

## **Asperger's syndrome explains both the eccentricity and the genius of Jeremy Bentham**

Jeremy Bentham may have suffered from Asperger's syndrome (AS), an autistic condition compatible with high intelligence and achievement.

JB's history is reviewed in terms of AS's characteristic features - impairment in social and communicative ability and obsessive preoccupation with circumscribed interests - and in terms of the three main current (and complementary) psychological theories of AS: lack of 'theory of mind' of the other; a cognitive style of 'weak central coherence' (favouring detail over coherence); and impaired 'executive' function.

JB's life provides clear examples of social interaction suggesting lack of 'theory of mind' (eg with Marquis of Lansdowne); communicative dysfunction (his texts manifest 'weak central coherence' and required the 'executive' function of Dumont); and longstanding narrow preoccupations (Panopticon).

The Panopticon project may have reflected JB's (infantile) desires for omniscience and omnipotence in reaction to the AS sufferer's helpless confusion in the face of an inexplicable social world.

Current psychological constructions of AS seem to fit JB's case. The authors suggest that AS may represent the most parsimonious explanation for JB's particular combination of social oddness and striking intellectual abilities. By 'preventing' JB from sharing his contemporaries' assumptions, AS may have enabled him to articulate unprecedented critiques with such extraordinary persistence.

Philip **Lucas**  
Anne **Sheeran**