For an eternal peace through the establishment of the liberty of commerce:
the case of Jeremy Bentham’s „Economic Pacifism“

A close examination of the history and development of major political concepts presupposes necessarily the investigation of a wide range of ancient, medieval and modern contributions to political philosophy that represent the theoretical elaborations of particular aspects of the historical realities which signaled the process of the genesis and gradual crystallization of various conceptual representations of socio-political phenomena. To the extent that the history of the (western) political philosophy symbolizes the evolution of the fundamental concepts,

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which constitute the focal point of different schemes of interpretation, political theorists find themselves not rarely exposed to the serious difficulties emanating from the attempt to analyze the pervasive interplay of the political ideas in different historical contexts, and they end to realize the vagueness and obscurity of the terminology underlying the language of political theory as long as it is viewed as a static artificial creation destined to serve merely as a means of expression to the various modes of human speech and thought. A proper understanding of political concepts as products and expressions of concrete historical situations presupposes the conception of the texts, where these concepts come into use, as integral parts of the historical reality, as concrete historical moments, as stations in the history of concepts which runs closely parallel to the history of human societies.

Bentham’s theory of peace appeared in a period, marked by the radical developments in the field of commerce, the triumph of the „èsprit de commerce“ in 18th century, but also by the need for an Enlightenment in economy, since all these changes led to the propagation of the idea that the consolidation of a permanent peace should be inescapably viewed as a corollary of systematic efforts for the establishment of the liberty of commerce on an international basis. Adam Smith in particular stressed the intimate relationship between the liberty of commerce and the fundamental problems of political life, and the raising of any barriers in distribution of products turned, from a new point of view, to be viewed as a first bold step for the freedom of thought and the creation of a new atmosphere of solidarity and mutual cooperation between the nations. Besides, this period witnessed the genesis of Utilitarianism, a new philosophical movement in England, whose architects, as they had been galvanized into a vigorous tradition of economic thought very soon embraced the ideals of the new Enlightenment turning to defenders of the case of the liberty of commerce, but this time from a profoundly different perspective, namely that one of ethics, advocating of the coincidence of morality and utility, in order to shift the emphasis from the economic advantages of a policy favour to the liberty of commerce to the moral consequences which such a policy would have.

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Bentham begins the demonstration of his ideas on peace with the axiomatic formulation that „War is mischief upon the largest scale“\(^2\). Then he goes on to provide an account of the main causes of war, regarding it as a symptom resulting from the pathology of the human nature. He discerns the „incentives of war“ in the „prejudices of men, the notion of national rivalry and repugnancy of interests, confusion between meum and tuum-between private ownership and public sovereignty, and the notion of punishment, which in the case of war, can never be other than vicarious“. He proceeds to an exhaustive analysis and enumeration of the most important inducements to war as well as the principal causes or occasions of war, adding possible ways for their prevention, emphasizing characteristically the importance of occasional injuries caused by the rivalry in the field of commerce and the interception of the rights of property as real or pretended offences of the citizens of one state towards the citizens of another state, caused primarily by a conflict of the interests of the individuals as well as of the interests and pretensions of the sovereigns. In regard to the second aspect of the problem, he translates attempts of monopoly in commerce as the prelude to a status of insolence of the strong towards the weak, of a perpetual tyranny of one nations towards the another, highlighting at the same time the value of the initiatives for the establishment of defensive confederations\(^3\).

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and the contracting of conventions limiting the size of military forces to be maintained, as effective means of prevention. Bentham goes further to question the efficacy and viability of such a project, precluding any possible objections against his program. At the following passage he argues of the rationality of his suggestions, employing a suggestive metaphor in order to dismantle any arguments, that might be used against his position:

...there might be some difficulty in persuading one lion to cut his claws; but if the lion, or rather the enormous condor which holds him fast by the head, should agree to cut his talons also, there would be no disgrace in the stipulation: the advantage or inconvenience would be reciprocal.  

