The Development of Lockean Moral Philosophy

Whereas Paley's political philosophy engaged explicitly with the hot political issues of the 1780s, including proposals for the reduction of regal influence and the improvement of parliamentary representation, the context of his ethical thought is more difficult to reconstruct. We know that much of the *Principles* was based on lectures given at Christ's College in the early 1770s. Paley was admitted to Christ's as a sizar on 16 November 1758 and started his residence in October 1759, having been a pupil at the free grammar school in Giggleswick in the West Riding of Yorkshire, where his father was headmaster. A capable mathematician, he graduated as senior wrangler in June 1763. Unhappy spells as a schoolmaster's assistant at Dr Bracken's academy in Greenwich and then as an assistant curate ('the rat of rats', as he put it) were brought to an end in 1766 when he was elected a fellow of Christ's following his receipt of the Cambridge Members' prize in 1765 for an essay in Latin on the relative merits of Stoicism and Epicureanism. Vacating Christ's in 1776, Paley took up residence among the rural community of Appleby in the diocese of Carlisle. Then, from 1780 onwards, he had two houses, a prebendal residence in the close of Carlisle Cathedral and the vicarage at Dalston. In 1782 he replaced John Law, his college friend and confidant, as Archdeacon of Carlisle. He owed these appointments to John's father, the eminent theologian Bishop Edmund Law. In the late 1770s, Edmund began pressing Paley to get on with the job of developing the lectures into a book.[1] The Bishop's apparent anxiety about Paley's slow progress was undoubtedly brought on by the changing intellectual climate at Cambridge.

In an atmosphere of toleration and erudition, natural-theological apologetics flourished in 'Whig-Cambridge' for much of the eighteenth century, and, as Paley recognised in his dedicatory preface to the *Principles*, few had

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[1] Edmund Law to John Law, 4 June 1778, London, National Archives, Edward Law 1st Earl of Ellenborough Papers, PRO 30/12/17/3/43.

laboured harder than Law to render religion more credible. However, according to Gascoigne, from the 1770s on, this tradition gradually began to give way to more transcendental doctrines, a shift that was partly the result of changes in the political landscape at the university.[2] As master of Peterhouse, Edmund had been among the foremost advocates of reform in the university. A confirmed Hoadlyite, he joined the campaign to relieve the clergy from mandatory subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles, efforts which culminated in the Feathers Tavern Petition to Parliament in 1772. In the wake of the American Revolution, many at the university became more wary of the reform movement, not least because they believed that the concerted efforts of Wilkes and Wyvill to enlist popular support for their petitioning campaigns threatened to turn an innately tumultuous populace into actors on the political stage, where hitherto they had been mere spectators. Such worries help to explain why some at Cambridge thought the Feathers Tavern men, by petitioning Parliament, had taken matters too far. The defections from the church that followed the petition's failure appeared to point to the schismatic tendency of latitudinarian lenity. In 1779 one such renegade, John Jebb, advised the freeholders of Middlesex that if the government continued to deny the people their rights to equal representation and universal suffrage, 'it would be truly constitutional' for an extra-parliamentary convention to declare the dissolution of the Commons.[3] Small wonder that by the 1780s, many clerics began to equate the distaste for creeds with sedition. As Gascoigne observes, one upshot of this growing ideological polarisation at Cambridge was that anxious dons began to look more to the certainties of revealed theology.

No doubt sensitive to these changes, in 1782 Law was advertising Paley's talents to influential figures at Cambridge, probably in the hope of installing a latitudinarian work of ethics on the syllabus while like-minded clerics still held sway in university affairs.[4] It was the reformer Thomas Jones who, as moderator in the philosophical schools, introduced the *Principles* into exams at Trinity in 1786, and university-wide after 1787. If Law had expected Paley to throw in his lot with those agitating for constitutional change, he must have been disappointed, however. For despite his avowed aloofness from such disputes, the *Principles* expressly

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[2] Gascoigne, *Cambridge*, pp. 238–9.
[3] John Jebb, *Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex* (3rd edn. London, 1780), p. 16.
[4] He told his son that Paley's discourse had been 'highly approved' by vice-chancellor Richard Beadon. Edmund Law to John Law, 7 November 1782, PRO 30/12/17/1/21. But see pp. 82–3. For a further discussion of Law's motives.

rejected calls for a reform of the representation of Parliament and for the abolition of subscription. Yet if his politics had disappointed them, there was plenty for Law and Jones to like about Paley's theology, for the *Principles* was a work of rational religion par excellence. It was his unparalleled ability to give cogent answers to their theological and ethical questions that recommended the book to so many divines. Paley himself saw his system as a remedy for the failings of the moral philosophy curriculum at Cambridge. Whereas the writings of Grotius and Pufendorf were 'of too *forensic* a cast, too mixed up . . . with the jurisprudence of Germany' for his liking, the 'sententious apophthegmatising style' of Adam Ferguson's *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* (1769) gained 'not a sufficient hold upon the attention' of the ordinary reader. Moral philosophy should aim at nothing less than 'the information of the human conscience in every deliberation that is likely to come before it', according to Paley, and expediency met this criteria by providing a hard and fast rule, applicable in all situations.[5] Thomas Rutherforth's *Institutes of Natural Law* (1754–6), popular with tutors at Cambridge, had defined the 'law of our nature' as those rules that it is 'necessary for us to observe, in order to be happy'.[6] But here the doctrine of expediency was lost in a fog of otiose definitions which Paley believed would blunt its effect on young minds. By contrast, his bold affirmation that it is 'the utility of any moral rule alone which constitutes the obligation of it' signalled his intention to expound the principle in a manner sufficiently clear and comprehensive to direct behaviour.[7] The *Principles* drew heavily on John Gay's groundbreaking 'Preliminary Dissertation' (1731) and Edmund Law's follow-up, 'On Morality and Religion' (1758).[8] But where these earlier pioneers had explored the psychological underpinnings of theological utilitarianism, they had said little about its practical application. First in his lectures, and then in the *Principles*, Paley applied expediency to the lives of eighteenth-century Englishmen.[9]

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[5] William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (London, 1785), pp. i, iv, xv.
[6] Thomas Rutherforth, *Institutes of Natural law: Being the Substance of a Course of Lectures on Grotius de Jure Belli et Pacis Read in St John's Cambridge*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1754–6), vol. 1, p. 10.
[7] *Principles*, pp. vi–vii, 61.
[8] Gay's 'Preliminary Dissertation Concerning the Fundamental Principle of Virtue or Morality' first appeared anonymously in Edmund Law, trans., *An Essay on the Origin of Evil* by William King (Cambridge, 1731). Law added two moral treatises of his own to the fourth edition, 'On Morality and Religion' and 'The Nature and Obligations of Man as a Sensible and Rational Being', in *An Essay on the Origin of Evil* by William King, trans. Edmund Law (4th edn. Cambridge, 1758). King's *De Origine Mali* was first published in 1702.
[9] *Principles*, p. ix.

