

Jean-Marie Guyau's Presence and Absence in the History of Philosophy

FEDERICO TESTA

Guyau's Presence*

Today, 130 years after his premature death, Jean-Marie Guyau (1854-1888) remains an unknown figure in the history of philosophy. However, during his short but prolific life, Guyau was more than a promising young scholar. In François L'Yvonnet's words, 'Guyau was a sort of meteorite',¹ whose 'exceptional precocity' had a significant impact on the works of his

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¹ François L'Yvonnet, 'Préface'. Jean-Marie Guyau, *Contre l'idée de sanction*. (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 2008), p. 7.

contemporaries. During his lifetime he was known especially for his two major works: the *Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction* and the *Irréligion de l'avenir*, as well as for his book on Epicureanism, which was re-edited twice before his death. He published at least six philosophy books,² several articles in the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, in addition to poems (gathered in *Vers d'un philosophe*) and a series of school books.³ Guyau's interests were manifold. He was an active participant in the philosophical debates of his time, and had his works translated into several languages.⁴

Guyau's absence in Anglophone scholarship is baffling. Not only was he an avid reader of English philosophy, but his work was also well received in England between the late 1870s and the early 1880's.⁵ This is even more striking if one considers the importance of English philosophy for the formation of his own thought. Since his 1878 book *La morale d'Épicure*, Guyau referred to English philosophy as an important expression of a philosophy of pleasure, enjoyment and utility – against moral philosophies based on duty and obligation.⁶ For Guyau, the British positivist, evolutionist and utilitarian thinkers embodied and accomplished

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 In 1889, Fouillée edits and publishes two of Guyau's unpublished manuscripts: *L'art au point de vue sociologique* and *Education et hérédité*.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

³ Namely, *Première Année de lecture courante* in 1875, *l'Année préparatoire* in 1884, *l'Année enfantine* in 1883. Guyau's method for teaching to read and write was widely used in French schools, and it was later named '*méthode Guyau*'.

⁴ In Fouillée's 1913 short biography of Guyau, he mentions translations of Guyau's works in English, German, Spanish, Polish and Russian. For the reception of Guyau outside Europe, see *L'effet Guyau: De Nietzsche aux anarchistes*. Ed Jordi Riba. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014. The volume brings different accounts on Guyau's importance in Latin America.

⁵ For this early Anglophone reception, see Testa & Dennis, 'Pleasure and Self-Cultivation in Guyau and Nietzsche'. Dennis gathered a series of references to Guyau's work from *Mind*, in which we find Thomas Whittaker's essay from 1889 (*Mind*, IV, 16), followed by an 1890 text by James Sully (*Mind*, XIV, 54).

⁶ Guyau, *La morale d'Épicure*. (Paris: Encre Marine, 2002), p. 43.

a sort of fundamental Epicureanism which underlies the development of the history of moral thought and ethical attitudes.⁷ In his exegetical work – especially *La morale d'Épicure* and *La morale anglaise contemporaine* – one finds references and reflections on Bentham, Spencer and Mill. These thinkers were of great importance for the formulation of Guyau's *démarche*, especially in what concerns the task of constituting a 'scientific morality' or an 'ethics from a scientific point of view'.

Moreover, Guyau's work was read and commented in England during his lifetime. In 1879, Henry Sidgwick wrote a review of Guyau's *La morale d'Épicure* for *Mind*.⁸ Additionally, one of the founding figures of the analytic tradition, G. E. Moore, also read and reviewed Guyau's work in 1899.⁹ He discussed Guyau's work again in the second chapter of his 1903 book *Principia Ethica*, dedicated to 'Naturalist Ethics'.¹⁰ Herbert Spencer, who according to Riba was one of Guyau's main references, also read the latter with enthusiasm, and claimed that the French philosopher was the first to describe his ethics with precision.¹¹

