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Contra Kant and Beyond Nietzsche:
Naturalizing Ethics in the Work of Jean-Marie Guyau[1]

In this essay I propose to examine the contribution the work of Jean-Marie Guyau (1854-88) makes to the articulation of a post-Kantian naturalized ethics. Although a neglected figure today, Guyau was read as making an important contribution to ethics in his own day by the diverse likes of Friedrich Nietzsche, Peter Kropotkin, William James and Josiah Royce. His major work on ethics was published in 1885 and is entitled in English Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction (Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation, ni sanction).[2] Prior to this work Guyau had published studies of ancient and modern ethics, being especially concerned with Epictetus and Epicurus with regards to the ancients and with Darwin and Spencer with regards to the moderns. As one commentator notes, Guyau displays a novel and independent philosophical standpoint and in his work he presents a relentlessly honest criticism of fixed and dogmatic moralities, be they Kantian or utilitarian.[3] The parallels with Nietzsche's project are especially striking, and I shall point out some affinities in what follows. For Nietzsche, conventional and prevailing moralities – what he calls the 'morality of decadence' that considers itself to be 'morality' as such – represent the denial of ascending and affirmative life. Nietzsche wishes, then, to espouse the healthy morality of an ethical naturalism grounded in the instincts of life and that seeks to overturn the core values, as well as moral psychology, of traditional Christian ethics.[4] Guyau too is embarks on a quest for a naturalistic ethics anchored in a philosophy of life that is built on the rejection of the divisive character of conventional morality and that rests on a dogmatic faith. However, Guyau's conception of life departs from the core

assumptions of Nietzsche's thinking of life: whereas for Nietzsche the essence of life is will to power, for Guyau it is fecundity and *amour*, in which the most intensive life is also the most extensive. As one commentator notes, in contrast to Nietzsche's immoralism that of Guyau's stands to reinstate the key virtues of Christian morality.[5] It is no doubt for this reason that in spite of the affinity he felt with Guyau, Nietzsche ultimately regarded him as a mere freethinker and not a genuine free spirit.

As we shall see, Guyau is not a straightforward or simple-minded naturalist, and his work in ethics can be construed as an attempt to fuse in a novel and open-minded manner philosophical idealism with scientific naturalism. In this essay I begin by highlighting key features of his naturalism and his commitment to a philosophy of life. I then devote sections to his attempt to naturalize Kant on ethics and to his attempt to move beyond an Epicurean-inspired ethics. I conclude with a section in which I suggest that his thinking on ethics beyond Epicurean naturalism contains a potent criticism of Nietzsche's position.

Guyau and Naturalism

In Guyau's time there are important debates on the relation between ethics or moral philosophy and the new scientific insights into life. There are important dialogues and cross-fertilizations between German and French philosophy at this time, and for a number of thinkers in both Germany and France the concept of life becomes central as well as the meaning of naturalism and its application to moral phenomena; issues of egoism and altruism and of freedom and determinism. In addition, there are different accounts of

egoism and altruism and the issue of freedom and determinism is made central. There are important dialogues and cross-fertilizations between German and French philosophy at this time. There are important explorations of the meaning of naturalism and its application to moral phenomena. Modern naturalism holds the world of experience, the empirically given coherence of nature, to be the one reality.[6] It is accepted at this time that naturalism can assume different philosophical articulations. Three forms of naturalism are identified, which are idealism, materialism, and monism, and these are seen to generate three systems of thought: theism, atheism, and pantheism. Emerson, for example, was taken to be a representative of idealist naturalism.[7] Guyau write succinctly on his naturalism as follows:

> We are content to admit, by a hypothesis at once scientific and metaphysical, the fundamental homogeneity of all things, the fundamental identity of nature. Monism, in our judgment, should be neither transcendent nor mystical, but immanent and naturalistic. The world is one continuous Becoming; there are not two kinds of existence nor two lines of development, the history of which is the history of the universe (Guyau 1962 p. 494).[8]

