

# SINGAPORE SYMPOSIUM IN LEGAL THEORY

## “The Epicurean Universe of Jeremy Bentham”

BY **Prof. Philip Schofield**  
*University College London*

11 FEBRUARY 2019, MONDAY

5.00PM – 7.00PM (TEA RECEPTION STARTS AT 4.45PM)

NUS LAW (BUKIT TIMAH CAMPUS)

EU TONG SEN BUILDING, LEVEL 1, LEE SHERIDAN CONFERENCE ROOM

### ABSTRACT

Bentham appears to have adopted a materialist ontology and a sceptical attitude towards religion by the time when, aged 16, he was required to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England in order to take his degree at the University of Oxford. He later confessed himself to be ‘an Epicurean’. As Michel Onfray (*A Hedonist Manifesto*) has pointed out, Bentham thereby positioned himself in opposition to the dominant intellectual tradition represented by Plato, Christianity, and Kant, which posited a dualism, whether of the material and the ideal, the body and the spirit, phenomena and noumena, or the descriptive and prescriptive. For Bentham there was the physical world and nothing more, at least nothing more that could be known, and all notions (ideals, concepts, angels, gods) that purported to refer to the non-physical world were so much nonsense. The same was true for statements about beauty and taste, insofar as they were made with reference to some metaphysical standard, while those making these statements were claiming not only aesthetic but political superiority over the bulk of the population who failed to appreciate the (non-existent) standard. In his typology of ethical theories, Bentham had distinguished adherents of the principle of utility from adherents of the principle of sympathy and antipathy. The latter attempted to exercise power and influence by elevating their own opinions into standards that were binding on others. Bentham’s Epicurean materialism was the basis for his radically reformist approach to legal theory and law.

### ABOUT THE SPEAKER



Philip Schofield is Professor of the History of Legal and Political Thought in the Faculty of Laws and Director of the Bentham Project, University College London. He is General Editor of the new authoritative edition of *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham*, for which he has edited or co-edited a dozen volumes. His study *Utility and Democracy: the political thought of Jeremy Bentham*, was published in 2006 by Oxford University Press and was awarded the WJM Mackenzie Book Prize by the UK’s Political Studies Association. He has published extensively on Bentham and has received major research grants from the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council and Economic and Social Research Council, as well as the Leverhulme Trust, Wellcome Trust, and the European Union.

### Participation is by Invitation Only

Registration commences at 4.45pm and light refreshments will be served.

For more information, please contact Ms Atikah Shaftee at [atikah.shaftee@nus.edu.sg](mailto:atikah.shaftee@nus.edu.sg)