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The Principles of Asceticism and Sympathy and Antipathy in Patterns of Abuse Part I: Bentham's Frameworkⁱ

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When Bentham wrote that, "The principle of asceticism never was, nor ever can be, consistently pursued by any living creature," did he fathom how so many individuals could be brought to nonetheless pursue it to a high pitch while still remaining alive? And as he continued, "Let but one tenth part of the inhabitants of the earth pursue it consistently, and in a day's time they will have turned it into a hell," did he foresee the circumstances where this would actually come about? Finally, to what extent did he envisage the principles opposing utility—asceticism, and sympathy and antipathy—working in tandem to enforce patterns of systemic and institutionalized pain?

These three questions can now receive but speculative answers. However, they invite an analysis comparing Bentham's writings on these principles averse to utility to accounts of systemic abuse—at levels ranging from the societal to the individual. This first study will create a framework for this comparison by examining these principles. A subsequent essay will harness accounts and stories of those trapped in patterns of abuse, to investigate possible uses of Bentham's work in understanding these patterns.

The principles involved will be introduced (appropriately) through Bentham's *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Their operation will be traced through *An Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind* after an examination of the purpose of this latter work. It will be argued that it illuminates many attributes of patterns of imposed pain in secular society.

1. The basic principles

By the "natural constitution of the human frame" Bentham feels that people embrace and refer to the principle of utility, "which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question." Yet he also asserts, "not many... have been disposed to embrace it purely and without reserve. Most human action can be subsumed under either: (a.) on the opposing side, the principle of asceticism, or (b.) the sometimes supporting, sometimes opposing principle of sympathy and antipathy. This latter duo is not really an objective principle at all but an amorphous cloud of subjective judgments, each masquerading as a standard worthy of following.

a. Asceticism

The principle of asceticism operates in an inverse manner to that of utility, "approving of actions in as far as they tend to diminish [a person's] happiness; disapproving of them in as far as they tend to augment it." Bentham draws what Baumgardt calls a "rather rough distinction" between the two groups—moralists and religionists—who have embraced this principle. The former are generally animated by hope, for example of honour; the latter by fear, usually "the offspring of superstitious fancy: the fear of future punishment at the hands of a splenetic and revengeful Deity." Bentham feels that educated people are more susceptible to the former influence, the "vulgar" to the latter—due to lack of knowledge, being prone to superstition, and to "the abjectness of their condition, continually open to the attacks of fear." However, these

two "tinctures" of influence from the differing sources "would naturally intermingle, insomuch that a man would not always know by which of them he was most influenced: and they would serve to corroborate and enliven one another."

The principle of asceticism seems to represent a veritable anti-life force, but for several reasons Bentham indicates its operation is curtailed and effects less awful than might first appear. First, as Manning notes, Bentham regarded any claims concerning the superior value of pain to pleasure to be "sheer sophistry." One might call attention to his non-hedonistic sounding goal such as finding truth, yet nonetheless be "pursuing this goal because it gives him pleasure." Thus "the pain so willingly endured by the saint and the sage are embraced for no other reason than the promise of heavenly reward and earthly praise." In Manning's words, "The ascetic pursues only that pain which is necessary to his greatest happiness, and, consequently, he is a hedonist." Many appeals to asceticism, if not fully hypocritical, are thus for show.

Second, even if the sophistry entails deceiving oneself and these actors go so far as to "think it meritorious to fall in love with pain," as Bentham avers this "is at bottom the principle of utility misapplied." Baumgardt interprets, "to fall constantly in love with pain without having as a counterbalance a greater love of pleasure is impossible, even if the man experiencing such a mixture of feelings should never become aware of the complications of his emotional make up." Accompanying appeals to asceticism here are not then evidence of true love of pain, but of self-delusion or psychosis.

Third, Bentham indicates that the principle of asceticism cannot be "pursued consistently by any living creature." That crucial processes of life are inherently pleasurable was clear to the Utopians (who "gratefully acknowledge the kindness of

mother nature who, with alluring sweetness, coaxes her offspring to that which of necessity they must constantly do"xiv") and certainly clear to Bentham. To abjure such pleasures completely is to impose a death sentence on oneself; to court pain deliberately can only hasten the execution. Put another way, life itself weeds out the true ascetic.

Fourth, Bentham gives credit to even the apparently genuine ascetic for generally limiting ill consequences of the principle to her or himself: "For a man to give himself a certain number of stripes was indeed meritorious: but to give the same number of stripes to another man, not consenting, was a sin." Bentham acknowledges that "from the same source from whence, among the religionists, the attachment to the principle of asceticism took its rise, flowed other doctrines and practices, from which misery in abundance was produced in one man by the instrumentality of another." Baumgardt argues that in these cases some other factor justifies infliction of pain on "infidels, heretics, or criminals," never on the like-minded. This infliction of misery has "nothing to do with asceticism;" it is again a misapplication of the principle of utility.

