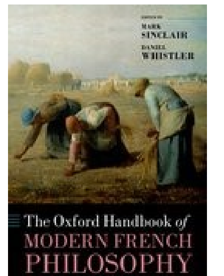

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CHAPTER

9 Jean-Marie Guyau on Morality and Life

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Abstract

Jean-Marie Guyau is an unjustifiably forgotten figure in the history of ethics. This chapter examines Guyau's contribution to moral philosophy in the light of his philosophy of life. It begins by showing how he seeks to ground ethics by focusing on the dynamics of life, notably the trend of life's activity in its aspect of fecundity. It then analyses Guyau's engagement with Kant as the modern thinker who challenged the transcendent positive content of the moral law, and who sought in the individual and his self-legislating capacity a new ground for moral action. The chapter also examines Guyau's critique of a morality of pleasure from the perspective of his philosophy of life in showing that, for Guyau, hedonists and utilitarians mistakenly focus on the end of moral action and neglect its efficient cause: life itself.

Keywords: philosophy of life, ethics, fecundity, moral variability, anomy

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JEAN-MARIE Guyau was born in Laval on 28 October 1854. He began his philosophical studies at an early age, with the help of his stepfather and mentor, Alfred Fouillée. In 1874, Guyau won the prize of the *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques* for his dissertation on Epicureanism and utilitarianism. Alongside *La morale d'Épicure et ses rapports avec les doctrines contemporaines* (1878), the *Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction* (1885) and *L'Irréligion de l'avenir* (1887), Guyau published several other philosophy books and contributed to the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger,* the *Revue des deux Mondes,* and the *Revue bleue*. He also published a book of poems (*Vers d'un philosophe*), as well as a series of textbooks for children.[1] His intellectual work was interrupted by a lung disease, aggravated after an earthquake in Southern France. Guyau died in Menton on 31 March 1888 at only 33 years of age. He left a series of unpublished texts, later published by Fouillée.[2]

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Guyau remains an unjustifiably forgotten figure in the history of French philosophy. The fact is baffling when we consider the enthusiastic reception that his work met during his lifetime, as well as his engagement in the intellectual debates of his time. Once considered the 'Spinoza of France',[3] Guyau inspired thinkers like Henri Bergson—who reviewed Guyau's posthumous work on *La genèse de l'idée de temps*—and Friedrich Nietzsche, who read and annotated Guyau's works, and referred to him as 'brave Guyau'.

Guyau's interests were manifold, including moral philosophy, the philosophy of religion, and the philosophy of time. His presence was felt in several fields of nineteenth-century p. 139 ↳ intellectual life from writers such as Lev Tolstoy and Marcel Proust to political and social thinkers such as Piotr Kropotkin and Émile Durkheim. Gabriel Tarde considered Guyau as a pioneer in the sociological approach to criminology and in the critique of punishment in penal law, and he lamented his early death (Tarde, 1890). Guyau's work was also read in England, where figures such as Henry Sidgwick, Herbert Spencer, and G.E. Moore responded to his ideas. Guyau himself was an avid reader and scholar of what he called '*la morale anglaise*', and in the work of the British utilitarians, positivists, and evolutionists he found important ideas that he sought to integrate in his own work.[4] Despite his deep acquaintance with anglophone literature and the initial interest in his own work in England, the material published on Guyau's philosophy in English in recent decades remains scarce.

The present chapter shows how Guyau's contribution to the study of ethics in the *Esquisse* is twofold. First, he seeks to provide a satisfactory holistic approach to modern ethics, and this on the basis of the claim that positivists and idealists consider only one of its aspects, either the factual or the ideal, at the expense of the other. A proper account of the dynamics of moral life, he argues, must account for both moral ideas and moral actions (see Orru, 1983: 503–4). Second, Guyau criticizes Kant's ethics of duty in embracing the idea that the reign of the absolute is over in the domain of ethics; 'whatever comes within the order of facts is not universal, and whatever is universal is a speculative hypothesis' (Guyau, 1913: 6; 1898: 4). From this perspective, a chief characteristic of a future conception of morality will be moral variability, by which Guyau means individuality in human behaviour and in opposition to the expected conformity of Kant's ethics of duty and that, like Nietzsche, Guyau regards as a continuation of traditional morality. In assessing in this way Guyau's contribution to ethics, the chapter also addresses his critique of the philosophy of hedonism together with his positive notion of life. The chapter concludes by analysing Guyau's revised idea of autonomy, understood as *anomie*, and draws attention to ideas he shares with Nietzsche.