Guyau takes naturalism to consist in the scientific view that nature, together with the beings that compose it, make up the sum total of existence. The problems that confront the philosophical naturalist include determining the essential character of existence (for the likes of Guyau and Nietzsche this takes the form of developing a notion of 'life'), ascertaining which mode of existence is most typical, and seeking to determine whether existence is material or mental, or perhaps both. The dominant view at the time is a double-aspect theory centred on the two inseparable correlatives of the subjective and the objective, or consciousness and motion (a view held, for example, by the likes of Taine and

Théodule Ribot). The task is one of determining which one of these is the most original and primary, and this gives rise to the two main philosophical positions of idealism and materialism. Where idealism dissolves reality into thought (psychical existence is a matter of thinking, feeling, and willing, in which life is the subject of conscious effort), materialism accords consciousness and will a merely epiphenomenal status.

Guyau's philosophical motivation for adopting a naturalistic approach is his rejection of what he sees as the limitations of idealism and materialism. Modern science, especially in evolutionary theory, offers a promising way of overcoming the limitations of idealism and materialism and offering a genuine naturalism. In fact, Guyau argues that the two aspects should be viewed as possessing a certain unity and the human mind needs to follow out the two lines to the point of their intersection: 'We live in the universe, and the universe lives in us' (ibid. p. 481). Guyau refuses to choose between idealism or materialism simply because he thinks our knowledge of reality has a long way to go. There is a form of idealism that is least incompatible with the theory of evolution and the facts of both natural and human history and paying attention to these facts is Guyau's primary concern in order to defeat transcendentalism. This kind of idealism also allows scope for the religious sentiment freed from mysticism and transcendence. The problem with materialism is its dependence on one of the most vague terms in science, namely, matter, and he recommends that materialism and atheism need to enlarge themselves to stop themselves from becoming dogmatic. A key question facing naturalists and evolutionists is whether the universe is made up solely of dead matter or whether the universe is everywhere alive. If we declare matter to be the sole reality analyzable into force, do we not

then have to recognize that force is a primitive form of life? A problem that occupies a number of philosophical minds at this time, and in the decades to come (Bergson, for example), is the need to think life and evolution in a way that is attentive to the problem of anthropomorphism. For example, when pure materialism results in an abstract mechanism is this actually the case with respect to reality or are we simply abbreviating reality so it accords with the laws and mechanisms of human logic and thought?[9] Guyau's worry is that materialism, no less than idealism, belongs to the 'poetry of metaphysics' (ibid. p. 490), and he thinks that both science and philosophy will make more progress if they now work with a concept of life and investigate it free of moral and metaphysical prejudices. This will have enormous implications, he thinks, for our understanding of morality and of the human animal as the moral animal: 'Morality in the beginning is simply a more or less blind, unconscious, or at best, subconscious, power' (ibid. p. 496).

The basic principle of Guyau's naturalism is the one established by modern science: man is not a separate being different to the rest of the world and the laws of life are the same from the top downwards on the ladder of life (Guyau p 86; p. 73). Guyau's appeal at the time was as the 'Spinoza of France'. His aim was to promote a renewal of ethics in the face of the rise of mechanical materialism to a position of intellectual dominance in which there would be a focus on emotional and reflective activity in contrast to the exclusive attention paid to physical and external phenomena. The influence of Darwin and evolutionary theory on Guyau is immense. He makes frequent recourse to natural and sexual selection to explain various human phenomena, including moral ones such as

courage for example. His appropriation of the Darwinian revolution for ethics is incisive and novel. In the preface to his book, Guyau expresses his chief concern:

> Apologists who defend a particular system of morals or religion have never proved anything, for there always remains one question which they forget – namely, is there any true religion or true morality? (p. 68; p. 58)

Statements such as this resonate with the perspective Nietzsche develops in chapter five of Beyond Good and Evil, starting with aphorism 186 and its criticism of any and all attempts to establish ethics (der Ethik) on a real foundation (das *eigentliche* Fundament), which is something, Nietzsche claims, moralists have been seeking for thousands of years like the philosophers' stone. For Guyau a scientific conception of morality cannot be expected to agree with the general conception of morality since the latter is composed for the most part of prejudices and feelings. Attempts have been made to do this in ethics, such as Bentham's utilitarianism, but, Guyau argues, this has been at the expense of violating the facts. Moreover, for him the scientific spirit is 'the revolutionary spirit' since it is the enemy of all instinct, the dissolving force of everything nature has bound, and the struggle against the spirit of authority that is at the root of all societies and also that which is in the depths of conscience (p. 132; p. 111). In following habits, instincts, and sentiments human beings, he argues, are obeying not some mysterious obligation, but 'the most general impulses of human nature' along with the 'most just necessities of social life' (p. 4; p. 2).