Let the cost of the attempt be what it would, it would be amply repaid by success. What tranquillity for all sovereigns!-what relief for every people! What a spring would not the commerce, the population, the wealth of all nations take, which are at present confined, when set free from the fetters in which they are now held by the care of their defence.

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5 Bentham, “A Plan for an Universal and Perpetual Peace“, 548. For a lucid and recent introduction to Bentham’s views on the issue of colonies, see L.Boralevi Campos, Bentham and the Oppressed (European University Institute: Ser.C, political and social sciences; 1) (Berlin, 1984),120ff. Campos Boralevi emphasizes Bentham’s ambivalent attitude towards colonization, taking into account all the intrinsic antinomies and inconsistences of Bentham’s theory concerning this issue. Campos Boralevi follows in effect Donald Winch’s (Classical Political Economy and Colonies, London, 1965) line of interpretation on this subject, who discerned a gradual development of Bentham’s attitude towards the emancipation of colonies and attempted to follow its evolution by distinguishing three major „phases“. Winch introduced this way a radically new scheme of interpretation, rejecting pointedly the widespread claim that the English philosopher was for the whole of his life an ardent supporter of anti-imperialism. Noteworthy is that although Bentham’s attitude presents to a
In his preface to his essay on „A Plan for a Universal and Perpetual Peace„, Bentham states explicitly the fundamental principles, upon which his project is based:

a) the limitation and fixation of the force of the nations which constitute the European system, and

b) the emancipation of the distant dependencies (colonies) of each state\(^6\). From a methodological point of view, it is clear that Bentham follows a twofold strategy in order to substantiate his arguments: on the one hand, he stresses the complete inutility of war and the pressing need for the reduction of the military forces of the European states while at the same time he advances the request for the abolition of the colonial system. In this way, he defines the main problems which undertakes to discuss, underlining, as it is evident, the consequences of the total lack of peace. On the other hand, he underscores—this time in a positive way—the utility of a universal and perpetual peace and the advantages of a plan which should be articulated for this purpose.

Bentham addresses his program to the whole of mankind, not only to the wisest but even to the least wise since all of them are wish enough to ascribe the chief of their sufferings to war.

\(^{6}\) Bentham notes at this point that he follows a line of argumentation advanced by Dean Tucker and Dr. Anderson, but he seems to aspire to a more general and thorough treatment of the problem, Bentham, „A Plan for an Universal and Perpetual Peace„, 546.
In this perspective, he anticipates that his plan will acquire a universal character, concerning all the civilized nations. However, he seems to ascribe the full responsibility for the realization of his program upon Great Britain and France, expressing his belief that an initial agreement between these two countries could serve as the starting point for a general and definite pacification in Europe. To this direction, a set of proposals is being put forward, something that reflects Bentham’s confidence on the viability of his plan. Among the measures to be taken are the emancipation of the British colonies, the abolition of all the treaties of-offensive or defensive-alliance between Britain and any other state, and what regarding trade the abolition of any treaties between Great Britain and any other power for the purpose of gaining any sort of advantages in the field of commerce and the subsequent exclusion of any other nation. These three points lead to the nucleus of the Benthamian idiosyncratic theory of „Economic Pacificm“. Regarding the first argument, Bentham claims that the policy of the maintenance of colonies could not be but detrimental to the benefit of trade. In a revealing passage, he writes:

For maintaining the colonies there are several avowed reasons, besides others which are not avowed: of the avowed reasons, by far the principal one is, the benefit of trade. If your colonies were not subject to you, they would not trade with you; they would not buy any of your goods or let you buy any of theirs; at least, you could not be sure of their doing so: if they were subject to anybody else they would not do so; for the colonies of other nations are, you see, not suffered to trade with you.  

