

Spring 2016

# A Dickensian utilitarianism

Zachary Allentuck  
*James Madison University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/honors201019>

 Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [European History Commons](#), [History of Philosophy Commons](#), [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#), and the [Political History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Allentuck, Zachary, "A Dickensian utilitarianism" (2016). *Senior Honors Projects, 2010-current*. 190.  
<https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/honors201019/190>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Projects, 2010-current by an authorized administrator of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [dc\\_admin@jmu.edu](mailto:dc_admin@jmu.edu).

A Dickensian Utilitarianism

---

An Honors Program Project Presented to  
the Faculty of the Undergraduate  
College of Arts and Letters  
James Madison University

---

by Zachary Ryan Allentuck

May 2016

---

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of English, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program.

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

HONORS PROGRAM APPROVAL:

---

Project Advisor: Annette R. Federico, Ph.D.,  
Associate Department Head, English

---

Bradley R. Newcomer, Ph.D.,  
Director, Honors Program

---

Reader: John J. Butt, Ph.D.,  
Associate Professor, History

---

Reader: Scott J. Hammond, Ph.D.,  
Associate Professor, Political Science

---

PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at JMU's Honors Symposium on April 14, 2016 .

## Table of Contents:

Acknowledgements:	3
Introduction:	4
Chapter 1: <i>A Christmas Carol</i>	23
Chapter 2: <i>Hard Times</i>	49
Chapter 3: <i>Little Dorrit</i>	75
Conclusion	100
Works Cited	103

### **Acknowledgements:**

Special thanks to Dr. Annette R. Federico for serving as my advisor and Drs. John J. Butt, and Scott J. Hammond for serving as my readers.

## Introduction

During the nineteenth century, Victorian Britain underwent a large amount of changes, many of which related to the Industrial Revolution and the rise of industrial capitalism. With the rise of industrial capitalism came problems: How should the government deal with the unionization of workers? What should be done about the rampant income inequality and increase in the poor and homeless? How should those who commit crimes be treated?

As the Industrial Revolution began to take place in England, Jeremy Bentham created a theory of utilitarianism, which simplified morality down into several easy questions. In his book *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, he outlined his theories and answered some of the above-mentioned questions, especially the prison-related ones. In addition, he explained how to determine if an action, whether by the government or private citizen, was moral; again, determining this simply required asking a few easy questions. Bentham's main point, which ended up becoming the point for which he is most remembered, is that government should engage in actions that increase utility. Utility, as Bentham defines it, is the "property in any object" that either creates "benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness" or prevents "mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness" (I.4).

Charles Dickens became a prominent voice in British society, strongly advocating for changes and reforms. His calls for reforms are seen in many of his essays and letters, as well as his fiction. In a sense, each of his classic stories addresses one of the above-mentioned questions. *A Christmas Carol* (1843) addresses the need for Victorians to practice charity, while *Hard Times* (1854) addresses trade unions, and *Little Dorrit* (1857) addresses prison reform.

Because Dickens advocated for humanitarian reforms, and because his criticisms of Victorian society were so emotional, there is a perception that Dickens hated the theory of

utilitarianism. Yet, if we examine utilitarianism, especially as seen in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, we see that Dickens' ideas about reform were not necessarily incompatible with utilitarianism. In this paper, I will make the argument that Dickens took issue not with utilitarianism as a whole, but the way Victorian society appropriated its ideas to justify not reforming itself. Furthermore, Dickens viewed utilitarianism, as espoused by Bentham and Mill, sympathetically.

To fully examine this idea, I first address utilitarianism, as seen in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* as well as *Considerations on Representative Government* by John Stuart Mill. Next, I discuss the historical conditions that led to its rise, and, more specifically, the effects of the Industrial Revolution on England. Because Dickens lived in this period, I briefly look at his personal life, to see the beginnings of his personal philosophy and its influence from utilitarianism. Finally, I look at the above-mentioned Dickens stories (*A Christmas Carol*, *Hard Times*, and *Little Dorrit*) through utilitarian lens, to see his opinions on the problems plaguing Victorian society. In this way, I compare Dickens' opinions on these problems with utilitarianism's answers and determine that Dickens positively viewed utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism, as an ideology, begins with *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, published in 1789. Bentham begins by explaining the concepts of benefits and costs, which he explains based on utility. Essentially, humans make decisions based on outcome; if an action "augment[s]...happiness," then we will perform that action, and, if an action "diminish[es]...happiness," we will avoid it (I.3). Furthermore, as noted earlier, he conflates happiness with pleasure and unhappiness with pain. Morality, then, is a simple matter of performing pleasurable actions and avoiding painful ones. In a later chapter, he further clarifies

the different kinds of pleasure and pain, but, for the moment, all we need know is that pleasure and pain are not solely physical.

As a contrast to the principle of utility, he explains the concept of asceticism. In his view, asceticism is similar to utility, but, whereas utility considers right actions to be ones that increase pleasure, and wrong actions to be ones that bring pain, asceticism turns this idea on its head; actions that bring pleasure are wrong, and actions that bring pain are right (II.3). He clearly dislikes this idea, and states that “moralists” have adopted this idea because they feel it makes others view them with “honor and reputation” (II.5). As will be seen with Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, Dickens also dislikes this idea.

Bentham extrapolates the principle of utility to communities, arguing that, as communities are simply collections of people, it must follow that this principle can be applied to them (I.4). Furthermore, he places this burden on the government, noting that a government’s actions is “conformable” to the utility principle if “the tendency which it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any which it has to diminish it” (I.8). However, with this extrapolation comes a question: how does a government balance the interests of multiple people with the community? In true utilitarian fashion, Bentham further explains the different factors that go into determining the pleasure or pain of an action, in the process, creating a mathematical formula to calculate the total sum of pleasure and pain a community feels. With this sum, Bentham argues, a government can easily determine how to act.

Essentially, Bentham states that a person can determine the value of their actions based on several factors, including the actions’ “intensity, duration, certainty or uncertainty, and its remoteness (IV.2).” While intensity and duration are reasonably easy to understand, certainty and remoteness require some explanation. To understand these two ideas, Bentham uses the

concept of land ownership as an example. How much pleasure a person can receive from land depends on how certain they are of receiving the land (certainty/uncertainty), and “the nearness or remoteness of the time...it is to come into possession (IV.17).” Remoteness, then, seems to refer to how large an impact on a person’s life the land would have.

In addition, Bentham noted a few more factors, including the actions’ “fecundity,” and “purity” (IV.7). Fecundity refers to the likelihood that the sensation that comes from an act will be “followed by sensations of the same kind” (that is, pleasure or pain) (IV.4). If an act is a pleasure, pleasure should follow and likewise for pain. Purity refers to the likelihood that the sensation that comes from an act will not be “of the opposite kind” (IV.5). In other words, with fecundity, when one performs an action that we consider a pleasure, will it bring them pleasure? If it as an action we consider a pain, will it bring them pain? Likewise, with purity, if we perform an act that we consider pleasurable, how likely is it not to bring us pain? And, if we perform an act that is painful, how likely is it not to bring us pleasure? Because fecundity and purity relate specifically to the actual action, and, not just the concepts of pleasure and pain, Bentham separates them (IV.6). In this way, Bentham imagined an easy method of calculating pleasure. Bentham also adds extent as a factor. Extent measures the number of people who are affected by the action (IV.7). While this can apply to individual actions, it also applies particularly well to community action and the ethical questions surrounding it.

With this set up, Bentham then goes through a logical, mathematical process explaining just how a person would calculate the value of their actions. Essentially, one would take the values of the pleasure and pain the action would cause when first performed (IV.9-10). Next, one would take the “fecundity of the first pleasure and the impurity of the first pain,” as well as “the fecundity of the first pain and the impurity of the first pleasure (IV.11-12). Next, calculate the



pleasures and pains separately (IV.13). If there is more pleasure than pain, then the action has a “tendency” to be good, for “an individual,” and if there is more pain than pleasure, the action has a “tendency” to be bad, for that same person. To find the value of an action on an entire community of people, do the above process for each person affected by the action and look at the totals (IV.14). This will give the “general good tendency” and the “general evil tendency.” With all this done, we have a simple method of determining the value of an action.

Most of the rest of the book further explains human morality by including different factors, including the intentionality of the action, the action’s motives, and the action’s consciousness. This leads to a discussion on punishments for different crimes, since not all crimes are necessarily the same.

To Bentham’s mind, there are four different kinds of punishments. He prefaces the types by arguing that all punishment is “evil” to some extent (XIII.2). This explains why he distinguishes the types of punishments; if punishment is, at best, a necessary evil, then he would presumably want to decrease the net amount of punishment. To this end, he identifies four times when punishment should not be used, using “mischief” as his word to refer to evil or bad actions. Punishment should not be used when it is “groundless,” when the action a person receives a punishment for is “not...mischievous upon the whole,” “inefficacious,” when the punishment “cannot act so as to prevent the mischief,” “unprofitable,” when the punishment would produce greater evil than the act it is preventing, and “needless,” when the “mischief may be prevented...without it” (XIII.3). It is clear that Bentham wants to reduce punishments.

Bentham also gives examples of these concepts. He considers a punishment inefficacious when it is applied to a child or to an intoxicated or mentally ill person (XIII.9). Like other liberals, he championed “instruction” and education, too, arguing that if that could prevent

mischief, then the punishment is needless (XIII.17). He devotes the rest of the book to answering when people should be punished, and to what extent, in an effort to keep punishment fair.

Arguably his most important point, and the one that most of Victorian society remembered, was his statement that “the business of government is to promote the happiness of the society, by punishing and rewarding” (VII.1). Ultimately, Bentham believed that the government should work to make its citizens happier. Now, I will turn to John Stuart Mill’s book, *Considerations on Representative Government*, to see the other leading philosopher of utilitarianism’s thoughts and opinions on the world.

Unlike Bentham’s work, Mill’s book is more focused on the actual process of creating a government, than the ethics behind human behavior. To this end, Mill explains which form of government he believes works best, by listing through various criteria. He notes that government works best when the governed people are “willing to receive it,” when they are “willing and able to do what is necessary for its preservation,” and when they are “willing and able to fulfill the duties and discharge the functions which it imposes on them” (71). Mill also believes that the best form of government is a “completely popular” one (54). By “completely popular,” he refers to democracy. Thus, he clearly believes the best form of government is a democracy.

This said, Mill does have specific requirements about democracy. He believed that the best form of government was one where everyone is called on at some point to “take an actual part in the government” (53). However, he also has strong opinions about who should be governing; he considers a “low grade of intelligence” in either the elected officials, or the citizens voting for them, to be a “danger.” (131). He also states that if “corrupt” people are in power, then the government will not accomplish much (32). Likewise, he considers having virtuous people in the government is “the first element of good government,” which, in turn,

produces good people (30). Mill's ideal government, then, is somewhat conditional on the people in charge.

Mill also discusses the nature of Order and Progress. He considers both of them essential to the running of government (27). However, he notes that the line between the two is somewhat fluid, since he states that the "greater security of property [Order] is one of the main conditions and causes of greater production [Progress] (23). Producing situations that are beneficial to Order will benefit Progress. His taxation example gives a practical use of this idea. Though taxation is a necessary part of governing, and thus, a part of Order, taxation can also promote progress by keeping "the existing stock of national wealth," which then "favors the creation of more." Mill describes his ideal taxation system in moral terms, stating that if "burthens" (presumably burdens) are distributed, the citizens can see examples of "morality and good conscience." Moreover, proper taxation increases the national wealth and allows for citizens to perform actions, unimpeded (24). Thus, proper taxation balances Progress and Order.

Like Bentham, Mill also relied on the classic utilitarian idea of government shaping people. He states that with the exception of religion, "the nature and degree of authority exercised over individuals, the distribution of power, and the conditions of command and obedience are the most powerful of the influences" (36). To this end, he uses a people in a state of "savage independence" as an example of this concept (37). Mill notes that a society where "everyone lives for himself" would be "practically incapable of making any progress in civilization until it has learned to obey." Because of this, he believed that democracy would actually not suit these types of people well, since they would not be willing to voluntarily give up their freedom.

From this point, Mill discusses what he perceives to be the natural progress humans undergo. In the “savage independence” stage, the crudest and most rudimentary form of civilization calls for the crudest and most rudimentary form of government; a despot. Through a despot, the civilization would learn how to obey. For this period of time, at least, Mill felt that slavery best instilled the principles of obedience in a society (38). Interestingly, though Mill considers this inevitable, calling a slave “a being who has not learnt to help himself,” he also strongly dislikes slavery, calling it “repugnant to that government of law.” Though slavery may be a necessary step, it is by no means the ideal state, and he makes it clear that he would disapprove of a society that continually enslaves its population, even after it has reached a more modern state.

In order to progress further, the government must change. Once the people have learned how to obey, the state must teach them “self-government” and “the capacity to act on general instructions” (39). Mill considers aristocracy the next logical form of government because, it provides “guidance” and “possesses force, but seldom uses it.” Mill does not go on to describe the next step, but, presumably, the final one is democracy. In all cases, Mill believes that the type of government should depend on the type of people in the state; it (the government) should help give to the people that which they cannot obtain themselves (40). This, then is how another utilitarian would view the state and how it should be set up.

Ideologies and philosophies do not exist in vacuums, As such, a close look at English society during the creation and rise of utilitarianism is warranted. More specifically, the Industrial Revolution and its effects on British society could help explain where utilitarianism came from. As Dickens was a member of this society, having a reasonably thorough background

understanding of Victorian England can help contextualize Dickens' life, and, ultimately, his work.

Though the Industrial Revolution influenced many countries in similar ways, England, as the Revolution's birthplace, felt the strongest impacts. Arguably the biggest shift caused by the Industrial Revolution was the growth in income inequality. In his book, *Dickens in His Time*, Ivor Brown best explains the inequality at the time, saying that "when steam power set the wheels revolving it meant more wealth for some and less well-being for most" (9). As a result of this, the scourge of people imprisoned for debt increased. Those prisons were "shabby, dirty, and insanitary," as well as hot, foul-smelling, and full of insects and rodents, but much of English society did not care (63). In addition, the Industrial Revolution shifted the English mindset to value quantity over quality (9). This permeated to all aspects of life; Victorians wanted more goods, more money, and more cities.

With the increase in population and cities, problems began to arise. While the Revolution did increase productivity, the conditions the workers lived in were awful. In his book, *The City of Dickens*, Alexander Welsh notes that cities during the 1850s were clustered, crowded, and confusing (11). As a result, the living conditions in the cities were unclean and unsafe (17-18). It is little wonder, thus, that the city became a "problem" in the nineteenth century (31). Nor is it surprising that Dickens would address the issues present in cities in his own work.

In addition, cities grew in population during this time. As a result, several problems developed. Closely related to the sanitation issues was the question of what the city was to do with the corresponding swell of dead bodies it accrued over time as the population increased (62). In addition, the city began drawing a greater number of older workers, some of whom were not able-bodied, rather than young able-bodied ones (61). As a result, the amount of poor and

homeless also swelled. Anyone even remotely familiar with Dickens is aware that Dickens reserved his harshest criticism for the way the city treated its impoverished classes. In particular, Dickens was disgusted that, to an extent, prisoners were actually treated better than the poor (48). Nevertheless, he also desired prison reform. As we will see, his desire for prison reform may not have been inconsistent with Bentham's utilitarian accounts.

The Industrial Revolution also set capitalism into motion. The markets were ruled by the concept of "free trade" (Brown 36). As a result, at least initially, laborers' rights went unexpanded for a large chunk of the Victorian Era. Because unions interrupted this idea of free trade, they were made illegal at the beginning of the nineteenth century (37). The excess of the French Revolution and its ideas worried English conservatives, fearing that England would be awash in democratic revolution. In a sense, this explains why the economy's success trumped workers' rights to many in this period; if the economy succeeded, there would be less chance of a revolution. Unfortunately, this meant that many laborers were only "free" in legal terms; in practice they had very little freedom.

Even the little freedom laborers had proved preferable to the plight of the poor, however. We should look at the controversial law passed in this time that affected how the poor would be treated: the Poor Law. Dr. Marjie Bloy offers a brief explanation of the Poor Law Amendment Act (PLAA), which amended the initial Poor Law Act of 1601 ("The Poor Law: Introduction"). The PLAA eliminated "outdoor relief," a system that gave the poor money. Instead, it created a commission that would regulate how poor relief was distributed, and the local units in charge of distributing it (Bloy, "Implementation of the Poor Law"). Bloy also notes that the PLAA worked to de-incentivize poverty by making workhouse conditions "less preferable than those of the lowest paid laborer" ("The Poor Law Amendment Act: 14 August 1834"). Presumably, this

would motivate people to want to go to work, since even the little money made would be preferable to the conditions they would face in a workhouse.

In addition, at least initially, there were calls to segregate people based on age, gender, and ability. Children were to be housed separately, as were the elderly, while men and women were divided based on if they were able-bodied or not (Bloy, “The Implementation of the Poor Law”). Though there were not different workhouses for each of the aforementioned groups, the workhouses created did have separate areas, thus, still segregating.

There were several purposes to the PLAA. Dr. Bloy notes that the PLAA centralized efforts to reduce poverty (“The Poor Law: Introduction”). Before this point, poor relief was mostly in the hands of the local parishes. There was no standardization in the amount of relief each parish should provide. Moreover, taxes were high for citizens of the areas, since the government had to find a way to fund poor relief.

In addition, the PLAA worked to make poverty unappealing. At the time there was a widespread belief, especially amongst the middle class, that the poor intentionally made decisions to keep themselves poor, since they could live off of the outdoor help (Bloy, “Changing Attitudes Towards Poverty After 1815”). To this end, the poor would have multiple children, since keeping children is costly. In response, the PLAA segregated men and women, presumably to prevent the creation of more children, and the workhouses were made unpleasant (Bloy, “The Separation of Families Under the Poor Law Amendment Act”). In doing this, the PLAA would supposedly make able-bodied men and women less likely to be poor, since they were essentially being punished for it. The poor would, thus, be encouraged to seek employment, if only to stay out of the workhouses.

The conduct of the workhouses reflects the ways middle-class Victorians best thought to dis-incentivize poverty. Dr. Bloy notes that the people who stayed in such institutions were referred to as “inmates” and forced to wear uniforms, thus equating them with prisoners and de-humanizing them (“The Implementation of the Poor Law”). This helped to create a taboo that made many poor unwilling to go to them, with some even preferring to starve. In addition, the food they provided laborers only barely sustained them (Brown 47). With the exception of potatoes, the workhouses did not provide fruits or vegetables. Further drawing the prison comparison, the poor were set to menial tasks, like hole-digging and stone breaking (Bloy, “Work in the Workhouse”). All of this worked to make the poor less likely to go to them.

Of course, while English democracy was certainly imperfect, as evidenced by the aforementioned issues, it was still a democracy. Therefore, looking at England’s political parties would make sense, especially since, in doing so, we can attach the PLAA to one. It is not necessary to have a full and complete knowledge of English politics; we simply need the basics. To this end, there were essentially two parties: Conservatives and Whigs. The Conservatives were branched off from the, at that point, defunct Tory party (Cody, “Tory”). As the Tories were mostly landed gentry, they opposed the taxation of landed gentry (Bloy, “Conservative”). In addition, Tories favored keeping the British monarchs powerful. By the Victorian Era, the latter position especially was obviously no longer tenable, necessitating a change. The Conservatives, as they became known, favored a strong government, and, while they no longer wanted the monarchs powerful, they still wanted them there. In essence, Conservatives wanted to keep the traditions English society had established at this time.

