Moral Values
There are two principal questions in ethical theory. One is psychological and refers to the genesis and nature of moral judgments: what elements of our constitution, what factors in our lives lead us to form distinctions of this kind, and what processes are involved? This question, with which the Ancients were scarcely concerned, was dominant in the eighteenth-century intellectual climate. It frequently involved a confusion between two different problems, the genetic factors of moral judgment and the justification of such judgments. The second question is substantive. It addresses itself to the objects of moral approbation and disapprobation, inquiring into the common quality (or qualities) of the modes of virtue (benevolence, rational self-love, proper action in a given situation, etc.)—in other words, into what makes something right or wrong, good or evil. This will be the subject of the concluding part of our inquiry.

The essential elements which gave impetus to the review of moral values in eighteenth-century France were the secularization of ethics and of the general outlook and the naturalistic analysis of human nature and motivation. "Man in revolt," writes Albert Camus, "is man situated before or after the sacred, and applied to demanding a human order in which all responses are human, that is to say, reasonably formulated . . . revolt is one of man's essential dimensions. It is our historical reality. Unless we flee from reality, we must find our values in it. Can we, far from the sacred and its absolute values, find the rule of conduct? Such is the question posed by revolt." ¹ And such is the question which eighteenth-century moralists undertook to examine and to solve.

¹ L'Homme révolté, 1951, pp. 34–35.
In the first part of this study, we investigated the relation of God and of revealed religions to the foundations of ethics. A belief in either or both enabled many people at that time to find a firm and convenient solution in the form of standards of conduct in conformity with the pronouncements of a superior and all-powerful Being. In the eighteenth-century climate, however, deists, and even nominal Christians, were often swept by the tide of "revolt" to a re-examination of ethics in purely secular terms. In such cases, the existence of God also becomes nominal, in the sense that it is allocated to a metaphysical plane of reality which is not considered as an immediate causative or determining factor in the human order. This secularization is even more certain in the case of the relatively few atheists who led the vanguard of the "rebels." We may pose the problem, as it presented itself, in these terms: Is there a universal, general notion of moral value that will subsist by itself, with no support but that which belongs to human beings and sufficient to constitute moral law or obligation?

The general (though not exclusive) direction will be toward a social norm of value. The process of cultural evolution, in addition to the previously mentioned factors, led to a reaction against "that systematic morality which, attaching itself only to the salvation of the soul, neglected social welfare." Fundamental to the social focus and of broader perspective was the underlying assumption that a valid, workable ethics would have to be human in its terms of reference and human in its goals. Such a framework returns us immediately to the dilemmas of human nature, to which we have given ample consideration. Awareness of these dilemmas led to a number of ethical problems. Does the rule of virtue, for instance, hinge on what the Stoics called the *honestum*, as contrasted with the *utile*? Is the rule of nature an abstract, inner standard? Or should we rather, like Cicero, admire the Stoics but reserve our adherence for a more realistic view, one whose criterion would be appropriateness, looking at men in their actual functioning as social and political animals? Shall virtues be inner-directed, with internal sanctions, or the reverse? Which is paramount, the individual, his obligation to other individuals, or the social group?

The dominant trends are utilitarian—that is, a theory which holds that the right action is the one which will probably produce the greatest amount of pleasure or happiness in the world. In France, however, this theory emerges out of a prior stage, in which “utility” is understood as being primarily and fundamentally utility to oneself. Utilitarianism involves the replacement of “the nature of things” as the support of value (as in Natural Law) by human nature. It implies (consequently, it was thought) replacement of “Virtue for its own sake” by virtue for reward, or satisfactory consequences. The eventual sequel was the idea of “virtue as its own reward,” an almost desperate resort in order to conserve the moral component of value. This was an essential element in the situation as it evolved in France. It resulted from the naturalistic view of human nature in its prevailing form and the founding of ethics upon it, and from the end of heaven and hell. It was also one outcome of relativism which, denying absolute standards and inherent value, left utility as a touchstone. As Vauvenargues expressed it, “there is nothing which cannot be good or bad, useful or harmful, according to the occasion and the circumstances.”  

The atheist, in particular, found all acts to be equivalent and without meaning in Nature, or in themselves. However, we shall see that many proponents of Natural Law were also permeated by the same criteria.

While one of the chief weaknesses of eighteenth-century value theory is the confusion of “good” and “right,” we must make that distinction, or else we cannot understand the nature of utilitarianism, or its major fault. For that theory the good is prior to the right, and right may be defined as what is productive of good. In contrast, the traditional moral philosophies had said, “Act out of respect for principle.” Good (advantageous) results may be expected to follow, but they should not determine motivation. In short, other ethical theories do not deny that virtues are useful to mankind; on the contrary, it may be assumed that the original approbation of an act or attitude was related to its value as a universal, for mankind, and indeed, this is not excluded from Kant’s categorical imperative. What is excluded is the judgment that what is useful, to the individual, the majority, or the whole community, is ipso facto right or virtuous. What is included is the

supposition that moral imperatives might, in particular situations, be disadvantageous to individuals, the majority, or the whole community, and nevertheless be right and virtuous. Right and utility, in other words, are distinct, though not unrelated principles, and the former is not exclusively definable and justifiable in terms of the latter. For the utilitarian, acceptance of moral truths and values depends on proof of their validity in the form of evident social welfare or personal happiness. This is expressed most clearly by a utilitarian theologian, Father Castel: “Utility is an inseparable companion of virtue. The rules of morality are always advantageous to him who follows them; and they would cease to be rules, if they ceased to be useful. That is why some great men have taken happiness for the principle of morals.”

Another consequence of utilitarianism is evident in the last quotation. This is the shift in the object of judgment from intention to result. The utilitarian view has its source in the reduction of all motivation to self-love (or self-interest), and it finds this reduction convenient for its purposes. The whole problem of moral judgment is— or rather appears—simplified. The difficulty of judging intention is obviated—as indeed it must, since there is only one form of motivation and that one nonmoral. We are left only with the value of the act, in terms of that same motive. Benevolence is, on this view, a kind of act which happens to satisfy selfish desires in a way that is useful to others. Motive is not involved in the term. To take care of a child, or to neglect him (to use Ferguson’s example), derives from the same intent of self-gratification, but the results of the act are distinct. Or, to state the matter in a different way, Adam Smith agreed with Mandeville’s analysis (which was that all acts result from self-interest, or “vice”), but concluded that the meaning of terms must be altered. “If it be vice that produces all the good in the world, then there is some-

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5 In Sabatier de Castres, Dictionnaire, II, pp. 394–95. Augustine had faced a similar dilemma. He opposed the Gnostic heresy because he realized that its demand that Christianity bring about the kingdom of God on earth could lead to the view that Christianity is justified by its utilitarian values, or else must be considered false.

6 This is certainly not true for Shaftesbury or Hume, both of whom think in terms of social welfare. However, neither one is a categorical utilitarian. The analysis in this chapter is concerned essentially with the development of French thought, even though English moralists are brought in for analogical and comparative purposes. We should note, in this regard, that the great British utilitarians, Bentham and Mill, were not primarily concerned with motivation.
thing the matter with our terminology; such vice is not vice but good." Rejecting the rigorism that gave rise to his paradox, Mandeville "set up instead a utilitarian scheme of ethics." 7

The evolution of thought in the eighteenth century which issues in utilitarianism reveals a definite pattern. The revolt against traditionalism begins with the assertion of egoistic hedonism, that is, with the demand for self-gratification. Then a major change of emphasis takes place when the locus of value is shifted to social utility: virtue, or duty to others becomes supreme, but conceived only as a function of duty to oneself. Identity of self-interest and the general interest is usually implied. Finally, love of virtue, in some instances, becomes transformed into an end, and the meaning of virtue into sacrifice of individual interest. Thus, what begins in self-centered egoism terminates at the opposite pole, in other-centered altruism, after passing through the major phase of a general theory of utilitarianism. In all of these developments, the emphasis is on the criteria of good acts rather than on motives.

This statement of evolutionary pattern must, however, be qualified. Altruism receives limited expression among philosophical writers, and is to be found mostly in sentimental middle-class literature. The movement from one phase to another is a matter of emphasis and diffusion, but is not exclusive; on the contrary, all three phases may be said to exist simultaneously, to some extent, at any and all moments. Finally, the utilitarian patterns, which are dominant and characteristic, do not exhaust the phenomena. The traditional ethics remains alive, especially among religious writers; since it contains no novel elements, before Kant, it is not of great interest. On the other hand, the original assertion of egoistic hedonism refuses to become completely sublimated into the socially centered developments. It not only persists in its original form of moderate epicureanism, but becomes transformed into a movement of extreme rebellion, nihilism, which is of great significance in the history of our culture. Such was the actual complexity of eighteenth-century intellectual history.

When we speak of utility, we must have an object in mind, which is the definition of the useful. For the vast majority of men in the eighteenth century, there is no doubt what this object was—happiness. It is therefore improper to study utilitarian ethics and

7 F. B. Kaye, in The Fable of the Bees, CXXX.
the question of happiness as separate phenomena. In view of the near-universality of psychological hedonism (which we examined in the first part of this work), happiness seemed the only justifiable value, since it was the only natural motive and goal of action. The whole psychology of the period—sensationism, association of ideas, pleasure and pain, the natural laws of conduct—plus the prevailing mores and social atmosphere, led to formulations such as that of John Gay: “obligatory acts are those which lead to happiness.” Or as Diderot put it, “there is only one virtue—happiness.” A large part of French philosophy and literature became the expression and validation of egoism and the search for pleasure, with particular emphasis—in both forms of writing—on sexual excitement and satisfaction.

One may appropriately speak of a universal, omnipresent preoccupation with the question of happiness—its justification, its relation to ethics, its nature, and the ways of realizing it. In 1759, for instance, two tales were published in which happiness is the basic theme. One was *Candide*, the other Johnson’s *Rasselas*. Both may be summarized (though *Candide*, of course, is far more complex), in the phrase which is the *leitmotiv* of *Rasselas*, “Surely happiness is somewhere to be found.” From one viewpoint, then, the eighteenth century is a prolonged quest for happiness. Now, happy people are not obsessed by the search for happiness. Behind the search lies an anguished soul which is really seeking a meaning for its life. In most writers there is an uncertainty, an ambiguity about happiness which underscores the moral crisis.

The crisis of ethics had two components. The first was the secret menace of frustration and futility. Could one hold up as the highest value and devote his life to a goal which might be only a delusion, a phantom, a will o’ the wisp? If this were so, all other values having been subordinated to it, there could only be a total

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8 *An Age of Crisis*, Section III, “Human Nature and Motivation.”
9 Quoted in Halévy, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
10 The malady lies in the loss of a clear sense of meaning and purpose in life, in a feeling of being adrift and alienated in a world without center or boundaries in place or time, and most of all, perhaps, in the loss of values to direct action and give it meaning. See *An Age of Crisis*, chaps. 1, 2, 3, and my article, “Hamlet, Don Quijote and la Vida es Sueño: The Quest for Values.” Boredom, melancholy, restlessness, libertinism are the symptoms. Paul Hazard simplifies the true picture and paints only the optimism (*La Pensée européenne au XVIII*e Siècle, 1946, I, chap. 2).
11 The metaphysical doctrine of optimism for a time acted as a partial sedative to the inner disquiet. Although its overthrow increased pessimism, this only added to the intensity of the preoccupation with happiness.
collapse into nihilism. We shall return to this problem in the course of our analysis. The first component of the crisis was psychological. The second was ethical. If happiness is, naturally, the highest value, what becomes of moral virtue? To establish and validate moral values, it seemed necessary, in this situation, to follow one of three courses: to accept as absolute the supernatural commands of Revelation, to validate supranatural and "contranatural" criteria of reason and culture, or, remaining within the natural, to forge an inseparable link between happiness and virtue. The first solution had lost its force. The second might defeat the very object of individual happiness. As Victor Riquetti de Mirabeau wrote, "Virtue, which some want to make the spring of republics, is a prejudice against nature, one which dedicates the individual to the maintenance of public security against the extension of his personal property." The third solution had as its flaw the subjectivism of happiness. It might also lead, like the second, to a social tyranny, which is a confession of nihilism.

In an association of virtue and happiness, it is possible to emphasize one term or the other. Virtue frequently becomes the dominant consideration, and happiness its support or substantiation, replacing the traditional imperatives. But very often, too, happiness remains paramount, and virtue is only a useful means. The difference is tenuous, and ambiguity is constant. "If all men were capable of possessing a virtue in all its perfection," writes Mably, "it would be unnecessary to ask what is the virtue which, by its nature contributing most to our happiness, should be placed first in order and in dignity." D'Holbach is certain that "it would be idle to speak to men of morals and virtue, if the greatest good for them did not result; a totally gratuitous virtue is not a seductive chimera for beings who desire happiness by a constant compulsion of their nature." Or, to take another out of an endless possibility of examples, there is Meister's definition of ethics as "the science of habits which can perfect our being and lead us to the most constantly happy state." We are reminded of Kant's description of the two "ancient Greek schools," both of which "did not allow virtue and happiness to be regarded as two distinct elements of the sumnum bonum," but which differed "as

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12 Quoted by Weulersse, II, p. 94.
13 Principes de morale, Oeuvres, pp. 282–83.
14 La Morale universelle, III, p. 107n.
15 De la Morale naturelle, Londres, 1788, pp. 10–11.
to which of the two was to be taken as the fundamental notion. The Epicurean said: To be conscious that one's maxims lead to happiness is virtue; the Stoic said: to be conscious of one's virtue is happiness.”  

The contrast with the traditional ethics is obvious. As one eighteenth-century priest wrote, “A Christian must posit as a principle that he is on earth only to prepare his salvation.” This was the official view which had prevailed in the seventeenth century—whether it was practiced is another matter. In Guez de Balzac, Pascal, Bossuet, Fénelon, happiness is recognized as the prime human motive and desire, but its locus is in the next life, where (if paradise be gained) it is surer, more lasting and more perfect than any earthly simulacrum. From Pascal on, Christians were warned that the quest for happiness could not find its fruition here, and that man's merit and greatness lay elsewhere. “There is nothing so common among men,” admitted Ameline, a Swiss pastor and theologian, “as the desire to live happily in this life: that is the aim and end of all their acts.” But the fact is, he continues, that despite all their efforts, they are not happy. Radix malorum cupiditas. We have a limitless power of desire, but limited powers of realization. The end of our actions should therefore be the divine and infinite goods, but this is too much to ask of men (“man is always man, and by himself he can do nothing which is not human”) without God's grace.

It is easy to see why so many revolted against the Christian ethics as a fraud and a hypocrisy. Not only does it ask men to give up the reality of pleasure for the uncertainty of election to an unprovable paradise. Far more important, it admits—as Ameline does quite frankly—that all good is valuable only for the pleasure it gives, or will ultimately give us. If this is so, why turn aside from the pleasure at hand, and on what grounds condemn pleasure, when it is the motive and reward used by God himself? Christianity, it is true, at other times lauded suffering as humiliation of the ego, acceptance of God's will, and the path to heaven. But few Christians dared to advance this thesis in a climate which

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16 Critique of Practical Reason, pp. 207–8. Kant goes on to show that virtue and happiness are “two extremely heterogeneous notions.”
17 Collet: Traité des devoirs des gens du monde, 1763, chap. 1.
18 L'Art de vivre heureux, 1667, pp. 1, 17 ff.
19 Ibid., p. 62–63.
would have rejected it out of hand, which was in rebellion against needless suffering on earth, and thought that the reasonable way to live was to enjoy life as much as possible.²⁰

The demand for happiness here and now produced a moral crisis which involved Christianity, even as Christianity, in its early centuries, had been obliged to fight a similar demand for happiness and justice on earth. The seventeenth-century Christian and the uncontaminated eighteenth-century Christian, by admitting and emphasizing that the quest for happiness here was an illusion and an inevitable frustration, avoided this crisis. Virtue, even when it thwarted happiness, was the only way to eventual happiness. It was not only right; it was worth-while. The widely read Abbadie, for instance, though not a Jansenist, followed and developed Pascal's analysis of man. Man is a low being, he says, incapable of virtue or happiness, "a phantom that walks amongst such things as have only appearance," the dreams and fictions of self-love, everywhere encompassed by Nothingness. "In time past he is no more, in the future he does not yet exist, in the present he partly is and partly is not. In vain does he endeavor to fix the past by memory, to anticipate the future by hope, that he may stretch the present to a greater length." Everything around him puts him in mind of his end and evokes the dread of death. "'Tis a very grievous thing to a creature that loves itself so well, to behold itself continually dying." Fortunately men are not alone, but have their support in God.²¹ There is no doubt, and no alternative.

We may compare this outlook with that of another Christian some sixty years later. Romilly-fils, writing the article "Vertu" for the Encyclopédie, declares that virtue lies in seeking happiness, and that conversely, virtue is the source of happiness. However, the virtuous are not happy on earth—in fact, the contrary is obvious. Religion alone makes the second statement true, because it gives the hope of later reward and recompense, without which virtue has small attraction, since happiness is the universal motive.

²⁰ In this regard, cf. the following dialogue from a twentieth-century nihilistic novel:

"Oh, you! naturally! You venerate suffering, you Christians!"
"We do not venerate it, we try to accept it."
"That amounts to the same thing."

(R. Merle, Week-end à Zuydecoote, p. 148.)

²¹ L'Art de se connoître soi-mesme, p. 13 ff.
“If virtue is lovable, it is surely because it works for our happiness.” Were this not so, what would virtue, order, universal harmony matter to me? To sacrifice for duty, if we have only this life, to give up all we have, and present happiness, would be the height of stupidity. But is there merit in loving virtue in this fashion? Yes, replies Romilly, “the rather rare merit of recognizing one’s true interests.”

As we have seen so often before, Romilly, in his eagerness to defend his faith and his cause, undermines the cause of morality. If there is no heaven and hell, the materialist and the nihilist are right, and we must seek happiness in whatever way we can. In any case, virtue is no value or obligation in itself. Of course, we must recognize the fact that the concessions made by apologists were simply a change in tactics, not in substance or goal. Moreover, this dilemma into which many Christians drifted was certainly equalled by that of their opponents. In fact, for the philosophes there was not only the problem of virtue and happiness, but this other dilemma: men, most agreed, are unhappy; and yet the philosophes proposed happiness as the goal and highest value. Without God and a future state of bliss, how could this be justified?

The penetration of the dream of happiness was wide and deep. While the Jansenist Arnauld warned men to flee the pleasures of the senses, Malebranche defined happiness as a pleasurable feeling and affirmed that pleasure was God’s way of making us happy. “Pleasure is always a good, and pain is always an evil; but it is not always advantageous to enjoy a pleasure, and it is sometimes advantageous to suffer pain.” Natural Law theory was to become similarly warped. The search for happiness, writes de Vattel, is “our first and most general obligation; since self-love is our first motive, and obligation is only the connection of the motive with the action, the obligation of working for our happiness . . . is the foundation of all the others.” Following this admission, we can

21 Le Franc de Pompignan provides another example. Right would be a meaningless term, he declares, “if it were indifferent, for the happiness or unhappiness of those it obliges, to accomplish it or to thwart it.” There would be no reason to prefer virtue (La Religión vengée, p. 207). Cf. Leibniz, Monadology, pp. 89–90. Cardinal Polignac also defends the same viewpoint, concluding: “Yes, I shall freely admit it; the sovereign good is pleasure; but pleasure taken in its true source.” (L’Anti-Lucrèce, I, p. 64.)


24 Questions de droit naturel, pp. 4–9.
take the next step, says de Vattel, and show that our happiness depends on our perfection and virtue; but happiness is the end and the obligation.

I. Hedonism

Utilitarianism is indissociably tied to happiness, but it is not—as Mill was later to protest—necessarily linked to sensual pleasure. Historically, however, its seeds lay in the hedonistic revolt of the seventeenth-century libertins (continuing certain currents of the Renaissance) against an ethical ideal which, in its other-worldly orientation, required limitation of the ego and its enjoyments, especially in regard to physical and sensual pleasures and the desire for greatness. Lanson, in an article already referred to, has studied the movement for a “secular morality” which gained wide momentum during the latter part of the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century. It was a movement which asserted the legitimacy of our natural demands and satisfactions, and expressed a hatred of suffering, which Christianity was accused of justifying and sanctifying. And so we have the open proclamation of hedonism, an empiricism which locates “good” in a universal form of experience—pleasure.

Some Christians moved rapidly to meet the challenge in a way which was to become widespread in the eighteenth century, by admitting the legitimacy of moderate sensual pleasures. As early as 1667, Ameline conceded that “voluptuousness, or sensual pleasures, are only feelings of love or joy excited in our soul by movements which it knows to be favorable to the constitution of the body.” In fact, Ameline goes even further. Although the surest happiness comes from virtue, he admits that Epicurus was right in saying that nothing, not even virtue, is good except for the pleasure it gives us.\(^1\) Malebranche, though he insists on the qualitative difference between pleasures, also grants that “any pleasure is a good, and at the moment makes the person who enjoys it happy. . . .”\(^2\) The Jansenists, however, remained firm in their refusal to compromise their rigoristic position.

\(^2\) *Op. cit.*, I, pp. 427–28 [1675]. See also Abbadie, *op. cit.*, pp. 299–300. There were similar tendencies in the Quietist heresy.
The hedonistic movement was from the first, and in general remained, a moderate one. There were, to be sure, many exceptions, as is evidenced by libertin verse from Malherbe and Saint-Amant on. But the principal libertins placed themselves under the aegis of Epicurus, that is (as they understood him) of moderate indulgence in all forms of pleasure. Rémond le Grec, Rémond de Saint-Mard, the marquis de Lassay, Baudot de Juilly all belong to the early eighteenth-century group. The latter's *Dialogues sur les plaisirs* (1701) is a delightfully ironic work. One of the interlocutors, d'Ablancourt, protests against the thunder of the preachers:

I am sorry, in truth, that a thousand gentlemen who are friends of mine, who are very virtuous, and who nevertheless carelessly enjoy the delights that life sometimes offers them are in danger of being damned for that. Isn't there any way of extending them a little mercy? Right now I am trembling for myself. I received a present today of two nice-looking melons, and some splendid strawberries. They're not really bad, you know, and it is pleasant to eat them. If every pleasure is a crime, as your Preacher says, I have a grievance against the person who in sending me those fruits . . . thought me wicked enough to enjoy something criminal . . .

Patru disagrees. All voluptuousness degrades man and destroys the Christian by awakening the passions, the greatest enemy of reason. We are born for virtue, and for its recompense, Heaven, and nothing in pleasures leads to God. With women, especially, nothing is innocent, except flight. D'Ablancourt replies that pleasures are made for man, and that man needs them. Virtue and pleasure are not exclusive choices, and only the abuse of pleasure is evil. "It is permissible to live according to nature, which is only God himself." Pleasurable desires are "sacred rights, which one may and should follow . . . We cannot so easily forget we are men, though it is easy to declaim against humanity."  

3 E.g., the following verses, popular in the secret society, "Ordre de la Félicité":

\[
\text{"L'Ile de la Félicité} \\
\text{N'est pas une chimère.} \\
\text{C'est où règne la Volupté} \\
\text{Et de l'amour la mère;} \\
\text{Frères courons, parcourons} \\
\text{Tous les flots de Cythère} \\
\text{Et nous la trouverons."}
\]

(Paul Hazard, *op. cit.*, I, p. 21.)

4 See Lanson, *op. cit.*

5 *Dialogues sur les plaisirs*, I, pp. 36–77, 154–81, 248. By the end of the second volume, Patru is convinced, or, as he says, "perverted." For Rémond le Grec and other early writers see Thémiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe, *Recueil de divers écrits*, 1736.
The Utilitarian Synthesis

One of the most important propagandists for the new epicureanism was Saint-Evremond. To Pascal who had said that man's need to forget himself by means of entertainment is part of his wretchedness, Saint-Evremond replied that it cannot be wretchedness, since it is a way of forgetting it.\(^6\) He candidly says that virtue is a painful state, against inclination; that he prefers *sagesse*, or classical "prudence," indulgent and tranquil, a careful governance of pleasures, the avoidance of passions and commitments. "To live happily, we must reflect little on life, and leave our selves often." Solitude is fatal to happiness. Fame (prestige), wealth, power, voluptuousness, "properly managed," are our refuge from the unhappiness which belongs to life. "But only the enjoyment of pleasure, voluptuousness, in a word, is the true end of all our acts." To avoid anything annoying, to be free and master of oneself—these maxims complete Saint-Evremond's prescription for obtaining what modicum of happiness life has to offer. He wagers against Pascal, and accepts the quest for happiness, imperfect though it is, in this world.\(^7\)

For Fontenelle, too, happiness is an uncertain state. Only illusions make life bearable; thought and truth lead to sadness. New pleasures become new needs. Nature, nonetheless, wants us to live, and to seek pleasure, to strive constantly to make life bearable. But the best we can hope for is a balance of enjoyment and suffering.\(^8\)

Bayle was another pessimistic defender of hedonism. No man is satisfied with his condition, he notes, none, therefore, perfectly happy. Happiness is not in our power, for what life does to us is too important. (Kant will uphold the opposite.) "Are galley slaves, prisoners, sick men happy?" Those whom we think happy, because of outer signs, generally are not. "There are few days when they are not envious of the contentment of mind which they suppose peasants enjoy." \(^9\) But this is all the more reason, according to Bayle, for pursuing pleasure. The only happiness is on earth, so

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\(^6\) Pascal, however, does not deny the *efficacy* of diversion, but only condemns its betrayal of our true condition. Cf. Pensée 171 (Brunschvicg).


\(^8\) *Dialogues des morts*, especially "Parménisque et Théocrête de Chio," "Sénèque et Scarron," "Lucrèce, Barbe Plomberge." See also Vyverberg, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

\(^9\) *Oeuvres diverses*, III, pp. 669b, 669–70. The best of men have had a hard job at times "not to curse the day of their birth. . . . There are more evils than goods." (P. 831.)
God has willed, and all pleasures come from him. "Every pleasure is a good. . . . Sensual pleasures make us happy." God, the sovereign good, is not enough to make us happy. Therefore sensual pleasures do not have any stain, or any fault, which prevents them from making us truly happy. . . . A voluptuary's love of voluptuousness is only the result of the natural tendency of our soul to happiness. Every mind seeks its own good. The soul of a voluptuary finds its good in union with certain bodies. . . . It would seek virtue and piety no less ardently if it found the same pleasure in them. In a word, its disorderliness and crime do not consist in its taking for a good what is not a good, but in its not sacrificing to God its passion to be happy. . . .

The fact is that God has united, for a time, happiness and crime; and a voluptuary will say, "if I were to be eternally in the state in which I am when I enjoy, I should be eternally happy." One cannot deny, then, that any kind of pleasure is a good, and that it gives us happiness, whether it is legitimate or forbidden. Even Paul seems to admit this, since he says that if there were not another life, Christians would be the unhappiest of all men.\(^{10}\)

It is obvious, from these lines, that if one did not choose to wager on the next life, any activity which brings pleasure is as good and valid as any other. Bayle denies that there are any qualitative differences in pleasure and happiness.\(^{11}\) In fact, his reasoning could easily be transposed into one of La Mettrie's or Sade's writings.

