

spinoza: a synthesis of epicureanism and stoicism¹

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Spinoza's vast system, which assimilates the systems of Epicurus and Hobbes, contains the fundamental theories of the French and English schools. At the same time, however, it seeks to surpass them by recasting the ethics of happiness [*la morale du bonheur*] in terms of the ethics of intelligence [*morale de l'intelligence*] and placing the highest pleasure in supreme knowledge [*savoir*]. Spinoza exercised direct influence on d'Holbach, and a more or less indirect influence on all the other thinkers that we will discuss later on, such as Helvetius.

I. SPINOZA: METAPHYSICIAN OF UTILITARIANISM²

An absolute negation of all that we understand by morality [*moralité*] and a reduction of everything, including the will, to the necessary laws of nature, which are also the necessary laws of intelligence: this is, in concise terms, what Spinozism is. There is no other absolute than eternal necessity, which is the cause of the existence of everything that exists. Everything else is relative. The absolute is that which is; and when we speak of what *could* or *should* be, we are simply uttering judgements on perfection and imperfection, on good and evil. Through a strange illusion we take these judgements for what is most absolute, when in fact there is nothing more relative than them. For what are, in effect, perfection and imperfection, which the Platonists wished to posit as the absolute archetypes of our intellect? Perfection and imperfection are simply relations between things and our

thought. “If someone has decided to make something, and has finished it, then he will call it perfect – and so will anyone who rightly knows, or thinks he knows the mind and the intention³ of the author of the work.” (E IV, Pref.). You see an unfinished house; if the builder wanted to finish it but did not succeed, the house is imperfect; if, on the other hand, he wanted to take it only to the point in which we find it, then it is perfect. All perfection is relative to the thought of the agent. Accordingly, would we have the right to say that the works of nature are perfect or imperfect, as if nature had ideas and intentions, as if it were guided by ideal types imagined by Plato? “As the vulgar⁴ commonly say – that Nature sometimes fails or sins and produces imperfect things – I count among the chimeras [I treated in the Appendix of Part I]. Perfection and imperfection, therefore, are only modes of thinking, that is, notions we are accustomed to feign because we compare individuals of the same species or genus to one another.” (E IV, Pref).⁵

In the same way in which perfection and imperfection are relative to our thought, so good and evil are relative to our desires, as Epicurus and Hobbes have shown. “For one and the same thing can, at the same time, be good or bad, and even indifferent. For example, music is good for one who is melancholic, [bad for one who is mourning,] and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf. ... Good and evil do not indicate anything positive in things considered in themselves.”

Thus, when we say that something is imperfect, it is because we compare it to what it *could be* according to us; but this possibility indicates only a way of thinking, since in fact everything is necessary. Similarly, when we say that something is evil, we are actually comparing it to how we think it *should be*, that is to say, we compare it to that which we desire it to be. We make our desires – and our thoughts – the measure of things, and thus we create the chimera of an absolute moral order which would surpass the relative orders of physics and logic. On the contrary, it is morality that is relative, while nature is absolute. This is the implied principle of every Epicurean and utilitarian system, expressed in all its rigour: Spinoza brings it to light with his unshakable logic.

Since there is no absolute good, what is, then, the relative good? – Spinoza answers the same as Hobbes and Epicurus: “By *good* I shall understand what we certainly know to be useful [*utile*] for us.” (E IV, D1). The useful, in turn, is that which produces joy, and joy is caused by the satisfaction of desire: it is still the Epicurean definition, except that Spinoza adds a metaphysical complement to it: desire is the tendency of our being to persevere in being. This desire is the basis

of self-love, just as Hobbes and La Rochefoucauld described it. “No one strives to preserve his being for the sake of anything other than himself.” (E IV, P25).

