

A problematization of the concept of utility: Bentham's chrestomathic project.

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Bentham's work related to education and schooling catches our attention, particularly his *Chrestomathia* or project of *chrestomathic education*, for it comprises the opportunity to question the notion of utility. We consider Bentham's reflection on education as an initiative to evaluate individual judgment and behavior regarding utility, this notion being constantly discussed and criticized. Three dimensions of the problem will be developed in the presentation.

Firstly, we'll present Bentham's chrestomathic project. Bentham aims at proposing a *tree of knowledge* covering all the branches of art and science from the most general to the most precise, following a logical order. This implies an articulation of sciences and arts, which are considered to be tightly intermingled and non-separable, and a construction of an exhaustive nomenclature of ever finer branches. For educational purposes, *Chrestomathia* is about what should be taught and learned, and Bentham's work then involves a classification of these arts and sciences by stages of instruction.

Secondly, from this, we discuss the very principle governing the nomenclature of art and science. Reason is most evidently called upon, but it is neither unique nor prime. According to Bentham, it is happiness that ought to guide all thought and human action. Thus, *eudaimonia* becomes the *object* of all arts and the *subject* of all sciences; arts aim at happiness and sciences provide the required knowledge. Knowledge only is, in the end, the necessary means for reaching happiness. In applying utilitarian theory, Bentham points out that the arts should be put first, for in dignity as in worth, they directly aim at utility (the pursuit of happiness). They are a finality in human action, whereas the sciences, even though unavoidable and indivisible, only are a means.

Thirdly, Bentham conceives of education as an essential way for people to gain respect, develop their judgmental skills, and above all, better deal with the trade-off between immediate satisfaction and higher pleasures. In this light, we should reconsider critics against Bentham, firstly by John Stuart Mill, who blamed him for not conceiving of qualitative differences between pleasures i.e. a hierarchy of pleasures. In fact, Bentham's educational perspective leads us to consider an individual to be driven not only by selfish interest or passions, but able of moral and esthetical consideration and of will for perfection.

All in all, with these three developments, we intend to present how the notion of utility is problematized and seen in a new light in Bentham's work on education.

Technology request : video projector