1. Guyau and Naturalism

In a Spinozist manner, Guyau states that his starting point is nature and human beings considered as they are.[5] It is from nature that he will seek to establish an ethics, and this procedure would cost him the accusation of having succumbed to a 'naturalistic fallacy' by G. E. Moore (1993: 97–8).[6] Guyau illustrates his naturalistic procedure of attentively observing the drives and actions of human beings in order to discover the natural end towards which they tend by means of the image of the marksman:

> When a marksman has for a long time practised shooting at a target, one sees, in looking at the numerous holes which he has made in the piece of cardboard, that these holes are distributed pretty uniformly around the *white* at which he aimed. Not one of these balls, perhaps, will have hit the geometrical centre of the circle of the target, and some will be grouped round this p. 140 ↳ centre, according to a very regular law […]. Even without knowing this law, one would not be deceived by the mere aspect of the holes; one would put a finger in the centre of the place where these holes are most frequent, and one would say: 'That is the point of the target aimed at.' This searching for the point aimed at by the marksman may be compared to that which the purely positive science of morals undertakes when it endeavours to determine the ordinary aim of human conduct. What is

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> the target constantly aimed at by humanity, which must also have been the target for all human beings, for today man is no longer regarded by science as being separate from the rest of the world, and [since] the laws of life are the same, from the top downwards, on the ladder of animal life? Where is the centre of the universal effort of beings, towards which the strokes of the great hazard of things have been directed, though perhaps without one perfectly exact stroke, without the aim having ever been fully attained?
>
> (Guyau 1913: 85–6; 1889: 73)

This focus on the notion of life and its natural unfolding will have enormous implications, he thinks, for our understanding of morality and of the human animal as the moral animal. The basic principle of Guyau's naturalism, then, is the one established by modern science: man is not something different to and separate from the rest of the world, and the laws of life are the same from the top downwards on the ladder of life.

It is important to determine the specific character of Guyau's naturalism. It is, first, what one could call a 'social' or 'sociological naturalism'. Guyau saw the dynamic of life not only through the prism of individualistic and egoistic appropriation—that is to say, not only from the point of view of an egoistic drive to preserve and expand one's own existence. Rather, he included in his description of life another drive, often neglected, namely a social one (see Guyau 1913: 245; 1889: 209–10). The reality of life is not marked solely by individual tendencies, but also by sociable ones. Later on, in books such as *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*, Guyau will extend this insight into sociability to all living entities: even the organism and the cell are organized like societies, and they function through an association of elements (1889: viii).

A further, and very important, characteristic of Guyau's naturalism is the insight that a mere description of the drives and tendencies of life cannot provide us with definite moral ends. Morality goes beyond the realm of facts ascertained by positive science. Although these positive facts reveal fundamental tendencies and movements of life (as Guyau makes clear in the example of the marksman), they cannot provide us with rules to follow or ends to pursue. Each of these fundamental movements can be realized and affirmed in a variety of ways. We can make life fruitful and intense through the pursuit of a multitude of different goals. This powerful insight reappears in Guyau's *anomic* perspective: in a morality based upon the facts and tendencies of life we find no transcendent rule, but rather moral variability. Guyau places the emphasis on the need to create forms of action and ways of life, as well as on the need to accept the risks and consequences of this creative activity. Even though science dispels metaphysical and dogmatic illusions about nature and the human being, Guyau wants a space for speculation to be preserved. It is the power of ideas, even when limited in scope and when presenting apparently mere speculative hypotheses, that propels us into action and towards the experimental realization of what an idea can produce in the world.

What makes Guyau's naturalism unique, then, is its social or sociological aspect and its recognition that there is still a place for moral experimentation that cannot be derived from the realm of positive fact (Fouillée 1902: 23).

2. Our Anomic Condition: A New Approach to Ethics

Concerning our present moral condition, Guyau's ethical reflection starts with the diagnosis of a state of abandonment, in which we are left to ourselves with no transcendent law or authority to guide us. This is made clear in the *Esquisse*:

> We stand as if upon the deck of some great vessel, whose rudder had been torn away by a wave, and whose mast has been broken by the wind […]. No hand directs us, no eye looks out for us. The

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> rudder has long since been broken—or, rather, there was never one; it has to be made. This is a great task, and it is our task.
>
> (1913: 252; 1889: 215)

This diagnosis of our moral condition can be defined as an *anomic* condition. He proposes a hypothesis that can provide humanity with tools to navigate this condition and in which we seek an equivalent of duty in life itself. It is only from the perspective of the dynamics of life that we can now find support for moral action since all the other categories have collapsed.

In Guyau's account, the absolute, originally given by religious feeling, historically changes its abode, passing from the domain of religion to that of ethics. Although this absolute may call forth a generous enthusiasm, it may also give rise to a kind of fanaticism that is perhaps less dangerous that the religious kind but not without its own inconveniences (1913: 62; 1889: 53). According to Guyau, we are witnessing in the modern epoch the decline of religious faith and this faith is being replaced by a dogmatic faith in morality. The new voice is conscience and the new god is duty: '[t]he great Pan, the nature-god, is dead; Jesus, the humanity-god, is dead. There remains the inward and ideal god, Duty, whose destiny it is, perhaps, also to die someday' (1913: 63; 1889: 54). The belief in duty is questionable because it is placed above the region in which both science and nature move. Guyau maintains that all philosophies of duty and conscience—whether in the Scottish school of 'common sense' or in neo-Kantianism with its assumption that the impulse of duty is of a different order to all other natural impulses—are unscientific in their reliance on supposedly common intuitions. Phrases such as 'conscience proclaims', 'evidence proves', 'common sense requires' are as unconvincing as 'duty commands', 'the moral law demands'. Guyau notes that the decline of the 'ideal God' of Duty is already taking place. What lies outside the range of our knowledge cannot have anything obligatory about it, and science should replace habituated faith.