Bentham’s appeal culminates in the following phrase:

Give up your colonies, you give up much of your trade as it is carried with your colonies.

and he takes refuge to the following syllogism, in order to prove the logical consistency of his theory:

7 Bentham, „A Plan for an Universal and Perpetual Peace“, 549.

8 Bentham, „A Plan for an Universal and Perpetual Peace“, 553.
Suppose, then, any branch of trade or manufacture to decline—even suppose it lost altogether—is this any permanent loss to the nation? Not the smallest. We know the worst that can happen from any such loss; the capital that otherwise have been employed in the lost branch will be employed in agriculture. The loss of the colonies, if loss of the colony trade were the consequence of the loss of the colonies, would at the worst be so much gain to agriculture.  

According to the second proposition, the following argument illustrates clearly how Bentham envisages the function of commerce, and provides a description of the profound (eminently critical) analogy which he detects between the national and the individual commercial activities:

Nations are composed of individuals. The trade of a nation must be limited by the same causes that limit the trade of the individual. Each individual merchant, when he has as much trade as his whole capital, and all the credit he can get by means of his capital can suffice for carrying on, can have no more. This being true of each merchant, is not less true of the whole number of merchants put together.  

9 Bentham, „A Plan for an Universal and Perpetual Peace„, 549.

10 Compare with Ch.Brown, International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches (New York, 1992), 42-3, 110. I am indebted to Kyriakos Mikelis for calling my attention to this crucial point and for a stimulating discussion on the cosmopolitan character of Bentham’s utilitarianism.
Bentham recognizes the existence of a necessity that presides over the commercial activities in the international sphere. At the same time, he stresses the importance of the fields of primary production, particularly of the agriculture, and he finds any measures for the encouragement of commerce as blatant and, ultimately, arbitrary and abortive interventions to the natural course of the commerce. Accordingly, he urges openly the readers of his essay to invest on the field of raw materials and avoid buying manufactured materials from abroad. In this sense, he asserts the need for the further development of the industry and, consequently, the production and distribution of manufactured materials. Bentham conceives this condition as a guarantee for the increase of the capital, and for this reason he goes on to reject any laws and measures advanced from the state for the encouragement of the trade, and he opposes vigorously any policy, aiming at the exclusion of foreign manufactured products and the creation of a solid, hermetically closed market within the boundaries of the state, where only national manufactured products are to be distributed.

As a result, he advises that these guidelines should be followed for the prevention of the:

a) no treaties granting commercial preferences and privileges should be made,

b) any wars for compelling these treaties should be averted,

c) no alliances should be contacted for the sake of purchasing them,

d) no encouragement should be given to particular branches of trade, by the prohibition or taxation of rival manufacturers, and

e) no treaties for the advancement of commercial preferences should be signed.\footnote{Bentham, „A Plan for an Universal and Perpetual Peace„, 550.}

Bentham advocates of the viability of such a program, and thus he provides this set of measures to be taken for the consolidation of the liberty of commerce, which—in strict utilitarian terms—is conceived as a \textit{conditio sine qua non} for the the safeguarding of peace and the aversion of a future war. An eternal peace is considered to function as a decisive factor for the maximization of the largest as possible number of people, and is by no means to be
regarded as an end in itself. It would be a fatal interpretative mistake to assume that Bentham aspires to the introduction of an independent, autonomous theory of international relations, using the principle of the liberty of commerce as its cornerstone. Even this sophisticated, coherent and original theory of international relations has necessarily to be analyzed under the prism of Bentham’s moral philosophy, and, from this point of view, his essay on peace represents a very interesting and original amalgamation of Bentham’s pure philosophical and economical positions, though it cannot be extricated from the whole body of his utilitarianism. The principle of the liberty of commerce has to be connected with the principle of utility. The crucial question is whether or to what extent any actions for the protection of the liberty of commerce are conformable to the central principle of utility or whether and in what degree any actions that cause a violation of the liberty of commerce contravene this principle.