The hedonistic movement swells during the first half of the century and continues strongly until its very end. Once again, we may find in the concessions of Christians significant evidence of its pervasiveness. Pleasures, writes the abbé Pluche, "do not dishonor men, since they are the work of God." Only excess or abuse is blameworthy. However, pleasure, he adds, is not the end of man, and he should not live as if it were.\(^{12}\) In fact, the very pessimism about the possibility of obtaining happiness was much to the apologists' liking, and supplied them with a persuasive argument for what they had to offer. These views summarize the defensive stand of Christian apologists, and there is little need to examine the variations of tone.\(^{13}\)


\(^{11}\) See also, *ibid.*, III, p. 891.

\(^{12}\) *Le Spectacle de la nature*, 1746, V, pp. 110-17.

\(^{13}\) Cf., among many others, Trublet, *Essais*, 1749 ("He who knows how to be happy, knows everything. . . . The circle of pleasures cannot be extended too wide. . . .")
Two or three Christian writers, however, deserve particular mention. The *Traité des premières vérités* (1724), a popular work by Buffier, defines good, or goodness, as "nothing but what makes us happy or contributes to it." 14 He admits that any good is useful, since it satisfies us in one way or another, for the moment or for eternity. Every man thinks of himself first and has his own good, corresponding to his own happiness. This must be admitted, although we really ought to reserve the term to "what contributes to the general happiness of all men, or what benefits or seems good to all." We should note, too, Yvon's article "Bien," in the *Encyclopédie*, in which he declares that the argument about sensual pleasure being "false," is itself false; surely, a man knows when he is feeling pleasure. It is also useless to argue that this kind of pleasure is contrary to order; such a person need only reply that he is only seeking his own contentment. The only valid argument is that sensual pleasures are not consistent with happiness because of their consequences; but there is no moral argument against them. The happiness argument is valid, because if the voluptuary answers that he cares only about the present, "I'll say to you that you are not a man in that," for man lives at once in past, present, and future.

Samuel Formey wanted to reconcile Christianity with reason and science. Like so many others, he agrees that "ethics is nothing, or it is the science of happiness." Virtue can best be practiced when one has proper comforts; their lack is an obstacle to morals.15 He dwells on the relation between intelligence and happiness. Intelligent people have stronger perceptions. They are therefore capable of being both happier and unhappier than others.16 We are reminded of Fontenelle, and of Voltaire's later tale, *Histoire d'un bon bramin* (1768). This relation obtains because "the feeling of our state is linked with the ideas we have of other possible states." Thus, too, it is possible to be happy, but not content. "Man's will impels him towards something better, so that contentment is the rarest of states." 17 Nevertheless the fact is that man can act by

Nothing matters but happiness."

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14 Chapter XV.
17 P. 58 ff.
himself only toward happiness and away from unhappiness. It is evident, then, "that all man's duty consists in augmenting his happiness, in preferring the states which will give it to him.... Thus moral duties are all the actions which a man should do for the sole reason that his happiness is involved in them." And in this way we see how Formey, a Protestant defender of Christianity, is led by his desire to absorb the new currents to reduce moral duty to selfishness.

In many of these writers, there is a continued nuance of pessimism. Thus the abbé Trublet writes: "We are not happy; we hope to be. Everybody has in mind a certain situation for himself in which he flatters himself that he will be happier than he is now. Thus happiness is only in the waiting; not only for those who are awaiting it in the next life, but even for those who admit only the present life." As a result, we are all working for happiness to come (which is mainly work for acquisition), and how painful that is!

Among the deists, Shaftesbury and Collins both defended sensual pleasures. Collins, like Formey later, defines virtue and morality as "such actions as are in their own nature, and upon the whole, pleasant," immorality and vice as actions which are painful. Without pleasure or pain, one neither knows right from wrong, nor has any motive to practice it—for there are no other motives.

In France the libertin tradition was continued and strengthened by such writers as Fréret and Meslier. Fréret affirms that there is no happiness other than "the enjoyment of pleasures attached to our needs." Meslier attacks the moral doctrine of Jesus and evangelical Christianity, confusing it (as was frequent) with the Christianity of the eighteenth-century Church. It reverses justice and equity, he charges, and favors the wicked; it perverts the natural maxim: "conquer in order not to suffer," into "suffer in order to conquer."

D'Argens, Toussaint, and Ladvocat all maintained the necessity of pleasure for happiness and defended sensual pleasures taken in moderation. Christian Wolff asserted that happiness is our

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18 P. 80.
22 Oeuvres, III, p. 110.
“capital obligation,” and defined it as “the state in which we enjoy true and enduring pleasure.” Passing pleasures are allowable if they do no harm. Hume went further: “No gratification, however sensual, can of itself be esteemed vicious. A gratification is only vicious when it engrosses all a man’s expense, and leaves no ability for such acts of duty and generosity as are required by his situation and fortune.” Boulanger declared that all happiness is equal, and that knowledge and unsatisfiable desires are its greatest enemies; men who think are “melancholy and thin.”

Maupertuis’ *Essai de philosophie morale* (1749) is one of the more important works of the first half of the eighteenth century. As a scientist, Maupertuis wishes to reduce qualitative to quantitative differences. He defines a happy moment as the time of duration of the perception of a pleasure. There are only two elements in pleasure: duration and intensity. Greater intensity compensates for shorter duration, or the reverse. This leads to Maupertuis’ famous hedonic calculus, or moral arithmetic, which had great influence on later utilitarians: happiness can be calculated as “the product of the intensity of pleasure or of pain and the duration.” This calculus, though not exact, is one that is naturally performed by every man. Good is “a sum of happy moments,” evil a sum of unhappy ones. Happiness is “the sum of goods which remain after one has subtracted all the evils.” Our action should be aimed at preferring the greatest good, thus understood, but everyone must do this in his own way, according to his own tastes.

Despite all this, Maupertuis is pessimistic about the chances. Our search for happiness, necessary and justifiable though it is, cannot be successful. In the average life there is more suffering than pleasure. Pleasure diminishes with its duration, but pain increases. All parts of the body can give us pain, only a few, pleasure. Excess of pleasure produces pain, but the reverse is not true. What is worse, life is a constant series of new desires, and we are always wishing to annihilate the time that separates us from their realization. We should, indeed, if this could be done, live only a few hours. All this time we would wish to annihilate is not

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27 The idea of a calculus had already appeared in Wollaston’s *Religion of Nature Delineated*, 1722, Sect. 2; it was not translated until 1756 (P. Hazard, I, p. 25n).
a happy time. For confirmation, Maupertuis points to the pursuit of entertainment (a flight from the self), and to the use of alcohol and tobacco. Everywhere and at all times, “men have sought remedies for the ill of being alive.” And who would consent to reliving his life? Notwithstanding these dour facts, Maupertuis defends the possibility, through the use of reason, of increasing the proportion of pleasure. Above all, we must dismiss as nonsense the idea that the pleasures of the senses are less noble than others. There is no difference between pleasures except duration and intensity, and “the most noble pleasures are the greatest ones.” 28 Finally, there is no difference among the various ethical systems, Maupertuis maintains, except their method of calculating happiness—all seek the greatest pleasure in one way or another. In the Preface, Maupertuis defends himself against critics of his radical naturalism, claiming that calculation would show that greater happiness comes from the pleasures of virtue. The theory is nonetheless devastating. 29

Montesquieu's ideas about happiness are variable. He is not a hedonist, but recognizes the value of pleasure. At times he is inclined to a mild pessimism. “We must set down the limit which happiness can attain through human nature, and not begin by demanding the happiness of angels,” he notes in his Spicilège. But “everyone throughout life must get as many happy moments as possible.” Business should wait on pleasure, and not the contrary. 30 How shall we find this happiness? In several places, Montesquieu insists that happiness comes from virtue; sobriety, prudence, the good will of others are essentials. 31 But religious notions are excluded; nature and reason are the only resources for man on earth. They may not be sufficient. Much depends on the inherited “disposition of our organs, favorable or unfavorable,” and on the accidents of life, such as wealth. Different people will be happy or unhappy in the same situation. Some are always un-

28 Oeuvres, I, p. 194 ff. In another piece, “Sur le Bonheur,” Maupertuis asserts that the happiness each individual may have is a given constant (II, pp. 95–96).
29 For Kant's criticism of Maupertuis, see Cassirer, op. cit., pp. 150–51. Another criticism is to be found in M. Mendelsohn's Recherches sur les sentiments moraux, Genève, 1763, pp. 24–25. For Maupertuis' theory to be defensible, he charges, we should have to make two suppositions: 1. that all our feelings give us a pure, unmixed pleasure, 2. “that absolutely every displeasure diminishes the sum of happiness.”
30 Pensées, 206, Oeuvres, ed. P. M. Masson, Vol. II.
31 Lettres persanes, X, XII; Pensées, 496: “Let us try to adjust ourselves to this life; it is not for this life to adjust itself to us.”
happy: those who are bored and want nothing, those who want what they cannot have. Some are almost always happy: those who desire keenly and enjoy what is accessible, those “whose machine is so constructed that it is gently and continuously titillated,” even by the little things of life, such as a book or a conversation. On the one hand, Montesquieu warns us that joy is fatiguing in the long run, and continual pleasure is incompatible with keen pleasure. On the other hand, he reassures us that pleasures are everywhere available: “they are attached to our being, and suffering is only an accident. All objects seem to be set out for our enjoyment.” Art completes nature in this regard. The essential thing is to be open and ready to receive these happy moments; happiness consists less in pleasure than in “the readiness to receive pleasure.” Even pain (contrary to what Maupertuis had said) may increase pleasure, as hunger sharpens appetite. We also have the great resources of pride and vanity, and that of hope. In fact, most of our life consists of pleasant hoping—far more than of pleasant possession. This argument, too, contradicts Maupertuis. A simple calculation, then, shows that we are mostly happy. The great enemy of happiness is wanting to be happier than others, “because we believe others are happier than they [really] are.” Maupertuis also erred in his calculus, Montesquieu affirms, by including only pleasures and pains. “He overlooks the happiness of existence, and the habitual felicity which does not obtrude itself, because it is habitual.” It is wrong to say, happiness is that moment which we would not exchange for another. “Let us rather say, happiness is that moment which we would not exchange for non-being.”

With La Mettrie we return to one of the most radical figures of the century. Having disposed of other values, his analysis leaves us only happiness. In *L’Homme machine* (1747) he declares, as others had, that man is “made to be happy,” and so are all creatures, “yes, all, from the worm that crawls to the eagle who is lost in the cloud.” Maurice Solovine comments: “To be happy! this idea alone dominates his thinking about human behavior. It is the cry so often uttered by those who find it hard to support the weight of obligations which so-called civilized society thrusts upon them, without offering them an equivalent individual compensation.”

La Mettrie does not deny that we may derive pleasure and

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28 Penseés, 157, 871, 274, 479, 620. The last thought is similar to one of Formey’s.
29 *L’Homme machine*, pp. 31, 103.
happiness from virtue and humanitarianism; the contrary is true. But he makes no distinctions among pleasures other than their quantitative values. If one finds happiness in virtue, then all we can say is that he is “fortunately born.” In his first important work, the *Histoire naturelle de l'âme*, La Mettrie had asserted that happiness depends entirely on sensations, of which we are not the masters. It follows that we cannot create our happiness, or determine what will give us pleasure. But he then asserts that to look for happiness in thought, or in the pursuit of truth, is vain, for it depends on “corporal causes.” People of quiet and moderate temperaments are most likely to be happy.

La Mettrie’s most important piece on the subject, and his most notorious work, was his *Discours sur le bonheur* (also titled *Anti-Sénèque*, and sometimes referred to in the eighteenth century as *Discours de la vie heureuse*), published in 1748. Boissier summarizes La Mettrie’s thesis in these words: “It is, then, finally, in sensual satisfaction, in the normal accomplishment of organic functions, under the imperious call of needs in a kind of perpetually unstable equilibrium between their requirements and their satisfaction, that happiness lies.” La Mettrie divides pleasurable “modifications” of our organs into three kinds: pleasure (those of short duration), voluptuousness (longer sensations), happiness (permanent pleasurable feelings). He appeals to us to discard illusions; happiness does not come from perfection, virtue, honor, detachment, or serenity. Let us admit “the empire of the senses,” and let us be happy. “The first condition of happiness is to feel.” Feeling is natural to man, but not wisdom or virtue.

This is the only truth that matters—happiness; it belongs to all, wise and ignorant, rich and poor, good and wicked. “Who has found happiness has found everything”—there is no other value. Happiness may come from the organism itself (and this is best), or from such externals as voluptuousness, wealth, prestige. It may

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36 *La Mettrie*, p. 152.
37 *Discours sur le bonheur*, *Oeuvres*, Amsterdam, 1774, II, p. 98.
38 Ignorant people miss some pleasures, but avoid greater suffering. They do not fear happiness-giving illusions, nor care whether the earth turns around the sun or vice versa. “He is clever enough, who is happy enough.” Again, we have the problem which will torment Voltaire in the *Histoire d’un bon bramin*. Thinking “is the poison of life. Reflection is often almost a remorse. On the contrary, a man whose instincts make him happy, is always happy . . . and cheaply.” (*Ibid.*, p. 105.)
also come from inculcated habits (by which term La Mettrie designates moral reactions and conscience). Hedonism, then—although La Mettrie is not consistent on this point—does not exclude virtue, which may, indeed, increase happiness. The virtuous man is happy "with that kind of happiness which belongs to virtue." 40 It is one kind of happiness. In this regard, however, to be taken for virtuous is just as good as to be virtuous. "What does it matter . . . if a man is vicious, if he passes for virtuous?" On the other hand, real virtues that do not bring the desired rewards and satisfactions are useless. The immoralism of La Mettrie's philosophy is evident. We should note his priority of values when he summarizes: "We make the happiness of society with our own." 41 Most of all, we do not have to be good to be happy—the wicked are equally happy, perhaps more, provided they are free from remorse. "It is then very clear that in regard to felicity, right and wrong are quite indifferent; that a person who gets greater satisfaction from doing wrong will be happier than anyone who gets less from doing good . . . there is a special kind of happiness which can be found in vice, and in crime itself." 42 This statement contains the kernel of Sade's philosophy.

Later in the essay, La Mettrie admits his preference for moderation, for the mere satisfaction of needs. Sensual pleasures are too brief, too infrequent, to constitute the permanent state which is felicity; but he insists that there can be no happiness without them.43 "Let us give to nature what belongs to nature." We have, for instance, an urgent, even a daily need for coitus, and this need must not be frustrated. The modification of La Mettrie's extreme sensualism is therefore slight or nonexistent. And soon after we find him telling the voluptuary to forget all else:

. . . nonsense for you, all the stoic virtues; think only of your body. That part of you which is soul is not worth being distinguished from it. . . . Enjoy yourself whenever you can; enjoy the present, forget the past which no longer is, and do not fear the future. . . . Let pollution and orgasm (jouissance), lascivious rivals, follow each other in turn, making you melt day and night with voluptuousness; let them make your soul, if it is possible, as sticky and lascivious as your body . . . or if, not satisfied with excelling in the great art of voluptuousness, if debauch and

40 Ibid., pp. 120–21.
41 Ibid., p. 116.
42 Ibid., p. 139.
43 Ibid., pp. 169–70.
lechery are not strong enough for you, then filth and infamy are your lot; wallow, like pigs, and you will be happy as they are. . . . Let it not be said that I urge to crime; for I urge only to peace of mind in crime. 44

This "invitation" is repeated, in milder form, in *L'Art de jouir* (1751), which is a hymn to pleasure. By severing happiness from right and wrong, by rejecting moral values as inexistente or as untenable compared to pleasure, by legitimizing and equalizing all sources of pleasure, La Mettrie has, in effect, developed the first theory of nihilism in the eighteenth century, and opened the path to Sade.

Buffon is rather less optimistic than Montesquieu, but much more proper than La Mettrie. In the chapter of the *Histoire naturelle des animaux* (1749), entitled "Homo duplex," he distinguishes the soul, which is the source of calm and serenity, of knowledge and wisdom, from the material, animal principle, "a false light which shines only in the tempest and the darkness, a murky torrent which rolls and carries passions and errors with it." 45 But this qualitative distinction has little to do with felicity. We are happy in both states. "In the first, we command [ourselves] with satisfaction, in the second, we obey with still more pleasure." The main point is that there should be no conflict, no tearing in two directions. "It is in this unity of action that our happiness consists: for if by reflection we start to blame our pleasures, or if we try to hate our reason out of violence of passion, we at once stop being happy." Doubt, worry, remorse follow the destruction of unity. Thus far, Buffon's analysis bears a resemblance to La Mettrie's evaluation, especially of remorse. But then he goes off on an original tangent. We are most unhappy, he continues, when both forces are strong and in balance. Then we are subject to boredom and distaste for ourself and for life, and even the body receives injury from the mental anguish. Therefore we are happiest in childhood, when the material principle rules exclusively. Youth is next best, for although the spiritual principle is by then awakened, it is completely overwhelmed by the new surge of material force embodied in the sexual energies, so that unity is conserved. We are far worse off in middle age. By then the dream

and the charm have vanished, leaving indifference [dégoût] and a sickening emptiness. The soul, too weakened to command, seeks another master; one master follows the other, producing ever new disillusionments. Melancholy and depression set in. Perhaps we run after the pleasures of youth; but, as it happens more and more frequently "that we experience pleasure less than our impotence to enjoy it, we are in contradiction with ourselves, humiliated by our weakness," with the result that we end in self-reproach and self-condemnation. Eventually the heart is healed, and a state of apathy follows. Worries about our career, injustices, the fading of the shining goal of glory into "a vain and deceitful phantom" complete the story, and we are left with—boredom, "that sad tyrant of all thinking souls, against which wisdom is less effective than folly." 46

Voltaire had only wrathful scorn for La Mettrie. Yet he, too, began as a pure hedonist, though of the more usual, moderate variety, and he will reiterate La Mettrie's tri-partite division of pleasure, happiness, and felicity. 47 In 1722 he wrote to Mme de Bernières, "The main business of life, and the only business, is to live happily." 48 He quotes the libertin Bernier as saying that "abstinence from pleasure is a sin." 49 In even earlier verses he had heaped scorn on "insane mystics." 50 The famous poem, Le Mondain (1736), continues this hedonism and faith in happiness.

With increasing maturity and schooling in life's disappointments, injustices, and follies, and with the lessons garnered from his study of history, Voltaire's outlook evolves in two ways. He develops a social consciousness which to a considerable extent subordinates his egoism; in this way he may be taken as a model of the general evolution of moral feeling in the eighteenth century. And his optimism gradually wanes. In the 1750's, he undergoes a crisis of pessimism (for personal, political, and metaphysical reasons), from which his later recovery is only partial.

In the well-known Discours en vers sur l'homme (1738), he

46 For a physical analysis of sensual pleasure, see ibid., p. 329.
47 "Heureux," Encyclopédie.
48 Œuvres, XXXIII, p. 62.
49 Ibid., XXXII, p. 544. See also Samson, III, p. 9.
50 "... Qui, dévots fainéants et pieux loups-garous, Quittent de vrais plaisirs pour une fausse gloire? Le plaisir est l'objet, le devoir et le but De tous les êtres raisonnables. . . ." (Ibid., X, pp. 231–32.)
still maintains the possibility of happiness, and its equal availability to all classes. But this goal of life is already only an evanescent quality:

Hélas, où donc chercher, où trouver le bonheur?
En tous lieux, en tous temps, dans toute la nature,
Nulle part tout entier, partout avec mesure,
Et partout passager, hors dans son seul auteur. (Ier Discours)

It is easy to see that Voltaire is already engaged in what will be a great inner struggle for faith in life and in man. A large part of the other discourses in this poem is devoted to prescriptions for happiness, which may be summarized as enjoyment tempered by moderation. Pleasures are like flowers:

Chacune a sa saison, et par des soins prudent
On peut en conserver pour l’hiver de nos ans,
Mais s’il faut les cueillir, c’est d’une main légère;
On flétrit aisément leur beauté passagère. (IVe Discours)

It is not our task here to trace in detail the gradual deepening of Voltaire’s pessimism, which one may follow in many studies devoted to him. We need only note several outstanding statements. Zadig (1747) shows thematically the difficulty of finding happiness even with the best intentions and the greatest care. The article “Félicité” in the Encyclopédie sounds like a mockery of his tripartite definition: “Felicity is the permanent state, at least for some time, of a contented soul, and that state is quite rare.” In the article “Bien, Souverain Bien” (Questions sur l’Encyclopédie, 1756), happiness is now merely “an abstract idea composed of a few sensations of pleasure. . . . If we give the name of happiness to a few pleasures scattered throughout life, there is happiness indeed.” The year 1756, with the Lisbon earthquake, marks the nadir of his faith in happiness—in God and in man, too—a period which continues until the early part of the next decade. The Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne pictures all as sighing and dying in a “fatal chaos of misfortunes.”

Ce monde, ce théâtre et d’orgueil et d’erreur,
Est plein d’infortunés qui parlent de bonheur.
Tout se plaint, tout gémit en cherchant le bien-être. . . .
Quelquefois, dans nos jours consacrés aux douleurs,
Par la main du plaisir nous essuyons nos pleurs,
Mais le plaisir s’envole, et passe comme une ombre,
Nos chagrins, nos regrets, nos pertes, sont sans nombre.
Voltaire's masterpiece, *Candide*, broadens the picture to paint a world of rampant evil, cruelty, and misery. Happiness exists only in the unattainable realm of El Dorado; all others struggle for a taste of it. Another jewel among his tales, *Histoire d'un bon brahmīn* (1761), poses a great humanistic note of doubt, and reveals the intensity of Voltaire's anguish. Indeed, this apologue is of exceptional importance because, beyond Voltaire's personal torment, it reaches and lays bare the great weakness of the eighteenth-century eudaemonistic value system. As several writers had already suggested, thought is the enemy of happiness. With his usual facility for making abstract ideas vividly concrete, Voltaire pits the unhappy, thoughtful brahmin against the ignorant but happy old woman, more beast than human. But he, and everyone Voltaire consults, would rather be the unhappy brahmin than the old woman. How can this be? "For after all, what matters in life? to be happy." Yet we prefer being a man to being happy. "But, after thinking about it, it seems that it is very crazy to prefer reason to felicity." And Voltaire finds no way of explaining the contradiction. He can discover no issue from the dilemma, despite his perception of other values, for he could not quite transcend the value system of his time. Here we see the impasse of eighteenth-century hedonism, its self-defeating character, its ethically unacceptable terminus, the judgment of an act on a quantitative scale of pleasure, subjective and (openly or implicitly) amoral. Voltaire's problem had in fact been solved by Pascal, that great adversary with whom he wrestled for many years, and whom he never completely understood. Pascal had said that happiness is the natural motive of our acts, but he scorned it as the goal of life; man's greatness and dignity lie in his thought which, because it reveals his true position to him, creates anguish in him—the very anguish of Voltaire's brahmin. But without that anguish, one is not fully a man. Voltaire's animosity prevented him from separating the humanistic import of Pascal's genius from his mystical conclusions.

It would be futile to cite the innumerable epigrams in which Voltaire continued to express his disillusionment. They may themselves be epitomized by a line in *Il Faut prendre un parti*

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51 Perhaps (among other things) an ironic commentary on the Marquis de Lassay's kingdom of the Féliciens; see P. Hazard, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 20–21.

52 XXI, pp. 219–21.
(1772): "Man is a very wretched being who has a few hours of relief, a few minutes of satisfaction, and a long series of sorrows in his short life." 53

However, Voltaire's value outlook does evolve, in the displacement of its locus from the self to society, and from hedonistic satisfaction to altruistic beneficence. This change is evidenced in his own life, in his ever-expanding involvement in social problems, cases of injustice, and the welfare of the community in which he lived. It is visible in his increasing emphasis on virtue, and in his constant definition of that word as obedience to law. Typical of his mature outlook is the revulsion he felt for La Mettrie and d'Holbach (though the two should not be coupled). In the Système de la nature he had read these lines: "If man, because of his nature, is forced to love his well-being, he is forced to love the means to it. It would be useless and unjust to expect a man to be virtuous if he cannot without making himself unhappy. If vice makes a person happy, he must love vice." Execrable! cries Voltaire. "Even if it were true that a man could not be virtuous without suffering, we should still encourage him to be virtuous. The author's proposition would be the ruin of society." But the supposition, he adds, is not true; and indeed, d'Holbach's purpose was only to give a new proof of the necessity of being virtuous. 54

For Helvétius conduct is "the art of happiness," 55 and ethics "the science of the means invented by men to live together in the happiest way possible." 56 Like Maupertuis and La Mettrie, Helvétius tried to supply a mathematical measure of happiness and suggested the possibility of a calculus based on the assumption that all pleasures are qualitatively equal. This view was all the more appealing to him, since a central idea of his system was the reduction of all psychic phenomena to physical. Pleasures, then, "are indistinguishable except in terms of their location, their velocity and direction, and their size." 57 Although Helvétius is one of the leaders in the swing to social utilitarianism, he conserves a large measure of egoistic hedonism. In a dull allegorical

53 XXVIII, p. 535.
54 To understand fully Voltaire's aversion to d'Holbach, we must therefore add the moral question to the political and the religious, and to their division on the question of strategy. He would surely have felt the same aversion to Diderot, had he known the latter's unpublished writings.
55 De l'Esprit, p. 585.
56 De l'Homme, IX, pp. 140–41.
57 Charles Frankel, op. cit., p. 60.
The Utilitarian Synthesis

poem, "Le Bonheur," he gives his prescription for happiness. Love and ambition are pleasurable, but dangerous; riches may be quite useful. Most important are independence, tastes that can be satisfied, and intellectual pursuits, together with a controlled indulgence in sensual pleasures. The progress of knowledge is necessary to both private and public happiness. When men become enlightened, they will find happiness in unselfish good deeds. But, until the yoke of kings and priests is thrown off, the wise man will enjoy the arts, women, and the pleasure of enlightening others as much as possible. In being virtuous, however, Helvétius makes it clear, in De l'Homme, there is no question of sacrificing one's pleasures or passion; virtue is merely another passion which happens to conform to the general interest. As Hayer pointed out in criticizing him, virtue, like all else, is reduced to physical sensitivity.

Ethics, writes d'Holbach, "is the art of making man happy by the knowledge and practice of his duties." 58 From this opening sentence, one might expect a nonhedonistic theory, and we shall later see d'Holbach's emphasis on virtue. Individual happiness, however, remains an ever-present preoccupation. In one place, he defines happiness as "enduring, continuous pleasure." 59 In another, he warns that pleasures, especially sensual, are only momentary and cannot provide "the permanence necessary to happiness." 60 D'Holbach recognizes the subjectivity of happiness; it "cannot be the same for all beings of the human species, but depends on their particular temperament and conformation." 61 There is a fundamental contradiction here with two other theses advanced by d'Holbach: that morality is possible only if it brings happiness, and that moral laws and duties are universal.