Fifth, as above but in terms of collective or public policy, Bentham does not hide his contention that bad (that is to say vexatious, expensive, and inefficient) government abounds, but he believes that these problems have come about from other reasons, not a deliberate and pure design to inflict pain: "We read of none who have set themselves to work, and made laws on purpose, with a view of stocking the body politic with the breed of highwaymen, housebreakers, or incendiaries." It could even be suggested that Bentham's earlier noted dictum—on one tenth of a population pursuing the ascetic principle consistently producing a hell—carries an assumption that a conscious design of producing hell on earth is beyond even the wildest collective ascetic imagination.

b. Sympathy and Antipathy

The principle Bentham felt had "the most influence in matters of government," hence in the public realm, was that of sympathy and antipathy. xix By this principle actions are approved or disapproved not through anything such as reference to an augmenting or diminishing of happiness, "but merely because a man finds himself disposed to approve or disapprove of them: holding up that approbation or disapprobation as a sufficient reason for itself, and disclaiming the necessity of looking out for any extrinsic ground." It is thus not "a positive principle of itself, so much as a term employed to signify the negation of all principle."xx Bentham asserts that all moral accounts prior to utility are reducible to the principle of sympathy and antipathy. They avoid reference to a concrete external standard, and "prevail upon the reader to accept of the author's sentiment or opinion as a reason and that a sufficient one for itself."xxi "Ipsedixitists" (Bentham's later adopted term for adherents of this principle, based on disciples of Pythagoras who blindly stated "'ipsedixit': 'He has said the matter is so... therefore... so it is.""xxiii) express their own opinion or echo someone else's, but no external justifications are employed.

Four elements of Bentham's account of this principle have special relevance to this study. While these elements are set forth within *The Introduction* they will assume a more significant role in the *Analysis*. First, in a lengthy note Bentham looks at several prevailing levers that have been used to justify authors' views. Examples are "moral sense," "common sense," "law of nature," and the "fairest and openest of them all," whereby a person states directly, "I am a number of the elect.... If therefore a man wants

to know what is right and what is wrong, he has nothing to do but come to me."xxiii All such "pretended systems" are elaborate synonyms for "I'm right!" But a crucial factor exacerbates problems created by this multiplicity of erroneous justifications. Because a justification under this principle is not attached to anything "real," different reasons are easily used in turn or in combination. The object is to get one's way; matching different appeals to different reactions would come naturally. Fittingly, annexed to Bentham's introduction of the principle is his note that "it ought rather to have been styled, more extensively, the principle of caprice." "Caprice" implies both the noted lack of reason on extrinsic ground and a tendency to sudden change. This inclusion of capriciousness suggests that the person given to this mode of argument has a natural tendency to shift from one justification—indeed one mode of judgment or even position—to another.

Second, as Bentham states, "the principle of sympathy and antipathy is most apt to err on the side of severity." Through judgments based on this principle punishment is applied where it is not deserved, excessive punishment is doled out, and "there is no incident imaginable, be it ever so trivial, and so remote from mischief, from which this principle may not extract a ground for punishment." Bentham goes on to note that the principle also errs on the side of lenity, especially in regard to the future. But as will be suggested by what follows, this apparent lenity often becomes illusory: the nearsighted element of antipathy will always be moved by a "near and perceptible mischief," and immediate severe action will very often trump any expected lenity.

Third, while in *The Introduction* Bentham explains that under the principle of sympathy and antipathy an opinion is taken as necessary and sufficient grounds for its own justification, elsewhere he develops what might be called the preemptive strike

capability of this principle. In marginal notes to *A Table of The Springs of Action* he states: "Ipsedixitism, its modes of warfare: 1. Direct: by setting up its own standard and so causing nonapplication of utilitarianism. 2. Indirect: viz. by reprobating calculation and so causing misapplication of utilitarianism for want of it." This reprobation of calculation serves to disarm abilities such as that to detect relationships between causes and effects. Just "as by real connection discovered, science and art are advanced, so by imagined disconnection they are thrown back," so encouraging imagined disconnection and connections injure the science or art of living.

Bentham felt that in society the "subject many" are prevented from "entertaining a true conception of their own interest," fallacies directed to that end are given "all possible currency," and what can be done "towards the suppression of discourse tending to the exposure of these fallacies" is done. Similarly on an individual level, the disarming of logical capacity blinds people and prevents them not just from pursuing interests, but to actively assess which actions might "augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question"—in other words from seeking happiness at all.

The fourth element of Bentham's account of the principle of sympathy and antipathy to be examined here is articulated in another long note:

The mischief common to all these ways of thinking and arguing (which, in truth, as we have seen, are but one and the same method, couched in different forms of words) is their serving as a cloak, and pretence, and aliment, to despotism: if not despotism in practice, a despotism however in disposition: which is but too apt, when pretence and power offer, to show itself in practice. The consequence is,

that with intentions very commonly of the purest kind, a man becomes a torment either to himself or his fellow creatures. xxxii

And as Baumgardt summarizes the sentences following, if the actor in question "is 'of the melancholy cast' they sit 'in silent grief... if of the irascible,' they 'declaim with fury and virulence against all who differ from' them."

Bentham thus indicates that there is a direct link between use of the principle of sympathy and antipathy and "despotism in disposition" in the user. It might seem from his wording ("if not despotism in practice") that this link does not guarantee a despotic condition. But that such a condition may not exist yet is of secondary importance to the adoption of the disposition. However pure an actor's design may be originally, her or his character is altered by use of the principle. The despotic disposition will thus show itself "when pretence and power offer."

Through the examination thus far, an intriguing contradistinction appears between on one side, asceticism, and on the other side, sympathy and antipathy. The principle of asceticism—being apparently dedicated to pain—would seem to be the most dangerous to prospects for human happiness. But through the mitigating factors identified, to the extent this principle operates on its own many of these ill effects disperse. Contrary to this, the principle of sympathy and antipathy may appear innocuous at first: an elaborate acknowledgement that people enjoy claiming to be right more than demonstrating valid reasons why they may be so. Yet Bentham indicates that the effects upon both people adopting this principle and on those subject to their judgments, and consequences

resulting, are progressively deleterious. The relationship between these two principle threats to utility will be seen to develop in the *Analysis*.

