham, Ayer, and many other growing cities and towns. In gathering this data, Chadwick is trying to communicate the need for a coordinated response to the problem that bad sanitation poses for the health and prosperity of the nation as a whole. The tallies of wages lost to sickness and disease are an argument for a corresponding investment in massive new infrastructure projects. While Bentham proposed a network of Panopticon prisons to manage the laboring population, Chadwick threw the weight of his career behind developing plans for a network of roads and sewers that would allow waste and workers to move through the city more effectively.

Chadwick derives his method of data analysis from Bentham's theory of aggregate calculation, but his method of data *collection* departs from his mentor's in a significant way. As Chadwick compiled his *Report*, he was, in large part, dependent on the cooperation and expertise of local parish officials like the Reverend Lewis who provided the report from Dundee. Bentham generally saw these local church officials as the self-interest, sinecured and uncoordinated civil service that his *Constitutional Code* would replace with a centrally managed bureaucracy. Chadwick's career-long collaboration with such officials suggests a more accommodating approach, one that acknowledges that the transition to a modern biopolitical government would have to be

made through the Church of England's pastoral system of management.²⁵ But if Chadwick relied on the research and expertise of these local officials, he would also continue to argue that the decentralized administrative apparatus would eventually have to be replaced by a centralized bureaucracy. As testimony, he offers the story of how the sewage system overflowed when the rapidly developing districts of Holborn and Finsbury had their sewage systems linked up to the City of London's older infrastructure (309). "[I]f anything like combination had existed previously," Chadwick concludes, "the improvements would have been carried on simultaneously, and the inconvenience would never have occurred" (309). However much he may have needed church officials to gather data distributed across the cities, then, his attempt to do so only proves Bentham's point that these many projects in local administration must be coordinated in a form of government that allows people, information, and sewage to transverse district boundaries without encountering blockages.

While Chadwick and Mill tried to imagine a fluid social body in constant motion, Stanley Jevons focused on how calculating individuals might express their consumer preferences in such a dynamic world. In his *Theory of Political Economy* (1871), Jevons

²⁵ Chadwick was composing his report at the same time that he had been asked to edit the manuscript of the *Constitutional Code* for the nineteenth-century edition of Bentham's *Collected Works*. Practical reformer that he was, it should not come as any surprise that Chadwick left Bentham's manuscripts largely unattended to—much to the chagrin of John Bowring, Bentham's literary executor (CC xxviii).

would use explicitly Benthamite terms when he asserts that economic analysis is a matter of measuring the “quantitative effects of feeling”:²⁶

A unit of pleasure or of pain is difficult even to conceive; but it is the amount of these feelings which is continually prompting us to buying and selling, borrowing and lending, laboring and resting, producing and consuming; and it is from the quantitative effects of the feelings that we must estimate their comparative amounts. (13-14)

For Jevons, like Bentham, the individual is a calculating machine and the operations of the economy as a whole are best understood through an analysis of that individual’s speculations. To paraphrase Jevons’s discussion of the law of diminishing returns, the question before any consumer is always: “Would the amount of pleasure I derive from this purchase increase if I were to purchase one more unit?” For Jevons’s calculus, the individual is always imagining how he might respond to future purchases, and just like Bentham the question is not one of sensations *felt* but rather sensations *anticipated*.

However, after having taken up the idea of the calculating individual from Bentham, Jevons quickly moves to argue that this consumerist psychology does not admit of any general utilitarian calculus. As Jevons asserts, we cannot “compare the amount of feeling

²⁶ The so-called Marginal Revolution was a new economic research program pursued by thinkers like Stanley Jevons in England, Carl Menger in Austria and Leon Walras in Switzerland in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As many critics have observed, this new way of thinking about the economy set aside the analysis of production in terms of class (capital, rent, labor) in order to view the economy from the perspective of the individual consumer. As Regenia Gangier argues in *The Insatiability of Human Wants* (2000), this shift production to consumption in economic theory was coupled with a similar shift in aesthetic theory: late-nineteenth century aestheticism leaves beside the question of the individual artist’s productive genius in order to begin, as Walter Pater does, with the consumer who asks, “What is this song or picture [...] to me?” (SHR 3).

in one mind with that in another [...] Every mind is thus inscrutable to every other mind, and no common denominator of feeling seems to be possible" (14, qtd. Gangier 43). For Jevons, pleasure and pain are purely subjective quantities making it impossible to weigh pleasures of the whole population together in order to consider what might make for "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." In the place of any such general analysis, Jevons argues that the only way to measure the "quantitative effects of feeling" is to look at the fluctuation of prices, which, he argued, reflected the changing preferences of calculating individuals. This adjustment considerably narrows Bentham's analysis of how bad systems of government and religion can create expectations of pleasure and pain in the population that are ultimately detrimental to collective health and security apart from whatever preferences individuals might articulate.

While rejecting Bentham's notion that legislators could aggregate and analyze pleasures and pains, Jevons does share Bentham's commitment to imagining a society without the agrarian estate and the fictions of liberal self-governance that Locke associated with it. As Philip Steer has recently argued, Jevons's analysis of consumer desires was at least in part inspired by the time he spent in Australia where towns (in Jevons's words) "mushroom" up around gold-mining sites (Papers, 2:371, qtd. Steer 450). While Locke imagined that a stable civil society could only emerge out of a collection of cultivated agrarian estates, Jevons observed a world where towns made up of canvas tents sprung up around gold mines. Though the populations of these nomadic

towns disperse once the gold was gone, Jevons was fascinated by the way that each new town obtained a kind of order and offered a wide variety of consumer goods to its inhabitants. This was a modern society of “delocalized and desiring metropolitan individual[s]” who could be lead by their undisciplined desires to build temporary infrastructure that facilitates the movement of commerce and labor (Steer 439). While Jevons abandons Bentham’s analysis of an entrenched legal order that might inhibit the pursuit of pleasure with dangerous legal fictions, his ideal image of Britain’s colonial periphery imagines a version of Bentham’s utopia where individuals might pursue their pleasure inside what was once a continental prison.

Bentham’s system continues to be taken up in part in the present day.²⁷ Peter Singer, the twenty-first century’s most prominent utilitarian philosopher, sees utilitarianism as a guide for moral conduct rather than the system for population management that Bentham intended. For Singer, utilitarian morality is a matter of “careful reflective judgments that [...] are based on reason” as opposed to “our everyday moral intuitions [that] tend to have an emotional basis” (“Twenty Questions,” 71). This

²⁷ Among Bentham’s other major interpreters we might count figures like the late nineteenth century philosopher Henry Sidgwick, whose *Method of Ethics* (1874) attempts to synthesize the diversity of nineteenth-century utilitarian philosophy; the animal rights activists who point to a footnote in Bentham’s early work as a landmark moment in making the case against speciesism; and Gary Becker whose *Treatise on the Family* (1981) uses a version of Bentham’s cost-benefit analysis to explain how parents distribute resources among children. Rather than going through all of these adaptations of Bentham in this introduction, these later interpretations—each piecemeal in their own way—will be taken up in turn in the chapters that follow and woven into the “fabric of felicity” that Bentham himself claimed must be seen as a whole (IPML 11).

guide of what a reasonable man ought to do certainly informs Singer's notion of what good government policy should be (for example, he, like Bentham, has argued that infanticide and bestiality ought to be permitted in some cases). But the crucial difference between Singer and Bentham is that Singer insists reasonable individuals *can* muster this kind of disinterested reason and feel themselves morally compelled to act in the general interest. Bentham's whole governmental system is an attempt to bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number in the *absence* of any class of individuals deploying such "careful reflective judgment." The various debates in contemporary philosophy about whether or not a utilitarian calculus will lead individuals to make the right kinds of moral judgments is almost entirely beside the point for Bentham. In this sense, Singer could be seen as following the pattern of Mill, Chadwick, and Jevons in taking up the calculating method of Bentham's plan while holding on to Locke's notion of disinterested reason. But we should also note that the figure of the rational individual that Singer and all of Bentham's other partial interpreters end up imagining never looks like the disinterested man of family and property that Locke proposed. For his part, Singer largely embraces the fact that a utilitarian calculation can lead us to conclusions that go against our felt affiliations for our families and even our species because its abstractions can get us to the "point of view of the universe," which sees all sentient beings as equally deserving of consideration. If that beneficent perspective should lead to the unraveling of the institution of private property or the sacrifice of our kin in favor

of distant populations, so much the better—a form of disinterested reason that takes us as far away from the familial estate as possible.

IV: The *Benthamroman*

As Mill, Chadwick, Jevons and Singer offer their various compromises between the liberal rights-bearing individual and Bentham's utilitarian biopolitics, they offer a preview of this dissertation's method and structure. The chapters that follow present four different aspects of Bentham's complete system, each of which would be taken up by different thinkers working in a range of different disciplines. In focusing on these separate parts of his system, I show how Bentham stumbles into four different versions of the same contradiction that ultimately keeps him from finishing his grand writing project: namely, how to incorporate self-interested individuals into a biopolitical system that would secure the health and well-being of the population as a whole?

My first chapter develops Bentham's psychological theory in order to flesh out the speculating "man of interests" who displaced Locke's eighteenth-century man of property. This individual was supposed to be governable because his calculations would be predictable, but I will use Bentham's theory to show how the process of calculating pleasures and pains generates its own additional pleasures and pains that necessarily exceed calculation—thus making the calculating individual unpredictable and ungovernable. My second chapter looks at Bentham's contribution to the nascent field of

sociology: how he imagined organizing a population of self-interested calculating individuals. No longer able to trust Locke's rational gentlemen with the task of legislating in the general interest, Bentham proposes a bureaucracy that would subject naturally untrustworthy government functionaries to supervision. The only problem is that this bureaucracy would have to expand *ad infinitum* as each additional layer of self-interested supervisors would need to be supervised in turn. My third chapter resituates Bentham's plans for a reformed penal institution in its original context as an institution of population management. Bentham insisted that his Panopticon was a means of putting the surplus population to work in a system that would not only produce disciplined subjects but would also earn a profit. At once a model for the capitalist-run factory and the government-run hospital, Bentham's plan represents a peculiar cross between free-market capitalism and socialism before they parted ways. The contradiction that pulls this institution apart is Bentham's double claim that his prison might at once be a completely self-contained economy that provides the unemployed with healthcare *and* a profitable joint-stock company that sells its products on the open market. My final chapter deals with Bentham's defense of "sexual irregularities," including homosexual, bestial and necrophilic sex acts. While nineteenth-century sexologists like Krafft-Ebing would read these non-reproductive sex acts as indicating psychological deformities that evince perverse desires, Bentham's alternative sexology insists on reading these acts as an efficient means of gaining pleasure without suffering

the expense of bearing children. In imagining children as the wasteful by-product of sex, Bentham comes up against a problem that troubles his entire political economy: where will the surplus people he intends to manage come from if not from procreative sex? Each of these chapters thus demonstrate how Bentham pits self-interest against the “greatest happiness for the greatest number”: (1) in the domain of psychology, Bentham’s calculating individual turns out not to be a predictable cog but rather an unpredictable speculator; (2) in the domain of sociology, those calculating individuals cannot be trusted to join together and govern in the general interest; (3) in the domain of political economy, the necessity of generating profits for self-interested shareholders conflicts with the imperative to maintain a potentially revolutionary surplus population under lock and key; and finally (4) in the domain of sexology, the self-interested individuals who would prefer non-reproductive sex might fail to reproduce the population for the next generation. At each juncture Bentham would exercise the full force of his creative powers to fill in the gap between his belief in the individual’s natural self-interest and his vision of a society organized to provide for the “greatest happiness for the greatest number.”

Bentham was writing at the moment when the disciplines of the human sciences (psychology, sociology, political economy, and sexology) were forming separately and developing their own specialized problems, terminologies, and styles of writing. In titling this dissertation “The Complete Bentham,” I am attempting to assemble the

scattered disciplinary pieces of this utilitarian system and show how they make up a single picture of a complete world. Bentham envisioned a reformed liberal government that prioritized human health and economic productivity over natural rights, private property, and the reproductive household—indeed, as I have already suggested, he saw the latter as an obstacle to achieving the former. While those who adopted Bentham’s system (notably, Mill, Chadwick and Jevons) retained and integrated aspects of an earlier, more individualistic liberalism, they had to cut Bentham’s thinking along disciplinary lines in order to do so.²⁸ If we look at those disciplinary divisions within the human sciences through the lens of “the complete Bentham,” it will quickly become clear that those divisions served to keep at bay the more radical conclusions of Bentham’s biopolitics. As specialists bracketed one or another part of Bentham’s theory, they were able to stop short of imagining the whole and so occasionally hold on to the ideals of disinterested reason and domestic bliss.

²⁸ In *The Order of Things* (1966) Foucault argued that the modern disciplines of biology, philology, and political economy worked in concert to make “man” into an object of scientific inquiry as an entity distinct unto himself, no longer part of the classical systems of knowledge that linked man with nature by means of analogies about the “great chain of being.” In *The Other Women* (1995) Anita Levy offers the other side of this argument, showing how as man was produced as the subject of modern scientific investigation the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and psychology collaborated to produce the idea of a modern woman as a being whose right, natural and necessary place was subordinate to man. As my own study returns to a similar set of emerging disciplines—psychology, sociology, political economy, and sexology—my intent is to emphasize that as “modern man” and “modern woman” were produced as objects of study by these separate disciplines, that very separation served to ward off the radical conclusions of Bentham’s biopolitical analysis of the population as a whole and the governmental system needed to manage it.

While psychologists, philosophers and economists took up Bentham in part, it was the nineteenth-century novelists who imagined the utilitarian world in full, often in ways that exacerbated its contradictions. As an eighteenth-century genre that emerged from the world Bentham was trying to void, the novel might at first seem like a peculiar executor for Bentham's utilitarian fiction. But the novel's formal features make it particularly well suited to adopting Bentham's project. When Mikhail Bakhtin proposed that one of the novel's distinguishing features is its heteroglossia—its holding-together of different discourses—he imagines a practical alternative to the method of the “summing-up” that Bentham proposed in the abstract. For Bentham, the cohesion of his utilitarian summation depends on translating different *qualities* of individual experience that unfold over time and in relation to others into *quantities* of pleasure and pain. The parts of Bentham's sum become a whole by means of a universal equivalent that renders each part a fungible quantity that might be exchanged for any other. For Bakhtin, the translation of parts to whole looks very different. Once the novel is patched together out of a cacophony of different discourses—newspaper-speak, technical jargon, nationalist ballads, pornographic poetry, incantations—the conflicts within and between those discourses do not vanish into a sum that combines positive and negative quantities. Instead, for Bakhtin, the novel's various discourses are recombined in an ongoing, contentious process, in which it is difficult—but not impossible—for an integrated and cohesive framework for human action to emerge. Bakhtin's model of heteroglossia

presupposes that the different perspectives at play are modified by their contact with others, such that each is changed in relation to others without losing its difference. Where Bentham imagines his social whole as a collection of weights that might be quietly measured on a balance, Bakhtin imagines a noisy accumulation of different voices.

When the novelists picked up Bentham's project, all the dissenting opinions and "capricious" reasoning that Bentham tried to write out of his fiction come rushing back. In the novels of Shelley, Dickens, Collins and Pater, we will see that each of these writers take up Bentham's revolutionary system in part while combining it with the remnants of an Enlightenment discourse in order to imagine new worlds that do not quite fit either mold. In my first chapter I turn to *Frankenstein* (1818) where Mary Shelley embraces Bentham's idea that individuals are speculative by nature, and imagines both Victor and his creature as beings who are always imagining futures for themselves. As the novel follows these calculating individuals from the act of imagining a potential future to the disappointment and fear that those speculations create, Shelley shows how the unpredictable passions that Bentham wanted to write out of his rational order might return as the affective byproduct of speculations gone awry. My second chapter follows up on the horror and fascination that Charles Dickens finds in Bentham's vision of the modern city full of calculating individuals. Though Dickens accepts that self-interested individuals are part of a modern urban world, and though he shares Bentham's

suspicion of unsupervised governing elites in Chancery Court and the Circumlocution Office, the novelist rejects Bentham's presupposition that all individuals are self-interested and instead shows how spectacular displays of self-interest can provoke equally spectacular displays of mutual aid. In this way, Dickens attempts to transform Bentham's vicious world into popular entertainment. In my third chapter I show that Wilkie Collins's sensation fiction, like Bentham's plans for the Panopticon, imagines a condition of full employment where readers and characters join in the work of detection and no one can be dismissed as part of a disposable surplus population. While Collins and Bentham agree on the necessity of managing disposable people, I show that the aesthetic bent of Collins's fiction insists that the only way to do so is by treating each surplus person as distinct and non-fungible: while Bentham imagines that disabled "fractions" of people can be seamlessly incorporated into the whole, Collins creates plots of extraordinary complexity in order to make each supposedly disposable person play an irreplaceable role. My final chapter turns to the similarity between the economy of pleasures and pains that underlies Bentham's defense of sexual irregularities and the phenomenology of aesthetic experience that Walter Pater explores in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). Pater was among those who insisted that the pleasures of art have nothing to do with sustaining the bourgeois family and instead give only "the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake" (R 121). Read in these aesthetic terms, however, the constant, future-oriented drive of Bentham's

theories about speculation and calculation seems to turn back on itself and imagine that the happiest population might be one that has no reproductive future at all.

For all of these novelists, the urban future that Bentham tried to imagine in full was always a little bit too fictional when viewed from a world where enlightenment notions of individual, family, and property still structured much Britain's of social life. But, for having considered bits and pieces of Bentham's world, none of these novelists could imagine any kind of return to the agrarian world of the eighteenth century. As the imaginative expanse of Bentham's own project unfurls from the contradiction between general and particular interests, the domains of nineteenth-century fiction would grow out of the gulf between enlightenment liberalism and its radical utilitarian alternative. As Matthew Arnold, anticipating Antonio Gramsci, might have put it, the nineteenth-century novel is "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born" ("Stanzas" 85-86). Only, in the nineteenth-century novel, the "dead" world of the eighteenth-century estate was never fully dead: crowds of sinecure-seeking cousins still gather in *Bleak House's* Dedlock manor, and by the end of the novel that moribund residence becomes the proper place for a solidier like Mr. George. And the "powerless" fantasy that Bentham proposed was rapidly gaining imaginative force in, for example, the economic aspect of Pater's aesthetic theory that insists we must get "as many pulsations as possible into the given time" (SHR 120). In the nineteenth-century novel, the contradictions between old and new liberalisms serve as the basis for imagining

alternative social formations, a dialogic capacity that the novel continues to deploy in what we sometimes call our contemporary “neoliberal” age.

It should be clear by now that to make these claims, I will be reading Bentham’s system as a novel. As each chapter discusses the nineteenth-century novel’s response to his contradictory biopolitics, my intent is not to break Bentham’s system into parts but rather to assemble it in sequence. Beginning with his conception of the calculating individual, successive chapters show how Bentham imagined managing that individual’s social relations and economic productivity while offering some forms of “irregular” pleasure to compensate for the inequity and self-denial entailed in being so regulated for the good of the whole. The result of this sequential articulation of Bentham’s system might be called an anti-*bildungsroman*: the utilitarian individual does not develop into a mature rights-bearing citizen but rather becomes part of an institutionalized population free to engage in non-reproductive forms of pleasure. One might even go so far as to say that part of the reason why literary critics can never seem find an exemplary *bildung* in nineteenth-century literature is precisely because of the persistence of Bentham’s alternative narrative in the fiction of the period. In this respect, Bentham joins Karl Marx who was writing the *bildung* of capital itself—the growth and development of an economic system that would become the material basis of the bourgeois fiction of self-development. Writing from the urban center of London, Marx would call Bentham a “genius in the way of bourgeois stupidity” (C1 759). By rereading

Bentham with this bad utilitarian *bildung* in mind, we might take Marx's judgment not just as mockery but also as recognition that they were both writing versions of the same story.

Chapter 1: Calculating Pleasure

Bentham insists that his utilitarian system of government would “rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and law” (IPML 11). For this goal to be plausible, he needed a theory of human behavior that could imagine a population that would be susceptible to manipulation of such “hands.” This is where Bentham’s conception of the human as a “calculating” creature becomes important. As I’ve already discussed in the introduction, Bentham insisted that all men have a speculative cast of mind that compels them to imagine future pleasures and pains and then choose the course of action that they think will yield the most pleasure with the least expenditure of pain. Pushing this claim to its limit, Bentham further asserted that, “When matters of such importance as pain and pleasure are at stake [...] who is there that does not calculate? Men calculate, some with less exactness, indeed, some with more: but all men calculate. I would not say, that even a madman does not calculate” (IPML 173-4). According to Bentham’s logic, the man who calculates is a man who can be managed so that his actions might be aligned with the governmental imperative to secure the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The crafty utilitarian legislator can use the threat of punishment or the promise of reward to direct individuals away from actions that might diminish the “happiness” of the whole population and towards actions that might increase it. In this paradigm, even the madman can be controlled: “There are few madmen” Bentham

noted, “but what are observed to be afraid of the strait waistcoat” (IPML 174).

Bentham’s theory of calculation allows him to imagine that unruly bodies might be restricted by the speculating mind that anticipates punishment. Ideally, the “hands of reason and law” would never even have to touch the bodies of a calculating citizenry, instead weaving a “fabric of felicity” that applies a straightjacket directly to the mind.

The Victorians who followed Bentham largely rejected this theory of calculation as a woefully insufficient description of human behavior and a poor basis for the theory of government. In J.S. Mill’s assessment of Bentham, “no one, probably, who, in a highly instructed age, ever attempted to give a rule to all human conduct, set out with a more limited conception either of the agencies by which human conduct is, or those by which it should be, influenced” (B 63). The alternative “agencies” that Mill gestures towards were those discovered by the manifold new disciplines that emerged over the course of the nineteenth century. In the anthropology of Pritchard, Tylor, and Knox, the inexplicable aspects of modern life (like a lady’s desire for earrings) were shown to be the “survivals” of primitive and savage culture rather than the product of an individual’s calculating reason. In the physiology of Alexander Bain and G.H. Lewes, the capacity for sensation is distributed all over the body along the lines of nervous tissue, making Bentham’s idea of a centrally located “calculating” mind harder to accept. Even the novelists got in on mocking Bentham’s theory of calculation as the basis for a practical theory of government. In *Can You Forgive Her?* (1865), Anthony Trollope would

represent calculation as a psychological aberration rather than the universal mechanism of human cognition. A resigning minister is said to have “no instinct in politics, but reaches his conclusions by philosophical deductions,” and as he leaves his office another character offers the judgment that “in politics, I would a deal sooner trust to instinct than to calculation” (2:147; qtd. Fredrickson 10). For Trollope, instinct seems like a comforting foundation for the practice of governmental reason because instinct is rooted in habit and history, a long trajectory that might restrain our excesses and keep the order of civil society (such as it is) from being too quickly thrown into turmoil. The vanquished “calculating” minister “may probably know how England ought to be governed three centuries hence better than any man living, but of the proper way to govern it now, I think he knows less” (89). For Trollope, such Benthamite reformers, in their commitment to speculative governmental reform, are always out of joint with time and place.

In this chapter, I will show how Bentham’s common-sense theory of human motivation already contains the paradox that would make it a Victorian aberration. Recent studies of nineteenth-century literature have tended to argue that the Victorians, armed with breakthroughs in anthropology, biology, and psychology, embraced an anti-rationalistic theory that imagined human life as a materially embodied and de-

individuated tangle of instincts and sensations.¹ While these studies have much to say about the Victorian alternatives to Bentham's theory, in this chapter I want to emphasize that Bentham's rationalism already harbors the unruly excess that later theorists would relocate in the realms of culture, biology, and physiology. The root of the problem lies in the mental procedure that Bentham assumes individuals must use in order to decide whether a given act will have good or bad consequences:

Sum up all the values of the *pleasures* on the one side, and those of all the *pains* on the other. The balance, if it be on the side of pleasure, will give the *good* tendency of the act upon the whole, with respect to the *individual* person; if on the side of pain, the *bad* tendency of it upon the whole. (IPML 40)

In this metaphor, all future pleasures and pains are rendered imaginatively present as weights that might be balanced on either side of the scale. The only problem is that this calculating procedure cannot account for the pleasures and pains generated by the activity of calculation itself. Inasmuch as Bentham insists that individuals are motivated by pleasure and pain, the mental process of calculation threatens to produce still more pleasures and more pains, creating an excessive motivate force that cannot be accounted for—and perhaps cannot be managed.

¹ For example, work by Nick Dames and Benjamin Morgan on nineteenth-century physiological aesthetics uncovers a Victorian theory of “reading” that saw that activity as reaching beyond the calculating capacity of mind and extending throughout the body. Focusing on nineteenth-century anthropology and biology, Kathleen Fredrickson has argued that as Victorian theorists became unsatisfied with Bentham's account of an individual driven by pleasures and pains, they developed a alternative discourse around the concept of “instinct”—a shadowy motive force that more to primitive inheritance than modern rationality.