In doing so he was continuing the systemisation of theological utilitarianism initiated by Abraham Tucker, who in his *Light of Nature Pursued* had sought to demonstrate the sanctity of human happiness by a rigorous examination of human nature. Fearing that the profuseness of his speculations would confine his readership to the learned, Tucker modestly observed that it was 'no uncommon thing in the sciences . . . to see one man prepare materials for another to work up'.[10] Paley apparently read this as a personal invitation, declaring that 'I shall account it no mean praise, if I have sometimes been able to dispose into method . . . or to exhibit in more compact and tangible masses, what, in that otherwise excellent performance, is spread over too much surface'.[11] In Chapter 3, it is shown that there was more to 'working up' Tucker's theology than merely distilling it into a practical code. First, however, some account must be given of the birth of the tradition in the 1730s.

The True Origin and Criterion of Morals

The prime mover in the development of Christian utility was Edmund Law. The son of a curate and schoolmaster, Law graduated from St John's College, Cambridge in 1723 and was elected a fellow of Christ's College in 1727.[12] In a long career at the university, crowned by his ascent to the Mastership of Peterhouse College in 1754, his mission was to ensure that it led the way in advancing the investigation of religious truth, on the one hand by spearheading the endeavour to restore the teachings of scripture to their original simplicity and on the other by nurturing natural theology and the sciences that sustained it.[13] To create the optimum conditions for truth to thrive, moreover, he strove tirelessly to remove alleged obstacles to free religious inquiry such as mandatory subscription – though like his close friend Francis Blackburne, he remained committed to doing so from within the Anglican fold. On the ground, Law's campaign to forward the march of Christian Enlightenment involved modernising the curriculum, nurturing the next generation of latitudinarian thinkers and contributing to scholarly debate through his own publications.[14] As will become

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[10] Abraham Tucker, *The Light of Nature Pursued: From the Second Edition Revised and Corrected with Some Account of the Life of the Author*, ed. H. P. St. John Mildmay, 4 vols. (1768–78; Cambridge, 1831), vol. 1, p. 88.

[11] *Principles*, pp. xiii–xiv.   [12] *ODNB*.

[13] See Paley, *A Short Memoir of the Life of Edmund Law (Extracted from Hutchinson's 'History of Cumberland', . . .) Re-printed with notes. By Anonymus* (London, 1800).

[14] His protégés included future-Unitarians like Jebb, John Disney and Gilbert Wakefield; but also lifelong Anglican latitudinarians like Richard Watson and John Hey.

apparent, all three endeavours contributed to the rise of Christian utility. While its success did not precipitate the kind of doctrinal warfare sparked by anti-Trinitarianism in the period, it did provoke a hostile reaction from a number of prominent churchmen, who saw utility as undermining some of the basic assumptions of Christianity. Its rise undoubtedly owed much, therefore, to Law's intellectual character, his extraordinary openness to new and challenging ideas, but also his stubborn adherence to those he found persuasive. He was willing both to brave the censure of his more orthodox colleagues for propounding unorthodox teachings – most notably, the doctrine of mortalism, the notion that the soul slept between death and resurrection – and to take up the cudgels for some of the most heterodox churchmen of the day, many of whom were his acolytes.[15] Importantly, his intellectual courage was matched by his energy and commitment. As we have seen, it was Law who coaxed Paley into turning his lectures on ethics into a textbook, while working tirelessly on the University authorities to ensure it became required reading. Given, in addition, that John Gay was by all accounts a highly reticent character, it is hard to think that his seminal essay would have seen the light of day had Law not included it in his edition of William King's *De Origine Mali* (1731).

A fellow of Sidney Sussex, Gay lectured in Hebrew, Greek and Ecclesiastical History. All we know about him apart from this is that he was an accomplished biblical scholar with an unsurpassed knowledge of Locke.[16] A vital influence on Tucker and Paley, his 'Preliminary Dissertation' was a highly original contribution to the debate about moral sense theory. The work challenged Francis Hutcheson's characterisation of the moral sense as innate, offering in its place a genealogy of moral affections drawn from Locke's analysis of human motivation. In a bid to refute the assertion of Hobbes and Mandeville that both moral approbation and virtue stemmed from selfish motives, Hutcheson's *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* (1725) had ascribed such behaviour to the interplay of two instincts which acted 'without regard to *self-interest*' – the *moral sense* which determines our minds to approve of 'some quality apprehended in actions' which we recognise as morally good, and '*disinterested affection*' from which virtuous actions flow.[17] That men generally look favourably upon good actions without being able to give reasons for their approbation and that they often pursue

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[15] Paley, *Short Memoir*, pp. 12–13.   [16] This was according to the Bishop. Ibid., p. 2.
[17] Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (3rd edn. London, 1729), pp. 115, 104, 158–9. Hutcheson styled the moral affections instincts in *Inquiry*, pp. 195–6.

virtue without considering their private interest, only a fool or a Hobbist would deny, asserted Gay. But the theory that described the moral sense and the public affections as instincts, if not necessarily guilty of resurrecting the discredited doctrine of innate ideas, smacked nonetheless 'of that of *occult qualities*'.[18] It is an extremely telling allegation in regards to the themes of this book, since it reveals that from its inception, theological utility was conceived of as an attempt to extend the 'scientific revolution' to the realm of ethics.

As Keith Hutchison has shown, when exponents of mechanical science scorned occult qualities, what they were often really objecting to was the idea of Aristotelean qualities per se, i.e. the *qualitates* or forms said to be responsible for the attributes of things.[19] Because they assumed that in perception, the properties of bodies accessed the mind directly, peripatetics held that such qualities provided 'a complete and satisfactory explanation of the observed phenomena, the final answer to all queries'.[20] Qualities that were 'within the realm of experience, but outside the realm of sense', however, such as magnetism and ether, were deemed to fall beyond the scope of *scientia*, which dealt only with things that could be perceived by the senses.[21] These were designated occult qualities by the peripatetics, and frequently ascribed to supernatural causes.[22] As the proponents of mechanical science saw things, however, all causes were occult by this definition, since they all produced their effects imperceptibly, i.e. through some indiscernible interaction between the minute parts (corpuscles or atoms) of the bodies in question.[23] Perception did not partake of the real essence of things. They asserted, moreover, that the specific phenomena deemed occult by the Aristotelians were amenable to scientific explanation, in the sense that their causes might be accounted for mechanically, or that their effects could be described in terms of general scientific laws. In claiming that invoking the moral sense to account for morals was redolent of the doctrine of occult qualities, then, Gay meant either that it was vacuous – akin to explaining heat as a manifestation of the form of heat – or that it was a way of evading explanation altogether while giving credence to mysticism.

