

Mill on Bentham

The proposed paper is part of a larger project – an intellectual biography of Bentham 1824-1832. In this context the views of contemporaries, particularly those who knew the philosopher well, are of special importance – perhaps none more so than John Stuart Mill, Bentham's self-described intellectual 'godson'. This was the period when Mill convened meetings of the Utilitarian Society at Bentham's house, during which he edited and published the five volumes of Bentham's *Rationale of Judicial Evidence* (1827), and which saw the onset of his mental crisis and the beginnings of his reappraisal of the utilitarian philosophy.

The relevant sources for this paper include the correspondence volumes in the *Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham* (vols. 11 and 12, in progress) and *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*; Mill's obituary notice of Bentham in the *Examiner* (10 June 1832), pp.371-2; 'Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy', in Edward Lytton Bulwer's *England and the English* (London 1833), II. 321-44; 'On Bentham', *London and Westminster Review*, 7 & 29 (Aug. 1838), pp.467-506); 'Utilitarianism', *Fraser's Magazine*, LXIV (Oct. 1861), pp.391-406, (Nov. 1861), pp.525-34, and (Dec. 1861), pp.658-73; Mill's *Autobiography* (London 1873); and incidental remarks on Bentham and his philosophy in such essays as *Whewell on Moral Philosophy* (1852).

The literature on Mill contains considerable debate about his supposed 'revisionist' utilitarianism, an apostasy that has vexed scholars writing on the history of utilitarian thought. Recently, however, in *Classical Utilitarianism from Hume to Mill* (London 2003) Professor Rosen has convincingly argued that Mill does not represent a rupture in the utilitarian tradition. Rather, like Bentham, he stands squarely in the Epicurean hedonist tradition. The crucial issue of the distinction between higher and lower pleasures – frequently cited by Mill scholars as evidence that he departed from the basic Benthamic version of utilitarianism – is shown by Rosen to be entirely consistent with Bentham's own conviction that distinctions between quality and quantity were basic to assessing which pleasures were more desirable than others. I do not wish to argue with Rosen on this point. In the broader context of this paper I want to draw attention to another potential issue that could be said to divide Mill from Bentham, though the former did not believe his interpretation of its meaning was any different from Bentham's. I refer to Mill's understanding of 'Bentham's dictum' cited in *Utilitarianism*: 'everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one'.

James E. Crimmins