2. The basic principles at work in "Analysis of... Natural Religion"

Bentham's *Introduction* was published in 1789. An *Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind* emerged much later in 1822.

Though the name Philip Beauchamp appeared under the title, George Grote composed it from Bentham's notes. Both the composition of the work and the ideas within it deserve great attention. On the former point, James Crimmins concludes, "we can be sure that the *Analysis* truly reflects Bentham's opinions on the topic of the influence of the religious sanction on temporal happiness." Delos McKown seconds this, asserting that the reader gets the best of both worlds: "the *Analysis* exhibits the clear and trenchant mind of Bentham on religion in the discerning and graceful hand of Grote." Recent work by Catherine Fuller and Philip Schofield indicates that Grote's hand may have been too graceful, altering some of Bentham's meaning. For now, however, the working assumption in this study will be that the words express Bentham's ideas.

Concerning the ideas within the *Analysis*, Crimmins states that it "represents the systemic gathering together of all Bentham's previously stated grievances over the influence of the religious sanction in the temporal concerns of society," and his *Secular Utilitarianism* traces these grievances carefully. What follows here has two limited purposes. The first is to suggest the validity of a particular reading of the *Analysis* that attends to its doctrines not as an assessment of problems inherent in religion, but of those generated in the secular world by the operation of the principles

averse to utility and by people assuming excessive power over others. This reading makes liberal use both of the work assembled by Crimmins and his insights. The second purpose is then, to follow the operation of the principles averse to utility through the *Analysis*.

a. "Secular Religion"

At the heart of Crimmins' study is the dual proposition that Bentham's views on religion were "substantially indicated many years before publication" of the *Analysis* and that "they were developed and worked up towards completion in an intimate relationship with his theory of knowledge." His tracing of these themes through Bentham's works supports both parts of that proposition. L. J. Hume had noted that within Bentham's writings, "everything is connected with everything else in multiple ways, and... particular themes and notions appear and re-appear in many contexts." Crimmins develops several such echoing themes, arguing for example that there is "a more or less precise correlation between the emergence of Bentham's opinions on religion and the development of his social science."

Crimmins argues that Bentham's critique of religion in fact "facilitated the development of his later extreme stand on political issues." Bentham's understanding of (what he felt to be) "the illusory nature of religion" allowed him to "see that the abolition of illusion depended on a substantial alteration of the social environment in which it thrived." Disillusionment with religion became a catalyst for his belief that "organized religion, political power, and legal institutions were... all part of the same system standing together both as objects for radical reform and as supreme obstacles to it." It

was not just that members of ruling elites of these spheres interlaced with each other.

Nor was it, as Bentham asserts, that they were constantly "cooperating without the need of concert" in "inflicting on the subject and unaffluent many all the miseries out of which they can contrive to extract profit for themselves." Crimmins points to the degree to which Bentham felt that these more practical problems were all built upon illusions generated by natural human reactions to being subject to great power.

Crimmins illustrates an apparent weakness of Bentham's understanding of religion, and oddly a potential strength. He argues Bentham did not "focus upon religion as the theologian or Church historian might conceive of it." He was not concerned with "whether and in what fashion our conceptions of the cosmic universe and attendant religious beliefs influenced or shaped our actions and social relationships." Bentham was primarily concerned with "the relationship between religion and political life," and focused "on religion as a social sanction—that is, as an agency of motivation—on what he perceived as the disutility of religious motives and inclinations." Thus the weakness: Bentham "seems to have been singularly incapable of proceeding further than to consider religion as a set of rituals or as a social sanction founded on fear of the supernatural."

Crimmins writes, "Bentham's explanation of why men and women continue to revere the Deity was typically shallow and depended on a psychological assumption which was necessarily speculative." He notes the *Analysis* to articulate this assumption:

[Bentham] posited it as a general characteristic of human nature that it is towards those who have 'the largest power of inflicting evil upon us, and who confers on us the most significant favours, that our encomiums are the warmest, our censure the most gentle and sparing.' From this Bentham inferred that we generally conceive of God as differing only in degree from earthly possessors of power... xlvii

Crimmins describes Bentham's explanation of reverence as "typically shallow," and he argues that Bentham at times constructs his argument on "little more than a caricature" of the religious mind. This assessment may seem to be dyslogistic, but arguably it is not. It conveys well that Bentham does not address entire dimensions of intimacy that might come with a relationship with a goddess or god, and that he edits out practically any space for numinous experience. Crimmins summarizes, "the materialist and nominalist underpinnings" of Bentham's system "could not encompass the 'internal' and the 'mysterious' and this impoverished his analysis."

Bentham's inability to thus think in terms beyond the utilitarian might indeed, as Crimmins suggests, impoverish his analysis of genuine religious experience. However, his noted insights on parallel "illusions" underpinning various genres of power—gained from perceiving what he felt were illusory aspects of religion, and also the workings of the religious sanction in human affairs—may in fact enhance his understanding of the rule of very (as opposed to all) powerful beings and equally powerful ideas in the secular realm. In this sense, Bentham arguably addresses something of a netherworld.

On a hierarchy of power one might imagine the lower, more conventional forms of natural and public authority. In these areas, so long as a person is of sound mind and mature years the dynamics of power relationships should be fairly straightforward. (Of course they are generally not, but with utilitarian reforms they could be.) Conversely, the gods presumably dwell at the highest level. The dynamics of the power relationship at

the top of the hierarchy are less obvious to the utilitarian eye, perhaps even, as Crimmins argues for Bentham, invisible. At this level language becomes incapable of description, the conventional senses are oft overridden, and logical capacity can only take one to the leaping off point for faith. Crimmins' terms "internal" and "mysterious" capture essential aspects of this realm.

