“DAVID HUME AND JEREMY BENTHAM ON VIRTUES AND UTILITY.”

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ABSTRACT:

It is a commonplace to speak of the influence of Hume on Bentham, under which is often further argued that the admiration of the founder of classical utilitarianism by the Scottish philosopher faded out over time primarily because Bentham tended to believe that Hume was not clear or totally utilitarian.

A detailed and comprehensive study of the relations between the two thinkers is still to be done, and also a minute analysis of the possible role occupied by David Hume in what has been called "The Invention of Utilitarianism."

Most, if not all, work that addresses these two issues, with too many different degrees of depth and penetration, do so from very inclusive views and reach on to highly general conclusions, but they lack in a certain sense of solid fundamentals. It is necessary to address both the relationship between Hume and Bentham, and between the Scottish thinker and utilitarianism, in a much more accurate and detailed form, proceeding issue by issue, problem by problem. This will make the job much more complicated and time-consuming, but the results will be much firmer.

In response to this consideration, in this paper we focus on a particular aspect of the relationship between Hume and Bentham.

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One of the arguments used by Bentham to admire first and then criticize Hume was that on his view, Hume supported an incorrect theory of virtues, since by defining them as qualities that demanded approval, such an approval not always was linked with utility (at least directly) of the qualities in question. This seemed to Bentham simply unacceptable and on his opinion detracted value to the otherwise a complex and very interesting theory of the virtues by Hume, in which utility occupied a prominent place.

In my opinion, Bentham did not receive properly in all its implications the importance of the central thesis of the theory of the virtues by Hume: there is a gradual building process of the virtues from a **natural area**, in which he would defend an act utilitarian justification, up to an **artificial dominion** in which the justification of virtue's utility would be indirect and results in a strong rule utilitarian position.

In support of this view, at first, we are going to account for briefly in this paper Hume's theory of the virtues. In a second step, we will expose Bentham's critique of this theory. In a third stage, we will evaluate the interpretation of Hume's theory in which Bentham's criticism is based. Finally, we will propose a re-understanding of Hume's theory of the virtues. This, on our view makes it compatible with some forms of utilitarianism, mainly with what might be called "evolutionary rule utilitarianism", though perhaps not with the more orthodox utilitarian benthamian variant.

Thus, we not only hope to contribute to clarify some of the problems of the relationship between Hume and Bentham, but also to provide more data to determine accurately the place of Hume in the history of utilitarianism, and his contributions to its development.

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