Guyau is interested in ascertaining the exact domain of science in moral philosophy, so an initial task is to work out how far an exclusively scientific conception of morality can go. Guyau invites us to inquire into the ends pursued by living creatures, including humankind. He searches for a purely natural aim of human action. A first candidate for this natural aim is found in hedonism. The principle of hedonism, with its claim that living creatures strive for a minimum of pain and a maximum of pleasure, can be explained in evolutionary terms in which conscious life is shown to follow the line of the least suffering. To a certain extent, Guyau accepts this thesis but finds it too narrow as a definition since it applies only to conscious life and voluntary acts, not to unconscious and automatic acts. To believe that most of our movements spring from consciousness, and that a scientific analysis of the sources of conduct has only to reckon with conscious motives, would mean being the dupe of an illusion. He holds that consciousness embraces a restricted portion of life and action; acts ↳ of consciousness have their origins in dumb instincts and reflex movements. Thus, the 'constant end of action must primarily have been a *constant cause* of more or less unconscious movements. In reality, the ends are but *habitual motive causes become conscious of themselves*' (1913: 87; 1889: 74). Moreover, another problem of hedonism is that it misconstrues the relation of cause and effect when it depicts pleasure as an end. Guyau argues that pleasure needs to be seen not as an end, but rather as an effect of the expansion and diversification of life itself. As he explains: 'We believe that an exclusive scientific morality must, to be complete, admit that the pursuit of pleasure is only itself a consequence of the instinctive effort to *maintain and enlarge life*' (1913: 87; 1889: 75).

For Guyau, the cause operating within us before any attraction of pleasure is 'life'. Pleasure is but the consequence of an instinctive effort to maintain and enlarge life. Contra Bentham he argues that 'to live is not to calculate, it is to act' (1913: 247; 1889: 211). Guyau advances an essentially Spinozist position emphasizing every being's tendency to persist in life, adding that such persistence also entails an expansion and enrichment of life. Guyau takes this tendency to be one that goes beyond and envelops conscious life, so it is 'both the most radical of realities and the inevitable ideal' (1913: 88; 1889: 75). Therefore, Guyau

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reaches the conclusion that the part of morality which can be founded on positive facts can be defined as 'the science which has for object all the means of *preserving* and *enlarging* material and intellectual life' (1913: 88; 1889: 75). His ethics centres, then, on a desire to increase the intensity of life, which consists in enlarging the range of activity under all its forms and that is compatible with the renewal of force. A superior being is one that practises a variety of action; thought itself is nothing other than condensed action and life at its maximum development. He defines this superior being as one which 'unites the most delicate sensibility with the strongest will' (1913: 42; 1889: 35).

Guyau contends that when conceived as the 'systematization of moral evolution in humanity', the science of ethics will come to exert an influence on this very evolution and alter the human animal in the process: 'The gradual and necessary disappearance of religion and absolute morality has many ... surprises in store for us. If there is nothing in this to terrify us, at least we must try to foresee them in the interest of science' (1913: 135; 1889: 114). The chief problem posed by the new scientific approach to morality is the question Nietzsche also focuses on: why obedience? Why submission? The only form morality can assume for us today is as a critique of morality (see Nietzsche 2011: Preface). This is perceived to be our problem today by Guyau because we are bound by an impulse or inward pressure which has only a natural character, not a mystical or metaphysical one that can be completed by an extra-social sanction. Guyau's conception of the future of morality differs from Nietzsche, however, in placing the emphasis on an expansion of the social and sociability: 'Develop your life in all directions, be an 'individual' as rich as possible in intensive and extensive energy; therefore, be the most *social* and *sociable* being' (1913: 140–1; 1889: 117). Science can only offer excellent hypothetical advice and not anything that would purport to be categorical or absolute. If we wish to promote the highest intensity of life, then we have to experiment, that is, if we take the realm of the practical seriously, we must recognize that a scientific conception of morality cannot give a definite and complete solution to the problem of moral obligation. A mature humanity is one that will decide for itself what it wishes to obligate itself to and on the basis of the insights secured by scientific knowledge and in terms of an experimentation: '[t]here is one unchangeable moral philosophy—that of facts; and, to complete it, when it is not sufficient, there is a variable and individual moral philosophy—that p. 143 ↳ of hypotheses' (1913: 165; 1889: 139). It is through the formulation of hypotheses, that we accomplish one of the expansive tendencies of life: that of the risk in thought and action. In the formulation of hypotheses, Guyau finds a temporary ground for action since, as he explains, conceiving an idea also means striving for its realization. Guyau's commitment is not to any moral conformity—in the sense that a scientific morality could somehow require of us to conform to nature—but rather to experimentation in action and in thought.