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[18] Gay, 'Preliminary Dissertation', p. xiv. On Hutcheson's attitude to innate ideas see Daniel Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 161–172.

[19] Keith Hutchison, 'What Happened to Occult Qualities in the Scientific Revolution?', *Isis*, 73 (1982), 234.

[20] Marie Boas, 'The Establishment of the Mechanical Philosophy', *Osiris* 10 (1952), 415.

[21] Hutchison, 'Occult Qualities', p. 239.   [22] Ibid., pp. 235–6.   [23] Ibid., p. 243.

A more credible explanation of the moral sentiments, Gay hypothe-sised, was that such dispositions were rooted in rational calculations of self-interest and ultimately derived therefore from 'the principle of all action', the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. When viewed in the imagination, the objects of pleasure and pain, or what we call good and evil, 'have a present pleasure or pain annexed to them, proportional to what is apprehended to follow them in real existence'.[24] These are our passions, and the desires that arise from them are affections. The theological utilitarians agreed with Locke, then, that the province of reason was to consider which desires ought to be satisfied in order to produce happiness, understood as 'the utmost pleasure'.[25] Adopting a first-person narrative, Gay advances a conjectural history of how moral sensibilities would have evolved among rational beings dedicated to seeking private happiness. As my happiness depends on the voluntary behaviour of my fellows, approbation is a way of 'annexing pleasure' to their selfless behaviour as the only means of encouraging them to promote my happiness. But since I approve of my benefactor's happi-ness, I also desire and take pleasure in it. And this esteem which I attach to actions that benefit me is the source of public affection, as it provides the motive for moral actions.[26] The error of those like Hutcheson who saw merit as being incompatible with acting for the sake of private happiness was that they failed to distinguish properly between ultimate and inferior ends. As all actions are ultimately moti-vated by the pursuit of happiness, the merit of an action must concern its inferior end. Though I am aware that his final objective is to bask in the warmth of my approval, as long as his immediate aim is to promote my general well-being and not to procure some particular favour, the moral agent is worthy of my esteem.[27] Like Adam Smith later, Gay maintained that that the whole gamut of moral affections – benevolence, ambition, honour, shame, etc. – could be explained in terms of an economy of esteem; but whereas, for Smith, such 'fellow feeling' was its own reward, for utilitarians the hunger for merit derived

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[24] Gay, 'Preliminary Dissertation', p. xxii.

[25] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Peter H. Nidditch (ed.) (4th edn. 1700; Oxford, 1975), p. 258. The sphere of morality, according to Locke, consists in our 'power to *suspend* the prosecution of this or that desire', for during this suspension 'we have opportunity to examine, view, and judge, of the good or evil of what we are going to do'. Our duty then is to ensure that we choose those sources of uneasiness (i.e. passions) which yield the highest amount of satisfaction. pp. 263–4.

[26] Gay, 'Preliminary Dissertation', p. xxiv.   [27] Ibid., pp. xxv–xxvi.

from our perception that those who held us in high regard were more likely to treat us well.[28]

The obvious objection to this scheme, Gay acknowledged, was that we approve or disapprove of moral actions spontaneously without any consideration of self-interest, and even where the behaviour has no effect on our private happiness. Rather than providing evidence of divinely implanted instincts, however, such phenomena could be explained in terms of Locke's theory of the association of ideas. In a brief chapter added to the fourth edition of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke had described how ideas with no natural correspondence often became fixed in the mind through chance or custom, and how, indeed, 'most of the Sympathies and Antipathies observable in men' could be ascribed to associations cemented in this way.[29] Gay took the further step of explaining the process by which such connections gave rise to the moral sense and to all the '*acquired Principles* of acting' that may have the appearance of instincts.[30] On observing that certain modes of action promote our private happiness, we attach pleasure to them. But eventually such behaviour becomes inextricably linked in the imagination with the idea of pleasure, such that when we witness selfless actions we automatically feel enjoyment, even where we are not the beneficiaries. The moral agent comes to admire virtue in the same way a miser develops a love of money then, association turning 'that which was first pursued only as a *Means*' into 'a real End, and what their Happiness or Misery consists in'.[31] Crucially, however, many of these associations come to us second-hand, being gradually accumulated as we imitate others in attaching pleasure and pain to certain types of action. It was thus conventional morality that was supported by the moral sense and public affections. And it was clearly with a view to exposing the gulf between 'that, which is thought praiseworthy'[32] and that which was right in God's eyes that Gay's critique of Hutcheson was prefaced by a section purporting to reveal the true criterion of virtue.

Again, the reader is invited to see the world through the eyes of a reasonable creature trying to maximise personal happiness. Obligation is defined in similarly Lockean terms as '*the necessity of doing or omitting any Action in order to be happy*'. As it arises '*from the necessary Influence which*

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[28] Ibid., pp. xxvii–xxviii. For Smith, esteem was easily the most sought-after pleasure, but virtue was only one means of attaining it. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Knud Haakonssen (ed.) (6th edn. 1790; Cambridge, 2002), pp. 69–70.

[29] Locke, *Essay*, p. 396.   [30] Gay, 'Preliminary Dissertation', p. xxx.   [31] Ibid., p. xxxi.

[32] Locke, *Essay*, p. 354.

any Action has upon present or future Happiness or Misery', obligation can emerge from natural or civil law as well as conventional morality. But complete obligation can only come from divine authority, for God alone can influence our happiness in all cases (presumably because of the sanctions at his disposal).[33] If the will of God was the rule of virtue, however, it remained to be explained what it was he commanded. In attempting to answer this question, so vital to clergymen who saw virtue as the main province of religion, Gay was entering territory that Locke had left largely uncharted. For despite Locke's insistence that the proper definition of mixed modes would render morality as demonstrable as mathematics and his frequent hints as to the type of behaviour likely to be rewarded by the Almighty, no clear measure of rectitude was identified in the *Essay*.[34] Such direction could be gleaned, maintained Gay, from the abundantly evident goodness of His works, which plainly demonstrated 'that he could have no other design in creating Mankind than *their* Happiness'. As the will of God was 'the immediate Criterion of virtue', a morally good action was one that furthered this design by promoting the happiness of our fellows.[35] In addition, then, to the Lockean account of the moral sense, Gay's bequest to later latitudinarian moralists included a standard of virtue which neatly reconciled private with public good while preserving the religious basis of ethics. For Paley and Tucker, as we shall see, the role of the philosopher was to effect a closer alignment between these two pillars of theological expediency, by increasing the degree to which the morality of opinion was governed by the rational rule of virtue. In other words, Paleyan ethics was largely concerned with the cultivation of the moral sense, and it is this objective which engendered the sociological approach to morality, religion and politics that forms the core theme of this book. Any genealogy of Paley's thought must give due weight therefore to the moral sense tradition, at least as it was construed by Christian utilitarians.

