

## BENTHAM AND COLERIDGE <sup>1</sup>

This series of lunch-hour talks has not only been introduced by a historian but is set in a primarily historical framework. The people we are thinking about are held together by having lived in a particular place, England, at a particular time, between 1815 and 1851, and by all [the] connexions that are consequent on this spatio-temporal one. But I must warn you of something which you already know, namely that I am not myself a historian, or not primarily that; and I would only make a fool of myself if I pretended to be one. I am a philosopher, and that means that what I chiefly see in Bentham and Coleridge is not a pair of people who adorned a scene twelve thousand miles away a hundred and forty years ago, but people who could be right here with us now, and as I introduce some of their opinions to you I shall from time to time pause to argue the toss with them just as if they were right here with us now. And perhaps in this way I can indirectly serve the historian's purposes too, for if I can help you to see what it would be like to have them here with us, that may indirectly help you to see what it would be like to be back there with them, and participating in the controversies which they stirred up.

I shall be summoning Bentham before us in person, that is quoting from him, rather more often than Coleridge; one reason for this being that Bentham could write good English while Coleridge could not. Well, I suppose that should be qualified a bit – I understand that Coleridge has a considerable reputation as a writer of verse; and he has the poet's gift for coining the odd st[r]ieking phrase, but what he can't do is sustained, lively, readable philosophic prose – ~~and~~ it's rather, with him, a case of gems shining through the ooze.

Jeremy Bentham was born in 1748 and died in 1832, so that it is only the last part of his long life that falls strictly speaking within our period. There is, however, a singular continuity in Bentham's history – it was simply a matter of this man steadily emerging as the centre of an increasingly influential school; and this extension of his influence continued, as Professor Phillips told us last time, still more spectacularly after his death. I need therefore make little excuse for concentrated[ing] on two works of his that appeared in the 1770's and the 1780's; for these works already contain that essential Benthamism that was one of the major intellectual influences in our period.

The first of these two works is his Fragment on Government, an attack on Sir William Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England. In the introduction he draws our attention to an elementary distinction which he thinks Blackstone neglected. He says, 'There are two characters, one or other of which every man who finds any thing to say on the subject of Law, may be said to take upon him; – that of the Expositor, and that of the Censor. To the province of the Expositor it belongs to us to explain to us what he supposes the Law is: to

---

<sup>1</sup> Editors Note: This text has been transcribed by Simon Herbert and edited by Simon Herbert, Adriane Rini and Max Cresswell. The text is kept in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Box 6. The page numbers in the original text have been put in curly brackets. All underlinings are Prior's. Prior's handwritten editing of the text is indicated in two ways. Prior's deletions have been shown with strikethrough, and his additions in square brackets. Editorial comments, mainly indicating Prior's typographical errors, have been signalled with angle brackets.

that of the Censor, to observe to us what he thinks it ought to be.' Well, that seems a simple and obvious distinction, and it applies not only to the study of Law. Not only with respect to laws, but with respect to any other human and social phenomenon, it is one thing to describe the thing as it actually is, and a different thing to venture an opinion as to how it ought to be. In fact the class[ear] recognition of this distinction seems to me the hallmark of a civilised and liberal moral and political philosophy. A distinction is not, of course, a necessary opposition, and I wouldn't say, and Bentham didn't say, that things never are as they ought to be. But the question as to how things are, and the question as to how they ought to be, are two different questions – that's the important point. And it's not only an important point but surely also a very simple one, so simple that you wouldn't think anyone would ever be blind to it. But writers on law and politics have in fact a set of words and phrases which you'd almost think were expressly designed to gle[o]ze <sic> over this distinction. And not only writers on Law and Politics – even our own nannies or whatever domestic mentors we have are armed with a stock of such words and phrases. For example, that magic phrase "It isn't done." You're {2} contemplating some action and you're told 'it isn't done' – what does this mean? Does it mean that nice people don't do it and therefore you shouldn't do it, or that nobody does it and therefore you won't do it? This is something we're never told, and that's part of the phrase's efficacy – if our moral sense isn't very strong, sheer fatalism will paralyse us – we're just not going to do it, so it's no use. I remember something that happened to me in this College only a month or two ago, during the Easter break – the Library door was open, so I wandered in to have a look at the periodicals until some harpy came up to me and said 'We're not open.' What an extraordinary thing to say – how did she think I had got in? But of course the charm worked as it always does, and I went out the way I had come in, through the not-open door.