The good is, for a being, to succeed in this effort to conserve and satisfy its nature. The good, therefore, is nothing other than this *success* and it amounts to *power* [*puissance*]; and it is this power [*puissance*] that we call virtue: “By virtue and power I understand the same thing.” (E IV, D8).⁶

But he who is *able* to satisfy the fundamental desire of conservation is he who *knows* what the best means for achieving it. *Power*,⁷ for a rational being such as man,⁸ is *knowledge*. Therefore, true power [*puissance*] resides in reason, without which we would not be able to calculate utility with certainty. From this follows the theorem: “Acting absolutely from virtue is nothing else for us but acting, living and preserving our being (these three signify the same thing) by the guidance of reason, and all this according to the rule of interest that is particular to each one.” (E IV, P24). This is the fundamental theorem of the utilitarian system. “The essence of virtue is the very effort to preserve one’s own being, and happiness consists in [one] being able to effectively preserve it.” This power [*pouvoir*] merges with virtue itself. Striving [*effort*] would be but its ground and success its achievement. In this way, there is an identity between happiness and virtue. “Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself.” [E IV, P42].⁹ To really be able to preserve oneself is the same as being successful in doing so; additionally, to act in this way is to enjoy [*jouir*], and to enjoy is to be happy. On the other hand, to act in this way is also to be virtuous. Virtue, then, is not different from happiness itself, as all Epicureans and utilitarians maintain.¹⁰

II. INDIVIDUAL ETHICS

The human being can be considered both as an individual and as a member of society. From this fact, it follows that there are two relative points of view in this equally relative science that one calls ethics [*morale*], or the science of virtue and happiness.

If we [first] consider the individual, leaving aside society, then virtue for him consists in obtaining the greatest possible happiness. In order to do this, he must satisfy his true nature in the best possible way. Now, this true nature is reason, since reason is the essence of man. The activity which is proper to reason is that of understanding, and understanding is to perceive the necessity of things. This

necessity is Nature or, if you wish, God. Thus, Spinoza refers the ethics of happiness [*morale du bonheur*] to the ethics of intelligence [*morale de l'intelligence*], that is to say, Epicureanism to Stoicism. "What we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding; nor does the soul, *insofar as it uses reason*, judge anything else useful to itself except what leads to understanding." (E IV, P26), We know nothing that is *certainly good* or *bad* except that which leads us to really understanding things, or that which can prevent us from understanding them. (E IV, P27). The soul [âme] only acts when it understands; and it is only in this case that we can say that the soul acts virtuously in an absolute sense. Understanding is, then, the absolute virtue of the soul. Now, the supreme object of our intellect is God. Therefore, the supreme virtue of the soul is understanding or knowing God. (E IV, P28).

To understand the absolute necessity of eternal nature amounts to understanding that which, while being subject only to its own law, is free. Therefore, understanding this necessity means understanding eternal freedom. It is through understanding that one participates in this freedom and identifies with it. The science of necessity and the science of freedom are one and the same thing. Again, Spinoza adds a Stoic principle to Epicureanism. The point where these two doctrines come together is the intellectual intuition which crowned Aristotelian ethics, namely the identity of human and divine thought, or the consciousness of eternity. "We feel and know by experience that we are eternal."¹¹ This awareness, which produces supreme joy, is the real love of oneself, and it is simultaneously the love of God. The mystical ideal of the Hebrews and the Christians seems here to merge with the moral theories of antiquity and in the broad synthesis proposed by Spinoza. His conception of nature is all-encompassing: the utility of the greatest possible happiness is nature enjoying itself; and the intellectual freedom of the Stoics, which is the very knowledge of necessity, is nature possessing itself. Finally, the mystical ecstasy, through which individuality is absorbed in universal being, is nature penetrating itself and finding its eternal existence underneath its ephemeral modes.

III. SOCIAL ETHICS

Spinoza has shown the nature of the good for the individual: the individual's relative good is that which satisfies his desires. His absolute good is that which is no longer individual, it is not merely in relation to him but is universal and necessary: it is nature or God. For, again, there is no other absolute than being itself in its

eternal necessity.