Dr. David Cody explains the Whigs. The Whigs served as the opposites of the Conservatives (“Whig”). Whereas the Conservatives’ base was mostly rural landed gentry, the



Whigs represented the emerging bourgeois and middle-classes. Generally, they represented liberal interests. They pushed for numerous reforms based on Bentham and Mill's logic, and, indeed, Bentham and Mill were both Whigs. Such reforms included the Reform Act of 1832, the Factory Act of 1833, and the abolition of slavery in England's colonies in 1834 (Brown 23). The PLAA came from the Whigs, and, as such, was opposed by the Conservatives (Bloy, "Conservative").

The PLAA coming from the Whigs makes sense. Utilitarianism did seem to espouse an idea that reform could happen fairly easily, with just the passage of laws, and so, it follows that the Poor Laws would be the logical extension of this idea.

A few years prior to the PLAA, Parliament passed the Reform Act of 1832. Brown explains that, after "outbreaks of popular violence," Parliament worked to placate reformers by passing a law to make Parliament more democratic (23-24). Any freemen in "corporate towns" gained the right to vote, as did "ten-pound householders." However, as Brown also notes, the Reform Act did not enfranchise a large amount of people. The right to vote did not extend to county people, nor did it extend to land workers or the urban working-class. Though Parliament did successfully pass various reform acts, such as the Ten Hours Act of 1847, and the Public Health Act of 1848, until 1868 only 900,000 of 5.3 million adult males, roughly 17%, could vote. Women could not vote at this time. As a result, discontent began to brew.

This discontent expressed itself in the form of the Chartist movement. The Chartists were a group of people who, logically enough, wanted a democratic Charter (25). More specifically, they wanted to extend the right to vote for all men. They were, thus, more Radical, in their own time, at least, than the Whigs and reformers. As such, Bentham and Mill likely did not agree with them.

The Whigs succeeded in introducing other reforms to better the lives of laborers. Included in these reforms were a ten-hour workday, and the Lord Althorp's Factory Act (44). This law placed limits on the amount of time children could be forced to work, and introduced much-needed regulation in the form of officials, who examined the factories. Arguably the most important part of the Factory Act was the regulations on child labor because, during this time, children worked frequently, in dangerous conditions.

These conditions ranged from coal-mines, to mills and factories. In the coal-mines, the work was long, in conditions that could be only be described as hellish. Brown's excerpt from a Report describes the horrible conditions quite well: the children were "chained, belted, harnessed like dogs in a go-cart, black, saturated with wet, and more than half-naked, crawling upon their hands and knees, and dragging their heavy loads behind them" (52). The Report goes on to say that the children appeared "disgusting and unnatural." Because smaller children could perform the job easier, ones as small as five were encouraged to work. In the mills and factories, children between the ages of nine and sixteen worked for thirteen hours. In garment factories, children worked long after the Victorian Age ended (54). Needless to say, children suffered greatly because of the Industrial Revolution.

Unfortunately, the Factory Act could not help all children. Those of parents in workhouses were frequently "apprenticed" to chimney sweeps (49). Like their counterparts in the factories, they were treated as slaves. In addition, because of the nature of the work, small children were, again, favored. As a result of their work, they "suffered from severe sores and cankers caused by continual rubbing against the chimney-walls and they became deformed by the ceaseless twisting and squirming on their way up (50)." As one might expect, they stayed dirty most of the time and were rarely cleaned.

Parliament proposed various laws to make this practice illegal, or, at the very least, lessen its harshness, but this remained unsuccessful. Brown notes the strange arguments against banning this practice. Most odd, perhaps, was the theory that since the children were “illegitimate sons of the gentry,” that “any maltreatment” could be justified (51). Moreover, Parliament did not want to admit that England was not as “moral” as they wanted to believe. Though reform did eventually happen, and the practice was ended, this did not happen until 1875, five years after Dickens died.

We now have a proper framing of English society in the nineteenth century and know of the abuses people suffered in this time period. Since we know these abuses, and to complete the framing, I would like to turn to a brief discussion of the man who would write about them with such scathing fervor: Charles Dickens. In doing so, we can understand his views, especially with the context given.

Dickens’ father, John Dickens, clerked in the Naval Pay Office, but squandered his money and ended up in debtor’s prison (Cody, “Dickens: A Brief Biography”). This led to the most obvious starting point with any discussion of Dickens is the traumatic childhood event that would shape his life, working in the blacking factory. Brown describes this work as “daily and detested,” a “drudgery,” and as “shameful,” which it certainly was (57). His father was also sent to the Marshalsea prison, for debt. As Ivor Brown notes, imprisonment for debt appears frequently in Dickens’ works, though most obviously in *Little Dorrit* (62). Given Dickens’ background with debtor’s prison, (his father even stayed in the same prison he wrote about in *Little Dorrit*), this is none too surprising. Indeed, Dickens expressed great anger at the punishment, “since it was utterly callous to the penniless debtor and quite merciful to the man

who had something in hand to pay for his own room and comforts in prison” (63). Even though his father did belong to the latter group, the inequality still angered Dickens.

The immense gulf between the manners of living between the two groups explains why. Those with money could have larger, higher rooms, and not have to work (66). By contrast, the situation for those without money was far more “desperate,” as “there were no regular rations of food,” which meant that prisoners had to provide for themselves. This often involved pawning their clothes and begging. With this said, we can understand why Dickens so strongly opposed debtor’s prison; it created horrendously unequal classes within the prison and was harshest to those who needed help the most.

Eventually, as Dr. Cody mentions in “Dickens: A Brief Biography,” Dickens left the Blacking Factory and became educated at a London school. By the 1830s, he became a Parliamentary reporter for the House of Commons debates. Unfortunately, his father also ended up in jail for debt again. He eventually became a full-time novelist and, as he got older, wrote more and more politically-infused literature.

With this knowledge in mind, we can better understand where Dickens’ opinions came from. His father’s monetary issues helps explain why Dickens took issue with the workhouses’ treatment of those with money; he had personal experience with a man who could not save his money. As the man was his father, and it led to a traumatic experience, he likely resented him and people like him.

Given this brief excerpt of Dickens’ life, I would like to briefly turn to his politics. First, I will discuss his opinions on the PLAA. Afterwards, I will discuss his thoughts on the Reform Act and the aforementioned Chartist movement that developed.

What were Dickens' opinions on the PLAA? In short, they were complicated. Because of its effects on the poor, Dickens did have a strong distaste for it, calling it, as Alexander Welsh notes, "infamously administered...openly violated...ill-supervised" (95). However, Dickens did agree with the PLAA's intent of dis-incentivizing poverty amongst those who were able to work. Though Dickens did have an amount of sympathy for the poor, his sympathy only extended so far. Thoroughly disgusted with the sanitary conditions, he supported sanitary reform, particularly since he believed that "moral ills" had "physical causation" (96). As such, it made sense that he would want better sanitation, since, as a physical condition, it would improve England's moral ills. However, he ultimately believed that it was more honorable for the poor not to accept charity. It would seem that, though Dickens did want the poor to be able to, at the very least, live, he did not believe they needed necessarily to live well; he just wanted them to live in a healthy manner. Furthermore, it would appear that he did believe in the "pulling yourself up by the bootstrap" mentality present in Victorian England. Because the prison made it impossible for debtors to do any work, it worked to keep them impoverished, in a never-ending cycle of debt and poverty, and preventing them from pulling themselves out of poverty.

However, he did seem to have a large amount of sympathy for impoverished children. H.W. Schupf discusses Dickens' attitudes toward the "ragged schools:" schools created for impoverished children (162). He was quite critical of the schools, namely of their qualities. Because the schools were poor, his initial criticisms, in the 1840s, focused on the conditions of the buildings, which he described as "like an ugly dream" (164). Fortunately, as the 1850s happened, the ragged schools received charitable donations, improving the schools' conditions. Even then, he was never quite satisfied with the Schools' operations, calling the teachers "narrow-minded" (168). It would seem that Dickens approved of the Schools in theory, but

disliked how they were run. The plight of the Cratchitt children in *A Christmas Carol* and his dislike of Gradgrind's narrow-minded teaching style in *Hard Times* reflects his dislike of the schools rather well.

His time as a reporter in Parliament, along with the issues of the Ragged Schools, likely helped solidify his dislike of government, explaining his views on the Chartists and the Reform Act. Brown describes the Chartists' large rallies which many, including Dickens, feared would end in violence (26). Dickens "feared the mob enraged," which, as Brown notes, can be seen in his "terrified and terrifying picture of a working-class upheaval," as seen in his novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (27). He viewed this upheaval as one with "maddened men, armed with sword and fire-brand, spurning the tears and prayers of women who would restrain them, rushed forth on errands of destruction to work no ruin so surely as their own." Thus, it would appear that he disliked the Chartists because he feared that their protests could become full-blown rebellions which would have been destructive for everyone, including themselves. However, even if he did disagree with their means, did he necessarily disagree with their goals?

Evidently, he did. While Dickens certainly supported reforms to make the poor's lives easier, he was ultimately too cynical to support a movement that made Parliament more inclusive. Dickens hated Parliament and did not think them terribly effective, so what difference would it make to him if more people could vote? He disliked how elections were conducted and he disliked the candidates running in them (28). With such a fierce anti-government perspective, it is unsurprising that Dickens would not support the Chartists; he viewed Parliament as ineffective and squabbling, anyways. Thus, this explains his view that Parliament was ineffective, and explains why he would have thought that no one running for positions could make it more effective.

With this framing done, we can now finally discuss Dickens' work and how he addresses these topics. I will examine each of Dickens' works, in chronological order, and also look at literary criticism to see how others have made similar interpretations. In doing so, I will compare these interpretations to utilitarianism, and prove that Dickens' attitudes towards the philosophy were positive. With this said, I begin with what is arguably Dickens' most famous and well-loved work: *A Christmas Carol*.

## Chapter 1: *A Christmas Carol*

The first work I wish to focus on is *A Christmas Carol*, published in 1843. More so than his other works, *A Christmas Carol* focuses heavily on the idea of charity, by introducing characters like the Cratchit's and the urban poor, as well as the consequences of not acting charitably. In his biography on Dickens, Edgar Johnson notes that, in the story, Dickens has “a symbolic criticism of the relations that throughout almost all the rest of the year subsist between men and their fellow men” (483). In other words, Dickens does not just want people to feel charitable during Christmas; he wants people to feel charitable all the time. To this extent, then, *A Christmas Carol* is a story about the need for human charity.

Charity was a common topic at this time. Gertrude Himmelfarb notes that there were societies devoted to “the protection of animals, for the suppression of vice, for the abolition of tithes, for helping working people to own their own houses, for building good houses for the working-class,” and “for setting up a basic fund to provide the workers with savings banks” (50). Himmelfarb explains this as a result of religion producing a strong desire for social change (51). Furthermore, she notes that those giving charity were “held to high standards,” and “expected to give generously of their time and resources and to have a sustained personal involvement in the work” (52). All of this goes to show that Victorian society legitimately valued charity.

Though a relatively simplistic moral tale, some of Dickens' political and social criticism creep through and relate to and expand on this need. Early, in the first stave, when asked to donate to the poor, Scrooge asks if the prisons and workhouses are “still in operation” (6). He goes on to say that he helps to support the “establishments,” and, as such, he should not feel obligated to donate directly to the poor. When the donation collectors mention that many of the poor cannot go to the workhouses or would rather die, Scrooge cynically states that, “if they



would rather die, they had better do it and reduce the surplus population.” In this stave Dickens establishes Scrooge as a miserly, unsympathetic, but financially successful man. Furthermore, in acting as he does, and viewing charity in such an impersonal way, he goes against the established norm of the English happily engaging in philanthropy.

Scrooge is more than a character, and he is more than a simplistic moral device to help convince England’s population to donate to charity. He is also a symbol, as Johnson argues, of England’s economic philosophy (485). As I mentioned earlier in Brown’s book, England’s philosophy at the time encouraged the accumulation of money, even at the expense of the impoverished. Scrooge acts exactly like this. The reason why Scrooge does not donate to charity is not simply because he wants to use the money to benefit himself; his nephew, Fred, says as much when he points out that “he [Scrooge] don’t make himself comfortable with it” (45). Even if Dickens did not have Fred express this sentiment, the audience can still read Scrooge as simply a money hoarder in the first few pages, with the narration’s description of him as “a tightfisted hand at the grindstone...a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner” (2). Scrooge does not just keep money to greedily use for himself; he has a compulsion to hoard it, even though doing so does not even benefit him.

Johnson’s biography agrees with this idea. He extrapolates Scrooge’s money hoarding to include other aspects of his life, arguing that, in addition to sitting in cold, he “has stifled and mutilated” any generosity he may feel towards other people (487). In doing so, he becomes alone and locked away in his “dismal cell” of his office. Scrooge’s fear of losing money dominates his life, even to the point of ruining it.

If we accept that Scrooge represents the “quantity over quality” mentality that Brown mentions, then Scrooge’s character, and the change it undertakes at the end of the story are

telling. By having Scrooge change, Dickens suggests that he wants English society to change, to an extent. Yes, he wants people to be more charitable, but he also wanted people to *want* to be more charitable. Moreover, by having a fear of losing money, England's philosophy only hurt itself; not wanting to donate money to the poor just makes England weaker, because it forces the poor to live off the workhouses, rather than acting as contributing members of society. Just as Scrooge does not even use his money to "make himself comfortable," England's philosophy did not encourage using its money to improve the lives of its citizens.

Scrooge's comment about the necessity of the poor to die is also telling. Just as Scrooge's comments about the establishment and the way he uses his money could be viewed as Dickens using an over-exaggerated stereotype to comment on England's monetary philosophy, this comment is also intended for this purpose. Dickens is remarking on the callousness and cruelty of the middle-class. He is pointing out at how little the middle-class cares about the poor and impoverished.

Does this reading truly echo utilitarianism? Depending on the interpretation, the answer may be yes. Edgar Johnson, in his essay, "The Christmas Carol and the Economic Man" argues this point, claiming that *A Christmas Carol* is attacking "the economic behavior of the nineteenth-century business man, and the supporting theory of doctrinaire utilitarianism" (91). He then provides various examples of Scrooge's behavior. In addition, Barbara Hardy argues, in "The Change of Heart in Dickens' Novels," that Scrooge is a "utilitarian wise man" (54).

As we can see, then, scholars have read Scrooge as a representation of utilitarianism, especially when we consider his statements, which simply sound like exaggerations of utilitarianism. Since Scrooge has to change for the story to end happily, the interpretation is that *A Christmas Carol*, and Dickens as a whole, are anti-utilitarian. Yet, when Bentham's ideas in

*An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* are actually examined, they co-exist with the ideas of *A Christmas Carol* quite well.

Bentham's pleasure and pain calculations, at first blush, would seem to favor utility, since he extrapolates his ideas about pleasure and pain to the whole community. However, I have excerpted part of the first chapter, when Bentham discusses community, because I noticed that his definition of community does not seem to agree with the common interpretation. He says, "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" (I.5). Note how he describes the community as "fictitious." In other words, a community is simply a social construct. As such, Bentham argues, the actual individuals in the community matter far more than the community as a whole. He later goes on to say that "it is in vain to talk of the interest of the community, without understanding what is the interest of the individual" (I.6). To me, this completely changes the common Victorian interpretation of utilitarianism as a philosophy that allows for the middle-class to ignore the poor. In fact, when we actually look at Bentham's words, he seems to be arguing that the only way for the community to thrive is for *every* member to be happy.

If we are to accept that England's appropriation of utilitarianism is incorrect, then Johnson's argument as a whole is incorrect. He describes England's economy as mostly unregulated, allowing for mill owners to pay their employees the cheapest amount possible. Moreover, "if the poor, the insufficiently aggressive, and the mediocre in ability were unable to live on what they could get, they must starve ("The Christmas Carol," 93)." I do not contend that Johnson's assessment of England's philosophy is incorrect. What I contend is the notion that the

philosophy was “utilitarianism.” Rather, it was a completely different philosophy that England just called utilitarianism.

After all, do not forget that Bentham’s main arguments in relation to communities still involved individuals. It is easy to read his statement that a government action is good when the “manner the tendency which it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any which it has to diminish it” as Bentham saying that the overall community matters more than the individuals in it, but, as I have already noted, this is untrue (I.8). Remember, he states that the interest of the community is “the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it” (I.5). Considering the rest of the book discusses how to best make laws to help individuals, this interpretation is likely the most correct one.

Moreover, Bentham devotes several chapters to the morality of actions. He first discusses the materiality or immateriality of them (that is, if an action physically affects another human), and how often said event occurs (VII. 20). In Chapter 8, he describes the morality of various actions based on the actions’ intentionality; that is, he looks at how much the action was purposely committed. While intentionality matters, he also notes that “the goodness or badness of the consequences depend upon the circumstances” (VIII. 22). In Chapter 9, he speaks of the consciousness of the action, which, broadly stated, could be thought of as an awareness of the consequences that the action could cause. Finally, in Chapter 10, he discusses motive, which he defines as “anything that can contribute to give birth to, or even to prevent, any kind of action” (X.2). In other words, motive refers to a person’s ability to know what their actions could or could not do.

The reason why I bring this up is to further emphasize the point that Victorian utilitarianism was not necessarily the kind Bentham would have endorsed. As with other

philosophies, it was oversimplified and commodified for the benefit of the middle-class. In actuality, the idea that a utilitarian action is “the greatest good for the greatest number of people” is actually quite an oversimplification. As Bentham’s writing shows, intentionality and motives matter at least as much as consequences. Yet, because it was beneficial for the middle-class to use utilitarianism in a teleological way, the maxim became that the best actions were the ones that promoted the welfare of the society as a whole. This allowed the middle-class to absolve any seeming ethical issues involving the poor, since they could declare any action as simply being good for the country.

In addition, John Stuart Mill, the other architect of utilitarianism would also likely not agree with the middle-class’ interpretation of utilitarianism. Certainly, his writings did not affect *A Christmas Carol*, since his writings on Representative Government were not published until after *A Christmas Carol* had been in print for 20 years. Moreover, though Mill may have taken enough issue with Bentham’s utilitarianism to amend it, he did not have enough issue to fundamentally reject it. Mill’s issue with Bentham’s utilitarianism was that he believed it did not adequately enough consider human nature (Hicks 466). Ultimately, Mill did not change utilitarianism enough for it to be an unrecognizable philosophy. Thus, the middle-class interpretation of utilitarianism was just that; a middle-class interpretation, not Mills’. If we accept Hicks’ article as correct, then the English “utilitarianism” that Dickens attacks is not utilitarianism.

With this reading in mind, look back at Scrooge’s words. His statements reflect the classical Victorian reading of utilitarianism as a philosophy that justifies not helping the poor, since that increases the overall money in the community. Yet, Bentham’s words imply the exact

opposite, and, more importantly, Scrooge changes to these views. To me, this indicates that, Dickens actually agreed with Bentham, even if he did not realize it.

Johnson's interpretation seems to agree with this, even if, like Dickens he does not realize he does. He notes that Dickens did believe that people should have concern for themselves, but "true self-love cannot be severed from love of others without growing barren and diseased" (487). Now, look back to Bentham. An individual, in his view, adheres to the principle of utility when they perform an action or obtain an object that produces "benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness" (I.4). Scrooge's exclamations and actions, though perhaps a bit contrived, are certainly happy; he says that he is "as light as a feather...as happy as an angel...as merry as a schoolboy," and "as giddy as a drunken man" (63). Furthermore, his happiness only increases with each charitable deed he commits, laughing as he sends a delivery boy to fetch a turkey for him to buy and send to Cratchit.

