

Jeremy Bentham: An Iliad of Argument*

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My title is, manifestly, a contrivance - a deliberate attempt to match Mary Mack's 1962 title for a book which may have been rather too roughly handled - not least by me: *Jeremy Bentham: An Odyssey of Ideas 1748-1792*. The book still seems to me to be flawed; and I am not persuaded that the allusion in its title is particularly apt. Even if we credit Odysseus with the splendour of purpose ascribed to him by Tennyson when he took up and developed the marvellous Dantean image of the aging and 'idle king' setting out

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield -
any resemblance to the young Bentham would be hard to detect. Bentham may even at times seem to have more in common with James Elroy Flecker's ironic caricature of Odysseus -

That talkative bald-headed seaman came
(Twelve patient comrades sweating at the oar)
From Troy's doom-crimson shore,
And with great lies about his wooden horse
Set the crew laughing and forgot his course.

It is indeed hard to see Bentham as an Odysseus of any kind. He had his fantasies, if not his 'great lies'; he may sometimes have forgotten his course; but he was no mere adventurer wandering serendipitously from one idea to another. And if he had been a seeker, an explorer, at the early period covered by what he called, in *A Fragment on Government*, the 'History of a mind perplexed by fiction',¹ his concern throughout most of his long life was surely to guide others to the utilitarian harbour where his own perplexities had been securely resolved. Sometimes he appears to have supposed that this humane purpose could be achieved by providing more and more elaborate charts and other navigational aids and leaving it at that - leaving it in particular to those who had the effective power to shape policy and enact legislation. Sometimes he saw himself, not indeed as the captain or master of the vessel (he was in general remarkably free from political ambition in any ordinary sense), but certainly as the pilot, indispensably there, on the quarter-deck or the bridge, to ensure that the charts were properly understood and followed. That self-image is perhaps already present in what he called the *Legislaturientes epistolae* drafted in the early 1780s.² It is certainly present in the offers he made thirty or forty years later to draw up codes of law for different countries: the whole *Codification Proposal* concept reveals Bentham in the pilot-cutter clad in oilskins and sou'wester, waiting expectantly to be taken on board this or that ship of state.³

Yet, from an early stage in his efforts to put to work the 'genius for legislation' he believed himself to possess, Bentham was aware that - to continue the nautical metaphor - there were wreckers to be combated as well as navigational hazards to be

¹ *A Comment on the Commentaries and a Fragment on Government*, ed. J.H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart, London, 1977 (CW), pp. 440-1n.

² UC clxix.14-127.

³ See generally 'Legislator of the World' : *Writings on Codification, Law, and Education*, ed. P. Schofield and J. Harris, Oxford, 1998 (CW).

negotiated. The 'obstacles to reform' he was already identifying in manuscripts of the 1770s were not just personified by, they were incarnate in, individuals and groups whose malign influence had to be overcome.⁴ That is why Bentham was to be, from the outset of his career almost until he lay on his deathbed, a polemical writer. Now the root of the word 'polemical' is *polemos*, and *polemos* of course means 'war'. The *Iliad* is the epic tale of a ten-years war: my title is intended to suggest that Bentham waged a war over the three-score years of his adult life against those who stood in the path of what he saw as rational improvement in society. The war was, of course, a war of words. I know of only one passage in Bentham's voluminous writings where he talks of personally 'taking up arms'; and the contingency was perhaps as remote as the image is risible.⁵ The *Iliad* for which Bentham set sail soon after his twenty-first birthday, if not before, was indeed an *Iliad* of *argument*.

What I want to do in the main body of this lecture is to examine various aspects of Bentham's lifelong war of words and ideas. There are points to be made, for instance, about the enemy forces with whom he fought; about the different weapons he deployed; about the allies he sought - and the alliances he was prepared to accept. Much of this will be concerned with tactics rather than strategy. Yet there is at least one major strategic question, which must not be lost sight of, and to which it will be necessary to return at the end of the discussion. That is the question whether there was or was not a decisive strategic change of direction in the middle of Bentham's career - a change which, even if we may regard him throughout as a radical reformer, made him in the last twenty-five years or so of his life a different kind of radical.