Guyau's thinking takes its bearings from a number of influences. On the one hand he is strongly influenced by naturalist and positivist developments and on the other by an idealist legacy. He has respect for three works of modern moral philosophy: Spencer's Data of Ethics; Hartmann's The Phenomenology of the Moral Conscience; and Alfred Fouillée's The Criticism of Contemporary Moral Systems. Naturalism offers, to its credit, no unchangeable principles either with regards to obligation or sanction; idealism can furnish at best only hypothetical and not categorical imperatives. As one commentator on Guyau has noted, his goal is to provide a satisfactory holistic approach to modern ethics since positivist and idealists consider only one aspect, either the factual or the ideal, at the expense of the other. Thus a proper account of the dynamics of moral life must account for both moral ideas and moral actions.[10] For Guyau 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' (p. 6; p. 4). For Guyau, a chief characteristic of the future conception of morality will be 'moral variability': 'In many respects this conception will not only be autonomous but anomos' (ibid.).[11] Spencer's theory is to be preferred over Hartmann's metaphysical monism, which posits the folly of the will to live and the duty of nirvana logically imposed by reason, since the latter rests on 'transcendent speculations' and the former can admit of an empirically demonstrable and verifiable plurality of values and value-systems. He departs from Spencer, however, in his conception of the conciliation of individual and social life, though the grounds on which he does this I am unable to explore here.

Guyau and Ethics

The absolute has changed 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 certain kind of fanaticism – perhaps less dangerous that the religious kind but not without its dangers and inconveniences (p. 53). According to Guyau, we are witnessing today the decline of religious faith and this faith is being replaced by a dogmatic faith in morality. Although its fanaticism may be less dangerous than the religious sort it is equally menacing. The new voice is conscience and the new god is duty:

> The 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 some day (p. 63; p. 54).

The belief in duty is so questionable because it is placed above the region in which both science and nature move (p. 64; p. 55). Guyau maintains that all philosophies of duty and of conscience are, in effect, philosophies of common sense and are thus unscientific, be it the Scottish school of 'common sense' derived from Thomas Reid or neo-Kantianism with its assumption that the impulse of duty is of a different order to all other natural impulses. Phrases such as 'conscience proclaims', 'evidence proves', 'common sense requires' are as unconvincing as 'duty commands', 'the moral law demands'. Guyau, by contrast, appeals to scientific truth, which he conceives not as brute fact but as a 'bundle of facts', a 'synthesis' not simply of the felt and the seen but of the explained and connected. What lies outside the range of our knowledge cannot have anything obligatory about it, and

science needs to replace habituated faith. Like Nietzsche, Guyau recognises the paradox – we immoralists remain duty-bound and freely impose on ourselves a new, stern duty (BGE 226). Guyau calls this 'the duty of being consistent to ourselves, of not blindly solving an uncertain problem, of not closing an open question'. In short, the new method of doubt is not without its obligations and cannot be (p. 68; p. 58). The extent to which Nietzsche empathized with Guyau on these issues cannot be underestimated.