Now, the human being cannot exist alone. In fact, man is but a mode of existence which is inseparable from all other modes. Thus, in order to understand [and, therefore, to satisfy his nature], it is not enough for man to know himself [taken individually]: he must know other beings and, especially those that most resemble him. Finally, if he is to be happy, man needs to know that he is not self-sufficient: he needs the help of fellow men and other beings. His existence, his thought and his desire are equally linked to the existence, thought and desire of humankind and, indeed, of the world as a whole. Hence the recognition of the movement from egoism that will engender society. Social passions and the love of others are, ultimately, transformations of self-love. This physics of custom [*moeurs*] that the French Epicureans would later erect, and that psychology of custom under the law of association that the English utilitarians would later establish, Spinoza conceived them first – and he did something even more remarkable: he constituted a geometry of custom. “I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies.” (*E* III, Pref.). Spinoza proceeds *a priori*, by deduction, and he contemptuously opposed his method to that “*historiette* of the soul,” *haec historiola animae*, which was still satisfying to Bacon and his school.¹² The effort to persevere in being, insofar as it is conscious of itself, is [called] desire.¹³ From desire both joy and sadness arise, and here we find the principle of all passions. “Love is nothing but joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause, and hate is nothing but sadness with the accompanying idea of an external cause.” (*E* III, P13S). The mechanism of the ideas, or of the “images of things,” (*E* III, P19, P20, and the following) which links one representation to other, explains the mechanism of the passions.¹⁴ Spinoza does not limit himself, as the English utilitarians do, to positing the law of association of ideas empirically. Rather, he deduces this law and draws its consequences. It is this law that explains, for instance, the sentiment of sympathy, which will play a major role in the English school. “I know, of course, that the authors who first introduced the words sympathy and antipathy intended to signify by them certain occult qualities of things. Nevertheless, I believe we may be permitted to understand by them also qualities that are known or manifest.” [*E* III, P15]. Sympathy is thus reduced to a theorem: “If we perceive or represent an object that is similar to us (for instance another man), and towards which we previously had no affect, to be affected with some passion, we are thereby affected with a similar passion.” (*E* III, P15).¹⁵ From this fact derive both *pity* and *emulation*. “This communication of the affects,¹⁶ when it is related to sadness is called *pity*; but related to desire it is called

emulation, which, therefore, is nothing but the *desire for a thing which is generated in us from the fact that we imagine others like us to have the same desire*. [Guyau adds the following:] If the thing desired cannot belong to the two at the same time, then emulation turns into envy.” [E III, P27S]. This proves that the same mechanism, according to the different outcome, is at the basis of virtue or vice.

Among these theorems, there is one of capital importance, namely the one regarding the love of others [*amour d'autrui*]. “When I say the lover’s will to join himself to the thing loved is a property of love, I do not understand by *will* a consent, a deliberation of the mind [âme], or a *free decision*; for we have demonstrated that this is a fiction.” (E III, Definitions of the Affects, 6). This is the fundamental issue, not only for psychology, but also for ethics itself. If we are not morally free, then there is nothing else within us than desires and interests; therefore, both the exclusive love for others and full disinterestedness are but appearances. Self-love is what is real, and the Epicureans win the quarrel. Spinoza, while rejecting freedom, acknowledges that it is for us the condition that sets the value of love. He writes the following theorem, which Fouillée highlighted in his *Histoire de la philosophie*: “Given an equal cause of love, love towards a thing will be greater if we imagine the [loved] thing to be free than if we imagine it to be necessary. [And similarly for hate.] If we imagine as necessary the thing that is the cause of this affect, then we shall imagine it to be the cause of the affect, not alone, but with many others. Consequently, our love or hate towards it is less.¹⁷ From this it follows that because men consider themselves to be free, they have greater love or hate towards one another than towards other things.” (E III, P49). Ultimately, love is reduced to an illusion, and this is also the last word of the Epicurean system.

Nevertheless, it must be possible to establish, among men, if not love, at least the appearance and the equivalent of love. The social problem consists precisely in this. And there is only one way to solve it: making the interests of one [man or agent] coincide with the interests of another. This is what¹⁸ all Epicureans have sought, from Epicurus himself to Helvetius.

Now, from where does the opposition between men come from? From the opposition that exists between their passions. “Men, insofar as they are torn by the conflict of passive affects, are contrary to one another.” The interest of the passions is what divides men, and that which is also often used as an objection to the ethics of interest. However, according to Spinoza, there are two remedies for this state of division among men. One can subject men’s passions, bringing them

to unity [and making them converge] either by means of the power [*puissance*] of a stronger passion, namely fear, or through the power of reason [*puissance de la raison*]. These are the two main sources of the social order: the law of fear and the law of reason. “And surely, we do derive, from the society of our fellow men, many more advantages than disadvantages. ... Men still find from experience that through mutual help [*secours mutuels*] they can provide themselves much more easily with the things they require and that, by joining forces, they can avoid the dangers which threaten on all sides” (*E IV*, P35S). From this interest derive society and the social pact, as well as the sovereign power instated to protect this pact by force. For “no pact has any value except because of its utility; if utility disappears, the pact fades with it and loses its authority. It is folly to pretend to chain anyone to their word forever, except that one would do so in such a way that breaking the pact brings more damage than profit to the violator of his oaths” (*TTP*, XVI). These are Epicurus’ and Hobbes’ principles.