In his famous work *Colonies, Commerce and Constitutional Law: Rid Yourselves of Ultramaria and other writings on Spain and Spanish America*, which was written between 1818 and 1822, Bentham proceeds to clarify his arguments on the liberty of commerce. He doesn’t hesitate to criticize vehemently the prohibitory system, by emphasizing the problems resulting from it, which are the following:

a) dearer commodities are promoted instead of cheaper,

b) commodities of inferior quality are used as substitutes of commodities of superior quality,

c) drastic decrease of the demand for the commodities, which are produced at the home country,

d) loss of the tax, which should be paid by the commodities currently prohibited,

e) increase of the number of smugglers,

f) discord inside the nation, conflict between those who profit from the system and those who are excluded,

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12 The book stems from the pamphlet „Emancipate your colonies!, addressed to the National Convention of France“, which was published by Bentham in 1792-3. The pamphlet has been regarded as a sort of a manifesto
g) germination of feelings of antipathy\textsuperscript{13} and unfavourable reactions from the side of the rulers and people, whose commodities are excluded from the market,

h) ill-will on the part of the people of the country itself towards the group of those who exercise the power and exercise their influence.\textsuperscript{14}

One might well assume that the consequences of the realization of a prohibitory police could be identified with sufficient reasons for the outbreak of war. Bentham makes a valiant effort to debunk this system, by the elaboration of his famous principle of utility. Thus, he concludes that „the greater and more manifest the sum of mischief produced to all others, the less will be the benefit to those on whom it is sought to confer that benefit“. It is clear that Bentham doesn’t endorse the differentiation between foreign and national interests. For him, no national frontiers exist, only an international community of individuals, which, in other terms, corresponds to an international community, a conglomerate of different interests. Unless this principle receives general acceptance, it is most certain that feelings of antipathy will prevail between the nations, a fact that leads inescapably to an atmosphere of mutual enmity and therefore, soon or later, will flow into a future conflict. According to Bentham:

Thus, as towards foreigners in general, towards all the inhabitants of the globe, with the few exceptions of those we call our fellow-countrymen, antipathy is

\textsuperscript{13} See Bentham, „A Plan for an Universal and Perpetual Peace“, 552: „The moral feelings of men in matters of national morality are still so far short of perfection, that in the scale of estimation, justice has not yet gained the ascendancy over force“ and his makes an appeal to his countrymen to „purge their eyes from the film of prejudice-extirpate from their hearts the black specks of excessive jealousy, false ambition, selfishness, and insolence“(p.553).

\textsuperscript{14} J.Bentham, Colonies, Commerce and Constitutional Law, 358-70.: Rid Yourselves of Ultramaria and other writings on Spain and Spanish America, ed. P. Schofield (The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham) (Oxford, 1990), 358-70.
excited and propagated; a foolish and regrading antipathy, not less adverse to the
dictates of self-regarding prudence, than to those of benevolence and beneficence.
And what is the result, the melancholy result? Every effort which a man makes
every effort which a man makes to excite his countrymen to hate foreigners, is
an effort made, whether designedly or not, to excite foreigners to hate them; by
every attempt in which he thus labours to bring down upon his countrymen
the fruits of the enmity of these foreigners, he more effectually and certainly
labours to deprive his countrymen of those fruits of good-will which they might
otherwise have enjoyed

His verdict on the character of this policy is clear and he brings to the fore a very interesting
use of his forceful argument on antipathy, in order to demonstrate in strong and unpleasing
colours the effects to which a status of mutual enmity between nations can produce:

The enmity which cannot but be produced on the part of those foreigners, even by
the calm pursuit of interests, -the enmity necessarily produced by the frequent and
unavoidable competition of interests,-is surely quite enough, without making any
new and needless addition; without exerting and letting those the angry passions in any
other direction, and giving to ill-will-already too active and too prevalent-auxiliaries
at once so unnecessary and so dangerous.

15 Bentham, Colonies, Commerce and Constitutional Law, 368.

16 Bentham implies here that a total clash of interests would lead to the escalation of enmity, providing the
catalyst for a conflict. War is defined in this case as the natural end of this process, caused by the domination of
the feeling of antipathy in both sides.