In another work, d'Holbach declares that man seeks happiness "in all moments of his duration," and he defines happiness as "the continuous enjoyment of the objects of our desires." 62 There is no happiness without desires and passions. The question then becomes our ability to satisfy our desires. Consequently, happiness

58 La Morale universelle, III, p. 207. Also: "As soon as there exist beings essentially lovers of happiness . . . and necessary to one another in procuring it, duties are established among them." (Quoted by Palmer, p. 189.)
59 Ibid., I, p. 12.
60 Ibid., III, p. 208. Cf. Système de la nature, I, p. 146: the keener the pleasure, the more fugitive, and the more likely to become pain.
61 Système de la nature, I, p. 147. See also pp. 338-40 for a more detailed analysis.
62 Système social, I, pp. 58. 167-70.
depends on our limiting desires to those we can easily satisfy. It is especially important to limit "artificial needs," which have a tendency to lead from one to another, as each is satisfied, until we have nothing left to desire and find ourselves in a miserable condition. "A pleasure demands to be followed by a still keener pleasure." We must beware of this enslavement, which can only give us constant torment. By prudent conduct of our lives we can do much to avoid this danger; but there are some men, "unfortunately born," whose temperament and imagination are uncontrollable and lead them to seek satisfaction in ways which threaten their welfare and even the security of society. Philosophers are the most "fortunately born" of men. D'Holbach then contradicts his earlier statement that desires should be of a kind that can be easily satisfied. Such facility makes the objects of desire insipid; "to find charms in enjoyment, desire must be irritated by obstacles" and require effort and anticipation. "Action is the true element of the human mind; as soon as it ceases to act, it falls into boredom." Happiness therefore cannot be continuous.

D'Holbach, it seems, has presented an inconsistent and chaotic picture. We are not surprised by his conclusion. "By an irrevocable law of fate, men are forced to be discontented with their destiny, to make efforts to change it, to envy each other for a felicity which none of them enjoys perfectly." In a way, this is all to the good. If men were perfectly happy, there would be no activity. Society could not endure nor could a man's body remain healthy, without endless restlessness and the creation of new needs, even though the end of the circle for each individual is dégoût. The artificial needs, which d'Holbach elsewhere says lead to satiety and unhappiness, are therefore necessary and beneficent. Unhappiness, it seems, is the necessary and healthy condition of our existence, at the same time that happiness is the universal goal and the highest value.

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63 Ibid., I, pp. 172-73.
64 La Morale universelle, I, pp. 17, 21-22.
65 Système social, I, pp. 303-4.
66 Ibid., p. 34 note 1.

An assessment of the minor writers of the century would provide little of interest that has not already been brought out. For more detailed analysis, see R. Mauzi, L'Idée du bonheur au XVIIIe siècle, especially chap. X. It is worth mentioning that Mme du Châtelet stresses illusions, among other factors, and the proper goal of seeking pleasant sensations (Réflexions sur le bonheur). Her approach to happiness is rationalistic and calculating; but this rationalistic woman is a romanticist and
There was one special kind of pleasure that was distinguished by several writers as constituting the purest, or most basic, kind of happiness. This may be called the feeling or experience of our own existence. We find a trace of it in Abbadie. While on the one hand, he notes, we strive to forget our existence (as Pascal had said) because of its wretchedness, at the same time we turn in upon ourselves and build an imaginary felicity composed of illusions.\textsuperscript{67} We have noted his awareness of man’s anguish at the nothingness which surrounds our being on all sides, ever threatening it.

Morelly, in his \textit{Essai sur le coeur humain} (1745) asserts that God made the feeling of our existence a good, for “he has attached pleasure to whatever can make that feeling keener. Thus . . . pleasure makes us love our existence, because this pleasure cannot subsist without it.”\textsuperscript{68} Morelly is perhaps guilty of some confusion. Do we love our existence for the sake of pleasure, or do we love pleasure because it makes us experience and enjoy the feeling of existing?

In the \textit{Encyclopédie}, the article “Homme” (signed “D.J.”) links happiness to the existence feeling. According to the author’s view, this need leads to restlessness, because it requires constant renewal by ever keener experiences, inasmuch as prolonged sensations become dulled. “We are therefore forced, in order to be happy, to change objects continually, or to exasperate a single kind of sensation. This is the cause of our natural inconstancy, which does not permit our wishes to remain firm, and of that progression of desires, which, always annihilated by enjoyment, rush forward towards infinity.” In this analysis we can see, unrecognized, the


\begin{quote}
\textit{Quoi! Parce que la nuit finira la journée,}
\textit{J’irai, traînant partout une âme consternée,}
\textit{Détourner mes regards de la clarté des Cieux,}
\textit{Je croirai les plaisirs défendus par les Dieux,}
\textit{Et follement épris des vertus d’un faux sage,}
\textit{Je n’oserai cueillir des fleurs sur mon passage?}
\textit{. . . . Mortels! goûtez la vie;}
\textit{Hâtez-vous, saisissez le jour qui vous a lui;}
\textit{Et demain au tombeau, jouissez aujourd’hui.}
\textit{(Les Mois, Chant XII.)}
\end{quote}
germ of the Sadian psychology, or of that of other nihilists from Nero and Caligula on.

D'Holbach comments on the same need to seek ever keener sensations, despite the unattainability of a satisfactory object or the harm to our organism. "Man always wants to be made aware of his existence as vividly as possible, as long as he can do it without pain. What do I say? He often consents to suffer rather than not to feel." 69

C.-G. Leroy approaches the same phenomenon in his analysis of the principles of human action. We are tormented by the need to experience a keen sensation of our existence; since only immediate sensations can make us present to ourselves, they must be renewed. Several of Leroy's sentences are lifted textually from the article "Homme." But he finds a contradictory principle of equal strength in man: lethargy and love of rest, so that we oscillate between the two contraries, the need to act and the desire not to. With the savage, the second principle is dominant. The flowing of a stream is enough to enchant him, and "the ignorance of a stronger emotion allows him to enjoy this peaceful situation neighboring on sleep." 70 Leroy is also a pessimist. The imperfection of social organization and the progressive blunting of sensation give us constant regret for an existence "which is constantly escaping from us, and which we are constantly trying to bring back." A frequent result of the dulling is the perversion of natural impulses, until actions which once would have made us shudder become necessary to us—witness the increasing cruelty of circus games devised to satisfy Roman ladies. "We may conclude that what is called pleasure consists only in the feeling of existence, intensified to a certain degree." Indeed, a close examination of our sensations and emotions "tempts us to believe that pain and pleasure, so essentially different, really differ only by nuances." The mystic, finding prayer insufficient, graduates to chains, hot coals, spikes. "By these different kinds of rigors against himself, he is made aware of his existence in a closer and stronger way than the person who simply performs the duties of civil life and charity." 71

Rousseau, who was not a hedonist, gave this existence-feeling

69 Système de la nature, I, p. 338.
70 Lettres philosophiques, pp. 174-77. We have seen how the other impulse, according to Leroy, develops into the drive for power (An Age of Crisis, p. 315).
71 Ibid., pp. 194-200.
its most meaningful expression in his last work, the *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire*, taking it from the realm of philosophy into that of literature and concrete experience. In his case, however, that experience is obtained through isolation, inner concentration, and reverie, which exclude all hindrances to full and immediate self-experience. No longer is it a question of a Faustian up-reaching of will, insatiable, restless, coursing after an ideal usually recognized as beyond reach; it is, instead, a Platonic autarchy and the withering away of desire, as consciousness of the self fills the entire emptiness of the self. But this is only one pole of the Rousseauist ideal. As through all his life and work there is a profound split which he never succeeded in unifying, so in this matter he also conceives of the deepest fulfillment of the existence-need in the loss of isolation. In the fusion of the open self with other open selves, in the fragile happiness of the little circle centered around Julie, in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, or in the wider communion of the spontaneous village festivals, the self experiences itself most deeply, even as its protective walls of isolation, made necessary by the normal course of artificial social life, are for a while demolished, like the walls of Jericho, allowing the "natural" feelings to take their course, immediate and unhindered. But this is literature. It was Rousseau's dream, which he never succeeded in realizing in life, except—he thought—with Mme de Warens. That is why, for him, there remained only reverie and isolation.72

While occasionally Rousseau may seem to place virtue above happiness, he more generally considers it as the path to happiness.73 He eschews self-indulgence, as in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, and at times even sounds Cartesian, as when he writes, in *Emile et Sophie*: "I learned that the first wisdom is to want what is, and to rule one's heart according to one's destiny." His concepts of happiness assume three forms, reflecting aspects of his general philosophy. For the individual, in addition to reverie and concentration on existence, he envisions simple pleasures such as the contemplation of nature, walking, herborizing. But we must emphasize that to a large degree this is really the expression of his

72 Other brief references to "existence" may be found in Barbeu du Bourg, *Petit code* [1774], s.l., 1789, pp. 26-27, and Béguelin's "Réflexions sur les plaisirs et les peines de la vie," 1787, summarized in Bartholmess, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 27-29. The entire subject would doubtless repay deeper study.

own defeat and withdrawal. His preference, as we have seen, is for the small, intimate group, the self-sufficient and perfectly united little community. At this stage, the self is fulfilled through a surpassing of the self. The little group stands in contrast to the sophisticated society he condemns; the latter prolongs the "personal usefulness is all" of the state of nature, and, in fact, even exacerbates the evil, since interdependence (in contrast to dependence) involves doing one's own good through the hurt of others. In the perfect unity of Clarens, there is no dissonant private will. We may speak of both a submergence and a sublimation of the self. There is both a renunciation of individual will, that is, of the quest for personal good in any way distinct from that of the group, and an opening of the self to the immediacy of true contact. Rousseau constantly celebrates the result as joy and happy contentment. Finally, there is the abstract whole of the corporate self. In the macrocosm of the abstractly conceived ideal State, as in the ideal microcosm, there is no dissonant private will, but the harmony of sublimation in the organic whole.

Virtue in the *Contrat social*, *Emile*, and *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is exalted. It is exalted because it is defined as a sacrifice for a larger whole. In this sacrifice, Rousseau sees the way to happiness, which can come only from the elimination of the conflict between nature and culture, between the natural man and the artificial man. To speak of giving the natural man full sway, as Diderot sometimes does, is a folly which Rousseau never considers. The conflict must be eliminated by going in the other direction. In giving themselves up, in surrendering their egoistic atomism to the collective organism, men will find happiness and the expansion of their selves, because the mutuality of the sacrifice makes a new world, a unanimous world of harmony and open consubstantiality.\(^7\)

Rousseau defines, then, two kinds of happiness, the sufficiency of the self and the surpassing of the self. And yet he, too, is fre-

\(^7\) See the whole development at the beginning of *Emile*, e.g.: "Good social institutions are those which are best able to denature man, to take away his absolute existence for himself and give him a relative one, and transport his self into the common unity, that is to say, into the social self; so that each no longer thinks of himself as an individual, but as part of the unity." Otherwise, "always in contradiction with himself, he will never be either a man or a citizen."

This also explains why Rousseau expresses opposite views about ignoring or submitting to the opinion of others. The first represents the independence of the self, the second, its integration.
quently dubious about the very possibility of happiness, when he considers the various aspects of human nature and the human condition, and especially his own life. Men cannot be happy, he tells us in the fifth Reverie, for they live in the past and the future more than in the present—a present which brings at best only fleeting pleasures and which no one would wish to last forever. “As for happiness, I doubt that it is known here.” Happiness would require no regrets for what has gone before, no longing for something else to come, for a filling of the vague emptiness of the heart. In the last, unfinished Reverie, he declares that happiness in this world is not for man, because everything changes, including ourselves; so that “all of our plans for happiness in this life are chimeras.” As there are fleeting pleasures, so there is, too, a contentment of resignation. But as for happy men, “I have seen few, perhaps none.” This was the Rousseau who had written, in the second “Lettre morale”: “The object of human life is man’s happiness.” At the close of his own life, then, he admits that the goal is well-nigh unattainable.74a

From the standpoint of the question of happiness, the two tales which we mentioned at the beginning of our investigation stand out, it should now be clear, in one important way as most representative of the eighteenth century. In Candide and Rasselas we see the consuming dedication to the quest for happiness which characterizes the period (in thought, as well as in life), and the pessimism and frustration which frequently accompany it. That the frustration was also a part of life is evident in the personal correspondence, as well as in much of the fiction, of the time. The purpose of life is happiness, the highest value in life is happiness, and yet the conditions of life do not permit its realization—such is the content of the consciousness of many sensitive, thinking people. The mating of these apparent contradictions in the eighteenth century, together with the undying residue of hope for some better future on earth (whence so many books offering prescriptions for happiness) form a peculiar psychological syndrome which rises out of the uncertainties and anguish of a changing—in some ways, a dying—culture, and which contributes, by a reverse influence, to the intensification of those feelings. At the same time,

74a In the Discours sur l’inégalité (1755), he had said men are unhappy because they prefer appearance to reality. In the Profession de foi, he had written, of man, “The Universe is not big enough for you.”
it was an intellectual defeat; thinkers were boxed in a corner by the sensationist reduction of behavior to pleasure-pain reactions and self-interest motivation.

The first, most spontaneous expression of the eager rush to happiness naturally took the form of a legitimizing of all pleasures. This defense of pleasure, or defiant encouragement to it, will continue unchecked throughout the century. "The chief business of my life has always been to indulge my senses. I never knew anything of greater importance," wrote Casanova; and we may almost take these words as a motto for the age. The philosophers, of course, did know of other things, despite their defense of pleasure. But the novels of the time hold the mirror to life. A considerable part of them are obsessed with seduction, lasciviousness, and the search for sensation by characters whose senses have been dulled by pleasure (even as the philosophers said); and the spiritual dimension of love, or even real passion, is lost. If we think of Descartes' propositions: that the reasoned use of will gives the greatest pleasure, that we should estimate pleasure by a rule of reason, that pleasure should be independent of bodily passion, because dependence on body introduces an imperfection—if we think of these, we shall realize that the eighteenth century has both a feeling of existential realities and a disillusionment with ideals which have carried it very far.

The eighteenth-century commitment to happiness-seeking, and in simple fact, to pleasure is heavy. Perhaps this may be considered normal and unobjectionable. The difficulty is that it became involved with moral theory. Starting as a humanistic, anti-religious reaction, it led down a very long road. On the one hand, ethical theory was used to justify pleasure; conversely, upholders of hedonism strove to reconcile their summum bonum with morality. The resulting moral confusion is disastrous. That pleasure, it has been made clear, could take many forms, from sexuality and an epicurean cuisine to friendship, benevolence, or the solitude and simplicity of a contemplative country life. But wherever revolt is involved, the accent is on the former.

Doubtless eroticism was also an expression of a vaguely felt feeling of the absurd, of a malaise, an emptiness, a loss of meaning and destiny. The many moralizing novels are a reaction to the prevailing hedonism; they express both the middle class taste and the increasing sentimental intoxication with virtue which (as we shall shortly see) was itself called forth by its contraries. For still another view on this phenomenon, see Mauzi, op. cit., p. 428.

"Finally happiness became a rite, whose idea was substituted for that of beauty. Since it was the purpose of all intelligent beings, the center to which all their ac-
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ure is a good is undeniable. That it is a moral good or value is something else. It is evident that some pleasures are not morally good, and that others, such as malice, are evil; to pretend otherwise is nihilism, the assertion that the fact of my pleasure is the sole value. But graver still was the conception of happiness in elementary terms of physical sensation, because such a conception betrays the complexity of the human psyche and human needs. Isolation of the affective aspect of our activity, of what may be the common factor of our acts, but not their distinguishing factor (pleasure is common to both eating and creativity) falsifies our experience.

The psychological analysis of motivation into its pleasure component, the proclamation of pleasure as guide and goal for life, its denomination as the highest good, and its influence on moral philosophy all make the establishment of objective moral values extremely difficult and problematical. Happiness and of course pleasure are in their essence, as Sartre has said, subjectivity; they cannot exist in the kingdom of objectivity. But if we are to say that all pleasures are good and all pains evil, no moral distinctions remain. As Albert Schweitzer has said, "As soon as the notion of pleasure is brought into connection with ethics, it shows disturbances, as does the magnetic needle in the neighborhood of the poles. Pleasure as such shows itself incapable in every respect of being reconciled with the demands of ethics. . . . Reflection upon the ethic which is to produce happiness is compelled at last to give up the positive notion of pleasure in any form. It has to reconcile itself to the negative notion which conceives pleasure as somehow or other a liberation from the need of pleasure. Thus the individualistic, utilitarian ethic, also called Eudaemonism, destroys itself as soon as it ventures to be consistent." 77 Respon-

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77 Op. cit., pp. 35-36. Cf. E. Fromm: "How can our life be guided by a motive by which animal as well as man, the good and the bad person, the normal and the sick are motivated alike? Even if we qualify the pleasure principle by restricting it to those pleasures which do not injure the legitimate interests of others, it is hardly adequate as a guiding principle for our actions. . . . Psychoanalysis confirms the view, held by the opponents of hedonistic ethics, that the subjective experience of satisfaction is in itself deceptive and not a valid criterion of value. . . . All masochistic desires can be described as a craving for that which is harmful to the total
sible ethical thinking could not stay at the level of pure hedonism. Its attempt to create bases for moral laws which would not conflict with personal interest led to a wider utilitarianism.

II. Social Utilitarianism

Despite the power and persistence of hedonism, then, a tendency begins which will end by outweighing it, and even, in some cases, submerge the individual and his subjective satisfactions in an abstract social whole. The focus of individual good is diverted toward social good. This change was facilitated by the concept of good as happiness, rather than as self-perfection. Hedonism, remarks Reinhold Niebuhr, ostensibly has no criterion of good except pleasure, but it manages to introduce the criterion of the "greatest good to the greatest number" into its estimate of moral value, "thereby proving that moral theory is practically unanimous in preferring the general to the particular interest," however interest may be defined.1 There is a tide, growing stronger across the years, which shifts the locus of happiness and, pari passu, the criterion of moral value, to the impalpable entity called the group or the whole. In this way the eighteenth century was to reach an ethical attitude corresponding to its great effort for political and social reform, and which is therefore characteristic.

A social morality had been proposed by Descartes, but its metaphysical basis and content were different, its tone static.2 With the philosophes it was something entirely distinct. They, remarks Henri Peyre, "were fired by a passion for man's better future, for his happiness and for the progress of the race. They offered their contemporaries a new faith to replace an outworn creed. Man would be happy in this world, not in another one, and not individually happy working out his own salvation in fear and trembling, but through saving other men in fraternal charity along with him."3 The connection with the decline of religious au-

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1 Children of Light, New York, 1949, pp. 72-73.
3 Henri Peyre, in a paper read at the Weil Institute.
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Authority is obvious. "With the rejection of the Church, and of transcendental justice," comments J. L. Talmon, perhaps with some overemphasis, "the State remained the sole source and sanction of morality." 4

We have seen the extensive pessimism about the possibility of happiness (somewhat less strong for the future than for the present), and commented on the fact that a great effort for personal happiness persists nonetheless. The intellectual infatuation with social happiness was even stronger, for the goal was nebulous and undefinable, and not subject to immediate personal feeling, and so more difficult to disprove or be disillusioned about. It became more and more clear that if each sought his own pleasure or happiness as the highest good, regardless of all else, society would become a battlefield and end in chaos, in addition to morality itself being destroyed. (There were important exceptions. Mandeville, the Physiocrats, and Adam Smith thought that if each worked exclusively for his own selfish good, the general good would naturally ensue.) 5 But if the locus of value were shifted from the individual to the group, then, it seemed, selfishness would be surpassed (but not destroyed); morality and society would be saved. This was the grand solution. Even religious people could concur in this utilitarianism. Bishop Berkeley, for instance, is almost an epitome in this regard. Starting from a naive form of egoistic hedonism (good and evil are what satisfies our self-love), he then posits the existence of God and the rational obligation to obey his will, and finally concludes that God's will is not "the private good of this or that man, nation or age, but the general well-being of all men . . . which God designs should be procured by the concurring actions of each individual." 6 Secular moralists could not help realizing that their own criterion for judging conduct, the amount of pleasure or pain which results from an act, led to the inference that the act which produced the greatest amount of pleasure (the most pleasure for the most people) was the best. The many who did not really believe in a state of nature, but thought man naturally social, could also conclude that since values are to be founded on man's nature, and he is a

4 *The Rise of Totalitarian Democracy*, p. 4.
social being, then the good of society is his good. At any rate, be it by nature or by will, men were fated to live together and share a common destiny. The facts of dependence and interdependence made it impossible, according to optimists like Shaftesbury, Pope, and d’Holbach, to dissociate one’s own happiness from that of others (a thesis which was denied or even reversed by pessimists and amoralists).

We can perceive the drift to social utilitarianism early in the century. Shaftesbury seems to have it in mind in his theory of symmetry: “the proportionate and regular State is the truly prosperous and natural in every Subject.” 7 For Hutcheson, the foundation of moral sense is benevolence, or usefulness to the public. 8 Butler conceives of justice, veracity, and the common good as comprehensive ethical ends. Wollaston affirms that happiness is the end of society, and what makes most men happy is best. Any act that favors self over everybody else is wrong. 9 “It is manifest,” proclaims Mandeville, “that when we pronounce Actions good or evil, we only regard the Hurt or Benefit the Society receives from them, and not the Person who commits them.” 10 In fact, a government may commit evil in order that good may come of it—the “evil” then is good. Nothing beneficial can be wrong. 11

In France, Rémond de Saint-Mard asks, “What do the motives we impute to men’s actions matter, provided they are good, that is, useful to Society?” 12 Father Buffier warns us that the command, “Do unto others,” is not so simple as it seems. A judge condemning a criminal to death would want mercy himself. Justice and right are above this maxim, form a higher maxim, which is “to seek our own advantage in everything, united with that of the men with whom we have to live.” What furthers the common good is right. 13

The superior validity of social over personal welfare (and the latter’s dependence on the former) is the object lesson of the story of the Troglodytes in Montesquieu’s Lettres persanes. Virtue, he

7 Characteristicks, III, pp. 180–85.
8 Op. cit., p. 199. However Hutcheson holds pleasure-pain reactions to be immediate, and so not strictly dependent on advantage or detriment (p. 4). According to Halévy (op. cit., pp. 16–17), moral sense theorists may be considered as utilitarians, because the principle of sympathy involves a spontaneous identification of private and general interest in the consciousness.
11 Ibid., I, p. lx.
12 Oeuvres, Amsterdam, 1750, I, p. 337.
13 Traité de la société civile, 1726, pp. 27–32.
states simply in the *Esprit des lois*, in a republic, is love of the republic. His explanations make it clear (although he claims not to be speaking of moral virtue) that he means the preferring of the general interest to the particular.\(^\text{14}\)

Vauvenargues is a somewhat contradictory writer. There are times when he sounds like a firm utilitarian, as when he declares that nothing is good or evil unless it tends to the advantage or disadvantage of society as a whole. “Who says ‘society’ says a body which subsists by the union of its divers members and fuses the private interest in the general interest; that is the foundation of all morality. . . . By what reason does an individual dare to sacrifice so many others to himself, without society being able by his ruin, to secure public peace?”\(^\text{15}\) No one could have put it more clearly than Voltaire: “Virtue and vice, moral good and evil, is then in any country what is useful or harmful to society. . . . Virtue is the habit of doing those things which please men, and vice the habit of doing those things which displease men.”\(^\text{16}\) The passage is noteworthy for two reasons. The second part of it anticipates Hume. And, at this early period when Natural Law is strongest in Voltaire’s thinking, we can see its fusion with utilitarianism: if there are certain universals, it is only because they are universally useful.\(^\text{17}\) We should also note Voltaire’s line in the seventh *Discours sur l’homme*: “To be good only for oneself is to be good for nothing.” Good acts are those which lead to pleasure or to other advantages for our fellow citizens. All our ideas of justice, Voltaire explains, arise from the social utility of acts, in

\(^\text{14}\) Bk. V., chap. II. Later, Montesquieu makes an important restriction for property (Bk. XXVI, chap. XV), and we must also take into consideration such factors as his belief in Natural Law and his attack against slavery. Maupertuis, in his “Eloge de Montesquieu,” rejects the “obscure” principle of Natural Law and suggests a calculus of individual sacrifice according to the amount of happiness lost and gained. (*Oeuvres*, III, p. 401 ff.)

\(^\text{15}\) *Oeuvres*, I, pp. 76–77 (“Du Bien et du mal moral”). He also says that “preference of general to personal interest is the only definition worthy of virtue and which should determine its meaning. . . . It is equally clear that humanity is better than inhumanity, that it is more likable, more useful, consequently more estimable.” (*Ibid.*)

\(^\text{16}\) *Traité de métaphysique* (1734), ed. H. T. Patterson, p. 57.

\(^\text{17}\) We have already commented on the dilemma of Natural Law and utilitarianism in Voltaire. For another interesting example of a combination of formalism and utilitarianism, see Elie Luzac, *L’Homme plus que machine* (in *La Mettrie, Oeuvres philosophiques*, Amsterdam, 1774, III, pp. 190–92). The persistence of the dilemma in Voltaire can be seen in his *Philosophe ignorant* (1766). Certain acts are always, inherently, right or wrong. Then he asks: “but if I know for sure that the man to whom I owe two million will use it to enslave my country, am I obliged to return this fatal weapon to him? . . . in general, I need keep an oath only when no harm results.” (XXVI, pp. 49–81.)
conformity with the laws we have established to this end. No act has an intrinsic or formal value; its effect on men alone confers value on it.\(^{18}\) But suppose some men decide that what is of value to them is precisely what a society forbids? In these cases, force alone decides that the general good must be respected above personal good. Such men will be hanged, even as we shoot wolves. Voltaire thus seems to admit an ultimate arbitrariness in the morality of social good, or virtue, since there are elements in human nature which deny it and which it must deny by will or force. However, as a believer in Natural Law, he would call these “pathological deviations.”

Hume considers utility the standard of all ethical values, in virtue of the fact that this is what the impartial benevolent spectator would approve; but he is referring to the general utility rather than self-interest. Like Voltaire, he endeavors to avoid moral skepticism by claiming an empirical basis for the preference of social virtues. Unlike most of the French philosophers, he attributes our approval of utility not to self-interest, but rather to disinterested benevolence, or the desire for the happiness of society, a feeling which is innate in all human beings.\(^{19}\) But Hume holds utility to be superior to justice, and in fact, its only basis.\(^{20}\)

The abbé Yvon’s article “Bon,” in the Encyclopédie, distinguishes three kinds of good. There is “animal good,” or proper adaptation to function (an idea which Diderot will incorporate into his aesthetic theories); “reasoned good,” or virtue, “the good which is beautiful,” that is, the accordance of conduct with essential, immutable rules (Natural Law); and the useful, which is “the only good that has ascendancy over our hearts.”\(^{21}\) In “Ac-

\(^{18}\) This was the common opinion of partisans of a secular morality, throughout the century. Cf. Rivarol: “What we must especially avoid in morals, is to place virtue in indifferent acts, such as fasting, hair shirts, austerities: none of that can be useful to other men.” (Pensées inédites, 1836, p. 13.)

\(^{19}\) Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, Aiken, p. 208 ff. Hume’s theory combines many elements, and he also claims, like Hutcheson, that some qualities are immediately agreeable, without regard to utility (p. 144).

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 182 ff. Unlike others, however, Hume, while considering utility to be the basis of value, makes moral judgment rest on intention—the sentiment which causes us to prefer what is useful (pp. 263, 266, 207n.). Moral goodness, then, cannot be identified with whatever conforms to the greater happiness principle (p. xxxiv). For a similar distinction made by Marmontel, see Leçons de morale, Œuvres, XVII, pp. 210–12.