Guyau asks, 'what is the exact domain of <u>science</u> in moral philosophy (<u>la morale</u>)?' (83; 71) Metaphysical speculation beyond the empirically given and ascertainable can be permitted in moral philosophy but the most important task is to work out how far an exclusively scientific conception of morality can go. Guyau inquires into the ends pursued by living creatures, including humankind. The unique and profound goal of action cannot, he argues, be 'the good' since this is a vague conception which, when opened up to analysis, dissolves into a metaphysical hypotheses. He also rules out duty and happiness: the former cannot be regarded as a primitive and irreducible principle, whilst the latter presupposes an advanced development of an intelligent being. Guyau, then, is in search of a natural aim of human action. The principle of hedonism, which argues 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 springs of conduct has only to reckon with conscious motives, would mean being the dupe of an

illusion (p. 87; p. 74). Although he does not enter into the debate regarding the epiphenomenalism of consciousness, except to note it as a great debate in England (he refers to the likes of Henry Maudsley and T. H. Huxley), 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 <u>constant cause</u> of more or less unconscious movements. In reality, the ends are but <u>habitual motive causes become conscious of themselves</u>' (ibid.).

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' (p. 135; p. 114). The chief problem thrown up 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 (D preface; KSA 12 2 [191]; WP 399). 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 any extra-social sanction (p. 140; p. 117). Guyau's conception of the future of morality differs from Nietzsche 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 <u>social</u> and <u>sociable</u> being' (pp. 140-1; p. 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 of moral obligation (p. 160; p. 134). 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 (for example, placing the stress on questions of hygiene) and in terms of an experimentation:

> There 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 of hypotheses (p. 165; p. 139).

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. Although Kant begins a revolution in moral philosophy by seeking to make the will autonomous, as opposed to bowing before a law external to itself, he stops halfway with the constraint of universality of the law. This supposes 'that everyone must conform to a fixed type; that the ideal "reign" of liberty would be a regular and methodical government' (ibid.). Guyau argues that true autonomy must produce individual originality and not universal uniformity. The future of intelligence 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.

He envisages an end to penal justice (p. 182; p. 154), which again brings him remarkably close to Nietzsche who expresses the desire to restore innocence to becoming and purify psychology, morality, history, and nature of the concepts of guilt and punishment (The Will to Power section 765). Moreover, his championing of a 'truly scientific and philosophic mind' as one which does not entitle itself to possession of 'the whole truth' and whose only faith is that of continual 'searching' brings Guyau close to the free spirit Nietzsche celebrates in aphorism 347 of The Gay Science as the enemy of fanaticism (p. 170; p. 143).

Ethics concerns itself with achieving harmony between the two spheres of existence, unconscious and conscious, and this may reside in living life in 'the most intensive and extensive possible' so as to increase the force of life (p. 245; p. 209). In the sphere of life we necessarily deal with 'antinomies' (conflicts, contestations, etc); the moralist is always tempted to resolve them once and for all by appealing to a law superior to life: 'an intelligible, eternal, supernatural law' (ibid.). But we need to give up making this appeal to such a law. The only possible rule for an exclusively scientific moral philosophy is that it is a more complete and larger life that is able to regulate a less complete and smaller life. Again, we find this echoed in Nietzsche when he writes in the 1886 preface to volume one of Human, all too Human that it is necessary, 'to grasp the necessary injustice in every for and against...life itself is conditioned by the sense of perspective and its injustice'. The greatest injustice is to be found in a state 'where life has developed at its smallest, narrowest, and neediest'. Nietzsche wishes to aid the cause of what he calls the 'higher, greater, and richer' life.

Contra Kant

With respect to Kant, Guyau notes, like philosophical predecessors such as Hegel, the formalist character of his 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' (p. 57; p. 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 empiric laws (ibid.).

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: an intelligible and supra-natural law generates a pathological and natural sentiment, namely, respect. 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.[12]

Guyau cannot see any reason *a priori* why we should connect sensible pleasure or pain to a law that would, hypothetically, be suprasensible. Equally, can duty be detached from the character and qualities of the things we have do to 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 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 (pp. 232-3; p. 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…' (p. 59; p. 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' (p. 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' (p. 52). Indeed, if pureness were pushed to its utmost limit we would have the indifference of the senses and the intellect, and not 'that definite state of the intelligence and the senses which is called

the *affirmation* of a law and the *respect* of a law' (ibid); in short, there would be nothing for human judgment and sentiment to work upon.