Yet arguably there is a realm in between these two. In this middle area physical laws of the universe hold as steady as in the lowest one, as do both positive and negative "laws" of human nature. However, much is imported from the highest realm: language is incapable of accurate description, the validity of people's experiences is denied, and they are asked to take things "on faith" instead of for any logical reason. This realm becomes equally "mysterious" to the higher one; however it is not the Lord that is working in mysterious ways but sinister interests, which have arrogated god-like powers to themselves and to ruling sinister ideas. It is possible then, to accept Crimmins' assertions on the limitations of Bentham's account of religion, yet to postulate that as far up the hierarchy of power as this nether-realm extends, Bentham's analysis may be useful. In fact, the *Analysis* arguably works *better* as a study of secular power relationships where key elements have been imported unfairly from the religious province.

Crimmins identifies one such element Bentham emphasized, that "the religious sanction... was frequently used to elicit unwarranted beliefs." Belief is placed "in the catalogue of duties and merits, while unbelief is placed under the head of crimes and offences." Crimmins quotes from the *Analysis* to explain, "The inducements of religion produce a 'habit of credulity' tending to blind and confuse, 'rendering a man easy prey to deceit and error, and thereby exposing him to incessant disappointment and loss." And

as Crimmins explains, any ill effects are multiplied: "An odd paradox of psychology is often discernible on these occasions: the weaker the evidence the greater the merit in believing." Bentham's insights on faith being used as a lever to make people discredit their own senses, experience, and interests—more, to feel there is more merit in ignoring them completely—may not address the genuine religious experience. But they capture very well the role faith plays in manipulating people in the noted netherworld.

The essential argument for this secular reading of the *Analysis* is: (i.) a genuine religious experience is assumed to be based on faith or (in terms from the *Analysis*) non-experimental belief, (ii.) yet, many people and ideas in the secular world are supported by non-experimental belief, and (iii.) these latter people and ideas benefit by mechanisms in human nature such as the noted habit of credulity. The patterns of belief thus entrenched might well be called "secular religions."

This use the *Analysis*, to help study ill effects of such secular religions may seem to suffer from an insurmountable flaw. As Crimmins argues,

The theme of the *Analysis*, therefore, is a broader one than the limitations of Bentham's title might suggest; not only is it not merely concerned with natural religion, but its general objective is to show that conflict between legitimate attempts at political reform, on the one hand, and arbitrary power, on the other, can only be resolved with the destruction of all beliefs of a religious or otherworldly nature. ^{lii}

If this is correct, there could be no point in using the *Analysis* to study societal problems if Bentham's attack on religious belief is edited out—because such belief is the lynch pin

that holds together the entire evil empire. And if this is so, to ignore this lynch pin would be to both misread Bentham, and to fail to pack the one tool needed for the job.

Two defenses might be raised concerning this potential flaw. The first would entail providing alternate evidence from Bentham's texts to at least partially challenge Crimmins' perception of an all-or-nothing stand on eliminating religion for Bentham. This would be an especially daunting task because Crimmins' assessment stands on a veritable mountain of research. Second and far more efficiently, however, is to simply argue that even if this were Bentham's view, it would not ultimately matter. Bentham could hardly contest the role played in science by accidental discovery. And if one of his ideas—or an entire account as in the *Analysis*—proves useful for a purpose conducive to the greatest happiness, it should be employed. If it were permissible to use serendipitous discovery in any system of thought, one would think it would be in that of utility.

b. Basic Principles at work in the "Analysis"

Under the term *Natural Religion*, I include all religious belief not specifically determined and settled by some revelation (or reputed revelation) from the Being to whom the belief relates. The good or bad temporal tendency of any particular alleged revelation, can of course only be ascertained by an inspection of the books in which it is contained, and must therefore be a separate enquiry. To any such enquiry however, the present discussion is an essential preliminary... Nor is it possible to measure the benefit or injury derived from revealed Religion, without first determining the effects of Religion herself without any revelation. ^{liii}

Thus "Philip Beauchamp" defines the principal term and purpose of the *Analysis*.

"Religion herself" left in this purposefully generic role would entail both a belief in a superior being and elemental human responses such belief triggers. Thus duties and other intuited modes of appropriate action flow automatically from springs within human nature; and to evaluate religion one must understand these natural responses.

This setting of parameters of enquiry veritably invites the reading of the *Analysis* suggested above. For whether the initial apprehension is of a true superior being or of a human in a superior position, Bentham feels that the automatic responses flow essentially the same. And because he sees deities and "terrestrial potentates" through the same lens, he describes character traits naturally adopted by powerful humans. These patterns of action would be easiest to detect in the case of the extreme power differential he views; but they should hold all the way down the chain of command. Following is a look at the previously noted aspects of the principle of sympathy and antipathy as they operate in the *Analysis*: (i.) capriciousness, (ii.) a tendency to severity, (iii.) the disarming of a subject's capacity to pursue interests and happiness, and (iv.), a developing despotic disposition. Also introduced will be (v.) the implications of an "afterlife." Finally (vi.) the principle of asceticism will be seen to have dealt with its own inadequacies and assert its power.