\(^{21}\) Both Yvon and the abbé Mallet (“Charité”) agree that it is chimerical to speak of loving God except in our own interest, that is, inasmuch as he has power to benefit or hurt us.
tion,” Yvon writes: “Moral actions are nothing but men’s voluntary actions considered in relation to the imputation of their effects on the common life.” Like Hume, however, he keeps the moral “quality” in the will. Also in the *Encyclopédie*, Faiguet, in the article “Usure,” puts forward utility as the touchstone of justice: “what is reciprocally useful is necessarily equitable.... The reciprocal advantage of the contracting parties is the common measure of what should be called ‘just’; for there can be no injustice where there is no damage.” And the author of the article “Philosophe” writes: “Civil society is, so to speak, the only divinity which he [the *philosophe*] recognizes on earth; he worships it, he honors it... by a sincere desire not to be a useless or harmful member.”

Even La Mettrie may be spoken of as a utilitarian! True, everything is arbitrary, made by men, and there is no moral right or wrong, vice or virtue in itself. But society, arbitrarily if you will, does impose its standards. From society’s own viewpoint, “Everything that is useful to society is [a virtue], the rest is its phantom.” 22 Burlamaqui, a Natural Law theorist, claims to distinguish the just from the useful; but he also says they are related and derive from reason’s approbation of whatever leads to real happiness. Little interested in good will, he defines virtue as the *habit* of actions in conformity with laws and duty.23 For Morelly, what is useful to society is all that matters.24 Condillac asserts that the morality of our acts consists of only one thing, conformity with the laws.25 “It seems,” writes d’Alembert, “that we can define injustice, or moral evil, which is the same thing, very exactly, as what tends to hurt society by disturbing the physical well-being of its members.” 26

Diderot is one of the most complex figures of the century. He is not fundamentally (that is, in the context of real life) a hedonist

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22 *Discours sur le bonheur*, *Oeuvres*, II, p. 127. Also: “Education alone then has improved natural tendencies; she it is who has turned men to men’s profit and advantage.... Such is the origin of virtue; the public good is its source.” La Mettrie’s nihilism again lurks underneath: virtues and vices are politically instituted; otherwise “the edifice could not stand up and would fall into ruins.... Besides, convention and arbitrary value constitute the sole merit and demerit of what is called vice and virtue.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 18–20.)
26 *Éléments de philosophie, Oeuvres*, I, p. 209. He also proposed drawing up a catechism of utilitarian moral responsibility (I, p. 234).
in ethical theory, though in his radical speculative works he extends hedonism into the zone of nihilism; we shall return to that aspect of his thought in the next chapter. Fundamentally he is a social utilitarian. Social experience, he holds, makes moral beings of us; and it is the task of education “to perfect the natural aptitude, if it is good, to stifle or lose it, if it is bad.”

In *Le Rêve de d’Alembert*, Diderot’s spokesman, Bordeu, declares that the idea of virtue must be changed “into the idea of beneficence,” as determined by society; consequently, one can judge people only as “fortunately or unfortunately born.”

“Good” and “right” refer then to the generality, surpassing the natural demand of dissonant individuals for happiness. Diderot knew, however, as did Rousseau, that the natural is never (or has never been) replaced by the cultural, and that men suffer a constant struggle between two coexisting urges or laws. In this struggle, society is right. Like Voltaire, La Mettrie, and many others, he makes it clear in his letter to Landois that vice and virtue do not exist, except as society may decide; and he who will not conform must be severed, like the gangrened limb.

What remains is to provide as strong a motive as possible to induce men to behave in the desired way. “It is not thoughts,” he writes to Mme Necker, “it is actions that distinguish the good man and the wicked.” While Diderot’s utilitarianism stands in clear opposition to his moments of hedonistic nihilism, it is in equal if less dramatic disagreement with the apriorism of his Natural Law thinking which we examined earlier. According to Cassirer, Diderot underwent an evolution from apriorism to utilitarianism. Reference to our previous discussion would indicate rather a persistence of parallel currents, with the more frequent emphasis on the empirical and “scientific” approach.

Happiness, for Jean-Jacques Rousseau, is the goal of activity.

\[\text{Oeuvres, XVIII, p. 103; II, p. 410.}\]

\[\text{II, p. 176.}\]

\[\text{XIX, p. 432 ff. Diderot also extends this utilitarianism to smaller collectivities and condones a woman’s infidelity for the purpose of improving her family’s position. (Correspondence, ed. G. Roth, IV, pp. 120–21.) It is true that his attitude towards sexual morality is also involved here.}\]

\[\text{See Cassirer, op. cit., pp. 246–47. Cassirer seems unaccountably to confuse Diderot’s dictum, “Let nature rule... without conventional hindrances” with social utilitarianism.}\]

\[\text{See Note 32, pp. 171–72, in G. R. Havens’ critical edition of the Discours sur les sciences et les arts. Rousseau probably values virtue above happiness, but he always considers it as the instrument of happiness.}\]
Because of his concept of happiness, he places the locus of value (when he is not concerned with himself) in the group, large or small, rather than in the individual. The essential problem in the State is to make particular wills bend to the general will: "as virtue is only this conformity of the particular will to the general, to say the same thing in a word, make virtue reign." In a fragment he writes:

When we contemplate with a philosophical eye the interplay of all the parts of this vast universe, we soon perceive that the greatest beauty of each of the pieces which compose it does not lie in itself; and that it was not formed to remain alone and independent, but to concur with all the others to the perfection of the whole machine.

It is the same in the moral order. The vices and virtues of each man are not relative to him alone. Their greatest relation is with society, and what they are in regard to the general order constitutes their essence and their character.

Rousseau was in fact, as Schinz once noted, that kind of a utilitarian we now call a pragmatist. Thus in La Nouvelle Héloïse, he is entirely willing to compromise with his principles of equality and truthfulness in order to achieve the desired ends of a co-operative society, through the illusion of equality and the willing surrender of egoism. Truth is of value, but only insofar as it is conducive to happiness for men. The civil religion of the Contrat social is a matter of utility, not truth. If virtue is relative to the welfare of the social group, so also is the happiness of individuals who have lost their natural independence. Just as the individual will is absorbed into that of a social "body," so the evanescent subjectivity of his happiness is replaced, as a criterion of judgment, by something more solid and objectively verifiable, public happiness, which, however, will necessarily reflect that of its components.

Where is the happy man? If he exists, who knows it? Happiness is not pleasure; it does not consist in a passing modification of the soul, but in a permanent and entirely internal feeling, which can be judged by no one except the person who experi-

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32 Economie politique, Vaughan, The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I, p. 248. Also: "Wickedness is at bottom only an opposition of the private will to the public" (p. 278).
33 Ibid., I, p. 338.
ences it. No one then can decide with certainty that another is happy, nor consequently establish definite signs of individual happiness. But it is not the same with political societies; their good and their harm are all apparent and visible; their internal feeling is a public feeling ... and one can without temerity judge their moral being. ... Make man one, and you will make him as happy as he can be. Give him all to the State, or let him be completely himself.35

Rousseau's thinking on this matter is entirely consistent with the structure of his general system.

The most thorough-going and systematic utilitarian, and the most influential, was Helvétius. Speaking of ethics, he avers that "the true object of that science is the happiness of the greatest number."36 This is purely a calculus of the greatest amount of good, for he had started with physical sensation and the egoistic pursuit of self-interest as the criteria of moral judgment.37 Helvétius decisively eliminates intention as the basis of judgment, since no moral intention can exist.38

Helvétius, we know, considers justice as subsequent to law; and law is a utilitarian formulation.39 The summary of Discours II of De l'Esprit speaks of "the same self-interest, which presides over judgments we make of actions, and makes us look at them as virtuous, vicious or permissible, according as they are useful, harmful or indifferent to the public. ..."40 The public weal is more important than any so-called morality. "The same actions may then become successively useful and harmful to a people, and deserve in turn the name of virtuous or vicious, without the idea of virtue changing. ..."41 For laws to be good, they must con-

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36 De l'Homme, IX, pp. 140-41.
37 Ibid., VIII, pp. 56-57, De l'Esprit, Discours II.
38 De l'Esprit, pp. 240, also 374-75: "The virtuous man is not then he who sacrifices his pleasures, habits and strongest passions to the public, since such a man is impossible; but he whose strongest passion is so much in conformity with the general interest, that he is almost always necessarily determined to be virtuous."

To this Hayer replied that, according to Helvétius, for an action to be virtuous it would have to conform both to personal and to public interest. If there is opposition, personal interest necessarily wins out. (Op. cit., VII, pp. 65-69, 264.) The weakness in Helvétius’ system which Hayer here implies was the one which Sade was to seize upon and to exploit: he does not justify (i.e., legitimize in moral terms) the supplanting of the private interest by the general, nor, consequently, any sacrifice in favor of others of the real good experienced by the sentient and self-centered individual.

39 De l'Homme, p. 202 and discussion in preceding chapter.
40 For a defense of utility, and definitions, see De l'Esprit, pp. 45-46, 73-80.
41 Ibid., pp. 154-58. This does not exclude, for Helvétius or other utilitarians, the possibility of universals (pp. 185-86).
form to the principle of public welfare, that is to say, the happiness of the greatest number, “a principle which contains all of ethics and legislation.” The universal principle of self-interest operates, then, on the three levels of organization: the individual, the group, and the whole community. The last, being the most inclusive, is the final criterion.

Helvétius pretends to scientific method and is seeking an objective, measurable unit of value. However he constantly confuses subjective moral judgment with objective moral value. To quote only one instance: “No matter where we look, we shall always see self-interest presiding over the distribution which the public makes of its esteem.” It is obvious that even if utility is the sole criterion of value, the public is not always the best judge of that value, and that, assuming it were the best judge, it does not always accord its esteem and rewards in the light of the principle of utility. But according to Helvétius, we have only to agree on what is useful, and then we shall have agreement on morals and jurisprudence, and the happy society will ensue by the very necessity of natural law.

With d’Holbach we again have the juxtaposition or unification of the private and the public in virtue and in happiness.

The virtuous man is he whose actions tend constantly to the well-being of his fellows; the vicious man is he whose conduct tends toward the unhappiness of those with whom he lives; from which his own unhappiness usually results. Whatever gives us true and permanent happiness is reasonable.

D’Holbach, as we shall see, justifies the imposition of general utility by making personal happiness dependent on it—since no real sacrifice is possible to beings necessarily motivated by self-interest. For the same reason, actions which tend to public happiness necessarily excite approbation—except in those “whose passions or false opinions force them to judge them in a way which does not conform to the nature of things. Everyone acts and judges according to his own nature and his own true or false ideas about happiness.” Both the good man and the bad are necessarily determined by their differing natures, and so we have no way of distinguishing between them except by society’s judgment of the

42 Ibid., pp. 161, 175.
43 Ibid., p. 122.
utility of their acts. There is no "moral" criterion, except this. Little of significance is added during the rest of the century, though there are innumerable repetitions and confirmations.  

It is clear that in essence the utilitarian position is quite opposed to that of Natural Law. It does not bind us to ask "whether we are obligated to avoid legislation which violates the convictions of mankind," that is, ultimate principles of right and judgment. If the criterion of virtue is social good, it is an empirical criterion, except insofar as we consider social living to have essential qualities and relationships. There can be, on this view, no virtue before society, nor in any "essential" human nature, nor in a so-called Natural Law (unless Natural Law is conceived of as meaning necessary social drives plus necessary experiential development in universal forms). We may speak of a gradual invasion of Natural Law theory by utilitarianism. Its viewpoints, by infiltration, transfuse and transform Natural Law, without its adherents being aware of it, with a resultant hybridization.

Utilitarianism was also a logical result of Newtonianism and the new science that arose in the seventeenth century. No longer did one seek the intelligibility of a law, but its constancy and predictability, with the aim of a practical science in mind. By applying this method to the individual and society, eighteenth-century moralists proposed to determine the simplest and most

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46 Some additional references follow. Terrasson places moral duty above personal interest, but beneath the welfare "of States or the Public" (op. cit., p. 51). L. de Beausobre, in Le Pirrhonisme du sage (Berlin, 1754): "The truly virtuous man considers only the choice of the best, and that best is always the good of the State" (p. 81). Cardinal de Polignac (op. cit., I, pp. 57-58): "Since the universe is neither the dwelling nor the inheritance of a single man, and all have an equal right to enjoy it, the public interest is preferable to the private, and the happiness of all to that of one." Duclos, in one of the most interesting French attempts at establishing a scale of values (Considérations, pp. 335-48), speaks of the "extent of utility." Something whose utility "is common to a greater number of men merits greater esteem." Right and wrong are merely matters of public interest. "It is personal interest which makes crimes, when it is opposed to the common interest." Naigeon decrees: "I consent to name virtue only what procures real advantages to society (Discours préliminaire, 1782, pp. 87-88, Le Militaire philosophe, Londres, 1768, p. 163). Saint-Lambert praises Helvétius for having demonstrated that morals have been retarded by the habit of attaching virtues to actions "which are useful to no one," and of separating "private for general interest" (Analyse de l'Histoire, Discours préliminaire, in Oeuvres philosophiques, An IX, I, p. 35). Justice, Rivarol avers, is only the means to the end of self-preservation: "the end always has priority over the means; since indeed there are occasions when the State might be ruined if it consulted justice." (Penseés inédites, pp. 51-52.)

47 Bredvold, op. cit., p. 125.

48 Philosophers did continue to seek the intelligibility of psychological, moral and political laws.
The Utilitarian Synthesis

A general basic law or laws which would explain the phenomena and permit their control. It was still a matter of extending our power over nature, into which man was completely integrated—without transcendence, we should note, although the very possibility of conceiving and accomplishing such a task is itself the sign of transcendence. Thus the constitution of a moral and political science is undertaken, analogous in its experimental method and exactness to the Newtonian physics. Utilitarianism is a Newtonianism, with the law of universal gravitation replaced by sensualism, determinism, association of ideas, and the principle of utility. The principle of utility (welfare, happiness) was at first considered chiefly in regard to the individual. To repeat what Gay—and so many others—wrote, “Obligatory acts are those which lead to happiness.” Approbation was reduced to “indications of reason relative to personal happiness.” The essential step, as we have seen, was the displacement of the locus of value from the individual to the community. It was essential for two reasons. It made possible the creation of a social utilitarianism, as distinct from egoistic hedonism. To those for whom morals and virtue were themselves vital, as distinguished from the goal of happiness, it seemed the sole possibility of preserving those values against the corrosion of nihilism. For without this interposition, the other operative factors in the ethical climate—the weakening of Natural Law and of the belief in future rewards and punishments, plus the legalization of natural necessity for seeking pleasure—were headed in the direction of moral anarchism.

III. Virtue and Happiness

The philosophies of hedonism or eudaemonism, and of social utilitarianism, sometimes held conjointly by the same men, constitute a dichotomy which the eighteenth century was compelled

49 The necessity of embracing psychological determinism is evident. In order to arrive at constant, universal principles of human nature and conduct, the constancy and predictability of causation is required.

50 Others will replace or supplement reason by feeling or association of ideas (conditioned reflex), but Helvétius and Bentham will propose the direction of men by reason, and consequently, the liberation of ethics from sentiment.

51 The preceding paragraph is based in part on Elie Halévy’s classic work, La Formation du radicalisme philosophique.
to resolve. If self-interest is the only motive and happiness the only goal of conduct, and if, simultaneously, the locus of value is placed outside the particular sentient individual, a reconciliation becomes urgent. Moreover, if virtue is defined in terms of happiness, and if it is assumed that there is no natural impulse or reason to prefer the interest of others to our own, the amoralist must perforce triumph, unless it can be shown that there is an indissoluble, invariable identity between the two terms, virtue and happiness. This was the central problem of ethics for eighteenth-century thinkers, one with which they were faced as a result of their analysis of human nature and their reduction of moral experience to reactions of pleasure and pain. “It seems reasonable,” writes a modern philosopher, “and in accord with common sense to maintain that each person, when faced with alternative courses of action, should calculate his own good and choose accordingly. But it also appears reasonable that he should take account of the good of others and choose the alternative which promises that greater good to all the world. The attempt to reconcile these two points of view has led to endless subtleties and subterfuges. So astute a moral philosopher as Henry Sidgwick concluded that the only reconciliation of these two methods lay in divine sanctions. The dispute is settled if we have faith in God’s justice.”¹ Many eighteenth-century writers, however, believed they could solve this problem in secular, naturalistic terms.

Two approaches, related but not identical, were followed by them: enlightened self-interest, and what we shall call the virtue-happiness equivalence. The similarity is obvious. In both cases, we are summoned to make an apparent sacrifice of immediate good which turns out to be a gain. The difference, though less obvious, is significant. The virtue-happiness equivalence assumes that an act of virtue possesses a quality which is in itself happiness-producing, and immediately so. Enlightened self-interest calls for a rational calculation of ultimate gain; it concedes that the virtuous act may not itself produce happiness.

Enlightened self-interest impressed many thinkers as the logical and effective solution to the dichotomy of self-interest and social interest, and as the gateway to an effective naturalistic ethics. Social utilitarianism by itself was insufficient. If we expected men to act for the benefit of others, and particularly that of the com-

munity as an abstract whole, we should then be returning to an intentional and altruistic morality. Such abnegation could not be expected of men, without having recourse to divine sanctions, which were held to be neither true nor efficacious. Enlightened self-interest seemed like the magic door which avoided all this. We have only to make men realize that when they choose the act that is best for all (or for most), they are acting in their own interest. Perhaps that is not always true, some conceded, but it could be made to be true if legislation and society were properly reformed, so as to be in accord with human nature, desires, and needs. The utilitarians, writes Albert Schweitzer, became convinced “that nature itself has bound up together what is ethical and what is advantageous both to the individual and the community.” 2 If the self is a social self, is it not clear that its good could not be secured at the cost of the social unit of which it was a part? However, although nature may have made this link, it was certainly not a law which was naturally or spontaneously operative. The work of reason was required, as the phrase “enlightened self-interest,” or the French equivalent, “interest properly understood,” indicates.

Leibniz had a concept of enlightened self-interest which was quite different from that of the eighteenth century. He believed that if we loved ourselves in an enlightened way, then, by realizing our own perfection, we would also realize that of others; the more enlightened our self-love becomes, the more disinterested it becomes. 3 The eighteenth-century idea differed in two ways: a sacrifice was involved, and that sacrifice was motivated by interest rather than by disinterestedness. However the act itself was a “disinterested” one, and in the eighteenth-century view, that alone mattered. The roots of this concept are found in the seventeenth century, although it did not then achieve significant acceptance. Curiously, we find it in religious writers who despaired of human nature, and especially in the Jansenist, Nicole:

We may conclude from all that has been said that to reform the world entirely, that is to say, to banish all vices and coarse disorders, and to make men happy in this very life, it would only be necessary in default of charity to give them all an enlightened self-love, which will enable them to discern their true interest,

and go towards it in the ways that right reason would reveal. However corrupted that society might be within and in the sight of God, there would be nothing better regulated from the outside, nothing more civil, more just, for, being animated and moved by self-love, self-love does not show itself; being entirely void of charity, one would everywhere see only the forms and traits of charity.  

It would not be possible to state more perfectly the illusion of so many eighteenth-century writers that men can be made to behave morally through a rational understanding of their true and ultimate interests; nor to reveal more dramatically their renunciation of the hope for a moral existence, except from the external viewpoint of the conformity of action.

The doctrine of enlightened self-interest was developed in England, as well as in France, but received considerably less emphasis there. As early as 1672, Cumberland, making of the common good "the measure of every lesser good and evil, and of their comparative value," declared that this end would provide the "greatest practicable individual happiness." We find the theory threading itself through Shaftesbury; though in a way it betrays the moral sense theory, the resultant happiness for him is more an accompaniment or sequel, an added factor, rather than the incentive itself. Shaftesbury lays especial emphasis on a refutation of the apparent opposition between self-interest and the general interest. His purpose is to show that "to be well affected towards the public interest and one’s own is not only consistent, but inseparable." Nevertheless, such dependency on reason does not accord with the natural tendency to virtue of the moral sense theory, although, as he usually does, Shaftesbury so interprets human nature that nature and reason coincide. Butler’s theory, as we can see in the first Sermon, at one point entertains the notion of enlightened self-interest. Chubb accepts the hypothesis

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4 *Essais de morale*, 1715, p. 177.

5 Cf. Ameline (1667): "Those who think only of themselves and their own interests hurt both themselves and others"; reason shows us that if we consider ourselves as part of the social body, we also share in "all the goods which are common to that body, without being deprived thereby of any of the goods which belong to us." (Op. cit., pp. 217–29.)


7 *Characteristicks*, II, p. 77. See also II, pp. 80–81, 175–76.


9 He holds, however, that even if enlightened self-interest cannot be substantiated, altruism is still right.
warmly.\textsuperscript{10} Priestley adopts it as a basic part of his theories: "when our interest is perfectly understood, it will be found to be best promoted by those actions which are dictated by a regard to the good of others. . . ."

The enlightened self-interest theory developed slowly but substantially in France. Its essential theme was always the same. "Virtue seems to be a preference of others to oneself," wrote Abbadie. "I say that it seems to be, because it is really certain that virtue is only a way of loving oneself, much more noble and sensible than all others." \textsuperscript{12} The social and economic decadence of the country pressed home on open-minded, responsible thinkers the organic quality of social welfare. Boisguillebert showed that even the privileged classes suffered from the general impoverishment, and he urged that, in their own interest, they give up some of their tax advantages. The privileged classes, significantly, were not sufficiently "enlightened." Saint-Evremond also urged an intelligent calculation: "To make oneself happy with less trouble, and to be happy with security, without fearing to be disturbed in one's happiness, we must, milord, act so that others are happy with us." \textsuperscript{13} Many, apparently, would not make this calculation, although they were urged to it by writers of quite different outlooks and opinions. Le Maître de Claville recommends it to his readers.\textsuperscript{14} Fréret defines virtue as "habitual tendencies toward the happiness and utility of those with whom we live in society, by the practice of which we engage them to care about our welfare in return." \textsuperscript{15} Vauvenargues expressed it in a cynical maxim, "The

\textsuperscript{10} "Some Short Reflections on Virtue and Happiness," in \textit{A Collection of Tracts}, L., 1730. Man is designed for happiness, but in society "when he pursues his own happiness with strict regard to the common good, then he is in the most proper and likely way to obtain it," etc.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion}, Birmingham, 1782, I, p. 94. The rewards are both those of conscience and the "good offices of others in return" (p. 107).

Hume could not accept this theory because he believed in the multiplicity of motivation; people do have benevolent motives. Hume, moreover, like Butler, did not use happiness as a definition of good, but as a necessary condition. Good is what the disinterested benevolent spectator would approve; we may assume that he would approve what leads to happiness, but this is only an empirically corroborated supposition derived from reflection on our conduct.

\textsuperscript{12} Op. cit., p. 204.

\textsuperscript{13} Quoted by Lanson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 719.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Traité du vrai mérite}, 1737, II, p. 192.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Oeuvres}, III, p. 2; also \textit{ibid.}, pp. 9–10. This is what he terms a universal ethic based on reason and human nature. With good laws, "Every man who reflects about himself will be forced to recognize the necessity of virtue in order to be happy in this world," since he himself needs justice and esteem and protection. (Pp. 85–86.)
usefulness of virtue is so manifest, that the wicked practice it out of self-interest."  

Montesquieu, like Shaftesbury, considers altruistic motives insufficient. His allegory of the Troglodytes shows that self-interest cannot be avoided; while every action should not be a matter of cold calculation, self-interest, properly directed, is the practical basis of society. The good survivors of the holocaust of selfishness teach their children "that the self-interest of individuals is always identical with the common interest; that to want to dissociate oneself, is to want to ruin oneself; that virtue is not something that should be hard for us; that we must not look upon it as a painful exercise; and that justice to others is charity to ourselves."  

Morelly makes the enlightened calculus an instinctive reaction, which only our unnatural society, with its vicious institution of property, has perverted. Duclos is optimistic. What we need, he assures us, is to prove to men "that their own happiness depends on their loving each other. They can be shown that their glory and interest lie in the practice of their duties." D'Alembert, in a systematic exposé of his moral theory and scale of values, defines virtue as the sacrifice of one's own welfare to the needs of others. But isn't this against nature? he asks. "Of course," he replies, "no natural or positive law can oblige us to love others more than ourselves; that heroism, if such an absurd feeling may be so termed, cannot be found in the human heart; but the enlightened love of our own happiness indicates as goods preferable to all others peace with ourselves and the favor of our fellows. . . . Thus the enlightened love of ourselves is the principle of every moral sacrifice." D'Alembert proceeds to calculate the extent of sacrifices that are necessary or advisable.

The Physiocrats did not follow this theory, holding instead that the unrestricted promotion of one's own good, limited by the

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16 Oeuvres morales, 1874, III, p. 96 (Maxime 403). See also, among the earlier writers, Richer d'Aube, op. cit., xxviii-xxix; Varennes, Les Hommes, pp. 16-19; Paradis de Moncrif, Oeuvres, 1751, II, pp. 308-16.
18 Lettres persanes, Lettre XII.
19 Code de la nature, pp. 173, 262-64.
20 Considérations, p. 9.
21 Élémens de philosophie, Oeuvres, 1, p. 212 ff. When D'Alembert says that "disinterestedness is the highest moral virtue," he is referring, of course, to action and not to intent. See also, pp. 207-8.
natural laws of free competition, would best further the public weal. Adam Smith also entertained this reverse notion, but conjointly makes moral demands in the name of enlightened self-interest. Turgot averred that morals depend on "self-love regulated by justice, which is itself only a very enlightened self-love," but on the whole he is closer to the Physiocrats.

The penetration of enlightened self-interest theory among religious apologists is insignificant. Although it corresponds to the theory of exclusive motivation by self-interest, which certainly had its antecedents in the Christian doctrine of depravity, Christian writers felt they were on safer grounds by promising the rewards in heaven rather than on earth. One does meet with occasional references. We must persuade men, wrote Marie Huber in 1738, that their duty is their interest; true spirituality's purpose is intelligent self-love, and religion and virtue are justified by their usefulness. If only we reflect, says Boudier de Villemaire, we realize that our legitimate self-love must not interfere with that of others.

Voltaire, too, pays little attention to this theory, preferring Natural Law as an exhortation and positive law as a compelling motivation. Yet it is to some extent implied in his concept of virtue as obedience to law, which he does not assume to be a form of devotion or altruism. It is also implicit in his drive to enlighten men. Voltaire, however, does not really attempt to set forth any clear statement of the moral problem and its solution. While this may be due in part to his aversion to systematic thinking, the fundamental reason, in greater likelihood, is his pessimism. Unlike the systematizers and revolutionaries, he does not really believe that enough social reform and enough enlightenment can be achieved to offset men's ferocious egoism. Sometimes he likes to say that evil comes from what society has done to men, especially when he is attacking the Christian dogma of original sin. But he knows better; he knows that men have made society in their own image.

