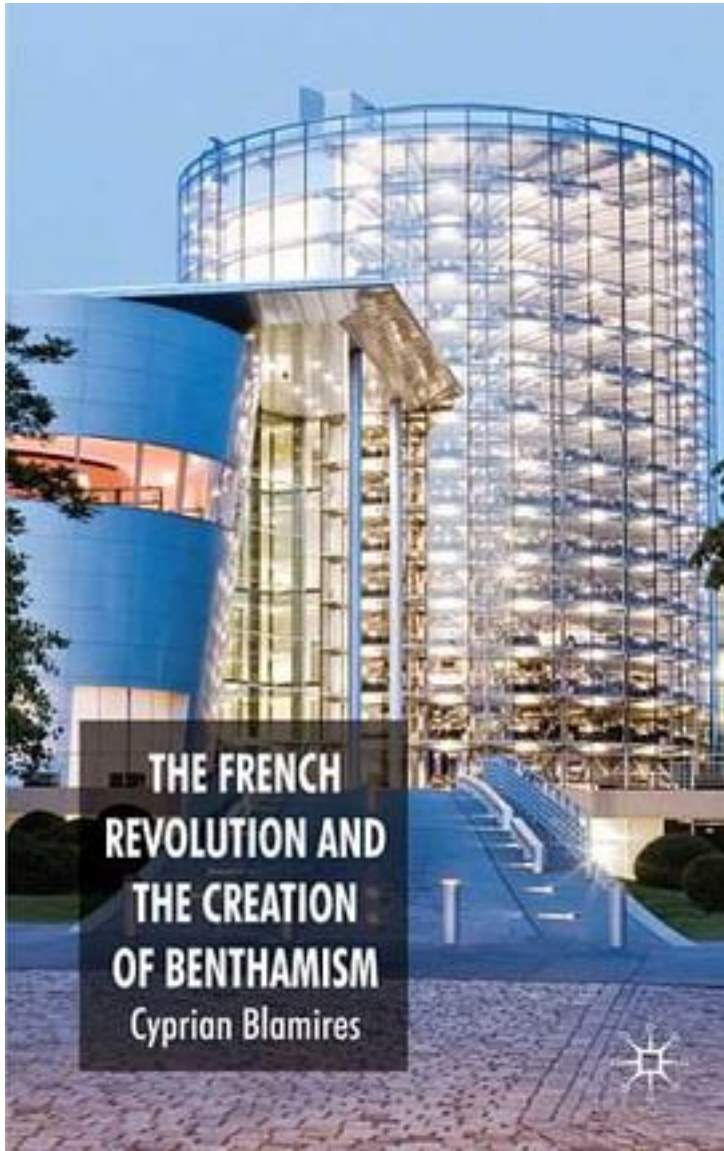


The French Revolution and the Creation of Benthamism



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The prevailing view of the English reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) is that he was essentially a moral philosopher and jurist with a penchant for indulging in occasional extravagant and rather mysterious practical projects such as the Panopticon. This book argues that such a view represents a misunderstanding based to a considerable extent on the one-sided view of Bentham presented by his greatest promoter, Etienne Dumont (1759-1829). Dumont's abstracts of Bentham manuscripts published in French in 1802 had a huge influence in the English-speaking world through the translation of part of them under the title Theory of Legislation -- the classic presentation of Benthamism. Dumont's own particular agenda, forged in his traumatic experience of the French Revolution, prevented him however from taking an interest in the 'other' Bentham presented here for the first time: the entrepreneurial figure who sought in Panopticon to embody, not the Orwellian nightmare of state intrusiveness so often assumed, but the cherished modern values of transparency, accountability and economy in public institutions.

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