Moreover, as Fouillée explains, morality for Guyau presupposes the intensification of life, but this intensification also means its diversification and variation of forms. Increasing the power of life is still an open principle since the experimental task of ethics is, if we follow Fouillée's presentation, not merely the increase of power, but the organization of this power in different forms and for the attainment of ends still to be determined.[7] This organization remains as an experimental task, and its unfolding can encourage moral variability. If it is true that life and power are naturally related, this does not necessarily mean that power should constitute the moral end in itself. On Fouillée's reading, Guyau's ethics does not consist in merely following nature or life (*sequere naturam or sequerem vitam*), since if this was the case there would be no need for ethics and no need for taking up the risk of establishing ends.[8]

Guyau's hope is that morality in the future will move in the direction, not simply of autonomy, but of *anomy,* in which the differences between individuals and temperaments are taken into account along with the absence of fixed and apodictic laws and rules. In this sense, Guyau wants to take Kant's claims about the importance of autonomy further. Real autonomy—or, in Guyau's terms, *anomie*—means a proliferation of forms of life, which he characterizes as 'moral variability'. Although Kant begins a revolution in moral philosophy by seeking to make the will autonomous, as opposed to submitting itself to an external law, he stops halfway with the constraint of universality of the law. This supposes 'that everyone must conform to a

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fixed type; that the ideal "reign" of liberty would be a regular and methodical government' (1913: 165; 1889: 139). In Kant, liberty is lawful self-government and autonomy would amount to a universal law. By contrast, Guyau argues that true autonomy should produce individual originality and not universal uniformity. The future demands that we allow for genuine pluralism of values and ideals freely chosen and rationally deliberated over, as opposed to a uniformity that can only annihilate intelligence. Guyau's hope is that heterodoxy and non-conventional living will become in the future the true and universal religion or way of life.

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3. Guyau Contra Kant: from Autonomy to Anomy

Let us now look in more detail at how Guyau responds to Kant. Kant challenges all transcendent, positive content of moral law, convention, and tradition, seeking to find in the individual and his self-legislating capacity, a universal ground for moral action. Guyau argues, however, that Kant seems to fall short in this enterprise, since he restores moral uniformity and the universality of moral law, even if the individual reaches it through self-legislation and self-government: morality occupies once again the realm of obedience. He thinks that in order to do justice to Kant's insight—and to advance where Kant has stopped—one has to affirm the consequence of autonomy: moral variability as *anomy*.

Guyau notes, like philosophical predecessors such as Hegel, the formalism of Kant's ethics. With its stress on the absolute character of the imperative independent of the idea of its object and application, such an ethics makes appeal to natural or empirical facts virtually worthless since it is always possible to find an answer by appealing to the distinction between the alleged intention behind the act and the act itself: 'If the act is practically harmful, the intention may have been morally disinterested, and that is all that the moral philosophy of Kant demands' (Guyau, 1913: 57;1889: 48). Furthermore, the good intention of the feeling of obligation in Kant must make an appeal to a supra-sensible and supra-intelligible reality. Guyau corrects Kant on this point:

> The *feeling* of obligation, if exclusively considered from the point of view of mental dynamics, is brought back to a feeling of resistance.... This resistance, being of such a nature as to be apprehended by the senses, cannot arise from our relation to a *moral* law, which hypothetically would be quite intelligible and independent of time. It arises from our relation to natural and empirical laws.
>
> (1913: 57; 1889: 48)

Guyau points out that the feeling of obligation is not moral but sensible, that is, the moral sentiment is, as Kant himself concedes, pathological. Kant's position is distinctive in holding this sentiment to be aroused by the mere form of the moral law and not its subject matter. This generates a mystery, as Kant fully acknowledges and as Guyau explains: 'an intelligible and supra-natural law generates a pathological and natural sentiment, namely, *respect*' (1913: 57; 1889: 48). How does a pure idea that contains nothing sensible produce within us a sensation of pleasure and pain? Kant acknowledges that he cannot explain why and how the universality of a maxim, and consequently morality, interests us (Kant, 1968: 124).