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23 *Oeuvres*, I, p. 311.
Voltaire's cynical friend, Frederick the Great, does claim allegiance. Asking what virtue is, he replies: "It is a fortunate constitution of the mind which leads us to fulfill society's duties for our own advantage. . . ." 26 Men are evil, he writes elsewhere, but virtue is necessary to society. Self-love is the only possible solution. "What can be more beautiful . . . than to draw, even from a principle which can lead to vice, the source of public welfare and happiness?" All we have to do is to show men that it is in their interest to be virtuous, and they will be. The royal philosopher notes an apparent contradiction. Virtue is "an attitude of the soul which carries it to the most perfect disinterestedness." How can one reach disinterestedness through self-interest? And Frederick goes on to explain the wide powers of self-interest, especially when stimulated by the fear of blame and shame, and by the desire for esteem and glory. It is a matter of fact, he assures us, that disinterestedness always springs from self-love.27

The staunchest and most doctrinaire supporters of enlightened self-interest were among the Encyclopedic coterie. For Helvétius, there could indeed be no other way. Virtue is both social in locus and motivated by personal interest. This interest may be either immediate or calculated for the future. "Without interest in loving virtue, no virtue." When virtue is without credit, we despise it, and rightly so, for it answers no need. Why does virtue always triumph in the theater? Because we want it to be rewarded and so justify being virtuous. Virtue can be cultivated in men, because it becomes the expression of the desire for power, esteem, and wealth. Consequently, in any sound education, "the idea of my own happiness will always be more or less tightly linked in my memory with that of my fellow-citizens, and the desire for one will evoke in me the desire for the other. From which it follows that in each person love of his neighbor is only the effect of love for himself." 28 Thus Helvétius emphasizes education as a conditioning process, bent to produce a desired kind of thinking and feeling. Men, left to themselves, will not be enlightened enough to avoid the kind of behavior which Hayer had accused

27 "Essai sur l'amour-propre envisagé comme principe de morale" [1763], Oeuvres, IX, pp. 87–98. This paper was later read to the public assembly of the Academy of Berlin.
28 De l'Homme, IX, p. 137 ff.; X, p. 193. See also De l'Esprit, p. 374n.
Helvétius' theory of justifying; they must be compelled to be "enlightened."

With d'Holbach, similarly, enlightened self-interest is a constant theme. On this score his thought is scarcely distinguishable from that of Helvétius. We love virtue only for what selfish good it can bring us. But if we calculate our real self-interest, we must be virtuous, that is, favor other people's happiness in order to induce them to favor ours. Thus duty and obligation are related to happiness in a certain rationalistic view of happiness. A key statement is this one: "Moral obligation is the necessity of using means suitable to making us happy." And elsewhere: "The object of morals is to persuade men that their greatest self-interest requires them to practice virtue. . . . Virtue is lovable only because it is useful. . . . Virtue consists in making oneself happy by giving happiness to others." 31 We must not forget that alongside this doctrine of egoism, d'Holbach (like Helvétius) defines virtue as actions which tend to the well-being of others. 32 We are virtuous when we consider not ourselves but others; however, if we are virtuous, it is because we have no consideration for others, but only for ourselves. This is precisely the ultimate meaning and import of the enlightened self-interest theory in its pure form. Its primary assumption is that of a reciprocity insured by the interdependence of interests—a theory which a modern Spanish dramatist, Jacinto Benavente, has deftly satirized in his comedy, Los intereses creados. 33

Where d'Holbach differs from others is in relating the pursuit of happiness and the necessity of "using" others to a formalistic concept of eternal relationships which contradicts the purely relativist and conventional theories of other materialists. He consistently stresses "the eternal and invariable relationships" be-

29 Morale universelle, I, pp. 2, 75-81.
30 Système de la nature, I, p. 150.
31 Système social, I, p. viii.
32 Système de la nature, I, p. 145, etc.
33 For a modern version of d'Holbach, compare the philosophy of John Dewey. "Why be moral?" he asks. "The answer to the question 'Why not put your hand into the fire?' is the answer of fact. If you do your hand will be burnt. The answer to the question Why acknowledge the right is of the same sort. For right is only an abstract name for the multitude of concrete demands in action which others impress upon us, of which we are obliged, if we would live, to take some account. Its authority is the exigency of their demands, the efficacy of their insistencies." (Human Nature and Conduct, p. 326.)
tween human beings in society, and the eternal and invariable moral laws which result from them. The individual, in his system, is just as much bound to moral imperatives as under the rule of his detested Christianity, although they are supposedly based on natural rather than supernatural laws. He admits of no separate or real realm of moral experience; and yet this is precisely what he wants. When he says that "our duties are the means the necessity of which is shown to us by experience and reason in order to reach our proposed end," he is not suggesting nihilism, but a formalistic relation between a legitimate end (happiness) and the fixed, necessary means (virtue). "When we say that these duties oblige us, it means only that without taking these means, we cannot attain the end our nature proposes. Therefore moral obligation is the necessity of using means calculated to make the beings with whom we live happy, in order to determine them to make us happy. . . . Morality, like the universe, is founded on necessity or on the eternal relations of things." 34 Thus d'Holbach endeavors to make natural (that is, identical with physical nature) what serves the needs and ends of culture, and what a culturally conditioned reason approves. 35 We recall that d'Holbach had argued, in similar fashion, that conscience is entirely acquired, but that when it was formed in conformity with the nature of things, it was universal—thus in effect establishing an objective good and evil independent of subjective pleasure and pain reactions. D'Holbach wants desperately to be a moralist, but on the basis of selfishness and unmoral tendencies. His "self-love" and "self-interest" are shorn of all subjective or relativistic realities; they are declared to be universal and satisfiable in only one way—except for "monsters."

In Diderot's ethical theories (in regard to Diderot we cannot properly use the word in the singular), enlightened self-interest plays an important role. Although he sometimes exclaims that men love virtue, he also, in his radical speculations, recognizes (and sometimes approves of) their complete selfishness. Approval leads to nihilism; but recognition without approval leads to enlightened self-interest. And so this theory winds its way through

34 Système de la nature, I, pp. 145-46, 592-93. These necessary ideas are not innate, nor instinctual, but are mechanically formed by the expression of pleasure and pain (pp. 182-83).
35 See especially, ibid., I, pp. 48-54; here, as on some other occasions, d'Holbach emphasizes the element of self-preservation within the context of self-love.
his works from beginning to end. Unlike some others, he never deludes himself about the difficulty of virtue. "What is virtue?" he asks in the *Eloge de Richardson*. "It is, no matter how you consider it, a sacrifice of oneself." But the sacrifice does not involve an ultimate loss. In the *Essai sur le mérite et la vertu* (1745), he defines virtue as a constraint of passions so that they conspire to the general good, "a heroic effort, and yet one which is never contrary to one's personal interests." This is a moralistic work. In a piece of a different temper, the *Introduction aux grands principes* (1763), his "proselyte" affirms it our duty to be happy; "whence derives the necessity of contributing to the happiness of others, or in other words, of being virtuous." On the virtuous isle of Tahiti, the word "virtue" is dismissed as a "vain display" (*fanfaronnade*), and has been replaced by self-interest. In the *Entretien d'un philosophe avec la maréchale* (1774), Diderot argues that education and experience can direct the natural pleasure motive toward virtue (reinforcing a natural tendency to beneficence). The esteem of others, both now and in future generations, seems to him a most powerful reward and incentive. Thus Diderot, at times, thought that by advancing a doctrine of rational, intelligent selfishness, it might be possible to end the struggle in man, to heal the schism between his selfish nature and his social nature.

The many writers who embrace the enlightened self-interest theory in the later years of the century do not add anything new. They are, to be sure, testimony to the diffusion of that idea. We need only list some of the most important references.

"Enlightened self-interest" is basically an attempt to unify nature and culture, through reason conceived of as culture's weapon rather than as "the slave of the passions." The essential natural

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37 I, p. 13.
38 II, p. 85.
40 *OEuvres*, II, p. 510.
drive is safeguarded, but its "bad" aspects are curbed. Those among its adherents who were naturalists were thereby introducing value distinctions among the several natural impulses and desires, and their varied modes of satisfaction. They were in effect, if not in deed, admitting that culture creates values, too, and that these take precedence over merely natural values (that is, over natural values which are not also sanctioned by culture). Virtue, wrote a nonnaturalist, is not nature, but a correction of nature; 42 and this definition applies strictly to all but the nihilistic writings.

Nevertheless this fine nostrum had its opponents in the eighteenth century. Their objections were various. Boufflers saw a limit. "One may also be just, it is said, out of intelligent self-interest; but self-interest is concerned only with duties that are seen and judged by [other] men; remove men's look and self-interest will again think only of itself. Therefore one is really just not out of fear or self-interest, but out of love of justice. . . ." 43

Among the apologists, Bergier was the principal enemy of this theory. He doubts the power of reason to control passion and direct action. "There is, in this life, no interest general and strong enough, no reward so certain, no punishment so infallible, as to persuade us to virtue when it is opposed by a violent passion or present advantage." 44 In this argumentation, Bergier was being far more consistent with the analysis of human nature and motivation accepted by most of the philosophes (and many others, besides) than they were themselves—we need only mention the analyses of Bayle, Fontenelle, and Hume. 45 Elsewhere he proffers a satirical barb: "[a man's] enlightened self-interest is therefore to get as much advantage for himself as possible, and to contribute as little as he can." 46 If a man is powerful or clever enough to get the help and esteem of others without giving them his, he will reach the perfection of morality: "virtue's heroism is to make dupes." It is obvious that Bergier is keenly aware of the nihilistic opportunities offered by an ethics of self-interest. This is most clear when he repeats d'Holbach's leitmotif with only a slight change of accent: "Since man's sole purpose is to make his existence happy

42 Le Maître de Claville, op. cit., I, p. 95.
43 Discours sur la vertu (Académie de Berlin, 1797), 1800, p. 45.
44 Principes de métaphysique, pp. 162-63.
45 See An Age of Crisis, chap. 9.
46 Examen du matérialisme, ou Réfutation du système de la nature, 1771, II, p. 394.
he should work for others only insofar as he has good reason to hope that it will be to his own advantage." 47 (Obviously, if everyone did this, no one would do anything at all for anyone else.) This is a reversal of morality, exclaims Bergier; it makes virtue identical with something else that is not virtue.

Among the secular writers, the most determined foe of enlightened self-interest was Rousseau. As early as 1743, in his Jugement sur la Paix perpetuelle of the abbé de Saint-Pierre, he pointed out a fatal flaw. The conditions required for the adoption of Saint-Pierre’s plan were those anticipated by the proponents of enlightened self-interest, and Rousseau declares them to be impossible: “for it would be necessary that the sum of private interests be less than the common interest, and that each should believe he saw in the good of all the greatest good that he could hope for himself. Now this requires a concourse of wisdom in so many heads, and a concourse of relations of so many interests, that one cannot hope that chance would bring about the fortuitous accord of all the necessary circumstances.” And he adds—very significantly for his own political thinking and for the logical implications of eighteenth-century ethical thought: “however, if accord does not take place, only force can take its place; and then it is no longer a matter of persuading, but of compelling. . . . What is useful to the public is scarcely ever introduced except by force, since private interests are almost always opposed to it.” 48

In the Discours sur l’inegalité, Rousseau’s picture of human nature in society is in fundamental opposition to the theory of enlightened self-interest. His derision breaks out in Note i. 49 In present societies, men, inevitably and in all duty, hate and hurt each other. There is no way of reconciling their interests.

If you answer that society is so constituted that each gains in serving others, I shall reply that this would be very well, if he did not gain still more in hurting others. There is no legitimate profit which is not exceeded by the profit we can make illegitimately, and the wrong we do to others is always more lucrative than the services. It is only a question of securing impunity; and that is what the powerful use all their force to do, and the weak all their ruses. 50

48 Vaughan, op. cit., I, p. 392.
49 Vaughan, op. cit., I, p. 203.
50 The same idea is again baldly stated in the Lettre à d’Alembert (ed. Fuchs, pp. 31–32).
The basis of Rousseau's central idea in the Contrat social, the total sovereignty of the general will, is precisely the impossibility of enlightened self-interest.

Indeed, each individual as a man may have a particular will contrary to or different from the general will which he has as a citizen. His private interest may speak to him quite differently than the common interest; his absolute and natural independent existence may make him look upon what he owes to the common cause as a gratuitous contribution whose loss will be less harmful to others than the payment will be onerous to him . . . an injustice whose progress would cause the ruin of the body politic.

The conclusion, foreshadowed by his criticism of Saint-Pierre, follows: "we shall force him to be free." 51

Rousseau's ethics alternates between the sufficiency of intuition, conscience, and common sense, when he is considering the individual as an independent, self-guiding entity, and the constraint or indoctrination imposed by "guides," when he is considering the individual as a part of the communal totality or "moi commun." Not only is Rousseau's moral and social thought hostile to the enlightened self-interest theory; his personal hostility to the Encyclopedists enabled him to feel considerable satisfaction in the opportunity for "unmasking" them which that theory gave him. For these self-styled benefactors and lovers of mankind also proclaimed that we could act only out of self-interest, told men that the right and best thing for them to do was to pursue their own interest. They are really arguing, he charged, for the denial of all values in order not to be hindered in the pursuit of their pleasures—of all pleasures.52 Only he, Jean-Jacques, was the true lover of virtue, the true moralist.

Diderot, too, when he is not intoxicated with virtue, or attempting to defend it, was perfectly aware of the same facts. In his Observations pour la confection des lois, written for Catherine the Great, he notes: "It is evident that in a well-ordered society, the wicked man cannot hurt society without hurting himself. [How many times had Diderot written this?] The wicked man knows this. But what he knows even better is that he gains more from his wickedness than he loses as a member of the society

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51 Livre I, chap. VII; also II, chap. VI.
52 Cf. J. Starobinski, op. cit., pp. 89–90 (with caution, since Starobinski does not point out the injustice in Rousseau's reasoning, especially the affirmation that the Encyclopedists condemned self-interest), and the references given to the Dialogues.
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which he is harming.” As we shall see in Chapter 7, Diderot is essentially a “liberal.” He refuses to draw Rousseau’s political conclusions. He rejects the inculcation of “patriotism,” the imposed discipline of personal pleasures, and the demand for sacrificing them to the social welfare. “I want society to be happy; but I want to be happy, too; and there are as many ways of being happy as there are individuals. Our own happiness is the basis of all our true duties.” Consequently, the sovereign, or general will—contrary to Rousseau—is limited by unalienable rights, and government’s role should be minimal. It is clear that Diderot is torn between the desire to make men virtuous through social organization and the desire to leave them as free as possible to realize their happiness, each in his own way. He does not really believe in his own rational solutions, as much as he would like to. And so, in Diderot’s dilemmas, we can see in sharp focus the dilemmas of ethical thought in his time.

It is noteworthy that Sade opposed enlightened self-interest on the same grounds as Rousseau, though with different motives and conclusions. We recall, from our discussion of Justice and Law, that he denies the general interest any prerogative. In the earlier Les Infortunes de la vertu, Sade had tried, somewhat more subtly, to point out a possible contradiction between virtue and public interest. “When the general interest of men leads them to moral corruption, he who will not want to be corrupted with them will fight then against the general interest.”

There were even more weaknesses and flaws in the argumentation for enlightened self-interest than its eighteenth-century opponents specified. Chubb, for instance, in his Reflections on Virtue and Happiness, had proposed that while it is reasonable to prefer my own happiness to another’s when we both cannot be happy at the same time, the “public felicity” must be preferred to mine because the greatest good should be preferred to the lesser. Now there is obviously a logical gap between the first statement and the second, because the quantity of good measured by the word “greater” involves a different kind of evaluation, the first being subjectively experienced, the second rationally conceived. If the second standard were to be uniformly applied, then the first proposition would no longer be true, for we should often, on that

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64 Ibid., pp. 168–69.
ground, have to prefer the happiness of another individual to our own. And conversely, if we are to prefer our feeling of happiness to another person's, then we are entitled to do so in regard to any number of persons. (Even weaker is Chubb's asseveration that to get pleasure out of doing harm to others is unnatural, because it introduces evil into the world.) In strict terms, as d'Alembert admits, there is opposition between personal and social interest; if a sacrifice or "renunciation" is demanded, this must be so. The imposition of identity depends on an "ultimate" self-interest which, as Rousseau and Sade pointed out, is not experienced or certain. But the proponents were so convinced of its certitude that d'Holbach could confidently admit that "if vice makes a man happy, he should love vice." 55

There were several other flaws in the theory. The assumptions most open to challenge were the interpretation of the "best satisfaction" of self-interest, and what Halévy has called "the artificial identification of interests." Reason was called upon to accomplish a most difficult task, perhaps in many instances, one beyond its powers: that is, to dispossess original instincts by a rational vision of ultimate good and a theoretical ideal which often involves a partial or complete sacrifice of the original good—even, in extreme cases, of self-preservation. Is the motivation involved strong enough to overcome instincts and passions? Christian virtue was a formalism dependent on conscience and divine commands. Enlightened self-interest was an eudaemonistic teleology which in some cases—as with d'Holbach—ended up with a very similar formalism (excluding differences of detail). But the immediate implication

55 The theory of enlightened self-interest also runs counter to the psychology of the Enlightenment, as Cassirer describes it: that the moving power comes from the will, from uneasiness, not from the idea of "a future good towards which the act is supposed to serve as a means." (Op. cit., pp. 102-3.) Albert Schweitzer writes: "But it does not follow that the individual becomes more moral the better he understands his own interests. The mutual relation between him and society is not of such a character that he derives benefit from the latter just in proportion as he himself by his moral conduct helps to establish its prosperity. If the majority of its members, with short-sighted egoism, are intent only on their own good, then the man who acts with wider outlook makes sacrifices from which there is no prospect of gain for himself... If, on the other hand, through the moral conduct of the majority of its members the condition of society is favourable, the individual profits by it, even if he fails to behave towards it as morality demands... he will carve out for himself an unduly big share of personal prosperity out of the prosperity of the community." Therefore rightly understood egoism will not oblige the individual to activity for the common good. (Op. cit., pp. 72-73.) In truth, each person feels the risk of being taken advantage of, if he sacrifices for the common interest and others do not. Schweitzer's arguments are precisely those of Rousseau.
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of radical materialism is an "evolutionary morality" of the strong. The other outcome requires the intervention of a moralizing intelligence operating in a social medium. Furthermore, the supporters of the theory all claimed that men are virtuous, not out of esteem for virtue, but only to win esteem and praise (and to avoid their opposites). However, if men did not esteem virtue, how could one win esteem by practicing it? On the other hand, the criticism that enlightened self-interest proposes an immoral basis for moral action does not point to an inconsistency (although it may be a valid objection), since it rests on a definition of "moral" as intentional, whereas, as we have seen, the utilitarians place moral value in the act.

In reading some of the moralists who supported enlightened self-interest, with heuristic emphasis, one sometimes gets the feeling that they were uneasy, and entertained unavowed mental reservations. Diderot, and doubtless others, never really forgot that men, subject to emotions, prejudices, and impulses, are very little swayed by reason, even in their own interest; and that the motive of their choice is not, most often, the ultimate results of an action, but the relative pleasantness of the idea of several possible courses of action. Perhaps they were vaguely aware of the type of criticism Lord Keynes once made of Bertrand Russell, and which we may aptly fit to them: Russell, points out Keynes, argues that our troubles are due to the fact that men have not lived rationally; therefore the remedy is to start living rationally.

Because of these shortcomings and these misgivings, many moralists turned for a supplement to the virtue-happiness equivalence, which offered the advantage of an immediate and certain fulfillment of the egoistic demand for happiness. The goal was still the same. If men have to pursue their happiness above all else, and society needs virtue above all else, a reconciliation must be affected. The problem was eternal, and the Christians faced it with the promise that the reconciliation would take place in the life to come. "Be just, be happy," writes the abbé Pey. "That is what the law of nature says to all men; and as under a just God justice must lead to happiness, these two laws may be reduced to this unique precept: Fear God and observe his commands."56 The

56 La Loi de nature, Montauban, 1789, pp. 16–17. Cf. Leibniz (ed. Latta, pp. 292–93): "But in order that it may be concluded by a universal demonstration that everything honourable is beneficial and that everything base is hurtful, we must assume the immortality of the soul and the Ruler of the universe, God."
secularists did not have this evasion. Their answer had to be one akin to the Stoic doctrine that virtue is its own reward, that happiness lay in the virtuous act itself. Obviously this involved an idea of happiness which was divorced from the sensual pleasure of hedonism. It was happiness conceived of as contentment, good conscience, self-approbation flowing from the contemplation of an ego-image which the person could look upon as satisfactory. It was nonetheless in harmony with the general utilitarian view, as we can see by Crousaz’s objection that if virtue were always rewarded, it would be a simple matter of interest to be virtuous.

On the thesis of virtue-happiness there was, with some exceptions, little quarrel between the pious and the free-thinkers. It was good Christian doctrine. As Ameline had said in 1667, “Good conscience is the Paradise of man on earth... it makes the most painful and grievous life sweet and contented.” This litany is repeated in countless sermons as well as in the writings of the apologists. Virtue “can make our happiness in this world,” Bergier assures us, “never is crime really advantageous.” No power on earth can frustrate this reward, adds Paulian. “Even if the entire universe were unjust towards the man of good, he still has the advantage of loving himself, of esteeming himself, of turning within his own heart with pleasure, of contemplating his actions with the same eyes with which others would see, were they not blind.” How Jean-Jacques would have approved and echoed these words, with himself in mind!

Among secular moralists, the virtue-happiness equivalence does not appear to have been a dominant theme in the early part of the century, although brief references are not infrequent. Perhaps it sounded too much like a preacher’s discourse to be palatable at a time of hedonistic indulgence; moreover, the issues and difficulties of a secular ethics had not become sufficiently sharpened to create an awareness of the need for it. Bayle, who was not at all attracted by the calculus of enlightened self-interest (not believing men to be rationally motivated), at times found this alterna-

57 Most eighteenth-century moralists would have affirmed that an ego-image is selected because its contemplation gives pleasure; but it is equally possible to argue that it gives pleasure because of admiration for or approbation of virtue, the approbation being the prior and determining factor.
60 Examen, p. 220.
tive appealing. At least he is aware of the powerful effects of remorse. "Nature has so tied together sadness with reflection on an unjust act of which one feels guilty, that even those who have feared nothing from God have been downcast in recalling their evil deeds." 62 Bayle, however, as Voltaire was to say, se combat lui-même, and we shall return to him later. Pope assures us that happiness, "our being's end and aim," cannot be had alone or by seeking more than one's share.

Oh blind to truth, and God's whole scheme below, Who fancy Bliss to Vice, to Virtue Woe! (Essay on Man, IV, 93–94)

Pope does add a word to take care of scoffers (like Bayle, as we shall see):

"But sometimes Virtue starves, while Vice is fed."
What then? Is the reward of Virtue bread? (149–50)
. . . Nor is his claim to plenty, but content. (156)
. . . That true self-love and Social are the same;
That Virtue only makes our Bliss below. . . . (396–97)

Among early French writings, the libertin piece, "Réflexion sur l'existence de l'âme," while upholding this view, cautioned that it was only for "honnêtes gens," and would be dangerous for the rabble, who are not open to such delicate feelings. 63 The high-minded, though not always consistent, Vauvenargues defines small men as those who are easily discouraged by what life does to them. Greater souls keep their feeling of worth despite injustice or persecution. But Vauvenargues' virtue is the antique strength of character rather than a general idea of moral virtue, and he is basically a pessimist, saddened by the cruelty of life and men's indifference to merit and virtue. 64 Montesquieu's Troglodytes learn the joys of virtue, and Usbek later exclaims, "When a man examines himself, what a satisfaction for him to find his heart is just! This pleasure, as severe as it is, must delight him; he sees his being as far above those who do not have it as he sees himself above tigers and bears." 65 Here the pleasure is clearly egoistic and comparative. Hume, too, believes that virtue, in a practical way, is productive of happiness, but does not dwell on the matter. 66

62 Oeuvres diverses, III, p. 320. Then how do some who kill feel no remorse?
"Those people imagine that everything considered, their act is not wrong."
63 Printed in the Nouvelles libertés de penser, Amsterdam, 1743, pp. 170–71.
65 Lettre LXXXIII.
66 Enquiry, p. 169.
Voltaire was, in general, an adherent. In an early poem he writes that all the glories of earth mean little if we do not have a just heart and are not pleased with ourselves, liked by the good and approved by the wise.\textsuperscript{67} These sentiments are repeated in a much later play, *Les Scythes* (1767).\textsuperscript{68} This is poetry. But in prose, too, Voltaire, fulminating against d'Holbach, asserts that it is “proven by experience that the satisfaction of having conquered [vices] is a hundred times greater than the pleasure of having succumbed to them.”\textsuperscript{69} However Voltaire was too much the realist, and the pessimist, to make a major commitment to so optimistic a theory as the virtue-happiness equivalence. *Zadig* and *Candide* show us the practical “rewards” of virtue in this world, in almost nihilistic terms. In the article “Souverain Bien,” he notes dryly, “The virtuous man with kidney stone and gout is very unhappy”—but then adds, “less than the evil man in the same situation.” The insolent persecutor caressing a new mistress is very happy. And Voltaire here reaches a nonutilitarian conclusion, one which harks back to his fondness for Natural Law: “Virtue is not a good, it is a duty; it belongs to a different class, of a higher order. It has nothing to do with painful or pleasant sensations.”

Voltaire again brings to mind Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas*, whose hero starts out in the world, from the prison of his El Dorado, confident that virtue will bring happiness and “the benediction of gratitude” of men. He is disinclined to believe the warning of Nekayah: “But this, at least, may be maintained, that we do not always find visible happiness in proportion to visible virtue. All natural and almost all political evils are incident alike to the bad and good. . . . All that virtue can afford is quietness of conscience and a steady prospect of a happier state; this may enable us to endure calamity with patience; but remember that patience must suppose pain.”\textsuperscript{70} Rasselas learns that the warning is true and retreats to his El Dorado.

It is toward the middle of the century that the virtue-happiness equivalence begins to be looked upon as a valuable factor in the

\textsuperscript{67} Epître XVI (1718), *Oeuvres*, X, p. 244.

\textsuperscript{68} \ldots le secret témoignage
\begin{quote}
Que la vertu se rend, qui soutient le courage,  
Qui seul en est le prix, et que j'ai dans mon cœur,  
Me tiendra lieu de tout, et même du bonheur.” (VI, p. 308)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{69} XVIII, p. 371.

\textsuperscript{70} *Rasselas*, p. 51.
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support of secular morality. It progresses simultaneously on two fronts; clarified in the speculative thinking of moralists, it obtains ever wider diffusion on the wings of the increasing vogue of sensibility. In 1748, Burlamaqui's *Principes du droit naturel* insists on this relation.

Everything contrary to the lights of reason and conscience can only win the secret disapprobation of our minds and cause us chagrin and shame. The heart is wounded by the idea of crime, and its memory is always sad and bitter. On the other hand, any conformity with right reason is a state of order and perfection which the mind approves; and we are so made that a good action becomes for us the germ of a secret joy; it is always recollected with pleasure. And truly, what is sweeter than to be able to bear witness to oneself that one is what one should be, and that one is doing what one should do and what one should reasonably do, what befits us best, what is most in conformity to our natural destination? Whatever is natural is pleasant; whatever is within order is satisfying.71

Burlamaqui, however, is unable to stay within the bounds of secularism. He undertakes a lengthy examination of the objections to this theory.72 Some of these he believes he can refute. While it is true that injustice and passions sometimes afford pleasure or advantage, virtue is surer, its results are more real, pure, and enduring, since man is a reasonable and social being. As for natural ills, virtue helps to avoid them, and gives greater strength to bear them. "There is a contentment inseparable from virtue, which can never be taken away from us; and our essential happiness suffers but little damage from the passing, external accidents which sometimes bother us." 73 Nature links the physical and the moral, in good and in evil. But then Burlamaqui admits that life does not work out that way. The goods and ills of nature and of fortune are not distributed according to merit. The wrongs of injustice fall upon the innocent as often as on the guilty; even more, virtue itself frequently attracts persecution, and the good man becomes "the victim of his own virtue." In such cases, what argument do we have? "Will the inner satisfaction given by the testimony of good conscience suffice by itself to determine a man to sacrificing his goods, his security, his honor and even his life?"