In this introductory overview, I propose to reflect upon Guyau's presence and absence in the history of philosophy. Reacting against the current neglect or forgetting of Guyau's work, I gesture towards its historical recovery. By presenting brief summaries of some of the main receptions of his work, my aim is to briefly highlight the presence of Guyau's philosophy in political thought and aesthetics, as well as underline its importance for debates that accompanied the birth and

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸ Henry Sidgwick, 'M. Guyau, La Morale d'Épicure et ses Rapports avec les Doctrines contemporaines', *Mind* 4:582, 1879. According to Jordi Riba, Sidgwick and Guyau later became acquainted: the two philosophers met in 1882, when Guyau hosted Sidgwick in Menton. See Riba, *La morale anomique de Jean-Marie Guyau* trans. by Mariló Fedz Estrada. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), p. 30.

⁹ G.E. Moore, 'Book Review: A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction. M. Guyau, Gertrude Kapteyn'. *International Journal for Ethics* 9 (2), 1899.

¹⁰ Moore critically engages with Guyau, 'a writer who has lately had considerable vogue in France', arguing that Guyau's work provides a clear example of the 'naturalistic fallacy' in its latest – that is, for Moore, evolutionistic – version.

¹¹ Riba, *La morale anomique*, p. 8.

institutionalisation of sociology in nineteenth-century France. In the final session, I comment the relationship between Guyau and Nietzsche. Mapping these receptions remains an incomplete task. My contribution consists in bringing together the sparse existing material on the receptions of Guyau's thought, filling a gap in existing Anglophone scholarship and opening possible paths for future investigation.

Political Thought and Anarchism

Guyau has left a mark on politics and political thought, especially in the work of the anarchist thinker Piotr Kropotkin, who saw in Guyau's work – in the *Esquisse* in particular – the foundation of an anarchist ethics. Indeed, according to Joll, for Kropotkin Guyau was 'an anarchist without knowing it'.¹² Guyau's work offered an account of human action that was very close to Kropotkin's reflections on mutual help and on evolution based on cooperation (instead of competition and the survival of the fittest). For Knowles, 'It was the French philosopher [...] little known but well respected in his own time, to whom Kropotkin gave the most credit for ideas that related directly to his own notion of mutual aid'.¹³ In addition, Kropotkin was sympathetic to Guyau's idea of an ethics without sanction and external coercion,¹⁴ but especially, to the young philosopher's emphasis on the notion of altruism. In Marshall's reading, 'like Jean-Marie Guyau [...] Kropotkin argues that altruism comes from a feeling of superabundance of life'.¹⁵ He explains that 'Guyau rejected the utilitarian calculus as well as metaphysical sanctions,' but 'he did not draw egoistic conclusions [from these rejections]. Altruism is based on a natural need to

¹² James Joll, *The Anarchists*. (London: Methuen, 1979), p. 137.

¹³ Rob Knowles, *Political Economy from Below: Economic Thought in Communitarian Anarchism, 1840 - 1914*. (New York/Oxon: Routledge, 2014), p. 224.

¹⁴ Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin: The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872 - 1886*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 5; Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*. (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 439.

¹⁵ Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 321.

live a full, intense and productive life'.¹⁶ As Riba claims, Kropotkin was one of the few authors to reclaim Guyau's heritage.¹⁷

Aesthetics and the Arts

Guyau's views also had important repercussions in aesthetics and the arts. Most notably, Guyau's ideas can be found in the works of Proust – as Ilse Walther-Dulk shows¹⁸ – and Tolstoy. In *What is Art?* Tolstoy quotes Guyau, 'who is very highly esteemed by some writers of our time' (§II).¹⁹ He refers to Guyau as an author who has a broad understanding of art, extending aesthetic feeling to different domains of human experience, as 'the senses of touch, taste and smell'. In his essay, Tolstoy also mobilises Guyau's vitalist notion of beauty.²⁰ Although Tolstoy only quotes *Les problèmes d'esthétique contemporaine*, Fouillée claims that it is from *L'art au point de vue sociologique* that Tolstoy took some of his main conceptions of art.²¹

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 439. On a similar line, see Alexander Vucinich, *A. Darwin in Russian Thought* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p. 350, as well as Jesse Cohn, *Anarchism and the Crisis of Representation: Hermeneutics, Aesthetics and Politics*. (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), p. 74.