The first means to maintain society is, then, physical power [*puissance physique*], along with the fear it inspires. Insofar as men are slaves to their passions, force is the only means to govern them. Reason, however, joins its logic to the physical power [*puissance*] of force in order to maintain the social contract, and to condemn all perfidy. “Suppose someone now asks: What if a man could save himself from the present danger of death by treachery? Would not the principle of preserving his own being recommend, without qualification, that he be treacherous? To this I reply that if reason should recommend that, it would recommend it to all men” – it is Kant’s criterion – “from which follows that reason would recommend, without qualification, that men should make agreements to join forces and to have common laws only by deception – that is, that they really should have no common laws, which is absurd.” (*E IV*, P72S).¹⁹ In other words, if [on the one hand] treachery can be the effect of passion, and a fatal and necessary effect, [on the other] it is not logical from the point of view of reason, which has brought men together by the need of forming a society.

If passion divides men, reason unites them. Indeed, the object of reason is the understanding of truth. Now, truth is the same for all, and everyone can know it at the same time. As we have seen, reason is the true good of each man. It transpires that the real good of each one is also the true good of all the others. Thus, we possess the principle which will be able to produce peace and concord among men. The conciliation of interests finds its place in the common interest of reason. “A man acts entirely from the laws of his own nature when he lives according to the

guidance of reason; and only to that extent must he always agree with the nature of other men.” [E IV, P35C]. In this way, the more each man seeks that which is useful to him, the more he is useful, precisely because of that, to other men. “For the more one seeks what is useful to him, and strives to preserve himself, the more he is endowed with virtue, or what is the same, the greater is his power of acting according to the laws of his own nature, that is, of living according to the guidance of reason. But men most agree in nature, when they live according to the guidance of reason. Therefore, men will be most useful to one another, when each one most seeks what is useful to him.” Here one finds Epicurus and Zeno finally reconciled: to live according to nature, or to live according to reason, is to live according to one’s particular interest, and to the interest of all; which amounts to being happy and virtuous. Therefrom we can turn to this other theorem, which Socrates as well as Aristotle would have admitted: “The greatest good of those who seek virtue is common to all and can be enjoyed by all equally.” (E IV, P36). This good is, in effect, the knowledge [*connaissance*] of the eternal truth, or of God. Here we return to the final absorption of all in God, which is the sovereign good of the mystics: “The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men; and this desire is greater as his knowledge of God is greater.” [E IV, P37]. “This love towards God cannot be tainted by an affect of envy or jealousy: instead, the more men we imagine to be joined to God by the same bond of love, the more it is encouraged.” [E V, P20]. This love, however, is by no means free; it is rather a necessity of reason, [for] it is still an interest. But insofar as it is rational, this interest is also universal. There is, therefore, a coincidence between interest and disinterestedness, between self-love and love towards others. For Spinoza’s God is ultimately ourselves, in our eternal substance. Hence, to love God is to love oneself and all others, it is one and the same love. The ethics of particular utility strives to identify itself to a universal ethics.

IV. POLITICS

In what concerns politics, we find the same [theoretical] movement in Spinoza and Hobbes. The latter wanted a full abdication of the individual in favour of the sovereign; but, as a matter of fact, this abdication is [ultimately] impossible.²⁰ Indeed, there is a power and a right which we can never abdicate: the power of thinking. Why? Because this power expresses the very necessity of our nature, that is to say, our reason. We cannot be deprived of our reason, which will be the refuge of freedom in Spinoza’s politics. It dwells within man as an inalienable power [*puissance*] and as an inalienable right: it is the necessity of thinking which

is identical to the freedom of thought. The true goal of politics is to organise²¹ the strongest possible physical power to prevent passion from tearing men apart; and, at the same time, it is to make this physical power increasingly useless, replacing it with the power [*puissance*] of reason. Now, the strongest physical power is not that of the absolute monarch, as Hobbes believed, but it is rather the general force of the whole people,²² or the force of democracy. On the other hand, the greatest rational power [*puissance*] is that of general reason [*raison générale*];²³ the more this reason develops in the individuals, the more these individuals are united among themselves. Therefore, in Spinoza, we find a relatively liberal politics which aims to place the greatest interest within the greatest freedom of thought; that is to say, within the greatest necessity of reason, or in the greatest possible unity of all [particular] interests by the universal interest of reason. This liberal²⁴ revolution in utilitarian doctrine will be henceforth an accomplished fact: Hobbes will remain as the sole partisan of despotism.