The contradictions implicit in Bentham's theory of calculation are most evident when taken out of his descriptive theory and embedded in narratives that unfolds over time and track the accumulation of calculation's excess pleasures and pains. To explain how Bentham's calculating theory produces monstrosities, this chapter will focus on two nineteenth-century narratives of calculation gone awry from Mary Shelley and J.S. Mill. In Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Victor and his creature are both individuals who distinguish themselves from the rest of the population by being especially speculative: the creature imagines a future that would include him in the human community, and Victor imagines a future where that human community is overrun by the creature's progeny. Unlike in Bentham's political theory, in Shelley's novel this speculative bent does not make these individuals more governable, but rather less. What Shelley recognizes in Bentham's theory is that the anticipation of future pleasures and pains creates the possibility for excessive affects like disappointment and rage that are the source of erratic and destructive behavior. Shelley, in other words, rediscovers the passions in Bentham's theory of the rational calculating machine. While Shelley suggests how Bentham's calculating mechanism might break down, J.S. Mill will dedicate his *Autobiography* to imagining a form of utilitarian life that can actually sustain a narrative of human development. As Mill recounts his famous mental "crisis" —brought on by a rigorous utilitarian education—he uses that inflection point in his own intellectual formation to reform Bentham's psychological theory. Where Bentham's theory of

calculation tries to sum up all pleasures and pains in an instant, Mill insists that the calculating individual can only remain motivated by focusing on the rates of change of pleasures and pains as experienced over time and woven into a narrative. Put another way, Mill transforms Bentham's calculation of pleasures and pains into a *calculus* of pleasures and pains. In making these modifications, neither Shelley nor Mill is rejecting Bentham's theory of calculation in its entirety. Rather, starting with Bentham's assumption that humans are creatures susceptible to pleasure and pain, these literary authors become fascinated with what the breakdown of Bentham's calculating machine allows them to imagine in their own narrative projects.

I: Bentham's Calculating Machine

The shortest and probably the most vexing chapter of Bentham's *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* is titled "Value of a Lot of Pleasure or Pain, How to be Measured." Coming in at a sparse four pages, this is the most direct account of what Bentham thinks is happening in the individual's mental machinery when he "calculates." As Bentham tells it, the individual calculating machine uses six different variables to estimate the value of an as-of-yet unfelt pleasure or pain: intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, and purity (IPML 39). What Bentham is trying to do with these variables is describe the way that the mind makes the diachronic unfolding of future events present for the purposes of instantaneous rational decision-making. The

first variable, "intensity," describes the raw force of the pleasure or pain as it would be felt by the body. Each of the following variables imagines different ways that such a raw feeling might be extended and modified over time. "Duration" describes how long or short the pleasure or pain's time with the body might be. "Certainty" imagines the phenomenological moment prior to the sensation's arrival when it is still possible that the hoped-for pleasure (or feared pain) might not show up at all. "Propinquity" considers just how long the individual might have to wait in anticipation, giving less weight to pleasures that might be later in the coming. "Fecundity" speculates about the nature of the individual's experience beyond a given pleasure, wondering whether or not a particular experience might give birth to still more future pleasures (or pains). And, finally, "Purity" considers whether the anticipated pleasure might be mixed with some amount of pain. Considering all these variables together, one might very well ask how these six distinct aspects could be combined into a single quantity and weighed on the calculating individual's mental "balance." On this score, Bentham offers little help. He gives no guidelines for how one might compare the value of a pleasure that is high in "intensity" but short in "duration" against a pleasure that is low in "intensity" but long in "duration." While his list of variables imagines all the different dimensions of speculation that a calculating individual might engage in, he does not explain how all that speculation might actually congeal into a single rational decision.

These and other unanswered questions about measuring the “value” of pleasures and pains remain for the rest of Bentham’s work. For all Bentham’s talk about measuring pleasures and pains, he never—not even once—assigns a number to the quantities of pleasure and pain he claims to be calculating. When Bentham revisits the problem of calculating later in his career, he all but concedes the point by arguing that it is impossible to arrive at an exact numerical comparison between the pleasures that one man might derive from an income of twenty pounds a year and the pleasures that another man might derive from an income of a million pounds a year.² In what seems a complete contradiction of his earlier work, Bentham remarks: “Weight, extent, heat, light,—for quantities of all these articles, we have perceptible and expressible measures: unhappily or happily, for quantities of pleasure or pain, we have no such measures” (FP 253). Though Bentham grants that such calculation is impossible in practical terms, he insists that legislators must calculate anyway because the activity of calculation—no matter how indeterminate—provides a kind of mental discipline:

How far short soever this degree of precision may be, of the conceivable point of perfection... in every rational and candid eye, unspeakable will be the advantage it will have, over every other form of argumentation, in which every idea is afloat, no degree of precision being ever attained, because none is ever so much as aimed at. (255)

² These reflections can be found in Bentham’s 1822 “Codification Proposal,” a statement of general principles that he would use to craft his *Constitutional Code*, which I will discuss in detail in the next chapter.

In this justification, Bentham imagines that calculation is not a means of reaching a final quantity but rather a disposition towards precision that disciplines governmental thinking. As Bentham imagined that the calculating individual might be managed by well-planned threats of punishment and the occasional promise of reward, the rational procedure of calculation itself is supposed to impose order on the legislative process. Without some kind of drive towards numerical precision, different ideas about how to manage a population might simply “float” about in uncertainty.³

Bentham’s notion that a theory of calculation might have a salutary effect on wild speculations and vague, floating ideas has a long pedigree in the Enlightenment theories of government. As Hirschman explains in *The Passions and the Interests*, the mental process of “calculation” that Bentham describes makes its debut at the center of governmental theory as one of the salutary mental capacities of the modern capitalist. The calculating governor might seek after his own self-interest, but because such an individual could be trusted to look to the future, calculation offered an alternative to the “passions” that supposedly prompted elites to seek glory in war and thus destabilize society (41). Bentham’s innovation was to transform this calculating “interest” from a virtue displayed by elites into a mechanistic principle responsible for the behavior of the

³ Even after Bentham, the idea that quantification entails disciplined knowledge production persists. In *Trust in Numbers* Theodore Porter shows how quantification emerges in different disciplines only after popular opinion stops trusting the expertise of professionals and demands some form of “objective” accounting. Along these lines, Porter notes that parapsychology—always wary of defending its professional credentials—was the earliest adopter of statistical techniques in the field of psychology.

population as a whole. Against the claim that “passion does not calculate” Bentham offers up his story about the madman who can be controlled by the threat of a straight-waistcoat (IPML 173-74). Rich or poor, sane or mad, the faculty of calculation that allows all these individuals to pursue their own interests is also the faculty that Bentham hoped would make them susceptible to management.

Bentham’s theory of calculation, and his insistence that its rational procedures were part of an orderly cast of mind, motivates his often-misunderstood writings on aesthetics. Bentham’s utilitarian understanding of the role interests play in subduing the passions forms the basis of his famous comment that “Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry” (RR 253). Among Bentham scholars, one common interpretation of this quote sees Bentham as a defender of popular amusements against earlier eighteenth-century judgments of taste from critics like Addison and Steele.⁴ But in defending these popular amusements, Bentham is also promoting a specific theory about the kinds of “pleasures” that a utilitarian legal

⁴ For an example of this line of thinking, see Schofield “The Legal and Political Legacy of Jeremy Bentham” (66). In one of his wittier passages, Bentham passes his own judgment of bad taste on the editors of *The Spectator*: “The celebrated and ingenious Addison has distinguished himself by his skill in the art of ridiculing enjoyments, by attaching to them the fantastical idea of *bad taste*. In the *Spectator* he wages relentless war against the whole generation of *false wits*. Acrostics, conundrums, pantomimes, puppet-shows, *boutsrimés*, stanzas in the shape of eggs, of wings, burlesque poetry of every description—in a word, a thousand other light and equally innocent amusements, fall crushed under the stroke of his club. And proud of having established his empire over these literary trifles, he regards himself as the legislator of Parnassus! What, however, was the effect of his new laws? They deprived those who submitted to them, of many sources of pleasure—they exposed those who were more inflexible, to the contempt of their companions.” (RR 254)

system can best allow without fearing social upheaval. Alongside his defense of pushpin, Bentham makes an especial point of singling out the card game of *solitaire* for approval:

I see a smile of contempt upon the lips of my readers, who would not think it strange that any one should play at cards from “eve till morn,” provided it were in company. But how incomparably superior is this solitary game to many social games—so often anti-social in their consequences! [Solitaire], a pure and simple amusement, stripped of everything injurious, free from passion, avarice, loss, and regret. It is gaming enjoyed by some happy individuals, in that state in which legislators may desire, but cannot hope that it will ever be enjoyed by all throughout the whole world. (RR 255)

Solitaire is the perfect “amusement” because it is a kind of pleasure that the individual can administer to himself without having to assemble with others in a potentially rowdy or drunken multitude. To drive his point home, Bentham insists that the whole population would be better off if government ministers themselves played solitary card games instead of reading Homer because the *Iliad* stirs up “the seeds of those ferocious passions which can only be gratified with tears and blood” (RR 255). The problem with the high art of poetry is that it creates something in excess of pleasure: it connects individuals to each other and to the passions of time past in a manner that produces unpredictable courses of action in the future. Poetry is a kind of violent social contagion that stirs ministers and aristocrats to join together and start wars. The game of solitaire, in contrast, is solitary. It isolates and divides individuals, and stirs no action beyond the laying out piles of cards. The pleasure “free from passion, avarice, loss, and regret” is a

pleasure that makes the calculating individual into a social atom, a placid and predictable element in the utilitarian legislator's calculations.

In spite of Bentham's proclamations about how the calculating individual is a manageable individual, everywhere one looks in Bentham's social theory, it seems as though that calculating individual is always in danger of being swayed by the passions of poetic phrases. In his famous critique of the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* Bentham argues that the whole document is filled with "hasty generalization" that appeals to man's poetic sense rather than his calculating reason.⁵ In a move that serves to illustrate his pattern of analysis, Bentham takes the second sentence of the first article—which he translates as "*Social distinctions can not be founded but upon common utility*"—and proceeds to ask "What is meant by *social distinctions*?—what is meant by *can*?—what is meant by *founded*?" (RRR 326). Every word left without systematic definition creates room for uncertainty, stirring up passions and provoking conflicting interpretations (though we might note that Bentham does not signal out the phrase

⁵ Sounding every bit like Edmund Burke, Bentham insists that the *Declaration* was "the effect of insurrection" and that its "grand object is evidently to justify the cause" (RRR 320). But the form and aim of Bentham's critique is radically different from Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, a text woven out of anecdotes about the dauphiness at Versailles and motivated by the assertion that "When antient opinions and rules of life are taken away, the loss cannot possibly be estimated" (78). Contra Burke, Bentham had no especial regard for "antient opinions"; his critique of the revolution focuses specifically on a sentence-by-sentence critique of the French *Declaration* that he gave the title "Nonsense upon Stilts, or Pandora's Box Opened." Where Burke looks back to the legitimating force of tradition and the organic growth of institutions over time, Bentham's problem seems to be only that when the French assembled to lay out their governing principles they did not do so with sufficient clarity.

“common utility” for critique, as if his own work had somehow more surely fixed that phrase’s meaning). Throughout the piece Bentham asserts that poetic words lacking definitions are liable to be seized by an “anarchist” who might use the document’s interpretive latitude to “set up his own will and fancy for a law before which all mankind are called upon to bow” (RRR 324). The calculating individuals who were supposed to be manageable are apparently also capable of being seduced by the linguistic creativity of a charismatic eccentric. Just as Bentham imagines that calculating individuals might be managed by the threat of punishment, in his critique of the French *Declaration* he also comes to the conclusion that they can be led astray by the promised restoration of natural rights.

The unpredictability of Bentham’s calculating individual is the result of a formal paradox that Bentham builds into his theory of calculation. While Bentham values seemingly unimaginative pleasures like *solitaire*, he also insists that even the most mundane practice of calculation requires an extraordinary capacity for imaginative thinking. As Bentham puts it: “it is no otherwise than through the medium of the *imagination*, that any pleasure, or pain, is capable of operating in the character of a *motive*” (D 90). In order for the calculating individual to be moved by anticipated future pleasures or pains, he needs the faculty of imagination to make those as-of-yet-unfelt sensations present to the mind as a matter for immediate concern. But that imaginative faculty does not just allow the calculating individual to consider potential future

pleasures and pains. The act of imagining creates its own distinctive kinds of pleasures and pains that Bentham calls “the pleasures and pains of expectation”: “The pleasures of expectation are the pleasures that result from the contemplation of any sort of pleasure, referred to time *future*, and accompanied with the sentiment of *belief*” (IPML 45; 48-49). The calculating process, then, produces additional pleasures and pains, and any attempt to calculate these pleasures and pains of expectation can only produce still more pleasures and pains to calculate. In calculating the pleasures of expectation, Bentham’s calculating machine enters an infinite regress.

The deep problem that the pleasures and pains of expectation pose for Bentham’s theory is suggested when he discusses the “*Disappointment-prevention* principle” that serves as an “aphorism fit to serve as an *axiom*” in his system of government (OAM 342).⁶ In his essay on “Retrenchment,” Bentham describes how a well-functioning government must ensure that its citizens’ expectations are met as much as possible. When a law that seems to promise one outcome or install one particular procedure in fact produces an unpredicted outcome or sends its citizens through an unexpected procedure, Bentham insists that a double loss to utility occurs. First, there is the “correspondent loss, actual or supposed” that manifests as time or money wasted in the

⁶ For Nancy Rosenblum, Bentham’s social psychology “concentrates on economic expectations” because “There is no better argument against the attractions of fanatical aspirations—especially the revolutionary goal of equality—than the prediction that if realized, these goals would wreck commercial society” (43). This is, to be sure, an astute summary of Bentham’s rational as he describes it, but as I am arguing here, Bentham’s calculating psychology contains a formal paradox that threatens to make Bentham’s manageable individual unruly.

endeavor, but there is also the additional pains of the “correspondent disappointment” that are purely psychological in nature (OAM 346). The pains of disappointment are a direct result of the imaginative capacity of expectation which both makes it possible for the individual to imagine future pleasures and then acutely feel the deprivation when those imagined pleasures fail to materialize. The calculating individual’s capacity to generate pains for himself thus extends as far as his capacity to imagine future pleasures. A government charged with minimizing such disappointments will have to measure its task against the individual’s infinite capacity to speculate. Considered in these terms, Bentham’s calculating individual seems less a manageable machine than a dangerously hopeful creature primed to experience disappointment and rage.

II: *Frankenstein’s* Calculating Monsters

It may seem odd to read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* through one turn-of-the-century critic of the social contract (Jeremy Bentham) when Mary Shelley’s autobiography puts her in direct contact with another (William Godwin). As many critics have pointed out, Shelley’s novel is deeply concerned with Godwin’s argument, in *Political Justice* (1793), that the social contract creates a situation where “our ancestors,” in agreeing to be bound by a system of law “could barter away the understandings and independence of all that came after them, to the latest posterity” (84). In other words, the social contract cannot offer any intergenerational guarantees

without violating the rights of future generations. This is exactly the problem that faces Victor and his creature: though both agree, as rational beings, that Victor will make the creature a mate and the creature will retire peacefully to South America, Victor considers the possibilities that the creature and his mate might give birth to “a race of devils” that do not adhere to that original promise (190). Critical opinion remains divided as to whether Shelley is siding with, or critiquing, her father’s conception of “justice.”⁷ Wherever one falls on that particular debate, in this section I will show that a turn from Godwin to Bentham allows us to see a problem in *Frankenstein* that Godwin’s *Political Justice* studiously avoids: the problem of the excessive affects produced by expectations.

As I’ve shown above, Bentham’s political philosophy is consumed by the problem of the extra pleasures and pains produced by the act of anticipating future pleasures and pains. In many respects, Godwin seems to follow Bentham in emphasizing the importance of bodily sensation in moral philosophy: “Pleasure and pain, happiness and misery,” Godwin asserts, “constitute the whole ultimate subject of moral enquiry. There is nothing desirable but the obtaining of the one and the avoiding

⁷ Balfour sees both *Frankenstein* and Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* as turning on the problem of “rash open-ended” promises that go bad (790). Jonathan Crimmins sees Shelley’s novel and Godwin’s political philosophy concerned with the problem of how “feeling is thoroughly saturated by ideology” even though neither the “feelings” of material psychology or the “ideology” of Hegelian spiritual dialectics can be reduced to each other (568).

of the other" (95 [1796]).⁸ But Godwin's critique of the promise as the basis of civil society leads him to downplay the role of "expectations" that are so central to Bentham's utilitarian theory of calculation. For Godwin, the social contract is not a promise to adhere to a particular system of laws but rather a conventional name for what rational creatures naturally expect from each other: "What we most expect and require in a member of the same community is the qualities of a man, the conduct that ought to be observed indifferently by a native or a stranger" (101 [1796]). Godwin wanted to emphasize that individuals are naturally sociable and thus do not need any extravagant appeals to tradition and custom in order to secure their expectations for happiness: in the social contract, he claims, "little is made over, little expectation is excited, and therefore little mischief is included in its breach" (101 [1796]). For Shelley and Bentham, however, these "little" expectations can become a big problem because the very act of anticipating future pleasures and pains brings about pleasures and pains of its own. Bentham's political philosophy largely tries to contain the calculation of those expectations to a single phenomenological moment: that "balance" where all pleasures and pains might appear together at once for a synchronic utilitarian reckoning. But if the act of calculation itself generates its own pleasures and pains, then every moment of

⁸ Godwin added this comment on the centrality of pleasure and pain to moral thought in the revised 1796 version of *Political Justice*. In doing so he demonstrates a tendency in his thought that tends towards the importance of the body to his conception of justice, a tendency that brings him closer to the figure with which he is most often opposed, Thomas Malthus. For more on Malthus and Godwin's theories of the body, see Gallagher 41-44.

calculation generates *another* moment where new pleasures and pains of expectation must be weighed and measured. Mary Shelley's work as a novelist allows her to play out the diachronic dimensions of this problem and shows how expectations of future pleasures and pains can go on to create new passions.

The creature's narrative in *Frankenstein* begins in the world of physiological pleasures and pains that Godwin emphasizes, but as the creature develops he comes to live in the world of expectations that Bentham's theory describes. When the creature first wanders out into the countryside, he does not calculate. Forming no future expectations, he is allured by whatever pleasure he encounters in the moment: "It was noon when I awoke;" he remembers, "and, allured by the warmth of the sun, which shone brightly on the white ground, I determined to recommence my travels" (132). Behaving more like a heliotrope than a calculating machine, the creature's pleasures lead him to steal food and sleep until noon on a journey that goes nowhere in particular.⁹ Hardly a promising laborer, and certainly not a governable subject. Such physical stimuli take priority in *Political Justice* when Godwin uses the "amputation of a leg" as an "obvious example" of "an evil of considerable magnitude" (95 [1796]). Godwin stresses the importance of such immediate brute violence because the magnitude of present sensations is supposed to argue against the keeping of past promises that result in such pain. But once the creature

⁹ The creature-as-heliotrope comes from Robert Mitchell's *Experimental Life*: "[The creature's] heliotropism draws him into a social milieu, as he is solicited by the emotional attachments of the De Lacey family" (176).

takes refuge in the De Lacey cottage, something changes: he begins to think of himself as one of Bentham's individuals who looks, not to past or present, but rather to the future as he attempts to calculate in order to gain what might please him:

I longed to join them, but dared not. I remembered too well the treatment I had suffered the night before from the barbarous villagers, and resolved, whatever course of conduct I might hereafter think it right to pursue, that for the present I would remain quietly in my hovel, watching, and endeavoring to discover the motives of their actions. (136)

Looking through the peep-hole in the side of the cottage, the creature begins to anticipate the pleasures of joining in the De Lacey community. The attempt to discover the proper "course of conduct" keeps him fixed in place. In this scene, it is the creature's capacity to imagine a future that serves to discipline him: no more sleeping until noon, and no more eating whatever milk, berries or bread he stumbles upon. Instead, the creature sleeps during the day while the De Laceys are off to work, and gathers wood for the cottage at night while they are asleep (140). Cottagers and creature alternate shifts as if working in a factory that must utilize both day and night for productive labor.¹⁰ The creature's newly regulated and productive life is maintained by his expectations. First he calculates that if he were to simply walk into the De Lacey cottage, he would be attacked. This expectation pushes him *away* from the cottage. Second, he

¹⁰ E.P. Thompson's classic essay "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism" shows that the kind of regular schedule that the creature arrives at is something that early factory owners had to expend considerable effort to install in their workers (who would otherwise take St. Monday, St. Tuesday and St. Wednesday for festivities). In this moment from Shelley's novel we can see how Bentham pre-loads the factory owners hard-won discipline into his theory by insisting that individuals calculate.

calculates that if he can only find the right course of conduct, he would be welcomed by the De Lacys. This expectation draws him *into* the cottage. The balance of these two forces keeps him in the woodshed. A prison maintained by expectations that Bentham no doubt would have approved of. But as Shelley's novel makes clear, this equilibrium is not sustainable: the imaginative capacity of anticipation that fixes the creature in place will also generate the ungovernable passions of disappointment and rage when the anticipated pleasures fails to materialize.

The expectation of future pleasure that keeps the creature in place generates a cascading series of ever-greater expectations, all of which produce the possibility for ever-greater disappointment that Bentham's theory of calculation suggested is always possible. As the creature watches and waits, he goes from simply observing the De Lacey family to forging a social contract with them out of the sheer force of his own solitary expectations: on first seeing the De Lacey family, he refers to them only as "the family" (135) or "the cottagers" (136) but then they become his "friends" (138, 147) and finally his "protectors" (157). The De Lacey family has made no promises to him, but the creature's social contract is—in appropriately Benthamite terms—entirely speculative. The more future pleasures the creature comes to anticipate, the more he comes to imagine that the De Lacey family is responsible for securing him against a hostile world. When the creature finally does approach the De Lacey family and is summarily rejected, the affective energy stored up in expectation turns to hostility: the creature runs back

into the woods to rage “like a wild beast” (160). As was always implicit in Bentham’s theory, this passion is not antithetical to calculation, but is rather thoroughly entangled in it. The creature can turn from passionate rage to contemplative calculation in an instant as he considers the million things he might have done differently: “I ought to have familiarised the old De Lacey to me,” he frets, “and by degrees have discovered myself to the rest of the family, when they should have been prepared for my approach” (161). The creature’s raging “like a wild beast” is not a temporary excess, nor is his return to calculation a momentary return to rationality. The rationality of calculation and the excess of rage are of a piece with one another in Shelley’s novel.

While Bentham insists that calculation is the province of every one, rich or poor, sane or mad, Shelley reserves the capacity to calculate excessively as the distinguishing feature of Romantic protagonists. The creature’s rage and disappointment differentiate him from the other placid, calculating individuals of Shelley’s novel. Everyone in Victor’s family is perfectly capable of cultivating hopes and expectations without being made ungovernable by the excesses of disappointment. Elizabeth, Victor’s wife-to-be, has expected to marry Victor ever since she was a child: “You well know, Victor, that our union had been the favourite plan of your parents ever since our infancy,” she explains, “We were told this when young, and taught to look forward to it as an event that would certainly take place” (210). However, Elizabeth is driven neither to excess nor to impropriety by that expectation, telling Frankenstein that if he disappoints her—if it

turns out that he loves another—she will be able to resign the pleasure she had hoped for and insists that Victor “remain satisfied that nothing on earth will have the power to interrupt my tranquility” (211). In other words, Elizabeth is a peculiar calculating creature who does not experience what Bentham describes as the pains of disappointment that are superadded to the pain of failed expectations. But without this superadded pain of expectation, all of these placid individuals seem to lack motive force. Elizabeth, Clerval, Justine, William—these eminently governable subjects, immune to disappointment, have their lives extinguished. The excessive pleasure and pain that calculation produces is, for Shelley, the motive force of that sustains life and keeps the individual on the move. While Bentham insists that all individuals are motivated by pleasure and pain, Shelley suggests a slightly more precise reading of Bentham’s theory that is attentive to utilitarianism’s speculative character. In *Frankenstein*, the individual whose level of motivation can sustain a novelistic plot is not animated by “pleasure” and “pain” but rather by the cycle of speculations and expectations *about* “pleasure” and “pain” that threaten to erupt into a destructive rage.