A helpful way of grasping its significance in relation to the emergence of Christian expediency is through Law's periodical updates on the state of ethics and religion, unsystematically strewn over successive editions of his works (and frequently in footnotes) in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. Interestingly, Law's first commentary on the subject, a lengthy footnote in his translation of Archbishop William King's *De Origine Mali*, wholeheartedly endorsed the idea of 'a disinterested

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[33] Unlike Locke, Gay does not stipulate that our obligation stems from rewards and punishments in the next life. Locke, *Essay*, pp. 351–2.
[34] Locke, *Essay*, p. 516. [35] Gay, 'Preliminary Dissertation', p. xix.

benevolent instinct', largely with a view to exposing the alleged vacuousness of intuitionist ethics. By directing us to perform and approve of actions which benefited mankind, the moral sense illuminated the true criteria of morals, providing it with the substantive basis which was lacking in those theories which made '*essential Rectitudes*, and *Eternal Notions*' the basis of virtue.[36] Clearly, however, this thoroughly utilitarian slant on the moral sense, which saw it solely as an indicator of the types of action that yielded human satisfaction, subverted Hutcheson's intention of showing that 'moral good is irreducible to natural good'.[37] Furthermore, by placing it at the hub of a theory that held 'a principle of Self Happiness' to be the 'spring' of moral obligation and therefore the basis of natural law, Law used the notion of conscience to support precisely the view of morality it was designed to overturn. The idea of a moral sense fit neatly into this picture because it suggested that we were to some extent driven to perform virtuous deeds by the pleasures accompanying them.[38] Hutcheson, on the other hand, had denied that virtuous actions were prompted by such a 'secret sense of pleasure', again, because it implied that morality was merely part of the system of natural wants.[39]

It was only on coming to appreciate fully the implications of Gay's 'Preliminary Dissertation' that Law finally rejected the notion of an instinctive moral faculty unequivocally. In the 1731 edition, however, he reflected only cursorily on its import, echoing Gay's conclusions that the moral sense was a throwback to 'the Old Philosophy' which too readily ascribed what it could not explain to appetites and innate capacities. At this stage he deemed it unnecessary to revise the 'Remark' expositing his version of the moral sense theory, probably because such exactitude was unnecessary to his broader aim in this part of the book of demonstrating the moral attributes of God from the appearances of human nature.[40] If it could be shown that man had a natural tendency to approve of virtuous actions, we

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[36] Edmund Law, 'Remarks referred to in Footnote 18', in *Origin of Evil* (1731), p. 66. As well as conflating Joseph Butler's idea of *conscience* with Hutcheson's moral sense, Law confused the moral sense with benevolence.

[37] Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought' 1640–1740* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 211. In Law's defence, the *Inquiry* assigned to utility the important role of determining the relative 'moral Excellency' of various proposed actions. *Inquiry*, p. 180.

[38] Law, 'Remarks', p. 66.

[39] Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, p. 108. This he took to be the implication of Shaftebury's assertion that the natural affections were the chief source of felicity. The Third Earl of Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper), ' An Enquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit', in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3. Vols. (2nd edn. London, 1714), vol. 2, pp. 99, 103.

[40] The aim of Footnote 18 of chapter one, section three, to which the remark refers, was to provide a sounder explication of the divine attributes than King had offered. See *Origin of Evil* (1731) pp. 45–50.

could infer that this inclination was inherent in the Creator, since it could only have derived from him. As Gay and Hutcheson concurred 'that we are led insensibly, and by the constitution and circumstances of our very Being, to love and approve certain Actions, which we call Virtuous', either version of the moral sense theory would substantiate the argument.[41]

As he began to work out the broader implications of Gay's theory in subsequent works, however, Law became increasingly strident in his espousal of both the Lockean explanation of the moral sense and the utilitarian ethical standard. It is useful at this point to explore Law's assessment of these two aspects of Gay's bequest separately, starting with the former. In the second of two short essays added to the fourth edition of King's *Origin* (1758), we find a more triumphalist Law deriding 'the inveterate prejudices' of those who defended 'the old idle doctrine of innate ideas and instincts'.[42] He enthuses about recent investigations into 'the power of ASSOCIATION', most notably those of David Hartley who in his *Observations on Man* (1749) had applied ideas 'just hinted at by Mr. Locke' to answer some of the fundamental questions about human nature. Law's suggestion that the principle of association was as influential in the intellectual world as gravity was in the natural registers his sense that he was witnessing an epochal moment in the history of the Christian Enlightenment.[43] It also enables us to place the development of a systematic Lockean moral philosophy in a broader institutional and intellectual context. Law's translations of King became influential at Cambridge in a period when Newtonian studies formed a core part of the syllabus – a pre-eminence owing largely to the efforts of latitudinarian divines[44] – and it was clearly his intention that the Lockeans should emulate in the human sciences the achievement of the Newtonians in the natural, by reducing the foundations of morals 'to that original Simplicity which Nature seems to observe in all her Works'.[45]

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[41] Edmund Law, 'Remarks', p. 67.

[42] Edmund Law, 'The Nature and Obligations of Man', p. lx. This essay came directly after Law's 'On Morality and Religion' in the 1758 edition. Ironically, his invocation of moral sense theory against intuitionism from the first edition survived with few changes.

[43] Ibid., pp. lvi, lvii.

[44] See Gascoigne, *Cambridge*, pp. 69–184. Law's translation of King was used as a textbook at Cambridge, where he became 'the principal channel for the diffusion of Lockean thought'. Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study in the Language of Religion and Ethics in England 1660–1780: Vol. 2, Shaftesbury to Hume* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 335, 334.

[45] Law, 'The Nature of Man', lx. This echoed Hume's surmise that principles of mind like those of astronomy 'may be resolv'd into one more general and universal'. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, in L. A. Selby-Bigge (ed.) *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1748; 3rd edn, Oxford, 1975), p. 15.