17 Bentham, Colonies, Commerce and Constitutional Law, 368.Bentham discusses further the problem of
antipathy between individuals and in a systematic attempt to demonstrate the fundamental principles of economic
man („homo economicus„), he observes:

The preparation in the human bosom for antipathy towards other men is, under all circum-
stances, most unhappily copious and active. The boundless range of human desires, and the
very limited number of objects adapted to satisfy them, unavoidably leads a man to consider
those with whom he is obliged to share such objects, as inconvenient rivals who narrow his
own extent of enjoyment. Besides, human beings are the most powerful instruments of pro-
duction, and therefore every one becomes anxious to employ the services of his fellows in mul-
tiplying his own comforts. Hence the intense and universal thirst for power; the equally prevalent hatred of subjection. Each man therefore meets with an obstinate resistance to his own will, and is obliged to make an equally constant opposition to that of others, and this naturally engenders antipathy towards the beings who thus baffle and contravene his wishes (J. Bentham, *Jeremy Bentham’s Economic Writings*, 430).

A thorough examination of Bentham’s psychology of economic man should help see his *problematique* on peace under a new light. With the articulation of this theory of human psychology Bentham ventures to penetrate into the deepest nature of man applying with a remarkable consistency the analytical and deductive method. He doesn’t fail to diagnose the main dilemma, with which every statesman is confronted, the „operation of two distinct interests; a public and a private one“ „that means a sharp distinction between the public interest, the happiness of the whole community and the private interest which is identified with the interest of the minor part of the community, of which smallest portion is that which is composed by his personal interest. Bentham doesn’t exclude cases in which these two interests contradict each other and one of them has to be sacrificed to the other. In the case of the war, however, he sees that the right decision is very easy to be taken, if a process of calculation of the effects of the sort of action to be preferred, is followed. He asserts then categorically that the solution of peace is not only legitimate, but also perfectly consistent with the dictates of the principle of utility:

If, for example, the commencement or continuance of a war being the question upon the carpet, if, upon his calculation, a hundred a-year during the continuance of the war, or for will be the amount of the contribution which according to his calculation he will have to pay, (and if in his own calculation not only the amount of his own share in the burden, but the interest which in the way of sympathy he takes in the amount of such part of the burden as will have to be borne by his private and particular connexions of all sorts be taken into the account,) if his expected profit by the war be equal to 0, and no particular gust of passion intervene, to drive him from the pursuit of what appears to be his lasting interest upon the whole be against the war and what influence it may happen to him to possess, will be exerted on that side. (Bentham, *Jeremy Bentham’s Economic Writings*, 429).

Bentham insists that „War, though, a almost as habitual throughout the last departed century, is not, it is to be hoped, a state of things altogether so natural as peace“(Bentham, *Jeremy Bentham’s Economic Writings*, 290) and he anticipates that:

...no consideration can warrant, nor can anything but mere mental weakness produce in you such expectation as that peace will find in him a real advocate, or what whether he himself be or be not aware of what passes within him, his conduct will have for its determining cause, anything but the balance of profit and loss above brought to view (Bentham, *Jeremy Bentham’s Economic Writings*, 429).
We are compelled at this point to take these arguments a step further in order to achieve a better understanding of Bentham’s argumentation; Bentham evidently examines the problem of peace using the principle of utility as a guiding rule. Since his fundamental tenet lies in the assumption that men tend to maximize the sum of their pleasures and to minimize the sum of their pains, he expresses his conviction that this would be a sufficient reason why men would acknowledge the value of the principle of utility as the only infallible criterion, the touchstone between right and wrong. According to this postulate, it follows that “a measure of

It is obvious that Bentham accepts the primacy of reason and suggests that all human actions should be subordinated to the general principle of utility and judged through a process of an accurate calculation of their results (teleology). It is precisely this rational element in human beings that compels them to adopt the solution of peace, in order to serve their interests. From this it follows that there should be no doubt that a must be all means be avoided, and both the statesmen and the citizens should vote for the peace and embrace all the principles that would lead them achieve a permanent status of peace. Every sort of sentimentalism has to be “ostracized” passions have no place in a process of deciding what steps should be made towards a perpetual peace. The only criterion for this decision is the “greatest happiness principle”. In fact, Bentham mentions the real enemies of peace, those ones, which at the same time could potentially lead the governors of the state to elaborate a policy and take decisions (e.g. violation of the principle of free trade), that might be detrimental to their as well as to the general interests:

The great enemies of public peace are the selfish and dissocial passions:-necessary as they are-the one to the very existence of each individual, the other to his security. On the part of these affections, a deficiency in point of strength is never to be apprehended: all that is to be apprehended i respect of them, is to be apprehended on the side of their excess. Society is held together only by the sacrifices that men can be induced to make of the gratifications they demand: to obtain these sacrifices is the great difficulty, the great task of government (Bentham, *Jeremy Bentham’s Economic Writings*, 431).

18 See Bentham’s definition of „utility,: By utility is meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing ) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered: if that party be the community in general, then the happiness of the community: if a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual (J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, eds. H.H.Burns and H.L.A.Hart (with a new introduction by F. Rosen) (The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham) (Oxford, 1996), 12. An illuminating introduction to Bentham’s concept of utility provides H.L.A. Hart, „Bentham’s principle of utility and theory of penal law,” in J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, eds. H.H.Burns and
government (which is but a particular kind of action, performed by a particular person or persons) may be said to be conformable to or dictated by the principle of utility, when in like manner the tendency which it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any which it has to diminish it.\(^\text{19}\)

Therefore, one should choose peace than war, in order to promote his own interests and at the same time the general interest; and since the liberty of commerce is one of the basic measures to be taken for the creation of a status of permanent peace, then it is logically imposed that governments adopt and follow with absolute consequence a policy favourable to this principle. Yet one could-legitimately-raise the objection that even in a case of war, it is for the benefit of a small group of people to try to promote their particular interests and secure their positions, though the general interests would be sacrificed for this purpose. Or it might well be supposed that in case when a government denies to follow a policy of free trade, the interests

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\(^\text{19}\) Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals, 13.
of a small number of individuals are promoted, though a policy of monopoly could seriously undermine the interest of the community and lead potentially to a future conflict. In such cases, it is up to the members of the community to react against these actions of their governments, and to criticize their policies. If we accept that the members of the community would prefer to have peace than war, granted that they follow with consequence a process of calculating the short-and long-term consequences of the actions of their governments, then it is certain that a clash of the particular and the general interests will occur. Even in case that the statesmen or any other adherents of a policy of monopoly (something that would be a sufficient reason for a war) insist on the legitimacy of their actions, Bentham maintains characteristically that:

When a man attempts to combat the principle of utility, it is with reasons drawn, without his being aware of it, from that very principle itself. His arguments, if they prove any thing, prove not that the principle is wrong but that, according to the applications he supposes to be made of it, it is misapplied. Is it possible for a man to move the earth? Yes; but he must first find out another earth to stand upon.20

On the other side, he doesn’t fail to express his outright condemnation of any efforts from the side of the governments to instill on their citizens feelings of antipathy against other nations or to make other nations feel discontent, in case they take the decision to exclude their products. In such cases, a war is likely to break out. Bentham assigns great importance to the relationship between the principle of sympathy and antipathy with the art of government, and he stresses the influence such a principle might have in the field of international politics, particularly when people fail to consult the reason, and they are manipulated, „tyrannized“ by their feelings and their passions.

One of the finest insights Bentham’s in the influence which the principles of sympathy and antipathy exercise human conducting and ultimately the entire function of the community lies in the claim that we tend to endorse and approve certain actions not because their consequences could prove detrimental for the interests of the community, but simply because we are inclined to promote our own interests, being actuated from the irresistible tendency to

promote our interests, regardless of the degree to which the results of our actions conform with the common good.