(i.) Bentham notes that beliefs concerning future "vengeance and remuneration" from a superior being "will be framed entirely upon the conceptions of his character." If the "temper of the Deity" were seen as beneficent fear is needless, if unbeneficent fear is logical. Iv Thus, "natural religion invariably leads its votaries to describe to their Deity a character of caprice and tyranny, while they apply to him, at the same moment, all those epithets of eulogy and reverence which their language comprises." The reason for this

inconsistency is "the infallible result of the circumstances, and agreeable to the principles of human nature." ^{Iv} Here, "the feeling which excessive power occasions in those who dwell under its sway [the circumstance], is extreme and unmixed fear [the reaction]." ^{Ivi} It may be possible to face great power without a natural fear, but the "heroic firmness" this would take is implied to be rare.

That fear is part of this natural reaction is pursued below. Of concern here is the other part, uncertainty. To a mortal, a deity practically has to be a being of "an unknown and incomprehensible agency." Bentham is not saying that a deity's actions must be inconsistent; rather, that to less mentally powerful subject those actions are nonetheless "incomprehensible," and "an incomprehensible mode of behaviour, not reducible to any known principles, is in human affairs termed *caprice*, when confined to the trifling experiences of life; *insanity*, when it extends to important occasions."

This situation mimics perfectly the relationship between a person who has power over another—and who bases decisions upon the principle of sympathy and antipathy—and one subject to that power. For here also two factors lead to the natural reaction of insecurity on the part of the subject: the perceived difference in power, and the lack of a predictable framework wherein the subject may form secure expectations. With a deity there might be a framework but the subject cannot understand it; with the ipsedixitist, because decisions were linked to no external factors, no such framework ever existed. In either case the more powerful being must appear to be capricious.

Beyond this appearance of caprice, however, does the principle of sympathy and antipathy actually encourage unpredictable behaviour on the part of the more powerful? For two reasons the answer is yes. The first reason, at least concerning human agency,

reason or concrete piece of evidence would establish at least a hint of consistency. But the ipsedixitist truly does not know her or his own mind (one knows one is right, but not having grounded this view on anything solid, any such "ground" shifts constantly).

The second reason is more tactical in nature, and assumes a greater role the more the exercise of power is felt to be desirable. If what is at stake is the expression of one particular view or the issuing of a single directive, it is in the dominant's interest to make that view clear. However, if what is sought is not a singular compliance but a desire to hold the subject in a subordinate position, capricious behaviour in fact works better than a consistent program of instruction. As Bentham states, though people "laugh at the caprices of a child; they tremble at the incoherent speech and gestures of a madman." If that madman "is entrusted with the government of millions, seconded by irresistible legions who stand ready at his beck," this would be terror enough; if the being "whose agency is unfathomable" is all powerful, the terror is complete. Whether the caprice of the powerful being is genuine or merely perceived by the subject, "present behaviour [of the powerful being] constitutes no security whatever for the future." And as one must attend to that being's actions in framing plans, one must be left in "all the restlessness of suspense and uncertainty." This perception of capriciousness is highly effective in keeping a subject in an uncertain and immobile state.

(ii.) Bentham states in the *Introduction* that the principle of sympathy and antipathy usually errs on the side of severity. The *Analysis* contains two embellishments of this doctrine of note here. The first is that severe judgment by a superior is seen as a

natural byproduct of a dominant subordinate relationship. This factor becomes visible as praise and blame are noted: "Our employment of the punitory sanction, or of blame, is in exact proportion to our power; our employment of the remuneratory sanction, or of praise, is in a similar proportion to our weakness." A possessor of "unlimited power… has not the slightest motive to praise," because "his blame, the herald and precursor of impending torture, is abundantly sufficient to ensure conformity to his will." Conversely a person "without strength or influence, who cannot hurt us even if he wished it, is cut off from the employment of the punitory sanction. His blame is an impotent murmur." All that person can do is praise the superior and hope.

A second element of Bentham's account of praise and blame is noteworthy here. He writes:

In proportion as we raise the inferior into equality, his blame becomes more efficacious, and is proclaimed oftener and more freely. Advance him still higher, and his propensity to find fault will be farther extended, until at last it becomes so exciteable and eruptive, as to disregard altogether the feelings of others, and to visit with merciless severity the most trivial defect of conformity to his wishes. lxii

Bentham seems to refer to a spectrum, with differing behaviours natural to different locations upon it. However, these words may also be interpreted to describe a process where the position of an "inferior" is raised and he adopts the increasingly severe and otherwise despotic behaviours naturally. Presumably this would not often be the case with deities (they usually start out at the top). But it would often be the case with people in the secular world assuming power over others. Especially noteworthy to this study is the escalation from beginning to blame—and the fact that the blaming is effective—

through stages of finding more and more faults, to a complete disregard of others' feelings, "merciless severity" in demand, and a hair trigger irascibility.

Bentham had already concluded that the principle of sympathy and antipathy erred more often on the side of severity. What these embellishments from the *Analysis* show is that the dynamics of the power relationship naturally encourage this tendency on the part of the powerful, as well as a tendency to acquiescence on the part of the subject. These two developments seem to reinforce one another: for example, a subject's initial lack of power will cause her or him (even if inadvertently) to adopt behaviours such as the noted avoidance of blame that reinforce the growth of severity in the powerful.

(iii.) Bentham had identified ipsedixitism's indirect "mode of warfare" as the "reprobating calculation and so causing nonapplication of utilitarianism for want of it." The *Analysis* contains a detailed examination of this doctrine, beginning with statements that articulate the problem. First, "fear is the never-failing companion and offspring of ignorance." Painful sensations intrude on people continually before they learn how to ward them off. Second, "the sole acquisition applicable to this purpose is knowledge." Third, and as a dual conclusion, "it is only to knowledge that we owe our respite from perpetual suffering," and "ignorance must generate incessant alarm and uneasiness." Ixiii

The acquisition of knowledge being crucial to warding off suffering, Bentham makes clear from where that knowledge must come.