¹⁷ Riba, *La morale anomique*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Ilse Walther-Dulk, *De Guyau à Proust: Essai sur l'actualité d'un philosophe oublié*. Weimar: VDG, 2008. Generally, one refers the philosophy of Proust's novels to Henri Bergson. However, according to Walther-Dulk, when reading Guyau's work and, particularly, *La g n se de l'id e de temps*, one notes a striking proximity with Proust's 'philosophical representations'. (*De Guyau   Proust*, p. 135). The author claims that if one consults the existing bibliography concerning Proust's philosophical background, one finds almost no mention to Guyau's work.

¹⁹ Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?* trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. (London: Penguin, 1995).

²⁰ 'According to Guyau, beauty is not anything foreign to the object itself, is not some parasitic growth on it, but is the very blossoming of that being in which it is manifest. Art is the expression of life, reasonable and conscious, which evokes in us, on the one hand, the deepest sensations of existence, and, on the other hand, the loftiest feelings, the most exalted thoughts. Art raises man from his personal life into universal life not only by means of participation in the same ideas and beliefs, but also by means of the same feelings' (*What is Art?*, §3).

²¹ For a detailed reading of Guyau's aesthetics, see Annamaria Contini, *Jean-Marie Guyau: Una filosofia della vita e l'estetica*. (Bologna: CLUEB, 1995). See also Testa,

In the twentieth century, an echo of Guyau's aesthetics can be found in the work of one of the main figures of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer. In his essay, "Art and Mass Culture", Horkheimer quotes *L'art au point de vue sociologique*, and stresses Guyau's claim 'that art occupies itself with the possible, erecting 'a new world... a new society in which we really live'. Horkheimer quotes Guyau's social conception of art to support his own claim that 'an element of resistance [to the restraints imposed by society] is inherent in the most aloof art'.²² Guyau's quote suggests that art brings with it the utopian image and the possibility of a new society, expressing what Horkheimer characterises as man's 'power to conceive a world different from that in which he lives'.²³

Guyau, Sociologist

In the context of the philosophical and socio-political debates of the nineteenth century, another discipline could reclaim Guyau's name and work as part of its own history, and that is sociology. Guyau has been a neglected figure in the histories of the 'birth' of modern French sociology.

According to Behrent, 'sociology constitutes the cornerstone of Guyau's thought'.²⁴ And, as Lambert puts it, with Guyau, philosophy departs from a 'metaphysical' demarche, becoming 'sociological'. He claims that Guyau would have agreed with the idea that 'philosophy will

'A arte do ponto de vista sociológico: estética e sociologia menor de Jean-Marie Guyau'; and Anthony Price, 'Community and Evocation in the Aesthetics of Jean-Marie Guyau'. (*n.d.*).

²² Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. (New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 274.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

²⁴ Michael Behrent, 'Le débat Guyau-Durkheim sur la théorie sociologique de la religion. Une nouvelle querelle des universaux?' *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 53^e année, no. 142, April-June, (2008), p. 12.

be sociological, or it will not be [at all]'.²⁵ Indeed, Guyau's work could be understood from the perspective of what we could perhaps call a sociological shift in nineteenth-century thought. This shift is clear in the work of an author that was essential in the formation of both Durkheim's and Guyau's reflections on society, Auguste Comte. According to Contini,²⁶ Guyau subscribes to a fundamental thesis of Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive*: as a consequence of the historical and intellectual evolution of humankind, sociology is destined to progressively acquire a supremacy among the sciences, whose particular points of view would be, finally, unified under the sociological perspective. Contini stresses that Guyau assimilates another important thesis by Comte, that of the co-presence, in human beings, of both egoistic and altruistic instincts.²⁷ She argues that Guyau's project of erecting a scientific morality and a sociological aesthetics could be understood as a continuation of Comte's project, developing it in order to fill the gaps that Littré identified in Comte's thought, namely in the domains of psychology, ethics and aesthetics.²⁸

