

MORAL REFORM Brought About by Social Reform

Bentham's
The greatest merit of Bentham was not to invent a "calculus of felicity" but to propose that moral reformation is not the result of moral sermons but of social reform: change the institutions and people will automatically adjust their behavior to the new society. Bentham's mistake was to believe that such changes could in turn be caused by fashioning the institutions in such a way that the pursuit of individual happiness would bring about social welfare. An egocentric morality is bound to clash with public interest. The solution lies not in subjecting public interest to individual interest (egocentrism) or conversely (sociocentrism) but in a mutual adaptation of the two--an adaptation that cannot be obtained overnight but can be attained gradually, by a process of social (economic, political and cultural) reforms. Among these changes school

reform, and particularly a reform in the education of moral feelings (e.g. empathy) and moral attitudes (e.g. towards mutual help), is central. Teach children to rely entirely on their moral intuition (or conscience), and you will help to fashion an irrational society; teach them to calculate exactly the consequences of every one of their acts, and you will contribute to ~~the~~ the status quo; tell them to seek to dominate all others, and you will push society towards fascism.