John Gay (1699-1745)

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throat of his position can be started without recourse to those underlying considerations. Gauthier's criticism of utilitarianism in Monthly Review is superficially similar to that stated by John Rawls in A Theory of Justice (1971). Gauthier writes: "For a choice is rational only to those able to identify with it, and impartial only if all are able to identify with it. But the choice required by average utilitarian affords no basis for this identification... Utilitarianism violates the integrity of the individual as a being with his own distinctive capacities and preferences, and so with a distinctive utility, not interchangeable with the utilities of others, that he seeks to maximize" (Gauthier, 1986, pp. 244-5). Utilitarianism treats the individual, with distinct preferences, as a mere input into the maximization of overall satisfaction; this Gauthier thinks "does not take seriously the individuality of persons." Gauthier notes that utilitarianism historically was the friend of liberal capitalism but that the two movements were not compatible. Expressing the theoretical tension in terms of the theory of perfect competition, Gauthier argues that utilitarians must "reject the outcome of perfect competition" and support "a redistribution of products from that realized in market equilibrium" (Gauthier, 1986, p. 250). His criticism here is related to that voiced above: "the utilitarian supposes that even a person's natural attributes, her physical and mental capacities, are vested in her only in so far as this proves socially convenient" (p. 109).

Gauthier thinks that the utilitarian perspective neglects the agency of cooperators. "The utilitarian proposal, applied to cooperation, treats the co-operators as passive recipients of goods, not as actively engaged in producing them and agreeing on their distribution" (Gauthier, 1986, p. 127). In his own words, rational agents agree not to maximize aggregate utility or well-being however it is distributed, but to mutually beneficial practices and principles. "An impartial choice," he says, speaking of Harsanyi's model of choice under uncertainty, "reflects no point of view; its outcome need be considered rational and fair by no chooser aware of his own identity." By contrast, Gauthier's own position, he thinks, may succeed where Harsanyi's fails. "An impartial bargain reflects every point of view; its outcome is rational and fair for each fully informed bargainer" (Gauthier, 1982, p. 146).

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Further Reading


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GAY, JOHN (1689-1745)

John Gay was born in Merth, Devon. His father, James, was rector of Upot Pyne, and among the Devonshire Gazette was his cousin of the same name, the poet John Gay. After grammar school in Devon, Gay entered Sid- 20 ney Sussex College, Cambridge, as Blundell scholar in 1718, taking his BA in 1721 (MA 1725). Ordained in 1723, he was elected a fellow of Sidney Sussex in 1724, becoming lecturer in Greek, Hebrew and ecclesiastical history. During his residence at Cambridge, a significant number of other notable and like-minded philosophical and theological figures were also present, among them Daniel Waterland, John Jortin, Edmund Law, John Taylor, Soame Jenyns, Francis Black- bourn, David Hartley, and John Brown. In 1732, Gay resigned his fellowship to become Vicar of Whickhamsted, Bedford- shire, and in 1739, Vicar of Hawes. He died on 18 July 1745 and was buried at Whickhamsted.

While at Cambridge, Gay composed his celebrated "Preliminary Dissertation. Concerning the Fundamental Virtues and Morality, which Edmund Law published anonymously in a preface to his 1731 translation of William King's seminal De origini et mali (1702), Essay on the Origin of Evil. Gay's dissertation appeared in all subsequent editions of King's work. Hartley, who knew Gay well, identified him as the author of the dissertation in the preface to his Observa- tions on Isaac (1749), and the attribution has remained unquestioned since.

The dissertation is the only generally accepted publication by Gay. Commentators have considered that he may have authored other works—namely "A Dissertation upon the Argument of Prior to Existence of a First Cause," appended Law's Inquiry into the Idea of Space, Immortality, and Eternity (1734); An Introduction Towards an Essay on the Ori gins of the Passions (1741); and An Essay into the Origin of the Human Appetites and Affections (1747)—but the evidence is not compelling (Selby-Bigge, vol. 2, pp. 388-9; Spalding, pp. 142-3; Passmore, pp. 376; McKeon, pp. 24-34). The impact of Gay's dissertation on the development of utilitarian theory has long been recognized. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Halévy described it as the "true founder of the new philosophy" (Halévy, p. 7), and Albee, with a degree of exaggeration, thought that "the whole outline of Utilitarianism in its first complete and unnumbered form is to be found in Gay's Preliminary Dissertation" (Albee, p. 83; see also Cragg, p. 279). Gay's essay was known to Brown, who borrowed from it in his more detailed statement of the religious or Christian form of utilitarian ethics in Essay on the Earl of Shaftesbury (1751). David Hume seems to have read Law's 1731 translation of King with Gay's dissertation, and his biography of Elrington (1754) believed this to be a telling fact, because "Gay's short dissertation is the earliest known record of utilitarian ethics with psychological association, two doctrines that were to be employed by Hume himself" (Moore, p. 80). William Paley, in his memoir of Law, also acknowledged Gay's importance (Meadley, p. 356). More particularly, Hartley owned that Gay provided the hint that led him to his own theory of association (Hartley, p. 111, see also Stephen, vol. 2, p. 43). In the dissertation, Gay set out to identify and discuss two issues: (1) the "Criterium of Virtue," viz. what is which determines any Action virtuous, and (2) the "Principle of Motive" by which Men are induced to pur- 22 sue Virtue (Gay, p. xii). He defined virtue as "the conformity to a Rule of Life, directing the actions of all rational Creatures with respect to each other's Happiness, to which conformity every one in all cases is obliged: and everyone that does so conform, is or ought to be approved of, esteemed and loved
for so doing" (p. 276). Further, the idea of virtue includes not only the idea of approbation "but also that it is to every one, and in all circumstances, an object of Choice" (p. 8). It is reason, to which approbation and all other affections are ultimately resolvable, that points out what will further our "private Happiness," and whenever this end is not perceived, the affections "are to be accounted for from the Association of Ideas, and may properly enough be called Habits" (p. 46).