Nor were these developments in ethics out of kilter with recent trends in Christian apologetics at Cambridge, particularly the increasing tendency among divines, from the 1690s on, to question the notion that men had innate ideas of God, a doctrine that had been fundamental to a widely employed proof of the existence of God, the so-called 'argument from universal consensus'.[46] No reason could be given for the universal belief in a Creator, reasoned Tillotson in a sermon of 1663, 'but from the nature of man's mind and understanding, which hath this notion of a Deity born with it, and stamped upon it; or which is all one, is of such a frame, that, in the free use and exercise of itself, it will find out God'.[47] As the second half of this formulation suggests, the thrust of such arguments was not that man emerged from the womb with full-blown *a priori* perceptions of God, but rather that his reason was primed to facilitate the ready deciphering of His signs.[48] The doctrine remained a prominent feature of latitudinarian theology until the 1690s, when a number of theologians began to see it as a liability in the assault on atheism, largely because it could be used by deists to undermine natural religion. In his Boyle lectures, the Newtonian Richard Bentley marked how atheists used 'their own wicked doubting' as evidence for the non-being of God by arguing that a wise Creator would surely have left 'a native and indelible inscription of himself' on everyone's mind 'whereby we must needs have *felt* him, even without *seeking*'.[49] Since our natural reason, if not corrupted, must inevitably lead us to knowledge of the Divinity, such implantations were unnecessary, replied Bentley. In the scheme of providence, indeed, they were plainly counterproductive, as there could be no merit in faith if His word was emblazoned on men's hearts.[50]

In a similar vein, in his *Considerations on the State of the World with Regard to the Theory of Religion* (1745) Law celebrated Gay's final dispelling of such notions from morals as a providentially ordained liberation.[51]

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[46] Locke attacked the argument in the *Essay*, identifying 'whole Nations' who had no concept of a deity, while also arguing that universal consent, if it did exist, would not prove such ideas innate. *Essay*, pp. 87, 49. On the argument prior to 1688 see John W. Yolton, *John Locke and the Way of Ideas* (1956; Reprint Oxford, 1968), pp. 36–48.

[47] John Tillotson, 'Of the Wisdom of Being Religious', Sermon 1, *The Works of the Most Reverend John Tillotson, Late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, 10 vols. (Edinburgh, 1772), vol. 1, p. 25.

[48] See Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, vol. 1, p. 62.

[49] Richard Bentley, *A Confutation of Atheism from the Structure and Origin of Human Bodies . . . Being the Third of the Lecture Founded by the Honourable Robert Boyle, Esquire* (London, 1692), p. 4.

[50] Ibid., pp. 5–6.

[51] The edition used here is the shorter-titled Edmund Law, *Considerations on the Theory of Religion* (6th edn. Cambridge, 1774), which incorporates a number of revisions Law made over successive publications.

Human happiness 'seems to consist entirely in agency', enthused Law and a world in which we were moved exclusively by our pursuit of happiness, directed by our 'active power' of reason, offered maximum compass for its exercise.[52] It was through rational deliberation that man's actions bore a relation to God. The scope of this agency must be narrower, therefore, and human dignity diminished, where fixed impulses steered mankind towards moral rectitude. And deemed 'unimproveable' by Law (despite Hutcheson's statements to the contrary) such instincts would stir none of the emulation and exertion that arose where it was left in man's power 'to improve and advance, as well as to impair his nature'.[53] Lockean man, by contrast, was very well equipped psychologically for the radically dynamic scheme of providence outlined by Law in *Considerations* – a dispensation driven by mutually reinforcing improvements in science and religion. There was an obvious consonance too between Locke's hedonistic description of motivation and a theology that viewed the imitation of God's moral perfection as 'the sum and substance, the end and aim, of all religion',[54] since if the final cause of ethical behaviour was human satisfaction, creatures moved by the rational pursuit of happiness were hardwired to fulfil the divine plan.

Needless to say, not everyone in the learned community shared Law's enthusiasm for these developments. Indeed, thinkers from disparate parts of the intellectual spectrum rallied to the defence of so-called 'natural' ideas of God and virtue. Shaftesbury's declaration that 'twas Mr. Locke that . . . threw all Order and Virtue out of the World' echoed the earlier complaints of the Cambridge high churchman Henry Lee and the latitudinarian schoolmaster Thomas Burnet.[55] This unlikely meeting of minds arose from the shared conviction that the rejection of 'con-natural principles' severed any possible connection with an eternal and immutable moral referent, condemning us to steer our course by moral distinctions originating in 'uncertain and contingent impressions'.[56] As Yolton observes, the doctrine of innate ideas that had prevailed among Christian moral thinkers in Britain before Locke's celebrated attempt to debunk it had held that the law written in men's hearts was

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[52] Law, *Considerations*, pp. 15, 12.   [53] Ibid., p. 13.   [54] Ibid., p. 195.
[55] The Third Earl of Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper), Letter VII, 6 June 1709, *Several Letters Written by a Noble Lord to a Young Man at the University* (London, 1716), p. 39; Henry Lee, *Anti-Scepticism; Or, Notes Upon Each Chapter of Mr Lock[e]'s Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (London, 1702), preface; Thomas Burnet, *Remarks Upon the Essay Concerning Humane Understanding in a Letter Addressed to the Author* (London, 1697), pp. 4–5.
[56] Lee, *Anti-Scepticism*, preface. Shaftesbury also accused Locke of dispensing with one of the most powerful arguments for the being of God. See Shaftesbury, *Letters*, p. 40.

reflective of God's eternal law.[57] Paley would later discover that there were indeed grave difficulties in constructing universal and unchanging rules on the grounds of expediency, as the effectiveness of any particular precept in promoting happiness must vary according to the culture and historical epoch. If, notwithstanding such issues, utilitarians seemed relatively relaxed about the problem of contingency, it was because they had very realistic expectations about the degree of certainty that could be attained in natural philosophical enquiries, subscribing, as they did, to Locke's view that in this 'State of Mediocrity and Probationarship' God had set few things in the 'broad daylight' of 'clear and certain knowledge', leaving man instead to steer his course by 'the twilight ... of Probability'.[58] This acceptance that the most accurate investigation of nature could at best yield propositions that were '*accurately or very nearly true*' provided a healthy psychological climate in which for natural philosophy and natural theology to thrive, insofar as both were dependent on the principle of general induction.[59]

But there was another crucial way in which theological utility seemed to Law to be perfectly suited to the character of man. As a representation of human nature, the Lockean account of moral sensitivity provided a *via media* between the deeply cynical characterisations of mankind in the works of Mandeville, Bayle and La Rochefoucauld, and the overly romantic portrayals of the moral sense school. Law argued that descriptions of human nature which centred 'all in self immediately' and represented man as primarily motivated by the 'the lowest gratifications' were dangerous distortions, likely to propagate the pernicious principles they depicted.[60] By contrast, the theological utilitarians continued to believe in benevolent affections that provided a fund of selfless passions, or at least of motives that were not *immediately* self-interested, even if, by their account, such feelings were 'formed by habit' and born of rational self-interest. But such a view, while it raised human nature out of the mire in which Mandeville and others had left it, stopped short of elevating it to the angelic heights suggested by the notion of a perfectly pure and disinterested benevolence.