72 Ibid., pp. 230--41.
73 A long quotation from Isocrates follows, to the effect that virtue promotes our self-interest.
This is a question of widest import to the welfare of society. On the one hand, only the observation of natural moral laws can preserve social order and make men happy. On the other hand, virtue and vice are not sufficiently distinguished by their consequences to induce men to follow these laws. Every law must have a sufficient sanction to determine a reasonable creature to obey it for the sake of his own self-interest, which is the motive of action. While the moral system is generally advantageous, it does not recompense particular individuals in particular instances for the required sacrifice. It is for this reason that civil law exists, to back up Natural Law. But civil law, though a help, “still leaves a great void in the moral system,” and vice is frequently better rewarded than virtue. It is at this point that Burlamaqui, with his back to the wall, slips out of the noose and finds the answer in God’s rewards and punishments in the life to come.

Diderot was an ardent champion of the virtue-happiness equivalence. “The happiness of the good, ‘the peace of soul’ found in bienfaisance,” writes Jean Fabre, “is one of the themes developed by Diderot to the point of dizziness.” Pierre Hermand declares that the coincidence of virtue and happiness is “the keystone” of Diderot’s ethics. After all, if happiness, as he declares, is the highest end and duty, there is no way of justifying moral virtue unless it produces that result. Only the vicious man would be wise, or indeed, moral, and thus nihilism would be entirely justified. The inevitable consequences of virtue and vice form the refrain of Diderot’s drames, of much of his criticism and theorizing in aesthetics, and of many of his letters. We need refer to only a few of his statements. By virtue, he declares, most significantly, we can transcend nature.

Thus you will raise yourself, so to speak, above her, by the excellence of a system which repairs its disorders. You will be happy in the evening, if you will have done more good than it has done harm. That is the only way of reconciling yourself with life. How can you hate an existence which you make sweet to yourself by its usefulness to others? ... The heart of man is sometimes serene and sometimes covered with clouds; but the heart of a good man, like the spectacle of nature, is always great and beautiful, whether tranquil or agitated. ... The habit of virtue is the only one which you can contract without fear for the future. Sooner or later the others bring regret.  

74 Neveu de Rameau, ed. J. Fabre, p. 186.
No reward is needed, writes Diderot to his mistress, for beautiful actions, and wickedness is its own punishment. In the *Introduction aux grands principes* (1763), he openly declares that the paths of virtue and happiness must be identical, or else it would be folly to be virtuous. Here it is quite clear that happiness is placed first in the scale of values; but Diderot really loves virtue at least as much as happiness, and if the intellectual framework of his time and of his own materialism had permitted it, he would doubtless have reversed the order. The least he can do is to assert their equivalence. "No; the path of happiness is the same path of virtue. Fortune may bring reverses upon it, but it cannot take away that sweet delight, that pure voluptuousness which accompanies it." Conscience, the testimony of one's inner self—"that is the source of true goods and ills; that is what makes the happiness of the good man amidst persecutions and misfortunes, and the torment of the wicked, amidst fortune's favors." In the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot tries to substantiate his thesis by a pseudo-scientific analysis of temperament. In both his first work and his last, in the *Essai sur le mérite et la vertu* and the *Essai sur Claude et Néron*, he uses the same phrase: "No happiness without virtue." He risks all on that proposition.

For d'Holbach, as for Diderot, the virtue-happiness equivalence becomes a mainstay of his system. Like Diderot, he desires virtue more than anything but knows that men desire happiness more than anything. His thought, like Diderot's, contains pronounced formalist elements, despite its announced teleology of happiness. He also agrees that it would be folly to be virtuous, if evil-doing were the path to happiness. But he is more convinced than Diderot of the certainty of the argument. "It is only by virtue that [man] can make himself happy." D'Holbach is aware of the objections. Like Burlamaqui, he knows that often virtue, far from being esteemed and rewarded, is "in almost all countries hated, persecuted, forced to sigh for the ingratitude and injustice of men." How can d'Holbach, the atheist, escape the noose? His recourse is

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77 *Oeuvres*, II, p. 88.
79 *In Claude et Néron* he repeats again: "there is only one duty, to be happy; there is only one virtue, justice." Since duty is to be virtuous, happiness and justice are made synonymous. (III, p. 312.)
80 *Système de la nature*, I, pp. 342–47. Here enlightened self-interest is inseparable from the virtue-happiness equivalence.
to betray the materialist-sensualist philosophy, which allowed of no difference between pleasurable sensations except the quantitative (intensity and duration), and to affirm an arbitrary definition of happiness that is in accord with his formalism of virtue, and is therefore a *petitio principii*.

I answer by admitting that as a necessary consequence of mankind’s errors, virtue rarely leads to the objects of which the rabble makes happiness consist. . . . But the good man does not desire either the recompenses or the suffrage of a society so badly constituted; content with a domestic happiness, he does not seek to multiply relationships which would only multiply dangers; he knows that a vicious society is a whirlpool with which the virtuous man cannot coordinate himself; he steps aside, away from the beaten path, in which he would inevitably be crushed. He does the good as much as he can, in his sphere; he does not interfere with the wicked who wish to go down into the arena; he sighs at the blows they give each other, he congratulates himself on the mediocrity in which he places his security. 81

Regardless of how life treats good and evil men, d’Holbach steadfastly maintains that the evil man is odious, is hated and despised, and therefore must be insecure and unhappy, and that he blushes at the bottom of his heart. “The least reflection proves to us that there is no wicked man who is not ashamed of his conduct, who is really satisfied with himself, who does not envy the fate of the good man, who is not forced to admit that he has paid very dearly for the advantages which he can never enjoy without unpleasant reflections about himself.” 82 And so, on and on. The good man has a different fate. He “consoles himself by looking within himself, approves himself on finding in his heart a pure joy, a solid contentment, the right to expect the affection and esteem of those whom his fate allows him to influence.” 83 On the one hand, then, d’Holbach proposes to us that we should be unselfish out of selfishness and assures us of a rigorous formal relation, an inevitable result. Conscience takes the place of the paradise of the Christians. On the other hand, he admits at other times that this universal truth is not operative in our society, in which the wicked reap rewards without corresponding penalties

82 *Ibid.*, I, p. 255 ff. See also the emotional passage at the end of the volume (I, 397), and *La Morale universelle*, I, p. 62 ff.
The Utilitarian Synthesis

from their warped conscience. Ethics now veers to politics: we must reform society so that this great truth becomes true. D’Holbach’s ethics are built on sand. 84

Rousseau was not a partisan of enlightened self-interest for the reasons we have seen, but the equivalence theory appealed to him strongly. It had the virtue of the immediate, and of not depending on rationality. The Savoyard Vicar summarizes his view:

The wicked man fears himself and runs from himself; his joy comes in throwing himself outside of himself. He casts worried looks about him and seeks an object that will divert him; without bitter satire, without insulting mockery, he would always be sad; the mocking laugh is his only pleasure. On the contrary, the serenity of the just man is inner; his laughter has no maliciousness, but joy; he carries its source within himself; he is as gay alone as in the midst of a group. . . 85

Julie, in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, is the incarnation of this theory. Worried, furtive, and unhappy when she sinned, the return to virtue liberates her heart from its oppressive weight, and she exults in her release. Unfortunately, as the novel proceeds, it becomes less certain that she is really happy. Rousseau, too, makes a clear distinction between the material and the moral rewards. Not an upholder of enlightened self-interest, he can admit without inconsistency that virtue is not rewarded by the world, but only in our hearts.

Once more we may speak of a refrain, of a chorus of ayes, which continues to the end of the century, and it is sufficient to list some of the principal references. 86 We must also reckon into the account

84 Holland pointed out that the phrase, “Man cannot be happy without virtue,” is meaningless in d’Holbach’s mouth. If we are so constituted that we have impetuous desires, necessary to our happiness which, as d’Holbach admits, can be satisfied only at the expense of others, one cannot say that virtue produces happiness. Holland emphasizes the trials of virtue but, instead of showing that virtue and happiness are different things, he claims that virtue gives us a different and better kind of happiness! (Op. cit., I, pp. 256–65.) The same point is well argued by Bergier (Examen, I, pp. 414–22); part of his argument is given in R. R. Palmer, op. cit., pp. 189–90, 215–16. See also d’Holbach’s *Système social*, I, pp. 58–65.

85 Emile, p. 351. See *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, ed. Pomcau, pp. 199–200, 344. etc.

86 Frederick the Great (Anti-Machiavel, *Oeuvres*, VIII, p. 89), amusingly writes that the tyrant will always be unhappy: “he will not escape that fatal melancholy which will strike his imagination, and which will be his executioner in this world.” Tous- saint pens a naïve piece to show that the wicked are always unhappy, virtue always rewarded, “Discours sur les Avantages de la Vertu” (Histoire de l’Académie de Ber­ lin, 1766, pp. 461–66). Mirabeau is equally naïve, asserting, together with the usual themes, that no man conceives himself as the center of the world (Des Lettres de cachet, *Oeuvres*, VII, pp. 49–56). See Naigeon, *Discours préliminaire*, pp. 92–98;
the innumerable moralizing novels and short stories whose lesson is the same; the outstanding example is Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*.

Like the theory of enlightened self-interest, the virtue-happiness equivalence had its critics in its own time. As it became increasingly diffused and more important, the attacks on it also increased. We hear very little against it in the first half of the century. We shall note Bayle's devastating scrutiny under another head. One of Rémond de Saint-Mard's characters declares: "You have no idea how many impudent people I have seen who were very happy despite it." Mandeville criticized it by implication, when he wrote that there are few men of virtue, "because all the Recompence a Man has of a virtuous Action is the pleasure of doing it, which most People reckon but poor Pay." J.-Fr. Bernard brings out the very arguments to which Burlamaqui and d'Holbach later attempted a reply.

Subsequently, the virtue-happiness equivalence and its attempted synthesis of nature and culture were attacked principally by two groups, both of whom were interested in marking the separation between nature and culture. Although both groups were of lesser importance (in regard to diffusion, but not in regard to cultural history), they gathered strength in the second half of the century. The first were the nihilists, the second the altruists. We may advance the hypothesis that the development of utilitarian thinking called forth these two opposing outlooks, in a way that Natural Law and simple, prudent hedonism, which dominated in the early part of the period, had not.

La Mettrie was the first nihilist to issue an open challenge. Virtue, he contends, is not natural to man and has no relation to happiness. Men are blissfully happy in the midst of vice, and many virtuous people are solitary and dour: "people respect them and run from them, that's the fate of virtue; while everyone seeks out likable people with vices which are despised." Happiness comes from the art of pleasing, not from virtue. There are instincts by

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87 Oeuvres, Amsterdam, 1750, I, pp. 504–5.

88 *Fable* (1714–1729), I, p. 246.

89 *Dialogues* (1730), pp. 72–88.

90 The chief current of criticism of the virtue-happiness equivalence is probably in the novel. See An *Age of Crisis*, chap. 14. Virtue is shown to be a handicap in the world.
which every animal is led to happiness; virtue is not among them. "It is the same with all the wicked. They can be happy, if they can be wicked without remorse. I dare to say more: he who has no remorse, in such familiarity with crime that vices are virtues for him, will be happier than such another who, after a fine action, is sorry he has done it, and so loses all the gain." 91

Not many men have had Diderot's intellectual courage—or versatility. In Le Neveu de Rameau he challenges the basis of his own moral philosophy, in the person of the protagonist of the dialogue, "Lui" (Rameau's nephew). When Lui's antagonist ("Moi") declares that one must be virtuous to be happy, he retorts, "And yet I see an infinity of honest people who are not happy, and an infinity of people who are happy without being honest." Moi's only reply is, "You think so." How close are some of the following lines, spoken by Lui, to La Mettrie's:

Lui: And since I can make my happiness by vices which are natural to me, and which I have acquired without work, and keep without effort, which fit with the morals of my nation . . . it would be very strange for me to torment myself like a damned soul, to castrate myself and make myself into something else; to give myself a character foreign to mine; very estimable qualities, I admit, without argument; but which would be hard for me to acquire, to practice, would lead me nowhere, maybe worse than nowhere. . . . They praise virtue, but they hate it; but they run from it, but it freezes you with cold, and in this world you've got to have warm feet. And then, it would make me sour-tempered, infallibly; for why do we so often see the pious so harsh, so ill-tempered, so unsociable? It is because they have undertaken a task which is not natural to them. . . . And to cut the matter short, I won't put up with your happiness, nor the happiness of some visionaries like you. Moi: I see, my friend, that you don't know what it is, and that you are not even made to learn it.

Lui: So much the better, blast it! So much the better. It would make me die of hunger, of boredom and perhaps of remorse.92

Diderot's character, Lui, reminds us of those Helvétius and d'Holbach write about, the ones who are so naturally disposed ("unfortunately born") that they cannot find happiness except in vice. And Diderot himself, in his Réfutation d'Helvétius, later takes Lui's view in a broadside against Helvétius' thesis that education

91 Discours sur le bonheur, pp. 172–73.
can change men. "Isn't the practice of virtue a sure means of being happy? . . . No, indeed! There are men, so unfortunately born, so violently moved by avarice, ambition, disorderly love of women, that I would condemn them to unhappiness if I prescribed to them a constant struggle against their dominating passion." But won't that man be unhappier as a result of his passion than because of his struggle against it? I'm sure I don't know, and every day I see men who prefer to die than to change their ways." Diderot cannot escape from the noose, as long as happiness is the end and virtue the means.

A few apologists also stood up in opposition to the virtue-happiness equivalence. They refused to abandon the traditional notion of virtue as a sacrifice of egoism, rather than as its fulfillment. Bergier pointed out that the theory made of Natural Law only a tendency to pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Why do the materialists complain that there is no Providence because vice is triumphant in the world? Isn't this complaint the very refutation of their virtue-happiness theory? Men's nature being what it is, society must be what it is; virtue cannot be happy in this world, and any planning for such a world is "ideal and chimerical."
The monk, Jacob (Bernard Lambert), ridiculed the idea that virtue is its own reward. Happiness is the sovereign good, and virtue can't give us that, "because it often imposes the most painful sacrifices on us." Its reward will come later, but it is a pretty poor reward by itself, for a creature who wants happiness above all else and who is incapable of disinterestedness.

It is clear that the virtue-happiness equivalence (like enlight-

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93 For the theory of "the dominating passion," see An Age of Crisis, p. 239.
94 Oeuvres, VI, pp. 438–39. See Rêve de d'Alembert, II, p. 176. This is the same Diderot who defied d'Holbach (as he writes to Sophie Volland) "to find me in history a scoundrel, however perfectly happy he may have been, whose life did not offer me the strongest presumption of unhappiness equal to his wickedness; and a good man, however perfectly unhappy he may have been, whose life did not offer me the strongest presumption of a happiness proportionate to his goodness. My dearest, what a beautiful task [to write] the secret and unknown history of those two men! If I could do it according to my liking, the great question of virtue and happiness would be far advanced; we shall have to see. . . ." But d'Holbach, laughing, found it easy to pick up any volume of history as an answer, and Diderot, despairing, is reduced (as Jean Fabre notes) to Rousseau's postulate: "it is bad education, bad example, bad legislation which corrupt us. If that is an error, at least I am glad to find it at the bottom of my heart. . . ." (Ibid., pp. 187–88.)
95 Métaphysique, pp. 162–63.
96 Examen, I, pp. 422–23.
97 Essai sur la jurisprudence universelle, 1729, pp. 318–28. See also Pey, op. cit., p. 127.
ened self-interest) is a secularization of Christian morality in regard to motivation, and was therefore bound to be opposed by some sharp-thinking theologians.

Man's moral history is an unending struggle to surpass the instinctual egoistic drives, to harness their libidinal energy to creative and co-operative social purposes. Freud, who in many ways was a spiritual child of the Enlightenment, wrote, "I should imagine that as long as virtue is not rewarded in this life, ethics will preach in vain." 98 That is precisely why the major group of eighteenth-century moralists tried so hard to convince their readers that it is rewarded, inevitably and handsomely, far more than vice, whose visible rewards are delusive and whose hidden punishments are cruel.

Duty and pleasure, they urged, coincide; morality asks nothing more of us than that we should be happy. The secularism which had been saying that happiness comes from following nature, now said that it followed virtue—but without violating nature. This, according to Robert Mauzi, constitutes a "double mauvaise foi." How true this judgment is can be seen in a phrase of Delisle de Sales: "the purest soul is ready to go astray, when one is clumsy enough to put into conflict its inclination to happiness and its virtue." 98a

Finding themselves unable to avoid the question of what actually happens in real life, the moralists were forced to retreat to the inner sanctum of conscience, and its rewards and punishments. They overlooked the fact that while virtue does have its rewards, they are not necessarily greater than those of vice, nor are the pangs of remorse more cruel than the deprivation of other satisfactions and pleasures. The idealistic thinkers tried to make men believe that they are not really happy, when they act and live in certain ways, even though they feel happy. Give up these pleasures and satisfactions, they urged, like religious apostles, and you will know real happiness. These supposed "experientialists" in ethics turned their backs to experience, which belies their doctrine. Is it any wonder that rebellious spirits reared their heads and declared all this to be nonsense or bad faith—an arbitrary imposition on fools?

This was not the only way in which the virtue-happiness

98a Philosophie du bonheur, I, p. 145.
equivalence ran counter to other beliefs and attitudes of many of its proponents. To say that virtue is its own reward and wickedness punishes itself implies that virtue is part of human nature, of its essence and natural function—an idea that many adherents of the theory did not accept. The virtue-happiness equivalence, moreover, like the optimism of Leibniz, Pope, and their disciples, was a philosophy inimical to social action and reform. If one can be happy in any situation, it is scarcely worth while trying to change the world. (However d’Holbach said that if we did change the world, virtue would also receive material rewards.) Finally, the equivalence proposed is, as Kant shows, a disguised form of the moral sense theory, which had also been rejected.

In sum, we may recall that ethical systems fall into two main groups, according to their choice of the ultimate ends of life: those which embrace pleasure or happiness, and those which hold up virtue or character. If the selected end is virtue, happiness is often thought to accompany it. If happiness is the end, then virtue is sometimes recommended as the means to achieve it. This was the eighteenth-century utilitarian choice.

In Plato's Republic, Glaucón, dissatisfied with Socrates' refutation of Thrasy-machus' arguments, asks him to prove that justice is a good; that it is, as Socrates claims, in the highest class of goods—those which have both intrinsic and instrumental value. Most people, he says, reckon justice in the troublesome class, among goods which are to be pursued for the sake of rewards and reputation, but in themselves disagreeable. Men who practice justice do so of necessity and against their will. Glaucón sketches this theory of the origin of justice: to do injustice is by nature good; to suffer injustice, evil; but the evil is greater than the good and so men establish laws and what is ordained by law is termed just. He then cites the story of the ring of Gyges, which made a man invisible and beyond punishment, in order to show that no man, having this godlike power, would be just: “wherever any one thinks that he can safely be unjust, there he is unjust... for all

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99 Cf. Kant, op. cit., p. 128: “In order to imagine the vicious man as tormented with mental dissatisfaction by the consciousness of his transgressions, they must first represent him as in the main basis of his character, at least in some degree, morally good; just as he who is pleased with the consciousness of right character must be conceived as already virtuous.”

100 “It is, therefore, impossible to feel this satisfaction or dissatisfaction prior to the knowledge of obligation.” (Ibid.) For Kant's argument against the equivalence, see p. 221. See also Lecky, History of European Morals, I, p. 61.
men believe in their hearts that injustice is far more profitable than justice.” If, on the other hand, we take an equally extreme example of the just man, one who is so despite the fact that everyone takes him to be unjust (an assumption which is necessary so that no reward is involved), it is clear that he is the unhappier of the two.

In the actual development of the dialectic, neither Glaucon nor Socrates remains on the level of intrinsic good. Glaucon’s challenge becomes an insistence that Socrates prove that justice is an instrumental good. The crucial point of his argumentation lies in this demand; “When both have reached the uttermost extreme, the one of justice and the other of injustice, let judgment be given which of them is the happier of the two.” It is the same demand which the eighteenth-century philosophers were trying to satisfy. Like the Greeks, they were not asking, “What ought I to do?” but “How should I live in order to achieve happiness?” Virtue is valued for the good it secures: ostensibly the happiness of the individual, in reality, the welfare of society—which is the reason they were so desperate to prove that it does also make the individual happy. But in fact, moral virtue and right action can never be justified, adequately or entirely, in terms of self-interest. Self-interest can be an inducement, but not a moral reason. For if self-interest is plainly served by immoral action, then either there is a moral reason to be moral, or no reason at all and the nihilist has won the day. The only pertinent reason is one which the skeptic will not recognize and which the moral person does not require: that our unique power of making moral distinctions and of being moral is also, by its very existence, a duty so to do. But as Hume knew, moral skepticism cannot be countered by providing reasons to persuade those who are not moral to become moral. This is one of the reasons why the eighteenth-century enterprise was bound to fail.

IV. Altruism and Anti-utilitarianism

Under the influence of sensationism and naturalism, hedonistic ethics—or, to be exact, one branch of it—had evolved through

\[101\] Adeimantus tries to bring it back to grounds of intrinsic good. See also Gorgias.
social utilitarianism to enlightened self-interest and the virtue-happiness equivalence. The moralists, frequently omitting such notions as freedom, right, and motive, and confining themselves to those of good, usefulness, self-interest, and society, had nevertheless reached the same terminus as the traditional morality: virtue is, or involves, self-sacrifice. Whether virtue is conceived of as prudential wisdom or as renunciation, it is taken as a value instrumental to the end or intrinsic value, happiness. (Happiness, secularized, is returned to earth.) Virtue is an evaluation made in reference to the useful result of an act, not to good will, or the performing of one’s obligations out of the desire to do just that.

Inevitably, however, the sign is often taken for the thing. By a natural psychological process of association, the act or idea of sacrifice itself, rather than the end it was supposed to serve, often becomes the thing of value, the object of praise. In like fashion, by a kind of mental shorthand, the general welfare (virtue, public spirit, patriotism) which was justified in terms of intelligent self-interest attracted to itself the characteristic of value. We may say that in this sense egoistic utilitarian thinking bred its own antithesis. At the same time—since no part of an inherited cultural complex is completely left behind—persistent voices of the traditional altruistic concept of virtue, never entirely stilled, lashed out in criticism of the new naturalistic utilitarianism. Sympathy, it was claimed, is as much a part of our original endowment as egoism, since we are social beings; and individual reflection aided by social influences transmutes egoism into self-sacrifice.

The anti-utilitarian currents merged, and flowed on, indistinguishable. In truth, the confusion was even deeper. Bienfaisance, we have just seen, was often lauded, from a utilitarian viewpoint, as the immediate means to happiness. But at other times it was the element of self-sacrifice in bienfaisance which won the highest esteem and the most abundant tears. Except in specific cases it would be difficult to distinguish the two. Certain it is that the rising tide of pre-romanticism favored this confusion. The lachrymose sentimentalism of the middle classes, conjoined to the praise of virtue-sacrifice, produced in the last decades before the Revolution an emotional intoxication with virtue which functioned as an

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1 Robert Mauzi distinguishes three concepts of virtue: (1) internal plenitude and good conscience ("la volupté du sage"), (2) social action and bienfaisance, (3) internal struggle and sacrifice, which bring their own voluptés. (Op. cit., pp. 602–3.)
antithesis to the arid, rationalistic skeptical facets of the age. The Revolution was to profit from it, and turning it to its own uses, augment it.

We may first note very briefly the persistence of altruistic currents in England. This chiefly concerns the opposition to Hobbes and to Mandeville. Cumberland had asserted, in 1672, that "It cannot be proved that animals, in those voluntary actions by which they actually promote the good of others, as well as themselves, do not alike intend and will both." Shaftesbury holds up several criteria: actions are intrinsically good or bad, intention is the moral touchstone, the natural "affection of a Creature" is toward the good of the species; he defines virtue as "a certain just disposition, or proportional affection of a rational creature towards the moral objects of right and wrong." Among the first, he raises the standard of benevolence. Wollaston distinguishes right, or obligation, from good. Hume makes natural sympathy, an original component of human nature, one of the bases of his moral philosophy, though he associates it with the pleasure it gives us. Hartley declares that self-interest should not be a primary pursuit, neither "gross self-interest" nor "refined self-interest." The latter, worse than the former, shelters itself under an assumed ideal. Even "rational self-interest"—the pursuit of the best means for happiness—is dangerous; by augmenting ideas and desires which center in the self, it extinguishes other motives: love of God and neighbor, sympathy, the moral sense. Kames, following Hume, deems benevolence a principle of action in man; the happiness of others is an object agreeable to the mind.

There is scanty evidence in France of similar attitudes, during the first decades of the century, outside of homiletics. The manuscript, "Difficultés sur la religion," does mention that part of the virtue of a duty lies in its difficulty and the efforts it requires.

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2 *Treatise*, p. 129.
3 *Characteristicks*, I, p. 332; II, pp. 77–81, 40, 24–30. However Shaftesbury does not discard enlightened self-interest or virtue-happiness.
4 Wm. F. Alderman notes that Fielding, in *Tom Jones*, derides Shaftesbury's benevolence; he shows that it is destructive to the Christian belief in merit, and that the virtuous hero is not happy. Dr. Johnson, Berkeley, Swift, and Wesley agreed. ("Shaftesbury and the Doctrine of Benevolence," *Transactions of Wisconsin Academy of Sciences*, XXVI, p. 145.)
7 *Essays*, pp. 82–83.
8 Fol. 34 (Mazarine 1168).
The abbé Desfourneaux writes that morality has two ends, self-advantage and the advantage of others; the highest virtue is magnanimity, or greatness of soul, "a trait of the soul which raises it above that low self-interest which attaches almost all men to little things and to themselves." For most, "self-interest is the heart of all their actions"; but it is possible to want to do good to others without any thought of self.\(^9\) Mme de Lambert advises her son not to neglect legitimate self-love, but to surpass it in the love of justice, and of others.\(^10\) In a recently published maxim, the abbé de Saint-Pierre inveighs against nonmoral motives of success or reputation; one should rather "try to make himself worthy of it by his good actions." \(^11\) Fréret, after developing a philosophy of hedonism and enlightened self-interest, declares: "Sublime virtue will consist in procuring the happiness of others at the cost of one's own." \(^12\) It turns out that this, too, may be a calculation. But when he writes, "by 'virtues' we should understand habitual tendencies to do what makes our fellows happy," \(^13\) and omits what is *sous-entendu*, namely, in order that they should make us happy, it is easy to see how the locus of value came to be displaced. The high-minded Vauvenargues asserts that "humanitarianism is the first of virtues." \(^14\) Pity is not merely "a return upon ourselves," he insists; "isn't our soul capable of disinterested feeling?" \(^15\) Father André also lashes out at the theory of exclusive self-interest motivation and insists that there is no virtue without a real sacrifice, over and above any satisfaction. The source of disinterestedness is compassion, an immediate impulse to help others.\(^16\)

To be sure, these are only inchoate reactions. But they begin to grow in number around the middle of the century. Levesque de Pouilly emphasizes sympathy.\(^17\) Toussaint makes love (rather than self-interest) the basis of ethics. "Only love can make us faithful to our duties; it is the foundation of our relations, and the only knot which maintains them." We should love men, treat them with

\(^{9}\) *Essay* (1724), pp. 358–68.