In this way, the great system of the rationalist Spinoza effected the synthesis between Epicurean or utilitarian ethics and Stoic ethics. The only element that seems to be absent from Spinozism is the ideal of a real progress of nature, or the idea of “*evolution*,”²⁵ an idea which the German metaphysicians (especially Hegel) and the English ethicists [*moralistes*]²⁶ (especially Spencer) will stress. To this metaphysics of universal evolution they will add an ethics of universal evolution. But in the end the principles remain the same: a relative good takes the place of the absolute good; this relative good is ultimately reduced to a progressive knowledge [*connaissance*] of a progressive utility, by means of which the interest of each individual is more and more identified with a universal interest.

NOTES

1. Extract from *La morale d'Épicure et ses rapports avec les doctrines contemporaines*, Book 4, Chapter 3. This chapter is part of *The Ethics of Epicurus*, translated by Federico Testa, co-edited with Keith Ansell-Pearson (Bloomsbury, forthcoming, 2019). I am grateful to Prof Keith Ansell-Pearson as well as to my colleagues Andre Okawara and Dr Thom Ryan for their attentive feedback on this translation. I would also like to thank Bloomsbury, in particular Liza Thompson, for making the publication of this extract possible.
2. *T.N.* I have added the section headings to Guyau's original section numbers. I have extracted the titles from Guyau's chapter summary, provided in the beginning of each chapter in *La Morale d'Épicure*.
3. *T.N.* Curley's choice was to translate this word as *purpose*. My choice was to include and prioritise Guyau's variations, translating the French quotations used by Guyau or translated by him into French. Guyau occasionally changes and adapts or emphasises certain aspects of the translations for the sake of his argument, highlighting certain aspects that are present in the original, which could have an effect in his argument. For this reason, although consulting Curley's and Shirley's translations, my choices throughout this extract was to follow the general rule of preserving Guyau's own French translations of Spinoza. Moreover, when Guyau provides an incomplete quote or omits relevant parts of the original text, I will occasionally add the missing parts in square brackets.
4. *T.N.* The French original here says "*le vulgaire*," which would be closer to the common man, the man in the street; this is a figure that reappears in Spinoza's work, with a slight negative connotation (the coarse or uncultivated people) or in contrast to the sage. It could also have the pejorative sense of "populace."
5. *T.N.* Guyau does not provide the reference for this quote. When this occurs, I will add the reference in square brackets.
6. *T.N.* Guyau's original reference is D7 instead.
7. *T.N.* Guyau uses the French *pouvoir* which also means "being able to." The noun "power" [*le pouvoir*] preserves that meaning, while at the same time indicates the particular power of the human being, which in this case is *reason*. In Guyau's explanation reason is an expression of our conatus and of our desire, and it is the condition for being successful in our effort for conservation and "satisfaction" of our nature. Additionally, in the original Guyau's use of *pouvoir* and *savoir* can be seen as two infinitives: to be able to [*pouvoir*] is to *know*.
8. *T.N.* I have preserved Guyau's literal phrasing, common in French, *l'homme*. A less gendered option would be 'human being,' which is the idea here. For this reason, in some of the occurrences of the term *homme*, I have decided to use 'human being.' In quotes from Spinoza's text, I have usually followed Guyau, Curley and Shirley.
9. *T.N.* Guyau does not provide the reference. When this occurs, I will consistently provide the reference in square brackets.
10. Way before Bentham, Spinoza protests the principles of asceticism; he laments the fact that the virtuous life is usually presented to men as a sad and grim life, a life of privation, in which all pain is grace and all enjoyment [*jouissance*] a crime: "To use things, therefore, and take pleasure in them as far as possible – not, of course, to the point where we are disgusted with them, for there is no pleasure in that – this is the part of a wise man. It is the part of a wise man, I say, to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theatre, and other things of this kind, which anyone

can use without injury to another.” *E IV*, P45S. [T.N. The reference in the is “*Ibid.*, Part II,” which is mistaken].