Let me begin, however, where Bentham himself began - began indeed (if we may believe the tale he told in later life) as a sixteen-year-old in Oxford, listening 'with rebel ears' to Blackstone's lectures - the draft, as it were, of the *Commentaries on the Laws of England* published between 1765 and 1769.⁶ The battlefield is English law; the opposing general is the first Vinerian Professor of that subject in the University of Oxford, later to be a justice of the Court of Common Pleas. I have argued elsewhere, and will not labour the point here, that Bentham's preoccupation with Blackstone was lifelong and at times almost obsessive. 'Our Author' (as he calls Blackstone in his *Comment on the Commentaries* and in the *Fragment on Government* which grew out of the *Comment*) came to embody or symbolise for Bentham a smug and inert conservatism - the conservatism of 'everything as it should be' - which had to be overcome if the struggle for improvement was to be won. The battle might be fought in different ways; but the weapon on which Bentham chiefly relied was satire and ridicule. At this point we need to remind ourselves of Bentham's position in relation to what we have come to call the Enlightenment.

It has been increasingly recognised in the scholarship of recent decades that the singular noun 'Enlightenment' embraces a multiplicity and a diversity of movements and tendencies. In regard to Bentham we may identify sources of his conception of a science of legislation in the work of Montesquieu; of Condillac; of Diderot and perhaps especially of d'Alembert in the *Grande Encyclopédie*; of Helvétius and Beccaria. Those influences, however, belong to what, in terms of the metaphors I have suggested here, we may call the navigational element in Bentham's enterprise.

⁴ See J. Steintrager, *Bentham*, London, 1977, ch., 2, 'Obstacles to Reform'.

⁵ *Comment/Fragment (CW)*, p. 57.

⁶ 1822 preface to *Fragment on Government: Comment/Fragment (CW)*, p. 526.

Nor, of course, should we forget that Bentham's great constructive work went on apace and in parallel with his polemics. The polemics, however, drew on another Enlightenment source - the indignant irony of Voltaire. Even before embarking seriously upon his campaign against Blackstone, Bentham was translating Voltaire's *Le taureau blanc*, and in his 'Preface, which may just as well be read afterwards', adopting his own Voltairean stance. One of his reasons for taking over from his friend John Lind the notion of a *Comment on the Commentaries* was Lind's lack - as Bentham saw the matter - of 'Voltairean legereté'. Addressing Voltaire himself in 1776 (in a draft letter never sent), Bentham indulged in one of his fantasies by supposing that he was about to send the great man 'a thick volume... entitled, Theory of Punishment'. The point here, however, is his claim that in his work he had 'taken counsel of [Voltaire] much oftener than of our own Ld, Coke and Hale and Blackstone' and that Voltaire's 'good opinion' was '[o]ne of the rewards' he hoped for.⁷

How much *légereté* Bentham himself achieved may be questionable. Certainly in later life his attempts at humour could be ponderous enough. It can at least be claimed that his early prose style allows for the possibility of wit; and there is real satirical bite in the *Comment* and the *Fragment*. There is also a sense of genuine commitment to a cause. That kind of commitment is an important key to understanding the aspect of Bentham's thinking with which I am concerned here. When he told his brother, in a letter dated 5 March 1776, that 'a Mr Gibbons, M.P.', who had begun publishing 'a history of the Roman Empire' with 'a 4to Volume price 1£.1s.', was 'quite one of us', he was saying something deeply significant.⁸ We might usefully recall a military term used by Bentham in his *Fragment on Government*, though misread and misrepresented by most of his modern editors. Recalling his early perplexities, he says that various factors had 'listed' - that is, *enlisted* - his 'infant affections on the side of despotism.' Now, however, arrived at man's estate, he had 'learnt to call the cause of the people the cause of Virtue.'⁹