Well, Bentham, at least in 1776, had a distaste for this method of reconciling people to the decisions and proceedings of the powers that be, and that was one of his prime quarrels with Blackstone. He selects, for example, Use [the] following passage:- 'A state', says Blackstone, 'is a collective body, composed of a multitude of individuals united for their safety and convenience, and intending to act together as one man. If it therefore is to act as one man, it ought to act by one uniform will. But in as much as political communities are made up of many natural persons, each of whom has his particular will and inclination, these several wills cannot by any natural union be joined together, or tempered and disposed into a lasting harmony, so as to constitute and produce that one uniform will of the whole. It can therefore be no otherwise produced than by a political union; by the consent of all persons to submit their own private wills to the will of one man, or of one or more assemblies of men, to whom the supreme authority is entrusted: and this will of that one man or assemblage of men is, in different states, according to their different constitutions, understood to be Law.'

Bentham comments on this passage as follows:- 'Suppose,' he says, 'that the people, no matter on what occasion, begin to murmur, and concert measures of resistance. H[N]ow then is the time for the latent virtues of this passage to be brought to light. The book is to be opened to them, and in this passage they are to be shown. . . . . a set of arguments curiously strung together and wrapped up in proof of the universal expedience or rather

necessity, of submission. . . . Armed, and full of indignation, our malcontents are making their way to the royal palace. In vain. A certain estoppel being made to bolt out upon them in the manner we have seen by the force of our Author's legal engineering, their arms are to fall, as it were by enchantment from their hands. To disagree, to clamour, to oppose, to take back, in short, their wills again, is now, they are told, too late: it is what cannot be done: their wills have been put in hotchpot along with the rest: they have "united", – they have "consented", – they have "submitted". – Our Author having thus put his b[h]look by their nose, they are to go back as they came, and all is peace. An ingenious contrivance this enough: but popular passion is not to be fooled, I doubt, so easily. Now and then, it is true, one error may be driven out for a time by an opposite error: one piece of nonsense by another piece of nonsense: but for barring the door effectually and for ever against all error and all nonsense, there is nothing like the simple truth.'

That last bit is no doubt over optimistic; in fact Bentham himself might be charged at this point with confirm[us]ing what is with what ought to be – men ought to be more impressed by 'the simple truth' than by error and nonsense, but it is by no means certain that they are so influenced. And had he been less optimistic at this point, he <sic.> might have found himself faced with a rather teasing problem. For Bentham was a Utilitarian; to use ~~the~~ [his own] language[,], ~~we have just quoted from him~~, he believed that we ought always to do whatever will result in the least mischief; and since men are in fact less rational creatures than he took them for, it may well be that less mischief might be done by filling them with uplifting Blackstonian nonsense than by publicising the simple Benthamite truth. For a realistic Utilitarian it is a genuine and serious problem {3} whether Utilitarianism ought to be widely propagated – you might spread more happiness, and prevent more pain, by letting the majority of men go on erroneously thinking that they have other duties beside the spreading of happiness and the avoidance of pain, and even by letting them remain in the more thoroughly muddled state in which they do not distinguish between what they ought to do and what they can't help doing. The fact is, I think, that Bentham had a higher regard for truth, and a keener concern for the propagation of truth and the exposure of what he considered nonsense, than his own theory warranted; and this was characteristic of the Utilitarians generally. For my own part, I think Bentham's exposure of Blackstone's particular kind of nonsense was admirable; but then I'm not a Utilitarian.

I want to turn now to the other book of Bentham's that I want to discuss, his Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation. This came out privately in 1780 and publicly in 1789, and it is a work in which Bentham develops his Utilitarian creed in a direct and positive way, not just in the course of criticising someone else. I'll read you the first paragraph – its rather famous. 'Nature', he says, 'has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will but serve to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while. The principle of

utility recognises this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law. Systems which attempt to question it, deal in sounds instead of senses, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light.’

Well! What’s happened to the distinction between is and ought now? For Bentham now says, almost in as many words, that what we ought to do and what we cannot but do are one and the same thing or pair of things – seek pleasure and avoid pain. I ought to say that after the paragraph I’ve just read you he adds the rather shamefaced sentence: ‘But enough of metaphor and declamation: it is not by such means that moral science is to be improved’. But of course you can’t just commit a purple patch and disown it like that. ‘Can’t’ in the sense of ‘oughtn’t to’, anyway. However, Bentham’s inconsistency at this point doesn’t go very deep. For the pleasure and pain which he considers the standard of right and wrong are the pleasure and pain, as he puts it, of everyone whose interest is in question, whereas the pleasure and pain which determined what we will in fact do is our own pleasure and pain. And the legislator’s primary duty is so to arrange things that publicly useful actions will pay the individual who does them, and publicly mischievous ones will not.