As Shelley shows how violent passion can emerge out of rational calculation, she also shows how utilitarian calculation studiously tries to avoid getting swept up in the narrative momentum of natural rights discourse. After the creature learns that the labor he performs getting firewood for the De Lacey will not be enough to secure him a place in the human community, he switches to the discourse of natural rights in order to argue

that Victor owes him a mate because he is a reasoning being: "I demand it of you," he insists, "as a right which you must not refuse" (169). At first, Victor feels compelled by the sweeping rhetoric of the creature's origin story: "His tale, and the feelings he now expressed, proved him to be a creature of fine sensations" (170). But as Bentham argued, the rhetorical flourishes that come with the discourse of natural rights are dangerous because they look backward to the promise made in the original contract rather than forward to the possible consequences that following through on that contract might have. In a move that Bentham would approve of, Victor withdraws into "a long pause of reflection" in order to separate himself from the creature's sweeping narrative and engage in rational calculation (172). When he finally consents to build a bride for his creature, that decision rests on the grounds of a utilitarian speculation rather than on the claims of the creature's natural rights. In Victor's speculative reckoning neither "the promise of virtues which [the creature] had displayed on the opening of his existence" nor "[the creature's] power and threats were [...] omitted in my calculations" (172; 125). In this calculating mental procedure, Victor combines contradictory pieces of evidence gathered from different temporal moments: past good behavior, recent violence, the threat of future revenge, and the promise of peaceful coexistence. In contrast to Victor's affective response to the diachronic unfolding of the creature's rhetoric of natural rights, this "long pause" removes him from the flow of time and allows him to speculatively combine past, present, and future in order to produce a decision. But as Shelley's novel

demonstrates, this calculating procedure is *also* embedded in a sequence of events that unfold over time, and it will produce its own excessive passions that are every bit as destructive as the creature's disappointed rage.

The problem with Bentham's calculating procedure is that it can never really be completed. More future speculations might always be added to the mix. As Victor extends the temporal horizon of his own calculations, he begins to imagine a future where the whole human species is at risk. The creature and his mate, he ventures, will give birth to a "race of devils" and "future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price perhaps of the existence of the whole human race" (190).¹¹ In this speculative leap, Victor imagines that the creature's progeny will be utilitarian individuals just like himself. The imagined race of devils will not look back any tradition of promises and contracts, but rather will follow their acquisitive desires in a colonizing project that might exterminate the human race. As a utilitarian individual, Victor's capacity to speculate about the future, and his conviction that others will do the same, is paradoxically the feature of his mental

¹¹ In *How Novels Think*, Armstrong argues that this "race of devils" moment is an instance of the "polygenetic imagination" where Frankenstein imagines that in building the creature a bride "he might well be creating not a species but a debased race of human beings with the power to destroy the normative prototype" (73). Armstrong sees this imaginative leap as a foundational moment for nineteenth century anthropology, and I would stress that even this characteristically Victorian mode of reading the human past also requires the Benthamite faculty of speculation that imagines a human future.

machinery that makes it impossible for him to imagine any sustainable community with either the creature or, indeed, his fellow man.

In Shelley's novel, this infinite speculation remains a source of infinite vitality for the individual even as it remains incapable of imagining a sustainable future. Onboard the ship, when the crew's representatives demand Walton abandon the arctic expedition that threatens to kill them all, a weakened Frankenstein springs to life—"his cheeks flushed with momentary vigour" (236)—and urges the crew to consider that "You were to be hailed as the benefactors of your species; your name adored, as belonging to brave men who encountered death for honour and the benefit of mankind" (236). This is the motive force of Bentham's pleasures of expectation operating at their limit. Victor is vitalized by his own internal imaginative extrapolations; he springs up from his death bed to extoll the pleasures that will only be secured with the death of himself and the rest of the crew. Like his creature, Victor is a kind of calculating monster, capable of being animated by the very act of imagining future pleasures and pains that he will never feel because they exist beyond the limits of his own life. The "good of the species" that Victor keeps on offering in his arguments always seems to require men to die alone in icy waters, a future preserved by the will of each to extinguish himself. The rest of the crew is not susceptible to this perverse form of motivation. Their desires are for the "warm fire-sides" and a return to their families that Victor mocks (236). As Bentham insisted, the faculty of calculation requires the work of the imagination, but for Shelley,

not all individuals are equally imaginative. The greater the scope of the consequences the individual can imagine, the more excessively motivated and active the individual can be. While Walton's crew may be more manageable in their modest expectations and desires, it is the excessive motive force of calculation pushed to its limits that creates monsters like Victor and his creature, at once impossible to govern and capable of giving shape to a narrative.

III: Autobiographical Utility

Frankenstein's narrative of development imagines that expectations might motivate individuals to take excessive courses of action. In his *Autobiography*, J.S. Mill tells a utilitarian developmental narrative with the opposite problem: that the individual's speculations might lead to him to a depression where all sources of motivation fail. Mill lays out the central problem of Bentham's theory of calculation by imagining a world where even the most active of utilitarian reformers—J.S. Mill's own father, James Mill—is not actually motivated by the pursuit of pleasure. As Mill tells it, the domineering elder Mill "deemed very few [pleasures] worth the price which, at least in the present state of society, must be paid for them" (55). Although James Mill anticipates few if any pleasures, he is nevertheless a man of "extraordinary energy," which allows him to provide for his oversized family, throw the full force of his opinions

into everything he writes, and manage his eldest son's education with unsparing attention (27). If the anticipation of pleasure and the fear of pain is not the source of this energy, then where does it come from, and how might it be acquired? As I'll be arguing below, J.S. Mill approaches this question as a formal problem. In Bentham's theory of calculation, the individual is motivated to act by a synchronous calculation of future pleasures and pains that determines his course of action in a moment. In contrast, for Mill, the individual's motive to act can only be sustained by a sense of self that emerges of the course of a developmental narrative that unfolds diachronically. Considered in these narrative terms, Bentham's synchronous calculation not only fails to motivate Mill's individual but is actually counter-productive inasmuch as it replaces narration with summation.

Mill introduces the question of the individual's developmental narrative to Bentham's utilitarianism by imagining that the project of utilitarian reform might be the basis of an individual's *bildung*. In the first chapters of his *Autobiography*, Mill presents his young self as motivated by the prospect of being "a reformer of the world," and he claims that "My conception of my own happiness was entirely identified with this object" (111). To formulate this goal, Mill adopts Bentham's idea that our laws and social institutions need to be reformed in order to bring about "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." In so observing Bentham's principle of reform, however, Mill adds something to Bentham's theory of motivation in order to incorporate it into a

developmental narrative—namely, the twin assumptions that one’s “happiness” can be “entirely identified” with an object, and that “social reform” has qualities that make it an object particularly suited to be so identified. As Mill puts it, “I was accustomed to felicitate myself on the certainty of a happy life which I enjoyed, through placing my happiness in something durable and distant, in which some progress might always be making, while it could never be exhausted by complete attainment” (111). That “durable and distant” object is social reform itself, an object that might be asymptotically approached, but never reached. The possibility of sustaining that developmental narrative is hinged on the idea that “some progress might always be making.” Mill imagines that the steady retreat of the desired object will keep him moving: to actually *attain* the goal of social reform would be to come to a stopping point where desired object’s allure is exhausted and the story would end. Considered in these narrative terms, happiness is something more than the sum total of pleasures after deductions have been made for pain; happiness is an object that sustains motivation by functioning as the teleological end of one’s life narrative. But if this seems like a good solution to the problem of motivation, we need only remember Robert Browning’s “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” and the nightmarish potential of the quest that organizes so much Victorian poetry. An object that is always receding in front of one’s view creates the possibility of a narrative that both never ends and cannot sustain life.

In the central episode of his autobiography, "A Crisis in My Mental History," Mill's account of his mental collapse plays on a formal contradiction implicit in making utilitarian reform the end of one's life narrative. Bentham describes calculation as a mental operation that takes all future pleasures and pains and renders them imaginatively present for the purposes of rational contemplation. Mill's narrative makes what Bentham supposed was an everyday act of rational calculation into an exceptional event that touches off a radical change in the individual's progressive narrative. As Mill describes it, his mental crisis is tipped off by an act of utilitarian speculation where the future of his reform project is rendered imaginatively present in an instant:

'Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?' And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, 'No!' At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. (112)

In this moment Mill identifies how the act of "supposing" gathers up all potential future reforms and pictures them as achieved "at this very instant." This mental maneuver is the same collapsing of temporal registers that Bentham proposes in his theory of calculation where all future expectations are rendered in the present. For Bentham this calculating procedure is supposed to help the individual determine the best possible course of future action, but Mill imagines that such a speculation might also force the individual to see the moment when the project that motivated him comes to an end. Faced with such a vision, Mill's "irrepressible self-consciousness" protests against the

possibility that his “self” might disappear when the object that was the basis of his life’s narrative is exhausted. A little calculating monster in its own right, Mill’s self-consciousness bellows out a “No!” and refuses to cede its developmental arc to an account of the measurable pleasures distributed among the many.

In order to meet Bentham on the field of biopolitics, Mill extends his personal mental crisis to the population as a whole and argues that proper management consists in preserving a shared sense in the possibility of narrative progress. As Mill puts it: “if the reformers of society and government could succeed in their objects, and every person in the community were free and in a state of physical comfort, the pleasures of life, being no longer kept up by struggle and privation, would cease to be pleasures” (120). A state of physical comfort, free of struggle and privation, may earn high points according to Bentham’s calculations that weigh all pleasures and pains in terms of absolute amounts. However, according to Mill, a constant state of physical comfort, without ups and downs, does not bring happiness because it does not generate a story. In the *Autobiography* as a whole, Mill imagines life as an unfolding linear narrative where the ordering and sequencing of events matters deeply: happiness is created when pleasure can be seen to emerge out of pain. The “crisis” that Mill recounts is itself a vital part of the narrative because it offers a low point between his father’s strict tutelage and his friendship with Harriet Taylor. To understand the value of pleasure and pain in diachronic terms, Mill deploys an autobiographical narrative that allows his readers to

trace the fall and rise of his pleasure like the rise and fall of a stock market index.¹² This narrative understanding of happiness is a radical departure from the formal logic of Bentham's theory. In the elder utilitarian's theory of calculation, future pleasures and pains are removed from the any narrative sequence and jumbled together on a scale that weighs all anticipated sensations simultaneously. Mill's deep critique of Bentham is that good government is not only a matter of maximizing health and economic productivity at any one particular moment but rather in creating a shared narrative for the population to collectively inhabit.

Mill's focus on narrative leads him to value "novelty" as a vital element in his utilitarian conception of aesthetic pleasure. Bentham imagined a world where the whole population might be satisfied with solitaire, but Mill agonized over the possibility that men might run out of amusements. In particular, Mill was "seriously tormented by the thought of the exhaustibility of musical combinations" and by the possibility that there "should not be room for a long succession of Mozarts and Webers, to strike out [...] entirely new and surprisingly rich veins of musical beauty" (119). For Mill, music, poetry, and literature become like the coal mines whose "rich veins" are always in

¹² In *The Affective Life of Average Man*, Audrey Jaffe relates this differential understanding of pleasure and pain to the Victorian invention of the stock market index; that venerable line which, going up and down, shows us the mood of the market. As canny speculators, what investors care about is not the sum total value at any given time, but rather whether the line will go up or down in the future and the rate at which it will do so.

danger of being exhausted.¹³ As pleasures and pains need to be set off from one another in order to create the appearance of narrative change over time, so aesthetic pleasure must constantly find new objects that are distinct from the old. The solution that the *Autobiography* offers for this problem of aesthetic scarcity is the fictional resource of autobiography itself. When Mill claims to discover “the internal culture of the individual” while reading Wordsworth, poetry becomes a renewable resource of novelty because it reveals “a source of inward joy [...] which had no connexion with struggle or imperfection” (118; 121). Here, poetry is not just an object that delivers pleasure by offering an ultimately limited set of new rhymes and phrases. Rather, poetry becomes an infinite source of joy because it directs the individual’s attention back towards his own life’s narrative. This resolution depends on the assumption that the individual’s narrative progress runs parallel to the story of the “improvement in the physical and social condition of mankind” (121). Mill thus invents his concept of the individual to compensate for the novel pleasures that are otherwise in short supply.

The fiction of pleasure’s scarcity creates Mill’s inward turn. But that fiction also allows Mill to discover a version of the infinite pleasures of speculation that was already

¹³ In a passage that might have inspired J.S. Mill’s fears about the exhaustibility of musical combinations, Bentham’s essay on “Place and Time” suggests that even when all utilitarian reforms are in place “the stock of sources, those sources more or less remote, of every thing that is called enjoyment, never can encrease. In the regions of poetry, painting, music and their sister arts, the mines of novelty will in a few centuries be exhausted: and if the instruments of enjoyment are more exquisite, taste will be more severe” (PT 204). Here, Bentham imagines the process of procuring pleasures as a kind of cruel joke, where “novelty” is a limited resource and greater refinement of taste only serves to limit the capacity to enjoy.

implicit in Bentham's theory of calculation. When Bentham talks about the "pleasures (and pains) of expectation," he is describing a form of pleasure (or pain) that the individual creates for himself. The infinite regress that drove the speculating individual to excessive action in *Frankenstein* becomes, in Mill's *Autobiography*, the powerful motive force that the otherwise depressed individual cannot move without. Herbert Marcuse's classic discussion of Romanticism's "the inward turn" lays out some of the political stakes of Mill's romantically-inflected conception of the utilitarian individual. In "The Affirmative Character of Culture" (1937), Marcuse explains how a compensatory world of gratification emerges within the individual's aesthetic imagination when material circumstances fail to support one's anticipation of pleasure. In the absence of some means of changing the material conditions of life, what art—literature, poetry, music, theater—offers is the pleasures of culture, pleasures that are hidden in the depths of our being rather part of our shared material condition. As Marcuse says, "the beauty of art is compatible with the bad present, despite and within which it can afford happiness" (118).

Mill's narrative revision of utilitarian calculation becomes the basis for the wholesale rewriting of Bentham's theory that he offers in his famous essay on "Utilitarianism." As has often been noted, Mill's essay departs from Bentham by insisting that there are qualitative differences between "higher" and "lower" pleasures. Where Bentham's theory might have considered the pleasures of poetry and the

pleasures of pushpin as interchangeable, Mill's defense of utilitarianism is premised on the idea that they are not. As Mill insists, "It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact, that some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others" (Ut 138-39). It's all too easy to think that we know what Mill is talking about when he distinguishes between "higher" and "lower" pleasures: higher pleasures would be the pleasures of poetry and music that he comes to enjoy in his *Autobiography*, while lower pleasures might be that of food, or drink (or the extra-marital sex that he claims never to have had with Harriet Taylor). But as Mill's essay makes clear, what matters in this distinction between "higher" and "lower" pleasures is not the acts that the individual ends up doing but rather the narrative that the individual tells himself as he chooses what acts to do. Rather than listing the different kinds of activities that might fall into the "higher" or "lower" categories, Mill spends most of his essay describing the phenomenology of choice. "Few human creatures" Mill insists, "would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures" (Ut 139). In this little narrative of consumer preferences, the individual subject's consideration of his own creaturely identity occurs before that subject's weighing of pleasures and pains even begins. Where Bentham imagined that the calculating individual would simply ask himself which course of action would yield the most pleasure with the least expenditure of pain, Mill's calculating creature must first ask itself what kind of being it is: man or beast? This

peculiar question is not one that can be settled—indeed Mill does not intend it to be—as we are at best but “human creatures.”¹⁴ Though Mill asserts that the well-conditioned subject would indeed prefer the pleasures of higher cognitive functions, this is a preference that is always in danger of eroding: “Capacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant,” Mill claims, “easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance” (Ut 141). The subject who would preserve his status as a reasoning individual must forever be evaluating his acts not only for the sum of pleasure or pain they yield but also for how they might confirm or deny his humanity. In Mill’s analysis of calculation, the question of pleasures and pains is replaced with the individual’s attempt to create a narrative—or even an

¹⁴ While the direction of Mill’s thinking insists on differentiating man from beast, Bentham’s utilitarianism famously tends in the opposite direction. In his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham presents the first argument for animal rights in a footnote where he predicts that the “day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which can never be withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny” (IPML 283). For Bentham the relevant question when deciding which creatures to consider in a utilitarian framework is not “Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?” (IPML 283). It is worth pointing out, however, that whenever later ethical thinkers have taken up the case of animal rights, they often shy away from an embrace of the moral calculus that Bentham himself espouses. When Bentham talks about “rights,” he is never talking about granting the individual creature any inalienable right to life like those that might be found in contemporary “personhood” amendments that grant rights to a variety of different primates. Instead Bentham is only talking about the animal creature’s “right” to have its pleasures and pains weighted alongside those of other human creatures. Bentham’s footnote on “animal rights” makes this point clear. Though we ought to count the animal’s suffering, Bentham insists “we should still be suffered to each such of them as we like” because “we are the better for it, and they never the worse” (IPML 282). Bentham counts a slaughter-house death to be quicker and less painful than a natural death drawn out by disease. Bentham’s utilitarian calculations always preserves a place for this kind of life-for-death exchange.

autobiography—where the human is always capable of becoming beastly in his pursuit of pleasures.

Having inserted the idea of a “self” with a narrative into Bentham’s utilitarian system, Mill created the means for his own *Autobiography* to be reread on psychoanalytic terms. He opens his narrative with the assertion that the project of reform made him happy, but it does not. Then he closes his narrative with the assertion that his marriage to Harriet Taylor made him happy. In doing so, Mill raises an obvious question: did Taylor *really* make Mill happy? Mill declares emphatically that she did, indeed that she was “the chief blessing of my existence, as well as the source of a great part of all that I have attempted to do, or hope to do effect hereafter, for human improvement” (A 145). But Mill’s friends would gleefully rush to that interpretive problem in their private letters and posthumous reflections.¹⁵ After Mill’s death, Alexander Bain’s *John Stuart Mill: A Criticism with Personal Reflections* (1882) would resurface the question of hidden motivations that Mill had already raised. For Bain, Mill’s “hallucination of [Taylor’s] genius,” is only a manifestation of his earlier deprivation under his father (171). Thus Mill’s “severe intellectual strain prepared him for a reaction on the emotional side, and

¹⁵ Thomas Carlyle was especially captivated by Mill and Taylor’s friendship during the time when Taylor’s husband was still alive. In a gossipy letter, Carlyle titters to John Sterling that “under her husband’s very eyes, [Mill] is (Platonically) over head and ears in love [with Taylor]” (Hayek 82). As Carlyle makes clear, the energy of Mill’s affair with Taylor seems to be due to the fact that it remained unconsummated, accumulating energy in its very deferral. In another letter, Carlyle—evidently pleased by the drama—exclaims: “They are innocent says Charity: they are guilty says Scandal: then why in the name of wonder are they dying broken hearted?” (Hayek 85).

[...] the grand passion came in happily to fill up an aching void in his nature" (172). In mentioning Bain's analysis, my point is not to psychoanalyze the Victorian sage, but rather to suggest that Mill's rewriting of Bentham's theory of calculation lays some of the ground-work for the theory of psychoanalysis that would emerge by the century's end. Anticipating Freud, Bain reads Mill's desire for happiness in terms of a little family drama where the motivating force behind the formation of attachments is not the fulfillment of pleasure but rather the presence of a void left by his father. This story is only possible when the pursuit of happiness is, as Mill makes it, a matter of assembling a life narrative that stretches from early childhood into adulthood, where each part of the story matters for what follows. The interpretive move that Bain makes—seeing Mill's hallucination as the product of past lack—would not be possible in Bentham's utilitarian psychology that jumbles past, present and future together to be weighed simultaneously.

IV: Utilitarian Paradise

In his essay on "Place and Time" Bentham (like Mill) takes a moment to pause his critique of the English legal system and imagine a world where his reforms have been implemented. Operating in the imaginative mode of utilitarian calculation, Bentham offers up a list of indicators that are supposed to describe the new and

improved static state of society: "The perfection of law will be at its *acme*," Bentham proclaims,

when palpable injuries are unknown except by means of the laws by which they stand prohibited: when no acts to which man's nature is prone, are included in the catalogue of offenses, that do not deserve to be so: when the rights and duties of the various classes of subjects are so well defined by the civil code that there are no longer any controversies on the point of law: when the code of procedure is so framed that the few controversies which arise purely out of the matter of facts are terminated without any unnecessary expense or delay: when courts of justice are seldom filled, though always open without intermission: when the military forces of nations being broken down by mutual stipulation, not by mutual impotence, the burthen of taxes is rendered imperceptible: when trade is so far free, that no branch which might have been carried on by many is confined to few, nor any branch pinched by the pressure of taxes into a smaller compass than it would otherwise assume: when for the encouragement of such branches of industry as require positive encouragement, positive encouragement is given, and liberty, perfect liberty, to such as require nothing more: when the constitutional law is settled on such a footing, and the rights, powers and duties of servants of the public are so distributed and circumstanced, and the dispositions of the people to submission and to resistance so tempered and adjusted, that the prosperity resulting from the preceding circumstances is fixed: lastly, when the law which is the rule of men's actions is concise, intelligible, unambiguous, and in the hands of every man. (PT 203-4)

The rhythmic intonation of "when" the courts, the taxes, and the dispositions of men will be properly organized points to a moment in time just beyond the passage of time itself, when circumstances are "fixed." But as Bentham fully well recognizes, these considerations do not address the one thing that he claims matters most of all: will pleasures be increased by such measures? On this front, Bentham is less certain.

Returning us to the problem of *Frankenstein* and the way that the pleasures and pains of expectation threaten to ruin any static state of happiness, Bentham admits that even after

his reforms are in place, “all must be tantalized more or less with the prospect of joys which they are out of hope of tasting” (204). While Bentham generally insists that the legal and governmental reform are the surest means of bringing about “the greatest happiness for the greatest number,” the prospect of actual legislative success drives him to imagine a utilitarian life that is still plagued with the possibility of disappointment. Given the speculative nature of his individual, there is no guaranteed limit to those pains.

But Bentham, unlike Mill, does not imagine that any kind of “inward turn” can save us from this disappointment. Encountering the possibility that pleasure might be exhausted, Bentham proposes a different, paradoxical solution. “If this be paradise,” Bentham says, “paradise is but at best what the Asiatics meant by it, a garden: it is still, however, a very pleasant garden to look to in comparison of the wilderness of evils and abuses in which we have yet been wandering” (204). The “garden” becomes pleasant only after the wandering utilitarians stop imagining the pleasures that tantalize them and instead maintain their gratitude for the evils that reform will have already removed. In this vision of reform, the calculating individual who is propelled forward by the expectations of *future* pleasures needs a lively cultural memory that will force him appreciate the difficulties already overcome. Even for Bentham, the calculating individual cannot be managed by an appeal to speculations about future pleasures and

pains alone: he needs to constantly imagine himself in a narrative that has both a past and a future.

Chapter 2: Expanding Bureaucracy

While the novelists who followed Bentham were equal parts horrified and fascinated by the excessive disappointments and passions that might emerge from utilitarianism's calculating individuals, still more troubling was the question of what those calculating individuals might do when operating the levers of governmental power. The problem of managing calculating individuals is, after all, not just a problem of legislators gaining control over a potentially unruly population: it is also a question of how modern government would manage the corps of legislators and administrators who, Bentham insisted, were cut from the same self-interested cloth. Simply put, the problem facing Bentham's theory of government is the paradox of government by particular interests of the general interest. Recent critics of nineteenth-century liberalism have tended to approach this problem through the attempts of thinkers like J.S. Mill, Matthew Arnold, and George Eliot to imagine how individuals might be cultivated by their aesthetic experiences to engage in disinterested reason.¹ In this chapter, I will pursue a different route in order to show that nineteenth-century utilitarianism rejected such curious reformulations of "disinterest" and turned instead to bureaucracy as a means of governing the population. I locate both Jeremy Bentham and Charles Dickens in this

¹ For a discussion of how Amanda Anderson and Elaine Hadley offer two different approach this problem, see footnote 2 in the Introduction.

lineage as critics of bureaucracy who were nevertheless drawn to its paradoxical capacity to expand and reproduce the conflict between particular and general interests even as it tried to reconcile them.

The problem of particular and general interests that animates Bentham's utilitarian theory is nowhere more concisely demonstrated than in the "memoritor verses" that he wrote for his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*:

*Intense, long, certain, speedy, fruitful, pure—
Such marks in pleasures as in pains endure.
Such pleasures seek, if private be thy end:
If it be public, wide let them extend.
Such pains avoid, whichever be thy view:
If pains must come, let them extend to few.* (IPML 38)

A comparison of the poem's first three lines to its last three lays the problem bare. The first lines assume a reader ("thy") who has his own private ends and who seeks his own pleasures accordingly. But the last lines enjoin that same reader to resist his own pleasure-seeking nature and consider how he might order the optimum distribution of pleasure across the population in order to promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number. In a system that defines human beings as self-interested by nature, what individual could be capable of administering government on behalf of the common interest?²

² In *The Method of Ethics* (1874), Henry Sidgwick disaggregates the psychological assertion that individuals are driven by self-interest to seek their own greatest happiness and the moral proclamation that the best society is one where the total happiness is the greatest. He chides

Bentham answered the question posed by his poem with an elaborate plan for a bureaucracy designed to make those in administrative positions work against their own natural, self-interested inclinations. Before his death in 1832, Bentham had begun assembling this plan for his “Pannomion” in his three-volume *Constitutional Code*. For Bentham the “Pannomion” “in Greek [means] the *whole* body of the *laws*” (CC 11). The etymological association with his famous “Panopticon” prison is intentional: this body of laws would subject self-interested government functionaries to the same infinite surveillance as his prisoners by using documents, inspectors, and archives to hold them responsible for their work, thereby preventing them from exploiting their power over the citizens whose happiness they were appointed to promote.³ This procedure of subjecting all government functionaries to supervision seems reasonable enough, until

thinkers like Mill and Bentham who, in his view, confuse the two questions and think that one implies the other (4.1). In so disaggregating these two principles, Sidgwick skirts around the hard problem of Bentham’s whole governmental system: namely, how to *make* a world made up of self-interested individual organized for the purposes of securing the general interest. This is the difference between a text on the methods of ethical thinking and the governmental policy that Bentham set his sights on, in which no two questions can be so easily separated.