In addition, we can state the critical point that the will cannot be indifferent to the aims it is seeking to pursue or promote. Guyau 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!' (ibid.; see also pp. 218-20; pp. 186-8) Nietzsche describes Kant's ethics a form of 'refined servility' (GS 5). Guyau makes the same criticism of Kant 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 (p. 67; p. 57). He then closely echoes Nietzsche when he argues, 'While 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?' (ibid.)[13] As Nietzsche points out, one's judgment that 'this is right' has a pre-history in one's instincts, likes and dislikes, experiences (including the lack of them), and so on (The Gay Science 335).

Guyau does not dispute that Kant's thinking on ethics is without importance or merit; indeed, he holds the theory of the categorical imperative to be 'psychologically exact and deep' and the expression of a 'fact of consciousness'. What cannot be upheld, however, is the attempt to develop it without the requisite naturalistic insight in which what we take to be a practical, internal necessity will be demonstrated to be an instinctive,

even mechanical, necessity (pp. 102-3; p. 89).[14] In short, Guyau holds that there is within us a primitive, impersonal impulse to obey that is prior to philosophical reasoning on 'goodness', but our understanding of this needs to be opened up to naturalistic and critical inquiry. For Guyau 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' (p. 117; p. 98). In addition questions of 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'? (p. 121; p. 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' (p. 170; p. 144).

Life and Pleasure: Beyond Epicurus

Guyau is in search of a natural aim of human action. The principle of hedonism, which argues 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 springs of conduct has only to reckon with conscious motives, would mean being the dupe of an illusion (p. 87; p. 74). For Guyau the cause operating within us before any attraction of pleasure is 'life' (p. 247; p. 210). Pleasure is but the consequence of an instinctive effort to maintain and enlarge life, and nature is to be regarded as self-moving and self-governing. Guyau writes:

> One does not always act with the view of seeking a *particular pleasure* – limited and exterior to the act itself. Sometimes we act for the pleasure of acting…There is in us an accumulated force which demands to be used. If its expenditure is impeded, this force becomes desire or aversion; if the desire is satisfied, there is pleasure; if it is opposed, there is pain. But it does not follow from this that the stored-up activity unfolds itself solely *for the sake* of pleasure – with pleasure as motive. Life unfolds and expresses itself in activity because it is life. In all creatures pleasure accompanies, much more than it provokes, the search after life (p. 90; p. 77).

For Guyau, Epicurus, along with his faulty thinking about evolution, in which pleasure is said to create an organ's function, needs correcting on this point. In addition, he argues contra Bentham that 'to live is not to calculate, it is to act' (p. 247; p. 211). An essentially Spinozist position – the tendency to persist in life is the necessary law of life – is deduced: 'The tendency of the creature to continue in existence is at the root of all desire, without forming in itself a determinate desire' (p. 92; p. 79). 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' (p. 88; p. 75). Therefore, Guyau reaches the conclusion that the part of morality that 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' (ibid.). His ethics centre, 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 (p. 89; p. 76). Like Spinoza and Nietzsche, Guyau thinks that 'becoming-active' is the cure to many of life's ills and to passive pessimism (see also pp. 175-8; pp. 148-51).[15] When Guyau argues that all action is an 'affirmation', a kind of choice and election, this elicits from Nietzsche one of only four 'bravos' he makes in the margins of his copy of the book (p. 77; 66).[16] A 'superior being' is one that practices 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' (p. 42; p. 35). This finds an echo in Nietzsche when he entertains the idea of a future superior human being as one composed of 'the highest spirituality and strength of will' (The Will to Power 957).

It is clear that Guyau's approach to ethics has its basis in a philosophy of life. For him this rules out any appeal to a supernatural principle to explain morality:

> There is no supernatural principle whatever in our morality; it is from life itself, and from the force inherent in life, that it all springs. Life makes its own law by its aspiration towards incessant development; it makes its own obligation to act by its very power of action (248; 211).

