Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713)

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perform it” (Nozick, p. 231). The deontologist denies this, since there can be duties that forbid bringing about the action that brings about more goodness. This way of distinguishing the positions relies on (plausibly) taking the deontologist’s talk of duty as equivalent to, or as justifying, talk about what one has most reason to do. This raises the worry that when the Scalar Utilitarian claims that there is the strongest moral reason to perform an action, this is no different than claiming that there is a duty to perform the action.

This conclusion can be reached by a different route. If I fail to do what I have most reason to do, Nozick says only that. The maximizing utilitarian adds that I have failed to do my duty. But it is not clear that this is an important difference. There are, for example, no consequent differences in blame or punishment. Whether either scalar or maximizing utilitarianism would blame or punish those who fail to do what they have most reason to do depends on whether blaming or punishing is what there is most reason to do.

Nozick's view that there is more moral reason to perform actions which produce more good also as a matter of charge that there is more maximizing as the rightness-point is arbitrary. A choice is nonarbitrary if there is more reason to make it than there is to make any alternative choice. For Nozick, and utilitarians generally, there is more reason to make the choice that maximizes goodness than there is to make any alternative choice. If so, making the maximizing choice is not arbitrary.

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See also CONSEQUENTIALISM; MAXIMIZATION; SATISFACTORY.

SELF-INTEREST. See BENEFIT, ETHICAL EGOISM, INTEREST; PREFERENCES (PREFERENCES); PSYCHOLOGICAL EGOISIM; SYMPATHY.

SHAFTESBURY, ANTHONY ASHLEY, EARL OF (1667-1713)

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury, was born on 26 February 1667 in London. He was educated under the supervision of John Locke, secretary to his grandfather, the first earl of Shaftesbury and one of the leading Whig politicians of the age, and at Winchester College from 1683 to 1686. Shaftesbury remained in contact with Locke, through whom he made useful intellectual acquaintances, and with whom he conducted an extensive philosophical correspondence. He became an MP in 1685 and following the death of his reclusive father, he assumed the family peerage and entered the Lords in 1690. In parliament, initially he asserted his independence from party, but was increasingly drawn into Whig politics in the later years of the reign of William III. His political prospects dimmed with the death of William in 1702, and thereafter ill-health led him to withdraw from political life altogether. He spent his last years in Italy, and died in Chislea on 15 February 1713. Shaftesbury's principal moral and aesthetic writings were published in a collected edition of three volumes in 1713 as Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times. It went through a dozen editions and was widely read and commented upon during the eighteenth century. The most important and systematic of these writings are An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit (1699) and The Morals (1709). In these writings he set forth what came to be known as the "moral sense" theory of ethics, which had such a profound influence on Francis Hutcheson. In other respects, however, Shaftesbury’s thought stirred up considerable controversy, nicely captured by Stanley Coren in his introduction to the Characteristics: "A devoted thesis, he has been accused of atheism; a defender of religion, accused of being its most skillful enemy; and enthusiast in religion, pilloried as a cold-blooded Diderot or skeptic; an advocate of rational sentiment in morals, attacked as a vengeful emotionalist; a precursor of emotivism, denounced as a rather conventional neo-classicist" (Shaftesbury, pp. viii–xvii). Part of the explanation for these diverse perspectives, according to Coren, is the "dialectical method" in which Shaftesbury presented his ideas, with its "stress on the need for inner coherence or "self-locomony as a means to self-knowledge" (p. xviii). But, part of the explanation also lies with the varied influences that shaped his philosophy, including Socrates and Xenophon, Hobbesian empiricism and Epicurus, the republicanism of Harrington, and the writings of moderate churchmen like Jeremy Taylor, Richard Cumberland, and Benjamin Whichcott. One finds elements of Platonic idealism, partly derived from the neo-Platonists Ralph Cudworth and Henry More, alongside Lockean empiricism; scepticism and antiscientificism coupled with opposition to materialism and atheism; a deep appreciation of the aesthetic character of morality opposed to philosophical egotism, Epicureanism, and natural law theory. The resulting synthesis could not fail to recognize "the inevitable polarities of human thought—of reason and emotion, of self-interest and public interest, of action and contemplation" (p. xvii).

Shaftesbury was in the vanguard of moralists who based ethics on psychological experience, understanding the affects as the source of motivation, not reason. In developing this account, he was careful to dissociate himself from the Hobbesian theory of the emotions, which reduced all motivation to self-interest. He counted benevolence among the social affects, without which no account of motivation could be complete (a third category of motives included the "unnatural affects"). The central problem addressed in the Inquiry is the relationship between personal and public interest, with Shaftesbury arguing that self-interest properly understood lies in the exercise of the social affects, and that virtue consists in the desire to do good for its own sake. Nevertheless, Shaftesbury also maintained that to bring about genuine and lasting happiness is virtuous and that being virtuous is the only true and lasting happiness. Consequently, "to have the natural affects (such as are founded in love, complacency, good-will, and in sympathy with the kind or species) is to have the chief means and power of self-enjoyment and that to want them is certain misery and ill" (Shaftesbury, vol. 1, p. 293).