But all our knowledge with regard to pleasure and pain is derived from experience... All useful knowledge, therefore, (that is, all which can be instrumental in multiplying the enjoyments and diminishing the sufferings of this

life) consists in believing facts conformable to experience... It is on the conformity of belief with experience, therefore, that the attainment of pleasure and the prevention of misery, in every case without exception, is founded. "Experience is the teacher of all things," as Julius Caesar noted; Bentham insists that it is the *only* teacher. Thus, "whatever tends to disjoin belief from experience, must be regarded as crippling, to a greater or less extent, the sole engine by which our preservation even from incessant suffering is ensured." This disjoining also tends to "disqualify our mental faculties for the purposes of temporal happiness." "Ixv

Singular instances of disjoining belief from experience are damaging, but the derivative effects worse: "Each separate instance of this want of conformity engenders others, and renders the mind less likely to keep close to a conformable belief upon other occasions." The result is a "general habit of derangement which it creates in the mental system—by preparing the intellect to be at other periods the recipient of useless or uncertified belief." Such a derangement in extreme becomes insanity, but Bentham reminds the reader, "all intellectual weakness is the fruit of this divorce to a lesser extent." As noted, Bentham identifies the "habit of credulity" to be "the weakest and most fatal." And because "the less reason there is for receiving [a] doctrine, the larger share of merit will be awarded to the believer... the tendency of the religious premium is thus to give birth to the most sweeping and indiscriminate credulity."

The consequences of divorcing belief from experience are brought to fruition in natural religion:

Hence the belief of an unseen agent, infringing at pleasure the laws of nature, appears to be pregnant with the most destructive consequences. It discredits and

renders inadmissible the lessons of experience: It vitiates irrecoverably the processes of both proof and refutation, thereby making truth incapable of being established, and falsehood incapable of being detected... and plunges us into the naked, inexperienced and helpless condition of a newborn child—thereby qualifying us indeed for the kingdom of heaven, but leaving us wholly defenceless against the wants and sufferings of earth. lxix

By this view taking any leap of faith would seem an enormously silly thing to do. Yet it should be recalled that Bentham does not necessarily consider everything. It may be argued that a relationship with a superior being provides pleasure from the relationship itself, and may also help to ward off or deal with great pains. However, as an analysis of patterns of belief in the secular world Bentham's critique has no such disqualifications, and it puts ill consequences of the principle of sympathy and antipathy in focus.

As the ipsedixitist eschews experience—or extrinsic evidence—in forming a belief, anyone conforming to that belief (without independent assessment) takes a similar leap of faith. This leap is to unsupported opinion only; yet the problems identified enter the new believer just the same. The habit of credulity is acquired, and the subject is left without capacity to detect truth or falsehood, in a "inexperienced and helpless" and fearful condition, with mental faculties "disqualified" for pursuing temporal happiness. These consequences come about not only because of the original use of the principle of sympathy and antipathy, but also because of the difference of power; and the subject's subordination is exacerbated by each such leap of faith.

(iv.) As noted earlier, Bentham warned that one mischief common to all uses of the principle of sympathy and antipathy was their encouragement to "despotism... in disposition" in the actor. This disposition was seen to grow and foster negative results, even if the actor began with the purest intentions. Though this picture of the despotic disposition plays a large role in the *Analysis*, Bentham does not claim to form it from an understanding of a deity's nature or character. In fact he states plainly that this would be impossible: such a superior being is by nature "incomprehensible and unlimited," but these terms are "merely negative, and therefore have no positive meaning whatsoever." Essentially "the Deity is a being of whom we know less, and who has more power, than any other." Thus it comes that "We conceive of him as differing only in degree from other possessors of power, and we therefore assimilate him the most closely to those earthly sovereigns in whom the most irresistible might resides."

Just as Bentham does not attempt to define any deity's nature, neither does he ever state that he himself thinks of a deity as an enlarged terrestrial potentate. What he suggests rather is that this equation between a deity and the wielder of absolute earthly power is generally the one people have made—and the one that has played a formative role in how they conceive of their gods. Bentham follows this path to describe the feeling that this kind of "excessive power occasions in those who dwell under its sway," that being "extreme and unmixed fear." The foremost cause of fear (with the previously noted perception of capriciousness) is the assumption that great strength is most often accompanied by a "disposition to do harm," and he notes the Cyclops as an example. [xxi]

Using the *Analysis* to study secular relationships of power requires no apology then, as it is precisely on these relationships that the book is based. And here the natural

fear of excessive power is well grounded. Bentham states, "The central passion in the mind of the earthly despot is an insatiate love of dominion, and thirst for its increase." That this passion grows naturally, and leads to other negative behaviours such as cruelty, was seen in the ascendancy to severe and despotic action. Bentham is not alone on this point; this process been illustrated by commentators from Plato to the present.