There’s one other point, though, at which Bentham does seem cut the ground from under his own feet. The point I’m going to mention has been commented on by many recent writers, but it seems to have only just noticed by Professor Rees of Swansea, that it was also made by Macaulay. Bentham, as we have seen, is pretty emphatic on the duty of so acting as to maximise pleasure and minimise pain. Of this principle of utility, as he calls it – the principle of doing that thing which will be most useful all round – of this principle he says ‘Other principles in abundance, that is, other motives, may be the reasons why such and such an act has been done: that is, the reasons or courses of its being done: but it is this alone (that is utility) that can be the reason why it ought to have been done’. But then he says, and says more than once, that words like ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ have no meaning except in terms of utility – ‘right’ means ‘conducive to the general happiness’, or it means nothing at all. But if that is what ‘right’ means, then it does mean nothing at all, or at all events nothing of any moral significance, to say that it is right to do what is {4} conducive to the general happiness. For if ‘right’ means ‘conducive to the general happiness’ then ‘It is right to do what conduces to the general hapiness’ means ‘It is conducive to the general happiness to do what is conducive to the general happiness’, and while that’s true enough, it’s hardly worth writing home about.

Something seems to have got gummed up here, and I think the way it happened was this: Bentham was in fact a person of very strong moral convictions. He was aware of legal anomalies and abuses which were causing unnecessary unhappiness, and he was out to remove the unhappiness by various schemes of reform. He naturally encountered opposition, but the most vocal of his opponents were not men who exhibited a cynical indifference to moral considerations, but men who at least professed to be opposing Utilitarianism on moral grounds. That is[,] Bentham found himself involved in one of the most tricky kinds of conflict, a conflict of opposing moralities. And he did exactly what one might have expected

an impatient man to do – he took what seemed an easy way out of this conflict by denying that the opposing morality was a morality at all. And that trick was a fatal one. For a realistic morality is bound to recognise not only, as Bentham saw, that what is and what ought to be may be different, but also that there may be genuine differences of opinion as to what ought to be. And any linguistic trick which makes such differences of moral opinion impossible – such as the trick of defining ‘right action’ as the thing that your own moral code enjoins – will automatically also have the effect of emptying your own morality of all its content. You take all the kick out of your own morality if you try and make it appear that it cannot have any real opponent to kick against.

That is not a criticism of Utilitarianism as such, but only of Bentham’s form of it, and it would be quite easy to be a Utilitarian without digging this particular pit for oneself. For you could hold that our duty is to maximise pleasure and minimise pain, and say frankly that this is not a theory about what the word ‘duty’ means but a theory about what our duty is, so that another person who means by ‘duty’ exactly what we mean by it could honestly differ from us as to what is our duty. That was the form which Utilitarianism took much later in the century in Henry Sidgwick’s Methods of Ethics, which I am inclined to think the best book on Ethics that has ever been written. I am also inclined to think, though, that there is another objection which is fatal even to Sidgwick’s version of Utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is the theory that that action is the right one which, out of all the acts open to us, will produce the greatest total balance of pleasure over pain. Now either we have free will or we have not. If we have no free will, then no act is ever open to us except the one we actually perform, so that there can be no comparing of the total results of one possible act with those of another possible act, and the Utilitarian test of rightness simply doesn’t apply. If we have free will, we may presume that other people have free will also, so that the chain of consequences flowing from any possible act that we might do sooner or later gets fuzzy because of interaction with the as yet unfixed choices of other people, so that when it comes to comparing the total consequences of different causes of action, there just aren’t any definite totals to compare. Or to put it another way, no total course of events can be described as the result of [our] acting in such and such a way, since however we choose to act, the total course of events can still be varied by the way others choose to act. So either way our duty cannot consist in that act which has the pleasantest total consequences out of a group of acts open to us. For either there’s no group but only one act open to us, or no possible act has anything that can be called its total consequences. And this argument disposes not only of Utilitarianism but of any account of our duty which makes it depend on a comparison of total consequences.