11. T.N. Guyau does not provide the reference. *E V*, P23S. In the French, Guyau’s phrasing would be closer to the following sentence: “We experience our eternity,” or “that we are eternal.”

12. T.N. This reference comes from Fouillée’s *Histoire de la philosophie*, 1920, 293.

13. T.N. See *E III*, P9S.

14. T.N. *Ep.* II, 393.

15. T.N. This is the reference provided by Guyau. The passage actually seems to be *E III*, P27, in which Spinoza formulates the important notion of “affective imitation”.

16. T.N. Curley’s translation is slightly different: “This imitation of the affects.” Although an unusual choice in scholarship, I have kept Guyau’s French “*communication*.”

17. T.N. These two sentences are originally part of the demonstration of *E III*, P49. The following clauses are part of the scholium of the same proposition.

18. T.N. A more literal translation would be: “This means [to solve the social problem] is that which all Epicureans have looked for.”

19. T.N. In this case, I have corrected Guyau’s reference (he quotes the *TTP* as well as *E IV*, P62).

20. T.N. See Spinoza’s *Ep.* L, to Jarig Jelles, where he explains to his friend and correspondent the difference between his political philosophy and that of Hobbes, especially in what concerns natural right and transfer.

21. T.N. In his 1902 text comparing Nietzsche and Guyau (“The Ethics of Nietzsche and Guyau.” *International Journal of Ethics* 13:1), Fouillée claims that whereas Nietzsche was the philosopher of *power*, Guyau was the philosopher of the *organisation of power*. As Fouillée explains: “Quantity [Fouillée refers to the idea of ‘intensity of life,’ central both for Nietzsche and Guyau] in the rough meant to him only ‘power’ to which ‘order’ should be added, that is an *organisation of power* in view of some end to be attained” (p. 23). Fouillée argues that if, for Nietzsche, the end to be achieved was power and intensity as such, for Guyau, “The end always remains to be determined” (23). Additionally, this idea of *organisation* points to the fundamentally social – or societal – and political aspect of Guyau’s philosophy: as he highlights in the *Esquisse d’une morale sans obligation ni sanction*, the expansion of life in its fecundity is always social, extensive to others and ultimately collective. As Fouillée explains, “Guyau sees the genuinely intense life in the generous and fruitful life, which ‘lives for many others’” (24).

22. T.N. A literal translation of *people* after Guyau’s text would be “the whole nation.” This argument is close to Spinoza’s description of the *multitudo* in the *TP*, although Guyau makes no reference to it and seems to prioritise the *TTP* (and *E IV*) in his reconstruction of Spinozist politics.

23. T.N. We could read this notion of *raison générale* as a sort of collective reason.

24. T.N. “Liberal,” here, refers to freedom and liberty. One should avoid reading the phrase in terms of its contemporary (and contextual) meaning in English. Guyau’s idea is that of a revolution of freedom: it is the freedom of thought, on the one hand, and the freedom of the people organised in a democracy, on the other, which is the opposite of Hobbes’ “despotism.” Freedom, here, refers to both collectively organised power and collective reason.

25. T.N. Guyau finds in Epicureanism the foundations of a scientific idea of progress. See *La morale d’Épicure*, book 3, chapter 3. On other occasions, I have emphasised the importance of the idea of *time* and *temporality* in *La morale d’Épicure*: See Testa and Dennis, “Pleasure and Self-Cultivation in Guyau and Nietzsche;” Testa, “Guyau and Nietzsche, lecteurs d’Épicure,” paper presented at the *Journée d’études Jean-Marie Guyau: Guyau et ses contemporains*, international conference at the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, Paris, 22 – 23 March 2018. Forthcoming.

26. T.N. Although Guyau often refers to the tradition of the French *moralistes*, my choice for ethicists aims at highlighting the difference between this tradition and that of positivistic and scientific attempts to found morality and a science of ethics, which is here represented by Spencer. In Guyau's perspective, positivism, utilitarianism and evolutionism are linked in what he calls *morale anglaise*. This term loosely designates what Guyau sees as the 'school' of thought which represents modern Epicureanism in England.