Though Shaftesbury rejected the theory of innate ideas, he believed that each person is born with the capacity for "natural sense" and, therefore, with the capacity for fairness, justice and honesty (Shaftesbury, vol. 2, p. 135). However, the "natural sense" exists in varying degrees within individuals since, like "taste" in aesthetic matters, it is an activity of judgment that requires cultivation and rational reflection, producing a union of feeling and reason. This was more than an enlightening parallel for Shaftesbury; he believed that morality had an aesthetic quality. Just as judgements about the beauty of an object depend on the perception of its "regularity," "harmony," and "order," so
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this is also true of the goodness of an action. "The mind," he wrote, "which is spectator or auditor of other minds, cannot be without its eye and ear so as to discern proportion, distinguish sound, and scan each sentiment and thought which comes before it. It can let nothing escape its censure. It feels the soft and harsh, the agreeable and disagreeable in the affection; and finds a final and fair, a harmonious and dissolvent, as really and truly here as in any musical numbers, or in the outward forms and representations of sensible things" (p. 251). But intuitions and feelings could not account entirely for virtues. Experience and reflection have their place in enabling us to recognize that benevolence has a purpose, which is identified with producing the good of the whole, the general welfare or common good. Among Shaftesbury’s early critics were George Berkeley, Joseph Butler, Bernard Mandeville, and, notably, the religious utilitarian John Brown (1715–66). Brown accused Shaftesbury of merely “ranging Changes upon words” in his explanation of virtue. “We might with equal propriety affirm, that Virtue consists in acting virtuously” (Brown, p. 117). Cutting through Shaftesbury’s eloquence, he detected the outlines of a consequentialist moral theory that could be viewed as psychological hedonism, even if this was not the doctrine the Earl sought to advance. It is the consequence of an action which gives us the idea of beauty, truth, or virtue, so these ideas cannot themselves constitute the criterion by which the morality of actions is judged. Like other moralists, whose theories are masked by a “cloud of metaphysics,” as soon as Shaftesbury descends to particulars he invariably invoked utility, and recognized that happiness is integral to the moral character of actions and the judgment of right and wrong, good and evil. “Thus he talks of the Notions of a public Interest, as necessary towards a proper Idea of Virtue he speaks of public Affection in the same manner, and reduces Generosity, Kindness, and Compassion, as the Qualities which alone can render Mankind truly Virtuous. He again, when he frames the Bounds of the social Affections, he evidently refers us to the same kind, of human Happiness” (pp. 129–30).

Brown was correct in discerning consequentialist elements in Shaftesbury thought. The effect on public happiness plays a part in our judgment of what is virtuous, right and wrong, and so on, and no doubt for some the motivation to be virtuous, to do good, is the possibility of enhancing the happiness of others. But this should not lead us to conclude that at bottom Shaftesbury was a hedonistic utilitarian. Rather he combined a description of the moral point of view as “disinterested” with ideas closer to that of “ideal utilitarianism,” in which one acts for the enhancement of the good not the maximisation of pleasures. As Charles Bulley noted in his defense of Shaftesbury, while happiness is often produced by virtue, he did not hold that happiness is necessarily the object of virtuous action (Bulley, pp. 7–8).

Shaftesbury’s influence on Hutcheson led to his ideas permeating the Scottish Enlightenment, though his work found a more critical reception there as disciples. In England his ideas made a considerable impression on Bolingbrooke and James Harris, among others, and in America both Jonathan Edwards and Thomas Jefferson acknowledged his influence. In continental Europe, Diderot, Montesquieu, Herder, Lessing, and Moses Mendelssohn found much to praise and emulate. By the nineteenth century, however, Shaftesbury’s writings fell out of favor and have had little impact since.

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See also HUTCHESON, FRANCIS; IDLE UTILITARIANISM; RELIGIOUS UTILITARIANS.

SIDGWICK, HENRY (1838–1900)

Henry Sidgwick was born on 21 May 1838 in Skipton, Yorkshire, and was educated at Rugby and then Trinity College, Cambridge University, where he remained until his death on 28 August 1900. In 1858 he was elected Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy. A millenial liberal reformer and religious agnostic, albeit of a prevalent type, Sidgwick famously resigned his Fellowship in 1869 because he could no longer subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England as required. His struggles with the ethics of subscription foreshadowed the more ambitious treatment of common sense morality in his best known work The Methods of Ethics (1874), described by Derek Parfit as “the best book on ethics ever written” (Parfit, p. xxiii).

The aim of the Methods, Sidgwick explains, is not to take sides, edify or educate, but to examine in an impartial manner the leading “methods” of ethics, that is, the leading procedures “by which we determine what individual human beings ought—or what it is ‘right’ for them—to do, or to seek to realize by voluntary action” (Sidgwick, 1907, p. 1). He focuses on three such methods—rational egoism (one ought to promote one’s own greatest good), utilitarianism (one ought to promote the greatest good of all), and common-sense or irrational morality, which encompasses faustian duties such as promise keeping and truth telling and the more systematised versions of these found in the works of philosophers such as Mill’s great antagonist William Whewell. Sidgwick had studied Whewell’s Elements of Morality (1845) as an undergraduate, an experience that apparently enhanced his admission for MII. However, a large part of the Methods is an attempt to show not that common-sense morality is flatly wrong, but that it is too vague, rough, inconsistent, and incomplete, depending on utilitarian calculations to refine and clarify its rules, resolve moral dilemmas, and throw it into more systematic, scientific form. No one on reflection denies that there are utilitarian exceptions to the rule of utility, such that one ought to “speak falsely to an invalid” if the truth would prove to be a fatal shock. But just what degree of non-fatal shock severity might demand also remains obscure, without appeal to utilitarian considerations. And much the same holds for benevolence, justice, good faith, and other duties.

Happily, however, “the Utilitarian estimate of consequences not only supports broadly the current moral rules, but also sustains their generally received limitations and qualifications.” The utilitarian can explain “anomalies in the Morality of Common