Now that’s a criticism that was made last year by a philosopher still living, and so far as I know none of Bentham’s own contemporaries hit upon anything so devastating. But to those contemporaries, all the same, we had better now turn, and I have been asked to speak, in particular, about Samuel Taylor Coleridge. {5}

The first and most important fact about the relation between Coleridge and Bentham is that Coleridge hardly ever mentions Bentham. When he has occasion to discuss

Utilitarianism, or moral scepticism, he refers far more frequently to a different person altogether, the theologian William Paley. Paley believed that the whole universe was governed by a beneficent divine legislator of the Bent[h]amite persuasion, and that because of this we must each promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number or else – Paley’s main positions are worth hearing in his own words. “We can be obliged to nothing,” he says, “but what we ourselves are to gain or lose something by.” And if you ask us why we are obliged to keep our word, he answers that it is because we are ‘urged to do so by . . . the expectation of being after this life rewarded, if I do, or punished for it, if I do not.’ “This solution”, he says, “goes to the bottom of the subject, as no further question can reasonably be asked.” Paley admits that “there is always understood to be a difference between an act of prudence and an act of duty’, and we might well wonder in what this difference consists. Well, he says, “the difference, and the only difference, is this, that in the one case, we consider what we shall gain or lose in the present world, in the other case, we consider what we shall gain or lose in the world to come.”

This pious Utilitarianism, as we might call it, worried Coleridge far more than Bentham’s impious Utilitarianism, precisely because Coleridge was a profoundly religious man, and that’s really the main thing about him. There are a number of passages in which he develops an interesting view of the relation of religion to philosophy and of both to public welfare. If you begin, he says in one ph[il]as[c]e, “with the attempt to popularise science . . . you will only effect its plebification”. And it’s the same with philosophy. “From a popular philosophy and a philosophic populace, good sense deliver us . . . It is folly to think of making all, or the many, philosophers, or even men of science and systematic knowledge. But it is duty and wisdom to aim at making as many as possible soberly and steadily religious; - inasmuch as the morality which the state requires in its citizens for its own well-being . . . can only exist for the people in the form of religion.” However, philosophy has a part to play in this programme the philosopher, for Coleridge, being a kind of religious back-room boy. “The existence of a true philosophy,” he says, “in the rulers and teachers of a nation, is indispensable to a sound state of religion in all classes.” And it was his belief that theologies like Paley’s were the by-product of a false philosophy – a false philosophy recognizing no source of knowledge but sensation, and thereby denying the power of conscience to reveal to us obligations which go beyond self-interest. In this connexion there is another passage from Paley which I must read you. It occurs in a chapter dealing with the theory that we perceive right and wrong by means of a special moral sense. After questioning the very existence of “such instincts as compose what is called the moral sense,” he says, “But further, suppose we admit the existence of these instincts; what, it may be asked, is their authority? No man, you say, can act in deliberate opposition to them, without a secret remorse of conscience. But this remorse may be borne with: and if the sinner choose to bear with it, for the sake of the pleasure or the profit which he expects from his wickedness; or finds the pleasure of the sin to exceed the remorse of conscience, of which he alone is the judge, and concerning which, when he feels them both together, he can hardly be mistaken, the moral-instinct man, so far as I can understand, has nothing more to offer.”

This was the sort of thing which Coleridge found shocking, and especially shocking in a clergyman – the deadening of our reverence for the very voice to which above all he ought to be appealing. {6} “Consisten[t] truth and goodness”, we find him saying in his Table Talk, “will assuredly in the end overcome everything, but inconsistent good can never be a match for consistent evil. Alas! I look in vain for some wise and vigorous man to sound the word Duty in the ears of this generation.” This emphasis on duty, which is highly characteristic of Coleridge and which he learnt in part at least from the German philosopher Kant, has two aspects. Firstly, there is the side we have already noticed – the insistence that, in the language of Bishop Butler, duty is what it is and not another thing, and in particular is not just long-term self-interest. But Coleridge also emphasises the demands of duty against a class of people who were by no means moral sceptics, the people whom he calls, in the language of his time, “Jacobins”.