The issue to be resolved by moral theory is the apparent tension between the self-interested motive—"the necessity of doing or omitting an Action in order to be happy" (Gay, p. 35)—and the benevolent objective of morality. An action is said to be right if it contributes to the happiness of its subject, while it is obligatory only if it contributes to the happiness of the agent. The right action and the action which is obligatory can be made to coincide through the religious sanction (hopes and fears related to the after-life). Gay's starting point, then, is the essential notion of God who, by his very nature, wills the happiness of his creatures. What men must do under such God's will in order to know which actions promote the happiness of mankind and thus what is that morality requires of them. Gay did not explain how we can truly know the will of God, settling for the apparent truth that God's benevolent will is manifest in his design for the general "good of mankind"—pursuing this end, therefore, is the will of God and it is in this that we find our own personal happiness fulfilled.

In the process of examining these questions, Gay made two important contributions to the development of utilitarian moral theory: (1) his statement of the four sanctions of morality—natural, virtuous, civil and religious—which is a refinement from Locke, and (2) the idea that happiness is constituted of the sum of pleasures, between which only quantitative distinctions can be made. Both views are found in Bentham's respective variant of the utilitarian doctrine, with the latter underpinning his explanation of the framework for calculating pleasures and pains stated in An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789).

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See also ASSOCIATIONISM; BENTHAM, JEREMY; HARTLEY, DAVID; RELIGIOUS UTILITARIANS.

GIBBORNE, THOMAS (1738-1846): See PALEY, WILLIAM.

GODWIN, WILLIAM (1756-1836)

Williams Godwin was born on 3 March 1756 in Wilsden, Cambridgeshire. He was educated at the renowned Hexton Academy for religious dissenters and was initially destined to follow the correct path of his father, a non-conformist minister. Despite his religious upbringing and tuition in the ideas of the ultra-Calvinist Andrew Sandeman, he had become an atheist by the time he came to write the works for which he is best known. A genuine polymath who composed plays, novels, histories, biographies as well as moral and political philosophy, Godwin was an extremely influential and controversial figure throughout the 1790s, when liberal politics was dominated by polarised reactions towards the French Revolution. Almost immediately after that decade ended, however, he found himself (often persecuted) obscurity. His chief legacy became his widely lampooned future predictions about an era in which humans will have overcome death, government, and war, and his trenchant rejection of conventional moral practices and institutions that obviately his incitements of marriage, vivisection and domestic affections, which were regretted by his peers as representative of the worst excesses of Enlightenment rationalism. Despite his frequent financial crises, often aided by his son-in-law, the poet Percy Shelley, Godwin continued to write prolifically for the rest of his life, albeit mostly histories and biographies with a somewhat nostalgic, conservative bent, prompting the view held by many that his philosophical radicalism receded with age. He married the early feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft, but her tragic death of puerperal fever immediately following the birth of their daughter caused him not only severe emotional anguish, but also—through his subsequent and brutally frank memoir of her life, loves, death and alleged religious apotheosis—further public opprobrium. He married a second time for a second time (to Mary Jane Clairmont) in 1801 and although this union lasted until his death, several biographers have suggested it was less than happy. Godwin died in 1836, 4 years after Jeremy Bentham, whom he finally met in 1833. Godwin's fame in the 19th century in part related to the social circles in which he moved. He enjoyed close friendships with the playwright Thomas Holcroft, the essayist Charles Lamb and the leading demic figure in the reformist London Corresponding Society, John Thelwall. After a short-lived stint as a journalist, over a period of 16 months in the aftermath of the French Revolution and at the height of the "Burke-Paine" (or loyalist-reformist) pamphlet war, Godwin composed his best-known work, the lengthy Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Modern Morals and Happiness, printed in 1793. It was subsequently republished in 1795 and 1798 with important revisions, especially of the sections concerning revolution and property ownership. In Political Justice, Godwin outlines and defends a utilitarianism in which "pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, constitute the whole subject of moral enquiry" (Godwin, p. 221). He traces the genesis of the theory, which departs from the thought of