In addition, Scrooge's use of his money completely changes. Rather than hoarding it, he decides to use it, and with each successive use, he becomes happier and happier. The same Scrooge, who at the beginning of the story, was content to eat gruel, now thinks nothing of buying a turkey, paying for it to be delivered quickly with a cab, making a large donation to a charitable organization for the poor, and, most tellingly, talk with Cratchit over a roaring fire. Remember, at the beginning of the story, the narration points out that, while Scrooge's fire is bigger than Cratchit's, it is still a "very small" one (3). Scrooge's happiness increases when he begins to spend money, showing us that Dickens believed money should not be hoarded, and striking back against the idea that quantity mattered. In addition, his happiness increases with each charitable act towards the community, showing us that charity adheres to the principle of utility, by producing happiness.

Furthermore, the penultimate paragraph of the story echoes Bentham's words about the importance of increasing the happiness of individual members of the community. Scrooge becomes "as good a man, as the good old city knew," suggesting that his charity enriches and benefits the entire community. *This* is what Bentham means when he says that the individual members of the community matter. Bentham was not saying that the happiness of the community mattered more than the individual; rather, he was saying that each individual would have to be happy for the community as a whole to be. Regardless of whether Dickens knew it, or not, he actually echoed Bentham and his utilitarianism.

If Dickens agreed with Bentham's ideas, at least in regard to charity, then why would he reject utilitarianism? Granville Hicks, in his essay, "The Literary Opposition to Utilitarianism," may have an answer. He notes that the middle-class "took what it wanted" from utilitarianism to create "a body of ideas that served its needs" (454). Moreover, despite being a mostly liberal philosophy, some Tories also embraced it. Considering how cynical Dickens already was about Parliament, his rejection of utilitarianism makes sense; he may very well have thought it was a good idea in principle, but rejected it because society was unwilling to actually practice it. Instead, the English middle-class simply appropriated the parts of it that benefitted themselves and ignored or outright misinterpreted the rest.

In defense of both Dickens and the middle-class, there were multiple ways to interpret Bentham's utilitarianism. James E. Crimmins argues there were two ways of interpretation. The first was an authoritarian interpretation, which said that the government should "construct rationally grounded institutions and policies to educate, condition, and/or direct humankind to the end of optimizing personal and public well-being" (752). The second was an individualist interpretation, which said that the government should create laws "to be modelled to facilitate

individuals in the pursuit of happiness in ways they, rather than the legislator, deem appropriate” (754). It is understandable why Dickens would become confused. In reality, a philosophy having more than one interpretation is really a strength, not a weakness, but, we can forgive Dickens for rejecting utilitarianism, considering how callously the middle-class treated the poor.

Dickens’ anger also related to his love of Christmas. Brown argues that Dickens’ idealistic love of Christmas motivated his anger against those unwilling to donate, since “now was the time for mercy and for giving” (230). He viewed Christmas as a time when “even the hungriest had a chance to be less hungry and the chilliest could manage to stoke up some kind of fire.” With such a strong love of Christmas, he developed a strong distaste for people unwilling to donate, and said distaste is reflected in *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens’ description of Scrooge at the beginning of *A Christmas Carol* makes him seem cold and unfriendly at best; he was “hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster” (2). Not only is Scrooge cold in the sense that he disliked company, but the narration makes Scrooge also sound literally cold, and the coldness affects his features, “nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue...a frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin.” Furthermore, he is so cold that, not only can heat not warm him, but “wintry weather” could not make him colder. Though, like with the rest of the story, this is an exaggeration, it still gives us a very good description of Scrooge, and, with the knowledge of Dickens’ love of Christmas, shows us just how much Dickens disliked the Scrooge mentality. If Dickens’ ideal Christmas was a warm, food and people-filled occasion of joy and merriment, then Scrooge is, in every way, the diametric opposite of this ideal. Scrooge is not simply a grumpy old tightfisted, curmudgeon; he represents the opposite of everything Dickens loved.



This knowledge makes Scrooge's change all the more important. It also reflects one of the most central tenants to utilitarianism, namely the idea that a person can change their entire personality for the better. Granted, this change normally comes about through institutional changes, but, the principle is the same.

In addition, the change reflects a strong dislike of what Bentham called "asceticism." Bentham defines asceticism as a reversed version of utilitarianism; a person who practices asceticism approves of actions "as they tend to diminish his happiness," and disapproves of ones that "tend to augment it" (III.3). Bentham certainly disliked asceticism, since he said that any principle that differed from utilitarianism was wrong.

While asceticism comes up more overtly in other Dickens works (most obviously, *Hard Times*), Dickens' descriptions of Scrooge reflect a subtler form of it. I will not rehash the earlier descriptions, but Fred's statement that Scrooge does not even use his money to make himself comfortable seems to reflect asceticism. Scrooge sits in the cold and dark, eating "gruel," all because he believes that this is more proper. Considering that this is the same man who said "humbug!" at the mention of Christmas, and regarded it as a frivolous celebration that would be better spent making money, Scrooge can pretty clearly be regarded as a practitioner of asceticism. One quote from the narration confirms this: "It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call 'nuts' to Scrooge" (2). Scrooge's interpretation of pleasure and pain are confirmed to be reversed at this point, marking him as interested in asceticism.

If Scrooge represents asceticism, and Scrooge also represents English philosophy, then, logically, it must follow that English philosophy was one of asceticism. Furthermore, since Scrooge changes and embraces the "correct" actions that will bring him pleasure (charity, food,

etc.), the logical interpretation would be to say that Dickens wished England to reject asceticism. Again, intentionality is unnecessary; Dickens does not need to know whether or not his push for charity could be read as a push against asceticism. My only point is that Dickens' writing reflects a sympathy with true utilitarian thought, even if Dickens himself did not know this.

Furthermore, Dickens provides us with a foil for Scrooge in the form of his nephew Fred. Fred could be thought of as the man Dickens could have become had his money-hoarding ways not overtaken his personality. Fred is joyful and, based on Dickens' writings on Christmas, appears to act as the author avatar on the topic; he calls Christmas time "a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely" (4). Clearly, we are meant to see Fred's interpretation of Christmas as the "correct" one.

To me, though, the most important part about Fred is not that he loves Christmas and is joyful, but that he spends money in what Scrooge would deem to be a spendthrift manner, and, yet, is still quite happy. Despite Scrooge's assertion that Fred is "poor enough," when Scrooge visits him with the Ghost of Christmas Present, as well as at the end of the story, he appears to be doing quite well for himself. He has an "exceedingly pretty" wife, friends, music and dancing, and games. In every conceivable way, he is a foil to Scrooge; Scrooge has no friends to play games, or dance to music with, and he has no wife. Yet, The Ghost of Christmas Past shows that, at one time, Scrooge had these great parts of his life. When his former boss, Fezziwig, hosts a Christmas party, there are "dances" and "cake" and a lot of people to keep company with (25). Interestingly enough, this scene proves Scrooge wrong in several ways. Obviously, it proves that he was happy at one point in his life, but it also proves that happiness and wealth are not

mutually exclusive; in fact, Scrooge's entire social life seems to be his co-workers and people who know them.

As such, Fred appears to be an alternative to Scrooge, and thus to England. Charity and happiness in spending money do not automatically mean poverty, says Dickens. There is no good reason to embrace asceticism, when the alternative makes us and our communities, as a whole, happier. Furthermore, there is no reason why we cannot have fun at appropriate times, and still do well.

In addition, the fact that Fred's life appears to be a mirror image of Scrooge's earlier life, is important. Yes, Fred is an alternative to Scrooge, meaning that his philosophy is an alternative to England's philosophy, but, he is also a younger Scrooge. It as if Dickens is saying that, at one time in England's history, they were affluent *and* regarded each other with love and respect, but, because of a major change, like, perhaps, the Industrial Revolution, this has changed. Now, England's philosophy only cares about money and regards people as means to an end, rather than an end unto themselves.

This circles back to utilitarianism. Based on this analysis, it is pretty clear that Dickens dislikes the idea of treating people as objects. And, as I have noted, he seemed to misattribute this to coming from utilitarianism, when, in actuality, utilitarianism very much advocated for treating people like actual people. In fact, based on my reading of Bentham's utilitarianism, one could argue that Bentham believed people should be treated well, partly because it is inherently good, but also because it increases "pleasure." Bentham makes clear that pleasure can include happiness and success. Bentham's philosophy, thus, could actually apply to an employer. In Bentham's eyes, a good employer, presumably, would be one who cares about his employees and treats them well, both because he likes them, and because doing so helps the business. We do

not need to look far to find an example of this in *A Christmas Carol*; Fezziwig provides us with an excellent example.

Dickens describes Fezziwig as having a “rich, fat, jovial voice.” In addition, he is prone to laughing, has an “organ of benevolence,” and possesses a “capacious waistcoat” (24). Though perhaps not intentional, Dickens’ description of Fezziwig matches up to descriptions of Santa Claus. This image is further impressed when we consider that the party Fezziwig throws is on Christmas Eve. All of this works to make Fezziwig a jolly, happy, generous man.

Just as with Fred, Dickens gives us no indication that Fezziwig has any financial troubles. Therefore, as with Fred, Dickens makes the argument with Fezziwig that it is possible to be generous and happy, and still have money to spare. There is no need to assume that using money would cause England to become impoverished.

Further connecting this idea of a benevolent boss giving charity to others, are Scrooge’s words on the matter. After viewing the happy party, the Ghost of Christmas Past uses Scrooge’s own logic to argue that, from a financial perspective, Fezziwig’s actions make little sense. Scrooge angrily responds that Fezziwig “has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil...the happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune” (26). While this indicates that Scrooge has already begun to change, that is not all his words indicate.

Scrooge’s words provide yet another example of Dickens’ sympathy with utilitarianism. Scrooge says that Fezziwig can control the happiness or unhappiness of his employees. This statement is true, in multiple regards; certainly to money, but also in regards to workload. As Scrooge’s employer, he could have given him more work and made his job difficult, but he did not. Instead, he is a fair boss. Not only does this contrast with Scrooge’s behavior and treatment

of Cratchit (at least until the end), this also relates to the utilitarian idea that the right people need to be in charge. In *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill comments that, if the “checking functionaries” (the people in government who make sure the government is acting appropriately) “are as corrupt or as negligent as those whom they ought to check” (the government officials), “little benefit will be derived” (32). Even though this statement was in regard to government officials, it is not difficult to extrapolate to employers. If an employer is “corrupt or negligent,” under this view, then, “little benefit” will come from this. What constitutes “benefit” is questionable, since, if we use Bentham’s interpretation of pleasure, then it need not solely be economic in nature. However, to me, Mill’s statement reflects again the utilitarian idea that treating people well is good for the country. Since Dickens creates a character who acts in this manner, this would seem to indicate an affinity towards utilitarianism.

Furthermore, Fezziwig acts as a model for Scrooge. Scrooge’s joyous laughter and behavior after the Ghosts visit him are quite similar to Fezziwig’s own joyous laughter and behavior. In this way, Dickens says that charity is better for everyone; it benefits the employees, and the employer, both by increasing productivity, and making both parties happier.

Dickens addresses this idea most obviously with the Cratchit family. The Cratchits, initially, are introduced as a happy, loving family; to pleasantly surprise Bob, they have Martha pretend to not be there, and the text describes a warm, comforting, familial image. They have a goose, whose “tenderness and flavor, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration” (39). Furthermore, they have a “wonderful” pudding, a fire, apples and oranges, and chestnuts, concluding with the family gathering around the fire. In this way, the Cratchit’s appear as happy as can be.

However, there are hints that Scrooge's behavior helps to make their lives more difficult. During the descriptions of their merriment, Dickens remarks that "nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing." The use of apologetic-sounding language shows us that the Cratchit's are noble, since they do not complain about their lack of money, but the fact that Dickens even feels the need to comment on the pudding's size also indicates that they are somewhat impoverished, even as they enjoy their Christmas.

After this bout of merriment, Scrooge asks the Ghost of Christmas Present if Tiny Tim will live, and the Ghost makes it quite clear that if his images of the future, "remain unaltered," then Tiny Tim will die (40). In this way, the Ghost begins to foreshadow that Scrooge's cheapness is directly responsible for the family's problems. The Cratchit's themselves address this idea, when Bob asks the family to drink to Scrooge, as "the Founder of the Feast" (41). Though Mrs. Cratchit disagrees with this assertion, calling Scrooge an "odious, stingy, hard unfeeling man," Bob is not technically wrong, since Scrooge's wages to Bob, as minimal as they may be, were the basis for the food provided.

However, Scrooge has a larger effect than merely providing the financial means for the feast. After Scrooge's name is mentioned, the narration describes the Cratchit family in less than happy terms: "the children drank the toast after her. It was the first of their proceedings which had no heartiness. Tiny Tim drank it last of all, but he didn't care twopence for it. Scrooge was the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party." In this description, Dickens shows us how important the charity of an employer is; if that employer is not charitable, it can make an entire family unhappy at the mere mention of his name. Going

back to Bentham's idea of "pleasure," it would seem that, in being stingy, Scrooge is not just denying material pleasure to the Cratchit's, but a sort of emotional one, as well.

For what it is worth, this feeling does eventually dissipate. In fact, after it does, "they were ten times merrier than before." Yet, the language indicates that discussing Scrooge was almost a necessary evil; no one wanted to do it, but it had to be "done with." The use of the word "baleful" in describing Scrooge underscores just how immediately he can impact the family; in a fit of rage, he can become a destructive force, denying them money and, thus, food. In this way, Scrooge is directly linked to the Cratchit's lives.

This sense of Scrooge being linked to the Cratchit's lives only increases when the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come visits. He shows Scrooge the Cratchit's household after Tiny Tim's death, and it is a somber scene. In the first paragraph of the scene, alone, the word "quiet" is used three separate times, while the stillness of the Cratchit children is emphasized (59). The family then talks gloomily about Bob, and how slow he is without Tiny Tim around. After Bob breaks down crying, he mentions that he ran into Fred, who promises to help in any way he can.

Again, Fred is contrasted to Scrooge. Whereas Scrooge is stingy and unfeeling, Fred is generous and warm-hearted. More importantly, however, in this future, Tiny Tim is dead, again emphasizing the amount of control Scrooge has over this family. Dickens is saying that, if Scrooge acts more like his nephew, in the present time, then, Tiny Tim need not die. In this way, Dickens emphasizes the utilitarian idea that a member of government (or employer in this case) can help create happiness.

The famous last scene in Stave III helps to cement this idea. When Scrooge questions the Ghost of Christmas Present about what is present under his robe, the Ghost presents two malnourished children, one representing Ignorance, and the other Want. Their description is

animalistic; initially, Scrooge believes them to possess claws, and Dickens describes them as “scowling” and “wolfish” (49). In de-humanizing the children, Dickens reflects Scrooge’s de-humanization of the poor, which the Ghost of Christmas Present had reminded him of shortly before, when discussing Tiny Tim (“If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population”). Moreover, the Ghost says that “Man,” and, by extension, Scrooge, is responsible for these children. Furthermore, by not fixing the problems represented by the children, particularly Ignorance, society will continue to be beset with problems. As the Ghost notes, “Doom” is written on Ignorance’s forehead, indicating that, so long as the middle-class continue to remain ignorant about the plight of the impoverished and working-class, the latter classes will be doomed to eternal poverty and starvation.

In addition, the last words the Ghost throws back at Scrooge, (which, really, are the last words any of the ghosts throw back at him, since the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come does not speak), are a cruel mockery of Scrooge’s earlier statements about the necessity of workhouses and prisons. By having the Ghost throw these words back at Scrooge, Dickens reflects his disdain for these institutions and his desire for their change. Moreover, the fact that these are the last words any of the Ghosts say helps to emphasize the importance of these ideas and show the strength of Dickens’ desire for institutional change.

It is worth examining the Ghosts, because each of them really make the same argument, just in different ways. First, I would like to discuss Marley’s Ghost. Of the four, he is the only one with a personal connection to Scrooge. Dickens’ strategy to reform Scrooge then, begins with emphasizing elements from his own life as a justification for changing his ways. Scrooge does not believe Marley’s ghost even exists, at first, claiming that he is a hallucination, perhaps



brought on by a “slight disorder of the stomach” (12). While this is a reasonable response to have, it also reflects Scrooge’s belief that he does not need to change.

Marley provides a perfect visual metaphor for Scrooge’s stinginess in the form of an ankle chain. The chain, which is “ponderous,” obviously represents his lack of charity, which explains its size. However, the most disturbing part of Marley’s visit is not the chain, but his justification; Marley says that every person’s “spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellowmen, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit does not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world-oh, woe is me!-and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth and turned to happiness” (13). This, really, is why Marley’s visit should disturb Scrooge so thoroughly; because Marley was uncharitable during his life, he must make up for his stinginess in death, preventing him from resting in peace. The chain represents that forced servitude. Furthermore, Marley has changed in death; he does not like wandering the Earth, not just because he cannot rest, but because he is genuinely regretful. Marley’s ghost, as the narration makes quite obvious, serves as a cautionary tale for Scrooge. Nonetheless, Scrooge, does not believe him, necessitating a visit from the Ghost of Christmas Past.

The Ghost of Christmas Past is the gentlest of the spirits. He is both “like a child,” and “like an old man” (18). In a sense, he represents the most comforting aspects of both, and is angelic, with long, white hair, a “tunic of the purest white...a branch of fresh green holly in its hand,” and, most angelically of all, “a bright clear jet of light” underneath its crown on its head. His voice is also “soft and gentle,” once he begins speaking. After he introduces himself, Scrooge asks the Ghost to clarify the extent of the past, which the Ghost does, with “your past”

(19). This continues the trend started by Marley of having the Ghosts attempt to impart the moral of charity to Scrooge by using his own life as an incentive.

To this end, he shows Scrooge Christmas' at different parts of his life, including as a child, when he spent it mostly at school, as an apprentice, when he spent it at work, and as an adult, when he spent it alone, after his fiancée, Belle, rejects his proposition for marriage. While these scenes exist to inform the audience as to why Scrooge acts the way he does, they also provide a strong, albeit self-serving, argument for charity. Belle rejects Scrooge because she claims Scrooge has displaced her with a "golden idol," obviously money (27). Scrooge justifies himself by claiming that he just wants to avoid poverty, since it is very difficult to live in the world under poverty. Incidentally, this is also Dickens' way of making a quick statement about English's treatment of the poor, since, it turns Scrooge into a stingy, hard, man. After Scrooge sees Belle reject him, the Ghost shows him one more memory, this time from Belle's perspective; the Christmas when Marley died. The house she lives in is "full of comfort" (29). The noise in the room was "perfectly tumultuous," and Belle is sitting there, with children who are all noisy, which Belle enjoys. Belle's husband comes back with "Christmas toys and presents," which makes the children happy, as evidenced by the "shouting and struggling" that happens; they "hold on tight by his cravat, hug him round his neck, pommel his back, and kick his legs in irrepressible affection!" They even had "shouts of wonder and delight," when they see him. Scrooge notes that one of Belle's daughters could have been his daughter, a realization that makes him unhappy, and makes his sight grow "dim" (30).

The Ghost and story are arguing that, if Scrooge had cared less about money and given Belle a chance, he could have had the same happiness. His fear of losing money, as noted in his earlier rejection of Belle, is unwarranted, and, since Scrooge represents England, this is a way of

saying that England's fear of losing money is unwarranted. This helps to conclude the idea that, if Scrooge is more charitable, his life will be more enjoyable. Moreover, it relates back to utilitarianism, because it rejects asceticism; rather than not taking part in pleasures, because those pleasures are wrong, we should enjoy the world around us.