Manifestly, 'the cause of the people' was - and doubtless always is - a problematic concept. Almost at the moment when Bentham recorded his conversion to that cause, he was becoming aware of the need to fight for rational reform and improvement *against* some of those who had taken their stand for 'the people' and against 'despotism'. 1776 saw events more dramatic by far than the publication of Gibbon's first volume, of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, to say nothing - which is precisely what most people did say - of the anonymous and soon forgotten *Fragment on Government*. The American colonies' Declaration of Independence had its own importance for Bentham. It was important for him, however, not as a manifesto on behalf of 'the cause of the people' - the light in which it was seen by most proto-radicals - but as the promulgation of a false ideology of natural rights which could only obscure and distort 'the cause of Virtue'. As with 'everything-as-it-should-be Blackstone', so with what he was later to call the 'simple nonsense' of natural rights, we have an almost lifelong theme of Bentham's polemical activity. Fifteen years after his anonymous contribution to John Lind's attack on the American Declaration,¹⁰ the errors of the colonists were compounded and intensified, for Bentham, by the French revolutionaries in *their* 1791 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

⁷ *Correspondence (CW)*, i., 185 n. 4, 204-7, 367-8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁹ *Comment/Fragment (CW)*, p. 440n.

¹⁰ *Correspondence (CW)*, i. 408-9.

Hence the work Dumont was to edit as *Sophismes anarchiques*, which appeared posthumously in English as *Anarchical Fallacies*.

In his attack on natural-rights thinking, Bentham's weapons are perhaps more analytical than satirical. Yet the passionate conviction of the fallacious character of what was to be attacked and of its pernicious consequences is still there. 'What then was their object,' Bentham demands rhetorically, 'in declaring the existence of imprescriptible rights?' And he answers - 'This and no other - to excite and keep up a spirit of resistance to all laws - a spirit of insurrection against all governments.'¹¹ And when he offered the text of what became *Anarchical Fallacies* to William Cobbett for publication, he gave it the title *Pestilential Nonsense Unmasked*.¹² As he himself moved into a phase of more vigorous and active political radicalism, the problem of 'nonsense upon stilts' continued to vex him. Those who were now in some sense his allies - Francis Burdett, the veteran John Cartwright, Henry ('Orator') Hunt - were still imprisoned in the inadequacies and contradictions of the natural-rights ideology. When Bentham broadened the front along which he attacked political fallacies, his objectives lay mainly (as we shall see presently) among those whose concern was to resist all change, to block every reform. Yet when *The Book of Fallacies* was originally planned, it was to have included a section dealing with 'the Anarchy-preacher's fallacy'. As a matter of tactics, Bentham was later, in the 1820s, willing to suspend this part of his campaign for the time being; but he was never to be at ease with the natural-rights ideology he had first attacked in the mid-1770s.¹³

In an odd way, indeed, Bentham's adversaries in the polemical campaigns so far considered shared a common terrain, though they faced in very different directions as they looked out from that base. The radicals' natural-rights doctrine was, after all, an offshoot from the great natural-law tradition to which Blackstone too claimed to adhere - a claim very much in Bentham's sights as he took aim against 'our Author'. And alongside the rights of man in the radical ideology of the early nineteenth century we find what has been called 'popular constitutionalism' - a reformist idealisation of the 'ancient constitution' to match its conservative idealisation by Blackstone - and, for that matter, by Edmund Burke. The older Bentham, however, the presiding genius of the 'philosophical radicals' of the 1830s, had uncovered a flank along which the enemy could be attacked in ways only partly foreshadowed in his early work.