Guyau cannot see any reason a priori why we should connect sensible pleasure or pain to a law that would, hypothetically, be supra-sensible. Guyau discusses this point in detail in his problematization of the idea of sanction in both morality and penal justice (1913: 182; 1889: 154): how can a supra-sensible principle (moral merit, for example, or the lack thereof) produce a sensible consequence?[9] For Guyau this amounts to an unjustified leap. Equally, p. 145 ↳ can duty be detached from the character and qualities of the things we have to do and the actual people to whom we have obligations? Like Hegel, Guyau appeals to 'social life' (what Hegel calls *Sittlichkeit*) as the context in which duties and obligations find their sense. The 'moral law' can only be

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a ‘social law’; just as we are not free to get outside the universe, so we are not free (in our thinking) to get outside society (1913: 232–3; 1889: 198). Moreover, even if we were to suppose that the universal, qua universal, produces in us a logical satisfaction, this itself remains ‘a satisfaction of the logical instinct in man’ and ‘is a *natural* tendency’ because it is ‘an expression of life in its higher form … favourable to order, to symmetry, to similitude, to unity in variety …’ (1913: 59; 1889: 50).

For Guyau, and contra Kant, moral sentiment is not to be explained rationally and a priori. It is impossible to prove by fact ‘the act of respect for a pure form’ (1913: 58; 1889: 49). The sentiment that Kant wishes to attach either to pure reason or to pure will can be accounted for in terms of appealing to the natural interest we experience in our superior faculties and in our intellectual life: ‘We cannot be indifferent to the rational exercise of our reason, which, after all, is a more complex instinct, nor to the exercise of the *will*, which, indeed, is a fuller force and a potentiality of effects anticipated in their cause’ (1913: 61; 1889: 52).

In addition, Guyau makes the critical point that the will cannot be indifferent to the aims it is seeking to pursue or promote. He contends that a purely formal practice of morality, as Kant’s ethics demands, would ironically prove demoralizing to an agent: ‘it is the analogy of the labour which the prisoners in English prisons are obliged to do, and which is without aim—to turn a handle for the sake of turning it!’ (1913: 59; 1889: 50). Nietzsche describes Kant’s ethics as a form of ‘refined servility’ (Nietzsche 1974: §5). Guyau makes a similar criticism when he questions the performance of duty for the sake of duty, which he regards as pure tautology and a vicious circle. We might as well say be religious for the sake of religion, or be moral for the sake of morality. He then closely echoes Nietzsche when he argues, ‘[w]hile I believe it to be my sovereign and self-governed liberty, commanding me to do such and such an act, what if it were hereditary instinct, habit, education, urging me to the pretended duty?’ (1913: 67; 1889: 52). As Nietzsche points out, one’s judgement that ‘this is right’ has a pre-history in one’s instincts, likes and dislikes, experiences (including the lack of them), and so on (Nietzsche 1974: §335).

In short, Guyau holds that there is within us a primitive, impersonal impulse to follow duty that is prior to philosophical reasoning on goodness, but our understanding of this needs to be opened up to naturalistic and critical inquiry. This inquiry into the sentiment of obligation is to take the form of a ‘dynamic genesis’ in which we come to appreciate that we do not follow our conscience but are driven by it and in terms of a ‘psycho-mechanical power’ (Guyau 1913: 117; 1889: 98). Moreover, Guyau argues that questions about evolution—the evolution of the species and of societies—also need to be taken into account. What kind of ‘impulse’ is duty? How has it evolved? And why has it become for us a ‘sublime obsession’? (1913: 121; 1889: 101) Ultimately, Kant’s ethics, Guyau argues, must be seen as belonging to an age that future humanity will outgrow. It is ‘a moral philosophy similar to ritualist religions, which count any failure in ceremonial as sacrilege; and which forget the essence for the sake of the form’; it is thus ‘a kind of moral despotism, creeping everywhere, wanting to rule everything’ (1913: 170; 1889: 144). Guyau is keen, then, to strip Kant’s notion of autonomy of any trace of moral despotism: freedom and autonomy must be liberated from the remnants of religious obedience and placed instead in the realm of *creation* and where we make the move towards the realm of variety and experimentation. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Kropotkin saw Guyau as a precursor of anarchist ethics (Kropotkin, 1942).

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4. Life and the Sociality of Pleasures: Guyau's 'Social' Naturalism

Although Guyau's approach to morality is clearly naturalistic, it is rooted in an appreciation of the evolution of human life. In speculating on the future development of morality, Guyau identifies a new kind of obligation to be derived from the nature of sensibility itself and the transformation it has undergone in the course of evolution, a transformation that implies the expansion of cooperation and of the social aspects of human existence. For example, he argues that the higher pleasures contain a highly sociable character that provides a fertile ground for new ethical connections between individuals. He has in mind the superior pleasures, including the pleasures of art, the pleasures of reasoning, and the pleasures of learning and understanding. Although the accomplished human being possesses a source of varied enjoyment in its own activity, this does not mean that such a human being will decide to shut itself up in itself, establishing an autarchic realm of self-sufficiency, like some Stoic sage. For Guyau, intellectual pleasures are both the most inward pleasures and also the most communicative, being both individual and social. The bonds that the sharing of the higher pleasures can generate create a particular kind of obligation: 'an emotional bond—a union produced by the complete, or partial, harmony of sentiments or thoughts' (1913: 113; 1889: 94–5). Guyau does not, of course, deny that there is often conflict and disagreement over values and ideals, but at the same time he insists new bonds between individuals arise from the sharing of the higher pleasures. Indeed, he maintains that the higher we rise in the scale of evolution the more we see the highly social and sociable character of the pleasures of humankind. We moderns are becoming more intellectual in our enjoyments and tastes, and with this arises a 'universal consciousness' in which consciousness becomes easier of penetration (1913: 113; 1889: 95). It is on this point that Guyau thinks we are going beyond the life of pleasures envisaged by Epicurean philosophy. As he writes in the conclusion of *La morale d'Épicure*:

> We are now on our way to an epoch in which egoism will turn back and retreat [*reculé et refoulé*] further and further into ourselves, becoming less and less recognisable. When this ideal epoch comes, beings will no longer be able to enjoy [*jouir*] in solitude: their pleasure will be as if part of a *concert* [of pleasures] in which the pleasure of others will take part as a necessary element. Moreover, is it not [already] like this in the most cases? […] This predominant part played by sociable sentiments must be acknowledged by every doctrine, and in whatever way they may conceive the principles of ethics [*morale*].
>
> (Guyau 2002: 383)

If one considers Guyau's description of our modern condition as one of *anomie*, one can say that we are becoming more individualized; the idea of moral variability points to the fact that we distinguish ourselves more from one another than we have ever done before in our history. However, individualism alone cannot explain the growth of life in terms of its expansive social aspects. In this sense, Guyau's reflection on 'the existence of a certain impersonal *duty* created by the *growing fusion of sensibilities*, and by the more sociable character of higher pleasures' (1913: 110; 1889: 93–4) points to the fact that we are also becoming more connected to one another through the sharing of higher pleasures and social and intellectual activities. In p. 147 modern society, we are more in need of the others to form ourselves and ↳ flourish. This corresponds to an aspect of life itself, that of moral fecundity. Here, Guyau locates an important principle of human evolution: its 'point of departure' is selfishness, but 'by virtue of the very fecundity of all life', selfishness is 'obliged to enlarge itself, to create outside of itself new centres of its own action' (1913: 114; 1889: 95).

For Guyau, then, human evolution is on the way to an epoch in which primeval selfishness will more and more recede. Compared to the selfish component of our existence, the sphere of altruism is becoming larger, and even the so-called purely physical pleasures, such as eating and drinking, only acquire their full charm when one shares them with others. The social sentiments are, then, of crucial importance for understanding the character of our enjoyments and pains: 'Neither my sufferings nor my pleasures are

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absolutely my own' (1913: 115; 1889: 96). There is for Guyau an abundance of life that motivates us to care and work not only for ourselves but for others. This is, in large part, what he means when he seeks to locate 'morality'—the sphere of the social expansion of the human animal and of other-regarding actions—within life itself. Life has two main aspects: nutrition and assimilation, on the one hand, and production and fecundity on the other. The more a life form takes in, the more it needs to give out. He maintains:

> Thus, the expenditure for others which social life demands is not … a loss for the individual; it is a desirable enlargement, and even a necessity. Man wishes to become a social and moral being; he remains constantly agitated by that idea. The delicate cells of his mind and his heart aspire to live and to develop […], every one of us feels in himself a kind of pushing of moral life, like that of the physical sap. Life is fecundity, and, reciprocally, fecundity is abundance of life; that is true existence.
>
> (1913: 101; 1889: 86–7)

For Guyau, the superior form of life, then, is that which expands beyond the narrow horizon of the individual self. We have, he thinks, a need to go out of ourselves to others: 'we want to multiply ourselves by communion of thoughts and sentiments' (1913: 98; 1889: 84). We enjoy others knowing that we exist, feel, suffer, and love. In this respect, then, 'we tear the veil of individuality', and this is not simple vanity but a fecund desire to 'burst the narrow shell of the self' (1913: 98; 1889: 84). Guyau, however, is not utterly naïve in his appreciation of 'life': he draws our attention to the phenomenon of 'altruistic debauchery' in which one lives too much for others and neglects a healthy care of self (1913: 99; 1889: 85). In this sense, Guyau's ethics is not one of self-sacrifice and renunciation of self, but one of the care of self and others. Ultimately, a healthy life reaches others by the same movement it preserves itself and grows.

Guyau is inspired by the idea, which he partly derives from his stepfather, Alfred Fouillée, of making the moral ideal strictly immanent, that it is derived from experience. He puts it as follows: 'It is from *life* that we will demand the principle of morality' (1913: 81; 1889: 70). By this he means that although the communicability of emotions of thoughts can be explained on its psychological side as a phenomenon of nervous contagion, it can also be explained as an integral feature of the evolution of life itself, that is, 'by the fecundity of *life*, the expansion of which is almost in direct ratio to its intensity' (1913: 81; 1889: 70). Guyau is attempting to explain phenomena of morality, such as sympathy and altruism in terms of this conception of the development of life. If sympathy of feeling can be regarded as the germ of the extension of consciousness, in which to understand is also to feel, and to understand others is to feel ourselves in harmony with them, then this can be explained by the fecund character of life itself.