Next, I will talk about the Ghost of Christmas Present. He takes Scrooge to various people, to show their experiences of Christmas. Some people were "shoveling away on the housetops," who "were jovial and full of glee" (34). Everyone enjoys themselves, and Dickens describes a happy, comforting scene, including "great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats of jolly, old gentlemen." There were "Spanish Onions...pears and apples, clustered high in blooming pyramids," along with other mouth-watering fruits. Then, he goes to describe the Grocers, who also help to provide a good Christmas, including "blended scents of tea and coffee...and candied fruits" (35). The customers are so excited by all of this, that they "hurried" and "they tumbled up against each other at the door, crashing their wicker baskets wildly." Dickens, thus, begins by describing the working-class who helped make Christmas possible. He then moves to discussing the Cratchit's and Fred, stopping at a "cheerful company" of miners, "assembled round a glowing fire," in between Cratchit and Fred (43). Despite their impoverished nature, they are still singing and happy. After visiting Fred, Scrooge and the Ghost visit a wide variety of happy people, including "sick beds...foreign lands...struggling men...almshouse, hospital, and jail" (48). This is reminiscent of Dickens' characteristic love of Christmas, and also connects to Bentham's rejection of utilitarianism and embracing of pleasures. After this, the Ghost shows Scrooge the impoverished children and leaves.

Unlike the Ghost of Christmas Past, who shows personal memories (with the exception of Belle, though she is certainly relevant to Scrooge), the Ghost of Christmas Present shows him mostly strangers. Considering that Scrooge clearly enjoys himself at Fred's, requesting the Ghost that they stay for another half an hour, as if he were a child asking his parents, it is obvious that Scrooge has been softened up by his personal connections. In making the issue of charity personal, the Ghosts make it accessible for Scrooge, and incentivize him to perform it. Furthermore, now that Scrooge has an understanding of charity and its benefits as they apply to his own life, he can begin to sympathize with others, and apply those principles to their lives. Likewise, Dickens argues that, if the English middle-class is shown a personal incentive to perform acts of charity, they will perform them for selfless reasons.

This leads to his last encounter, with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Unlike the previous Ghosts, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come takes a different approach. Rather than showing Scrooge either directly personal memories, or a combination of impersonal and indirectly personal ones, the Ghost shows Scrooge mostly impersonal memories that all, in one sense or another, relate to Scrooge. Visiting shortly after Scrooge's death, they look at businessmen whom Scrooge had worked with, a group of poor workers, a couple of debtors who no longer have to worry paying him back, the aforementioned Cratchit's, and Scrooge's own tombstone. With the exception of the businessmen and Bob, none of these people are ones whom Scrooge actually interacts with. Yet, nearly all of them benefit from his death. The Ghosts have gone from giving positive, mostly personal incentives to convince Scrooge to be generous (love, affection, happiness), to giving him negative, mostly impersonal ones (contempt, relief at death). Likewise, Dickens has gone from giving England positive incentives to negative ones. Furthermore, the use of mostly impersonal anecdotes indicates that Scrooge has changed; he no

longer needs the personal connection necessary to want to be charitable. Through their efforts, as shown by the conclusion, the ghosts have succeeded in making Scrooge want to be generous for the sake of being generous.

The scene with the debtor's is particularly worthy of a close reading. Caroline, the wife, is waiting with "anxious eagerness," as evidenced by her various actions, including being jumpy at every sound, constantly checking the clock and window, and trying to distract herself with sewing (57). When her husband finally appears, the narration describes him as "careworn and depressed, though he was young" (58). Based on these descriptions, we can conclude that the couple has had a serious reason to feel anxious, one so serious that it has nearly prematurely aged them.

The narration takes care to qualify that, though the couple seem to be perfectly nice people, they cannot help but feel relieved when they discover that Scrooge has died; the husband has a "remarkable expression" of "serious delight of which he felt ashamed" on his face, while Caroline, though "mild and patient," is still "thankful in her soul" to hear of Scrooge's death. Like her husband, she feels some shame at the relief she feels, since she "prayed forgiveness" for this emotion, but the overall feeling of the scene is relief and happiness. The knowledge that they no longer owe a debt to Scrooge a "merciless" creditor, eases their fear. It is interesting to note that, though they feel relieved, the husband still refers to Scrooge's death as "bad," indicating that he is still able to sympathize with Scrooge.

This scene performs multiple functions. It is yet another scene that shows how Scrooge's lack of generosity and charity makes both his and others' lives worse; as the narration points out, the only emotion connected to Scrooge's death is joy, indicating that Scrooge does not even have the benefit of people feeling sad, in the wake of his death. Scrooge's stinginess also makes

others' lives worse, as it produces anger and anxiety in various people, from business men, to debtors, to the working-class.

However, this scene also relates to Dickens' desire for institutional change and dislike of debtor's prison. Dickens makes it quite clear that he finds the anxiety the couple feels completely unnecessary. To be sure, he places most of the onus on Scrooge, considering the scene focuses on Scrooge as the creditor, rather than all creditors in general, but it can also be read as a strong dislike of the fact that the couple is even in this situation to begin with. This is especially true, considering all of the qualifications the narration uses to tell us that the couple are actually good people. The qualifications, which almost sound like justifications, seem to tell us that, while their debt hurts the couple in the obvious way of anxiety and pain, it also hurts them, spiritually. Though Scrooge should have certainly been a kinder creditor, the scene's logic also indicates that the couple perhaps should not have had to be worried.

This interpretation has broader implications. After all, the reason, presumably, as to why the couple was terrified of Scrooge was because they knew that he would have no compunctions about sending them to debtor's prison. *That* is what they are actually scared of. While Dickens certainly wanted the middle-class and Scrooge to be more generous, he may have also wanted debtor's prison to be abolished.

Yet, this would appear inconsistent, since Dickens did support workhouses, as seen in his support of the PLAA. However, Dickens' support existed because he felt that the poor should work to alleviate their poverty. Considering there was little opportunity for work in the debtor's prison, this would run counter to this idea. In addition, Johnson notes in *His Tragedy and Triumph*, that Dickens believed that, if a person was "able and willing to work...he is entitled at least enough to live on, by mere virtue of his humanity alone" (486). The efforts Dickens goes to,

to make the couple sympathetic indicates that they worked hard, but still ended up in a bad situation. As such, they should not be punished.

All of this reflects a sympathy on Dickens' part for utilitarianism. In Dickens' eyes, charity and Christmas are inextricably linked as a happy time of year that brings us pleasure. In this sense, then, his discussion of the topics fundamentally rejects asceticism. Dickens sees no reason why people must reject pleasure just for the sake of rejecting it, to appear proper.

Additionally, his assertion that charity and Christmas can make one happy relates back to utilitarianism. Liberal and utilitarian thought of the time believed that people could essentially be taught morality. As a moral tale, then, *A Christmas Carol* is fundamentally utilitarian in nature. Obviously, *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit* are also like this, but *A Christmas Carol's* introductory statement confirms this idea: Dickens wishes to “raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humor with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me” (ix). The “Idea” in question is obviously charity, especially in relation to Christmas.

The rest of the statement is relevant because it shows that, while Dickens was a liberal, in the style of Bentham or Mill, he was fundamentally not a radical. Though willing to write impassioned stories about the plight of the working-class, Dickens ultimately still wanted to write a story that would sell. As a result, the introduction serves as a sort of disclaimer; it as if to say that, though Dickens may show sympathy and desire for change, *A Christmas Carol* is still a story. It reflects middle-class sentiments and tastes.

This is also seen with Scrooge's progression from stinginess to charity. I noted earlier that the Ghosts choose to begin by making the issue personal, before broadening it to other people. Though this process makes sense, it, like Dickens' introduction, is ultimately a moderate view. Rather than actually taking into account the perspectives of the people Dickens cared so

much about (the poor and homeless), the story instead shows us those people through the eyes of a wealthy man. Furthermore, the fact that the Ghosts need to push charity in a self-serving way further emphasizes this point. Dickens may very well have wanted those with money to help those who did not, but his reasoning for why those with money should do so appears to be related more to how it will benefit the moneyed, rather than the penniless. If the moneyed donate, Dickens says, then they will be well-liked and respected, and they will have loving friends and family, and a successful career, and, most importantly, they will be remembered and mourned in death. Fail to donate, and they will be hated and feared, have very little, if any, friends and family, possibly a successful career, and they will be forgotten in death, or worse, have it celebrated. In both situations, the successful career is possible, but in the latter, the successful career would be the only benefit. In the former, the successful career is included in a list of benefits.

These benefits could also be thought of as pleasures. Again, this circles back to utilitarianism. Dickens' very story structure is, thus, utilitarian. By focusing on the pleasures and pains that come with each decision, Dickens is essentially performing a Bentham-esque pleasure and pain calculation table. By demonstrating that charity brings more pleasure than it does pain, Dickens makes it a utilitarian question. However, rather than using utilitarianism to justify not donating and helping the poor, he argues the exact opposite. By committing acts of charity, everyone's lives will be improved. Thus, this adheres to Bentham's idea of taking actions that benefit every individual.

In these senses, then, *A Christmas Carol*, despite being one of the less overtly political stories Dickens wrote, is still at its core, deeply moralistic and calling for real, human change. Even if Dickens himself did not quite understand utilitarianism as it actually applied, he still



successfully used it in the story, from the use of the Ghosts as a device to make Scrooge charitable, to the very idea that a stingy man could become a charitable one in one night. Throughout the story, the narration and characters frequently criticize England's economic system in place that engendered and encouraged the conditions Dickens so angrily wrote about. Thus, regardless of whether Edgar Johnson's belief that *A Christmas Carol* is explicitly anti-utilitarian may not be correct, certainly his assertion that it is a political story seems reasonably sound.

It is worth noting though, that, while some literary criticism does call *A Christmas Carol* anti-utilitarian, this is by no means a universal opinion. Because of the more supernatural elements, it is regarded as a less political story. As a result, literary criticism of the story does not always focus on the economic aspects, instead focusing entirely on the moral ones. Because of this, *A Christmas Carol*, by itself, is not really a strong enough example of Dickens' relationship with utilitarianism. While Dickens may very well have written it with utilitarianism in the backdrop, the story was not explicitly written as an attack against utilitarianism (or what Dickens called utilitarianism, at least). For his true attack on "utilitarianism" and asceticism, I shall now turn to another one of Dickens' shorter stories, *Hard Times*.

## Chapter 2: *Hard Times*

*Hard Times*, published in 1854, differs from *A Christmas Carol* in several ways. It is longer (though still much shorter than many of Dickens' other novels). More relevantly, it is much more overtly political. One can be forgiven for seeing *A Christmas Carol* as a simple little morality tale; *Hard Times* really cannot be viewed in this way. Through the characters (particularly Gradgrind), and the story, Dickens wrote a strong polemic against what he perceived to be utilitarianism. As I will continually argue, Dickens' attacks, though relevant to Victorian times, were not really attacks against utilitarianism, even if he believed they were.

Hicks' article is a good starting point, since it helps to connect *A Christmas Carol* with *Hard Times*. Hicks describes how Dickens qualified his view of labor unions by focusing less on their importance, and more on the importance of the people in charge. Hicks argues that "only a change of heart" Gradgrind undergoes can help the working class (465). To be sure, in context, he means that Bounderby has to have a similar change of heart that Gradgrind has, but the point still stands. Rather than having the working poor solve the problems themselves, in the form of unions, Dickens calls for bosses to act more charitably.

Several aspects of this idea reflect *A Christmas Carol*, most obviously that Dickens wants moral change amongst the upper-class, rather than a redistributing of power and wealth amongst the lower ones. In this way, he draws a direct comparison between Scrooge and Gradgrind; both need to have a moral change for the lives of the poor to improve. In addition, just as Dickens had a qualified view of the theme in my previous chapter (charity), he has a similar view, here. As noted in my introduction, though Dickens certainly believed the poor should be offered charity, he also believed that it was more honorable for them not to take it. Incidentally, this helps to explain why he portrays the debtors in the Third Stave so sympathetically; they had worked hard,

rather than just relying on charity. A similar reserved view of the theme of this chapter (labor unions) appears here; though Dickens has some support for the labor unions, he still makes their leader, Slackbridge, “only slightly less a villain than Mr. Bounderby.” Considering that Dickens makes Slackbridge the leader, and thus, the embodiment of labor unions as far as he is concerned, and considering that he makes Slackbridge unpleasant and untrustworthy, this indicates a reservation for labor unions. Dickens may accept them, but he wants to keep them at an arm’s length. Ultimately, he still wants the upper-classes to solve the working-class’ problems.

The comparisons between *A Christmas Carol* and *Hard Times* extend to both stories’ main characters. Like Scrooge, Gradgrind could be thought of as an exaggeration of utilitarian philosophy. From the very beginning, he discusses “fact” as an essential aspect of life. Additionally, he detests “fancy,” calling only for facts. In fact, of the 26 uses of the word “fact,” Gradgrind is responsible for no fewer than 20 of them. In his obsession with facts over fancy, and his belief that facts are the most important parts of life, then, Gradgrind is certainly a parody of utilitarian philosophy.

However, as previously noted, Bentham defines pleasure in different ways; physical, political, moral, and religious (III.2). The kind of pleasure that Gradgrind attempts to squash would appear to be either physical or political. Physical pleasure, by Bentham’s logic, is “in the present life, and from the ordinary course of nature (III.3). Political pleasure is pleasure “at the hands of a particular person or set of persons in the community, who...are chosen for the particular purpose of dispensing it” (III.4). Based on these descriptions, Gradgrind has political power, since he has a position of authority, but, by not dispensing it, he is abusing it. By sacrificing “fancy” for fact, Gradgrind is definitively not following actual utilitarian philosophy.

More accurately, he is less a parody of utilitarianism as much as he is a parody of the dominant English philosophy at the time that the English called utilitarianism. In this way, he is quite similar to Scrooge, since Scrooge also denied various pleasures from those poorer than he, including food and heat (i.e. Bob Cratchit).

Additionally, like Scrooge, Gradgrind changes, in this case because his beliefs about fact being better than fancy are wrong. Sleary's philosophy of the necessity for people to have entertainment echoes and agrees with Bentham's philosophy of utilitarianism far more than the upper-class' version of it. Therefore, Gradgrind changing his philosophy to better reflect this reflects Dickens' sympathy with actual utilitarianism.

Dickens' first description of Gradgrind also helps cement the idea of a man without wonder. He possesses a "square wall of a forehead," with a "wide, thin, and hard set" mouth and an "inflexible, dry, and dictatorial" voice to emerge from said mouth (1). Additionally, Dickens describes him as having an "obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders" and a neckcloth tied "like a stubborn fact." This image resonates particularly well with Dickens' description of Scrooge, except, whereas Dickens describes Scrooge in terms of coldness, Dickens describes Gradgrind in terms of squareness. Both appear as hard, stingy, unfeeling men.

However, Gradgrind's ordinariness, as emphasized by the use of the square imagery, works to differentiate him from actual utilitarian philosophy. As previously noted, Bentham hated the idea of asceticism. Just as Scrooge embodied asceticism, so, too does Gradgrind, albeit in a different way. Whereas Scrooge embodies it with monetary stinginess, Gradgrind embodies it with a sort of emotional stinginess. Gradgrind's desire to raise his children to only focus on facts reflects the idea of asceticism because he believes that wonder and enjoyment are bad. In

this way, he runs counter to actual utilitarian theory, since, if Bentham would have disliked Scrooge's asceticism, there is little reason to think he would have liked Gradgrind's.

While *Hard Times* and *A Christmas Carol* do share a similar main character, what ultimately differentiates them is their ending. In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge, and all the characters both directly and indirectly affected by him end happily. The same cannot be said of *Hard Times*. After Bounderby promotes Mrs. Sparsit, the narration goes through and explains exactly how each of the characters' stories end. First, the narration describes Mrs. Sparsit, as "fighting out a daily fight," indicating that she will always have to work hard (394). Next, Dickens describes Bounderby's future, which includes him reflecting on his "vain-glorious will," only for him to die five years later "of a fit in the Coketown street," which results in the will's "long career of quibble, plunder, false pretenses, vile example, little service and much law" (395). By dying in a public spot, Dickens gives Bounderby the ultimate karmic retribution, by making him only known for his death, and not any of the actions he took in life. Moreover, he does not even have the satisfaction of his will being properly executed.

Bounderby's ending is thus, quite fitting; he does not change, and, so, the novel sees no reason to reward him. Mrs. Sparsit's ending, though perhaps a touch unfair, considering how she is the one who provides the impetus for unraveling Bounderby's lies, at least follows from both her and Bounderby's actions. Bounderby never did say that she would not have to work hard, and, so, in promoting her to a position where she has to work harder, this does make some sense. Up to this point, Dickens' endings for the characters has been reasonably fair; the main villain receives a strong punishment, while one of the people working for him is dragged down.

This changes with the description of Gradgrind's future. At first, the description sounds good, since it mentions that he makes "his facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope, and

Charity; and no longer trying to grind that Heavenly trio in his dusty little mills (396). Thus, the lesson that he was supposed to learn stuck. However, Dickens also states that he is “much despised by his late political associates,” indicating that the people he has to work with have lost all respect for him because of his newfound rejection of England’s dominant philosophy. The narration refers to Gradgrind’s co-workers’ opinions of citizens as being the exact opposite of his; whereas Gradgrind now thinks of people as actual people, his associates think of people as an “abstraction.” People, in their eyes, are more an abstract concept than actual living creatures. Because of this, they frequently taunt him.

This is a big shift from *A Christmas Carol*. In *A Christmas Carol*, England’s issues appear much more individualized; the issue is that *Scrooge* is uncharitable. In this novel, the issues appear to be more institutionalized, since Gradgrind ends up being punished for not supporting England’s philosophy. Even though he changes, this is not enough to fix England’s problems. Ultimately, even though Gradgrind is able to view people as a living creatures, creatures who should be able to unionize, much of England’s ruling class are unable to view people in any other way.

This view even extends to Louisa. Louisa, who never does any wrong, still ends up in a less happy situation; though Dickens describes her as “sweet-tempered and serene,” he also describes her as “a working woman,” who suffers “a long illness,” and “always dressed in black,” perhaps indicating that a close family member dies in the near future. Louisa, who has been negatively affected by Gradgrind’s interpretation of utilitarianism, ends in a situation that, though not horrible, is certainly not as happy as compared to the idyllic endings of all the characters in *A Christmas Carol*.

Additionally, Tom Gradgrind Jr.'s fate works to show the destructive nature of England's philosophy. Though he escapes arrest from the authorities, he never again sees Louisa. Worse, the narration describes him as "coming nearer home, with hope of seeing her, and being delayed by illness; and then a letter in a strange hand, saying: 'he died in hospital, of fever...and died in penitence and love of you: his last word being your name'" (397). This description evokes several emotions. Firstly, it evokes frustration, because Tom very nearly had the chance to properly make amends with his sister, his death prevents this. Furthermore, it evokes sadness and regret because his love for Louisa is not strong enough to allow him to actually see her. Instead, the best she can hope for is a message from an unknown doctor, an impersonal means if there ever was one, to know of his death. Thus, while this ending is mostly unhappy for Tom, it negatively affects Louisa, too.

In fact, the only character with an unqualifiedly happy ending is Sissy Jupe. Her "happy children" loved her, as did all children, and, she had "grown learned in childish lore; thinking no pretty and innocent fancy ever to be despised; trying hard to know her humbler fellow creatures, and to beautify their lives of machinery and reality with those imaginative graces and delights." I find her idyllic, utopian description quite amusing and also telling; everyone around her is happy and loving, and all because she understands children and "fancy." Essentially, she exists to perpetuate the philosophy Dickens wished to continue, and for this, the narration rewards her.

