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Review: Anne Brunon-Ernst, *Utilitarian Biopolitics: Bentham, Foucault and Modern Power*

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**Review: Anne Brunon-Ernst, *Utilitarian Biopolitics: Bentham, Foucault and Modern Power*. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012, 204 pp. £60/\$99USD. Hardback.**

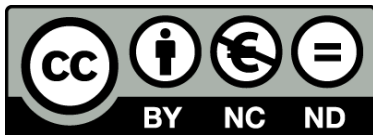
**ISBN: 9781848931695**

With this book Anne Brunon-Ernst has done a great service. As she notes in the General Introduction, hers is the first full-length study bringing the work of Jeremy Bentham together with that of Michel Foucault (1926-1984), to show how very important Bentham's work was to Foucault's analyses of modern power. Until now, too many readers would think of the relationship between Bentham and Foucault in terms of Panopticon: this narrow, disciplinary and often *dirigiste* focus has turned Bentham scholars off of Foucault and Foucault scholars off of Bentham. Instead, building on the work of Christian Laval and others, Brunon-Ernst shows how Foucault's Collège de France lectures on biopolitics are inspired by an appreciation of utilitarianism as modern and flexible governmental rationality, informing and implementing actually existing liberalisms less on the basis of abstract right than on the basis of concrete instruments of security. Foucault recognized in Bentham a thinker for whom power was not so much top-down as lateral, and for whom law could be converted into a set of tactics of government that go well beyond the state, narrowly understood, to regulate population rather than territory, and to regulate individuals through their own freedom to act on and respond to incentives and disincentives. On this view utilitarianism is the anti-*dirigiste* framework for biopolitics; it is a 'technology of government' (p. 113) that provides the primary means and ends of liberal rule.

Between its Introduction and Epilogue (on language), *Utilitarian Biopolitics* is divided into three parts: 1) the biopolitics of interests (biopolitical pleasure and biopolitical pain, or sex and crime/punishment); 2) the utilitarian conduct of conduct (through laws, norms, and publicity); and 3) the biopolitical expert (the moralist and the economist). Brunon-Ernst aims to demonstrate not only the close affinities between Bentham's schema and Foucault's account of biopolitics (and thus the importance of Bentham to Foucault's generation of this account), but to suggest what Bentham can learn from Foucault and what Foucault can learn from Bentham. For this reader, the first project is far more successful than the second: Brunon-Ernst offers close and compelling readings, for example, of the connections between Bentham's direct and indirect legislation and Foucault's government as conduct of conduct, and of the relationship between Bentham's emphasis on economy and frugality and the role for Foucault of political-economic expertise in constituting the truths of biopolitical regimes. What seems strange about the second project—for example, Brunon-Ernst's insistence that Foucault's 'bodies and pleasures' needs Bentham's utility and that Bentham's theory of motivation needs Foucault's analysis of instinct—is that it sidesteps the extent to which Bentham and Foucault were very different kinds of thinkers. Bentham was a resolutely non-historical critical projector, and Foucault a resolutely historicist skeptic; it's not clear that either would or should have any interest in learning from the other, and the notion that they should seems to need more justification. Perhaps Brunon-Ernst is simply emulating Bentham's constructivism, but such an approach risks misconstruing Foucault, and risks gliding over important differences between late Enlightenment and postwar twentieth-century contexts. These concerns and other more minor ones, however, do not

take away from Brunon-Ernst's achievement. She has produced a piece of thorough and extensive scholarship, consulting a huge number of primary and secondary English and French sources; it should be impossible, following her work, for Bentham and Foucault scholars to dismiss each other as they have in the past. As she argues persuasively throughout, both camps need to get beyond Panopticon to reassess the illuminating relationship between these two thinkers.

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