³ Although Bentham never used the word “bureaucracy,” that term started to come into popular usage when his writing career was getting off the ground. As Ben Kafka observes, the word “bureaucracy” first appeared in 1764 as a pun in a popular French newsletter that “simultaneously invoked and violated a well-worn semiotic code”: monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, and bureaucracy; governance by a king, a class, a people and then a desk (or *bureau*) (77). Bentham’s system can best be described as bureaucratic because it sought to remove power from individual persons and instead invest that power in a set of transparent procedures embodied by a collection of desks and documents—inanimate objects that supposedly lack the sinister quality of self-interest.

one asks “one of the most puzzling of political questions” originally posed by Bentham’s prison “*quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*” [who watches the watchmen?] (PW 46). Each supervisor required a supervisor who would in turn require supervision, *ad infinitum*. Though critics who follow him will never tire of noting bureaucracy’s capacity for infinite expansion, it is Bentham whose endless writings on the topic show where bureaucracy acquired that metastatic capability.⁴ Bentham endowed his plan with the capacity for boundless self-expansion the moment he sought to resolve the twin assumptions that individuals are by nature self-interested and that government must nevertheless operate for the good of the entire social body.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Charles Dickens shares Bentham’s sense that self-interested individuals could not be trusted to govern in the general interest—a suspicion in ample display in his depiction of bureaucratic expansion in *Bleak House*’s Chancery Court and *Little Dorrit*’s Circumlocution Office. But while Bentham can only attempt to solve this problem by adding more layers of self-interested supervision, Dickens asks his readers to consider their aesthetic responses to the display of self-interest. For Dickens, self-interest is not the standard issue psychological mechanism

⁴ In Weber’s *Economy and Society*, bureaucracy expands because its “[p]recision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, [and] strict subordination” combine to create increased efficiency that can only be managed by experts (973). Writing half a century later, Parkinson reverses Weber’s assessment of bureaucracy’s efficiency by showing how each additional administrator creates more useless work for every other (2). In these analyses, assessments of bureaucracy’s efficiency and social utility may differ, but all agree that it is an apparatus that expands without limit.

that motivates the whole population in a predictable pattern of action. Instead, Dickens's self-interested individuals are as grotesque as they are unique. For example, Mr. Wholes, the vampiric lawyer, is not just described in terms of how the mechanistic pursuit of his own interest secures abstract quantities of pleasure. Instead, he is registered in the novel as "a sallow man with pinched lips that looked as if they were cold, a red eruption here and there upon his face, tall and thin, about fifty years of age, high-shouldered, and stooping," a description that gives Bentham's mechanism a body that is like no other (BH 606). In such figures, Dickens works to make self-interest *interesting*, in the sense of the word that we tend to associate with our aesthetic responses to a text. The perverse bureaucratic tangle that allows some to take advantage of others gains the capacity to fascinate us as readers. Unlike in Bentham where every expression of self-interest always provokes more of the same anti-social sentiment, Dickens imagines an aesthetic response to self-interest that dares to be intrigued by its grotesque spectacle and functions as the basis for forming relations of mutual aid trust between people who share that response. In examining this aesthetic response to the spectacle of self-interest, Dickens further suggests that bureaucracy can both horrify and fascinate us because—even in its most life-destroying formations—it shares with communities of mutual aid the need to link people together in networks of dependency.

I: Bentham's Bureaucracy

The conflict between particular and general interests that motivates Bentham's bureaucratic project is not original to Bentham; it was built into the theory of European liberalism at its inception. Locke and Rousseau reconciled particular and general interests by positing a subject capable, as he matures, of negotiating the turn from private to public ends. Locke's *Second Treatise* assumes that once the law secures the individual's private property he will no longer concern himself with accumulating goods and defending his interests; rather, he will consider himself better off if everyone else is as well. Having arrived at this state of disinterest, Locke's individual was considered qualified to make and administer the law for the "public good of the Society" (325). Less confident in the individual's capacity to negotiate the turn from self-interest to disinterest, Rousseau adds the stipulation that a government of such "representative" men could work only so long as they did not discover their shared interests and combine to form a "partial faction." Should the governing class do so, other factions would form in opposition, and the "large number of small [individual] differences" that constitute the general interest would, in Rousseau's model of the social contract, devolve into a collection of warring factions where each sought to become the controlling interest (66). The Enlightenment reconciliation of general and particular interests thus rested on two conditions of possibility 1) that an individual's particular interests could actually be translated into his concern for the general interest, and 2) having been elected to

“represent” the general interest, that individual would refrain from combining with others to form a more powerful faction. By the last decades of the eighteenth century, these assumptions could no longer provide a plausible foundation for a theory of government. Once he had discarded the possibility of a disinterested legislator, Bentham had already embarked on the political logic that would produce an ever-expanding surveillance bureaucracy.

Bentham’s very definition of the individual’s interest as the private pursuit of maximum pleasure and minimum pain undoes the double nature of the individual presupposed by earlier models of liberal government. As he put it, “in the breast of each individual is the propensity to sacrifice all other interests to that which at each moment appears to him to be his own preponderant interest” (FP 13). Contra Locke, Bentham’s individual pursues additional pleasures even after his property is legally secure. Indeed, it is in that individual’s very nature always to desire more no matter the cost to others. With this anti-social conception of interest in place, the only way Bentham can imagine holding such a community of self-interested individuals together is by recourse to mathematical abstraction. He equates the “interests of the community” with “the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it” (IPML 12). Bentham’s insistence that pleasures and pains can indeed be measured quantitatively and then “summed up” has perplexed even those most sympathetic to his project. Stanley Jevons, for example, expressed his reservations thus: “I confess that it seems to me difficult even to imagine

how such estimations and summations can be made with any approach to accuracy.

Greatly though I admire the clear and precise notions of Bentham, I know not where his numerical data are to be found" (Theory 12). What Jevons misses is that Bentham does not understand the problem of government as the absence of data but rather a problem of the gap between private and public reason, a difficulty that the translation of collective affiliations into summable quantities is supposed to paper over. Dickens famously personified utilitarianism's failures on both these fronts in *Hard Times's* Mr. Gradgrind, the intellectually irresponsible father and M.P. who insists on weighing and measuring "any parcel of human nature" but cannot hold his family or his city together (HT 10).

It is altogether possible that Bentham felt he had painted himself into a corner in the course of outlining his grand bureaucratic system. He was certainly aware that an individual inclined by nature to sacrifice the good of others for his own preponderant gain would pose a still greater threat to the common interest should he acquire a position of power in government. Bentham's favorite case of administrative selfishness, which he recounted in footnotes added to several of his texts, was that of Alexander Wedderburn, a government functionary who, over the course of his career, managed to

gain salaries of 15,000 then 25,000 a year, a peerage, and 500 sinecures (IPML 15).⁵ In Bentham's view, Wedderburn succeeded in accumulating these privileges, not by virtue of an especially enterprising or immoral nature, but simply because he belonged to an administrative elite that formed a "sinister interest" — Bentham's term for the "partial faction" that threatened to undo Rousseau's entire model of good government.⁶ According to Bentham's logic, officials who form sinister interests harvest funds from the general population by developing arcane rules and practices and then demanding an ever-larger roster of beholden functionaries to administer the mess. Insofar as their salaries depend on the fees they charge for various transactions, these otherwise superfluous functionaries have every incentive to compound the problem of bureaucracy by sending citizens from one office to the next. In Bentham's words, these officials "maximize delay, vexation, and expense, in judicial and other modes of procedure, for the sake of the profit extractable out of the expense" (IPML 15). While he concedes that some individuals may have "social regard, sympathetic regard, the desire to see others happy," he counts the exercise of such virtues among the pleasures of "private life" and, as such, considers them obstacles in the way of good government (FP 14-15). Government functionaries with such private sympathies would be all the more

⁵ Bentham's account of the case of Alexander Wedderburn appears in revised versions of both Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* and his *Fragment on Government* that appear in the 1820s while Bentham was composing his *Constitutional Code* (IPML 15; FG 59).

⁶ In *Utility and Democracy*, Schofield traces the development of Bentham's concept of "sinister interest" from a critique of the legal system in particular to a critique of government administration in general.

likely to seek useless sinecures for their friends, which would in turn further multiply delay, vexation, and expense. In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens uses his portrayal of the Circumlocution Office to demonstrate how the general population suffers as forms pile up to the benefit of a comfortable administrative class that is always on the lookout for another sinecure to support another dithering relative.

Bentham's Pannomion proposes a bureaucratic system governed by and thus capable of governing in accordance with this theory of calculating self-interest. Modeled on the factory system, Bentham develops what he calls "Economy as Applied to Office" to reimagine once-elite administrators as the interchangeable parts of a managerial infrastructure (FP 1). Contrary to theories of bureaucracy that focus on the development of "experts," Bentham's officials are only ever "functionaries," contingent laborers who might be placed in or removed from a position based on their performance.⁷

Competitive examinations would ensure that the largest possible pool of qualified applicants was available for any given position, and performance could be tracked by having all functionaries submit exhaustive records of their respective actions. These records were then stored in a centralized "Universal Registration System," where each bit of paper could at some point be used as "evidence of *misconduct*—wilful, or through

⁷ The word "expert," meaning a specialized knowledge worker who cannot be easily replaced, only comes into common usage during the 1850s (OED). In *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State*, Goodlad observes that in practice Victorian bureaucracy turned to the very sort of expert that Bentham's system was designed to do without—namely, the Oxbridge elites whose knowledge of Latin and Greek allowed them to pass civil service exams that tested class standing more than they did practical knowledge (154-158).

negligence or rashness" (CC 224). Ineffective or corrupt functionaries would be singled out and removed from office, and their successors could take over after reviewing the relevant files. Bentham pointedly designed the Pannomion to curb corruption by producing a surplus population of administrators and subjecting each official to the same competitive market that made it possible for the factory system to manage its supply of labor.

It is not difficult to see how such an effort to economize government opened bureaucracy to limitless expansion. Bentham's plan not only saw to it that no individual inspector would be secure in his position but also guaranteed that the total number of inspectors would grow ever larger. For every report filed in the Universal Registration System, there had to be someone to review it, and such inspectors would in turn require their own inspectors to ensure that they are properly carrying out the activity of inspection (CC 280). Bentham predicted that this system would produce so much paper that portions of the Universal Registration System would have to be periodically destroyed in order to "prevent the useful from being drowned in the mass of useless matter" (CC 162). The waste paper that appears in *Bleak House's* rag and bottle shop appears in the Pannomion's bureaucracy as a byproduct of documentation run amok, becoming as unwieldy as the overlapping and conflicting procedures of common law and local administration that Bentham set out to reform.

The recursive need for new layers of inspectors ultimately forces Bentham to involve the entire population in the task of supervision that he equates with government.⁸ As a last desperate attempt to limit his bureaucracy, Bentham decided to give voting rights to every literate male citizen over the age of twenty-one, stipulating that all government functionaries must hold, or be subordinated to, elected offices (CC 26). Voters would, in this case, double as an additional layer of inspectors that Bentham calls the “Public Opinion Tribunal.” This tribunal relies on reporters to dig through the Universal Registration System for evidence of official mismanagement and on newspapers to publish the incriminating documents with commentary (SAM 60-64). In so expanding the franchise and insisting on the “liberty of the press,” Bentham had no intention of allowing individuals to question the principle of utility or the bureaucratic system based on that principle. His fear of any open deliberation on his foundational principles is perhaps most evident in his reaction to the French *Declaration of the Rights of*

⁸ This paradox reappears in Dr. Seuss’s *Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are?* (1976):

Oh, the jobs people work at! Out west, near Hawtch-Hawtch, there’s a Hawtch-Hawtcher Bee-Watcher. His job is to watch—is to keep both his eyes on the lazy town bee. A bee that is watched will work harder, you see.

Well, he watched and he watched. But, in spite of his watch, that bee didn’t work any harder. Not mawtch.

So then somebody said, “Our old bee-watching man just isn’t bee watching as hard as he can. He ought to be watched by another Hawtch-Hawtcher. The thing that we need is a Bee-Watcher-Watcher.”

Well, the Bee-Watcher Watcher watched the Bee-Watcher. He didn’t watch well. So another Hawtch-Hawtcher had to come in as a Watch-Watcher-Watcher. And today all the Hawtchers who live in Hawtch-Hawtch are watching on Watch-Watcher-Watching-Watch, Watch-Watching the Watcher who’s watching the bee. You’re not a Hawtch-Hawtcher. You’re lucky, you see. (26-27).

Man and the Citizen. As he saw it, only the combined effort of a population “so numerous, so unequal in talents, as well as discordant in inclinations and affections” could have produced the “miserable nonsense” of the doctrine of natural rights which, he claimed, could be used by any demagogue to overturn the legal order (RRR 319, 321). In his own Pannomion, Bentham accordingly limited the role of the citizen to that of a member of the Public Opinion Tribunal empowered only to vote specific officials in and out of office on the basis of evidence stored in the Universal Registration System (SAM 54).

If citizens were empowered to use these procedures to prevent the formation of “sinister interests” within the government, then government was empowered to prevent elements of the population from assembling factions that could contest the Pannomion. In practice, Bentham never thought that, if given access to government documents, any population would limit itself to the narrowly defined powers of the Public Opinion Tribunal. As the last line of Bentham’s poem suggests (“If pains *must* come, let them *extend* to few”), the “few” who are unequally allocated pain would hardly sit still for that decision once they understood it (IPML 38). Bentham was well aware that transparent government was likely to spark protest. Anticipating, as he put it, that some “ten dozen of individuals, impregnated with effective malevolence” might attempt “the purposed destruction” of his infrastructure, Bentham proposed a “Preventive Service Ministry,” the military wing of his bureaucracy, to quell “popular commotion” (CC 454).

The very people called to serve as the Public Opinion Tribunal had to feel the threat of military force, lest popular assembly disrupt transparent governance.

Going by this final reiteration of the paradox, Bentham's bureaucratic apparatus predictably fails to reconcile particular interests with the general interest at the level of theory. The philosopher-accountant Richard Powers observes that "[t]hese systems have slowly crumbled because of the weight of their informational demands, the senseless allocation of scarce resources to surveillance activities and the sheer human exhaustion of existing under such conditions, both for those who check and those who are checked" (2). Yet, as it expands to encompass both citizens and government functionaries, Bentham's Pannomion is the logical conclusion to the problem he poses for himself: how to build a society out of a collection of self-interested individuals? As Francis Ferguson insists, the purpose of any Benthamite institution is not merely to survey individuals, but rather to actually insert them into a community by "*giv[ing] social groups the means to make themselves felt by individuals*" (15). Bentham designed the Pannomion so that its self-interested functionaries would work with a sense that the population they managed could bear down on them at any moment, and the papers that his functionaries are always filing provide the material basis for that fear. I find this a useful nuance to the reading Foucault offers in *Discipline and Punish*, which focuses on the procedures by which Bentham's Panoptic prison forms invigilated individuals who are supposed to adjust their own behavior to comply with institutional norms. Ferguson shows us that

Bentham's aim was actually more specific than that. The disciplinary procedure that Foucault elaborates can prove effective only if and when the self-regulating individual imagines himself as part of an aggregate body that is in a position to evaluate him as such. Thus Bentham's is a discipline less concerned with policing the particular movements of the functionary's body than it is with making him recognize his place within a world of other self-interested individuals. The official must work for others or lose his job and vanish into the population. Such is the institutionally induced social consciousness at the base of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number."

II: Dickens's Novel Interest

Dickens picks up Bentham's critique of bureaucracy, and starts by satirizing the antiquated system of privilege that allows a cadre of administrators to abuse the very population they are supposed to care for.⁹ The Pannomion's watchwords "delay, vexation, and expense" are even overheard in *Bleak House* during an inquiry on legal reform:

If I understand you, these forms of practice indisputably occasion delay? Answer: Yes, some delay. Question: And great expense? Answer: Most assuredly they cannot be gone through for nothing. Question: And unspeakable vexation? Answer: I am not prepared to say that. They have never given ME any vexation; quite the contrary. (BH 622)

⁹ As Marjorie Stone points out, Dickens became acquainted with many second-generation Benthamite reformers during his time as a Parliamentary reporter.

From which exchange issues the Benthamite condemnation: “The one great principle of the English law is, to make business for itself” (BH 621). When it comes to reforming this flawed administrative system, neither Bentham nor Dickens trusts an assembly of disinterested individuals to do the job. To drive the point home, Dickens has Tom Jarndyce blow his brains out in a coffee house, the fabled eighteenth-century setting where individuals gathered to exercise their reason in debate (BH 16).

A number of critics have suggested that Chancery can hardly represent Dickens’s understanding of modern government because his novel depicts it as an archaic institution.¹⁰ I see those archaic characteristics as the signs that Dickens conceded Bentham’s point that self-interest is and has been built into the very notion of government and that even its modern forms inherit the problems of an earlier historical moment. Such features suggest that Bentham’s proposed solutions could do no better at managing a population of self-interested individuals than the system he sought to reform. In *Bleak House*’s Mr. Vholes we have a bureaucrat who brings a distinctively modern understanding to the parasitism he practices, and his post-Enlightenment understanding of the art of government allows him to turn Bentham’s critique of bureaucratic self-interest into a rationale for pursuing it. Vholes is every bit the

¹⁰ Failing to see how the attempt to economize might generate its own bureaucratic nightmares, Kathleen Blake argues that Chancery is “as far as possible from Panoptical” —and thus as far as possible from Bentham—because it is “uneconomical” and “self-serving at the expense of those it serves” (11).

reputation-conscious paper-pusher Bentham wanted his Pannomnion to create: a functionary who not only tolerates, but actively courts, inspection as he openly acknowledges that he is a self-interested actor looking to feed his family at his client's expense. "In attending to your interest," he says to Richard, "I wish to have all possible checks upon me; it is right that I should have them; I court inquiry" (BH 624). Yet in advising his clients to view his services with the "distrustful eye of business," Vholes persuades them to turn that same suspicion on friends and family (BH 624). The lawyer practices exactly what Bentham's Pannomnion sets out to demonstrate: namely, that when one assumes all social relationships are, at heart, conflicts of interest, then the bureaucrat will appear *more* trustworthy because his actions are recorded in transcripts and subject to supervision.

Suspicious as Dickens is of a bureaucratic answer to the question of how to turn endemic self-interest around so that it can serve the general interest, his position on bureaucratic governance is not only critical. The aesthetic drift of Dickens's fiction suggests otherwise: that institutional bureaucracy, for all its corruption, indeed harbors a creative force capable of generating pleasure. He shows his readers something of this force in the Circumlocution Office's "sprightly young" clerk, Ferdinand Barnacle, who lights up when explaining to frustrated visitors that the whole apparatus of government is a "a politico diplomatico hocus pocus piece of machinery, for the assistance of the nobs in keeping off the snobs" (LD 131). Ferdinand's interests lie not in a self apart from

the office that hopes to gain an unfair advantage but rather in his passionate attachment to procedures that he knows to be horrendously wasteful and unjust. While other officials warm desks and take long lunch breaks, Ferdinand works tirelessly to create useless impractical sinecures by marshaling the activity of officials who would otherwise stand motionless like “cows in the Cuyp picture” (LD 587). In the figure of Ferdinand, Dickens claims that bureaucracy does not expand by means of a slothful self-interest that works as little as possible to extract as much as it can. If bureaucracy is to encompass the city, it must, like the novel, draw on the vital energy of human ingenuity. For the novelist, such vitality is admirable in itself, even if it serves systems that are ultimately as life-destroying as the Circumlocution Office. Dickens even allows his dutiful protagonist, Arthur Clennam, to send Ferdinand off “with a real feeling of thankfulness for his candor and good humour” —gentle treatment in a book that shames rent collectors and suicides financiers (LD 771). The novel can do this because Ferdinand’s passionate attachment to his position suggests that under the dross of Circumlocution there is a pulsing, sustaining life-force that, more than anything else, wants to assemble people for ends good and bad alike.

By using his aesthetic rewriting of bureaucracy to call our attention to the vitality that sustains it, Dickens is going for a deeper critique of Bentham than simply exposing the deleterious effects of too much paperwork. To insist that life itself is inseparable from a force that seeks connections, even before it seeks advantage in forms of

domination, is to contest the first premise that motivated Bentham's Pannomion. For Bentham, interest is attached to the self, and individuals are compelled to seek advantages in the form of accumulated pleasures and property. Dickens, however, posits a form of interest as *inter-esse*, a state of "between-being" prior to the "self" of Bentham's self-interest. According to this concept of interest, our fundamental compulsion is to link our lives to the lives of others. *Bleak House's* Esther comes to understand the composition of this social fabric when illness causes her to lose the temporal thread of her personal history and to see all her connections "mingled together" (BH 555). That this understanding of human existence escapes the categories of Bentham's theory is indicated by her feverish vision of herself as both one and many, "a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which *I* was one of the beads!" (BH 555-56). Bentham has difficulty imagining any cohesive social order because the drive animating his individuals has no necessary social component; for him, the well-ordered society can only be imagined in terms of a set of individuals who are somehow prevented from inflicting undue amounts of pain on each other. Dickens, by contrast, assumes that all lives are necessarily linked. The proposition that humans fundamentally seek connection makes it possible for Dickens to imagine both that Esther is driven by the compulsion to gather others for the purpose of providing care *and* that Ferdinand Barnacle is driven to gather others for the purpose of creating new sinecures. Both live between others, involuntarily facilitating and managing the networks that

constitute the social life of the city.

In this unsentimental world of connections, less-skilled predators can organize themselves into little communities of mutual aid, but their efforts never overturn the energetic and dangerous currents of self-interest that remain part of the city's vital life.¹¹ In *Hard Times*, the circus master Mr. Sleary insists, "there ith a love in the world, not all Thelf-interestht after all, but thomthing very different," a locution that presents love as a way of being *in* the world rather than an escape from the laws of scarcity and competition (HT 282). Though Sleary's characteristic lisp softens "Thelf-interestht," his circus does not abolish it. This community of performers is constantly struggling with a city that incessantly gathers people into its own abusive bureaucratic networks: we are told of Emma, who lost her young husband in an elephant-related accident and then marries a cheese monger who is "makin' a fortune" —no doubt due to graft—as a poor-law administrator in Coketown (HT 209). The circus responds to this dangerous network, not by destroying the nexus of self-interest but rather by renewing its commitment to support those who support it, even in opposition to the rule of law. Thus we find that when the competitive Bitzer tries to secure a better position for himself by handing Tom Gradgrind over to the authorities for minor bank fraud, the novel doesn't

¹¹ Dickens, to be sure, was far from the only nineteenth-century writer to challenge the notion that social life is structured by universal, calculating self-interest. Pyotr Kropotkin faces off a notion of mutual aid against Huxley's Darwinism in order to argue that without mutual aid a species would have neither the means nor the motivation to survive as a group.

condemn Bitzer's self-interest on moral grounds but rather stages a slapstick scene in which the calculating schoolboy is swept off by a dog-and-horse show, thereby demonstrating the circus community's characteristic way of looking after its own (HT 279). Rather than a critique of self-interest, what we get is a new spectacle that reacts to self-interest's raw possessive force. Little communities of mutual aid also form in *Bleak House's* London under Esther's supervision, but this novel's rescue attempts fail more often than they succeed, because networks of care and abuse remain inextricably bound to one another in a relation of action and reaction. When Skimpole explains that, for a bribe, he sent the orphan Jo out of Esther's care and into the streets to die, Esther has "nothing to offer in reply" (BH 935). Confronting the brute fact of self-interest, the novel has no antidote, except to show that self-interest is no more universal than mutual aid.

Dickens makes the brute fact of self-interest's intractable presence palatable to his readers by transforming self-interest from Bentham's standard-issue psychological mechanism into a lived practice that is always as unique as it is ostentatious. In other words, Dickens makes self-interest *interesting*, an aesthetic spectacle. Though Bitzer of *Hard Times* runs a cost-benefit analysis before his every action, he is himself a surprising anomaly produced by a school of political economy that cannot seem to succeed in making another student so gleefully attached to the principles of self-interest. In his peculiar grabbing and grubbing mode of predation, Bitzer joins the ever-varied cast of Dickensian creatures who live at the expense of others, no two of which are ever alike.

Vholes provides for his family by sowing dissent in other families, while Skimpole generously affords others the pleasure of paying his debts, even when they can't afford it, and Turveydrop celebrates luxurious deportment at the expense of his son and daughter-in-law (BH 628, 98, 277). None of these predators choose their particular mode of being after a calculating consideration of other possible predatory practices; even Bitzer fails to consider the cost of approaching every social interaction as a problem to be solved by cost-benefit analysis. Rather, these creatures constitute, like Ferdinand Barnacle, a menagerie of parasites that compulsively enact their own peculiar ways of attaching themselves to others.