I find the qualification of why she teaches interesting; the novel states that she does not teach this as part of a "fantastic vow, or bond, or brotherhood, or sisterhood, or pledge, or covenant, or fancy dress, or fancy fair; but simply as a duty to be done." Again, this indicates that Dickens' requirements are much higher; not only must there exist a person to teach imagination, but that person must do so for no other reasons than because of its inherent

rightness. Furthermore, this relates to Gradgrind's ending by showing how best to solve it; institutional change, so that the members of Parliament would not view Gradgrind's newfound beliefs as ridiculous.

What to make of this ending, as compared to *A Christmas Carol*? While both endings are happy, only the former's is unabashedly, unqualifiedly, so. In *Hard Times*, the happiness is quite qualified and reserved. While part of this relates to the simple fact that *Hard Times* is an inherently more political story than *A Christmas Carol*, and part of it is because that *Hard Times* makes a stronger attempt at realism than *A Christmas Carol*, I contend this also shows how Dickens' stance against "utilitarianism" had hardened over time. In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge does not actually have to do much for everyone to achieve a happy ending; he simply has to be more generous with his money. In *Hard Times*, the story seems to suggest that, while individual action can help, it only goes so far. The only way for a person to have a completely happy ending is for that person to never be involved in utilitarianism, and, furthermore, act as a teacher to prevent others from falling into the utilitarian trap. In *Hard Times*, then, Dickens has a much larger task required of the characters, and with much larger stakes. This is evidenced by his description of what would happen if Sissy Jupe did not teach children about imagination: "the heart of infancy will wither up, the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death, and the plainest national prosperity figures can show, will be the Writing on the Wall" (398). This dark prediction of English society without fancy far exceeds any description *A Christmas Carol* conjures up. In that story, Scrooge's lack of charity means that Tiny Tim dies, and his own death will not be mourned, but the societal effects are mostly not mentioned. Here, though, not teaching imagination will literally cause England to fall and crumble. Perhaps this description exists for a more pragmatic reason; similar to the benefits Scrooge sees from charity, perhaps



Dickens wants to show that fancy can overall benefit England. Still, the dire terms indicate that the issues in *Hard Times* are far-reaching and institutionalized in a way that *A Christmas Carol* only hints at.

The idea essential to the novel, that England should “teach” imagination and fancy, is, at its core, an intrinsically utilitarian idea, not to mention a huge institutional change. This was, in fact, an idea championed by John Stuart Mill, who, similar to Louisa, had grown up with a strict background, and decided that imagination was important. In his book, *Utilitarianism*, he even mentions that the “pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures” (11). Mill clearly considered imagination an important element of human life.

Bentham would have agreed with this notion. In his chapter on pleasures in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, he notes that physical pleasure is “the ground-work of the political and the moral; so is it also of the religious” (III.11). Therefore, the political pleasure that Gradgrind and the other middle-class Englishmen would yield, would be composed of basic physical pleasures. Remember, I concluded earlier that the pleasures Gradgrind embraces are political, because certain people are the ones who must “dispense” it (III.4). Additionally, look back at how he defines the “the interest of an individual” (I.6). Bentham says that “a thing is said to promote the interest...when it tends to add to the sum total of his pleasures: or, what comes to the same thing, to diminish the sum total of his pains.” Again, this echoes Sleary’s idea that people “must be entertained.” Again, Dickens’ desire for imagination is not nearly as anti-utilitarian as we may believe.

Furthermore, Hicks’ essay gives credence to this idea. While Bentham’s version of utilitarianism was more focused on rationality than Mill’s, he still cared about the emotions.

Obviously, I have already pointed this out with his chapter on pleasures, but Hicks also notes that Bentham wanted to “broaden” rationalism. Based on my previous paragraph, I believe that, by using rationalism as a way to explain the importance of emotions, Bentham “broadened” it. Thus, any educating of the emotions would actually be consistent with Bentham’s ideas, since educating them would be rational.

Incidentally, Mill would also have likely agreed with the pro-labor union message of the book, qualified as it may have been. As I noted in my introduction, England abolished unions at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Without unions, the industrialists were free to exploit their workers and treat them as if they were slaves. While Mill approved of slavery in “uncivilized” society, he would certainly disapprove of it in England, since England was “civilized.” In all likelihood, he would consider the treatment of the workers as *de facto* slavery. In the book’s focus on unions, then, it has a much stronger interest in institutional change than *A Christmas Carol*.

However, while *Hard Times* focuses on institutional change, individual change is still important. Gradgrind’s change from fact to fancy, and from asceticism to actual utilitarianism indicates that he is, ultimately, a better person than Bounderby. While this is partly because he makes a change at all, Gradgrind can be viewed as a better person for why he changes; his children. Particularly noteworthy is how he treats Louisa, when discussing her failed marriage with Bounderby. At first, when he announces Bounderby’s proposal, he mechanically examines the “Facts of the case,” in the form of numbers; though there is a “disparity” in their ages, since Louisa is 20, and Bounderby is 50, Gradgrind argues that there is not any in regards to their “means and positions” (130). He then follows his logic by questioning whether “one disparity” is “sufficient to operate as a bar to such a marriage.” After pulling up statistics on all the marriages

in England and Wales, he determines that “a large proportion of these marriages are contracted between parties of very unequal ages” (131). Furthermore, he notes that the Indians and Chinese use this same practice. He concludes by saying that when “confining yourself rigidly to Fact,” Louisa should accept Bounderby’s marriage proposal.

His desire to mechanically and logically answer a question as emotionally charged as a marriage proposal contrasts with the first chapter of Book 3, when he expresses regret. Whereas in the previous scene, he explains emotions with pure logic, here he simply feels emotions. His hand “usually steady,” trembles, indicating that his worldview has been completely changed, and he “tenderly” asks how she is doing (294). He comes to the conclusion that there is a “wisdom of the Heart,” and that the “wisdom of the Head...may not be all-sufficient” (297). At this point, he has decided to reject the notion of only facts and no fancy, and to embrace both.

Gradgrind’s case is particularly interesting because the mechanical calculations he makes do seem to echo Bentham’s logic. However, we could argue that while Bentham certainly wanted people to use logic, even he would consider this excessive. Remember, Bentham emphasizes the happiness calculation much more in governmental affairs. To me, this implies that, while Bentham probably did strive for people to use logic in their decision-making, this decision really had more to do with large, more impersonal decisions. As related to personal decisions, like marriage, Bentham would likely disagree with Gradgrind’s decision. As Thomas Dixon notes, in his essay “Educating the Emotions from Gradgrind to Goleman,” during the Victorian Era, there was a strong desire to educate “children’s feelings, passions and emotions in the classroom” (483). Essentially, this idea reflected the utilitarian idea that a person can be taught the “correct” way to think. Gradgrind reflects this idea taken to its logical extreme. His first sentence (which is, by extension, the first piece of writing in the book), states that what he

wants are “Facts,” and “nothing but Facts” (1). He elaborates by instructing M’Choakumchild to “plant nothing else, and root out everything else,” concluding by telling him to “stick to Facts, Sir!” In the first paragraph alone, Gradgrind uses the word “Facts” once in five of the seven sentences, indicating a particular love and obsession with them. Additionally, the narration capitalizing “F” at the beginning of each of its uses suggests a reverence of them on Gradgrind’s part. To Gradgrind, facts are more than nuggets of information; they are incredibly important gifts. In this way, then, Gradgrind represents an over-the-top exaggeration and parody of the utilitarian notion of “educating the emotions.”

Furthermore, Hicks’ essay argues this same idea. He argues that the novel attacks the “spirit of the business men, against the spirit of utilitarianism” (464). In Hicks’ view, Gradgrind serves as a dark parody of utilitarianism. Additionally, he functions as a cautionary tale of what could happen if utilitarianism were to be applied to every family.

Yet, though Gradgrind could be meant as a satirical attack against utilitarian philosophy, Dickens still had a certain amount of sympathy for the idea. Dixon points out that Dickens “advocated for emotional education between the 1830s and 1870s,” which, as I noted before, John Stuart Mill did (482). As a middle-class man, Dickens was ultimately not revolutionary enough to question the utilitarian wisdom of educating the emotions; he simply felt that it perhaps went too far. Dixon’s interpretation agrees with this point, noting that wonder was not included in the educational scheme (484). Yet, one of the most important morals of the novel is the inclusion of wonder, or, as succinctly stated by Sleary: “people must be entertained.” Tom and Louisa’s fates also point to Dickens’ dislike of excessive utilitarianism quite well, since Tom is arrested and Louisa nearly commits adultery. As they had been raised by the same utilitarian

principles that Gradgrind uses in his teachings, it would be logical to conclude that Dickens disliked utilitarianism run amok, even if he agreed with the basic ideas.

Therefore, we can see that Dickens' views on fact and fancy would agree with Bentham and Mill. I noted before that Dickens' support of labor unions would also be in agreement with utilitarian philosophy, though it was still qualified. However, I never answered why Dickens viewed unions as a necessary evil, at best. Certainly, he agreed with the idea that the wealthy should help the poor, but, if that is the case, why make Slackbridge, the only representative of unions, such an unpleasant character? To this end, I would like to closely read Chapter IV of Book 2 in the novel, called "Men and Brothers," as this is the first chapter where Slackbridge appears. The chapter begins with him speaking to the workers, echoing what appears to be Communist rhetoric; he calls for the workers to "rally round one another as One united power, and crumble into dust the oppressors that too long have battened upon the plunder of our families" (182). His use of the word "plunder" draws a parallel between the upper-classes exploiting the working-class, and thieves. Furthermore, he ends by referencing "Brotherhood," another Marxist-sounding claim.

Yet, Dickens' description of how he speaks makes it clear that he dislikes this rhetoric. His speech worked him into a "violent" passion, because of "roaring at the top of his voice under a flaring gaslight, clenching his fists, knitting his brows, setting his teeth, and pounding with his arms." Roaring, clenching, knitting, pounding: these are verbs that indicate violence most of which Dickens likely did not approve of. When we consider the violent terms characterizing much of the labor unions' rhetoric, and we consider that Dickens disliked the Chartists, who made similar calls, we can draw the conclusion that Dickens would not have approved of the use of violence, at least by the working-class, as a means for change.

Additionally, Dickens clearly thinks of the labor unions as hypocritical, at best. Dickens describes him as “above the mass in very little but the stage on which he stood,” and that “in many great respects he was essentially below them” (183). Furthermore, “he was not so honest, he was not so manly, he was not so good-humored; he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense.” Essentially, what Dickens means is that Slackbridge was, in most respects, a contemptible man and that most of the working-class laborers in the union were, morally, better people; they are more honest, pleasant, and less deceitful. Yet, because he has artificially lifted himself above them (both literally and figuratively), they allow Slackbridge to lead them. As I noted in my previous chapter, Dickens had respect for the poor willing to work hard (like the couple who owed Scrooge debt in *A Christmas Carol*). Slackbridge, a phony, artificial man, peddling in revolutionary rhetoric, leads them, all to benefit himself, rather than actually help the poor. In this way, Slackbridge treats them much as Bounderby does; as a tool for self-benefit. In a novel so focused on the different elements of industrial capitalism, it is telling that Dickens describes the only labor union head in such a scathing, hypocritical, violent way.

Dickens furthers the impression that Slackbridge should not lead the workers by calling him “an ill-made, high-shouldered man, with lowering brows, and his features crushed into an habitually sour expression,” thus contrasting “most unfavorably, even in his mongrel dress, with the great body of his hearers in their plain, working clothes.” Again, Dickens emphasizes the unnatural elements of Slackbridge leading, by calling him “ill-made.” Furthermore, Dickens’ statement about his clothes implies how obvious his phoniness is; much as he may try to appear like the common working-man, ultimately, he still does not succeed. Therefore, I contend that,

while Dickens may have supported labor unions to an extent, he certainly had reservations about them, too. In this case, he feared that they were led by self-interested liars.

The language Dickens uses to describe Slackbridge becomes even more scathing once the characters and narration actually use his name. Slackbridge has “a withering smile,” and he holds “out his right hand at arm’s length (as the manner of all Slackbridges is), to still the thundering sea” (185). Several elements of this narration are quite telling. First, Dickens describing Slackbridge’s smile as “withering” indicates that, while he may be attempting to hide his displeasure with new ideas by smiling, the façade breaks, and his real self comes through. Additionally, the sweeping of his right hand appears to allude to the famous Biblical story of Moses parting the Red Sea. In this sense, Slackbridge fashions himself as a noble leader and almost savior of the working-class, indicating that he leads, not for selfless reasons, but entirely selfish ones.

Most important about this sentence is the parenthetical. The parenthetical confirms that Dickens’ belief about labor unions extended past just Slackbridge. By saying “all Slackbridges,” he implies that other labor union leaders act like this. Thus, Dickens’ criticism of labor unions crystallizes; not only are they headed by hypocrites who should not be leading, but they are headed by hypocrites who should not be leading, with practically religious delusions of their own grandeur. Considering Slackbridge literally compares Stephen Blackpool to both Esau and Judas Iscariot, this reading seems reasonable.

However, though Dickens did dislike labor unions, this does not mean that he did not sympathize with the working poor; he just felt that the middle-class men who controlled society should be the ones to help the working class. To this end, I would like to examine Josiah Bounderby, since he is in business with Gradgrind, and is roughly part of the same socio-

economic class. Only Gradgrind changes. By examining Bounderby, and his story arc, I hope to illustrate Dickens' intent.

Dickens makes it quite clear that Josiah Bounderby is an awful man. In the first chapter he appears in, called "Mr. Bounderby," the narration describes him as "a man perfectly devoid of sentiment" (18). This, along with the statements about him being the closest to a "bosom friend" that Gradgrind had, indicate that they are similar people. Unlike Gradgrind, who the narration describes as hard and unfriendly, Bounderby is fat and artificial; he is "a big, loud man, with a stare and a metallic laugh. A man made out of coarse material...with a great puffed head and forehead." Such description seems to imply that he is fake and full of hot air, both figuratively, and literally, since the narration also compares him to a balloon. Furthermore, whereas Gradgrind focuses on discussing why Facts are important, Bounderby discusses how he went from "old ignorance and old poverty" to great wealth and knowledge. His focus on his life and its self-made aspect make him a thoroughly unlikeable character; the narration pokes fun at his expense by calling him the "Bully of humility," a phrase that could be read as saying that he is very humble, or as saying that he "bullies" humility. In other words, Dickens is saying that Bounderby lacks humility. Considering he then spends no fewer than four pages telling an obviously uncomfortable Mrs. Gradgrind about his life, the ironic interpretation is the most likely.

In particular, he focuses on his mother, claiming that, when he was a child, she "bolted" and left him with his grandmother, who was "the wickedest and worst old woman that ever lived" (20). Yet, just as Bounderby appears to be full of hot air, in terms of his physical appearance, he is also a liar. In Chapter Five, of Book Three, Mrs. Sparsit brings Mrs. Pegler, Bounderby's mother, to him. After Gradgrind questions Pegler about why she would visit her



son when she had treated him so horribly, she responds by unraveling all of Bounderby's lies. First, she makes it clear that Bounderby never met his grandmother, because she died before Bounderby was even born. She then refutes the main part of his story, namely that he grew up in a ditch and a "gutter" (348). In actuality, Bounderby came "of parents that loved him as dear as the best could, and never thought it hardship on themselves to pinch a bit that he might write and cipher beautiful." Not only were Bounderby's parents not abusive, but, based on Pegler's descriptions, self-sacrificing and loving. Furthermore, Mrs. Pegler finds an apprentice for Bounderby, a kind one who helps him become wealthy; to create his image of himself as a self-made man, Bounderby then paid his mother not to talk about him. However, because Mrs. Pegler is such a loving mother, she is unable to keep her "pride" in Bounderby to herself (349). Bounderby responds by continuing the balloon imagery, with the narration describing him as having "swelled larger and larger, and grown redder and redder."

After this scene, the narration confirms that the phrase, "Bully of humility" is indeed meant to be taken as an ironic statement. Dickens wastes no time in describing Bounderby as a truly pathetic figure, with a "blustering sheepishness upon him, at once extremely crestfallen" (350). Furthermore, his status as a Bully is even pathetic, as Dickens describes him as not being able to "have looked a Bully more shorn and forlorn, if he had had his ears cropped." By using such animalistic imagery, Dickens implies that Bounderby is more animal than man, and is now being treated as if he were a dog needing to be punished.

This imagery, along with his muted behavior after Mrs. Pegler exposes him, marks him as different from Gradgrind. Gradgrind, after appearing muted, realizes the error of his ways, and attempts to resolve his mistakes. Though Bounderby does give Mrs. Sparsit a promotion, in the form of a larger place to live, one has the distinct impression that he does so because this can

prevent her from doing any more damage to his life; he claims that in his house, “there’s hardly opening enough” for a woman of her “genius in other people’s affairs” (393). Thus, Bounderby has not really learned his lesson, or, at the very least, he has not learned it for the right reasons. Rather than becoming a better person, he simply removes any of the influences on his life that could reveal his duplicity to the world.

In a sense, then, this ties into the importance of labor unions. As indicated by Slackbridge, Dickens was clearly not fond of labor unions. Yet, the labor unions would have advocated for the physical pleasures that Gradgrind was responsible for dispensing; pleasures like the ability for workers to have relaxation time. Even though Dickens did not like labor unions, likely because he viewed them as a large mob of uneducated people, he clearly agreed with their aims; his issue was with their means.

Hicks’ essay agrees with this idea. He lumps Dickens in with the group of middle-class people who argued that workers “must not act for themselves” (468). While different people called for different ideas, including “heroic dictators...more power for church and crown,” as well as Dickens’ call for more “charitable employers,” all believed in the “futility of political and economic action, of both Chartism and trade unionism.” Ultimately, though Dickens, like other middle-class Victorians did believe that the working-class should have better lives, he wanted their lives to become better under middle-class terms.

Dickens’ desire for imagination connects with the working-class in another significant way. Mary Catherine-Harrison, in her article, “The Paradox of Fiction and the Ethics of Empathy: Reconceiving Dickens’s Realism,” argues that, as an author, Dickens’ main goal was “to generate empathy,” and he wanted his audience “to imagine suffering and consequently feel with his characters in distress” (263). Because of this, he considered imagination incredibly

important; it was his means of changing hearts and minds on issues. Dickens believed that, “if middle and upper-class readers could vividly imagine the suffering they did not themselves experience...then they would be moved enough to intervene.” Dickens’ focus on imagination makes sense, then; he had a personal bias for it, since he used it to convince England’s middle-class to treat its working poor better. In this way, Dickens provides a sort of substitute for labor unions, again relating to the idea that, while Dickens may have been sympathetic with their goals, at least to a point, he disagreed with their means.

Yet, while Dickens may have disagreed with their means, he does not really provide any sort of answer as to what should be done instead. Aside from placing sympathetic people in power, and an awareness that some kind of institutional change needs to happen, he has no answers. Nils Clausson, in his article “Dickens’s ‘Genera Mixta:’ What Kind of Novel is *Hard Times*,” argues that for this reason, calling *Hard Times* a “social problem” novel makes little sense (163). Clausson notes that social issue novels usually present a solution to the social issue they discuss, which Dickens does not have.

