



Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists  
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## *Benevolent Utility (Duty of)* in Catharine Beecher (1800–1878)

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Benevolence is a cause for “awakening affection in the human mind,” Catharine Beecher claimed in *Elements of Mental and Moral Philosophy*. That mankind be engaged in good and useful occupation was mandated by the Creator. Woman, being female, was appointed to be engaged in education by which to build noble character and to form young minds. In her address, *To Benevolent Ladies in the United States*, Beecher argued that the mistake in the “economy of benevolence” has been to spend too much attention on “ignorance and sin” rather than on the “preventative method of education.” Since the “Creator designed that woman should have the leading position of educator of the mind,” a woman as a professional educator needs the utilitarian benevolence of men as well as women in securing funds, permanent institutions, and organizations to promote her “only” important and practical occupation. Although women are involved in many kinds of good works, and are engaged in industry with the “needle and manufacturing,” such good is not as high as is education. The vast practical benefits of woman’s benevolent teaching are two: saving the suffering children and saving the country by assuring an educated and moral citizenry. It is of greater utility to engage in such benevolent activities, first in one’s own family, and then in one’s own country (rather than as missionaries to another). In *Women’s Suffrage and Women’s Profession*, Beecher argued that women can change merciless and unjust laws not by entering the men’s public sphere but with “the gifts of justice and benevolence.” The Bible, as one of the fonts of knowledge, is a source for teaching benevolence as much as morals, refined taste, politeness, gratitude, love, sacred and profane history, and biography. In all, the perfect example of “self denying benevolence,” is Jesus Christ.

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