Already in that early work, to be sure, Bentham had glimpsed part of what was later to dominate his thinking about the 'obstacles to reform'. He had begun to see that it was not simply a matter of dealing with minds darkened by ignorance or blinded by prejudice. Interest - self-interest or sectional interest - was what closed the minds of lawyers and judges to the argument that the law they applied and administered - law as it was - differed fundamentally and fatally from law as it ought to be. According to several elaborate (and largely unverifiable) autobiographical accounts, this was something Bentham learned painfully during the first decade or two of his career. He had not, after all, embarked on that career with no hope at all of 'winning friends and influencing people' in the profession of which, as a barrister of Lincoln's Inn, he was himself a qualified member. Mansfield in particular - as both Mary Mack and David Lieberman point out in their very different ways - had aims with which Bentham

¹¹ *Anarchical Fallacies*: Bowring, vol. 2, 501.

¹² UC cxlvi.238; *Correspondence (CW)*, iv., 408-9.

¹³ See J.H. Burns, 'Bentham's critique of political fallacies', in B. Parekh (ed.), *Jeremy Bentham: Ten Critical Essays*, London, 1974, pp. 154-67.

could sympathise, however much he might deplore the need to look to the judicial bench rather than to the legislature for reforming initiatives.¹⁴ In the end, however, 'Judge & Co.' were to be targets for Bentham to attack rather than potential allies to be courted.

The learning process here was an experience similar to that in which - in the context of political ideology - Bentham had 'felt as if scales had fallen from [his] eyes'.¹⁵ It is well illustrated by his account of his reaction to a remark allegedly made, apropos of *A Fragment on Government*, by Alexander Wedderburn, the future Lord Chancellor: 'The principle of utility is a dangerous principle.' Baffled at first (Bentham tells us) by the suggestion that there could be danger in pursuing public utility or the greatest happiness of the greatest number, he came to see that the remark was, from Wedderburn's point of view, 'shrewd and perfectly true'. Were government to be based upon that principle, Bentham goes on,

Alexander Wedderburn might have been *Attorney General* and *then Chancellor*, but he would not have been *Attorney General* with 15,000 *l.* a year, nor *Chancellor*, with a *Peerage*, with a veto upon all justice, with 25,000 *l.* a year, and with 500 sinecures at his disposal, under the name of *Ecclesiastical Benefices* besides *et caeteras*.

Wedderburn here stands as a representative of all those whose interest it was to maximize delay, vexation, and expence, in judicial and other modes of procedure, for the sake of the profit extractible out of the expence. And in a crucially important phrase Bentham characterises that interest as a 'sinister interest'. The phrase had come to identify and to condemn the enemies against whom Bentham waged his polemical struggle.

In the passage just cited, written in 1822, Bentham explains his earlier failure to recognise what lay behind Wedderburn's remark by saying that

his disquisitions had not been as yet applied, with any thing like a comprehensive view, to the field of Constitutional Law, nor therefore to those features of the English Government, by which the greatest happiness of the ruling *one*, with or without that of a favoured few, are now so plainly seen to be the only ends to which the course of it has at any time been directed.¹⁶

Here we see the notion of 'sinister interest' linked to what may be regarded as the dominant theme of Bentham's mature political thought - the conflict of interest between 'the ruling few' and 'the subject many'. If the issue of that conflict was ever to be the assured triumph of the interest of the subject many, the permanent achievement of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, radical *political* reform must create new instruments of government. The essential instruments were to be a democratic franchise, the strict accountability of all office-holders (legislative, administrative, and judicial), and the established efficacy of what Bentham called the Public Opinion Tribunal.

¹⁴ M.P. Mack, *Jeremy Bentham: An Odyssey of Ideas 1748-1792*, London, 1962, pp. 81-94; D. Lieberman, *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined*, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 142-3.

¹⁵ *Comment/Fragment (CW)*, pp. 440n.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 447-8n. This additional note, dated 12 July 1822, was added in the second edition (1823) of *A Fragment on Government*. It was also printed, with minor variants, in the second edition (1823) of *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (CW)*, pp. 14-15. Bentham's preoccupation with the Wedderburn episode is further evinced in the Preface intended for (but not published in) the 1823 *Fragment*: cf. *Comment/Fragment (CW)*, pp. 515-17.