If *Hard Times* is not a social problem novel, then it is also not a “moral fable” as some have called it (161). While *Hard Times* is a fable, to an extent, just as it is a social problem novel, to an extent, there are certain elements that make this reading difficult. Clausson notes that, while the novel does have strong, pointed references to utilitarian thought, it also has discussions of Parliament and, as already noted, labor unions (162). If *Hard Times* really were “just” a moral fable, than it would not have these elements; the point of a fable is to convey an idea as simply as possible, so why include unneeded elements?

Because of these conflicting genre descriptions, Clausson decides that *Hard Times* is not either of these types of novels. Instead, it is a “Menippean satire” (166). Clausson quotes

Northrop Frye, explaining the Menippean satire as a book that “deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes,” going on to say that the Menippean satire handles “abstract ideas and theories...and presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent.” Read in this light, the characters’ interactions and thoughts make much more sense. If Gradgrind seems unrealistic and exaggerated, that is because he is supposed to be; he is less a person, and more of a representation of unbridled utilitarianism and English greed. Likewise, Bounderby is the representation of the sometimes slimy, lying nature of capitalism, and Slackbridge represents the sometimes self-serving nature of labor unions. This resolves the main issues with the other genres; the references to Parliament and labor unions are because Dickens is satirizing many different elements of English society. Likewise, the lack of a solution is because satires need not offer solutions to the problems they highlight.

Clausson’s argument also helps provide an alternative explanation to the dissonance between Dickens’ journalistic opinions on unions as compared to his authorial opinion. Clausson argues that, rather than viewing his portrayal of Slackbridge as Dickens saying that labor unions are obstructive and lying, we should view Slackbridge as representing an “obstructive society” that also includes Bounderby (172). By contrast, Sissy Jupe and Stephen Blackpool are members of a “congenial society.” Rather than reading *Hard Times* through a class-based lens, Clausson argues that we should view it through the lens of bureaucratic blocking opposed to considerate congeniality. Slackbridge and Bounderby are not equated with each other because they both lie or are members of the same social class (which they certainly are not), but because they work to impede the characters from acting.

Furthermore, this reading explains Slackbridge’s character better. Initially, I viewed Slackbridge as Dickens commenting on why labor unions seemed like a negative force, since he

made the labor union's leader a self-serving, deceitful, man. If we treat Slackbridge the same as Bounderby, however, this makes sense. Remember, Bounderby is an *exaggeration* of English capitalism; since the novel is a satire, he has to be. Considering that in the next novel I will discuss, *Little Dorrit*, Dickens has a noble capitalist and inventor in the form of Daniel Doyce, it does not seem likely that Dickens disliked capitalism. Like with his solution for middle-class oppression of the working-class, his solution is to have a better person in that position. Likewise, Slackbridge is simply an exaggeration of what could potentially exist from a labor union. Were there to be a less self-serving person in power, Dickens would have no issue.

Up to this point, most of the characters from *Hard Times* that I have discussed at length are, at best, bad people that have to learn to be better (like Gradgrind), or simply villainous people (like Bounderby and Slackbridge). However, I would be remiss if I did not discuss Sleary, particularly since he provides the most obvious example of Dickens' desire for fancy and imagination. In *The City of Dickens*, Alexander Welsh uses *Little Dorrit* as an example of a Dickens book that classifies work into "useful production and art," or, more relevantly "duty with diversion" (74). I find that, while this description works perfectly fine for *Little Dorrit*, it works just as well, if not better, for *Hard Times*. Without even closely examining Sleary's character, we can see that Dickens had sympathy for the idea of "lifelong amusement," solely because he considers "diversion" on equal level with actual physical production. Rather than considering physical production more important than imagination, Dickens appears to believe that English society should have and embrace both, to create better, more well-rounded humans and workers. Certainly, this is obvious with Louisa, and I will discuss that, but first, I want to discuss the ringleader of Dickens' amusement philosophy.

Sleary's first appearance where he speaks is in Chapter 6 of the first book, "Sleary's Horsemanship." In this scene, the novel works to make him as opposite to Gradgrind as possible; whereas Gradgrind speaks clearly and is easy to understand, Sleary has an asthma-induced lisp. Furthermore, the novel establishes Sleary as a good person immediately by offering him a drink several times. In addition, the various members of the circus have strong negative reactions to Bounderby, when he corrects Sissy, claiming that she cannot call Sleary her father, since her "father has absconded," and she "mustn't expect to see him again" (48). The circus people react by muttering harsh words, and Sleary suggests that Bounderby "drop it" (the topic). Considering the narration mentions that the people had "so little for plain Fact," it is clear that they strongly support Fancy.

At the end of this chapter, Gradgrind and Bounderby convince Sleary to have Sissy accompany them. Sleary then makes a famous speech that accurately sums up the book's (and, by extension, Dickens') opinion on the matter. Sleary states (translated from his lisp), that "people must be amused, squire, somehow...they can't always be a working, nor yet they can't always a learning. Make the best of us; not the worst" (53). He repeats the last phrase, which the book calls the "Sleary philosophy," ending the chapter (54). Sleary's philosophy directly opposes Gradgrind's; while he does not believe that work and education are bad, he believes that people need some form of entertainment in their life. Furthermore, his statement about making "the best of us, not the worst" could be read several ways. One interpretation is him imploring Gradgrind (and the middle-class, for that matter) to treat the entertainers with a modicum of respect. Considering my earlier statement from Welsh's book about Dickens considering art as important as labor, this makes sense.

The other interpretation is that he is telling the middle-class to treat the working-class well. This message fits well, considering that Dickens supported reforms for the working-class. Furthermore, this is done in the manner Dickens would have preferred; Sleary asks, not demands, it, from a middle-class working man. Sleary acts in a dignified manner, as opposed to a mob-like labor union, and he wants the middle-class to solve the working-class' problems, rather than the working class doing so. In this way, Dickens establishes Sleary as sympathetic, making his perspective the "correct" one.

Much later, in "Whelp Hunting," Sissy, Gradgrind, and Louisa all pay Sleary a visit, where he describes the various marriages and childbirths that have happened in the circus community. Whereas, in the beginning, the narration describes the circus people as having been in an "advanced state of degeneracy," in regards to fact, here the description is much more positive (48). Dickens describes Sleary's words as possessing "great heartiness and... a wonderful kind of innocence" indicating he approves (374). Furthermore, when Sleary brings in the circus people to see Sissy, the narration describes the event as "agreeable" and that it was "very natural in Sissy to be unable to refrain from tears." When we consider that Louisa views this scene, this indicates the extent to which she has changed over the course of the novel; no more is she tortured by a belief that Facts are the only important part of life. She realizes that having a strong community is at least as important. Furthermore, it is Sleary and the circus who keep Tom out of trouble and enable his escape after the robbery. This allows Gradgrind to also see the importance of having a close-knit community, even if that community is working-class. Finally, the fact that the community who saves Tom is the circus, and, thus, people who exist solely to provide entertainment, indicates that entertainment really is at least as important as Facts. Thus, the narrative structure confirms this belief.

Louisa's character arc also helps to confirm this belief. Whereas Sleary and the circus community affirm this belief in a positive way, by showering love and happiness on to Sissy, Louisa's story is, initially, negative. To this end, I have done a close reading of Chapter 12 of book two, "Down," as this is where Louisa's character arc essentially ends. She goes to Gradgrind and asks him how he could give her "life," while denying from her "the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death" (287). She further clarifies, by asking where the "sentiments of" her "heart" are, and says that if she had had them, their "ashes alone" would have prevented the situation she found herself in; accused of adultery, while her brother has committed a crime. Whereas Sleary and the circus people exist to show the positive reasons why one should embrace imagination and feelings, Louisa exists to show the negative reasons why, blaming Gradgrind in the process.

Louisa explains why Gradgrind's lack of emotional teachings caused this problem. Because Gradgrind did not bother to see if Louisa would even like being married to Bounderby, he failed to anticipate the "rebellion against the tie" that would occur (290). With this state of mind, she was a perfect victim for Harthouse, a man she describes as "used to the world; light, polished, easy; making no pretenses." Even though she does not commit adultery with Harthouse, Louisa, and by proxy, Dickens, essentially argues that, by not "educating her emotions," Gradgrind made Louisa susceptible and naïve. Furthermore, if he had done so, she could have expressed her dislike of the match, and he could have better understood it, thus avoiding the entire conflict, in the first place.

The ending of the chapter contrasts with the earlier scene with Sleary, since both use the word "philosophy" in reference to the respective worldviews. Louisa states that Gradgrind's "philosophy" will not save her, before collapsing into "an insensible heap" (291-292). She is,



thus, at her lowest point, and the narration strongly hints that this is because of Gradgrind's philosophy. By contrast, Sleary's philosophy of entertainment does Sissy well, and ultimately improves Gradgrind's and Louisa's lives.

Ivor Brown discusses *Hard Times* in his book, *Dickens in His Time*, going into a bit more detail on just what it was that Dickens disliked about England's dominant economic philosophy. Brown says that Dickens wanted *Hard Times* to address "the inhumanity of the economists, who reduced living people, chiefly the poor people, to rows of figures, and would allow no place amid all this arithmetic to feeling or to fancy. Everything must be factual, tabulated, argued out in terms of statistics to prove that the workers were there to work and that the more money they made for others, the more, but very little more, would accrue to them in the very long run" (40). This description perfectly encapsulates exactly what it was Dickens disliked about, what he believed to be utilitarian philosophy. As I mentioned in my previous chapter, this reading of Bentham's utilitarianism seems something of a stretch; remember, Bentham believed that each individual in the community should be happy. Therefore, while the middle-class may have used Bentham's theories to justify their actions, they were not really using utilitarianism, since treating an entire class of people in a way that would have made them unhappy and ignored their humanity is almost certainly against Bentham's ideas.

Brown also notes that Dickens attacked conditions engendered by the Industrial Revolution. Again, this involved treating the humans as machines, "weaving money for Bounderby" (42). Furthermore, this involved working conditions designed for efficiency and productivity, to the extent that "the streets were alike, the work done and the long hours kept were alike." Why bother trying to create unique work experiences for people, when making the same ones for everyone is easier and cheaper?

Additionally, Brown briefly discusses Stephen Blackpool, one of the heroes of the novel. Brown describes Blackpool as “a man with the traditional hero’s heart of gold, carrying...his own personal burden of a miserable marriage,” concluding that “he bears his fate with heroic fortitude” (43). To me, this description of Blackpool is telling, because it provides yet another example of Dickens’ insistence of a sort of “noble poverty.” Essentially, while society should certainly help the poor, Dickens’ sympathy, as I noted in my introduction, only seemed to extend to the poor who worked tirelessly to remove themselves from poverty. This results in an interesting and contradictory view; while Dickens recognized that there were systemic and societal inequalities, he also believed the solutions to them were mostly individual.

Brown helps explain this idea with his description of Dickens’ opinion on labor unions. To Brown, Dickens “sees the workers...as sound in moral essence but stupid and untrustworthy when policy is needed and as simpletons easily exploited” (44). Brown goes on to say that Dickens viewed mass of people involved in labor unions as similar to the mass of people involved in Parliament. It makes a fair amount of sense, then, that Dickens would dislike labor unions, since he equates them to Parliament, which, as I noted in my introduction, he enormously disliked and viewed as thoroughly unhelpful.

Furthermore, Brown points out that Dickens believed in individual action, rather than collective action. Even if trade unions were run by competent people, it does not seem that Dickens would support them, because he fundamentally, ideologically disagreed with their very existence. This helps to explain the apparent contradiction; Dickens recognized that systemic inequalities existed, but he ultimately believed that the individual should solve them, because his time in Parliament convinced him that collective effort is unhelpful.

If *A Christmas Carol* only briefly hinted at systemic inequalities, *Hard Times* certainly focuses on it. However, while Dickens clearly believes there to be rampant institutional inequalities, even his anger in *Hard Times* does not quite indicate that he desires for a change in said institutions. His solution appears to still be the same as it has always been; have better individuals running the system.

With *Little Dorrit*, the last book of his I wish to discuss, his criticism begins to change. Certainly, as I will demonstrate, Dickens had individualist ideas about institutions in this book, but his dissatisfaction with institutions, ranging from the Circumlocution Office to the prisons, indicates that, perhaps, they are inherently flawed. Furthermore, these institutions would be a utilitarian's nightmare, as they were horribly inefficient and largely unsuccessful at doing what they claimed to do. As we will see, *Little Dorrit* will provide the final example showing Dickens' sympathies with utilitarianism.

### Chapter 3: *Little Dorrit*

Just as *Hard Times*, which was separated by roughly 10 years from *A Christmas Carol*, is quite different from it, so too, is *Little Dorrit*, published in 1857. If *Hard Times*, with its focus on labor unions, marked the beginning of Dickens becoming a caustic social critic, then *Little Dorrit* showed Dickens' maturation in this regard. To examine Dickens' maturation, I will first contrast *Little Dorrit* to *Hard Times*, and then explain Dickens' attitudes on the prison system.

Just as *Hard Time*'s most obvious difference from *A Christmas Carol* was its length, so too is this the case for *Little Dorrit*. In addition, *Little Dorrit* followed a model many of his other novels did; it was long, had many characters, and possessed a fair amount of mystery. More relevantly to my discussion, it also harshly attacks England's institutions. To be sure, *Hard Times* does too, but, with a few exceptions, Dickens does not really problematize these institutions; his issue is that the institutions are headed by bad people. If they were headed by better people, Dickens argues, there would be no issue. Arguably, the only exception is Parliament, since they overwhelmingly reject Gradgrind, once he changes his views.

This stands in some contrast to *Little Dorrit*, particularly with the Circumlocution Office. In Chapter 10, "Containing the Whole Science of Government," Dickens describes the Circumlocution Office as essential to running England: "No public business of any kind could possibly be done at any time, without the acquiescence of the Circumlocution Office. Its finger was in the largest public pie, and the smallest public tart" (119). This description relates the essentiality of the Office. The comment about the public pie and public tart suggests that Dickens disliked how thoroughly the Office pervaded England; it felt necessary to intervene, even in relatively unimportant matters.

Never one for subtlety, Dickens' criticism of it becomes much more obvious. He claims that "it was equally impossible to do the plainest right, and to undo the plainest wrong, without the express authority of the Circumlocution Office." While this continues to emphasize the Office's intrusive nature, it also indicates its uselessness, since the narration makes it clear that the process of doing right requires quite a bit of effort. He states that "if another Gunpowder Plot had been discovered half an hour before the lighting of the match, nobody would have been justified in saving the parliament until there had been half a score of boards, half a bushel of minutes, several sacks of official memoranda, and a family-vault full of ungrammatical correspondence, on the part of the Circumlocution Office." This means that the Office is not only intrusive; it is inefficient. This combination is particularly irritating to Dickens because, not only is the office inefficient, it is required; even if there is an easier method of resolving conflicts, says Dickens, the Office will force England to take the more difficult and bureaucratic way. Even before Dickens describes the Office in this way, he hints at its nature by its name, as circumlocution refers to using many words, when fewer would do. Through extrapolation, this means the Office uses far more effort than necessary to solve conflicts, using a more complicated method, when a simpler one would do.

Dickens continues to emphasize the Office's ineffectiveness with his discussion of what he claimed was its "great study and object." He calls this "how not to do it." The Office is inefficient because it cannot perform any of the tasks required of it; it can only NOT do them. The rest of the chapter illustrates this point when Arthur attempts to find out information from them. The language surrounding this point drips with sarcasm; Dickens uses words like "delicate," "tact," "genius," "great," and "professional," to mock its inability to actually do

whatever would be helpful. Instead, the Office can only do what it should not; but, at least it does it well!

Dickens then continues for much of the chapter, expanding this discussion of “how not to do it” to the entire government. In Dickens’ mind, this discussion happens after a “general election” ends, and it happens in “both Houses of Parliament the whole session through,” even with a “royal speech” at the beginning and closing of each session extolling it (120). He then continues by explaining that, through a process which Dickens can only describe as “mechanical,” the Office, in an “efficient” manner, ended up involved in everything. Finally, before describing the specific people in the Office, he details how the Office placates people who actually want work done efficiently, or, as he calls them “demagogues so low and ignorant as to hold that the real recipe of government was How to do It” (121). Their version of this appears to be just telling the complainer that the Office is always right, and that they should never again “approach this matter.”

Dickens’ sarcasm and verbal irony continue throughout this section; he frequently uses “efficient” and “wonderful” in describing the functions of the Office. Furthermore, his description of the people who want the Office to actually accomplish what it claims to do are sarcastically demonized as simply an emotions-seeking leader. In making these sarcastic descriptions, Dickens makes his contempt for the Office clear, while also reflecting the attitude the Office would have to the very issues he raises.

While this anger and passion may not seem different than *A Christmas Carol*, or *Hard Times*, there is one key difference. In *A Christmas Carol* and *Hard Times*, while Dickens does reserve some institutional criticism, he mostly focuses on the people heading the institutions; *Scrooge* and *Gradgrind* are the problems, not bankers or headmasters in general. In *Little Dorrit*,

though, while Dickens clearly dislikes the family heading the Office, the Barnacles, he also does not mention them first. He mentions that the Barnacle family “had for some time helped to administer” it, but he never outright says or implies that they are the sole cause of its inefficiency (122). Considering that Dickens is not exactly the most subtle of writers, this choice is telling. Even if the Barnacles were not heading the Office, it would still be inefficient and badly in need of replacement. The Barnacles are a symptom of the problem, not its root cause. This comes out in Barnacle Junior’s description; rather than making him malicious, Dickens just makes him incompetent. He keeps on dropping his eye-piece and is clearly frightened by Arthur’s presence, indicating that he really should not be involved in governmental administration. Furthermore, the narration appears to even sympathize with him; it compares him to “a young bird,” and he is so underdeveloped that he could easily “die of cold” (123). This imagery works to make Barnacle appear like a bird that was pushed out of the nest too soon. Considering that, only a page prior, Dickens references Tite Barnacle’s nepotistic practice of placing his son in government positions, it is obvious that Dickens believes Barnacle Junior to be horribly misplaced.

This is a huge difference from the other two Dickens books. Here, he appears to take a more nuanced view of government; the Barnacles are not necessarily bad people, but, because of the institutions they head, they are required to make bad choices, perpetuating governmental inefficiency. It would seem that inefficiency is simply inherent in government, and is beyond any one person’s control. Indeed, based on Daniel Doyce’s experiences (who I will mention later), the best solution to England’s systemic inefficiency would be to just leave England and immigrate to a country friendlier to one’s interests. Otherwise, the only choice is just to suffer, since actually changing the institutions does not appear to be possible, and even the nicest people are too incompetent to head it well. This sharply contrasts with *A Christmas Carol* and *Hard*

*Times*, where Dickens' solution to England's problems is to reform the people heading them. Ultimately, it seems that the actual institution of government is inherently inefficient.

Is this another attack on utilitarianism? At first, it might seem to be the case, since the process the Office uses is all very mechanical and, in a sense, utilitarian. The idea of breaking down all the necessary processes into simple steps echoes Bentham's explanation for how to determine the relative goodness or badness of action. Indeed, Dickens' description of how the Office even began its role echoes utilitarianism; he mentions that the Office was "early in the field, when the one sublime principle involving the difficult art of governing a country, was first distinctly revealed to statesmen" (119). This implies that the Office was learning how to resolve this issue of how to properly govern a country, especially since the narration says that the Office "had been foremost to study that bright revelation, and to carry its shining influence through the whole of its official proceedings." Based on this description, it would sound as if the Office was learning how to deal with the difficulty of governing.