 It should now be clear that Guyau's overriding aim is to establish the foundations of an understanding of moral development through a novel philosophy of life. Its moral ideal is 'activity' and in all its variety of manifestations; to increase the intensity of life means to enlarge the range of activity in all its forms (1913: 89; 1889: 76). This principle stating that 'to act is to live' fosters a cultivation of human activity from the perspective of which the worst of all vices is laziness and inertia. This is clear in the critique of prayer that Guyau expounds:

> Work, as has been said, is as good as prayer. It is even better than prayer; or, rather, it is the true prayer—the true human providence. Let us act instead of praying. Let us have hope only in ourselves and in other men; let us count on ourselves. Hope, like Providence, sees sometimes far ahead (*providere*). The difference between supernatural Providence and natural hope is that the one pretends to directly modify nature by supernatural means, like itself; while the other from the first modifies only ourselves.
>
> (1913: 251; 1889: 214)

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But what is the relation of Guyau's philosophy of life to hedonism or the moral philosophy of pleasure? Here Guyau is very delicate in his thinking. He argues that there are two principal kinds of pleasure: first, the kind that corresponds with a particular and superficial form of activity, such as eating and drinking, and this is the pleasure of the senses; second, the kind that is connected with the very root of that activity such as the pleasure of living, willing, and thinking. The latter is the more deeply vital and the more independent of exterior objects for its fulfilment and expression; indeed, 'it is one with the very consciousness of life' (1913: 90; 1889: 77). The hedonists and utilitarians grant too much importance to the first kind of pleasure, and Guyau insists that we do not always act with the view of seeking the satisfaction of a particular pleasure. Moreover, we act on occasion for the pleasure of acting and we live for the pleasure of living. Here, there 'is in us an accumulated force which demands to be used' (1913: 90; 1889: 77). Indeed, he maintains that where the expenditure of this force is impeded it becomes desire or aversion: pleasure where the desire is ultimately satisfied and pain where the contrary takes place. The key critical point is that from this it does not at all follow that the stored-up activity unfolds itself solely or largely for the sake of pleasure and with pleasure as the motive: 'Life unfolds and expresses itself in activity because it is life ... Before all we must live; enjoyment comes after' (1913: 90; 1889: 77). If there is pleasure, then this is something that accompanies the unfolding of life and its intensification; it does not provoke it. Additionally, as Guyau explains in the *Esquisse*, while the utilitarian perspective considers only the final cause and takes this to be pleasure, if one takes the efficient cause seriously then pleasure shows itself to be a secondary and derived phenomenon: pleasure stems from the action and expansion of life that causes it. Life can be said to be the transitive cause of pleasure (1913: 247; 1889: 210–11).

5. Conclusion

Guyau's achievement is to provide a naturalistic and immanent explanation of morality that also allows for ethical experimentation and development. In this respect, he is a pioneer who merits being ranked alongside the great 'immoralist' Nietzsche, and who spoke of 'brave Guyau' (1998: 525). However, it is clear that Guyau departs from the core principles and assumptions of Nietzsche's thinking, notably the latter's emphasis on the will to power p. 149 ↳ as the core principle of a philosophy of life, and the emphasis on a radical aristocratism. For Guyau, life is expansive in the sense of a need to share: '[i]t is as impossible to shut up the intelligence as to shut up flame' (1913: 247; 1889: 210). This means that human nature is sociable and cannot be entirely selfish even if it wished to be: '[w]e are open on all sides, on all sides encroaching and encroached upon ... *Life is not only nutrition*; it is *production and fecundity*' (1913: 247; 1889: 210.). It is this fecundity of life which reconciles egoism and altruism. Guyau thinks that an evolutionary growth can be located in the development of human nature in which, from a growing fusion of sensibilities and the increasingly sociable character of elevated pleasures, there arises a superior necessity that moves us towards others and does so naturally and rationally: '[w]e cannot enjoy ourselves in ourselves as on an isolated island ... Pure selfishness ... instead of being a real affirmation of self, is a *mutilation of self*' (1913: 249; 1889: 212), and, as he puts it in his study of Epicurus: '[m]y pleasure, in order to lose nothing of its intensity, must preserve all of its extension' (2002: 384).