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[57] Yolton, *The Way of Ideas*, pp. 30–36.   [58] Locke, *Essay*, p. 652.

[59] The quotation is from Newton's fourth rule of reasoning, which states that 'In experimental philosophy we are to look upon propositions inferred by general induction from phenomena as accurately or very nearly true, notwithstanding any contrary hypotheses that may be imagined, till such time as other phenomena occur, by which they may either be made more accurate, or liable to exceptions'. Isaac Newton, *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, Andrew Motte trans., 2 vols. (London, 1729), vol. 2, p. 205. On latitudinarian attitudes to probabilistic reasoning see Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, ch 3.

[60] Law, *Considerations*, pp. 251–2.

Law now observed a danger in the latter theory that had not occurred to him previously, its natural tendency to run 'into rank enthusiasm'.[61] Though never explicitly elaborated, the reasoning behind this prognosis can be pieced together from his writings.

Aside from perturbations that might arise where the rulings of conscience, undirected by an objective moral standard, dictated behaviour,[62] it seemed to Law to be making impossible demands on the moral agent to require that his benevolent motives operate exclusively of all prospects of private interest. A chief aim of Anglican utilitarians from Law onwards was to adjust man's religious (not to mention social and political) expectations to suit the 'frailty' of his nature as increasingly revealed by the science of morals.[63] It was no 'degradation, or degeneracy' in virtue or religion that it was profitable to us in *this* life as well as the next, or that we promoted 'the true happiness of others . . . with a view to our own good upon the whole; otherwise it would not be reasonable in us, but romantic'. Those who found such a gainful morality disquieting might 'wish to revive the old stoical principle of following good for its own sake', jibed Law, but this had been thoroughly debunked by 'modern improvements', which had shown how all things seemingly approved of in themselves had originally been encouraged for their beneficial consequences.[64] The invective against the pointless austerities of 'stoical' virtue and the association of moral sense theory with arbitrariness and enthusiasm were frequently echoed in the writings of later latitudinarians, particularly in their attacks on evangelical religion. Equally, the discernment of nobility in what opponents saw as a shockingly terrene picture of human nature became a definitive part of Paley's thought.[65] It is clearly no indictment of their religious commitments therefore to describe this as a worldly theology.

In all, then, Law identified three ways in which the associationist account of the moral sense developed by Gay represented a critical breakthrough in the history of ethics. First, it revealed the foundations of morals in their native simplicity, laying a solid foundation for future investigations in the field and for the construction of a workable practical code of ethics. As a description of man's nature, it suggested an enlarged scope for human agency and happiness (relative to moral sense theory), while recognising both his frailty and nobility. Finally, the idea of an acquired moral sense,

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[61] Ibid., p. 252.   [62] Law, 'Nature of Man', p. lviii.   [63] Law, *Considerations*, p. 254.
[64] Ibid., pp. 256, 255.
[65] Nor did Law share anti-Lockean anxieties about the quasi-materialism of the *Essay*. See Law, 'Nature of Man', p. lix. Both Tucker and Paley leaned towards dualism of one kind or another. See below, p. 59 n. 4; Paley, *Natural Theology*, p. 312.

especially one guided by calculations of utility, discouraged the enervating pursuit of profitless virtue which Christian utilitarians associated with enthusiasm.

We now turn to the other half of Gay's bequest to theorists of expediency, 'the criterion of virtue': the will of God and the happiness of mankind, beginning with the latter. The theological principle of utility was developed in response to the perceived failure of moral sense theory on the one hand, and rational intuitionism on the other, to provide a substantive basis for practical ethics. Picking up on the contention in the *Essay* that it was the law of fashion that generally governed day-to-day behaviour in society, the Earl of Shaftesbury had concluded that Locke denied any other rule of virtue than that of custom.[66] But by demonstrating that the moral sense was an amalgam of culturally determined associations, and that it therefore acted as a watchdog for local norms and prejudices rather than some universal and eternal standard, Gay turned Shaftesbury's criticism on its head. Utility provided the moral compass for conscience.

Gay's secondary criterion fulfilled a similar role in relation to intuitionism. Like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, rational intuitionists like Samuel Clarke, William Wollaston and Ralph Cudworth rejected the voluntarist view that obligation arose from the commands of either God or the Sovereign. 'When things exist, they are what they are ... Absolutely', and 'not by Will but by Nature', insisted Cudworth. 'Meer will' could no more 'make the thing commanded just or obligatory', therefore, than it could make 'a Body Triangular'.[67] Being unable to make any mode of behaviour just merely by commanding it, lawmakers must always appeal to some pre-existing standard of justice to validate their claims, observed Clarke, because without such distinctions, we could have no way of judging why one law was better than another.[68] The core thesis of the intuitionists, then, was that these underlying moral truths were eternal and immutable, existing antecedent to and independently of either divine

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[66] Locke, *Essay*, pp. 353–7. Shaftesbury, *Several Letters*, p. 40. Henry Lee makes the same complaint in *Anti-Scepticism*, pp. 18–19.

[67] Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (London, 1731), pp. 16, 18, 14.

[68] This objection was specifically aimed at Hobbes' contention that, aside from some few branches of the Law of Nature, morality was a construct of the civil state, all things being 'indifferent in their own right' in the state of nature. If this were true, argued Clarke, all laws 'will be either arbitrary and tyrannical, or frivolous and needless; because the contrary might with equal reason have been established'. Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation* (1706; 7th edn. 1728), pp. 179–80.

commands or those of the sovereign.[69] Hence they frequently compared moral distinctions to mathematical axioms.[70] In Gay's view, however, the 'Fitness or Unfitness of things', the '*Reason* of things' and other such formulations, though indeed valid standards of virtue, were nonetheless only 'remote Criterions of it', since the ultimate measure of fitness, truth and right reason was human happiness.[71] A less conciliatory Law could 'fix no meaning at all to these words', beyond their relation to the production of natural good.[72]

But, as Gay was undoubtedly aware, the barebones moral theory in Locke's *Essay* was liable to similar objections to those raised by Clarke and others against voluntarism. 'You mean to resolve all into the will of the Law-Maker', wrote Thomas Burnet to Locke, 'But has the will of the lawmaker no rule to go by? And is not that which is a Rule of his Will, a rule also to ours, and indeed the original rule'.[73] Now clearly utility did not provide a ground for God's will in this sense, for as Law made clear, there could be no moral criteria 'antecedent to or independent of the will of God'.[74] Nor, obviously, by this thinking, could the deity be bound by laws emanating from his will. If, despite being an avid Lockean in politics, Law saw the seemingly despotic nature of God's moral governance as unproblematic, this is because he believed that an omnipotent being who was perfectly benevolent and wise must necessarily do 'what is absolutely *best*'.[75] There is some question as to whether Locke was a strict voluntarist, or whether, as some of his statements appear to indicate, he did in fact believe in a natural law independent of God's commands with divine sanctions providing a 'condition for our obligation to act morally'.[76] But whichever is the case, the principle of utility filled the void of normativity left by his virtual silence on the content of such laws, as it did with the intellectualist criteria.