Dickens then subverts this expectation when he ends the paragraph by stating that the Office learned "HOW NOT TO DO IT." The capitalization of every letter gives it an air of importance, which continues throughout the next few pages, as Dickens goes into more and more detail. Every time one would expect to see Dickens mention the government learning how to perform a function, he substitutes this with a mention that the government was learning how not to do it. This helps to contribute to the aforementioned sarcastic tone of the chapter. This sarcastic tone helps indicate to us, the readers, that we are not supposed to like the Office. Even without the events of the rest of the chapter, where Arthur, who is unambiguously the hero, runs into trouble trying to acquire information from the Office, the tone shows us Dickens' opinion. Thus, if we are not meant to like the Office, and the Office represents how awful applied



utilitarianism is in practice, it would be logical to conclude that Dickens is, yet again, attacking utilitarianism.

As with Dickens' seeming attacks against the philosophy in *A Christmas Carol* and *Hard Times*, this reading is too simplistic. Again, Dickens may very well have disliked what the English government would have called "utilitarianism" in its justification of its actions. However, Bentham and Mill would both hate it and consider it a perversion of their ideology. In both cases, their likely dislike of the government's application of utilitarianism relates to its complete misunderstanding of the philosophy leading them to adopt policies that would, in fact, be antithetical to utilitarianism.

First, it fails in what would seem to be the main point of utilitarianism; it is not useful. Instead, the processes required are horribly inefficient. When Arthur asks Barnacle Junior if he can talk to Tite Barnacle, Junior first asks if Arthur has an appointment. When Arthur says no, Junior asks if the issue Arthur has come for is related to "public business" or "Tonnage" (123). Arthur again says no, leading Junior to ask if Arthur has "private business," which Arthur does not know (124). Because Arthur cannot really answer the question, Junior directs him to their house, leaving Arthur to wonder what Junior's response would have been if he had had a question about tonnage.

Several elements of this scene stand out. First, Junior is clearly uncomfortable the entire time; Dickens frequently interjects parentheticals showing his issues with using his eye-glass. This helps to cement the previous impression I mentioned, of Junior not being well-suited for the job he was placed into. More relevantly to my discussion, though, is Junior's conversation with Arthur. It is both logical and illogical. Junior applies a mechanical, almost legalistic process, asking Arthur if his issue relates to the issues he was presumably trained on, which is logical.

Once Arthur says no, Junior does not know what to do, which is illogical. It is not as if Arthur is asking Junior on a matter completely unrelated to Barnacle; it relates to Mr. Dorrit's loan. Yet, because Barnacle was not logical or practical enough to teach his son how to handle this kind of situation, he is left with little choice, other than to redirect Arthur elsewhere. In this sense, then, the Office is inherently un-utilitarian, since it fails in the very basic definition of the word; it is not practical or useful, just obsessed with following the rules.

Moreover, the Office's strategy of dealing with people does not treat each person as if they were an individual. In this chapter, the Office shunts him from one office to another; first, Arthur talks to Tite Barnacle, who proves unhelpful. Arthur's conversation with Barnacle is particularly interesting because Barnacle's view of people is not even the exaggerated form of utilitarianism we might expect; at the very least, we would expect him to justify his treatment for the public good. However, Barnacle finds the word "Public" distasteful; the narration describes his mentioning of that word as "with reluctance, as his natural enemy" (127). The narration then uses the word "impertinent" when describing his view of the Public, again indicating his dislike. Even from a utilitarian standpoint, Barnacle's behavior and actions do not make much sense, because they do not help anyone. He does not even like the idea of the Public Good.

This dislike of the public continues when Barnacle sends Arthur back to Junior. Arthur tells Junior that his business is, in fact, public business. Junior, more concerned with Arthur's lack of appointment than the actual issue at hand, sends him to the secretary, Mr. Wobbler, who is two people. Like the Barnacles, they have no interest in the Public Good, instead focusing on eating their lunch. Finally, they send Arthur to another Barnacle, who is more helpful, in that he informs Arthur of the process he must go through. The process is a bureaucratic nightmare; once Arthur determines which Department he should visit, he must "memorialize that Department,"

which “must be entered in that Department, sent to be registered in this Department, sent back to be signed by that Department, sent back to be countersigned by this Department, and then it will begin to be regularly before that Department” (131). Rather than actually accomplishing any of their tasks, the Office succeeds in sending papers around.

The uncaring nature of the Office towards the Public continues in this conversation. Arthur, fed up with the meandering nature of the Office, proclaims that “this is not the way to do business.” Unlike everyone else in the Office, this Barnacle is self-aware enough to know that Arthur is right, which the narration notes. However, this also makes him a much more despicable person than the others; they were at least thoughtless in their errors. Dickens describes this Barnacle as wanting to keep the process the same as always because he could receive “any little bit of fat,” meaning money, for doing so, especially since he has a chance of becoming a “statesman.” Furthermore, Barnacle knows that the Office is a “hocus pocus piece of machinery, for the assistance of the nobs in keeping off the snobs.” Barnacle knows, more than anyone else, that the Office functions as a way to keep English society stagnant, and to preserve the status quo; the people on top must stay on top.

While this sort of thinking is certainly selfish, it is in no way utilitarian. Again, even from an exaggerated interpretation of utilitarianism, it does not work. Utilitarianism, at its worst, would have the Office running English society smoothly, while not caring about individual people, since the public collective good matters more than the individual does. Yet, the Office does not even succeed in that endeavor. And, since I have already determined that this reading of Bentham is likely not terribly accurate anyways (remember: “it is in vain to talk of the interest of the community, without understanding what is the interest of the individual”), the Office fails on pretty much every level as being utilitarian.

In my previous paragraph, I noted that the Office kept English society stagnant, and preserved the status quo. Nowhere is this idea reflected better, than with the character of Daniel Doyce, introduced in this chapter. Mr. Meagles refers to Doyce as a “public offender” (134). At first, the narration leads us to believe this because he is supposedly guilty of “murder, manslaughter, arson, forgery, swindling, housebreaking, highway robbery, conspiracy, fraud.” In actuality, his only crime is “trying to turn his ingenuity to his country’s service,” concluding that this is what makes him a public offender. Meagles continues, noting that Doyce became a public offender when he tried to sell an invention to the government; their response was to treat him “as a man who has done some infernal action...shirked, put off, brow-beaten, sneered at, handed over by this highly-connected young or old gentleman to that highly-connected young or old gentleman, and dodged back again.” Meagles then describes the arduous process in detail, until they eventually leave the Office.

The Office’s treatment of Doyce again reflects the impractical nature of “utilitarianism.” Again, if the Office had actually practiced utilitarianism, they would have embraced Doyce’s invention, or, at the very least, worked with him to resolve any of the problems it could have had. Instead, they treat him badly, all to keep English society stagnant. Furthermore, by not embracing his invention, they keep the traditionally wealthy in power, by discouraging entrepreneurs like Doyce to market their ideas and inventions to make money.

Ultimately, Doyce leaves England entirely, to market his invention elsewhere. The narration does not say where, but it refers to the country he goes to as “a certain Barbaric power” (702). The general consensus is that he goes to Russia, but, it almost does not matter. The fact that Doyce cannot market his product in England, and must go abroad to a barbarous nation suggests a strong criticism of the very forces that drove Doyce out (i.e.: The Office).

Furthermore, despite being barbarous, they actually focus on “how to do it,” rather than “how not to do it.” Dickens suggests that the Office’s control of the country pushes away perfectly good talent to other countries, even barbaric ones, and that even a relatively undeveloped country better understands how to run itself than England does.

All of this reflects Dickens’ disgust with England very well. However, it could also reflect Bentham’s. In her article, “Dickens, Bentham, and the Fictions of the Law: A Victorian Controversy and Its Consequences,” Marjorie Stone argues that Dickens was “an enthusiastic and consistent supporter of Benthamism in...the field of law” (126). Furthermore, she discusses *The Art of Packing Special Juries*, another one of Bentham’s writings published in 1821. In that book, he claims, in his own words, that the “the groundwork” of English law is from “lying and nonsense” (127). Does this not accurately reflect Dickens’ attitude towards government? Certainly, this description would fit the description of the Office that Dickens provides; they force people like Arthur to run from one place to another for mostly nonsensical reasons, lying that they will address the issue, without actually doing so. Furthermore, Stone summarizes Bentham’s beliefs that certain aspects of the laws were “fictions,” which existed solely to “serve the sinister interests of lawyers, judges, and all those who profit from legal procedures, rather than the happiness of the ‘greatest number’” (130). He outright states that this legalistic fiction is used “for the accumulation of undue profit and illegal power.” Again, this idea sounds quite similar to Dickens, especially in regards to Dickens’ dislike of the Office for working to keep English society stagnant in favor of keeping themselves at the top.

To me, this provides one of the strongest pieces of evidence showing that Dickens had a sympathy for utilitarianism. Up to this point, one could make the argument that, at most, Dickens’ beliefs did not conflict with utilitarian ones. However, with Dickens’ depictions of the

Office lining up almost exactly with Bentham's dislike of law and government, this shows that, even if Dickens was unaware of it, he actually did support utilitarianism. Certainly, he supported its legal aspects.

This is also apparent in the prison system. *A Christmas Carol* dealt primarily with issues of human charity, while *Hard Times* dealt with the importance of labor unions. At the center of *Little Dorrit* is the Marshalsea prison. Alexander Welsh, in his book, *The City of Dickens*, notes that Dickens had "a sense of outrage that criminals have a better time of it than honest men" (48). Welsh cites *David Copperfield* as his example. Initially, his issue seemed to be that people who had done wrong (criminals) were treated better than the poor, who had not necessarily done wrong.

Regardless of Dickens' feelings, Bentham would not have agreed with the prison system in place. Crimmins notes that Bentham had unique ideas about prison reform. Bentham called for "panopticons," where, "in contrast with the cesspits of the existing gaols and hulks...Bentham's prisoners were to be kept clean and their labor was to be productive, profitable, and serve to develop skills that might be useful to them upon release" (761). Thus, while Bentham still believed prisons were necessary, he certainly felt that the prisoners could be treated better. Ultimately, though, the point of the panopticon was not to punish, but to rehabilitate. He wanted it to be an "educational" place, "designed not merely to restrain but to transform the inmates" (762). Furthermore, he wanted to eliminate the "criminal urges," making it so that punishment would no longer even be necessary. To this end, he favored indirect over direct legislation; the latter had "penalties for actions deemed unacceptable," while the former was "designed not only to tell individuals what they should not do, but also to provide them with motives (pleasures and pains in prospect) sufficient to divert their desires into channels deemed appropriate by the

utilitarian legislator” (763). In other words, Bentham wanted English society to reach a point where laws could be passed that would incentivize good behavior, rather than simply punishing the bad.

Robert Alan Cooper, in his article, “Jeremy Bentham, Elizabeth Fry, and English Prison Reform” addresses Bentham’s ideas of prison reform more. His argument supports my theory of Bentham’s ideas being used in ways that Bentham, himself, would not agree with. Cooper notes that Bentham supported “classification of prisoners and productive labor in the prisons,” in addition to “the maintenance of healthful prison conditions” (675). By contrast, his followers advocated “solitary confinement and hard labor.” Cooper explains this divide by arguing that Bentham “belonged to a generation of reformers concerned with the salvation...of the prisoner” while the middle-class who used his ideas during the Victorian Era, were “primarily concerned with deterring crime.”

Furthermore, Bentham’s ideas for the panopticon are actually utilitarian, since they reduce cost and make holding prisoners easier. Essentially, for the panopticon, Bentham wanted the prison cells to be arranged in a circle, with the jailor’s room in the center (676). In doing this, “the prisoners would always be under the eye” of the jailor, “or at least they would think that they were.” While this helps improve behavior, as Cooper notes, it also has the utilitarian benefit of reducing the number of inspectors needed, and, thus, saving money.

Furthermore, solitary confinement would also be mostly unnecessary, since thorough inspections would prevent one prisoner from “corrupting” another. While it could be helpful for particularly “intractable” prisoners, it is mostly unhelpful, since it only produces “gloomy despondency” and “sullen insensibility” (677). Based on this wording, his logic would again

appear classically utilitarian, since he is essentially arguing that solitary confinement is not even an effective method.

Bentham's views on labor and education also blended morality with utilitarian thought. He believed that "productive labor" would be more productive than "hard labor" for two reasons. His moral reason was that "less irksome" labor would help teach "the idle to love work rather than avoid it." Even this moral idea is utilitarian, though, since he considered idleness "the root of criminal behavior." Thus, even his moralistic standpoint had a rational reason behind it. His utilitarian reason for productive labor was that, as one would expect of such labor, it made money. That money, Bentham argued, could be used both "to compensate the injured party" and "to relieve the financial burden involved in operating the prison."

Additionally, he justifies education with a combination of moral and utilitarian principles. He preferred religious instruction, because he believed it necessary for "the worst and generally most ignorant of sinners." However, he also emphasized that it would reduce illiteracy, which, as a reformer, he believed to be an unqualified good.

This idea of prison serving as an educational place continues with discipline. Bentham, correctly, noticed rampant prison abuse, which, to his mind, did not really do much to prevent future crimes. Instead, Bentham believed it would be far more logical to have the punishment "directly relate to the offense." To this end, he said that "outrageous clamor may be subdued and punished by gagging: manual violence, by the straight waistcoat: refusal to work, by a denial of food till the task is done." Now, while this sounds harsh in application, the principle of it did make sense. Essentially, Bentham appeared to be fighting punishments that did not do much to teach *why* a criminal should not perform certain actions. With this punishments, extreme though they certainly are, they at least relate to the crime, and directly counteract it. While Cooper (and



myself, for that matter) did believe that Bentham's ideas were a bit too naïve, since he believed that these punishments would not be subject to corruption, the basic concept of them does make sense.

Bentham also wanted the panopticon to serve as a laboratory of sorts for his previously-stated ideas of incentivizing good behavior. Cooper notes that Bentham wanted an “artificial environment...where, by a series of positive rewards, the prisoner would be induced to adopt a pattern of socially acceptable behavior,” adding that “if such behavior were continually reinforced, the prisoner would become habituated to it, and thus reformed” (680). This elaborates on Crimmins' article; not only did Bentham want laws incentivizing good behavior for the free people in society (that is, those not in prison), but also for those in prison. Again, Bentham embraces the power of education.

As a way to help make the prisoners more willing, Bentham called for their health to be given priority. He wanted “regular bathing,” with “simple but adequate clothing,” and “food...of the simplest kind, of which the prisoner could eat as much as he wished” (677). Based on his previous sentiments, these ideas make sense. Bentham saw no reason to treat prisoners badly, since that would not be conducive in rehabilitating them. As such, he wanted them treated reasonably well. However, they were still prisoners, so he would still want an incentive for people to stay out of prison, and, additionally, he would want a way to keep costs down, explaining the desire for simplicity.

Bentham having these ideas makes a good amount of sense after again looking at *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. His first mention of the criminal justice system is in Chapter Two, when discussing the principles of sympathy and antipathy. He considers these principles to go against the principle of utility, similar to asceticism. The

principles of sympathy and antipathy essentially mean that, rather than judging the goodness of an action based on how much happiness it increases or decreases, society should judge the goodness of an action based on whether an individual approves of it (II.11). Bentham takes issue with this for not considering others, and logically speaking, it makes little sense, since it is essentially a circular argument. He takes most issue with these principles when it applies to penal justice, though; he states that these principles are “most apt to err on the side of severity,” causing there to be “punishment in many cases which deserve none...any difference in taste: any difference in opinion...each becomes in the other’s eyes an enemy, and, if laws permit, a criminal” (II.16). It sounds as if Bentham’s issue with sympathy and antipathy is that it is too easy for people in power to abuse it to put people not necessarily deserving of punishment into prison. Considering part of his desire for a change in punishments related to the corruption and abuses present in practicing them, this would seem to be an accurate reading.

To me, this idea sounds quite similar to a Dickensian one. The idea that the people in power abuse it for their own ends, and to silence criticism does appear in his novels, albeit in a less dictatorial fashion. The Office’s actions of diversion and deflection, in particular, remind me of this idea; they only want to keep themselves on top, which, though it involves plenty of deflection, also involves invalidation of legitimate criticisms. Dickens’ description of the Office, and its seeming indifference to the concerns of the average citizen, all for the purpose of keeping themselves at the top of English society reflects Bentham’s main issue with sympathy and antipathy.

Bentham, as Cooper notes, elaborates on what punishments befit which crimes, though he waits until Chapter 13 to do so. In that chapter, he has four different cases when punishment should not be used. The first is when the punishment would be “groundless,” meaning “the act”

in question is not “mischievous upon the whole” (XIII.3). Within this category, Bentham outlines three different examples of this: when the act in question is “disagreeable, but the person whose interest it concerns gave his consent to the performance of it,” when the act produces mischief that is “outweighed” by a “benefit” of the action, and when there is good reason to believe that just compensation will follow the act (XIII.4-6). Based on this paragraph, Bentham appears to want to reduce punishments based on actions that are not actually crimes, which reflects his sentiments in Chapter 2.

The second category of when punishments should not be used is when the punishment would be “inefficacious,” meaning the punishment “cannot act so as to prevent the mischief” (XIII.3). Bentham provides six examples of this, including when the “penal provision” is not created until “after the act is done,” when the provision “is not conveyed to...the person on whom it seems intended that it should operate (that is, the person does not know what their punishment would be, should they choose to disobey the law), when the provision would not be able to effectively change the person’s behavior, either because they are a child, insane, or intoxicated, when the provision applies to a person unaware that their act would “produce that mischief,” when the provision acts in a situation when “the evil which he sets himself about to undergo...is so great, that the evil denounced by the penal clause... cannot appear greater,” and when the provisions are applied in a situation where the person’s “physical faculties...are not in a condition to follow the determination of the will,” which he describes as “involuntary” (XIII.7-12). If, in the previous paragraph, Bentham wanted to reduce the number of situations requiring punishment at all, here, he seems to be basing his decision on whether the punishment would even achieve what it wants to achieve.

The third category of when punishments should not be used is when the punishment is “unprofitable,” meaning that the “mischief” created from it “would be greater than what it prevented” (XIII.3). Bentham describes several examples of this: during “coercion” against a law-abiding citizen, when the citizen who broke the law feels pain, when the law-breaker feels pain from the punishment, and when others connected to the law-breaker feel pain (XIII.14). He also considers situations when the “evil” of the punishment would normally be less than the benefit, but because of “occasional circumstances,” the punishment’s evil is actually greater than its benefits (XIII.16). Thus, Bentham appears to believe that a punishment should only be used when it would put less harm in society than the mischievous act, itself.

The fourth and final category of when punishments should not be used is when the punishment is “needless,” meaning the “mischief may be prevented, or cease of itself, without it: that is, at a cheaper rate” (XIII.3). For this category, Bentham notes that “instruction” would be more helpful in many situations, “than terror,” elaborating that “informing the understanding as well as by exercising an immediate influence on the will” would work better. The main example he gives for these situations is when the person committing the crime is doing so because they consider it a matter of “duty,” which can include “political, or moral, or religious” duty. Thus, Bentham also allows latitude for a person’s morals or jobs.

All of this echoes Bentham’s earlier statement in Chapter 2, about his dislike for society wanting to create crimes when there are none. In this case, he does not address whether a certain act is a “crime” or not; instead, he simply addresses whether a punishment would even make sense in a specific case. Regardless, he definitely seems to want to reduce punishments, rather than increase them. By creating four different scenarios where a punishment should not be used,

Bentham seems to imply that they should only be used in truly worthy cases. Even then, education appears to do a better job of preventing future crimes than simple punishment does.