Gilles Deleuze proposes a similar post-sentimental reading in his brief discussion of *Our Mutual Friend*, which focuses on the moment when Rogue Riderhood is pulled up from the river as nothing more than "a life" to the community that gathers at the scene of his rescue (28-29). Although those assembled know and indeed hate the *person* Riderhood as he goes about his daily doings, they nevertheless feel a connection to the spectacle of a man wavering between life and death. As usual, Deleuze is unmercifully precise: what the community sees in the dying Riderhood is *not* a sentimental vision of life-in-general that Bentham tries to grasp with his concept of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." Rather, what they see is vitality coursing through life that manifests itself in the singular, as it does in the rogue who, after being revived, is compelled to continue linking people together in his own particular way by pilfering the

corpses that float down the river. All lives are linked, but each life is linked to others in a manner singularly its own, and it is that very distinctness that makes *a* life worthy of being a spectacle in the first place. As Deleuze insists, *a* life is a shared condition in which each “can be mistaken for no other” (29). Even Esther’s beatific encounter with life as an interconnected network cannot fix on one figure, instead stuttering between necklaces, rings, and circles, as her total vision breaks into a succession of distinct images (BH 555).

In Dickens’s hands, bureaucracy’s mode of connecting people together becomes a form of *inter-esse* that offers its own distinctive pleasures. *Bleak House* ends by coming back to the problem of scarce resources that supposedly started the competition between the proliferating cast of self-interested clients and lawyers. Restaged in one of the novel’s marriage plot, this scarcity problem forces Esther to choose a husband (Jarndyce or Woodcourt), leaving one man happy and the other disappointed. But Dickens recognizes that the managerial system he has been critiquing also gives him a way to imagine a form of pleasure in facilitating the pleasures of others. On giving up Esther to his sexual rival, Jarndyce proclaims: “what do I sacrifice? Nothing, nothing” (966). The pleasures that Jarndyce receives in compensation for giving up a happy marriage with his ward are the pleasures of arranging little surprises for Esther and Woodcourt: building a second Bleak House and making a game of insisting that he only wants Esther to help organize the home that he will in fact gift to her and her new husband.

Jarndyce's desire for happiness is secured when he finds a position for himself as the endlessly flexible mediator for the desires of others, a position not entirely unlike Ferdinand Barnacle who also finds joy in making a place for random relatives. Rather than functioning as a self-interested individual, Jarndyce serves as a mediator *between* the interests of others. Dickens thus offers a paradoxical resolution to the problem of the scarcity of pleasure that I discussed in the last chapter. When Mill and Bentham imagine that there might not be enough pleasures to go around, Dickens's proposal is perhaps truer to the spirit of Bentham's own utilitarian theory. In a system with an ever-expanding roster of managerial intermediaries, there might be space for ever more Jarndyces and Barnacles to take up the work and pleasure of mediating the desires of others.

In Bentham's bureaucracy, as I have argued, each performance of self-interest provokes a layer of supervision in which self-interest inevitably reappears, adding yet another layer to the bureaucratic apparatus. But when Dickens insists that all lives, both those tending towards self-interest and those tending towards mutual aid, are linked, he offers his readers a way to imagine that mutual aid's intensity might be *increased* by its proximity to self-interest. Thus when Mr. Turveydrop of *Bleak House* displays the costly Department that takes advantage of his son's filial duty, an old woman is moved to apostrophize, "Oh! [...] I could bite you!" (BH 227). What Dickens describes as the old woman's "infinite vehemence" performs a cannibalistic inversion of vampiric self-

interest that manifests itself as an equally compulsive concern for others (BH 227). Such sudden, uncalculating reactions are everywhere in Dickens: in *Hard Times*, when Bitzer's calculations prompt him to betray Tom Gradgrind, his gesture also mobilizes Sleary's circus to extend its care to that same whelp. In Dickens's world, when self-interest is a spectacular display, it becomes an aesthetic performance that is capable of jolting other individuals out of the categories of the self and moving them to form new associations. Once self-interest becomes *interesting*—thereby grabbing our attention and giving it a shake—Dickens can redistribute the reader's attention across the whole social field where one sees little communities of mutual aid as part of the pattern of self-interest, a combustible mixture that also creates the possibility for new connections.

III: Suspicion's Institution

According to both Bentham and Dickens, modern bureaucracy is the logical response to the premise that all individuals are self-interested and must be supervised lest each please him or herself at the expense of others. Given that its desideratum is to monitor virtually everyone, we can regard bureaucracy as a suspicious institutional formation. Its incentive to grow is, as I have argued, inherently boundless. In D.A. Miller's concise formulation, "the definitive dream of bureaucracy" is "to turn the end it serves into the means of its own expansion" (68). This institutional organization of suspicion is not only a problem for nineteenth-century political theory; it is also a

problem for literary studies.

In *The Limits of Critique*, Rita Felski argues that the “hermeneutics of suspicion” provides the affective force behind the critique that D.A. Miller performs in his classic study of the novel as a panoptic machine that trains readers in “the rhythms of bourgeois industrial culture” (Miller 83).¹² More than an incentive for literary readings derived from the insights of Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx, suspicion is, for Felski, a way of being in the world that finds pleasure in assuming that the text harbors a guilty secret that it is the critic’s job to detect. She contends that Miller’s artfully sinuous readings expose Dickens’s domestic fiction as a device that turns readers into their own self-policing detectives, and she further argues that the evident pleasure of Miller’s reading procedure is in act of getting one over on the novel. But, Felski asks, “What happens to critique once it is entrenched as a professional protocol and a disciplinary norm in its own right?” (119). Don’t those animating suspicions reproduce us as yet another layer of bureaucracy that takes part in a death-spiral of diminishing returns—a veritable dust pile of readings that accuse their predecessors of taking the novel at face value? Miller’s study alone has launched so many imitations and adjustments that it is something of a cliché in *Bleak House* criticism to observe that a novel about the proliferation of

¹² Felski follows a line of thought begun by Sedgwick in her essay on paranoid reading and followed up by Best and Marcus in their edited volume of *Representations*. Such critics have argued in a variety of ways that the methods of critique developed over the last thirty years, from Foucaultian New Historicism to Derridian Deconstruction, have not only tended to alienate us from the texts we read but also, and perhaps more damningly, have become predictable and routine.

paperwork has generated a critical archive that compounds the “great heaps, and piles, and bags and bags-full of papers” that constitute the novel itself (BH 397). It is as if Felski identifies the problem of liberal governance that generates Bentham’s boundless bureaucracy as the problem of critique more generally, namely, that suspicion gives rise to endless productivity that threatens to create institutional inertia.

In Dickens’s hands, however, suspicion does not produce a modernity that has, in Bruno Latour’s phrase, “run out of steam.” Rather, as I have argued, the suspicion that sustains institutionalized bureaucracy also animates contrary formations of trust and mutual aid. The pages of Esther’s narrative transform excessive indignation into calmly documented complaints that become the basis for friendship. Rather than simply attacking the objects of their disgust, those with grievances come to Esther so that the injustice they see and suffer might be recorded. Caddy Jellyby bypasses her obliviously derelict mother to lay her tearful confessions in Esther’s lap, while the old woman who feels compelled to bite Mr. Turveydrop stops short of assaulting the object of her “infinite vehemence” and becomes Esther’s “informant” instead (BH 83, 227). Where the accumulation of documents in Bentham’s public archive would provide each self-interested individual the means of checking up on every other and thus stoking still more paranoia, in *Bleak House*, documentation does nothing to punish and thus check the bad managers of home and office. Instead, the process of notation that composes Esther’s narration provides temporary relief after the fact of injury and so acts as a

substitute for destructive protest. Rather than a project for reforming a bad world, Dickens's palliative bureaucracy offers his readers a means of imagining how sustainable social bonds might be formed within that world.

In Felski's plea for a "postcritical" engagement with texts, she claims—and I believe her—that she has no intention of banishing critique from literary studies. She is promoting the idea that critique ought to be considered one good thing among others rather than "the only conceivable good thing" (118). I would submit that insofar as liberal intellectuals have internalized Bentham's contradictions, it must prove exceedingly difficult to institutionalize such an ecumenical approach. In her argument for an alternative to critique, Felski does not spell out how critique might remain part of our critical milieu without once again becoming, to borrow her metaphor, methodological kudzu (175). In this respect, I regard Dickens's literary tactics particularly illuminating because he accepts an environment animated by self-interest and conducive to suspicion, but he does not respond in kind by adding still more suspicion. Rather, he suggests that self-interest might be a source of amusement and shared suspicion the impetus for lasting trust and affection. Critique, after all, has always been something that people do together, and that shared practice is capable of creating friendship and enmity and envy and admiration and any number of other singular responses to the performance of any one particular suspicious reading.

Chapter 3: Panoptic Economics

One of the things that a bureaucracy can do is employ people. For all the worry that Dickens displays over whether the work done by functionaries and paper-pushers is the Circumlocution Office's parasitism, or Esther Summerson's professional care, the one thing his novels recognize is that a bureaucratic apparatus gives people a place to be. Putting the problem in slightly different terms, Anthony Trollope's novel, *The Three Clerks* (1857), goes one step further to imagine that bureaucracy's capacity to employ useless people might be one of its redeeming factors. When the kindly manager of the "Internal Navigation Office," Mr. Oldershole, is confronted with a studious utilitarian reformer who asks if his office serves any useful purpose, the career civil servant

felt a hearty inward conviction that his office had been of very great use. In the first place, had he not drawn from it a thousand a year for the last five-and-twenty years? Had it not given maintenance and employment to many worthy men who might perhaps have found it difficult to obtain maintenance elsewhere? Had it not always been an office, a public office of note and reputation, with proper work assigned to it? The use of it—the exact use of it? Mr. Oldeschole at least declared, with some indignation in his tone, that he had been there forty years and knew well that the office was very useful; but that he would not undertake to define its exact use. (528-29)

We might say that Mr. Oldeschole is rejecting the utilitarian rationality of Bentham's Pannomion, which insists on monitoring all government functionaries and asking them to give a precise account of their activities. But, in this chapter, I want to consider the possibility that Oldeschole's protest might also accord with an important strand in

Bentham's thinking on political economy: the problem of what to do with surplus people who might find it "difficult to obtain maintenance elsewhere." Trollope's novel focuses on the problem of young men who need a place with a salary in order to develop from dissolute spendthrifts into responsible adults. Bentham's focus, as we will see, is larger: not the mediocre men of Trollope's middle class, but rather the whole mass of the working poor who might be tossed out of the job by the fluctuations of capital and changes in the labor market. For Bentham, the problem of the surplus population is bigger than any one individual government office, and will require an employment solution larger in scope than the few sinecures that persist in the sleepy corners of Trollope's England. The solution that Bentham offers will be the massive apparatus of his Panopticon.

Filtered through Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, Bentham's Panopticon, with its central tower and ring of surrounding cells, has come down to us as the blueprint for institutions that produce self-policing subjects—the modern school and hospital, as well as the prison. But Foucault only quotes from the initial sketch of Bentham's prison, drawn up in a set of letters that the utilitarian philosopher traded with his brother in the 1780s. In the more than twenty years that he spent refining his plans and hectoring Parliament to secure funding and a site, Bentham came to see his institution as something more than a means of disciplining and reforming individual docile bodies. The Panopticon, as Bentham saw it, would be the means of solving *the* problem of early

nineteenth-century political economy: namely, what to do with the surplus population that was at once industrial capitalism's condition of possibility *and* the restless mass that threatened revolution? Bentham's response to the problem of the surplus population pushes him to imagine his prison as *both* a machine for disciplining docile bodies *and* a plan for a centrally managed subsistence economy that would bring about full-employment. Paradoxically, Bentham's plans for a massive prison-industrial complex that would detain the unemployed and protect private property also becomes a prototype for the socialist state. What I am proposing, in other words, is a biopolitical reading of Bentham's prison that shifts our attention away from the architecture that manages individuals and towards the political economy that attempts to manage populations.

For literary studies Bentham's Panopticon has long served as one of our a most powerful models for what the novel can do. Following Foucault, it was D.A. Miller who, in *The Novel and the Police* (1989), taught us that the novel is itself a disciplinary apparatus that trains its readers in the procedures of self-surveillance more effectively than any prison ever could. Wilkie Collins's sensation fiction served as a central part of Miller's argument: addressed directly to the "sympathetic nervous system," these early detective novels gave Miller a subtle way of talking about how fiction turns turns us inward and makes us see our bodies as the inscrutable source of our own self-identity (146). For Miller, the search for the eponymous diamond in Collins's *The Moonstone*

(1868) is beside the point; the detective plot instead serves as “a parable of modern policing power” that enacts the “explicit brining-under-surveillance of the entire world of the narrative” as household’s inhabitants attempt to discover the hidden basis of the normative impulses that the novel reaffirms (51, 35). However, as the Foucaultian reading of Bentham’s prison does not quite follow the logic of Bentham’s prison through to its conclusion, so D.A. Miller’s own Foucaultian reading of Collins’s novels comes up short against the dialectical potentials built into Collins’s work. By rediscovering the socialist element of Bentham’s privatized prison, I will be arguing, we can return to the sensation fiction that has so often been read in terms of totalizing surveillance and see that its commitment to surveying the population as part and parcel of a utopian socialism that imagines no piece of evidence, and no person, can be discarded as mere surplus. The question that joins Bentham and Collins’s work on surveillance to the theories of Karl Marx and the utopian fiction of Edward Bellamy is the question of how to attend to the surplus population.

This rereading of the Panopticon’s biopolitics focuses on the problems of political economy and so differs from other major reconsideration of Bentham’s prison offered in the wake of Miller and Foucault’s interventions. In *The Watchman in Pieces* (2013), David Rosen and Aaron Santesso focus on the way that Bentham’s prison resembles a theater, and they argue that the model of surveillance it proposes is one where the individual is not self-surveying but rather always imagines himself performing for a crowd. Like

Foucault, Santesso and Rosen draw from Bentham's initial sketch and are most concerned with the question of how the individual experiences his own subjection. They do not inquire into problems relating to the circulation of goods and labor that preoccupy the larger mass of Bentham's writing on the subject. In a different reconsideration of Bentham's Panopticon in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State* (2004), Lauren Goodlad argues that inasmuch as we understand Bentham's prison as a model for English government we are mistaking the history of nineteenth century state institutions. While many critics following Foucault have used Bentham's Panopticon to imagine a centralized state apparatus, Goodlad insists that the practice of government in nineteenth-century England is best understood in terms of the decentralized "pastoral power" that Foucault describes in his later lectures on *Security, Territory, Population*. When it comes to questions of how nineteenth-century government was actually practiced, I am inclined to agree with Goodlad. But I would add that in order to understand the utopian impulse of nineteenth-century socialist literature, we need to return to the Panopticon and see how it proposes a dialectic, where the figure of the surplus population that endangers private property becomes the object of imaginative management that makes the utopian institution thinkable.

I: Bentham's Socialism

Much might be made of the resemblance between the logic that animates Bentham's vision of the Panopticon and the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act that established workhouses for paupers.¹ The act's two of the major foci of that act resemble principles that Bentham regularly articulated in his own writings on the poor laws: (1) the principle of "less eligibility," which insisted that the pauper who enters the work house should find his living conditions worse off than those of the poorest "free" laborer, and (2) the "workhouse test" in which individuals would only receive relief if they chose to enter the workhouse.² Such provisions were designed to ensure that no body who could find labor elsewhere would willfully choose to become a public burden. Bentham's version of this argument is best summed up in his discussion of the "*Rule of Severity*" as the central principle of his prison economy:

Saving the regard due to life, health, and bodily ease, the ordinary condition of a convict doomed to a punishment which few or none but individuals of the

¹ Prior to 1834, the poor were cared for on a model that took the Lockean countryside as its imagined field of operation. In what became known as the "Old Poor Law," introduced in the Tudor period, relief was provided to destitute individuals out of a tax levied on landowners and tenants and distributed by local parish officials in accordance with a complicated and constantly changing set of distinctions and categories about what kinds of people might receive what kind of relief. The population boom that Malthus describes led to widespread call for reform as poor rates rose.

² Gertrude Himmelfarbe notes that in practice the 1834 Poor Law "proved to be less effectual than the reformers would have liked, subject to so many compromises, exceptions, evasions, and regional variations that an entire literature has grown up demonstrating the gap between the law and its applications" (153). In other words, the categories either established by law or imagined by Bentham were constantly redrawn in practice.

poorest class are apt to incur, ought not to be made more eligible than that of the poorest class of subjects in a state of innocence and liberty. (PW II 122-23)

Yet even within this “rule of severity,” Bentham makes the crucial modification in paying due regard to “life, health, and bodily ease.” Though the conditions of the prisoner must be worse than that of the free laborer, the prisoner’s body must be kept in good working order for the purposes of performing profitable labor. Attempting to design a diet that worked under the “Principle of Severity” Bentham insisted that “Bread, though as bad as wholesome bread can be, [prisoners] shall have, then, in plenty: this and water, and nothing else” (PW II 63). This difference matters because, while the 1834 Poor Law defines the condition of its inmates in relativistic terms (“worse than that of a free laborer”) Bentham attempts to establish a bare minimum of sustenance necessary for maintaining life. The workhouses that were built after 1834 certainly failed to meet what Bentham would have identified as that bare minimum: in the infamous Andover workhouse scandal of 1845 the inmate Charles Lewis testified to a select committee about how the paupers who were employed crushing bones for fertilizer were forced to seek nutrition by sucking marrow out of the dust (Andover 9839). As we will see in what follows, it is Bentham’s commitment to a political economy that makes some minimum provision for health that leads him to imagine an alternative social system within the walls of his perfect prison.

In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith states that poverty is one of those “private misfortunes, for which our feelings are apt to go beyond the bounds of

propriety” and that “in the present state of society, this misfortune can seldom happen without some misconduct” (MS 163, 165). Seeing poverty in terms of individual misconduct, Smith was able to insist that the poor ought to restrain themselves from expressing their pain too acutely or else risk becoming an “object of contempt” (MS 165). This kind moralizing was not tenable for Bentham. When the advocate of “the greatest happiness for the greatest number” was trying to get his prison built in the 1790s, food prices spiked and the so-called “surplus population” reacted by staging riots and seizing granaries.³ As Leslie Stephen put it, the problem confronting Bentham and his reformist contemporaries was that “[t]he vagabond could be flogged, sent to prison, or if necessary hanged, but it was more difficult to settle what to do with a man who was not a criminal, but simply a product in excess of demand” (90). What Stephen is identifying is a change in the scale of how to think the problem of poverty in the early nineteenth-century: what is at stake is not the identity of an individual man (is he a criminal or not?) but rather the way that poverty is linked to the so-called “problem of population.” Malthus formulated this problem in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) where he argued that population growth will outpace food production, leading to an

³ Bahmuller explains the conditions of revolt latent in the food crises of 1795: “The price rises were so acute that the common people took matters into their own hands. In the spring and summer, England (both North and South) was the scene of a series of ‘food riots,’ conducted mainly by women. In Carlisle, for instance, women accompanied by young children seized all available grain, brought it to the public hall, and formed a committee to decide its price. The incident was characteristic: the ‘rioters’ neither rioted in the ordinary sense nor stole, but rather forced the sale of food at prices they considered fair” (33-34).

unsustainably large number of people and diminishing wages. Having raised this problem, Malthus's solution was simple enough: abolish all poor relief and let the surplus people die off until population reached its "natural" level. But for Bentham that "solution" would waste vast stores of labor power.⁴ As he saw it, the systemic problem of the surplus population demanded a systematic response.

As Bentham considered how his signature institution might intervene in the hot-button issue of the day, he imagined that his prison design might serve as the model for a whole network of "Industry Houses." These big houses would contain all unemployed people—old, young, healthy and infirm—and would release them from its walls only when the labor market found a use for them. Poor houses and almshouses had long existed in England and served as a means of providing for the infirm and elderly since at least the sixteenth century.⁵ What makes Bentham's institutional design distinctive is that it imagines a means not just of providing for the destitute but rather for controlling the flow of labor for the entire population. The task of corralling the unemployed would

⁴ As many have pointed out, the second edition of Malthus's essay (published in 1803) revises this argument and imagines that population growth might be suppressed as long as individuals refrain from early marriage. In *The Body Economic*, Catherine Gallagher sees Malthus's revision as a retreat from the original *Essay's* radical insight that sexual pleasure is a vital part of human existence and must be factored into any economic analysis (42). As we will see in the next chapter, Bentham also saw sexual pleasure as an important facet of human life, but would come to very different conclusions about how it ought to be managed.

⁵ Nigel Goose describes how the sixteenth century almshouse was not one institution set apart from others, but rather part of a patchwork of locally-run institutions connected to the Church of England without central management from the state. Only with the rise of the problem of population in the nineteenth century could the "poor" be identified as a distinct problem requiring their own distinct and increasingly centrally managed institutions.

be taken up by police officers tasked with prowling the streets, stopping those who looked like they might be unemployed, and asking:

Have you or have you not, any honest source of lively-hood? —If you have, produce it: —if you do not produce it, it is because you can not: if you can not, it is because you have none: —if you have none, there —in that Industry House —you will find it. (WPL 235)

In what might seem a rhetorical sleight-of-hand, Bentham insists that the people being sent to the industry house do not have the right to a trial because they are not being “punished” for being poor. Asking the question that no doubt occurred to his readers (“What is [the Industry House] then, if not punishment?”), Bentham offers the answer: “It is this: —it is a measure of simple precaution and security, operating indirectly to the benefit of him who is the subject of it—but as to direct and principle purpose, instituted and observed *for* the benefit of the community at large” (WPL 49). This response is at once a clumsy evasion of the question at hand (has *habeas corpus* been violated?) and a deft shifting of argumentative registers from the discourse of juridical discipline to the discourse of biopolitical population management. For Bentham, a government only comes up against the question of individual rights when it addresses a particular person charged with a particular crime. But the field of extra-judicial action that Bentham is defining does not look to the individual and his past maleficence, as a juridical institution does. Instead, Bentham’s prison scheme is a measure of “precaution and security” for the “community at large,” and it looks forward to the moment when unemployed individuals might form an unruly revolutionary mass. It was obvious to

Bentham that catching out individual rioters and charging them with crimes after the surplus population had started to revolt was beside the point. Because revolution posed a material threat to the subsistence of the nation as a whole, Bentham insisted that this threat had to be pre-empted with new systems of population management rather than sorted out on an individual, case-by-case basis after-the-fact.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault famously read Bentham's Panopticon as a machine for isolating and managing individual bodies. But Bentham himself always linked the question of how his Panopticon would discipline individuals to the question of how that disciplinary practice was part of a political economy aimed at managing the circulation of labor and goods. In doing so, Bentham's panoptic writings already lay the groundwork for Foucault's more recently published lectures on *The Punitive Society* (1972-73) and *Security, Territory, Population* (1977-78) (which Foucault was working on during and soon after his more famous study on the history of the prison). In his lectures on the *Penal Society*, Foucault stresses one important point that is missing from his discussion of the prison in *Discipline and Punish*: the problem of "illegalisms" (PS 145). In Foucault's account, the rise of the English bourgeois required the work of vagabonds and smugglers who "illegally" moved goods and evaded the system of levies and taxes set up by the feudal system of English law. In Foucault's account, the "punitive society" emerges in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in order to regain control of the moving bodies that bourgeois capitalism at first needed to upend feudalism's

juridical system. These are the moving bodies that Bentham's Industry Houses hoped to contain, the "vagabonds" whose unofficial means of employment would have to be channeled back into the "legal" channel of prison labor. In Foucault's lectures on *Security, Territory, Population* the biopolitical questions of managing the circulation of goods and labor returns: for the eighteenth-century physiocrat and the nineteenth-century sanitary reformer alike, the central problem of government is not disciplining individuals, but rather obtaining social security by carefully monitoring and directing the movement of populations. What Bentham's writings on the poor laws demonstrate is that he was just as concerned with the question of how goods and bodies would circulate in and out of the Panopticon as he was occupied with the question of how those bodies might be individualized, classified, and studied inside its walls.