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[69] See, for example, ibid., pp. 148–9.

[70] That there was a 'fitness and unfitness of the application of different things or of different relations one to another' was 'as plain, as that there is any such thing as proportion or disproportion in geometry and arithmetic'. Clarke, *Discourse*, pp. 174–5.

[71] Gay, 'Preliminary Dissertation', p. xx.   [72] Edmund Law, 'Remarks', 65.

[73] Burnet, *Remarks* (London, 1697), p. 6.

[74] While they apply to all men at all times, divine laws are not strictly speaking eternal, says Law, because they relate to things which owe their existence to an act of creation. This qualification followed logically from the idea that created beings were necessarily less perfect than uncreated ones – the first premise of King's theodicy. Edmund Law, 'Remarks', p. 65.

[75] Edmund Law, *Origin of Evil* (1731), p. 48.

[76] Daniel Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson*, p. 131. Carey is summarising the views advanced in Alex Tuckness, 'The Coherence of Mind: John Locke and the Law of Nature', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 37 (1999), 73–90.

Edmund Law on Moral Obligation

Just as useless as criteria without content, however, were laws without the sanctions to enforce them. So rang the key note to Law's 'On Morality and Religion', annexed to the fourth edition of King's *Origin of Evil* (1758). In Gay's 'Preliminary Dissertation', the obligation to obey God's will was said to arise from his ability to affect our happiness in all circumstances. What Gay was implying, and what Law was now spelling out, was that divine sanctions were the very source of moral obligation. It is true, observed Law, that a kindly disposition will generally win us esteem, thus providing a motive for such behaviour. But in circumstances where the exercise of more selfish passions is more likely to promote our private happiness, there is no 'Principle in Nature' to oblige us to cultivate kindly affections. Without the assurance that the Creator would 'make us ample Amends hereafter' for the losses we were likely to incur through selfless actions, there would be no '*eternal and immutable Reason*' for us to perform them.[77] The language of unchanging moral distinctions was obviously chosen to further expose the shortcomings of rational intuitionism. Samuel Clarke had argued that truly *moral* obligation was derived from the assent that any man must necessarily give to the moral rules based on the 'necessary and eternal different relations, that different things bear one to another', on having given them proper consideration. The expectation of rewards and punishments on the other hand was merely a reinforcement of such obligation.[78] Responding to Clarke in the first edition of his translation of King, Law had declared himself at a loss to 'apprehend how these relations, &c. 'Are to be chosen for their own sakes and intrinsic Worth, or have a full obligatory Power antecedent to any reward and punishment annexed either by natural Consequence or Positive Appointment to the Observance or Neglect of them.'[79] At that stage, as we have seen, Law held that virtue was prompted by the warm feeling accompanying the indulgence of the moral sense. But having since identified supernatural sanctions as the only sufficient and perpetual motive for virtue, he now viewed all theories that asserted the independence of morals from the divine will as potentially damaging to morality, including not only doctrines of intrinsic virtue, but also the view that virtue was pursued for its immediate pleasure. The latter notion could be upheld only by those who subscribed to the discredited theory of moral instincts, argued Law, or

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[77] Edmund Law, 'On Morality and Religion', p. xliv.   [78] Clarke, *Discourse*, pp. 148, 218.
[79] Edmund Law, 'Remarks', 65. The quotation is a splice from Clarke, *Discourse*, p. 18.

by those who felt that the motive to act morally was the same as that which moved us to perform a whole host of habitual actions, i.e. the praise and blame of our neighbours and the comfort of familiarity. As a guide to behaviour and as a source of motives to virtue, the moral sense could only produce obedience to the law of fashion, whereas the primary and secondary criteria of virtue, as defined by Gay, appeared to Law to provide both the perpetual standard and motive wanted for a workable system of ethics.

Though much of Law's ethical writing was concerned with refining the philosophy of Gay's 'Preliminary Dissertation', the importance of his contribution should not be underestimated, especially in relation to the genealogy of Paley's thought. For if, as both thinkers agreed, divine rewards were the source of moral obligation, it remained to be explained how they could be earned. Gay had shown how an action ultimately prompted by private interest – including a concern for the fate of my soul after death – might still merit esteem if the immediate intention behind it was to promote the happiness of the beneficiary. But, by the same logic, such benevolence was of itself no worthier of *divine* merit than self-interested actions which unintentionally benefit others are deserving of esteem, for neither the intention nor the motive (the attainment of esteem) relates to God. Since 'the *Intention* is all that can make it bear any Relation to him', only 'what was done purely on his account; in Obedience to his Will, or in order to recommend us to his favour' could entitle us to his rewards.[80] Here again, however, concessions had to be made to human frailty. As we would not expect a servant to have his master's will in permanent view while performing his duties, neither is it required of us that we perform every action in conscious conformity to divine commands. In the way that the servant is deemed commendable if he acquires habits that enable him to serve diligently, divine recompense is merited if our behaviour is governed by the general intention of doing his will. Neatly combining this account of obligation with Gay's moral criteria, Law defined virtue as '*The Doing Good to Mankind, in Obedience to the Will of God, and for the Sake of everlasting Happiness*'.[81] This was the definition that Paley adopted in the *Principles*.

While attempts by the early utilitarians to establish the necessity of divine sanctions to ethics were largely aimed at exposing the insufficiency of the motives provided by moral sense theory and intuitionism, they also

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[80] Law, 'On Morality and Religion', p. xlviii. The intention connects the act to God, but this is obviously closely related to the motive, the goal of securing 'extraordinary recompense'. The presence of one implies that of the other.
[81] Ibid., p. lii.

supplied Paley with much ammunition for his attack on purely secular moral systems. Nor, we may assume, were the earlier theorists unaware of the overlap. Among those moralists Gay accused of excluding the will of God from ethics by making the happiness of man the whole of virtue, he surely meant to include unbelievers. Such thinkers could not explain how utility could provide 'sufficient obligation' for moral behaviour in all cases without the aid of divine sanctions, alleged Gay, for in particular Cases, such as 'laying down my Life', the good of mankind 'is contrary to my happiness', and could not therefore 'be any Obligation to *me*'.[82] As a demonstration of the supposed inadequacy of morals without supernatural rewards, the example was poorly chosen, given how few people, outside of the military, ever faced the prospect of having to give up their lives for their friends. Though Law did not furnish any better examples, his delineation of the role of supernatural rewards and punishments threw the lack of obligatory power in other moral systems into sharper focus. Moreover, Law's insistence that without such sanctions we had only the enticements and deterrents of custom to oblige us directly implicated non-Christian moral codes. The stoic injunction of 'following nature', endorsed by Shaftesbury and widely associated with atheism, lacked both an extrinsic standard and a perpetual motive, observed Law; and thus amounted 'to no more than this, Do always what you like best; or, Follow your present humour'.[83] As we will see, a significant reworking of these arguments was required for the more head-on confrontation with infidelity that Paley was engaged in.