Guyau is interested in the evolution of human life and how this leads to ethical transformations. Although the evolved 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' (p. 113; pp. 94-5). Guyau does not, of course, deny that there is often conflict and disagreement over values and ideals, but at the same 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 (p. 114; p. 95). It's on this point that Guyau thinks we are going beyond the life of pleasures envisaged by Epicurean philosophy. In modern conditions of human social evolution we find that the self distinguishes itself less and less from other selves and, in fact, has more in need of them so as to form itself and flourish. Here Guyau locates an important principle of human evolution: although the point of departure is selfishness, it is such 'by virtue of the very fecundity of all life,' and it is 'obliged to enlarge itself, to create outside of itself new centres of its own action' (ibid). For Guyau, then, human evolution is on the way to an epoch in which primitive selfishness will more and more recede. Compared to the selfish component of our existence, the sphere of altruism is becoming considerably 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 absolutely my own' (p. 115; p. 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 other 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 in the same way as those 'homunculi' of which M. Renan somewhere speaks, 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 (p. 101; pp. 86-7).

Even in the life of the cell we can locate a principle of expansion and one that prevents any individual being sufficient unto itself. Moreover, the 'richest life' is to be found in the life that lavishly spends itself, sacrificing itself within certain limits, and sharing itself with others. The most perfect organism will also be the most sociable being: not simply because this carries with it certain evolutionary advantages but also because it is part of the higher moral development of life itself. It's on this point that Guyau sharply distinguishes himself from the likes of Bentham and the school of utilitarianism. It is within 'the very depths of

our being' that the instincts of sympathy and sociability emerge and that the English school has shown us to be more or less artificially acquired in the course of human evolution, so being little more than adventitious in consequence.

For Guyau the higher life 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' (p. 98; p. 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' (ibid.). Guyau, however, is not utterly naïve in his appreciation of life: he draws our attention to the phenomenon of 'affective debauchery' in which ones lives too much for others and neglects a healthy care of self (p. 99; p. 85). So, although he is keen to attack what he sees as the dogmatism of egoism (p. 76; p. 65), he also appreciates the need for a healthy form of egoism consisting in the cultivation of a care of self.

Guyau is inspired by the idea, which he partly derives from his stepfather Alfred Fouillée, of making the moral ideal strictly immanent, for example, that it is derived from experience. He puts it in his own philosophical language as follows: 'It is from *life* that we will demand the principle of morality' (p. 81; p. 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' (ibid.). Guyau is attempting to explain phenomena of morality, such as sympathy and altruism, including intellectual 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.

Guyau's overriding aim is to establish the foundations of an understanding of moral development through a 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 (p. 89; p. 76). There is a *culture* of human activity in this principle of 'to act is to live', in which, from its point of view, the worst of all vices is laziness and inertia. But what is its relation 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' (p. 90; p. 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. Rather, 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' (p. 90; p. 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 point is this: 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' (ibid.). If there is pleasure then this is something that accompanies the search after life and does not provoke it. The basic idea is that nature is self-moving and self-governing, and as such it becomes superfluous to appeal to a particular motive, such as any special pleasure (p. 91; p. 78). Whilst it can be acknowledged, in accordance with the English school, that consciousness only comes into being with some sensation of pleasure or pain, and in which to act and react is always to enjoy or to suffer, to desire or to fear, it does not follow that this can explain the movement of life: instead of being the deliberate end of action, enjoyment is, like consciousness, merely an attribute of it. Only the distinction between consciousness and the unconscious can make this fact of life intelligible: 'Action springs naturally from the working of life, which is, to a considerable extent, unconscious' (p. 92; p. 79). Guyau is ultimately a Spinozist and re-works Spinoza on this point: 'The tendency of the creature to continue in existence is at the root of all desire, without forming in itself a determinate desire' (ibid.). In short, Guyau is giving priority to a philosophy of life over a philosophy of pleasure. In this philosophy of life a 'science' of morals replaces a 'metaphysics ' of morals, with morality being placed at the limit between the unconscious and conscious spheres, that is, of instincts, habits, and dumb perceptions on the one hand and of reasoning and thoughtful will on the other.