If the character of the deity that emerges in the *Analysis* represents the ultimate in human despotic disposition, this is because that is exactly what Bentham was describing. This deity "will be conceived as fluctuating" between evil and good, but "infinitely more as an object of terror than of hope." His "changeful and incomprehensible inclinations will be supposed more frequently pernicious than beneficial to mankind, and the portrait of a capricious tyrant will thus be completed." This pernicious portrait is fleshed out:

He who is thus absorbed in love of dominion, cannot avoid loving the correlative and inseparable event—the debasement of those over whom he rules; in order that his own supremacy may become more pointed and prominent. Of course he also has an interest in multiplying their privations, which are the symptoms and measure of that debasement. Besides, his leading aim is to diffuse among his subjects the keenest impressions of his own power. This is, in other words, to plant in their bosoms an incessant feeling of helplessness, insecurity and fear... happiness must, throughout their lives, be altogether overshadowed and

stifled.lxxiv

(v.) As mortals we can pray that the above description does not apply to beings above. As citizens we hope our earthly potentates do not fit the description, however

history teaches that too often they have. For students of abuse, it might seem that if Bentham had set out to describe essential elements of an abusive personality and hence relationship, he could not have done better. Aspects of the principle of sympathy and antipathy work together to amplify original problems caused by the principle. This nest of derived problems has especially ill consequences in dominant / subordinate human relationships, such as the development of a despotic disposition in the ipsedixitist actor, and acquiescence in those under that actor's jurisdiction. These acquiescent behaviours entrench the subject in a condition of insecurity and immobility. But another prominent theme in the *Analysis* serves to magnify this immobility: that of how concepts of life after death affect temporal happiness. Translating this theme into secular terms may seem outlandish, but what the translation suggests cannot be ignored.

Bentham does not analyze any actual revelation; rather he argues, "posthumous expectations, when unaided by revelation, are productive of injury." Just as he sees that within human nature lie automatic responses to great power, he perceives another set that activates automatically at the thought of death. If one feels her or himself "completely mortal" the thought of death brings no special apprehension or misery, "except that which the pains attending it, and the loss of present enjoyments, unavoidably hold out." If one believes posthumous existence to be blissful this would be a source of happiness; but for the majority of believers it is "replete with terrors." Thus natural religion "alone and unassisted" adds to the already daunting prospect of death "fresh grounds of uneasiness, wrapped up in an uncertainty which only renders them more painful and depressing."

Three arguments seem present here. First, because we have no direct experiential knowledge of life after death, it is an "empty canvass." And "since no reason can be given for preferring one mode of conceiving it to another, the strongest sensations of the past will be perfectly sure to break in, and to appropriate the empty canvass." This is because of the "regular economy of the universe," where thanks to general laws of nature "the past becomes the interpreter of the future." Second, a perceived dramatic change in this routine naturally induces anxiety: "Had we no longer any confident expectation that to-morrow would resemble yesterday—were we altogether without any rule for predicting what would occur to us after this night, how shocking would be our alarm and depression?" Anxieties produced by such a change are solidified by a third contention, that because "pain is a far stronger, more pungent, and more distinct sensation than pleasure," it is far more likely than pleasure to "obtrude itself upon the conceptions, where there exists no positive evidence to circumscribe their range."

A secular translation of these arguments may not be so outlandish. After all, just as was the case concerning reactions to power, Bentham takes his three assumptions on human nature strictly from observations on the terrestrial plane: (i.) people normally assume tomorrow will look much like yesterday, (ii.) the perception of a drastic change (less final than death but nonetheless major) interferes with this expectation and induces anxiety, and (iii.) pain is a more "pungent and distinct" sensation than pleasure, hence more easily colours such an unknown future.

If the scope of suggestion is limited to this mortal coil, one clear theme emerges from these arguments: the more a person's life is characterized by pain, the more it will be assumed that life after any drastic change will be more painful. All of the arguments

would be at work here: (i.) if yesterday was painful, tomorrow will be assumed to be so; (iii.) sensations of pain colouring the future will be even more pungent and distinct than they would be for those exposed to less pain, and (ii.) because the future state will thus appear to be more painful than the present, any prospect of change is more productive of anxiety. A corollary of this theme concerns those in conditions of imposed pain, hence abuse. That is, the more pain that is imposed on such persons and to which they become acclimatized, the more they will automatically assume that a future after a drastic change will be even more painful. Hence, the more likely they would be to avoid any such daunting drastic changes.

Worse, to the extent the subject's "training" in extra-experimental belief has helped condition her or him to an imposed pattern of pain, the less capacity that person has to escape—or even imagine escaping. For "it is only to knowledge that we owe our respite from perpetual suffering." And every time the subject has adopted a judgment of one in power over her or his own experience, a particle of such knowledge has been sacrificed—and with it a particle of hope to find a way out.

(vi.) It was suggested earlier that to the extent the principle of asceticism operates on its own, the potential negative effects are mitigated. But one conclusion of this study to this point cannot be a surprise after the foregoing analysis. The principle of asceticism does not operate in a vacuum; in fact various elements of the principle of sympathy and antipathy serve to nourish its growth, and for many people its practical ascendancy. One original source of this nourishment concerns the person making use of the principle of sympathy and antipathy; another concerns people under her or his power.

The initial analysis of the principle of asceticism revealed an overarching factor that mitigated potential damages: that people claiming to pursue pain deliberately were often using this claim for effect, that is to say it was often sophistry. Many such claims were either hypocrisy, misapplication of utility, or evidence of mental derangement. An underlying assumption Bentham makes is that to deliberately court pain is so illogical that a reasonable person claiming to be doing so would either be lying, mistaken, or not be reasonable after all. The principle of utility is grounded to this basic assumption that pain is to be avoided. Yet as has emerged, the more one uses the principle of sympathy and antipathy, the more one loosens oneself from this bedrock, and the more exposed one is to pain that is not in fact being sought out.