We can best see how the Panopticon joins the questions of political economy to the problem of population management by considering an aspect of Bentham's prison that Foucault never quite got around to: Bentham's ambitious plan for financing his network of disciplinary institutions. Bentham imagined that his Panoptic workhouses would be run as a joint stock company that sold shares to members of the laboring classes for sums as little as £5 (WPL 4).⁶ Under the paradoxical title of the "National

⁶ This plan to establish a joint stock company for the purpose of managing his workhouses represents a change from his earlier plans to run his prisons on a contracting scheme. Writing in the appendix to his plans for the Panoptic prison, Bentham at first insisted that a joint stock company's board of directors could not be trusted to manage the prison effectively because their own money was not at stake (PW II 130). In his early 1780 sketches of the Panopticon, Bentham

Charity Company," this massive joint stock operation would reap the profits of inmate labor until other private manufacturers saw fit to re-employ them. More importantly, this financing scheme would "giv[e] to the lower classes a more palpable interest in the existence of government itself" by offering everyone who could save £5 a chance to profit from the labor of the bodies rounded up by policemen (WPL 4).⁷ Bentham was especially keen to peddle shares in his "National Charity Company" to Friendly Societies—small health insurance collectives that some workers subscribed to—because he imagined that once their members had a monetary stake in the prison-industrial complex they might "join in the exercise of authority over [the unemployed], rather than join with them in giving opposition to authority" (WPL 18). On this model of social control, private property is secured and revolution prevented, not by imposing a universal surveillance on all citizens, but rather by playing one portion of the laboring population off against another.

preferred a system where contractors would make bids to gain access to the prison labor, thus making the manager have a personal stake in making the prison profitable and (Bentham assumed) maintaining the health of the laboring population. The joint-stock company plan seems to have emerged in the 1790s as Bentham became more and more interested in how his prison might be used to manage a whole population, inside and outside the walls of his institutions. The advantage of joint-stock, in this context, was that it linked the prison population to a whole mass of investors rather than to just a single contractor.

⁷ Bahmueller points out that the still quite princely sum of five pounds would still have been a considerable barrier to entry for the average British laborer in the 1790 (124).

This financial scheme is part of the logic of Bentham's prison design as a whole, which insists that bodies must be kept in constant contact with the labor market. For Bentham, a prison constructed by taxpayer funds that merely housed criminals would be a waste of perfectly good labor power. Even in Bentham's earliest writings on the Panopticon, his most pointed critique of the eighteenth-century prison is not that it fails to reform inmates, but rather that it subjects inmates to the whims of overseers rather than to the rational demands of the market. In Bentham's eyes, the magistrate who seeks to bring about moral reform by condemning prisons to Sisyphean tasks like "beating hemp," "rasping logwood," and "drawing in a capstern" is a sort of sadist who takes pleasure in "the exercise [...] of his own power, and the display of his own wisdom" (PW 60; 58). Francis Ferguson's study of Bentham and the Marquis de Sade is correct to emphasize that both thinkers crafted their ideal institutions with an eye to assigning rank-order values to the actions that individuals do, whether it be beating hemp or taking a beating (13). But Ferguson's comparison of Bentham and Sade does not quite account for the crucial difference in Bentham's own institutional plan that always insists on valuing the actions of bodies in accordance with the profit their labor will fetch on the market outside the Panopticon's walls. For Sade, the determination of what is valuable, or sexy, is a matter of the libertine's own capricious preferences that hold sway in his own little gothic enclosure, whether it be vampirism in a castle or pedophilia in a monastery. Bentham's Panoptic managers have no such latitude: the only ends to which

discipline can be directed is that of producing products that will fetch a price on the open market. The Panopticon's manager can surely reap all the pleasures of observing and correcting the prisoner's behavior, so much so that Bentham imagines that his prisons might be opened up to visitors in order to both ensure the institution's transparency and create a new public amusement (PW 47). But the moment that discipline fails to secure a profit, the prison's managers have substituted their own private fantasies for the biopolitical imperative that demands the Panopticon function as an economically viable means of containing a dangerous surplus population.

In missing this difference, Ferguson misses the dialectical element of Bentham's scheme: the way that his commitment to bringing profitable labor to the market forces him to imagine the Panopticon as a self-contained socialist economy. Though Bentham certainly talks up his network of Industry Houses as a brutally effective means of pumping profit out of the destitute, there is an evident contradiction in his plan: how to profit from the labor power that private capital has already failed to profitably employ? Bentham seems to square this circle by insisting that the Panoptic workhouse will have coercive powers that far outstrip that of any private manufactory: "What other master" Bentham asks, "is there that can reduce his workmen, if idle, to a situation next to starving, without suffering them to go elsewhere?" (PW 71). But even this added coercive power would not solve the problem of regulating the labor market because, as Bentham himself observed, if the Panopticon really were capable of better mobilizing

labor power than any other factory, it would “do much mischief to rivals in trade” by underselling and potentially even shuttering its competitors (WPL 123). This problem raises some questions about what a Panoptic political economy would actually look like in practice. As the Panopticon grows larger and benefits from the economics of scale (which Bentham insists it would) more factories would be put out of business, more unemployed people would be sent to the Panopticon, and more private capital would flow into the prison system in search of a profitable investment, until Bentham’s network of “Industry Houses” had levied the advantages of prison labor into a massive monopoly. In the third volume of *Capital*, Marx speculates that joint stock companies like Bentham’s “National Charity Company” might actually facilitate “the abolition of the capitalist mode of production within the capitalist mode of production itself” (C3 304).⁸ Engels elaborates on this contradiction by describing the case of United Alkali Trust, “which has brought all British alkali production into the hands of a single business firm,” and thus has paved the road, “most gratifyingly, for future expropriation by the whole of society, the nation” (C3 316). In other words, the tendency of joint stock companies to consolidate and centralize production and form monopolies creates ripe targets for nationalization, a movement towards centralized management that Bentham’s prison already enacts at the level of theory.

⁸ Marx himself recognized the protosocialist element of Bentham’s theory and included him in plans of a “Library of the most outstanding foreign socialist writers.” See Duichin.

Already seeing where his own logic might take him, Bentham attempts to cut it short by insisting that it is “in the interest of traders in general” to “confin[e] the productive strength of this vast body as much as may be within the channel of its own demand” (WPL 123). In order to minimize the threat to private industry, the Panopticon must refrain from maximizing its profits and instead focus on using the labor power of its inmates to provide *only* for the inmates’ own food, shelter, and healthcare. At this point, Bentham’s Panopticon starts to become something other than the profit-maximizing “National Charity Company” that he claimed to be proposing. In a prison economy that keeps within the channel of its own demand, Bentham insists that the value of goods would be “dependent on and measured by use, not a value dependent on the faculty of exchange” (WP 122). What Bentham means by this is that there will be no market for goods in his Panoptic network. Instead, a board of directors decides exactly what needs to be produced in order to care for the maximum number of lives. This logic is exemplified in the recipes that Bentham designed for his prisons, which list not only ingredients and processes for cooking in bulk but also lists prices, including prep-time labor, all costed to the quarter-penny.⁹ In the Panoptic economy that Bentham is imagining, these pennies are not tallied for the purpose of measuring the difference

⁹ Tim Causer notes that we cannot be sure whether or not the recipes found in Bentham’s notes were truly intended for his prison or some other scheme for a centralized cooking kitchen (BPC 19). They were, however, composed at the same time Bentham was pouring all of his mental energies into his plans for the Panopticon.

between the prep-cost and sale price; rather the “price” that Bentham is so carefully calculating measures resources consumed against the total amount of nutrition provided. Within this self-contained economy, the care for life takes precedence over profit.

But this sequence of contradictions leaves some questions. Suppose the Panopticon really could organize its operations so as to undersell the competition. Suppose Bentham is correct to assert that, while inside the Panopticon, the inmates would “not be exposed to experience degradation, by competition, stagnation or any other causes” (WPL 122). Why not just replace industrial capitalism with the Panopticon altogether? Within the broader scope of Bentham’s theory there is little to argue against such a substitution. As a mechanism for training the future labor force, Bentham insists that the Panopticon is preferable to the reproductive family. Bentham imagined that the Panopticon’s managers might develop a set of best practices gleaned from the experience of raising hundreds of children, in comparison to any individual mother’s experience of raising at most a dozen (WPL 170). Moreover, subject to a father whose passions might make him “negligent as well as careful, rough and brutal as well as tender and affectionate,” the household is a sadistic institution that is “is screened from observation, exposed to no suspicion, and, practically speaking, without appeal” (WPL 170). Pushing the question further and considering what children might miss in a Panoptic education, Bentham asks whether “the liberal spirit and energy of a free citizen

would not be exchanged for the mechanical discipline of a soldier, or the austerity of a monk?" (PW 88-89). Having posed himself this question, Bentham answers it with a question of his own: "Would *happiness* be most likely to be increased or diminished by this discipline? –call them soldiers, call them monks, call them machines: so they were but happy ones, I should not care" (PW 89). In this gesture, Bentham insists that "happiness" does not reside in the liberal individual's sense of himself as an uncoerced and self-determining actor. Rather, the happy individual is a body with shelter and subsistence.

Bentham certainly imagined that his Panopticon would meet these basic needs of its inmates while securing much else beside. In his more utopian flights of fancy Bentham argues that the Panopticon would allow its inhabitants to participate in unalienated labor as they produce goods for their "comrades," and he imagines that children's games, which often inflict undue harm, might be replaced with more nourishing forms of exercise (WPL 122, 173-177). Perhaps the most aspirational part of Bentham's scheme is his insistence that the Panopticon would convert disabled "*fractions*" of people (the blind, the deaf, the dumb, the mad) into profit-generating "*integers*" (WPL 151). In the recombinative machine of his ideal institution, Bentham imagines that deaf inmates might be advantageously paired with raving lunatics, creating a working duo where one malady cancels out the other (WPL 156). In Bentham's Panopticon, each body's potential labor power is not a matter of the

individual conforming to a particular model of health or fitness; potential labor power is rather determined by the institution's design, which must find a way to make use of as many different bodies as possible. This dream of harnessing the labor of the disabled has always existed alongside the Industrial Revolution. Bentham and his cohort were all well aware of Adam Smith's famous declaration that the repetitive nature of industrial labor tends to render a man "as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become" (WN 987). But proponents of the modern factory also imagined that as industrial labor made the human creature into only a fraction of a man, so it might also create a society that included those who never counted as fully human to begin with. Writing in 1832, Charles Babbage marveled at the inventions of Isambard Burnel who contrived machines that could derive labor power from amputees, and at the efforts of the Liverpool Institute for the Blind, which put the sightless to work weaving sash-lines (15). The factory's utopian potential, if only it could be kept from laying people off, was that it could take any body, no matter how abnormally configured, and assemble it in productive social relations with others.

Moreover, as the Panoptic institution accommodates (and profits from) the labor of abnormal bodies, Bentham imagines that new pleasures would emerge for those whose maladies might otherwise have excluded them from society. Such pleasures include the "comforts of matrimony" that fractional people might find when placed in a community of the similarly disabled. The Panopticon was to be an improvement over

the “miserable and solitary existence” in a cottage maintained at the parish’s expense where a fractional person would otherwise be “shunned as a monster, and scarcely regarded as belonging to the society of men” (WPL 162). In this tableau, Bentham imagines what amounts to an alternative happy ending to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, where the monstrous mass might be incorporated into the laboring community of the Delacey household. What Bentham recognized was that such a happy ending could only come about once the ideal of the domestic household had been replaced with a new institutional matrix that discards the liberal ideal of the self-governing citizen and sees the population as a collection of bodies in need of sustenance.

The end that Bentham imagined for his Panoptic Industry House was not just that it would contain the bodies of all surplus people, but that it would actually grow that population as inmates procreated within its walls. For Bentham, this expanding population would be the key to the National Charity Company’s profitable future: children born inside the Panopticon would be called “apprentices,” trained in body and mind to labor at the moment of conception, set to profitable tasks at age four, and—in their capacity as trained laborers—serve to “defray” the costs of maintaining other infirm paupers (WPL 14). By Bentham’s reckoning, the larger this “indigenous” population of apprentices, the more profitable the whole concern might be. Contra Charles Dickens’s *Scrooge*, this is a plan *dedicated* to increasing the surplus population, and it is decisively opposed to the Malthusian logic that came to dominate the Poor Law

debates in the early nineteenth century. Even for those who did not agree with Malthus that poor relief should be abolished entirely, the architects of the 1834 Poor Law Reform Bill insisted on limiting pauper reproduction by designing poorhouses that would divide families and keep women, men, and children separate. This is in stark contrast to Bentham, who proposed a sleeping system where beds that held a couple would be placed next to cribs that would hold four children: a geometric pattern that suggests the Panoptic population might nearly double with every generation (WPL 500-501).¹⁰ Bentham's intention of keeping "apprentices" until they turn twenty ensures that they will not leave the prison until they have already passed a few years inside its walls in prime breeding condition. Though, in theory, Bentham's institution would churn out skilled workers, the National Charity Company's monopoly would leave them in a world racked with unemployment where few private factories could compete. The flows of capital investment would push apprentices back into the panoptic clearing-houses for the unemployed where they were born.

Bentham's writings on Industry Houses and the Poor Laws were researched and composed before the release of Malthus's famous *Essay on the Principle of Population* in

¹⁰ Gertrude Himmelfarb gives a sense of the raw numbers involved: "Starting with 250 industry-houses accommodating 500,000 people, the enterprise would expand until by the end of two decades it would comprise 500 houses and 1,000,000 people. Each of these houses would contain living and working quarters for 2,000 people, and every one of those people, Bentham boasted, would be under the constant supervision and 'absolute' authority of the governor—a claim as startling as the thought of 500 such houses run by a privately owned company with an exclusive contract for the support and employment of over 10 percent of the population of England" (79).

1798. After the release of Malthus's essay, Bentham seems to have lost a bit of the courage of his convictions in an institution that would expand the laboring population. As Gertrude Himmelfarbe notes, when Bentham published additional pieces of his plans for his Panoptic network after 1798, he simply removed any mention of the "apprentice" program that was originally supposed to be such an important aspect of the prison's self-sustaining economy (82). In order to see what happened to Bentham's vision of an expanding population and the institutions that might care for them in the nineteenth century, we need to turn not to Bentham's theory, but rather to fiction. As I will be showing in the next part, it is Collins's sensation novels that pick up on the utopian edge of Bentham's prison and imagines that a growing population of supposedly disposable people is essential to a modern economy.

II: Surplus in the Sensation Novel

When D.A. Miller read Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* as a parable of modern policing power, he noticed that the form of the detective novel contains the potential for an alternative political economy that—like Bentham's Panoptic workhouse—cuts against the imperatives of capitalist production. The detective plot, Miller suggests, evinces "an interestingly paradoxical economy" where "everything might count" (33). As he puts it, no "trifle" of evidence can ever be dismissed until the *dénouement* where "the text winnows grain from chaff, separating the relevant signifiers from the much

larger number of irrelevant ones" (33). Miller goes on to argue that this "paradoxical economy" turns out to be something of a red herring: his analysis turns our attention away from the sorting of clues to show how the supposedly exceptional activity of detection that the inspector brings into the household was always part of the rhythm of bourgeois life where maids and masters are constantly watching each other and every linen in the closet must be accounted for. But if we shift our attention from Miller's problem of surveillance to Bentham's problem of political economy, the "interestingly paradoxical" nature of the novel's information economy brings us back to the problem of population. Reflecting on Wilkie Collins's sensation novels, Anthony Trollope felt that they were filled with too much information about too many different people: "[Collins] seems always to be warning me to remember that something happened at exactly half-past two o'clock on Tuesday morning; or that a woman disappeared from the road just fifteen yards beyond the fourth milestone" (A 257). In Trollope's remarks, a surplus of information and a surplus of people go hand-in-hand, creating an unwieldy aesthetic mass. As I will be arguing here, the aesthetic problem of Collins's fiction is also the political problem of Bentham's Panopticon: how to manage a surplus population that seems to always be on the move?

In Collins's *The Moonstone* the country house and its values of propriety and discipline are ill suited to manage an unstable political economy and a mass of people bitter about the inequitable distribution of wealth. The most obvious example comes in

the figure of Limping Lucy who calls out in anger against the novel's hero, Franklin Blake, that "the day is not far off when the poor will rise against the rich" (184). Even the odious Miss Clack—whose "perceptions are so blatantly self-betraying," Miller tells us, "that a reader inevitably revises them"—disdains a legal system that would allow a spendthrift like Blake to marry into wealth while her own family was "ruined" by the contingencies of the capital market (Miller 169; Collins 191). Far from supporting Blake at Clack's expense, the novel shows the Verinder clan's favorite scion to be every bit as self-betraying as Clack when he responds to Limping Lucy's accusations with dismissive petulance: "The one interpretation that I could put on [Lucy's] conduct has, no doubt, been anticipated by everybody. I could only suppose that she was mad" (302). Here, Blake hails his readers into an assessment with which they cannot possibly agree. As Betteredge's narrative makes clear, Lucy is not "mad" but rather upset that Blake's wealth has allowed him to remain oblivious to the suffering of her friend Rosanna Spearman, the former thief who has been squeezed into service on the estate. For a thinker like Bentham, Blake's obliviousness is dangerous because it fails to consider the risks that surplus bodies pose to the whole social system. Slightly more astute on this score, the butler Gabriel Betteredge recognizes that Rosanna's situation is the result of an inequitable system of law that disproportionately punishes the poor for relatively minor infractions: though she "had been a thief," Betteredge observes, she had not been "of the sort that get up Companies in the City, and rob from thousands, instead of only robbing

from one" (21).¹¹ According to Betteredge, when the British legal system fails to regulate the volatile excesses of capital, and instead focuses on snatching up and disciplining petty thieves, the institutions of law and order prove themselves to be ill suited to the age of modern finance. As for the country estate that Betteredge adores, the fact that its likely inheritor might not even understand how the problems of population, finance, and political economy intersect augers ill for its future. If the landed estate is not able to manage the population, Collins suggests, then the nineteenth-century needs new institutions.

The threat of a malcontent surplus population even appears in the form of the novel's eponymous diamond, which carries a history of violent colonial dispossession with it wherever it goes. The diamond only became "property" in England after Colonel Herncastle stole it from India amidst the "plunder and confusion" of the Storming of Seringapatam (4). Collins's novel makes this violent act of British appropriation into only one of a long string of dispossessions stretching back to previous Muslim conquests in Southeast Asia. The violent "return" of the dispossessed Indian subcontinent appears

¹¹ What Betteredge sees (and Blake misses) is that the inhabitants of the country house are living in a time after the Joint Stock Companies Act of 1856, which ensured that individuals were no longer liable for debts incurred by a company beyond the shares that they themselves had purchased. Betteredge's brief comments on the dangers of limited liability companies are only one small part of a large discourse in mid-nineteenth century British newspapers that saw this new law as a stimulus to capital activity and a means of (perhaps dangerously) severing the connection between the individual's personhood and the integrity of his property that had been established in Locke's liberal theory. On the contradiction between limited liability and liberal personhood, see Kornbluh (52).

in the form of a group of murderous Hindu priests who will stop at nothing to get the diamond back. What is particularly surprising about Collins's novel is the way that it joins the problem of Indian dispossession to the problem of England's own native and destitute population. In order to infiltrate the country house, the priests discard their "high-caste" status to travel among England's transient poor, enlisting the help of homeless orphans and becoming one among the number surplus people that Bentham saw as a permanent threat to security (71). This mixing of Hindu priests and paupers at once serves to cast the poor and migrant classes as aliens in their own country. But it also serves to animate the novel's attention to marginal bodies: anyone might be part of this Hindu conspiracy, and none of the poor, disposable, or orphaned people who populate Collins's novel can be counted as bodies who can simply be ignored.

The more private property is perceived as endangered by a wandering and dispossessed population, the more important it becomes to create new institutions of surveillance and management. As in Bentham's prison, so in *The Moonstone*, the form that surveillance takes creates the conditions of full employment. A hint of the relationship between property's insecurity and job creation is suggested by Herncastle's act of employing lawyers and bankers to help him retain possession of both the diamond and his own life in the face of the Hindu threat. On the Verinder estate, the prospect of full employment is further advanced after the diamond is stolen and everyone becomes the possessor of potentially valuable information. When Inspector

Cuff enters the narrative, he understands perfectly well that he is not looking for an individual criminal so much as trying to organize the labor of the entire estate in order to keep valuable information from being lost. Framing the process of communal detection as communal work, Cuff insists that he is not accusing the servants of anything but rather wants them all to “lay their heads together and help me find [the diamond]” (102). The Moonstone’s disappearance even becomes something of a full-employment act for useless relatives, as Miss Clack is paid to do her part in recording the diamond’s story. In the detective novel’s information economy, no one can be left to wander about like “a product in excess of demand” (to recall Leslie Stephen’s phrase). This is the context that makes Franklin Blake’s dismissal of Rosanna’s misery a dangerous neglect of the imperatives of a modern information economy. As Cuff, Clack, and any number of other workers who come through the estate insist, there is no such thing as a “trifle” in *The Moonstone* (99, 195). The army of detectives mobilized on the Verinder estate to recover the diamond replicates the situation depicted in the novel’s opening pages: the East India Company also needed to mobilize an army of troops to protect its trading posts, even going so far as to employ disreputable outcasts like Herncastle. In *The Moonstone’s* political economy the security apparatus that emerges around property’s inherent insecurity creates employment.

As expendable people become the possessors of potentially valuable information, Collins shows how that new information economy poses a challenge to the institution of

marriage. Gabriel Betteredge's account of his marriage suggests that the union is a labor agreement designed to remove negotiating power from the female party: once Betteredge takes his housekeeper as his wife, he observes that she "couldn't charge for her board, and would have to give me her services for nothing. That was the point of view I looked at it from. Economy—with a dash of love" (11). As Betteredge bemoans the way that the "business of the Diamond" has upset the normal routines of the household economy, he is in effect stating that the emergency of the diamond's loss has forced domestic relations to become more like a business where formerly uncompensated workers might claim a wage. For Miss Clack it is the "habit" of making an "entry of the day's events in my little diary"—part of the feminine work she has been trained to do from a young age—that allows her to suddenly claim a wage for her work (191). The problem of feminine labor that appears in the margins of Collins's novel is also the problem of the so-called "surplus women" who are absolutely necessary for the household's daily operations and classified as unsupportable by the economy that requires their uncompensated labor. As Emily Steinlight has observed, the critical outcry against "sensation novels"—with their madwomen crowded into sanitariums and extra wives crowded into bigamy plots—was always, in part, an attempt to reckon with the problem of the mass of unmarried women who seemed to have no place in the political economy of mid nineteenth-century England. For critics of the sensation novel, from Henry Mansel to George Eliot, their distaste from the genre was of a piece with their

sense that there was *too much* of it: the genre's excess pages of marital confusion and murder were largely the product of excess women like Ellen Wood (of *East Lynne*) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon (of *Lady Audley's Secret*) who turned to writing as one of the few tasks they could do that would fetch a wage.¹² *The Moonstone's* suggestion that uncompensated labor ought to be made visible as deserving, or even requiring, a wage, is of a piece Bentham's own insistence that the household's insular tyranny must be replaced with a Panopticon managed by salaried experts whose activities might be subject to review by the Public Opinion Tribunal. As readers are now able to "check" Clack's account, Collins's novel presents feminine diary entries as professional documents that are part of a modern information economy and worthy of purchase in serialized form.

However much it may give voice to the discontented, *The Moonstone* seems to succeed in finally getting rid of its surplus people by the end of the novel: Limping Lucy vanishes and Clack is forced into "foreign exile" by "events in the money-market" (252). But in the larger scope of Collins's fiction, surplus people never really disappear. His previous novel, *Armadale*, takes up the question of what happens to the disposable

¹² Steinlight draws our attention to the work of William Rathbone Greg who helpfully condenses the Victorian logic that saw otherwise unemployable women turning to writing to earn a living. According to Greg, "many well-educated women find themselves fully able to furnish" sufficient novels for the growing Victorian reading public, and "if only those who are really competent to this work were to undertake it, it would keep them in ample independence" (qtd. Steinlight "Why" 505). The only problem, according to a range of critics, was that the market was oversupplied by the writing of otherwise incompetent and unemployable women.

people who are “left over” after one plot has already made use of them. That novel throws its readers into a struggle already in its second generation. In *Armada*’s prequel, two men lay claim to the name “Allan Armadale” and battle over marriage and money, employing all manner of confederates in the process. *Armada* itself picks up after the principle actors of the first plot have died and follows the lives of the leftover children and accomplices who remain. The son of the dispossessed Allan Armadale comes back as the wandering mixed-race ‘gypsy’ Ozias Midwinter; a little orphan girl who helped forge documents in the first plot comes back as the aging beauty and murderess, Lydia Gwilt; the odious Dr. Downward and Miss Oldershaw, who made use of Lydia after she was cast out of the Armadale house, reappear to claim their due; and the naïve young man who happened to wind up with the Armadale estate invites a parade of new suspicious characters into his house to set the second plot in motion. In *Armada*, the surplus population does not just return. It grows.