Guyau and Nietzsche

Nietzsche does not refer to Guyau anywhere in his published writings. What can be ascertained of his thoughts about him and his work comes from a few unpublished notes and from the marginal remarks he makes in his copy of Guyau's Sketch (Esquisse). Nietzsche's attitude towards Guyau is ambivalent. On the one hand he calls him 'brave Guyau', and regards him as a courageous thinker who has written one of the few genuinely interesting books on ethics of modern times.[17] On the other hand he thinks Guyau is caught up in the Christian-moral ideal, and partly for this reason he is only a free thinker and not a genuine free spirit. Having noted in this essay a set of affinities between Guyau and Nietzsche, one cannot overlook the differences that ultimately separate the two thinkers. Guyau's philosophy of life departs from the core assumptions of Nietzsche's thinking. For him, life is expansive in the sense of a need to share: 'It is as impossible to shut up the intelligence as to shut up flame' (247; 210). For Guyau human nature is sociable and cannot be entirely selfish even if it wished to be: 'We are open on all sides, on all side encroaching and encroached upon... *Life is not only nutrition*; it is *production and fecundity*' (ibid.). It is this fecundity of life that reconciles egoism and altruism for Guyau. He 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, a kind of duty in fact, which moves us towards others and does so naturally and rationally: 'We 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*' (249; 212). Guyau objects to any ethics of pure egoism: 'We

cannot mutilate ourselves, and pure egoism would be meaningless, an impossibility. In the same way that the ego is considered an illusion by contemporary psychology, that there is no personality, that we are composed of an infinite number of beings and tiny consciousnesses, in the same way we might say that egoist pleasure is an illusion: my pleasure does not exist without the pleasure of others... My pleasure, in order to lose nothing of its intensity, must maintain all of its extension'. Guyau regards morality conceived as *caritas* as the great 'flower of life':

> There is a certain generosity which is inseparable from existence and without which we die – we shrivel up internally. We must put forth blossoms... in reality, charity is but one with overflowing fecundity...(101; 87)

Nietzsche finds this aspect of Guyau's thinking 'incredible'. Like Guyau he wishes to push life in the direction of a maximization of individual difference or 'individual speculation'. Yet in opposition to Guyau, Nietzsche often seems to assume that this entails a radical form of self-sufficiency, associability and incommunicability. Nietzsche stresses that his model of individual experimentalism is incompatible with all or most forms of shared sentiment, especially shared suffering (*Mitleid*).

The difference between Guyau and Nietzsche – at least so far as the thinking on life we encounter in Nietzsche's middle period – centres on their different receptions of Epicurean teaching. It's not that Nietzsche simply puts the emphasis on pleasure, though he certainly wishes his readers to practice a modest existence in accordance with Epicurean principles, and also a non-political existence entailing social withdrawal and seclusion. The

set of commitments Nietzsche displays in his middle period, especially *Dawn*, to small doses, slow cures, and the setting up of ourselves as small, experimental states, is indicative of an Epicurean scepticism about politics on his part. Continuing well into 1883 Nietzsche will write to Gast inquiring as to where and when they will set up their Epicurean garden. By contrast Guyau assimilates core aspects of Epicurean doctrine but goes well beyond it. In particular he criticizes the Hellenistic ideal of self-sufficiency, be it Stoic or Epicurean.

Guyau's attempt to locate the sources of morality in life is ultimately anathema to Nietzsche (life is will to power, he insists in his marginal notes on Guyau's text). For him free spirits need to resist the lure of the altruistic drives and affects, obviously compassion but also sympathy, philanthropy and love. However, let me ask in conclusion: would Nietzsche's ethics, as we encounter it in the middle period, have benefitted from following Guyau in recognizing the value of shared sentiment for human flourishing? Perhaps Guyau's ethics help to clarify an important inconsistency in Nietzsche's perspective. In The Gay Science Nietzsche is acutely aware that the Stoic strategy of eliminating the passions, conceived as a capacity to be affected by external causes, significantly limits on our capacity to flourish (GS 12, 306, 326). Yet Nietzsche follows just this course in rejecting *Mitleid* or shared suffering as a pathological affect that only leads to ill-health (Dawn 134). If, as Nietzsche argues strongly elsewhere overcoming one's *own* suffering is a necessary condition of individual flourishing then *prime facie* there is good reason for supposing that receptivity to and overcoming *others'* suffering can also contribute to one's own and others' flourishing. Nietzsche's justified suspicion that in some cases pity or compassion merely

masks envy should have led him to criticize inauthentic compassion and friendship, not mistakenly and inconsistently sever the ties between shared suffering and shared joy. Even if we are destined to forget Guyau as an intellectual figure, we should not forget his warning that we mutilate ourselves without sharing others' pleasures *and* pains.