\(^{10}\) *Avis d'une mere à son fils* (1728), p. 53.


\(^{12}\) *Oeuvres* (1722), IV, p. 115.

\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*, III, p. 76.

\(^{14}\) *Oeuvres*, III, pp. 174, 219 (Maxims 98, 322).

\(^{15}\) *Connaissance de l'esprit humain*, chap. XXXVIII.


kindness purely out of consideration of the fact that they are men. 18

Morelly, though allowing for natural self-interest, considers an egoistic motive as annulling virtue, which is the love of good itself. 19 Fraternity and co-operation are emphasized in his epic poem, La Basiliade (1753), and take the place of enlightened self-interest. 20 The Code de la nature (1755), with its totalitarian, controlled society, is one of the first works to stress bienfaisance. Morelly calls it the highest of our moral ideals and names love as its basis. Morelly also follows enlightened self-interest and advises bienfaisance because it is “the first and surest means to present happiness”; nevertheless, he considers bienfaisance to be prior, in the natural order, to any other idea. 21 It is the nefarious institution of private property which has upset the beautiful order of nature.

Buffon in a way puts compassion prior to interest, by making it a physical reaction, one which he claims is shared by animals. 22 Formey, who indulges in a mélange of theories, denies that the advantageousness of an act suffices; it is not virtuous “if it does not really have as its goal the good of others, or universal good.” 23 In 1759 the Journal de Trévoux reviewed a Discours moral sur le plaisir de la bienfaisance,” qualifying it as a sound but tiresome work.

Voltaire praised the abbé de Saint-Pierre for inventing the word bienfaisance. Himself a utilitarian with an invincible tendency to Natural Law and formalism, and with little faith in the virtue-happiness equivalence, he nonetheless makes bienfaisance the highest virtue and the central theme of his practical ethics. A deist, he exclaims:

Ah! si vous êtes son image,
Soyez comme lui bienfaisants. 24

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18 Les Moeurs, Amsterdam, 1748, pp. 258–59, 340–45. In 1768, Toussaint read a paper on “Bienfaisance as an Active Principle” to the Academy of Berlin.
20 See comment in Chinard’s ed. of Code de la nature, pp. 59–60.
23 Mélanges philosophiques, II, pp. 70–71. Also, Le Bonheur (1754), pp. 88–89, where he emphasizes motive.
24 Oeuvres, VIII, p. 544.
And in an ode:

L'homme n'était pas né pour égorger ses frères . . .
La nature en son coeur avait mis la pitié.
De tous les animaux seul il répand des larmes,
Seul il connaît les charmes
D'une tendre amitié.25

In his important article, “Vertu,” he considers force, prudence, and temperance to be “useful qualities,” but inferior to justice. However, “it is still not enough to be just, you must be beneficent: that is what is really cardinal.” He also dismisses faith and hope as virtues. As for charity, it is what the ancients called love of our fellows. “That love is nothing, if it is not active: bienfaisance is therefore the only true virtue.” If it is argued that nobody can follow virtue if you take away the reward, Voltaire will answer, “Then you have only your own interest in view.” God and virtue should be loved for themselves.26 Voltaire’s life is the great testimony to the sincerity of his words. It was Rousseau whose love of man was abstract, and did not extend to men.

Bienfaisance, as an ethical absolute, was not favored by the apologists. Le François, in fact, severely criticized Voltaire’s article, “Vertu.” He insists that we must consider the motive of any act of bienfaisance, and that virtue is love of order, i.e., of the hierarchy of values according to God’s plan.27 Ilharat de la Chambre identifies virtue with the accomplishment of duty.28 This is also the dictate of Para du Phanjas, who adds that the motives must be self-control and the desire to do one’s duty, but not pleasure.29

The enthusiasm for virtue and benevolence, nevertheless, reaches a point at which sensibility and virtue are confused, and the ready flow of tears is taken for a sign of virtuous character.30 As the article “Sensibilité-Morale” in the Encyclopédie puts it: “Reflection can make an honest man; but sensibility makes the virtuous man.”

Thus the primary virtue was benevolence, and it . . . of course, was an old Christian virtue. The philosophes some-

25 VIII, p. 489 (1768).
26 XX, pp. 572–74. See also XXXII, p. 555; Notebooks, I, pp. 23, 219, 221.
30 For a brief discussion, and references not given here, see Mornet, Les Origines intellectuelles, pp. 169–12.
what altered the idea, making it not a commandment but an inclination, and teaching, for the recalcitrant, that men in particular should be humane because men in general were humane, thus keeping up the appearance of deducing values from facts, and duties from actual behavior.31

The anonymous article “Générœux,” in the Encyclopédie, can only be described as a hymn to virtue. “What happiness for man to be able thus to become superior to his own being. . . .”

Rousseau, too, becomes emotionally excited on thinking of virtue, though for him it is less the benevolence which moves him than the heroic quality of victory over self. “The soul becomes heated, the spirit rises, in speaking about virtue. Even the most perverse sometimes feel its divine transports; and there is no man, however wicked, who has not felt in his heart some sparks of this celestial fire, and who has not been capable of heroic feelings and actions, at least once in his life.”32 The very meaning of virtue—as Rousseau distinguishes it from “goodness”—is the discipline or suppression of the instinctual ego; it is a renunciation or turning away from nature, rather than a yielding or a compromise. Nature and culture are not parallel lines. Virtue belongs to culture only. And culture is a human construction, partly a rational construction, a new order of things, a new way of being, to which the natural, as a self-justifying order, is inimical. Happiness is still the aim of the cultural order, but the conditions and the road are different. Virtue is its way, not the drive to happiness in its “natural” forms.

Diderot’s virtue is really altruism, and “bienfaisance-sacrifice” is its concrete form. What matters if in Le Rêve de d’Alembert he had argued that determinism voids merit and annuls good and evil, other than mere convention, and that he had derided shame and remorse; or that in Le Neveu de Rameau he paints a world where selfishness and happiness coexist? There is a love of virtue innate in all men, prior to all convention. It may involve sacrifice and unhappiness, he admits in the Réfutation d’Helvétius—so much the better. “What is virtue?” he asks in his Eloge de Richardson. “It is, no matter how you look at it, self-sacrifice.”33 In Le Fils naturel, the hero and heroine are quite ready to destroy the

32 Fragments, Vaughan, I, p. 337. See La Nouvelle Héloïse, ed. Pomeau, pp. 97, 142, etc., etc.
33 Œuvres, VII, p. 214.
happiness they had planned for themselves. A phrase of Dorval's bears witness to the confusion we noted near the outset of this section, between *bienfaisance* conceived as the immediate source of happiness and as a difficult sacrifice. "Virtue," he exclaims, "sweet and cruel idea, dear and barbarous duties! . . . O virtue, what are you, if you demand no sacrifice?" But the sacrifice does—immediately—fill their souls with well-being. How often in his letters, plays, and art criticism does Diderot become exalted, or weep, at the hearing or sight of a noble, virtuous deed! Or enraged by a tale of wickedness, which seems to lower all mankind!

In a more analytical way, Leroy considers benevolence a basic reality, one which speaks when it is not hindered by self-interest, and which grows stronger with use. Compassion is the one absolute which distinguishes man from beast, writes this close observer of animals.\(^\text{34}\) He suggests that it should be the major objective in the education of children and advises the use of pathetic stage spectacles—a technique which the *comédie larmoyante* and the bourgeois *drame* of the period, fathered by Nivelle de la Chaussée and Diderot, were exploiting amply.\(^\text{35}\) As for d'Holbach, while he joins the chorus in praise of *bienfaisance*, he will not admit it as anything but a form of self-interest, and deems pity a result of our weakness and the desire to avoid discomfort.\(^\text{36}\)

Delille sings of *bienfaisance* in his long poem, *Les Trois règnes de la nature*: "And the beneficent man is the image of God."\(^\text{37}\) A lesser poet, Nougaret, fulminates in 1769 against the lack of grain and its high cost, which he attributes to selfish profiteers. But this is hard to believe, for men are not evil.\(^\text{38}\) Pity, writes

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\(^\text{34}\) The sharing of feelings, he claims, is the foundation of sociability, and of virtue. Compassion is independent of self-interest.


\(^\text{36}\) *Système social*, I, pp. 111–12.

\(^\text{37}\) Chant VIII.

\(^\text{38}\) "Mais à l'humanité c'est assez faire outrage.
Non, des cœurs aussi durs n'existèrent jamais;
Non, de la Calomnie émoussons les traits.
Quoi, séduit par l'amour d'une vaine opulence,
On peut des malheureux ravir la subsistance,
L'on entend sans douleur ses sanglots et ses cris,
Et du bien qu'il souhaite on double encore le prix!
Le féroce lion respecte la Nature;
Va-t-il à son semblable arracher la pature?
Et l'on voudrait qu'un homme, artisan de nos maux,
Surpassât la fureur des cruels animaux!"

Pensons mieux des humains; non, la soif des richesses
Ne fit naître jamais tant de scélératesses . . .

*(La Voix du Peuple, Amsterdam, 1769)*
Sabatier de Castres in an early work, is the first feeling of the heart and the source of all virtues. Chamfort, high-minded yet cynical, also breaks into verse to celebrate virtue. This, he says, is worthier than any human accomplishment.

O prodige plus grand! ô vertu que j'adore!  
C'est par toi que nos coeurs s'ennoblissent encore:
Quoi! ma voix chante l'homme, et j'ai pu t'oublier!  
Je célébre avant toi . . . Pardonne, beauté pure;
    Pardonne cette injure. . . .
Là, tranquille au milieu d'une foule abattue,
Tu me fais, ô Socrate, envier ta vigueur;
Là, c'est ce fier Romain, plus grand que son vainqueur;
C'est Caton sans courroux déchirant sa blessure:
    Son âme libre et pure
S'enfuit loin des tyrans au sein de son auteur.⁴⁰

Are these mere words? We will not think so if we remember how Chamfort took his own life, with razor and revolver, to escape imprisonment by agents of committees of Public Safety.

The vogue of the pastoral, in poetry and fiction, can be explained by its uniting two high fashions—nature and virtue. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* and Marmontel's *Annette et Lubin* are two of the most popular examples.⁴¹ Marmontel's *Moral Tales* carried on the mode and furnished the antithesis to the *Immoral Tales* of the Prince de Ligne and countless others which merited the same title.

But let us return to the philosophers, several of whom are worthy of mention. The eccentric, Rouillé d'Orfeuil, decries the universal bandying about of the word, *bienfaisance*, and anathematizes all the books being written about it. Burn them! he cries. It is enough to follow the Golden Rule, to right wrongs, to solace the innocent who are suffering, to make others happy—there is no need to write books. Of course disinterestedness is an essential, for self-interest is the vice of low born churls; "every gentlemanly heart must despise it."⁴² Saint-Lambert urges benevolence, but, although it has some roots in our being, it is, in his opinion, largely a matter of selfish calculation; however he recommends that it be

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³⁹ *Dictionnaire des passions*, II, p. 257.
⁴⁰ *Oeuvres Complètes*, I, pp. 444–47.
⁴² *L’Alambic moral*, Maroc, 1773, pp. 84, 198, 533.
taught to children, even with the use of trickery. Saint-Lambert nevertheless claims that "love is the source of all virtues." 43 Delisle de Sales exclaims: "Oh virtue! all beings are annihilated before you; you alone, you take the place of all goods given by nature, or created by opinion; you exist, and evil is no longer on earth." 44

The 1780's show no diminishing of fervor. Sylvain Maréchal, refusing to accept the sensationist analysis, places "that natural impulse which carries us to our fellows" alongside of the desire for happiness. We love to do good, and not out of hope for a return. "I appeal to your heart, I appeal to mine, I appeal to all worthy hearts; this pleasure which we take in doing good to our fellow men is not the effect of a vile calculation; that inner satisfaction which follows a service is not degraded by the hope of a reward. What man, traversing a deep forest at night in a country he will never again see, would fail to succor the unfortunate man who would call upon him?" 45 In Sylvain Maréchal we can see a concrete example of another phenomenon connected with the intoxication of virtue. In the years preceding the Revolution, self-sacrifice and benevolence take still another step, and become particularized as patriotism, which Robespierre later embodied, and which he tried to propagate among the people. We get a taste of it in another piece by Sylvain Maréchal, written after the Revolution, and expressing the bitterness of disillusion:

Virtue rewards those who are faithful to her; virtue is not a beautiful and sterile theory. . . . Virtue sometimes ignores or disdains conventions. Considerations touch it little; harsh, fierce, brusque like truth, she does not know the use of circumspection. There is no compromise with her, she wants everything or nothing. . . . There is something above a good citizen, an excellent patriot, that is the man of virtue. . . . The man of virtue lives as if there were no laws. . . . Man complains of the limits to his faculties: ungrateful atom! has he forgotten that he can reach virtue? eh! what is there beyond that? 46

43 Note to "Hiver," in Les Saisons, p. 242; also Catéchisme universel, Œuvres, II, pp. 21, 152–53; Commentaire sur le Catéchisme, III, pp. 4–8.
44 De la Philosophie de la nature, III, pp. 494. 244–46.
46 De la Vertu, 1807, pp. 88–91. Cf. M. Dumas, L'Esprit du citoyen, Neuchâtel, 1783: "Every man must work for the public." It is not only our obligation, but part of the nobility of man's nature, of "the grandeur of his destiny." Virtue makes him like God.

Lamourette writes: "Virtue supposes effort and resistance. If man were necessarily just, or if nothing of what he owed to God and Society were difficult for his weakness, he would have Innocence, without having Virtue, which signifies a determina-
A related and somewhat broader version of benevolence went under the name of *humanité*. This word, however, which the sentimental currents appropriated and absorbed, had had an earlier history. More than charity, or humanitarianism in the narrow sense, it had already come to signify the unity of the human kind, and the duty of each to all. Its root, so it was thought, is our universal likeness, embodied in our needs and reactions, and particularly in our need for each other—not only as a survival mechanism but also as a natural inclination, call it pleasure or sympathy. These themes, which we have encountered throughout our study, lead to the conclusion that no man can think anything human alien to himself. The word and idea of *humanité* were destined to spread and gradually engulf all but the most skeptical, cynical, or nihilistic of eighteenth-century souls. The most optimistic grounded it on a supposed original goodness in men. Atheists attributed it to biological, psychological, or calculated utilitarian requirements. Deists and Christians—who constitute the bulk and the average—saw it as an aspect of Natural Law, immediately intuited by right reason. In any case, human nature and human welfare on earth, openly or implicitly, with or without an ultimate sanction of divine command, were to be the guideposts of proper moral action—an ethical view that stands in contrast with the moral writings of the seventeenth century. Such a faith, if charged with emotion, and made into an all-inclusive, sufficient virtue, might almost become a secular religion, rivaling the Christian dependency on the supernatural for salvation and for direction. It became, as we know, the religion of the *philosophes*, and spread beyond them to wider segments of society.

Although the development of an ideal of "humanity" had already been evident in the first half of the century, it was then rational rather than sentimental. It may be described as a peculiarly eighteenth-century development of Natural Law doctrine. It was taken as a rationally intuited truth and law, God-implanted or simply natural, whose function is the socialization of the self-centered individual. Pufendorf, Bayle, Montesquieu, and many others proclaimed "humanity" in its multiple senses, or defined it as the epitome of all virtues, as a moral imperative inseparable
from order and justice, and from social well-being. At the same
time, it was considered in one of two ways, either as the counter-
poise to self-love, in *homo duplex*, or else as the sublimation and
fulfillment of self-love, not its sacrifice. In either case, “humanity”
substitutes natural love (not necessarily excluding natural self-
love, then) for the Christian emphasis on original sin, on the cor-
rup tion of self-love, on grace and ritual as ways to salvation or
happiness in another life. Humanity, a rational claim, rivals with
Christian charity as a social duty which is rightfully expected of
men.

In the second half of the century, the spread of sentimentalism,
sensibilité and enthusiasm for virtue gradually transforms the ideal
of “humanity” into an emotional war-cry. The emphasis is on
the joy, the outpouring of the heart which accompany participa-
tion in the happiness of others and (even more) in their sorrows.
“*Humanité*” is spoken of now as a passion, a sweet, good passion,
not as a rational calculation or conviction. Diderot, Bernardin,
Marmontel, and many others celebrate it and preach it. To all
intents and purposes, it accompanies or fuses with the movement
of sentimental benevolence.

The ideal of “humanity” was upheld not only by the minority
of writers who considered men to be naturally good, but also by
the majority who deemed them either evil or an indifferent mix-
ture. Philosophers such as Diderot and Rousseau do not consider
this natural impulse to be strong, in comparison with the selfish
impulses. They emphasize the need to inculcate and to strengthen
it, at every step, by education and the power of legislation. For
the rationalistic adherents of Natural Law, “humanity” was a
*droit* that men would follow, if they were all rational and good—
which they are not; for the sentimentalists, it was a natural sym-
pathy and impulse that would bring men their deepest happiness,
if they were unspoiled by the struggle for existence, power and
prestige—which they are not. For both groups, then, only a few
“well-born souls” actually did find their intellectual or emotional
delection this way. A program of education and a political pro-
gram were thus required, to induce or compel men to act as they
*naturally* want to, or should. We shall see more of this in our final
chapter.

At the same time, in accord with the shift of emphasis in *droit
naturel* from the element of duty to the element of rights, the idea
of humanity gradually acquired another political connotation. A social order which was unfavorable to *humanité*, it became evident, was not a good order, and but one to be changed. In 1776, in his *Ethocratie*, d’Holbach makes it clear that “humanity” presupposes equality of rights. The ideal of humanity, then, in association with developments in Natural Law theories, is the fountainhead of the “liberté, égalité, fraternité” of the French Revolution. We have tried to show, in summary fashion, in the concluding chapter of *An Age of Crisis*, how this virtue of humanity, “by a strange perversion, came to be the justification of violence and barbarism.”  

Although the ideal of “humanity” had its roots in Natural Law doctrine, and remained tinged with utilitarian associations, its great diffusion, in the second half of the century, depended on its association with the trend of benevolence and sentimental virtue. It was, moreover, though a noble and admirable ideal, subject to the weaknesses of the cult of benevolence, even as it benefited from the emotional strengths of that trend. It differed somewhat from benevolence in being more vague, general, and abstract, leading Palissot to charge the *philosophes* with “loving mankind, in order to love no man.”

A few voices, but not many, dared to speak up against the new cult. Quite early, Crousaz had criticized Pope’s exaggerated altruism, warning that we must be careful to choose the objects of charity, and not to overdo it to the point of ruining oneself and family. In England, Price issued a similar warning. Benevolence, he notes, is not all of virtue. If it were, everything would be indifferent except the degrees of benevolence; there would be no distinction of persons involved, no other ground for disapproving injustice and falsehood. Most keenly, he points out that the doctrine is nothing but a disguised form of the greater happiness principle. If to make others happy is the highest value, we should be entitled to take the fruits of labor from one and give it to another whom it would make happier. The theologian, Nonnotte, also criticized Voltaire’s article, “*Vertu.*” If a wife is unfaithful, he

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46a P. Vernière, “L’Idée d’humanité au XVIIIe siècle,” p. 178, to which article I owe part of the preceding development. Vernière does not attempt to answer this question, or that of “the historical responsibility of the philosophy of the Enlightenment for the excesses of the Revolution.”


demands, but is charitable, does that make her virtuous? No, indeed; virtue is “conformity of our conduct with the prescriptions of reason, cause, and law.” 49 In 1775, two more writers offered a protest. Charles Levesque, while conceding that it is our duty to do as much good as we can (citizens must be useful to the State), asserts that self-interest comes first. After all, it is in the interest of the State that each citizen takes care of himself and his family first.50 The second writer was Marat. His words are helpful in reminding us that the current of egoistic analysis of human behavior continued to flourish. A doctor, with the pretension to a scientific analysis of man, Marat denies that compassion is a natural or innate feeling; it is unknown to children and to savages. It exists, to be sure, but as a product of culture. To pity others, we must know what it is they are suffering, but not be suffering at the time ourselves: “nobody gives to anybody else anything but the sensibility which he does not need for himself.” Men can easily habituate themselves to dulling this feeling. Basically, there is a great reservoir of cruelty in men, as their love of cruel sports testifies.51 And de Boismont, in 1781, lapses into irony: “Oh! Monsieur, we’ve made a great step forward! ... Honesty, uprightness, integrity, all those old words which disturb nature, are now fortunately replaced by those of bienfaisance and humanité; with those two words you accomplish everything: glory, reputation, justice. You can corrupt . . . steal from half the human race; as long as fine tirades, or a little public act proves that you are concerned with the happiness of the other half, everything is fine.” 52

As if in illustration of de Boismont’s words, one of the most striking scenes of Laclos’ Les Liaisons dangereuses (which appeared the following year) offers a confirmation of the arguments of the proponents of the morality of benevolence (in regard to its innateness, its power, and its results in terms of happiness), and at the same time, the confirmation of the arguments of its adversaries. We recall that Valmont is the nihilist, the embodiment of

49 Dictionnaire philosophique de la religion, Besançon, 1774, IV, p. 453. We should not forget Malebranche’s earlier insistence that the moral criterion is duty, not a good, whatever it might be.
50 L’Homme moral, I, pp. 182–84.
51 De l’Homme, I, pp. 162–69.
evil for evil's sake. Valmont walks to the village in order to succor a desperately needy family—this being a calculated plan to further his reputation so that, precisely, he may win some advantage in the heart of the woman he is planning to ruin. On the way, he takes sadistic pleasure in tormenting the spy who is following him. Then he reaches the cottage and succors the desperate family:

After this simple action, you cannot imagine what a chorus of blessings from all those present resounded around me! What tears of gratitude flowed from the eyes of the old head of that family, and ennobled that patriarchal face which a moment before had been made hideous by the fierce imprint of despair! I was examining this spectacle when another peasant, younger, leading a woman and two children by the hand, rushed up to me and said to them “Let us fall at the feet of this image of God”; and, at the same instant, I was surrounded by this family, kneeling at my feet. I will admit my weakness; my eyes were damp with tears, and I felt within me an involuntary but delightful impulse. I was astonished by the pleasure that doing good makes you feel; and I would be tempted to believe that those whom we call virtuous people do not have as much merit as they tell us. . . . You will notice that my faithful spy was in the crowd. My purpose was accomplished. . . . When everything is calculated I can congratulate myself on my invention. That woman is without doubt worth all the trouble I am taking . . . and having in a way, paid for her in advance, I will have the right to use her according to my whims, without having anything to reproach myself for. I forgot to tell you that in order to put everything to a profit, I asked those good folk to pray to God for the success of my projects.

Valmont's machinations have the desired effect on his intended victim. She is convinced that he is on the path of reform, and weeps at the story of his benevolence. “Now tell me,” she asks, “if M. de Valmont is really an unregenerate libertin, if he is only that and acts in this way, what is there left for good people to do? Can the wicked share with the good the sacred pleasure of benevolence?”

Despite the wave of enthusiasm, then, it appeared to many that altruism, like egoism, is a natural quality which can be moral or immoral according to the mode of exercise. The reaction against the Christian call to self-sacrifice had led to philosophies of hedonism and egoism, and thence, through the transfer of the locus of value to society and the sublimation of egoism in its so-called
“enlightened” forms, back again to the spirit of sacrifice, but on a secular basis of love for man rather than of love of God through his creatures. In this way moralists returned to that impulse to virtue-sacrifice and benevolence which is part of man’s earliest biological and social heritage. Simultaneously, they recaptured an indispensable element of the ethical experience. But the enthusiasts went too far and forgot that this element must itself be submitted to and ruled by general laws or principles of obligation, however they may be conceived. It is not surprising, then, that a few men, dissatisfied with the alternatives offered by utilitarianism, whether in the form of enlightened self-interest or benevolence (not to speak of the hedonism of the egoists or of the Physiocratic school) proposed an ethics of self-perfectionism. The current was weak, the traces few, but we cannot overlook them completely.

The ethics of self-perfection had been developed as a systematic philosophy by Spinoza. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries we encounter little more than isolated statements. Thus Abbadie had set it along with happiness as the two highest goods. Negatively, he explains, men want to get rid of their faults —unless it means giving up pleasure. Positively men want perfections that do not belong to their species. They often fail to think of the perfections they should have as men, rather than those attached to their careers and status. We should consider ourselves in God’s eyes, rather than in men’s. “Even men’s passions become perfections when they have their proper extension in immortal man.”

“If glory and merit,” asks Vauvenargues, “do not make men happy, does what is called happiness deserve their regrets? Would a courageous spirit deign to accept either fortune or peace of mind, or moderation, if he had to sacrifice to them the vigor of his feeling and lower the soaring of his genius?” Pleasure, then, is not for Vauvenargues the standard of value. Perfection, writes Christian

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53 Cf. Mornet on the Christian view: one must love nothing and no one except in God. Charity really means love of God, and if one helps one’s neighbor it is for the love of God. (Op. cit., p. 106.)

54 Cf. E. Westermarck, The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas, p. 186 ff. Also, E. Dardel: “Whoever calls men to sacrifice is appealing, beyond the demonstrable and the reasoned, to psychic dispositions and inner impulses capable of engaging the person, and of the same essence as that which, among archaic peoples, takes the form of myth.” (“Signification du Mythique,” p. 70.)


56 Oeuvres, III, pp. 19 (71), 61 (272 “variants”), 195 (217).
Wolff, is our natural duty to ourselves. He defines the word as "the harmonious use of all the faculties of our soul, both higher and lower." To this is added the duty to develop each faculty to its maximum. Yvon also mentions happiness and self-perfection as our two duties, but defines the latter term as the "perfect conformity of our will with order"—a reminiscence of Malebranche.

Formey was particularly interested in the ethics of self-perfection, and seems to have been familiar with Spinoza. He defines perfection as "the accordance and harmony with which the diverse parts of a whole conspire to the same end." The parts of man are two—body and soul. Therefore the goal of this composite being is "the maintenance and increase of the faculties of his soul and body, which he is obligated to procure with all the means in his power." As a free and moral being, there is much a man can do. "Perfection" applies to this moral life. But what is the purpose toward which all we do should tend harmoniously? It is the accomplishment of our natural functions: a mind that wants knowledge, a soul that desires moral good, a body to be kept vigorous. The result of the complete exercise of our faculties will be happiness. In summary, there are four golden rules that lead to perfection: first, to will it; second, to do nothing without relating it to the end, or a subordinate end; third, to harmonize the subordinate ends, so that one is always a means to the other, and the whole a means to our perfection; fourth, never to permit anything contrary to perfection.