Bentham doesn’t cease to emphasize interrelationship between these two principles and the way they affect human actions, presenting the credentials of an empirically verifiable theory of human passions. It is in this respect very interesting to see how Bentham’s anthropological observations penetrates into his political philosophy and how the fruit of such a sophisticated analysis of human actions serve in the case of the economic pacifism as central arguments for the unquestionable legitimacy of the solution of peace and ultimately for the crucial importance of the liberty of commerce. From this point of view, Bentham insists adamently on the need for the consolidation of the liberty of commerce. Morality has to follow the dictates of reason, since man is a being equipped with the unique ability of examining the consequences of his action, something that enables him to make, after the elaboration of this ability and recollection on his actions, the best decisions for him and the community. It goes without saying that in this context, the decision which could serve the happiness of the best number of people is the ideal, the moral and right. Therefore, even if we accentuate the practical side of humans and all those characteristics that seem to appertain to the special type of the so-called „homo economicus”, it is obvious that the entire function of economy has to be subjected to the principle of utility, which appears to serve as the sole criterion for the morality of human actions. A state of harmony of interests is the premise for the achievement of the happiness and prosperity of the creation of an the largest as possible number of members of a solid and coherent international community. Bentham’s doctrine could be summarized in the following argument: men seek from nature their happiness or in other words the fulfillment of their essential needs, and in addition to this, they possess the ability to judge whether their actions could conduce to their happiness or to estimate the degree to which their decisions follow unswervingly the principle of utility and are in accordance with the basic rules of morality. Thus, they are in the position to take the best decisions. Bentham’s program is not devoid of elements which are to be found in numerous utopian projects, although he follows a rather strenuous method of examining the social reality and the main ideas overrunning his political theory reflect a conscious attempt for the exaltation of reason and the glorification of the moral ideals (the way Bentham conceives and defines „morality“) in both the economic and social spheres. If men follow with consistency the commands of reason, then it is certain that they will make the best choice. Of course,
Bentham doesn’t overlook the true nature of humans. He is well aware that men seek to promote first of all their own interests and the common happiness doesn’t actually occupy their thought; he doesn’t underrate the egoistic elements of human nature and his elaboration of the use of sympathy and antipathy is indicative of his attempt to shed light on the role which human passions play in the field of politics; and he doesn’t cease to assert openly that cases of misuse of the principle of utility or of violation of the dictates of reason is an existing and visible danger. Passions often prevail over human decisions, feelings of antipathy neutralize the power of reason and then men become a plaything of the irrational elements of their nature. War is not merely a mischief upon the largest scale, it marks, above all, the escalation not only of the disharmony and conflict of human interests, but also the total eclipse of reason, the failure of the humans to govern their passions and exploit their rational abilities, in order to achieve a permanent status of morality. If we endeavour to grasp the logic which underlies Bentham’s project on peace, we need to refer to the following passage, in order to understand how Bentham depicts the function of this principle in human matters:

Among principles adverse to that of utility, that which at this day seems to have most influence in matters of government, is what may be called the principle of sympathy and antipathy. By the principle of sympathy and antipathy, I mean that principle which approves or disapproves of certain actions, not on account of their tending to diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question, 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. Thus far in the general department of morals: and in the particular department of politics, measuring out the quantum (as well as determining the ground) of punishment, by the degree of the disapprobation.

Moreover, Bentham highlights the devastating results of the non-application of this principle, specially when- and very often, indeed-the dictates of sympathy or antipathy coincide with those of utility, and suggests that „antipathy or resentment requires always to be regulated, to

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21 Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals, 23 and 25.
prevent its doing mischief: to be regulated by what? always by the principle of utility. The principle of utility neither requires nor admits of any other regulator than itself.  