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[1] I am grateful to Katerina Deligiorgi for comments that enabled me to finesse the essay and make it sharper.

[2] For the purposes of this essay I have been able to consult the fourth edition of the French from 1896 and the English translation of 1898 based on the second edition. The differences between the different editions are slight. In the citations that follow in the essay the first page reference given is to the French edition, the second to the English translation. Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation, ni sanction (Elibron 2006, based on the edition of 1896); A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction, trans. Gertrude Kapteyn (London, Watts & Co., 1898).

[3] Jeffrey C. Fidler, 'On Jean-Marie Guyau, Immoraliste', Journal of the History of Ideas, 55, 1995, pp. 75-98, p. 76.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 77.

[6] I am developing these insights about naturalism from a number of sources, including Guyau and Harald Höffding's, Modern Philosophers and Lectures on Bergson, trans. Alfred C. Mason (London, Macmillan, 1915). Höffding divides modern philosophers into different groupings: Nietzsche appears, along with Guyau and William James, in the third group 'The Philosophy of Value'.

[7] Emerson's philosophy is described by Guyau as one of 'objective idealism' in which the world is a precipitate of the soul. See J. M. Guyau, The Non-Religion of the Future, introduction by Nahum N. Glatzer (New York, Schocken Books, 1962), p. 482.

[8] In the essay a '1962' reference refers to J. M. Guyau, The Non-Religion of the Future (first published 1887).

[9] Bergson's classic study on this question is, of course, Creative Evolution of 1907. See also the remarks on 'science and anthropomorphism' in a study of 1899 by James Ward, Naturalism and Agnosticism in two volumes (London, Adam and Charles Black, 1906). This work contains an extensive critical treatment of Spencer's naturalism.

[10] Marco Orru, 'The ethics of anomie: Jean-Marie Guyau and Émile Durkheim', The British Journal of Sociology (1983) 34: 4, pp. 499-518, pp. 503-4.

[11] In the French original Guyau employs the Greek for both terms. Guyau's conception of 'anomos' was of course taken up by Emile Durkheim and put to quite different ends in his well-known theory of 'pathological anomie'. For further insight see Orru and W. Watts Miller, Durkheim, Morals, and Modernity (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

[12] I. Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 128.

[13] In GS 335 Nietzsche seeks to show that any attempt to truly know ourselves must have recourse to the intellectual conscience which works as a conscience behind our moral conscience and which may be little more than the product of habitually acquired opinions and valuations.

[14] Guyau's insight seems to anticipate the approach to the categorical imperative Bergson proposes in his Two Sources: 'an absolutely categorical imperative is instinctive or somnambulistic, enacted as such in a normal state…' (1979, p. 26). See also Nietzsche on 'the automaton of duty' in AC 12.

[15] There is an extended treatment on pessimism by Guyau in his Non Religion of the Future, where he treats the same figures that occupy Nietzsche's attention: Leopardi, Schopenhauer, and von Hartmann (Guyau 1962, pp. 457-66).

[16] For Nietzsche's annotation see J. M. Guyau, Sittlichkeit ohne 'Pflicht', trans. Elisabeth Schwarz, p. 286.

[17] Nietzsche, Kritische Studienausgabe 11, 35 [34], p. 525. This note is from May-July of 1885. It begins with Nietzsche noting the deplorable condition of literature on morality in today's Europe and then reviews contributions in the area from England, France, and Germany. Nietzsche singles out Guyau's book for special praise along with Rée's The Origin of Moral Sensations (1877) and W. H. Rolph's Biological Problems (1881). He regards these three texts as the strongest in contemporary ethics.