What is primary, according to Moses Mendelssohn, is not the pleasurable feeling but the effort toward perfection, which produces it. Our soul tends toward perfection, and no other choice has a sufficient reason. Perfection lies in unity. It is not true, as some argue, that this is a form of egoism. "Do you then imagine that the principle of perfection allows me to concentrate within myself, and to make a sad desert of everything that surrounds me?" No, Mendelssohn insists, this instinct, as natural to us as self-
preservation, is a principle of inclusion, not of exclusion. The separation of the self from others is "moral death." 61

In a way, the ethics of self-perfection was another form of the enthusiasm for virtue, one which refused to take the simple direction of benevolence. The enthusiasm for virtue, notes Jean Fabre, was more than an exaltation of sensibility, more than sentimental rose-festivals and the nauseating "literature" that went with them. The spiritual tension common to Charlotte Corday and Mme Roland, to Chénier and Saint-Just, and the virtue to which they were dedicated consisted in the will to devote their lives to an ideal which surpassed their lives. It was not a stoical virtue, but one which sought "a lever in the strength of passions. Imposing the affirmation of the self, it is far from letting itself be enclosed in the self . . . [it] intoxicates itself on nobility and energy, but does not blush to lay down as a principle . . . to seek the happiness of the greatest number." 62

The ethics of self-perfection, writes Schweitzer, falls into the optimistic-ethical world view. It lacks a content, and is not capable of so establishing the basic principle of the moral that it has a content which is ethically satisfying. The ethics of altruism "starts from altruism as content in order to conceive it as belonging to self-perfection"; the ethics of self-perfection "starts from self-perfection and seeks to conceive altruism as an item in its content which is a necessity of thought." 63 Kant also criticized this ethics as "empty and indefinite," and as unable to avoid "presupposing the morality which it is to explain." 64

It need scarcely be added that the transcendent, Christian ethics continues its unbroken history throughout the eighteenth century. As the pious Protestant, Crousaz, writes, "we must give ourselves entirely to our Creator, live, think, act only to please and to obey him." 65 LeFrançois agrees: "Man is made for God: the essential end of his being is therefore to attach himself to his God. . . ." He will incidentally be useful to men, and be happy. 66 "Man cannot propose his own goals," affirms Gauchat; he would

62 J. Fabre, Chénier, l'homme et l'oeuvre, p. 98.
64 Fundamental Principes, op. cit., pp. 61–62.
66 Observations, I, p. 819.
“have neither author, nor master, nor rule but himself.” Make man independent, say he exists for self-preservation and happiness—here is the whole philosophy of nihilism—is Gauchat’s conclusion.67

The dominance of a utilitarian-type thinking is evident from its diffusion, the quality of the minds which embraced it, and its pervasive infiltration of other types of ethics. And yet, in a counter-movement, ethical formalism takes possession of an important phase of utilitarianism. The vogue of virtue-altruism-bienfaisance had happiness (of others) as its end, but the act itself became the bearer of value, often, as its critics complained, regardless of other moral criteria.

We have considered the criticisms of the various aspects or components of the utilitarian synthesis. There remains for us to examine some general criticisms of utilitarianism as an ethical philosophy.

There were some who refused to lose sight of the fact that an important object in moral judgment (some would say, the most important) is intention, or good will. Virtue, Malebranche had said, is the love of order, “an habitual, free and dominating love of immutable order.” 68 The criterion of benevolent intention was the implication of Bayle’s “impious paradox,” that of the English anti-utilitarians and of Hume. It was upheld by a few apologists, 61 Op. cit., XVI, p. 88. For the Christian view, see also Maupertuis, Œuvres, I, p. 232 ff.; Abauzit, Œuvres, Genève, 1770, pp. 44-76; Bergier, Principes, pp. 159-60, 220-25; Para du Phanjas, op. cit., p. 114 ff.; Jamin, Pensees théologiques, 1769, pp. 54-55; La Luzerne, Instruction pastorale, 1786, pp. 48-132; Gauchat, op. cit., I, pp. 206-7; Dulaurens, Porte feuille, IV, pp. 148-54; Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, “De la Nature de la morale”: Marmontel, Leçons, pp. 208-10. See also the previously cited works by A. Monod and R. R. Palmer.

Para deduces the existence of God from the existence of virtue. If there is no God, he argues, whose will binds men, each is his own ultimate end. Then there is no limit to his right or his conduct, and virtue is folly. But such conclusions are so revolting that they are patently false. “Therefore God exists. Q.E.D.” We have noted several times that such a rigoristic approach advanced the cause of nihilism.

La Luzerne defends the Christian virtues largely on the basis of their usefulness. Like the nihilists, he implicitly denies the existence of moral feeling; religion is effective because men act only for rewards and to avoid punishment.

These are some examples of the failure of transcendental ethics in the eighteenth century. Suffused with new ideas, the notion of transcendental self-evidence is often forgotten and rules applicable to cases are almost never clearly given. Prudence and self-interest are given a wide role. This is a good distance from, for instance, the dictum of Malebranche: “For all our actions are good or bad only because God has commanded or forbidden them, or because of eternal law . . . or because of the written law. . . .” (Recherche de la vérité, I, pp. 426-27.)

66 Traité de morale, chap. 3. The term “dominating” is similar to Kant’s “practical.”
although most agreed that men could not act out of pure love of virtue. Holland, for example, exclaims against d’Holbach’s assertion that “virtue is everything which is truly and constantly useful to men living in society”: “It follows from this beautiful definition that a fertile field is very virtuous. . . . Let us rather say that virtue, although very useful, is in itself different from utility. It consists of an invariable inclination to the right. . . . The good which results from an action is not what makes it estimable; it is the principle of generosity, affection, gratitude, humanity, from which it comes. We despise the vicious man, even when his bad actions turn to our advantage; the intention which accompanies them makes their moral worth.” 69 Holland points out that d’Holbach is inconsistent when he writes that the virtuous man is one who is inclined to doing good. D’Holbach says that “virtues” relating only to the individual himself are not virtues but prudence. In this case, suggests Holland, his whole system is one of prudence and not of morals. Marmontel argued also that every act is pleasant or useful to someone, and on this basis, they are all good.70 One of Kant’s great distinctions was between the man of good morals and the morally good man.71

The main ground of criticism was the neglect by utilitarians of the distinction between right and good. “Even before the rise of this movement, Grotius had warned that “utility is not the mother of the just and equitable, and that men would not cease to seek for the right and to further it for right’s sake, even if no use or profit were connected with it.” 72 Pufendorf, following him, calls the useful and harmful a different science from the right and wrong.73 Bayle’s opinion may be summarized in the following lines: “Reason dictated to the ancient sages that one should do the good for the sake of good itself and that virtue (or truth) should stand as a recompense for itself, and that it belonged only to a wicked man to abstain from evil out of fear of punishment.” 74

A detailed scrutiny of the British anti-utilitarians would take us beyond the scope of this chapter. Yet we cannot pass them over

70 “Bonté,” Encyclopédie, Supplément.
71 Critique, pp. 337-38. Also: “We call a man bad, however, not because he performs actions that are bad (violating law), but because these are of such a kind that we may infer from them bad maxims in him.”
72 Prolegomena, Sect. 16.
74 Quoted by Fichon, Les Argumens de la raison, Londres, 1776, p. 97.
without brief consideration. Butler emphasized that approval and disapproval are unavoidable, and that their object is the desert of the agent, rather than the good produced by the act itself. The whole of virtue, he says,

does not consist in promoting the happiness of mankind. For it is certain, that the sum of the most shocking instances of injustice, adultery, murder, perjury, and even of persecution, may, in many supposable instances, not have the appearance of being likely to produce an overbalance of misery in the present state; perhaps sometimes may have the contrary appearance. . . . Nay, farther, were treachery, violence and injustice no otherwise vicious, than as foreseen likely to produce an overbalance of misery to society; then, if in any case a man could procure to himself as great advantage by an act of injustice, as the whole foreseen inconvenience, likely to be brought upon others by it, would amount to, such a piece of injustice would not be faulty or vicious at all; because it would be no more than in, any other case, for a man to prefer his own satisfaction to another's in equal degrees. The fact then appears to be, that we are constituted so as to condemn falsehood, unprovoked violence, injustice, and to approve of benevolence to some preferably to others, abstracted from all consideration which conduct is likeliest to produce an overbalance of happiness or misery.75

Price distinguishes between right as fitness taken in the non-moral sense of means to an end, and in the moral sense, which leads to judgments of guilt or virtue.76 If nothing can oblige but the prospect of pleasure and pain, then vice is only imprudence, and "nothing is right or wrong, just or unjust, any further than its affects self-interest; and . . . a being independently and completely happy, cannot have any moral perceptions."77 This is precisely what Helvétius and d'Holbach were later to assert. But Price argues that on the self-interest principle, virtue in certain circumstances becomes vice (an action that is not fit). He supports the formal value of acts—such as the wrong of lying; if lying is once admitted as justified by its advantages to us, there will be no limit to deceit. "Can we, then, when we consider these things,
avoid pronouncing, that there is an *intrinsic rectitude* in keeping faith and in sincerity, and intrinsic evil in the contrary; and that it is by no means true, that veracity and falsehood appear *in themselves, and exclusive of their consequences*, wholly indifferent to our moral judgment?" 78

Reid declares that the rule of greatest good is not enough. The correction of the tendency to immediate good by the good of the whole is a purely rational principle. But men are not rational enough and are too ready to make exceptions. A "disinterested regard to duty" is also requisite. Others are only *trained* to a certain discipline. Duty cannot be resolved into the notion of interest, and obligation is a relation between the real quality of the action and the person of the agent. 79 Ferguson, too, makes the point that moral obligation is itself "an ultimate fact and principle of nature, not an appearance to be explained from any other principle better known." 80 We are all the keepers of our fellow creatures; and "what hast thou done with thy brother Abel?" was the first expostulation in behalf of morality. 81

In England, then, anti-utilitarianism was a strong movement, and functioned as a reaction to Hobbes, Mandeville, and Hume. In France, however, the protests were relatively insignificant. Altruism, we must remember, operated within the utilitarian framework of producing the greatest amount of good, or happiness. The opposition was concentrated in the theological group, where it did not offer a secular alternative for those who had broken away from orthodoxy. Denesle, for one, points to the lack of a moral principle in utilitarianism. A son ought to kill his annoying, gouty old father; this would put him out of a useless life and would be good for the son and also for the public interest, since the son would spend his money. After all, public interest should prevail over the private, and the greater happiness principle (as well as self-interest) justifies the act. 82 Bergier takes a different tack: utility is too inconstant and relative to serve as a moral rule. 83 It may require the sacrifice of justice, equity, and of

79 *Active Powers*, pp. 137–53.
82 Denesle, *Examen*, p. 5 ff.
civil laws, adds Hayer.\textsuperscript{84} Virtue, says Bergier again, "pleases us independently of the advantage which it may bring us; crime can tempt us only insofar as it appears useful." We never feel regret for a noble deed, even if it produces only ingratitude and hatred.\textsuperscript{85} The idea of social utility and the idea of right are essentially different, argues Richard; the latter is conformity to the divine or natural law of duty, which the former often violates. The moral law inheres in the essence of things, as the expression of our relations to others, which we are not free to change. Man has duties because he has reason.\textsuperscript{86} Richard's analysis leads into the dilemma of the white lie, and of the legitimacy of lying in general. He, like Kant, erects truth-telling into a formal absolute. Much earlier in the century, Father André and Malebranche, in an exchange of letters, had devised ways of justifying the white lie, without (they thought) betraying their rigoristic formalism.\textsuperscript{87}

As for criticism of utilitarianism from the secular point of view, there is little to be mentioned other than the animadversions, which we have already considered, against particular theories. Turgot, it is worth adding, was aroused by Helvétius' \textit{De l'Esprit}, and he protested more than once against its exclusion of the independent ideas of justice and right. Helvétius, he complains, incorrectly reverses the proposition, "justice for all is to the interest of all." Nor does he ever understand men's need to love—other than sexual appetite. Philosophically, his maxim, "self-interest is the sole principle of human behavior" is stupid, and means only "man desires only what he desires." But moral judgments, affirms Turgot, are a real factor in decisions, alongside of self-interest.\textsuperscript{88}

The great opponent of utilitarian and happiness theories in ethics was, of course, Kant. Like others before him, but with

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Principes de métaphysique}, pp. 155–59.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Défense}, pp. 24–27, 247–51.
greater logical cogency and system, Kant argues that if it is wrong to lie, it is not in order to avoid a greater evil (such as loss of credit), but because lying "must be regarded as evil in itself, so that the imperative of the prohibition is categorical." He argues that man is bound by laws of duty which are both universal and of his own making. But on the interest theory (private or public), man never acts out of duty, and the imperative, being conditional, is not a moral command. We then have what Kant terms the heteronomy of the will, which is the source of all spurious principles of morality: the will does not give itself the law (as the fitness of its maxims to be universal laws), but goes out of itself and seeks the law in the character of its objects—"I ought to do something because I wish for something else." It is true that I ought indeed to promote the happiness of others, "but simply because a maxim which excludes it cannot be comprehended as a universal law." Empirical principles are wholly incapable of serving as a foundation for moral laws, for they lack the force of universality. The principle of private happiness is most objectionable, because it is false (experience denies the relation between virtue and prosperity), because it is not moral in principle, and because it positively undermines morality, by putting the motives to virtue and to vice in the same class, teaching us "only to make a better calculation." Exactly like La Mettrie and Sade, Kant declares that it is impossible to distinguish between higher and lower desires by separating those which come from the senses from those which come from the understanding, since "it is of no consequence whence the idea of this pleasing object is derived, but only how much it pleases." The feeling of pleasure is of one and the same kind, and can differ only in degree. Only when reason of itself determines the will immediately, not by means of an intervening feeling of pleasure and pain, can we speak of moral law and conduct. To be happy is a wish which is a law that is subjectively necessary, as a law of nature; objectively, however, it is a contingent or relative principle, and can never furnish a universal law, "since, in the desire for happiness it is not the form [of conformity to law] that is decisive, but simply the matter, whether I am to expect pleasure in following the law, and how much." On this basis, "practical" principles [those determining the will] can never be universally directed to the same objects; and even if they could,
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the unanimity itself would only be contingent, only empirically and subjectively valid. From the erection of the desire for happiness into a universal "practical" law, the extreme opposite of harmony must follow, and the complete destruction of the maxim itself. "For, in that case, the will of all has not one and the same object, but everyone has his own [his private welfare], which may accidentally accord with the purposes of others which are equally selfish, but is far from sufficing for a law; because the occasional exceptions which one is permitted to make are endless, and cannot be definitely embraced in one universal rule." 89 With such empirical principles,

each man makes his own subject the foundation of his inclination, and in the same subject sometimes one inclination, sometimes another has the preponderance. To discover a law which would govern them all under this condition, namely bringing them all into harmony, is quite impossible. . . . The principle of happiness may, indeed, furnish maxims, but never such as would be competent to be laws of the will, even if universal happiness were made the object . . . it can supply only general rules, never universal; that is, it can give rules which on the average will most frequently fit, but not rules which must always hold good and necessarily.

For man, as a sensible being, happiness is the only thing of consequence, "but it is not absolutely the only thing of consequence." He is "not so completely an animal as to be indifferent to what reason says on its own account, and to use it merely as an instrument for the satisfaction of his wants as a sensible being." Reason in that case would be only "a particular method which nature had employed to equip man for the same ends for which it has qualified brutes, without qualifying him for any higher purpose." But we do have this higher purpose—to take into consideration good and evil in themselves, as determined by moral law, and not as its determinants. All previous moralists have made the error of seeking for an object of the will which they could make the matter and the principle of a law; whether they placed this object in happiness, in perfection, in moral feeling, or in the will of God, "their principle in every case implied heteronomy," and must be determined by empirical conditions, "since their object, which

89 We are here reminded of the reasons for Rousseau's preference of a general will to the pluralism of private wills.
was to be the immediate principle of the will, could not be called good or bad except in its immediate relation to feeling, which is always empirical."  

At this point, we may offer some further observations. A purely organic view of man leads most logically to an evolutionary ethics. To arrive at virtue in a sense that has moral meaning, man must be considered as functioning also on a hyperorganic level. It is this level which requires the overriding of biological instincts, a partial or complete sacrifice of the original good (self-preservation, selfish happiness) in order to fulfill its need, which is the satisfaction of a rational ideal of good based on consciousness of the meaning of our actions. The pleasure-happiness value, in its naïve form, makes each individual the center of the universe and makes subjective evaluation the rule. Such a rule eventually leads to anarchism and nihilism by calling into question the function of society and government. On the other hand, the effort to establish objective value by social utilitarianism leads to the vague and indecisive idea of "general welfare"—a phrase rarely defined by its proponents, but which generally seems to signify the happiness of the majority, sometimes the happiness of all. On this view, the locus of value vanishes entirely. The happiness of all can only be the happiness of each, which from the viewpoint of moral law is contradictory in practical terms. If the happiness of the majority is taken as the rule, then it is for the happiness of the other that I am to sacrifice my own. The protest is inevitable: why is the happiness of another more valuable than my own, and why am I bound to sacrifice my own to it?  

"Your head is so filled with the right," remarks a character in some modern novel, "you can't see the good." We may reverse this statement and apply it to eighteenth-century utilitarianism, which

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90 Kant, op. cit., pp. 37, 51, 59-63, 105-16, 123, 125, 150-55, 163.

91 Some would argue that the utilitarians were not consistent, that they made moral judgment a function of maximum welfare, not realizing that the maximization of welfare is a prior moral principle. "Without natural moral perceptions we should never have known that it was our duty to seek the happiness of mankind when it diverged from our own..." (Lecky, op. cit., I, p. 69.)

Niebuhr maintains that the most naïve form of faith is that in the identity between individual and general interest. Utilitarianism extracts "a covertly expressed sense of obligation toward the 'greatest good of the greatest number' from a hedonistic analysis of morals which really lacks all logical presuppositions for any idea of obligation, and which cannot logically rise above an egoistic view of life." (The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, New York, 1949, pp. 29-30.)

See also Schweitzer, op. cit., pp. 39-40.
defined right as conduct productive of the greatest good, that is, well-being and happiness. Right, modern philosophers have argued, introduces an element outside of "good"—an exaction, demand, "ought" derived from claims, responsibilities and obligations inherent in our human relations and in our rational awareness of them. The right, in general, promotes the good, but is not determined by it, and is a claim *sui generis*. Either one may imply or demand denial of the other. We need only think of Socrates, and of military aggression.92

The eighteenth century faced this dilemma in the controversy over slavery. In this debate we can see how the separation between pure utilitarianism (which takes all ends in view) and expediency (which does not) tends in real situations to become fictitious and unrealizable, since good is defined in terms of general welfare, and the latter term is interpreted—as Helvétius would have been the first to admit—in terms of the self-interest of the dominant group, or "particular will." If the useful was right, then slavery was right—if it could be proven useful to the "general welfare," to the greater good of the whole. Its supporters argued that it was most useful and in fact absolutely necessary in the colonies, and therefore was morally right. Many of its utilitarian opponents, even though they actually spoke out of a feeling of its injustice, were forced to argue, in order to be consistent with themselves, that it was not necessarily or really useful. Some inconsistently asserted that it was unjust even though necessary and useful. Montesquieu, caught in the dilemma, hedges. Turgot says that slavery is unjust but sometimes useful; however he gives us no clear moral decision as to whether it is justified. Not so with Linguet. He went further and followed Helvétius' justification of public welfare above all else, which was the true course of eighteenth-century utilitarianism. The *philosophes* are right, concedes Linguet, in calling slavery an injustice. "But between them and me there is this difference, that they believe that injustice to be harmful, while I believe it necessary." 93 In American literature, Huckleberry

92 If we reject the just claims of our fellows on the ground that such rejection will produce greater good, remarks E. T. Mitchell, we are on dangerous ground. It is arguable that the death of Socrates has produced more good in provoking reflection on the importance of free inquiry than would have resulted from his acquittal. Would this have justified a juror, who believed Socrates innocent, in voting for his condemnation? (*Op. cit.*, p. 516.) The right and the good are also involved in Socrates' decision not to escape.

93 *Théorie des loix civiles*, II, pp. 280–82.
Finn intuited the right—that there is a human dignity, that men ought to be treated as ends, never as means only, that right and wrong depend on objective relations, not on subjective will—and thus he surpassed the criterion of naked usefulness embodied in the pressure of the social norm above which he had to rise. The good is, indeed, what satisfies our purposes; but to equate this with the right is to evade the moral question—are our purposes right, and what purposes are right for man? There is a world of norms, ends, and values, established by man's reasonable nature (which is aware of his sensible nature), that transcends the empirical sphere of desire. Moral judgment cannot be explained in terms other than itself (such as pleasant emotions, benevolent instincts, customs, usefulness) without "explaining it away and losing it." 94

The preoccupation with "natural man" and the "natural," which was so powerful an element in eighteenth-century thought, also made it difficult for eighteenth-century moralists to realize that moral good involves a different kind of experience than that of happiness, the sole criterion of "natural man." It may be true that nature causes us to desire happiness above all else, but it is also certain that our nature makes judgments of right and wrong inevitable, and that it makes us need and prefer (if not always desire) the right. We cannot therefore say that because we have this paramount natural desire for personal satisfactions, right and wrong are to be judged solely in relation to their furtherance or hindrance of our happiness. To consider right and good as equivalents is a redundancy similar to that of might and right which Rousseau pointed out so tellingly in the Contrat social. It is also obvious that, as Kant said, there can be no general law of happiness, not even for one individual; and that we feel and judge it wrong for one individual to hurt another for his own pleasure. Enlightened self-interest and virtue-sacrifice were proposed in order to overcome these difficulties, but still and always as a means to happiness, even when, in extreme cases of heroic virtue, one's own happiness was sacrificed for that of others. Sacrifice, however, may be not only for happiness, and the ethical good may involve the surpassing of natural good (interpreted as happiness). But because of the desire to integrate man into nature as a wholly "natural" being, it was difficult for such a view to be accepted

within the eighteenth-century frame of reference. It was not seen that man's uniqueness lies in the fact that, though he is wholly in nature, he transcends nature, because of his peculiar ability to contemplate himself and all else in nature objectively, and so to conceive of other beings as subjects. The difficulty, in sum, derived from the confusion of moral value and psychology, of the moral and the empirical. We can only desire happiness (it was thought), so everything else must be made compatible; there is no meaning in saying that we ought to value and desire something else or act in some other way.

But eighteenth-century utilitarian moralists desired, above all, to reconcile and unite nature and culture, or nature and reason. Happiness was to be safeguarded, and never given up as the highest value; but happiness could only be achieved, it was asserted, by submission to the cultural norms, and reason dictated the sacrifice of immediate or apparent happiness in order to achieve "real" happiness, or the greatest amount of happiness (according to the several views). Reason and culture were not distinct from nature and its great demand, but the servants of that demand—even as in any particular case they might be its master; so that this "nature" philosophy, which set up the natural happiness goal as the *summum bonum*, actually came to rely on reason to control or negate natural instinct in order to overcome hedonism and nihilism, and to preserve moral value and social order. Utilitarianism, comments John Dewey, "exaggerated the role of rational thought in conduct . . . it assumed that everybody is moved by conscious considerations and that all that is really necessary is to make the process of consideration sufficiently enlightened." 95

We have examined the objections raised in the eighteenth century to this philosophy. We shall shortly see that its failure to convince, its inability to grasp either the realities of passion ("nature") or the contradictory realities of the moral (reason and culture) led nihilists to assert the first at the expense of the second. But it could also lead to the assertion of the second at the expense of the first. The centering of value in "society" (as an abstract entity) is obviously a form of moral absolutism, and it would be folly to expect that a political absolutism would not follow. There are many implications of totalitarian conditioning, control, and

95 *Human Nature and Conduct*, pp. 221–22. Dewey adds that the rational element of conduct is nevertheless important.
repression in eighteenth-century thought.\footnote{See Chapter 7 of this volume; also An Age of Crisis, passim, and Talmon, The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy.} Noting that the utilitarian spirit is reflected in attitudes toward the arts and science, C. C. Gillispie points out that one aspect of it finds its way into collectivist philosophies and into the Jacobin totalitarianism "which found value in science only so far as its utility could be demonstrated."\footnote{"The Natural History of Industry," p. 402.} We may add to this the fact that utilitarianism, or the greatest happiness principle, is destructive of the very natural rights which some of the utilitarians defended. "For if morality and social institutions are justified merely by their utility, rights must be so too, and in consequence any claim to a natural right is either nonsense or merely a confused way of saying that the right does conduce to the greatest happiness."\footnote{Sabine, pp. 566–67.}

Let us summarize briefly. The eighteenth century found four ways to make a bridge between the egoistic starting point of self-interest (unique motive and end of behavior) and the ethical termini of social conformity, general welfare, or altruism. Common to all four groups was the general value outlook of utility (happiness). Some held the ethical termini to be a natural result of a laissez-faire pursuit of self-interest. A few thought this statement was true, but only in the conditions of anarchical primitivism. Others went to the opposite extreme, and demanded a rigidly controlled and highly conditioned society, either primitivistic or culturally advanced. In the middle stood the proponents of enlightened self-interest and virtue-happiness as the justification of the good of the greatest number, in preference to one's own; and in some milieux a mode of altruistic benevolence, which apparently surpassed self-interest, was engendered. In this fashion they answered the questions involved in establishing a secular ethics: what is the good? why be good? how make man good? how reconcile, or synthesize the two goals, virtue and the pursuit of happiness (culture and nature)?

On the other hand, four arguments were proposed in the eighteenth century against the various solutions of utilitarianism. First, it is more to our individual advantage to violate the general interest when we can get away with it. Second, each man finds happiness differently, and no rules or objective universals are possible.
Third, the criterion is a nonmoral one. Fourth, we have a non-
egoistic moral "instinct" or need which is primary, not secondary. Modern philosophy has amplified this criticism, and today utili-
tarianism is an ethics held only by a small minority of philoso-
phers.99

We must recognize the fact that utilitarianism had a valid func-
tion in the eighteenth century and that it made important positive
contributions. The rise of utilitarian thinking was an accompani-
ment and a result of the rise of secularism, of a scientific attitude
toward social problems, and of the economic changes that were
ushering in the age of capitalism. For those who re-examined ethics
from a naturalistic viewpoint, it supplied positive criteria which
made supernaturalism superfluous or, in some cases, only a useful
adjunct. It attempted to ground itself on the analyzable data of
human behavior as psychology could supply it—a consideration
which no ethical philosophy can ever ignore. For the purposes of
the correction of governmental abuses and of a basic restatement
about government itself, as well as for the new economic structures,
it supplied a most valuable rationale which could justify the pro-
motion of general welfare in a way that feudal institutions were
no longer able to do. In a word, it responded to the needs of the
time and seemed like the answer to the great problems. Its legacy
to the nineteenth century is historically of great importance. In
a more permanent way, eighteenth-century utilitarianism con-
tributed to the independence of ethical and social thought from
a prioris and absolutes. These positive values stand in need of no
defense and are quite well-known. It is far more important for us
to bring out the inherent weaknesses of utilitarianism as an ethical
theory (especially in its eighteenth-century French formulations),
and to uncover its actual role as a factor in cultural history. This
role was determined partly by its weaknesses and partly by its
strengths; and partly, also by the peculiar circumstances of the
cultural context which caused its development and which deter-
mmed its actual functioning within that context. This we have
tried to do, partly in this chapter, and also in the two chapters
which follow.

99 For an interesting nineteenth-century criticism, see Lecky, op. cit., I, pp. 36–
40, 69–70, 98–100. For criticism of twentieth-century sequels, see E. Vivas, "Animad-
141–42. The reader is urged to consult these references, to get a view of later per-
spectives growing out of the eighteenth century.