Armada’s byzantine plot is a product of its own relentless commitment to maximizing the number of bodies that appear in its pages. Time and again Collins’s characters acknowledge that the design of their schemes are motivated not by a desire to secure their own self-interested ends but rather by a desire to create more twists and turns that involve more otherwise disposable people. Lydia Gwilt’s plan is characteristically convoluted. The novel is built around her multi-part scheme to marry one “Allan Armadale,” kill the other, and finally inherit the fortune of the second by

means of her union with the first. Complications multiply as the “Armadales” (Ozias Midwinter) that she marries is fast friends with the “Armadales” she intends to kill. Even if she succeeds in killing the rich “Allan Armadales” she will still need to find a way of dumping her new husband in order to become a widow with an inheritance. As Collins makes clear, this scheme is obviously vastly more complicated than it needs to be. As Dr. Downward explains, Lydia’s considerable efforts have only succeeded in getting the wedding registry to note that she is married to an “Allan Armadales” but that a mere note in a registry is “no proof that you have been married to Mr. Armadales of Thorpe-Ambrose. Jake Nokes or Tom Styles (excuse the homeliness of the illustration!) might have got the License, and gone to the church and married to you under Mr. Armadales’s name” (591). Downward is pointing out that if Lydia’s goal was to gain the Armadales inheritance, she has unnecessarily complicated her scheme by marrying the man who is best friends with the man she is trying to kill. Any other man might have done just as well.¹³ But Lydia’s response suggests an alternative utilitarian consideration: when she insists, “Any other man would *not* have done just as well,” she protests against the logic that treats “Jake Nokes” or “Tom Styles” as interchangeable and thus ultimately

¹³ Nathan Hensley argues that the central problem of both nineteenth-century liberalism and Collins’s sensation fiction is the movement from the particular to the universal, where each singular individual is also functionally equivalent to every other—the “general equivalence” central to Marx’s analysis of capitalism’s monetary form. In Hensley’s reading, the constant substitution of one person for another under the proper names that supposedly mark the individual’s singularity is Collins’s way of ironizing theories of liberal equivalence that underwrite J.S. Mill’s concept of liberty.

disposable accessories to the plot's mechanism (591). Ozias Midwinter—Lydia's chosen Armadale—is an orphan and an outcast like herself, singularly attractive to her as one who shares her condition as part of the “chaff” that had been cast away after the first iteration of the Armadale plot. The capacity to value the peculiarity of a disposable life emerges in Collins's novel as a consequence of the problem shared with Bentham's prison: that, as a whole, the surplus population cannot simply be disposed of but rather must somehow be maintained.

Collins's attempt to imaginatively manage the surplus population in *Armadale* might be read as an attempt to reframe a series of mistakes he made in composing his first commercially successful novel, *The Woman in White*. Writing no more than a week in advance of publication deadlines, Collins made a number of blunders in the chronology of his blockbuster—an especially embarrassing mistake in a novel where characters constantly insist on the importance of tracing events to the exact date of their occurrence.¹⁴ After the (commercially successful) debacle of *The Woman in White*, Collins

¹⁴ As the novel's hero, Walter Hartwright, explains, “The one weak point in [Count Fosco's] conspiracy, and probably the one chance of proving that [Laura Glyde] is alive, centre in the discovery of that date [when Anne Catherick] died” (459; qtd. Sutherland 153). As written for serialized publication, the dates recorded in Marian Halcomb's narrative conflict with dates mentioned elsewhere in the plot and this creates a situation where two weeks of Laura Glyde's life are left unaccounted for. As one contemporary reviewer remarked, this flaw makes “the last volume a mockery, a delusion, and a snare” (qtd. Sutherland 156). Collins's later attempt to correct this flaw in volume publication ended up producing even more chronological inconsistencies. For a full discussion of how these inconsistencies contort the plot of Collins's novel, and Collins's increasingly convoluted attempts to sort out the mess, see John Sutherland's

clearly didn't lose his nerve. In *Armadale*, he doubled down to craft a plot with an even *more* complicated chronology, but he does so in order to suggest that what is most interesting about such a plot is its tendency to fall apart. In a small scene that reads like a metafictional digression, *Armadale's* Major Milroy attempts to show off his clock and cautions his audience:

The machinery is a little complicated, and there are defects in it which I am ashamed to say I have not yet succeeded in remedying as I could wish. Sometimes the figures go all wrong, and sometimes they go all right. I hope they may do their best on the occasion of your seeing them for the first time. (224)

The clock's machinery, of course, fails to perform as it should and generates all the more entertainment for falling apart. The wooden soldiers that were supposed to stage an orderly changing of the guard instead enact a farcical chase scene where doors open and close and no two figures are ever quite where they are supposed to be. This entertaining catastrophe mirrors the very structure of *Armadale* where it is precisely *because* the plot collapses under the weight of its own complexity that our attention is drawn to figures that might otherwise have passed unnoticed.

In Collins's convoluted plots, the one aesthetic rule is that everyone must be kept working. There is no comfort, relaxation, or repose to be found in the sensation novel—or in the panoptic workhouse. *Armadale* ends with an elaborate scene in Dr. Downward's

exceptionally detailed work in the Oxford University Press edition of *The Woman in White* and his article "Two Emergencies in the Writing of *The Woman in White*."

sanitarium, an institution that resembles Bentham's panopticon in its architectural design but becomes sinister precisely because it departs from Bentham's prison by insisting that its inmates must rest.¹⁵ The dark side of this soothing institution is hinted at when Downward describes the anodyne reading material that will be on offer: "All we want of [a novelist]," he explains, "is—occasionally to make us laugh; and invariably to make us comfortable" (636-37). The kind of frantic detective fever that infects the country house in *The Moonstone* and makes everyone a potentially valuable carrier of information is here replaced with a sedentary life that renders all its inmates potentially disposable. Downward's not-so-subtle pitch to his potential customers is that this is an institution where you can leave your Miss Clacks and Limping Lucys and never have to hear from them again.¹⁶ Hidden vents allow the doctor to "noiselessly fumigate" or "noiselessly oxygenize" the rooms with vaporized medicine so that a chemical substitute for "moral treatment" "follows the sufferer into his room at night; and soothes, helps, and cures him, without his own knowledge" (640; 639). As patients are medicated without their consent, they become targets for sexual assault: "rooms on the

¹⁵ In terms of its *architectural* resemblance to the Panopticon, the sanitarium comes equipped with the Panopticon's one-way surveillance technology in the form of a room where deputy physicians can watch for "any irregular proceedings on the part of the patients [...] with little or no chance of being detected in watching them" (655). Complete with locking doors and speaking tubes for communication between overseers, this is a madhouse that—in line with Foucault's analysis—not only resembles, but actually *is* a prison.

¹⁶ *Armada* began publication in 1864 after Charles Reade's novel, *Hard Cash* (1863), had primed readers to think about all the ways in which a madhouse can become a prison. Once contained in a madhouse, a reasonable individual cannot reason his way out of his position without deepening the imputed abnormality.

second floor” Downward assures his visitors, “are (with the exception of my own room) entirely devoted to the reception of lady-inmates” (637). Comfort and abuse go hand-in-hand in the paranoid aesthetic of Collins’s sensation fiction because a body in repose *will* be made to serve the pleasures of somebody if it is not working for its own maintenance.

The final scene of Collins’s novel imagines that this sinister space of comfort might be animated to become, like the rest of the novel, a place where everyone is put to work. While Bentham imagined that his Panopticon might contain more people by being brutally efficient at pumping work out of the infirm, Downward’s sanitarium becomes more effective at bringing the surplus population into the novel’s informational economy as it becomes more spectacularly ineffective at keeping its inmates in their proper place. The convoluted murder scheme of the novel’s final pages will take advantage of that “noiseless” fumigation system, by tricking Allan Armadale into a locked room and pumping it full of poison gas. The scientific accuracy of this mechanism is doubtful, but the great benefit of this scheme is that it allows the novel to imagine the coordinated effort of a huge number of participants.¹⁷ Lydia needs the assistance of Downward’s medical staff who are “in high good humor” because the sanitarium is finally getting upper-class patients who might secure the institution’s

¹⁷ Again, John Sutherland’s careful sleuthing has uncovered another blunder on Collins’s part. The chemical mechanism of the plot seems to be that of carbon monoxide poisoning brought on by dissolving limestone in carbonic acid. However, with the amounts of gas that Lydia seems to be releasing would be, in Sutherland’s words, “like trying to poison someone with the emissions of a fizzing coke can” (A, “Notes” 710).

reputation and their own future employment (655). Like Bentham's prison, this expanded employment in prison staffing depends on an expanding financial apparatus: Downward protests that he is only leasing his institution out for murderous purposes in order to pay back his financiers who will later claim to know nothing about the scheme that would secure their return-on-investment (606). Even the surveillance aspect of this scheme requires still more staff in the form of Mr. Bashwood, Lydia's toady and admirer, who will lie about what he sees in order to trick Lydia into killing the Armadale she loves instead of the one she hates (660). Bodies switch rooms, people are not watching when they are supposed to be watching, some people *lie* about what bodies are in what rooms, and by the end of the scene everyone is either gone mad, or married, or arrested, or suicided, or converted to evangelical Christianity. Like Bentham, Collins sees the surveillance institution as a place where the surplus population might be assembled. Unlike Bentham, Collins emphasizes the fragility of that institution. Like the just-in-time system of manufacturing that can be brought to a halt by the activity of just one undisciplined employee, Collins's novel creates an institutional space where the necessity of every piece is revealed by the breakdown of the whole.

A.C. Swinburne famously chided Collins's aesthetic with the devastating couplet: "What brought good Wilkie's genius nigh perdition? / Some demon whispered — 'Wilkie! have a mission.'" (127). Swinburne's rhyme asserts that Collins's genius unravels when it indulges in the preaching of a nineteenth-century social justice

warrior.¹⁸ But I would suggest that the politics of Collins's deliberately fashioned aesthetic problem—the convoluted plot that falls apart as it accumulates characters—never obtained at the level of any one particular hot-button issues. When Collins's fiction imagines a world where disposable people might become indispensable, it is because he also imagines a world where anyone might fall among the marginalized population due to a sudden reversal in fortune. The plot contortions of Collins's bizarre novel, *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), offer a case-in-point: a man is knocked on the head, suffers from epilepsy, takes a medicine, and then turns blue—a random sequence of events that threatens his marriage to a blind fiancé (deathly afraid of the color blue) who is on the brink for recovering her sight. The further twists and turns of the novel lead to a scenario where twins (one blue, one not) attempt to switch places, creating a compounding series of jealousies and uncertainties that require the labor and skill of an ever-larger number of marginal figures to sort out—including the novel's narrator, Madame Pratolungo, a piano teacher and dedicated socialist. Absurd and complicated, to be sure. But, contra Swinburne, there is no one particular "mission" that drives this unwieldy novel awry. Only a commitment to accumulating more surplus people in the mechanism of a plot that can only barely hold them together.

¹⁸ A principle example of this aesthetic failing might be Collins's anti-vivisection novel, *Heart and Science* (1883). Making a convincing case for the aesthetic achievement of *Heart and Science* Jessica Straley shows that in bringing the devices of sensation fiction to the social problem of vivisection, Collins is confronted with the problem of using a novel that assaults the senses of people for the purposes of arguing that vivisection is cruel for the way that it assaults the senses of animals.

III: Quarreling in Utopia

Fredrick Jameson has recently argued a vital part of any utopian imaginary is its capacity to imagine the continued proliferation of interpersonal conflict: against the “conventional stereotype of utopia as anedulcorated conflict-free zone of social peace and harmony” Jameson insists that there remains “the necessarily antagonistic nature of individual life and experience in a classless or communist society” (AU 113). In closing this argument, I want to suggest that one of the distinctive achievements of Wilkie Collins’s fiction is that it imagines a utopian situation of full employment that is also full of annoying malcontents.

In Collins’s fiction, disposable people distinguish themselves by annoying, nettling, and disgusting one another. In lieu of a fifth chapter, *The Moonstone’s* Miss Clack pesters her editor, Blake, by offering “copious Extracts from precious publications” on Christian morality (M 238). A sequence of passive aggressive missives prevails where “Mr. Franklin Blake presents his compliments to Miss Clack” and “Miss Clack is extremely sorry to trouble Mr. Franklin Blake” (M 238). On both sides of this exchange, Collins imagines that Clack and Blake take a kind of pleasure in taking each other down a peg. Even as Collins disposes of these useless tracts, he offers his readers still more writing in their place, as if to suggest that nothing can be left out without some kind of squabble. The clashing of personality against personality creates noise and

leaves behind a trail of documents that make it impossible to simply get rid of the quarrelsome and contentious elements of the population.

Collins's fiction of full employment distinguishes itself from other late-nineteenth century utopian novelists precisely by preserving this place for interpersonal conflict. In a classic of nineteenth-century utopian literature, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backwards: 2000-1887*, we get a very different vision of what full employment looks like. While Bellamy explicitly takes up the dialectic that Bentham's prison proposes (whereby growing joint stock companies give way to nationalized industries), he does not come around to Collins's aesthetic of convoluted plots and bickering disposable people. Instead, Bellamy offers a Benthamite view of the United States where an "industrial army" is organized for the purposes waging a biopolitical battle against the evils of "hunger, cold, and nakedness" (35). In a particularly deft move, Bellamy voids a bourgeois marriage plot and turns his readers' attention to the design of utopian institutions by using a Rip Van Winkle conceit: a nineteenth-century man who is about to be married falls asleep and wakes up in the twenty-first century, where the trauma of losing his family and friends is quickly replaced with wonder at the happiness and health secured by twenty-first century socialism. In each chapter, new infrastructural wonders are described, including warehouses for centralized data processing and a network of pneumatic tubes that ensure the most efficient possible distribution of goods

and labor. For Bentham and Bellamy alike, the narrative mode of their unfolding fictions focuses on the means of managing the population as a whole.

This infrastructural vision of the happy whole necessarily leaves behind the tangle of conflict that animate the unstable plots of Collins's imagined world. When Bellamy's time-traveler marvels at the twenty-first century and remarks that such a change could not possibly have taken place "without great bloodshed and terrible convulsions," Bellamy's Dr. Leete hastily replies that "there was absolutely no violence. The change had been long foreseen. Public opinion had become fully ripe for it. There was no more possibility of opposing it by force than by argument" (33). Differences of disposition, the will to opposition for no reason other than the thrill of argument, mere bitterness: all these disappear in Bellamy's rationalism. This board-clearing move resembles the stipulation that Locke puts in place at the beginning of his fiction about the social contract: "When God gave the world to men in common [...] he gave it to the use of the industrious and rational, [...] not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious" (ST 291). Locke can only imagine the earth as a commons that might provide sustenance for all reasonable men after the "quarrelsome and contentions" elements of the population are *a priori* excluded. Against the rationalism of Bentham, Bellamy, and even Locke, Collins imagines that if there really is to be a utopia of full employment, it must be one where quarreling continues. Even if only for

entertainment value, Collins cannot imagine a world where the surplus population could be both included and quietly content.

Chapter 4: Sexual Irregularities

Since the 1980s, queer theorists and activists have often rallied around the slogan, “Acts, not identities.” As I read it, the slogan suggests we do not yet know what a body can do. Rather than using a lexicon inherited from nineteenth-century sexology to endlessly discuss what the truth of our sexual identities might be, the slogan encourages us to experiment with assembling bodies in new ways to discover new pleasures.¹ As I’ll be arguing in this final chapter, there has perhaps never been a thinker more dedicated to “acts, not identities” than Jeremy Bentham. In his writings on human sexuality, Bentham provides a full-throated defense of homosexual, bestial, and necrophilic acts as valid means of gaining pleasure. Far from promoting the idea that individuals might be defined by the secrets of their “normal” or “abnormal” sexualities, Bentham insists that we consider individuals as bodies capable of acts that might cause pleasure or pain. In shifting the discourse of human sexuality from identities to acts, Bentham is not just arguing for a more “permissive” view of human sexuality; he is building on his career-long argument that the human population needs to be seen as an aggregate of pleasures

¹ Here, I am working from David Halperin’s claim that anal fisting might be part of a new art of life. As he puts it: “The shattering force of intense bodily pleasure, detached from its exclusive localization in the genitals and regionalized throughout the various zones of the body, decenters the subject and disarticulates the psychic and bodily integrity of the self to which a sexual identity has become attached. By shattering the subject of sexuality, queer sex opens up the possibility for the cultivation of a more impersonal self, a self that can function as the substance of an ongoing ethical elaboration—and thus as the site of future transformation” (97).

and pains rather than a collection of private households. As I have already suggested in the pervious chapter, Bentham's modern network of panoptic institutions sees individuals as fungible quantities of labor power rather than as the rights-bearing citizens who are best raised and governed by their mothers and fathers. Properly understood in its anti-familial and non-identitarian terms, Bentham's utilitarian biopolitics is queerer than has generally been assumed.²

Michel Foucault's work on Bentham has primed us, somewhat misleadingly I think, to see utilitarianism as part of a Victorian "discourse of sexuality" organized around the policing of sexual identity within the family. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975) Foucault famously argued that Bentham's Panopticon Prison subjected individuals to surveillance in order to transform them into self-policing citizens. In *The History of Sexuality* (1976), this inward-looking discipline became Foucault's model for the practice of self-inquiry that bourgeois Victorians took upon themselves as they tried to discover the secrets of their own sexual identities. Once these two books appeared in English, many prominent critics saw the Victorian novel as a disciplinary apparatus in its own

² Even those thinkers who are most resolutely dedicated to Bentham's notion that individuals are calculating, utility-maximizing machines will continue to hold onto the fiction of the heterosexual reproductive family. For example, Gary Becker—the neoliberal theorist most familiar for his appearance in Foucault's lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics*—makes paternal affection a central part of his economic analysis of familial relations in his *Treatise on the Family* (1981). When Becker proposes his "Rotten Kid Theorem" (which states that even if family members are selfish they will act to help each other if their personal incentives are aligned), he imagines a Dickensian scenario where a vicious child might be moved to be kind to his siblings when a beneficent, gift-giving patriarch is offering money to all children who are kind to each other.

right, one that induced both protagonists and readers to discover in the recesses of the self the perverse desires that made them distinctive as individuals—desires that then had to be managed with reflection, rationality, and more than a little vigilance lest the expression of such desires cost them their normalcy. In the intricate readings of a critic like D.A. Miller, individuals subdue deviant desires in order to find places in the households that encouraged them to seek out their perversions in the first place.

Productive though Foucault's line of inquiry has proved, more recent critics question whether this account of the formation of self-policing individuals might be leaving something out. As I have had occasion to suggest in previous chapters, Francis Ferguson has argued that the purpose of Bentham's institutional plans was not only, and perhaps not primarily, to produce self-supervising individuals fearful of always being watched. The purpose of Panoptic institutions was rather to assess the value of the actions an individual performed in terms that did not depend on that individual's social class, personal history, or intentions (2). Accordingly, Ferguson draws our attention to Bentham's utilitarian schoolroom where children are seated in rank order so that an observer might instantly judge the value of each individual relative to every other without any knowledge of their family connections or developmental history (4-5). Following Ferguson's suggestion that Bentham's utilitarianism would have us understand a person's value in terms of one's acts rather than the qualities of one's inner life, sexual or otherwise, I argue that the utilitarian theory of government did not, as

Foucauldian critics used to say, assume that liberal government depended on individual self-government.

It was self-evident to Bentham that the sex acts deemed indicative of deep-seated perversion by later nineteenth-century sexologists were nothing more than ways for individuals to increase their pleasures without incurring the costs of raising a family.³ Far from taking the parents' bedroom as the private theater of culturally sanctified sex, Bentham considered reproductive sex a violation of his utilitarian economy on the grounds that it produced a surplus population of children who were a "burthen to their parents" (*WPL* 29). In this respect Bentham is far from unique: the position that non-reproductive sex would contribute more to the general good than reproductive sex is implicit in Thomas Malthus's essay on the miseries of overpopulation and in J.S. Mill's disappointment with the laboring class's tendency to "people down" to a lower standard of living (*PPE* 342). In a utilitarian economy—which measures the value of sexual practices in terms of the pleasure they bring rather than the progeny they produce—children clearly *depreciate* the value of sex. While Foucault envisions Victorian culture in terms of an assortment of experts and professional institutions orbiting

³ Curiously enough, neither Ferguson nor Foucault discusses these writings. The Bentham scholars who do treat them tend to use Bentham's defense of sexual irregularities to show the "progressive" potential of utilitarian philosophy without considering how they fit into Bentham's larger project of population management (see Blake). One major exception to this general tendency is Englemann, who suggests that Bentham's sex writings offer a vision of "queer liberalism" that does not police individuals with respect to identities but rather seeks to manage populations.

around the discursive center of the reproductive family, Bentham's utilitarianism imagines a very different nineteenth century, one primed to dispense entirely with procreative sex.

As an essential component of the Victorian imagination—embodied in that Gradgrindian imperative “to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature”—utilitarianism's relentless economizing sparked what has often been taken to be its counterargument in *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism's celebration of the unnecessary (HT 10). “All art,” Oscar Wilde proclaims, “is quite useless” (4). However, Walter Pater actually imagines the aesthetic life as mode of being that, like Bentham's, proposes a careful economy of feeling. As Pater famously urges in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) we must get “as many pulsations as possible into the given time” (120).⁴ Far from offering an unrestrained search for immodest pleasures, the Paterian aesthetic life requires an intensified discipline that works to increase one's sensitivity to a variety of sensations. Many queer theorists have already read Pater's injunction to seek “pulsations” a disciplinary model that is detached from questions of self-identity and

⁴ Regenia Gagnier links late-nineteenth century marginal economics to late-nineteenth century aesthetics by arguing that both emphasize the theoretical importance of consumption over the early nineteenth-century focus on the means of production. In tracing this theoretical interest in the consumer's “pleasure” back to Bentham, I am building on Gagnier's argument while also pursuing Richard Dellamora's suggestion that there is “a covert tradition linking Utilitarian philosophy, Liberal reform, and Greek studies that extends backward in time to the arguments on behalf of decriminalizing sodomy made by Jeremy Bentham” (270).

offers an alternative to the inward-looking mode of self-policing Foucault describes.⁵ Building on those arguments, I will show that Pater's queerness, in this respect, is also Pater's utilitarianism. For both Bentham and Pater, the art of life is a matter of maximizing sensations without the reproductive family. To rediscover utilitarianism in these terms is to acknowledge that its calculus of pleasure and pain contains a position similar to that which Lee Edelman stakes out in *No Future* (2004): a queer anti-reproductive politics that refuses to accept that our happiness resides in the imagined children of future generations.

I: Bentham's Sex Acts

When Bentham refers to non-reproductive sex acts as "sexual irregularities," he only *seems* to be working within a discourse that denigrates "irregular," "unnatural" and "abnormal" sex while promoting "regular," "normal" and "natural" procreative sex. However, in using the word "irregularity," Bentham is only thinking in terms of relative frequency and expressing that "the existence of the appetite in question is [a] rare occurrence" (*SI* 6). Infrequency by no means implies inferiority in Bentham's utilitarian

⁵ Following Amanda Anderson's discussion of "irony" as a discursive ethos of "distance" at the heart of Victorian liberalism and aestheticism, a number of critics now see Pater's aestheticized "retreat" from the social order as an artful means of deflecting inquiry into the truth about his own sexuality. Heather Love sees in Pater "a politics of refusal" that retreats from a social order that would insist on his own self-pathologization (27). Matthew Price sees this retreat as only partial, as his Pater uses that position of detachment to work as a careful documentarian of the external world rather than his own internal psychic condition.

philosophy, as any action that yields more pleasure than pain will contribute to the greatest happiness for the greatest number. According to this rationale, those who would pursue non-procreative sex contribute more to the general good than those who would stigmatize such harmless pleasure-seeking as “unnatural” or “impure” (SI 6). Those who denigrate irregular sex acts turn out to be the perverts in Bentham’s argument, as they are possessed by “a sentiment of disapprobation, accompanied with passion” (SI 6). Bentham locates their prototype in Moses, whose “fertile brain” was so intent on reading “an exciting cause in every sort of irregularity” that he invented an ever-expanding “list of impurities” (SI 13). Such over-zealous legislation generated a legal “labyrinth without end,” one that was deliberately designed to confuse citizens and keep them in a “shivering fit,” unsure of when their inconsequential pleasures might suddenly be classified as transgressions (SI 13). In this respect, Bentham pinpoints what Foucault would later identify as the generative force behind the Victorian discourse of sexuality, namely, a perverse power that enjoys unearthing and classifying non-procreative pleasures as expressions of deviant desires housed deep within the self. To counteract the politically deleterious impact of normative sexual discourse, Bentham formulated a theory of sexual pleasure that was markedly opposed to this “repressive hypothesis” and perfectly in keeping with his utilitarian theory of government.

To distinguish the libidinal economy compatible with his utilitarian ethic from the discourse of sexuality that would sort out normal and abnormal desires, Bentham

proposed that all individuals are driven by a common compulsion to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. As means to the single end of increasing pleasure, all sex acts are ultimately interchangeable, a tenet apparent in the grammatical repetition Bentham uses when enumerating the “irregularities” that individuals might enjoy. For instance, stripped of secrecy and sin in his account, homosexual practices are designated by the number and kinds of bodies involved in the performance: “Number of persons concerned plural, but the sexes not the correspondent and opposite, but the same: in the first place say both males, impregnation consequently impossible” (SI 56). Bentham describes bestiality in similar terms: “Number of the parties whose bodies are the seats of the operation, plural: but one of them, though a living animal, an animal not belonging to the category of *persons*” (SI 57). This method of mixing and matching bodies continues in his description of masturbation (“no second person concerned in it”), extra-marital sex (“the two not united in the artificial and pneumatic bonds of the matrimonial contract”), and necrophilia (“One of the bodies concerned not belonging to the class of animate beings”) (SI 56–57). Consistent with his overarching theory of government, Bentham sees the human body as a mechanism for maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. One body might combine with any other body, be it human or non-human, living or dead. No pleasure-giving practice can be described as more or less natural or pure, so long as it observes this economic principle.