These are the central elements in the massive three-volume *Constitutional Code* which formed the last major constructive effort of Bentham's long career. Before they could even begin to come into being, however, there was a battle to be won against the diehard defenders of the old order. And, as before, my concern here is less with construction than with the polemical destruction of the forces opposed to reform. It would be romantically inappropriate to call this Bentham's last campaign and unsuitably sentimental to summon up the image of the old warrior on his deathbed in 1832 almost at the moment when the first halting stage of electoral reform was on its way through Parliament. It cannot in any case be claimed that Bentham's influence had much to do with the passing of the first Reform Bill. What he did achieve was to contribute to a climate of radical opinion; and my point here is that he did this more effectively by his polemical than by his constructive activity.

Bentham's polemical writings during the latter part of his long life were wide-ranging and had various targets. Here I can do no more than mention his attacks on the Church of England and, beyond that, upon what for him were the false doctrines which propelled the 'juggernaut' of organised religion in general. Such concerns, with their extension of central Enlightenment themes into the radical movement of the early nineteenth century, are obviously important. So too is Bentham's continuing onslaught upon the legal establishment of his day - notably, in this phase, upon the bewildering edifice of Chancery jurisdiction. I give precedence here, however, to the political issues which had come, for Bentham, to overshadow everything else; and I want to consider in particular *The Book of Fallacies*.

Bentham's accumulated manuscripts on the part played by fallacious arguments in political discourse were used by Etienne Dumont for part of his third recension of Benthamic materials, published in 1816.¹⁷ It was in the following year that Bentham himself 'went public' as a political radical, publishing, in his *Plan of Parliamentary Reform*, materials on which he had been at work, intermittently, since 1809. At an early stage in this new phase of his career he evidently had it in mind to secure publication in English of his critique of political fallacies. John Cam Hobhouse had the manuscripts in his hands for some considerable time, but no publication had resulted. A letter to Francis Place, written in late 1820, makes it clear that Bentham saw an essential connection between his polemics and the programme of political reform he supported. 'While in name,' he says,

it will be *The Book of Fallacies*, in its effect the work will include a defence of Parliamentary Reform against the most operative of the instruments of attack that are so continually employed against it; and, as Reform, in all other shapes whatsoever, is so completely dependent upon reform in the parliamentary shape, the use of the work, if it has any, in relation to parliamentary reform, will be its principal use - and *that* greater than all its other public uses put together.¹⁸

Hobhouse - whom in any case Bentham viewed with reserve as one infected, through his friendship with Byron, with a delight in 'universal and indiscriminating scorn' for 'all that comes in his way'¹⁹ - was to be replaced by an editor more to the author's taste. Peregrine Bingham, who edited *The Book of Fallacies* for its eventual publication in

¹⁷ *Tactique des assemblées législatives, suivie d'un traité des sophismes politiques*, ed. Étienne Dumont, 2 vols, Paris, 1816: vol. 2 comprises the 'Traité des sophismes politiques', with 'Sophismes anarchiques' at pp. [269]-392.

¹⁸ *Correspondence (CW)*, x, 250-1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

1824, was described by Bentham in 1820 as 'a friend and a disciple at the Bar who goes all lengths with me in favour of the cause of the people'.²⁰ How was that cause to be served by *The Book of Fallacies*?