It is not at all easy to disentangle the various things that Coleridge has to say on this subject, but let’s try. The aim of Jacobinism, he says in one key passage, is to ‘build up government and the frame of society on natural rights instead of social privileges. . . . Right, in its most proper sense, is the creature of law and statute . . . In morals, right is a word without meaning except as the correlative of duty’. And again he says, “Whoever builds a government on personal and natural rights is so far a Jacobin. Whoever builds on social rights, that is, hereditary rank, property, and long prescription, is an Anti-Jacobin”. And again: “We have repeatedly pressed upon the attention of our readers the impracticability of all theories founded on personal rights; we have contended zealously that the security and circulation of property, with political power proportioned to property, constitute a good government, and bring with them all other blessings which our imperfect nature can or ought to expect” Again, he contrasts what he calls “the acknowledged truth that in all countries both governments and subjects have duties – duties both to themselves and to each other” – he contrasts this with “the Jacobinal doctrine of the universal inalienable right of all the inhabitants of every country to the exercise of their inherent sovereignty”. “Rights!” he exclaims in another place; “there are no rights without corresponding duties”. And he applied this not only to the admirers of the French revolution but also to their opponents when they took to emphasising their rights and forgetting about duties. “It was evident to thinking men”, he says about a certain stage in this conflict, “that both parties were playing the same game with different counters. If the Jacobins ran wild with the rights of man, their antagonists flew off as extravagantly from the sober good sense of our forefathers, and idolised as were an abstraction in the rights of sovereigns. Nor was this confined to sovereigns. They defended the exemptions and privileges of all privileged orders on the assumption of their inalienable right to them, however inexpedient they might have been found, as universally and abstractly as if these privileged has been decreed by the Supreme Wisdom.”

Well, it’s at least clear that Coleridge wants us to pipe down rights and pipe up duties. But this statement of his that “there are no rights without corresponding duties”, is a little ambiguous. Does he mean that only those who have duties have rights, and that their rights are dependent on the satisfactory performance of their duties? If so, this view seems over-harsh; for surely babies and animals have rights, for example the right not to be tortured,

without having duties. But he may mean simply that there cannot be a right without somebody having a duty, and if this is what he means there is good deal to be said for it. A child cannot be said, for example, to have a right to food and clothing if nobody at all has any duty to see {7} that he gets it. It seems, further, to be Coleridge's view that rights are a kind of accidental by-product of the duties people have, in some sense in which duties are not an accidental by-product of the rights people have. I'm not quite sure what this means, but I suppose it would support Coleridge's view if there were some duties not giving rise to rights in anyone. Now are there such duties? Coleridge rather suggests that there are duties towards institutions and social arrangements about which he seems half inclined to say that they give rise to rights in the institutions and half inclined to say that they don't give rise to any rights at all, but in any case they don't on his view give rise to rights in individuals.

Let us consider some examples that might be regarded as supporting this theory. Persons in the armed services have a duty to salute their officers. But does this mean that the officers have a right to be saluted? This could certainly be questioned; for the usual theory of saluting or salutology is that you're not saluting the man but the rank, so that it's really the rank, if anything, that has the right to the salute. But while I think it makes sense to say that babies and animals have rights, it hardly makes sense to say that abstract entities like ranks and positions have rights. So it does look as if in this case we have a duty without a corresponding right. But it might be argued all the same that there is a right, and a right of individuals, out of which this duty ultimately springs. For we might say that saluting officers, or saluting their rank, is part of good order and discipline in the fighting services, and that such order and discipline is essential to their efficiency, and the individuals who make up our citizenry have the right to the protection of efficient fighting services. So far as I can see, Coleridge would not have agreed with this explanation of this duty, for he says in one place that 'the true patriot. . . will reverence not only whatever tends to make the component individuals more happy and more worthy of happiness, but likewise whatever tends to bind them more closely together as a people.' And again he says, 'It is high time that the subjects of Christian Governments should be taught that . . . the flux of individuals in any one moment of existence is there for the sake of the State, far more than the State for them, though both positions are true proportionally.'

It is just at this point that you can see the difference between Coleridge and Bentham. Bentham had no time for natural rights either, and he speaks rather scornfully of the preambles to the constitutions of the various American states, preambles asseñ[r]ting that all men were created equal and with certain 'inalienable rights.' 'Who can help lamenting', he says, 'that so rational a cause should be rested upon reasons, so much fitter to beget objections, than to remove them ? But with men who are unanimous and hearty about measures, nothing so weak but may pass in the character of a reason; nor is this the first instance in the world where the conclusion has supported the premises, instead of ð[the] premises the conclusion'. But one cannot imagine Bentham saying, as Coleridge did, that individuals exist for the sake of the State rather than vice versa. For in his initial statement of his utilitarian principles, he says that 'the community is a fictitious body, composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its members. The interest of

the community then is, what ? – the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it.’ And there is a kind of ‘inalienable right’ which Bentham’s system does give to in every individual, despite his criticism of American ballyhoo on this subject – there’s the right to be counted in when the sum of happiness produced by a given possible action is being computed. For Bentham to insist too strongly on the nonsensical character of natural-rights talk would be sawing off the branch he’s sitting on; but we have already seen that he was rather good at that. {8}