The greater source of nourishment for the principle of asceticism flows indirectly, through the ipsedixitist to people under her or his power. Through effects of the principle of sympathy and antipathy on the character of the original actor, pains of those under that actor's jurisdiction can be increased dramatically. This was the case, for example, with the tendency to severity and adoption of a despotic disposition. At first blush it might seem that it is not the ascetic principle itself (whereby one adopts the belief that pain should be sought and pleasure avoided) that is transmitted, but that pain is inflicted in a conventional sense. But as the *Analysis* illustrates, for two reasons it is not that simple. First, one of Bentham's recurring themes is the "disarming" aspect of the principle of sympathy and antipathy that operates as belief replaces reason for the subject. Even if subjects may not be coerced to adopt the specific belief that pain should be sought, that their capacities to understand the world and hence to pursue interests and happiness are injured severely is, if not exactly the same thing, certainly a "second worst" thing.

The second reason that it is not "just" the infliction of pain illustrated in the *Analysis* but an effectual training in asceticism has not been given full attention to this point. That is the degree to which subjects come to believe that enduring pain is an appropriate, in fact required gift to a superior power. Bentham explains:

You wish to give proof of your attachment to the Deity, in the eyes and for the conviction of our fellow-men? There is but one species of testimony that will satisfy their minds. You must impose upon yourself pain for his sake; and in order to silence all suspicion as to the nature of the motive, the pain must be such as not to present the remotest prospect of any independent reward. lxxxiii

The foregoing examination suggests that if there is a prime culprit in the initial actor's adopting these beliefs it is the principle of sympathy and antipathy. However, once any such beliefs are transmitted to another, and the focus shifts to the subject who has been so influenced, the situation changes. For whether subjects have been trained to believe they should not pursue interests and hence happiness, or that it is appropriate that they deliberately court pain, they have effectually been trained to be de facto partisans of the principle of asceticism. This alters dramatically the picture formed after the initial stages of this study, where it appeared that the ill effects of asceticism tended to dissipate, and the more dangerous principle was that of sympathy and antipathy. This may remain the case with an initial actor, but transmission to others has permitted the principle of asceticism to return with a vengeance.

The *Analysis* and other of Bentham's texts provide more insight on this ascetic resurgence, and much more on the operation of both principles averse to utility. Yet this

general framework constructed might serve as one side of a bridge. A subsequent essay will begin from the other side, focusing on those in abusive situations. In conclusion, however, it may be appropriate to harness just three notes from the other side, to suggest that what has been shown and suggested above may be reaching toward it.

The first such note comes through an assessment by Allison Moore of three identifiable characteristics of an abusive relationship:

First, the man characteristically lacks respect for the woman and her needs...

Violence and fear become a constant part of the woman's experience. Most abuse increases in severity and frequency over time... Second, both people center their attention, consciously and unconsciously, on the abuser's perceived needs, wants, and moods... Third, abused women begin to distrust their own judgment and sense of themselves. Significantly, they come to distrust their judgment in the moral domain as well... Women [in this situation] do not recognize many of the options open to them because their ability to evaluate the situations... is significantly eroded by their interactions with their abusers... moral agency is limited by abuse and by their internalization of the effects of the abuse. lixxxiv

Many elements from the above examination are echoed here: the increasing severity and despotic disregard of others wrought in the ipsedixitist actor, the focus on beliefs of, and subservience to the dominant actor, and the disarming of the subject's capacities for judgment and progress out of her situation, illustrate Bentham's ideas disquietingly well.

The second note is from Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia*, her study of the perilous position of adolescent women in today's cultural climate. That she titled the chapter on pressures that lead to eating disorders "Worshipping the Gods of Thinness" is

more than allegory. lxxxv Her naming this problem in this way illustrates how a ruling idea has risen to play a formative role in a powerful example of a secular religion, moreover one wherein the endurance of pain has become a major article of faith.

The third and final note comes from Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, as they assess the glorification of suffering in the Christian tradition:

But this glorification of suffering as salvific, held before us daily in the image of Jesus hanging from the cross... encourages women who are being abused to be more concerned about their victimizer than about themselves. Children who are abused are forced most keenly to face the conflict between the claims of a parent who professes love and the inner self which protests violation. When a theology identifies love with suffering, what resources will its culture offer to such a child? ... The image of God the father demanding and carrying out the suffering and death of his own son has sustained a culture of abuse and led to the abandonment of victims of abuse and oppression. Until this image is shattered it will be impossible to create a just society. Ixxxvi

This final note, based not on distant theory but an understanding of people in daily peril, is especially revealing. It suggests that the belief that suffering is an appropriate gift to a superior power has great currency in the present day, moreover, that the practical result of the belief is often "giving" this suffering not to a distant supreme being, but to a person who has power over one. It is also intriguing to see people from within the Christian tradition itself, almost two centuries later, echo Bentham's understanding that some key traditional assumptions from religion (natural or otherwise) must be dealt with for the temporal happiness of humankind to have a chance.

Bentham's initial account of the two principles averse to utility in the *Introduction* does not attempt to tell the full story of how they become a kind of malicious tag team undermining prospects for human happiness. This story is arguably fleshed out in the *Analysis*. Bentham's insights have direct relevance to many aspects of the lives of people in abusive situations, from his understanding of levers in human nature that serve initial recruitment, to his description of a deity who, exactly like the earthly despot dominating the abused person, "delights to behold a sense of abasement, helplessness, and terror" in his subject. Ixxxvii The examination of stories from the lives of the abused can facilitate a better appreciation of the practical workings of Bentham's doctrines—and conversely, hopefully allow some light from these doctrines to illuminate the dark world of abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> Crimmins, 222, quoting Analysis
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