The answer, in a sense, takes us back - like so much else in Bentham's later work - to the roots and early growth of his thought. As early as the 1770s, one of his major concerns was the need to purge language - especially, at that stage, the language of law and jurisprudence - of distorting and misleading fictions. Now, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, with his gaze fixed on the goal of radical democratic reform, it is the discourse of politics that Bentham seeks to purge and clarify. Nor is it in the rarefied world of philosophers and jurists that the clarifying process is to have its effects: it is the minds of the people that are to be enlightened so that they may recognise and sweep aside the fallacious arguments by which their enemies seek to block the advance of reform. The fallacies Bentham attacks do not subsist in an abstract world of logical analysis: they are levers for the exercise of power; they are indeed weapons to be deployed in a political struggle. As such, they are inseparably linked to the individuals and groups whose sinister interests they serve at the expense of the general interest, the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

This preoccupation with the motives - the sinister interested motives - of those who employ fallacies is, significantly, clearer in the arrangement Bentham himself had in mind for *The Book of Fallacies* than in the published text. Bingham essentially followed Dumont's scheme for the work. Bentham, in a manuscript of 1821, indicates, rather, an arrangement in which each fallacy is ascribed to a particular type among the enemies of rational improvement. Thus we have fallacies favoured by such characters as the hobgoblin-crier, the official-malefactor, the practical-man, the self-trumpeter, and other objects of Bentham's ridicule.²¹ There is, plainly, a strong element of political satire in this; and it may not be out of place to recall that the period was notable for the graphic satires produced by the pencils of Gillray, Rowlandson, and Cruickshank. Satire, however - at least in its classic forms - is more than mockery: it is mockery employed as the expression of *saeva indignatio*, as the scourge to chastise vice. The fallacies Bentham seeks to ridicule are, in his eyes, truly vicious: they are the instruments of delusion, corruption, and oppression.

It is, at the same time, noteworthy that Bentham was not concerned only with the vices of those actually in power at any given time. Recognising the existence and importance of the party struggle between the 'Ins' and the 'Outs', he insisted that both sides used fallacious arguments for their own partisan purposes. If the party in power sought to exploit such widespread feelings as fear, self-distrust, and superstition, their opponents were less concerned for the public good than with securing for themselves the benefits of office. This, among other things, led them to oppose any genuinely beneficial measures proposed by the government even more vigorously than they attacked those that were bad. Characteristic fallacies on this side are the 'Blind-place-abhorrer's cry. What? more places?' and the 'Blind-job-denouncer's cry. What? more jobs?'. The appeal throughout is to 'men's *jealousies* and *envyings*'. Both parties, Bentham notes, have recourse to 'trumpeting' (which we might nowadays call 'hype') and to the basic logical tricks of drawing false distinctions and begging the question.²²

²⁰ Ibid., 155.

²¹ Bowring, x., 521.

²² Bowring, ii., 481 ff.

It may be the case (as I have argued elsewhere) that Bentham's vision of democratic politics conducted by means of rational discourse purged of fallacy is utopian and unrealisable.²³ However that may be, the vision depended upon carrying the great principles of the Enlightenment into the theory and practice of democratic government. And this takes me back to the strategic question I mentioned earlier. Did Bentham's later radicalism involve a basic change of strategy? I believe that it did, though I would now be less dogmatic than I once was in denying that a conversion to democratic radicalism was in some sense implicit in the positions Bentham adopted from the outset of his long career. What still seems to me beyond doubt is that he did, in his earlier thinking, take the view that 'the cause of the people' could be served without the need in every case, for radical democratisation. In the last twenty years of his life he became convinced that such a belief was illusory. Both the scale of the conflict and the theatre of war were larger than he had supposed; and to wage the polemical struggle was thus strategically, and not just tactically, an undertaking of a different order.

Yet the continuities to which I have referred earlier are both persistent and pervasive. An extraordinary group of very late manuscripts strikingly illustrates this - and incidentally affords some unexpected support for the title I have given this lecture. These papers were eventually put together by Bentham in 1831, only a year or so before his death, as the basis for what he called a 'History of the War between Jeremy Bentham and George the Third by one of the Belligerents'.²⁴ Why did Bentham in his early eighties expend some of his failing energies upon this story of a supposed conflict in the 1790s with a king who had been dead for a decade by the time the 'History' was conceived? The question is not made any easier to answer by the fact that the whole thing was pretty clearly based on a delusion. Yet an answer is still worth seeking as an element in our understanding of Bentham as a polemicist.