In these terms, the pleasures of irregular sex not only offer an economical

substitute for reproductive sex but also compensate for the lack of economic means that would allow individuals to derive pleasure from other sources. The pleasures of sex are “precisely the only pleasures of sense” that are “equally within the reach of the subject many as of the ruling few,” and as such they are the only democratically distributed pleasures that could stabilize society in times of political turbulence (SI 112). As Bentham saw it, the French Revolution was dangerous precisely because it sought a redistribution of pleasures by means of a “seizure of property grounded on the leveling principle” that would “shak[e] the security of the whole state” (RRR 203). Accordingly, while irregular sex is a non-disruptive means of obtaining pleasure, the natural rights demanded in the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* are “a bastard brood of monsters” (RRR 400). Far from being a sexual revolutionary, Bentham’s defense of sexual irregularities portrays those practices as integral to a liberal order that hopes to guarantee the right of property. Cast in this light, Bentham’s account of the interchangeable acts that bodies might perform for pleasure is much more concerned with population management than with policing the sexual desires that Foucault places at the center of the modern discourse of sexuality.

The difference between the perverse discourse of sexuality and the utilitarian economy of pleasure becomes especially stark when we compare Bentham’s sex writings to the later nineteenth-century sexology of Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), one of Foucault’s major sources (HS 63). For Krafft-Ebing, an individual’s

sexuality is the secret desire that makes him “abnormal” down to the very foundation of his selfhood. *Psychopathia Sexualis* does not just list the numbers and types of bodies needed to perform a given sex act. It provides case-histories that follow individuals from precocious childhood to perverse adulthood, records of kinkiness that trace perversion back to its source *in* the individual of whose being that perversion is considered an essential part. Krafft-Ebing’s discussion of necrophilia consequently yields the unforgettable story of François Bertrand, the so-called “Vampire of Montparnasse,” who first learned to masturbate “without teaching” as a child and then graduated to exhuming human corpses, violating them, and stringing up their entrails in trees (69–70). According to Krafft-Ebing, Bertrand does not perform this ritual as a means to the end of obtaining pleasure; rather, Bertrand is compelled to perform these acts because he *is* a necrophiliac condemned to express his identity by fulfilling the desire for “absolute subjugation, without possibility of resistance” (68). Foucault has taught us how to recognize the game of power that Krafft-Ebing is playing in this final interpretive flourish, where the irregular act not only expresses pain and utters a cry for help but also provides the occasion for locking up the individual and mining his life’s history for data to deepen the imputed abnormality. By contrast, Bentham leaves no room for any such interpretive maneuver, as utilitarianism only evaluates resulting pleasures and pains. In this economy, reproductive sex necessarily loses its claim to being the natural norm in relation to which all other practices are found abnormal and inferior.

Bentham's economy even goes so far as to reverse this priority: reproductive sex is self-defeating because it diminishes pleasure by producing offspring. As Bentham writes, "the value of a child, reckoned from birth to legal maturity, appears to be regarded on the *minus* side. A child, so long as it is a child, is worth less than nothing" (WPL 29). Accordingly, he contends, infanticide is a rational choice, especially for poor families that cannot expect their offspring will reach wage-earning maturity; in such cases, execution at the moment of birth ensures that the "quantity of care and attendance bestowed in waste by the parents is so much less" (SI 26). Nor does infanticide violate what was generally regarded as the "natural" bond of affection between mother and child any more than irregular sex acts violate the natural imperative to seek pleasure. As Bentham reasons, "If on the occasion of a shipwreck, seeing another person, a stranger, saving himself upon a plank, the women were to beat him from it and take his place, in this case the act of self-preservation thus performed would not to any person, whether disapproved or no, be termed an unnatural one" (SI 7). At least among the poor, Bentham considers the mother's relation to her child analogous to that of two strangers battling for space on a wooden plank at sea, each jeopardizing the other's chances for survival. Bentham admits that some people might take pleasure in procreation, but those people, in his view, use the child to provide a particular kind of pleasure for themselves: aristocratic families might, for instance, want a child to preserve their bloodlines, while some poor couples might want a child to serve as a "token" of their

mutual affection—the latter being a case that “would not be thus sentimental as it is if it were not correspondingly rare” (SI 54–55). As a means to the end of procuring pleasure, procreation is neither more rare nor more perverse than any of the “irregularities” Bentham enumerates.

In declaring the family an inefficient source of pleasure, Bentham picks up on a suggestion that hovers over nineteenth-century political economy from his contemporary, Thomas Malthus, to his most dedicated Victorian interpreter, J.S. Mill. When Malthus argued that population growth necessarily outpaces food production and thus periodically kills off surplus people, he also introduced the possibility that “promiscuous intercourse, unnatural passions, violations of the marriage bed” might provide a salutary check to the miseries of overpopulation ([1803] 24). In practically the next breath, Malthus, a man of the cloth, retracts that suggestion and labels such activities “vices,” admonishing the poor to exercise “moral restraint” and refrain from early marriages ([1803] 24). Bentham quotes Malthus on these matters in order to reverse this moralizing retraction. Given that non-procreative vice affords pleasures that “moral restraint” denies, Bentham concludes vice “is the thing to be encouraged: Moral Restraint the thing to be discouraged” (SI 83). As Bentham saw it, Malthus could not reason economically until he abandoned his reflex to moralize the distinctions between procreative sex and alternative sources of sexual pleasure.

J.S. Mill also saw procreation as a source of misery, especially among the poor whose swelling numbers had suppressed their wages. Even leaving the matter of children aside, Mill further saw biological reproduction as “a degrading slavery to a brute instinct in one of the persons concerned, and most commonly, in the other, helpless submission to a revolting abuse of power” (PPE 352). In “The Subjection of Women,” Mill depicted what he considered the ideal marriage: not a procreative couple, but rather an intellectual companionship like his own relation to Harriet Taylor, where both parties “care for great objects” like liberal social reform (573). Mill’s depiction of the procreative family as tyranny echoes Bentham’s own assessment of the father’s unchecked power where no form of brutality short of wife or child murder could be legally punished, leaving the father free to inflict “severer though dark and silent injuries, such as habitual cruelty and murder committed by degrees” (WPL 170). This tradition of thought exposes the respectable household as a domestic torture-chamber run by perverse patriarchs resembling the sadistic Henleigh Grandcourt of *Daniel Deronda*. Far from securing the happiness of their inmates, the novel’s procreative family seems to turn potential pleasure into pain even to the point of turning life into death, as when little Father Time in *Jude the Obscure* feels compelled to kill both himself and his siblings because “we are too menny” (325). Indeed, most everywhere one looks in mainstream Victorian culture, the discourse of the happy procreative family seems caught in a counter discourse that exposed its miseries. Seen in these terms, Bentham’s

writings on sexual pleasure differ from many of his contemporaries only in the boldness of his imagination and the outspokenness of his polemic. Malthus and Mill return to the concept of heterosexual family in order to express the already discarded hope that individuals might discipline themselves and refrain from procreative sex. Bentham, by contrast, not only considers the pleasures attached to that act vastly overrated, but also imagines an alternative social order capable of making good use of the human excess that results.

As I've already suggested in the previous chapter, Bentham imagined that his system of Panoptic Industry Houses might serve as an alternative to the tyrannical regime of the reproductive family. Where parents might be pleasures seeking individuals whose rational preferences lead them to infanticide, the Panoptic Industry House would offer an alternative structure capable of putting that surplus life to good use. As Bentham puts it, his Industry Houses would "[carry] off the superfluous stock, and nothing but the superfluous stock, of children" (WPL 270). These big houses would take advantage of the economics of scale where infants could be rocked by a single caretaker turning a crank "as they lie in their cribs, in numbers at a time" (WPL 540). Furthermore, children would be put to work by age four and generate a profit that would justify the cost of their maintenance (WPL 5). Allowing nothing about childhood to escape the reach of his utilitarian logic, Bentham looks at games of marbles as "little more than a contrivance for killing time" and disapproves of children "trundling a

hoop” on grounds that “the arm exercise it affords is very trifling, and that too confined to one arm” (WPL 176). For a positive alternative, Bentham proposes placing children in an assortment of exercise machines, including the “walking wheel” (now found in hamster cages and adult workout establishments) where each step turns a millstone and produces a certain amount of nutrition in the form of flour (WPL 173). This scheme for child management evinces none of the worry about precocious masturbation that so consumed Krafft-Ebing’s sexology. To the contrary, it offers an alternative discourse aimed at maximizing the total pleasure of society while minimizing its pain. It is only too clear that this economy serves the profit motive, as the mechanistic body that combines with others for the pleasures of irregular sex is also perfectly at home on the factory floor.

II: Pater’s Aesthetic Discipline

By the time that J.S. Mill famously rejected his utilitarian upbringing on grounds that it trained him to see only “what the vulgarest eye can see; recognizing no diversities of character but such as he who runs may read” (B 63), Victorian intellectuals largely agreed that Bentham himself was aesthetically deficient. At the same time, paradoxically, the overarching machinery of government that Bentham proposed was winning the approval of the cultivated and aesthetically astute. Mill himself characterized Bentham as “the great questioner of things established” (B 41). Even

Walter Pater agreed that while Bentham's philosophical arguments may seem an "exaggeration of this or that side or aspect, of the truth," they also bring "special elements ... of our common moral effort, into prominence, by explaining them in unusual terms" (ME 175). Much like Bentham's pleasure-seeking individuals searching for new combinations of bodies and pleasures, liberal theorists of Mill's generation found it invigorating to "entertain" or "appreciate" a wide variety of ideas without fixating on any particular orthodoxy. Mill sketched out this position in "On Liberty" when he characterized the well-tempered liberal as one who distinguishes himself by tolerating "different experiments of living" (OL 63). In *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, Pater similarly exhorts his readers to be "for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy of Comte or of Hegel, or of our own" (SHR 120). This formulation turns "opinions" and "impressions" into ephemera through which the individual will have to sift. What emerges is not necessarily a comprehensive understanding of the world, but rather, as Pater insists, a maximization of physiological experience as the individual must get "as many pulsations as possible into the given time" (SHR 121). Like Bentham's "pleasure," the "pulsation" is a sort of universal equivalent, a maximizable measure that comprehends all manner of different "eccentric" sensations without making qualitative distinctions. Adopting much the same logic as Bentham's utilitarian calculus, Pater's description of the moment of peak aesthetic pleasure reveals a direct line of influence

from early nineteenth-century utilitarianism to the *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism manifest in the pleasures of the cultivated life.

While Bentham and Pater arguably thought within the same economy of pleasure, they certainly differed in their visions of how the individual might discipline himself so as to intensify his sensual experience.⁶ Assuming individuals were always already familiar with the range of possible pleasures and pains that could be expected from a given act, Bentham sees proper discrimination as nothing more than choosing to perform those actions most likely to yield the most pleasure with the least possible expenditure of pain. Yet as Pater considers this kind of cost-benefit analysis in his own aesthetic theory, he finds himself needing to assess the very methods of assessment used to maximize “pulsations” in the first place. Thus in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), Pater reevaluates the economics of sensation proposed in his earlier work:

What really were its claims as a theory of feeling and practice? It had been a theory, avowedly, of loss and gain, so to call it—of an economy: and if it missed something in the commerce of life, which some other theory of feeling or practice found itself able to save, if it made a needless sacrifice, then, it must be in a manner inconsistent with itself, and lack theoretic completeness. Did it make such a sacrifice? What did it lose? (168)

⁶ James Eli Adams argues that Pater’s aesthetic theory, especially as depicted in *Marius*, was an attempt to deflect the charge of “effeminacy” leveled against him and show aestheticism to be a discipline suited to the masculine exercise of power. Alternatively, Rachel O’Connell asserts that Pater’s discipline is “an eroticized experience of submission” that allows the opportunity to “disperse and dissipate into a pleasurable reverie of formlessness” (976). I would suggest these two readings are not contradictory but rather complimentary. It seems to me that Pater’s aesthetic discipline insists on the necessity of submitting to the flow of sensation in order to properly register what one will need to manage once in a position of power.

Is it not possible, he asks the reader, that the attempt to maximize aesthetic “pleasures” necessarily misses that mark? Marius considers whether in refusing to acquiesce to any “facile orthodoxy” for the sake of maximizing his pleasures he might be forfeiting sensations that only appear when experience is filtered through a particular system of beliefs and practices. After all, Marius concludes, “[t]he mere sense of belonging to a system—an imperial system or organization—has, in itself, the expanding power of a great experience” (177). This being the case, wouldn’t the aestheticism Pater proposed in *The Renaissance* conscript the individual in the disciplinary task of cycling through “opinions” and “impressions,” milking each of every “pulsation” it allows, come up short? In practicing such an aesthetic life, torn between conscription into a particular ideology and the pleasures of being so conscripted, self-discipline is spurred, not by the threat of punishment or medicalization, but rather by the fear of overlooking some sensual experience in an economy of pleasure whose methods of assessment must always be changing.

Cultivating a “sense of belonging to a system” is as necessary to enjoying the heightened aesthetic experiences that Pater seeks at a personal level as it is to managing the surplus population that haunts both Pater’s novel and Bentham’s political economy. The eponymous protagonist of *Marius the Epicurean* is, after all, a second-century bureaucrat called to Rome in order to “receive from imperial hands the great pile of manuscripts it was to be his business to revise and arrange” (181). Throughout the

novel, Marius uses the “dexterous training of his capacities” to be keenly aware of how his life is linked up to the displacement of populations that accompany the expansion of the Roman Empire (97). Without this training, he might experience his journey through “picturesque, romantic Italy” as would “a modern romantic traveler” who delights in views of farms falling into “their natural wildness” (108). With training, by contrast, Marius sees these “picturesque” ruins as the sensible trace of the plague brought back by Lucius Verus from the Parthian war (73).⁷ Augmenting his impression that the risk of disease increases as the empire incorporates new populations, is Marius’s growing awareness of how emperor Hadrian exacerbated the problem by abolishing private prisons and allowing slaves to wander as a “mendicant population” (107–8). Subtitled “His Sensations and Ideas,” Marius’s story reproduces the process by which a cultivated aesthetic vision transforms what would otherwise be a conventional view of a pleasant landscape into a densely layered and compressed moment of perception. Though composed of what seem to be Marius’s own observations, these scenes converge with the larger intellectual concerns of the nineteenth-century, an entangling of past and present that Pater uses to suggest Marius’s sensory abilities are capacious enough to detect where the project of population management is headed in the future. With his observation that “no system of free labour had as yet succeeded” in putting migrant

⁷ Pater’s citation of the Parthian war, a series of conflicts running from roughly 60 BC to 200 CE, is surely no accident for an England embroiled in its own constant imperial conflicts.

populations to use, Marius gives voice to the very problem that led Bentham to devise his Panoptic Industry Houses: that of providing the masses with the necessities of a healthy life (108). Thus it strikes me as only half right to claim that the disciplined aesthete sought to distinguish himself from his social environment and the common human condition. By cultivating his aesthetic sense, Pater's individual comes to see himself as part of a population whose collective health depends on how goods and labor are distributed throughout the empire.

Within the Victorian discourse of population management that Marius intuits, the reproductive family was, as we have already seen, a rather recalcitrant problem. For Malthus and Mill, the only remedy for the excess of procreative sex was to curb it by cultivating popular awareness of the "imperial system" that linked all human lives in a common human condition.⁸⁸ Using a plot device borrowed from Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*, Pater imagines a way to insert such a concern for humankind into the process of procreation. Performing a substitution of identities harking back to Sydney Carton, the confirmed bachelor Marius takes the place of his Christian friend, Cornelius, who is condemned to be executed (293). Marius, we are told, "believed that Cornelius was to be husband to Cecilia and that, perhaps strangely, had but added to the desire to get him

⁸ Malthus suggests that a laborer, "if he thinks at all," will realize that population-level effects beyond his control, like the "ill luck" of changes in the price of bread, will starve his children (1st ed. 34). Mill similarly argued that the laboring classes could improve their standard of living by acquiring a "rational view of their own aggregate condition" (*PPE* 374).

away safely" (293). This curiously anti-sentimental expression of Marius's desire for Cornelius's safety is prompted by the protagonist's sense that, by saving a Christian of prime breeding age, he will be shaping Rome's demographic future. This life-for-death exchange transfers the desire that forms the family from a self-interested pursuit of sexual pleasure to a cultivated concern for the population as a whole that Malthus and Mill hoped to see. To the very moment of his death, Marius's sense of being connected to an "imperial system" allows him to imagine himself alongside the "happy parents" who "are able to think calmly, and with a very practical affection, of a world in which they are to have no direct share" (298). It is important to note that the happiness of these parents rests not on the success of their own biological progeny but rather on the wellbeing of the entire population. The upshot of the protagonist's aesthetic training is a "calm" and "practical affection" for humanity that goes well beyond familial relations and whose future might well require his death.

Marius's deathbed reflections on "happy parents" are supposed to counter the "blind, outraged, angry feeling of wasted power" that accompany his bodily deterioration (279). But that pleasing fantasy only lasts for so long, as Marius finally has to "abstain from thoughts like those, as from what caused physical pain" (299). According to this thanatological phenomenology, the intensity of sensation Marius achieves when he expands his life to the entire population is admittedly no more or less

intense than any other physical ache or pain. Death therefore comes to Marius as the death of the senses, to which Pater imaginatively administers last rights:

In a moment of his extreme helplessness their mystic bread had been placed, had descended like a snow-flake from the sky, between his lips. Soothing fingers had applied to hands and feet, to all those old passage-ways of the senses, through which the world had come and gone from him, now so dark and obstructed, a medicinale oil. (300)

In principle, Marius gave his life in the interests of the future Christian community, and those who bury him “[hold] his death, according to their generous view in this matter, to have been of the nature of a martyrdom” (300). The novel, however, offers suggestions to the contrary. As his sense of the phenomenal world grows “dark and obscured,” Marius is palpably stirred by the metaphoric ministrations of “soothing fingers” and the communion wafer melting on his lips. When these sensations end, so does Marius’s story. This search for sensation even at the moment of his protagonist’s death lead Pater’s contemporary, Mary Augusta Ward, to the conclusion that if “stripped of its poetical dress, the ethical argument of *Marius* is essentially utilitarian ... hoping to cheat life of some of its pain” (134).

Pater’s most enthusiastic reviewers also suspected there was something about his theory of aesthetic discipline that might allow intensified sensation to override concern for social cohesion. In his review of *The Renaissance*, liberal party stalwart John Morley rushed to defend Pater from the charge of “Hedonism.” In doing so, Morley found it necessary to partition the artful life that Pater advocates from “the commonplace virtues

of honesty, industry, punctuality, and the like, [which] are the conditions of material prosperity, and moral integrity" (474). Pater, he assured his readers, is asking us to appreciate art only during the "accentuating portion of life," a pursuit that need not interfere with the "homespun substance of our days" (474). J.S. Mill creates a similar partition between high and low pleasure in his qualified defense of utilitarianism when he insists that, contrary to Bentham, not all means of obtaining pleasure are interchangeable. For Mill, there are "higher pleasures" that one would not exchange for any "lower pleasure," even when the higher pleasure is judged "to be attended with a greater amount of discontent" (U 139). In this way, Mill attempts to remove "higher pleasure" from the general commerce of life, while Morley attempts to cordon off Paterian aestheticism as a play space within a larger social philosophy. These containment strategies demonstrate how mainstream liberalism incorporated utilitarianism and aestheticism as minor irregularities in its own pragmatic politics. For all their claims to promote eccentricity, Mill and Morley insist that the pleasures of such irregularities fit into a pattern of thought and practice that enhances rather than replaces the pleasure of securing "material prosperity." In the search for pleasures and pulsations that Bentham and Pater advocate, however, there is no guarantee that a more practical notion of happiness will survive the effort of maximizing one's experience. Marius's story dramatizes that risk. By concluding with a body still searching for new sensations even at the point of death, Pater's novel suggests that the population's collective

reproductive future is cold comfort indeed. In that final scene of hands, feet, oils, lips and bread, he joins Bentham in imagining that the greater source of pleasure might be new combinations of bodies and pleasures that have nothing to do with happy children.

III: Queer Calculation

Following in the footsteps of J.S. Mill, liberal intellectuals continue to assume that happiness rests, to a greater or lesser extent, on securing a future that guarantees “material prosperity” for a judiciously limited number of our reproductive progeny. Lee Edelman’s *No Future* invites us to challenge that assumption by considering whether such a future could make good on the “happiness” it promises. Indeed, Edelman blames many of the inequitable and irresponsible decisions that liberal governments make in the present on an ideology that privileges the imagined children of our collective reproductive future, who remain “the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention” (3).⁹ Within this liberal ideology, Edelman argues, “queerness” becomes a pejorative term that “names the side of those *not* ‘fighting for the children’” (3). Yet Edelman enjoins his readers to embrace

⁹ As Edelman makes clear, the “fantasmatic” children on the behalf of whom the social order must be defended are to be distinguished from lived experience of actual historical children. As if to buttress this aspect of Edelman’s argument, in 2016 the North Carolina State Legislature passed a bill that would restrict the access to public restrooms on the basis of the sex listed on an individual’s birth certificate. Supporters have predictably defended the bill as a means of protecting children from, in the words of Texas senator Ted Cruz, “grown men pretending to be women,” in spite of the paucity of any such cases.

precisely this phobicized conception of queerness on the basis of a shocking proposition. Resisting the assertion that “queerness” might be nothing more than an amiable eccentricity that offers some “positive social value,” Edelman insists that the value of queerness “resides in its challenge to the very value of the social itself” (6).

We can see the makings of this negation of reproductive futurity in Walter Pater and a range of other nineteenth-century aesthetes. Pater put it perhaps most bluntly in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* with the final words: “art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments’ sake” (121). And in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Oscar Wilde pushes the fantasy of radical presentism to its logical conclusion by figuring the aesthetic life as that of a perpetually beautiful young man who does not age beyond the moment in which he was painted. Even Dorian’s increasingly monstrous violations of social norms seem to be of a piece with the momentary pleasures that the novel offers, as the marks of moral disapprobation only add to the aesthetic effect of the whole.

For all his talk about the capacity of his rational calculus to secure pleasures in a future-yet-to-come, Bentham arguably joins Pater and Wilde in proposing a hedonistic philosophy that might trade away the possibility of a future for the sake of pleasures that are palpably present. As Bentham explained in his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, the ideal utilitarian legislator must “Take the *balance*; which, if on the side of *pleasure*, will give the general *good tendency* of the act, with respect to the total

number or community of individuals concerned; if on the side of pain, the general *evil tendency*, with respect to the same community" (IPML 40). Here, we return to a version of the problem of synchronic calculation that I discussed in the first chapter: as so many imagined future pleasures and pains are materialized in the present with weight and heft to be placed on either side of a scale, the problem lies precisely in delimiting the temporal boundaries of the future community to which those pleasures and pains are supposed to belong. How many generations are to be considered in the present moment of calm utilitarian contemplation when we "take the *balance*"? Bentham himself suggests that, all other things being equal, the legislator ought to give the most weight to those pleasures and pains which come most quickly and of which we are the most certain (38–39). Viewed from the moment of calculative contemplation, the security all those future generations of "innocent" children are not the absolute end of political rationality but rather are of *diminishing* import in proportion to their distance from the present.

Edelman insists that his own anti-reproductive politics is a form of "political self-destruction" that performs "the only act that counts as one: the act of resisting enslavement to the future in the name of having a life" (30). In closing this argument, I would like to propose that Bentham's utilitarian ethic pushes this position to the point of reversing it: the utilitarian imagines a future enslaved to the present, as the next generation of children must either be a source of profit for their elders or have their lives voided at birth. This rather Swiftian "modest proposal" is, to be sure, not at all what

Edelman had in mind in writing *No Future*. Indeed, the whole point of Edelman's polemic is to resist the utilitarian propensity to manage costs and benefits for the sake of making human life more sustainable. But a serious consideration of Bentham's utilitarianism nevertheless suggests that in taking up the position of a queerness that would challenge, in Edelman's words, "the very value of the social itself," we will miss the mark if we assume that the reproductive family is the unchallenged center of the liberal social order (6). Bentham was not the only liberal intellectual of his age that would nod in vigorous agreement when Edelman insists that the modern family is a sentimental fantasy that necessarily fails to please. In keeping with this "eccentric" variation of nineteenth-century political thought, perhaps there are ways to use a utilitarian analysis of costs and benefits to imagine a world without the reproductive family. Whether or not such a world would actually turn out to be "better" when judged in accordance with some balance of pleasures and pains is beside the point: a calculus as queer as the one Bentham proposed might use the claim to produce the "better" as a means of producing what could only be said to be different. As Pater puts it, the end to which we aspire in economizing our "counted number of pulses" is only that of a "variegated, dramatic life" (*SHR* 119). Who could tell what form that might take?

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Biography

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