Unfortunately for Bentham, his ideas became wildly misappropriated. The Prison Act, as mentioned in the introduction, worked to make life harder for those in poverty, about to be sent to prison. Cooper argues that the very reforms Bentham called for actually spurred the Prison Act on, due to the widespread perception that the prisons, as a result of the reforms, “were no longer terrifying enough to deter crime” (686). This can also be seen by a popular story told at the time involving “a poor ragged sweep, about sixteen years of age, without shoes or stockings, and his red legs cracked with cold” who was imprisoned for some trifling offence only to discover paradise.” The “paradise” in question turns out to be all of the reforms Bentham called for: the boy receives a “warm bath,” actual clothes, and an actual bed. To me, this story better expresses what exactly English society took issue with, in the forms of the prisons; they were “too soft,” so to speak, on the prisoners. “Look at how nicely these prisoners are treated,” this story seems to be saying. “Why should they deserve it?”

Additionally, there was a widespread belief that the law went unenforced. The problem was that, while “prison legislation was on the books, the law was sometimes ignored” (687). Cooper comments that “there was no way of forcing a magistrate to obey the law, and, while country magistrates were generally conscientious in carrying out their duty, urban jurisdictions, especially London, were notably lax.” With these two factors, then, this helps to explain how Bentham’s ideas became misappropriated; even people calling themselves Benthamites did not actually follow Bentham’s real philosophy.

Let us think back to Dickens. While Dickens did dislike debtor’s prison, as I noted before, he did, at least initially, support the Prison Act of 1835. I find this extremely interesting,

because it shows that, in at least one way, Bentham had more progressive ideas than Dickens did. The idea that Dickens was a strict humanitarian, while Bentham helped to promote utilitarianism that cared little for people is, thus, quite incorrect. In reality, both cared about the plight of the poor; because they were from slightly different time periods, though, Bentham could see the issues with the prison system in English society that Dickens could not. Furthermore, because Dickens perhaps focused more on the poor than Bentham, his feelings on prisons were different. Though Bentham did care about the poor, he did not care about them as a distinct group; he just felt that lifting up the poor would make English society stronger. Dickens, however, actually focused on the poor. As a result, the two split on prisons, at least initially. As I stated before, Dickens' main issue with prisons, and thus, why he supported the Prison Act of 1835, was because he felt that the prisoners were being treated better than the poor were. Certainly, the above story about the sixteen year-old boy speaks to this idea, though Dickens perhaps read the story differently. Whereas English society would have seen the story as telling them how nice the prisons were, to Dickens, it would be telling him how awful life was for the poor; so awful, that prison life would be preferable. That said, *Little Dorrit's* emphasis on prisons does tell us his opinion on prisons.

Lionel Trilling's article, "Little Dorrit" argues that the prison, as a dominant part of the novel, serves as an "informing symbol" (578). He elaborates: "The story opens in a prison in Marseilles. It goes on to the Marshalsea, which in effect it never leaves." Even after the Dorrits leave prison, Trilling argues, the prison imagery continues, with the "monastery of the Great St. Bernard" the Dorrits visit at the beginning of the second part, and is even broader, with the Office, which "is the prison of the creative mind of England," and concludes by noting that "persons and classes" are "imprisoned by their notions of predestined faith, or of religious duty,

or by their occupations, their life-schemes, their ideas of themselves, their very habits of language” (579). Essentially, Trilling argues that everyone in the novel is imprisoned in a sense, either literally or figuratively.

In a sense, this very idea accurately reflects and summarizes all of Dickens’ novels and helps explain why the prison dominates *Little Dorrit* so thoroughly. In *A Christmas Carol* and *Hard Times*, Dickens calls for reforms in charity and labor unions, but those reforms do not happen, at least during his lifetime. As a result, Dickens became angrier and angrier, resulting in a novel where he attacked England by angrily decrying its prison-based system. Not only are far more people in prison than necessary, but new ideas are kept stagnant and imprisoned by society and the Office. In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens provides his explanation for why England would not change; society keeps new ideas locked up. In this sense, then, the Marshalsea serves as a microcosm of sorts for England.

Alexander Welsh confirms this argument in his article, “A King Lear of the Debtors’ Prison: Dickens and Shakespeare on Mortal Shame.” He notes a passage in Chapter Seven, of the second part of the book, when the Dorrits are traveling throughout Italy. Amy believes that, “this same society in which they lived [that is, outside the prison], greatly resembled a superior sort of Marshalsea” (536). She views English society as mainly a prison because of the movement of people, which reminds her of debtors in prison, and “prowled about in the churches and picture-galleries, much in the old, dreary, prison-yard manner.” All of this also reflects Dickens’ supreme dissatisfaction with English society, since he describes it as prison-like. Most damningly of all, though, Amy notes that people “paid high for poor accommodation, and disparaged a place while they pretended to like it; which was exactly the Marshalsea custom.” In Dickens’ view, English society is so terrible, it is little better than a prison. This idea even relates

to *Hard Times*, since it seems to echo the idea that people were overworked (since he compares them to prisoners). Welsh summarizes this point by pointing out that “the prison has become something like a metaphor for life itself” (1239). Furthermore, he notes that, after William’s stroke, his mind returns to the prison (1240). Subconsciously, even William knows that all of society is a prison.

Trilling helps explain this idea of the prison as a symbol. He states that “the prison is an actuality before it is ever a symbol; its connection with the will is real, it is the practical instrument for the negation of man’s will which the will of society has contrived.” Essentially, he argues that the very concept of prisons so thoroughly dominated English society that they worked to prevent progress. Furthermore, his words relating to “man’s will,” and the “will of society” indicate that this stagnation is unnatural; it only developed because people artificially forced it to develop. From this interpretation, Dickens’ feelings about prisons would seem to be obvious.

However, as I have noted before, Dickens’ issues with prisons seemed to stem more from the idea that certain people did not belong in them, not the idea that prisons themselves were inherently bad. Trilling makes this same argument by bringing up Blandois as a complicating force. Blandois, as Trilling notes, “is wholly wicked, the embodiment of evil; he is indeed, a devil” (582). As a result, he prevents us from believing in “the comfortable, philanthropic thought that prisons are nothing but instruments of injustice,” since, as long as “Blandois exists, prisons are necessary” (583). If Dickens really believed prisons were inherently bad, why would he create a character like this? It is not as if Blandois can be educated into goodness; personality-wise, he is little more than a one-dimensional villain. While certainly entertaining, educating him to make him a better person does not seem possible.



However, one could make the argument that he is not meant to be. Remember, Bentham did allow for solitary confinement in certain situations. Based on the text, we could certainly make an argument for Blandois belonging in prison. First, Dickens describes the Marseilles prison as “villainous” (16). While this could be an indication of Dickens’ dislike of prisons, it could also be a commentary on Blandois as a person; he frequently strikes fear and discomfort into other people, so, Dickens could be implying that he his villainy is almost tangible. Or, based on Bentham’s idea, the Marseilles could actually be a “villainous” prison, which Blandois is in because he is a villainous person.

Dickens’ further description of the cell Blandois resides in sounds reminiscent of solitary confinement (notwithstanding Cavalletto’s company); the chamber is a “repulsive” place, where light only comes in “through a grating of iron bars.” The idea that Blandois makes sense in the prison is confirmed when Dickens says that a “prison taint was on everything there.” This includes the air, the light, the “damps” and the people, all of which were “deteriorated by confinement.” This seems to imply that Dickens will argue that Blandois became a worse person because of prison.

He does not. Blandois’ first words in the novel are addressed to Cavalletto, and they are entirely insulting on Cavalletto’s part; he calls him a “pig,” telling him to wake up, because he does not believe it fair for Cavalletto to sleep when Blandois is hungry. Furthermore, when Blandois laughs, Dickens describes his mustache’s movement on his face as “cruel and sinister” (20). This seems to imply that Blandois is simply naturally evil, regardless of where he is; though the prison may throw is villainy into sharper relief, it does not change him.

The most obvious sign that Blandois is naturally bad is his insistence of his status as a member of the gentility. As he insists that he is a gentleman, he asks Cavalletto if he had “done

anything” while in jail, such as touching “the broom, or spread the mats, or rolled them up, or found the draughts, or collected the dominoes” or done “any kind of work” (23). Considering that Dickens hated the idea of the idle gentlemen who did little (remember, the Barnacles in the Office do little), this would seem to indicate that Blandois is simply a bad person. Indeed, as he goes on about his family and history, Dickens clearly has little sympathy for him, since the narration heavily implies pretention on his part; he tells his story as if he were “rehearsing for the President” (of the prison), rather than to “so small a person as John Baptist Cavalletto” (24).

However, Blandois’ desire to be a gentleman goes far beyond pretensions and rudeness and extends immediately into murder. He describes his marriage to a wealthy woman, which ends one night, when, as the two of them walk on a cliff overlooking the sea, she plummets to her death. Blandois’ description of her death makes it look like an accident; she throws herself on Blandois “with screams of passion,” tearing his clothes and hair, and finally, “dashing herself to death upon the rocks below” (26-27). Blandois then notes that, because of this, society views him as a murderer, trying to acquire all of his rich wife’s money.

Even if we were to assume that this story is true (which it is not), Blandois is still complicit in her death, since he mentions that he “provoked her” (26). Therefore, even if her death really was a suicide, he would still be responsible, to an extent, since he helped push her to it. Of course, we know that he really killed his wife.

As Blandois reminds us, he engaged in these actions to be a gentleman, stating this is “his intent” (24). He also insists that, when he speaks to the President, “a gentleman” will be speaking with him. Blandois is very clearly a dangerous man, motivated by a dangerous desire to become a gentleman. Even in a novel so focused on prison reform, Dickens cannot resist the urge to attack societal conventions.

Moreover, this happens before he goes to prison. Even if Dickens certainly disliked prison, prison is not what made him bad; Blandois was already bad to begin with. Thus, he certainly belongs there. Just as Bentham believed that solitary confinement was appropriate for certain members of society, Dickens believed that prison was appropriate for certain members of society. It may be fairly said that Dickens disliked *debtor's* prison, because he did not believe that it was fair or effective to imprison debtor's, but that does not mean that he disliked conventional prison. As the novel's most one-dimensional, evil character, he belongs in prison.

This would not conflict with Bentham. First, remember that his vision of the "panopticon" were still very much prisons. He did want society to reach a point where good behavior would be incentivized, rather than bad behavior punished, but he also recognized that society had not yet reached that point. While Bentham certainly did want to reduce the number of people in prisons, considering how many scenarios he describes where punishment would be ineffective, he still believed prison to be an effective method; he just wanted the prisons to operate in a more humane and educational way.

Looking back to Bentham's four broad categories of when punishment should not be practiced, it is clear that Blandois does not fall into any of them. Murder is certainly not a "groundless" act, and imprisonment would not be "inefficacious," since Blandois knew full well that his action was illegal. Imprisoning a man who killed another person in cold blood would certainly not be "unprofitable;" if anything, it would be profitable, especially from a utilitarian perspective, since this would prevent other people from being killed. Finally, the punishment is not "needless," because, as I stated before, there is little reason to think that education would reform Blandois. Certainly, educating the younger members of society, and raising them not to

believe in the ideals of gentility would prevent further murders, but it would do nothing on Blandois.

Based on all this evidence, it would seem that, even if Dickens did not completely agree with everything Bentham said, he did mostly agree with him on prisons. Even if Dickens was, arguably, a bit harsher on prisoners than Bentham was, his harshness was nothing compared to the “Benthamites” who pushed the 1835 Prison Reform Act, in his name. Bentham, generally speaking, believed in treating prisoners more humanely, and reducing the crimes that would lead to imprisonment. In this regard, Dickens was no different; his attacks against debtor’s prisons indicates that, like Bentham, he wanted to eliminate at least one reason for imprisonment (debt), and, based on his description of English society, he considered prison mostly awful. Arguably, Dickens’ words have a broader implication, since, in comparing prisons to society, he implicitly argues that English society is a bad force. However, despite their differences, both Bentham and Dickens believed in the power of education, and the idea that while certain people may belong in prison, many of the current prisoners, did not.

## Conclusion

While Dickens was a liberal, his liberalism had limits. As George Orwell has noted, Dickens was not a socialist. He still believed in the capitalist system England had in place. He may have wanted changes to improve the lives of the poor, but he ultimately was still fine with having some of England's citizens below the others. *Little Dorrit's* ending makes this clear; while the novel ends happily for the sympathetic protagonists, they do not have the sort of idyllic ending that *David Copperfield* or *A Christmas Carol* have. Furthermore, Daniel Doyce's success reinforces Dickens' acceptance of the capitalist system and epitomizes the self-sufficient and creative nature that Dickens and Victorian society embraced. By showing that Dickens agreed with utilitarianism, we can see him in a more nuanced way.

Likewise, the connection between utilitarianism and Dickens sheds utilitarianism in a more nuanced light. As with any ideology, utilitarianism developed over a long period of time and came from many disparate sources. While it is understandable that history would simplify utilitarianism down to one, frequently misunderstood quote ("the greatest happiness" principle), it does a disservice to those who study history. Rather than viewing utilitarianism as an ambitious and, admittedly, naïve, ideology that became hijacked and appropriated by the members of English society in power, utilitarianism is routinely viewed as an ideology that justified keeping the lower classes in their place. Certainly, as the nineteenth century progressed, this was how it was used, but to argue that all utilitarianism resembled this is patently false. Though Dickens did not read Bentham, his defense of charity in *A Christmas Carol*, of labor unions in *Hard Times*, and of prison reform in *Little Dorrit* all have Benthamite elements to them. Jeremy Bentham, to summarize his views, believed that the best way to improve English society was to educate its citizenry on right and wrong, and make doing right beneficial to the

person. He believed in a less punitive system. While Dickens does not completely agree with these ideas, as I have noted, he certainly seems to agree with the spirit of them. In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge becomes more charitable both because it is morally right, and because it benefits his own life; he is no longer friendless. In *Hard Times*, the circus people, who value humans as actual humans and not as tools, a belief that labor unions would agree with, are the happiest, because they also understand that life needs entertainment and imagination. And, in *Little Dorrit*, Arthur and Amy benefit the world more out of jail than in it. All three stories reflect the basic utilitarian belief that doing good actions should actually feel good.

Ultimately, my examination of Dickens' writings through Bentham's ideology, reveals a continuance of reform. They simply approached the matter differently. Bentham, as a philosopher, logically explained his arguments. While he references people, he only does so insofar as to explain his ideas better; we are not meant to sympathize with the people. Dickens, as a novelist, took a different approach. Rather than explaining why English society should reform, he shows us. The people Dickens uses are far more important, then, because they serve as a sympathetic, anchoring force. If Bentham were to urge charity, he would argue that doing so will help England as a whole, since, helping one segment of society benefits everyone (again, "greatest happiness"). When Dickens urges charity, he asks the reader not to think of society as a whole, but to think of the Cratchits, of Tiny Tim, and of the children personifications of Ignorance and Want. While Bentham relies on logos to convey his points, Dickens relies on pathos. However, regardless of the different approaches they take, the result is the same; both make arguments for reform.

All of this discussion shows that the various social changes England underwent in the nineteenth century helped progress utilitarianism and liberalism. With the Industrial Revolution

came a growing concern that workers were exploited. Utilitarianism provided justifications both to prevent the exploitation and encourage it. All of this was at the backdrop as Dickens wrote. Just as the Industrial Revolution developed utilitarianism, it developed Dickens and influenced his views. Ultimately, we can see that Charles Dickens' liberalism and Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism could not only co-exist, but enhance the other. This goes to show that a Dickensian Utilitarianism existed, not just in theory, but in practice.

## Works Cited

- Bentham, Jeremy. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1789. *Library of Economics and Liberty*. Web. 04 Sept. 2015.
- Bloy, Marjie. "Changing Attitudes Towards Poverty After 1815." *The Victorian Web*. N.P., 12 November 2002. Web. 30 September 2015.
- "Conservative." *The Victorian Web*. N.P., 11 October 2002. Web. 30 September 2015.
  - "The Implementation of the Poor Law." *The Victorian Web*. N.P., 12 November 2002. Web. 30 September 2015.
  - "The Poor Law Amendment Act: 14 August 1834." *The Victorian Web*. N.P., 12 August 2002. Web. 30 September 2015.
  - "The Poor Law: Introduction." *The Victorian Web*. N.P., 8 November 2002. Web. 30 September 2015.
  - "The Separation of Families under the Poor Law Amendment Act." *The Victorian Web*. N.P., 16 November 2002. Web. 30 September 2015.
  - "Work in the Workhouse." *The Victorian Web*. N.P., 17 October 2002. Web. 30 September 2015.
- Brown, Ivor. *Dickens in His Time*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. *James Madison University Libraries*. Print. 15 Sept. 2015.
- Cody, David. "Dickens: A Brief Biography." *The Victorian Web*. N.P., March 2004. Web. 30 September 2015.
- "Tory." *The Victorian Web*. N.P., 14 August 2006. Web. 30 September 2015.
  - "Whig." *The Victorian Web*. N.P., 13 May 2006. Web. 30 September 2015.



- Clausson, Nils. "Dickens' *Genera Mixta*: What Kind of Novel is *Hard Times*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 52.2 (2010): 157-180. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 21 July 2015.
- Cooper, Robert Alan. "Jeremy Bentham, Elizabeth Fry, and English Prison Reform." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42.4 (1981): 675-690. *JSTOR*. Web. 04 December 2015.
- Crimmins, James E. "Contending Interpretations of Bentham's Utilitarianism." *Canadian Political Science Association* 29.4 (1996): 751-777. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 July 2015.
- Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1991. Print. 23 Mar. 2015.
- Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1854. Print.
- Dickens, Charles. *Little Dorrit*. London: Penguin Books, 1857. Print.
- Dixon, Thomas. "Educating the Emotions from Gradgrind to Goleman." *Research Papers in Education* 27.4 (2012): 481-495. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 20 July 2015.
- Hardy, Barbara. "The Change of Heart in Dickens' Novels". *Victorian Studies* 5.1 (1961): 49-67. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 Oct. 2015.
- Harrison, Mary-Catherine. "The Paradox of Fiction and the Ethics of Empathy: Reconceiving Dickens's Realism." *Ohio State University Press* 16.3 (2008): 256-278. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 July 2015.
- Hicks, Granville. "The Literary Opposition to Utilitarianism." *Science and Society* 1.4 (1937): 454-472. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 Mar. 2015.
- Johnson, Edgar. *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*. New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1952. Print. 15 Oct. 2015.

- Johnson, Edgar. "The Christmas Carol and the Economic Man". *The American Scholar* 21.1 (1951): 91–98. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.
- Mill, John Stuart. *Considerations on Representative Government*. Cambridge: Parker, son and Bourn, 1861. *Archive.org*. Web. 14 Oct. 2015.
- Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. Kitchener: Batoche Books Limited, 1861.  
<http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/mill/utilitarianism.pdf>. Web. 10 Nov. 2015.
- Schupf, H.W. "Education for the Neglected: Ragged Schools in Nineteenth-Century England." *History of Education Quarterly* 12.2 (1972): 162-183. *JSTOR*. Web. 27 March 2016.
- Stone, Marjorie. "Dickens, Bentham, and the Fictions of the Law: A Victorian Controversy and Its Consequences." *Victorian Studies* 29.1 (1985): 125-154. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 15 November 2015.
- Trilling, Lionel. "Little Dorrit." *The Kenyon Review* 15.4 (1953): 577-590. *JSTOR*. Web. 06 December 2015.
- Welsh, Alexander. "A King Lear of the Debtors' Prison: Dickens and Shakespeare on Mortal Shame." *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 70.4 (2003): 1231-1258. *JSTOR*. Web. 05 December 2015.
- . *The City of Dickens*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. *James Madison University Libraries*. Print. 15 Sept. 2015.