Before exploring these developments, however, we need to situate the evolution of Lockean moral thought in relation to latitudinarian churchmanship on the one hand, and broader currents of European thought on the other. If in common with earlier latitude men, the theological utilitarians viewed the Reformation as a gradual stripping away of the unscriptural outward religious forms that human arrogance and ambition had piled upon the simple faith of the apostles,[84] Law's attack on the idea of innate moral dispositions registered his conviction that this purifying critique ought to be extended to natural as well as revealed religion. Viewed alongside his failure to defend the doctrine of the Trinity, as Tillotson and Burnet had done, it further demonstrates his willingness to take the rationalist and irenic agendas of broad churchmanship further than his

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[82] Gay, 'Preliminary Dissertation', p. xxi.   [83] Law, 'On Morality and Religion', p. xlvi.
[84] Such had been the spirit of latitudinarian invective against high-church sacerdotalism in the decades following the Glorious Revolution.

predecessors would have wished.[85] That such an intellectually radical theology was able to gain so much influence at Cambridge was partly due to the relatively comfortable hegemony that latitudinarians had secured in the university by the 1730s, at the expense of high churchmen. It also helped, of course, that Law had admirers and patrons in the very highest Whig political and ecclesiastical circles, including the Dukes of Newcastle and Grafton, and the future Archbishop of Canterbury, Frederick Cornwallis, a former pupil of his.[86] Law's Lockean politics may have appealed to old Whig connections anxious to fend off what they saw as the arbitrary incursions of the new monarch. But however cosy his relations with Newcastle and Grafton, Law's willingness to challenge some of the central orthodoxies of Anglicanism militates against any interpretation that sees latitudinarian moral thought in this period as driven primarily by the social and political interests of churchmen.[87] Motivation is complex, and undoubtedly moral and religious thoughts are deeply entangled with political and personal interests. From what we can gather from their writings, however, Law and Gay gave little thought to the political implications of their researches, and as Paley later proved, utility could just as easily be employed to defend the monarch's powers as attack them. Considering, finally, that it emerged as a sister science to theodicy, and as the product of such candid inquiry – reflection that prompted Law to revise his views on moral sensibility – the safest conclusion is that theological (and therefore moral) concerns were the primary driving force behind the evolution of utility.

Yet, clearly, the context for this development was not a narrow theological debate between Anglican churchmen, but a wider conversation in the Republic of Letters about the origins of morality.[88] Adherents of expediency, no less than Hutcheson or Hume, treated ethics as a branch of the science of the mind, and, if anything, saw themselves as applying such methods more rigorously than the former, who had been too ready to

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[85] Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, vol. 1, p. 71. Law was widely suspected of Arianism. See the editor's footnote in Paley, *Short Memoir*, p. 10.

[86] As Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, Cornwallis (himself of beneficiary of Grafton's patronage) made Law Archdeacon of Staffordshire in 1763. Newcastle's influence helped him acquire a prebend in the church in Lincoln in 1764 and a prebendal stall in the church of Durham in 1767, while Grafton was instrumental in securing him the bishopric of Carlisle in 1769.

[87] Margaret Jacob argues that earlier latitude men accepted Newtonian natural philosophy 'because it effectively supported a particular social ideology'. M. C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution 1689–1720* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1976), p. 20.

[88] Although Britain was the hub of the debate in moral philosophy, the controversy over theodicy with which the development of utility was entwined raged across the continent, involving Malebranche, Bayle, Pope, Leibniz, Hume, Rousseau and Voltaire.

ascribe moral sensibility to 'occult qualities'. These commitments became particularly pronounced in the works of Tucker and Paley, dedicated, as they were, to developing a programme of ethical instruction based on Locke's psychology. Judging by Law's writings, furthermore, the early utilitarians saw the advances they achieved by these means, and for that matter, all improvements in knowledge, as giving impetus to the ongoing progress of mankind in terms of happiness in this life and the next. If Gay and Law were detached from Enlightenment intellectual culture, in other words, they certainly did not know it.

Accepting the metaphysical framework laid by Gay and Law, Tucker and Paley aimed to develop utility into a guide for living. This change in emphasis is explored in the following two chapters. There were four areas in particular to which they turned their attention. Most obviously, there was the need to bolster the theological foundations of utility. Based on the premise that human happiness was the goal of providence, the principle of utility raised the stakes for theodicy, while the essentialness of extraordinary sanctions to the whole scheme added urgency to the bid to supply evidences of Christ's resurrection. Paley made celebrated contributions to both forms of apologetics. Second; accepting Law's prescription for the best means of serving the Deity, Paley and Tucker focused on the practical task of cultivating virtuous habits in their readers through the management of so-called customary morality, a role which engendered the intense focus on the psychology of virtue that distinguished them from earlier protestant theorists. And since to tempt sinners into virtue, you had to know what made them tick, the nature of human happiness increasingly came under the microscope. Thirdly; as the first philosopher in the tradition that was required to prescribe on a host of moral issues, from divorce to duelling, Paley faced the added challenge of forming general rules of behaviour based on complex assessments of likely outcomes, calculations further complicated by the need to analyse group psychology as well as that of individuals. This sociological perspective opened up a new chapter in Christian ethics and particularly in theologically based political thought. Finally, the need arose for a fresh perspective on the methods employed by moralists to inculcate virtue. As Law had shown in 'On Morality and Religion', the only way of sustaining a conscious obedience to the divine will, and therefore of bringing the moral sense into line with the standards of utility, was to increase the degree to which thoughts of the next life formed the ruling motive of behaviour. Thus it is suggested in this study that natural theology, as well as providing the foundational

premises for Paley's definition of virtue (as adopted from Law), fulfilled the equally vital role of fixing these edifying associations in the mind of the reader. In the crusade against irreligion, the argument from design was used as a rhetorical as well as a philosophical weapon, an approach which, as Chapter 5 explains, diluted their commitment to the strict rules of experiential reasoning they swore by.