Bentham’s model for a permanent peace through the liberty of commerce never really found a large impact. Though an extreme policy of mercantilism never appeared attractive in the field of commerce, yet trusts and cartels have always been undertaking the realization of a permanent war inside the field of commerce, elaborating all sorts of practices, in order to promote their own interests and impose their own principles. In fact, it is about a peculiar status, since the state ceased to be the central vehicle of constant interventions in the commercial activities, but frontiers still exist. Bentham would certainly identify this development with one of the sufficient reasons of present wars. But he wouldn’t but regard it as an ephemeral success, a temporary victory, the beginning of a course towards their self-destruction. Of this small group of people, who dare imprudently to transgress the dictates of utility and morality with a group of highly developed, sophisticated methods and with systematic efforts to instill on the nations feelings of mutual antipathy and hatred. This is one of the deepest discrepancies underlying the reality of commerce, but Bentham wouldn’t


24 See R. Aron, *Frieden und Krieg: eine Theorie der Staatenwelt* (transl. S. v. Massenbach) (Frankfurt a. M., 1963), 324. For a criticism of the philosophical arguments, upon which the theory of the „Economic Pacifism“ is constructed, see M. Scheler, *Die Idee des Friedens und der Pazifismus* (Berlin, 1931),40-4. On page 44 Scheler notes parenthetically: „...(Die prinzipielle Irrtümer) liegen erstens in den Unterschätzung der selbstständigen geistig-moralischen und rechtlichen Energien, die auch bei bloßer Annäherung an den Ewigen Frieden mitwirken müssen. Sie liegen ferner in der Meinung, daß Wirtschaftskonflikte (Handelskriege) die Hauptursache aller Kriege seien., and he ends to a radical rejection of them, by maintaing parenthetically (p.44): „Wenn Weltfrieden sein wird aus moralischen, politischen, rechtlichen Entwicklungen heraus, dann wird auch wie von selbst freier Handel sein. Der ökonomische Pazifismus verwechselt Ursache und Wirkung“. For Scheler, the Archimedeian point for the process of establishing the liberty of commerce has to be the articulation of a solid state policy that would be favourable to this principle. Since commercial and financial policies constitute a part of the general policy of a state, it follows that only the will of the governments would be a guarantee for the success of such efforts. Besides, Bentham’s critique is based the objection that even if free commerce prevail, it is not certain that all the reasons for a war would automatically get cease to exist. Though there is an element of truth in Schelers’s opinion, he underrates the importance of the popular will and overlooks dramatically the influence exercised by social dynamics into political and economic changes.
exclude the possibilities for the rehabilitation of morality through the opportune and drastic resistance of the nations. In this perspective, an exodus from such a situation should follow the harmonious function of commerce, and a new epoch should begin with the best omens for the domination of human reason and the consolidation of peace. Bentham draws his conclusions from an insightful analysis of the historical developments of his time. It debatable whether the liberty of commerce could function as a panacea for all the problems which stimulate the nations to fight against each other. Moreover, even if we assume that this principle gets realized and a status of peace appears in the horizon, it is hard to say that this would be permanent and that all dangers lurking would be automatically eradicated. Bentham remains silent on this point, but he himself alludes to one of the most serious menaces against an everlasting peace. Even when nations manage to achieve a liberty of commerce, no guarantee exists that morality, utility and equality will prevail. Human nature remains unalterable and in such an ideal situation feelings of antipathy are likely to prevail over human conduct and human decisions. Human reactions cannot be reduced to mathematical calculations and it is precisely at this point, where Bentham’s could not be interpreted but as a pure illusion, a product of a highly rational examination of social reality, underrating one of the biggest, not unexpected, dangers against peace. Humans consult reason and need indeed concepts and principles, when they attempt radical changes designed to the realization of their fundamental ends. But even if they get into a new phase, there is no assurance that the principle of sympathy and antipathy will cease to exist. When men use the incomprehensible language of their feelings, concepts lose their meaning, they become vague and obscure. Humans know why and how to fight for their freedom and strive for a permanent peace. But they are also inclined to sacrifice their liberties at the moment when they get paralyzed from the irrational elements of their nature, their passions, and get into a constant conflict with themselves. Individuals ought at first find peace in themselves, before attempting to reconcile with the others and have a permanent peace on a largest scale.
Primary sources


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**Bibliography**