While we are on this subject of duties to fictitious bodies, I ought perhaps in fairness to consider another one nearer home. I have sometimes said, and I certainly firmly believe, that my first duty as head of the department of Philosophy in this College is not to my students but to my subject. And I don’t mean that Philosophy is specially privileged at this point – I’d take the same view of the duty of any head of a department – his first duty is not to his students, not even to the ones who are just taking his subject as a fill-up, but to his subject. Of course I don’t mean that we haven’t a duty to our students as well; but that is a duty to persons, giving rise to rights, in those persons, and not giving rise to any special theoretical problems, as this prior duty to one’s subject does. For what rights can this duty be equivalent to ? It would be altogether too medieval[ ]and allegorical to say that the subject of Philosophy has the right to be advanced in my department. What can be said is that students with the capacity to advance the subject of Philosophy have the right to the assistance of the Philosophy staff in developing this capacity, and we have the correlative duty to assist such students; but this duty seems to me a consequence of our duty to advance the subject rather than the very same duty put in other words. So on the whole I’m inclined to agree with Coleridge that there are duties without rights corresponding to them, though I doubt I’d agree with him very strongly as to what these duties are.

<this paragraph crossed out by Prior>

I have concentrated, as you would surely expect me to do, on Bentham and Coleridge as philosophers, and on views which have seemed to me to lie pretty near the centre of their thinking. But you don’t see the full greatness of either of these men until you look at some of the details, - until you watch them particularising. There is only time now for me to mention one small example from each. From Bentham, I take this small wise remark, that although every law is either a command or a revocation of a command, in the actual statement of the thing what may be called the expository matter usually takes up much more space than the command or revocation itself. And this, Bentham says, goes not only for public law but for private orders. ‘Take for instance one from a bookseller to his foreman. Remove from this shop to my new one my whole stock, according to this printed catalogue. – Remove from this shop to my new one, my whole stock, is the imperative matter of this order; the catalogue referred to contains the expository appendage.’ Now I call that slight but illuminating, and Bentham is just full of such things. And from Coleridge I would mention his circular in support of Peel’s 1818 bill for shortening the hours of children in cotton factories, answering such objections as that ‘legislative interference with free labour is unproper.’ ‘Free Labour!’ he exclaims; ‘It is our duty to declare aloud, that if the labour were indeed free, the employer would purchase, and the labourer sell, what the former had no right to buy, and the latter no

right to dispose of : namely the labourer's health, life and well-being. These belong not to himself alone, but to his friends, to his parents, to his King, to his Country, and to God.' The writer of that, one feels, is somewhat given to declamation, but it's not empty declamation.

And with that I think I must end this contribution to the current series of plebifications.

<end of the section which Prior crossed out>

{9}

There's one other thing to be said at this point. It was Bentham, not Coleridge, who insisted that all good and evil must boil down to the pleasure and pain of individuals. But in another way Bentham forgot the individual. For with him the decisive factor was the sum-total of pleasures and pains produced, and as has been often pointed out by his critics, a sum of pleasures enjoyed by different people is not itself a single pleasure enjoyed by anyone, and it could be that in order to obtain the greatest abstract sum of pleasures certain individuals would have to suffer more than any individuals ought to, and pure Utilitarianism could say nothing against this. The stock case used by moralists nowadays is the exemplary punishment of an innocent man for the sake of public security; but there's another case more pertinent to our period. I don't know what were the exact historical connexions between Benthamism and laissez-faire economics, and hope to learn something about this from later speakers, but the two are often thought of together, and there is one logical connexion between them. A person could defend laissez-faire economics in the face of such evils as child labour by saying that whatever suffering the system caused to particular individuals it produced the greatest prosperity and therefore the greatest happiness on the whole; and I think some people did defend laissez-faire economics in this way. And at this point a man like Coleridge, however inhuman[e] his duties-without-rights theory might sound, could be more human[e] than those who were tied to pure Utilitarianism. What Coleridge in fact thought about child labour comes out in his defence of Peel's 1818 bill for shortening the hours of children in cotton factories, answering such objections as that 'legislative interference with free labour is improper'. "Free labour!" he exclaims; "It is our duty to declare aloud, that if the labour were indeed free, the employer would purchase, and the labourer sell, what the former had no right to buy and the latter no right to dispose of: namely the labourer's health, life and well-being. These belong not to himself alone, but to his friends, to his parents, to his King, to his Country, and to God." The writer of that, one feels, is somewhat given to declamation, but it's not empty declaration.

And with that I think I must end this contribution to the current series of plebifications.