Some of these manuscripts had begun life in 1827-8 as parts of a preface intended for a projected new edition of Bentham's work on *Pauper Management Improved*. Bentham evidently thought this an apt occasion for a piece of intellectual autobiography, beginning with his reading Fénelon's *Télémaque* at the age of eight; and this still seemed relevant to him when in 1830 and 1831 he began to compose the account of his 'War' with George III. The link between the two enterprises lies in the history of Bentham's Panopticon project. Pauper management was of course one of the key areas in which the Panopticon system was to be applied; and by 1830 Bentham had been haunted for many years by the disappointment and frustration he had experienced when the scheme was finally denied the government support it had at one time seemed likely to command. For that defeat Bentham blamed the hostility of George III; and he explained that hostility by reference to his opposition, in 1789, to the aggressive anti-Russian policy adopted by Pitt's administration.²⁵ Bentham's pseudonymous *Letters of Anti-Machiavel* were (he persuaded himself) so resented by the king that George conceived feelings of implacable enmity against their author and so, when the time came, set his face against Panopticon.

Bentham, as I remarked at the outset, had his fantasies; but you may well ask what this particular fantasy has to do with my subject here. The answer, I suggest, is that

²³ Burns, 'Bentham's critique of political fallacies', in B. Parekh (ed.), *Jeremy Bentham: Ten Critical Essays*, London, 1974, pp. 165-6.

²⁴ BL Additional MS 33550, fos. 365-416.

²⁵ Bowring, x., 201-12: the 'Letters of Anti-Machiavel' were printed in the *Public Advertiser*.

the episode throws light on a peculiar feature of Bentham's mature radicalism - his virulent antagonism to monarchs and the monarchical principle. You may recall my quoting a passage in which Bentham explains how he came to see that 'the only ends' ever pursued by 'the English Government' were those connected with 'the greatest happiness of the ruling *one*, with or without that of a favoured few'. Where others might have seen an oligarchy with a monarchical figurehead, Bentham saw - to quote one of the manuscripts I have just been referring to - 'an aristocracy-ridden and by-corruption-working... monarchy'. And whether under that or under absolute monarchy, 'the lot of the human race' was to be '[d]isposed of by the humours of a single being, of human race and of human form but in character separated from every other in whose hands the same vast mass of power is not enclosed.'²⁶ Bentham's imaginary 'war' with George III is thus a sufficiently apposite symbol for the real war he waged for sixty years and more against the 'obstacles to reform'.

To this there is, as I have hinted, an epilogue or coda. In these papers, Bentham himself turned - and this is a point of which I was quite unaware until I came across it while preparing this lecture - Bentham himself turned to the analogy of the *Iliad*. 'The appropriate subject of this history,' he wrote on 25 March 1831,

was and is the wrath of one single man and the baneful effects of that same wrath: a sort of counterpart to the *Iliad*: Achilles, George the 3d; People of Greece, the people of England; Agamemnon, it is not necessary to say who. As to the baneful effects... volumes in an indefinite number would not suffice for the exhibition of them. Among them are the multitudinous manifestations of depravity on the part of individuals - fruits of matchless Constitution and the system of corruption which is at once the product and the instrument of it.²⁷

Here the *Iliad* is contracted into a single episode; but Bentham might not have been too displeased to see his warfare exhibited, as I have tried to exhibit it here, in broader Homeric terms. No nightingales, so far as we can tell, sang in Queen's Square Place over this dead warrior, as (we are assured) they

sang within the bloody wood
When Agamemnon cried aloud
And let their liquid siftings fall
To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.
But perhaps a glass-fronted box in Bloomsbury has been a quieter resting-place.

*This article was originally presented as a lecture, 18 March 1998, as part of 'Bentham 250' a series of events commemorating the 250th anniversary of the birth of Jeremy Bentham.

²⁶ BL Additional MS 33550, fo. 375.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 403.