As we have seen, Guyau's reflections on morality begin with a diagnosis of an epochal crisis. We have reached a moment in history where the possibility of revering or making reference to transcendent laws has been exhausted. This diagnosis appears under different aspects in Guyau's work, and one of the symptoms of this crisis is—as for Nietzsche—the death of God: the event in which we see the collapse of all transcendent entities or laws that could give us tools to govern our lives. Guyau witnesses the gradual death of the last stronghold of transcendent sanction and obedience in duty. Our modern moral condition is, then, one of crisis, in which we are completely left to ourselves, with no transcendent law or authority to guide us. As we have seen, Guyau illustrates this condition with the image of the great vessel, upon which we stand, realizing that its rudder has been broken. It is our task to make a rudder and chart a course for the ship by

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ourselves: we are left to our own self-government (1913: 5; 1889: 3).[10] However, this situation in which we are abandoned to ourselves to the adventure of our own moral experiences, should not be seen as something negative. As Orru has shown, for Guyau, 'anomie is not to be considered an evil or illness of modern time, but its distinguishing quality' (1983: 503). Indeed, as we have seen, in the absence of apodictic, fixed and universal rules, new possibilities of freedom arise, and in this sense the anomic condition can make space for the 'greatest possible diversity of action and the greatest variety of ideals pursued' (Guyau, 1913: 166; 1889: 139).

For Nietzsche, the diagnosis of this crisis takes up the form of a critique of nihilism. Like Guyau, Nietzsche stresses the sense of abandonment caused by the collapse of a moral interpretation of the world based upon transcendent values: 'The end of the moral interpretation of the world, which no longer has any sanction after it has tried to escape into some beyond, leads to nihilism' (Nietzsche, 1968: 7). In a condition of nihilism the highest values devalue themselves and the aim (what Nietzsche calls the '*Wozu*?'), which we believed to be transcendent, now appears to be lacking. The nihilistic experience of groundlessness and meaninglessness is linked to an 'old habit of supposing that the goal must be put up, given, demanded *from outside*—by some *superhuman authority.* Having unlearned faith in that, one still follows the old habit and seeks *another* authority that can speak *unconditionally* and command goals and tasks' (1968: 16). However, there is no such authority, and we can now no longer evade 'the risk of positing a goal for *oneself*' (1968: 16).

p. 150 Both Guyau and Nietzsche show the extent to which transcendent values and categories have failed to sustain action and life, and both search for an immanent and natural principle that could support the creative and experimental aspect that morality now needs to assume: for Nietzsche this is the will to power; for Guyau, it is the fecundity of life. Both seem to show that the models of morality that have led to this crisis have done a disservice to life. In the case of Nietzsche, one has devalued this earthly world in the name of other-worldly values, which would transcendent the realm of becoming and belong to a 'true world'. In the case of Guyau, morality has been conceived of as sanction grounded on the transcendence and universality of the law, ignoring the fundamental movements and tendencies of life. Finally, both seem to suggest that, once the realm of transcendent value and moral law has collapsed, ethics becomes a task, an adventure, rather than a matter of obedience. Both propose that rather than conceiving morality in terms of obedience to a universal law, human beings are now faced with the challenge of experimentally positing goals and freely accepting the risks involved in this positing.

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Notes

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4 See, for example, Thomas Whittaker's essay from 1889 (*Mind,* IV, 16), followed by an 1890 text by James Sully (*Mind,* XIV, 54).

1 Namely, *Première Année de lecture courante* in 1875, *l'Année préparatoire* in 1884 and *l'Année enfantine* in 1883. Guyau's method for teaching to read and write was widely used in French schools, and it was later named '*méthode Guyau*'.

2 During his lifetime, Guyau published *La morale d'Épicure* in 1878, *La morale anglaise contemporaine* in 1879, *Les problems d'esthétique contemporaine* in 1884, the *Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction* in 1885 and, finally, *L'irreligion de l'avenir* in 1887. In 1889, Fouillée edited and published two of Guyau's unpublished manuscripts: *L'art au point de vue sociologique* and *Education et hérédité*. In 1900, he edited and published Guyau's *La genèse de l'idée de temps*.

3 In her preface to her translation of the *Esquisse,* Gertrude Kapteyn writes: 'In Guyau, who has not unjustly been called "the Spinoza of France", they will find the inspiration needed for the carrying on of all social efforts and reform' (1898: xii).

5 Exemplified by Spinoza in the Preface to the third part of the *Ethics*.

6 Moore argues that Guyau's work provides an example of the specific latest—or 'evolutionistic'—version of the 'naturalistic fallacy'.

7 'Quantity in the rough meant to him [Guyau] only "power" to which "order" should be added, that is an organization of power in view of some end to be attained. The end always remains to be determined' (Fouillée, 1902: 23).

8 'The natural direction of life which Nietzsche takes into account is one thing; the ideal and the moral directions which we should impress upon it by a deliberate act of the will is quite another thing. If morality consisted of nothing more than living, then we should all be moral, the misfortune is that in certain cases morality consists in dying' (Fouillée, 1902: 23).

9 'Is it true that there exists a natural and rational link between the morality of the will and a reward or a suffering caused to the sensibility? In other terms, is it right to associate merit with enjoyment, demerit with suffering? […] Does there exist any sort of reason (exclusive of social considerations) that the greatest criminal should receive, because of his crime, a simple pin-prick, and the virtuous man a prize for his virtue?' (Guyau 1913: 181; 1889: 153–4).

10 The expression 'self-government' is in English in the French original.

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