Moreover, the authors engaged in the epistemological and institutional foundation of the young discipline critically discussed Guyau's ideas. The most significant example is Émile Durkheim. In addition to the shared reference to Comte, Behrent stresses that both Durkheim and Guyau were marked by the thought of Alfred Fouillée, who attributed a major theoretical and social role to sociology. In this sense, Behrent argues that Fouillée's thought is characterised by 'the effort to overcome the antinomy between the two main definitions of society which mark philosophical thought in the post-Revolutionary [France]: the contractualist conception, on the one hand, and the organicist conception,

²⁵ In the original, '*la philosophie sera sociologique ou ne sera pas*' (Alfred Lambert, 'L'œuvre sociologique de Guyau'. *Revue internationale de sociologie*, (Paris: V. Giard et E. Brière, 1900). Riba, *La morale anomique*, p. 50.

²⁶ Contini, *Jean-Marie Guyau*, p. 92.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93. See also Émile Littré, *Auguste Comte et la philosophie positive*, (Paris: L'Hachette, 1863), pp. 674-678.

on the other'.²⁹ Fouillée, seeks to make of 'sociology the principle of reorganisation of republican politics', aiming to overcome the antinomy between liberalism and socialism.³⁰

Durkheim wrote on Fouillée's reflections on sociology,³¹ but he also knew Guyau's work very well. Indeed, Durkheim mentions Guyau in his thesis, *De la division du travail social*.³² In addition to the discussion on *anomie*, a notion that Durkheim develops throughout his work, perhaps the main divergence between the two authors concerned the definition of society implied in their sociology of religion.³³ The young Durkheim wrote a review of Guyau's 1887 book, *L'irréligion de l'avenir*.³⁴ As Behrent puts it:

While at the same time recognising the sociomorphic thesis according to which religious beliefs can be explained from the perspective of social forms which produce them, his objection concerns Guyau's definition of 'society'. The young Durkheim vigorously refuses his senior's [*aîné*] nominalism: for him [Durkheim], the existence of religion shows that society is a reality, rather than a [mere] object of thought [*être de raison*]. Therefore, reading Guyau allows Durkheim, since his first writings, to refine his own way of conceiving society, particularly in its relation to religion, a task to which he will dedicate his whole life.³⁵

²⁹ Behrent, 'Le débat Guyau-Durkheim', p. 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11; See Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français: la société civile contre le jacobinisme*. (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

³¹ Behrent, 'Le débat Guyau-Durkheim', p. 11.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 19. This issue was recently developed by Annamaria Contini in her intervention at the *Journée d'Études Jean-Marie Guyau 2018 – Guyau et ses contemporains*.

³³ Behrent (2008) reconstructs the Guyau-Durkheim divergence regarding the sociology of religion in terms of an opposition between a nominalist idea of society (which he finds in Fouillée and Guyau) and a realist one (which is Durkheim's).

³⁴ Durkheim's review of Guyau's *L'irréligion de l'avenir* appears in *Revue Philosophique*, vol.23, 1887. See also 'The Conception of Religion' in Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings. ed. and trans. by Anthony Giddens. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 219-222.

³⁵ Behrent, 'Le débat Guyau-Durkheim', p. 10.

Gabriel Tarde and Criminology

The philosopher and magistrate Gabriel Tarde, Bergson's predecessor in the chair of Modern Philosophy at the *Collège de France*, himself also a relatively forgotten figure in the history of sociology, engaged with Guyau's work.³⁶ Guyau and Tarde share many key insights and are both concerned with a philosophical elaboration of a 'universal sociological point of view'.³⁷ Moreover, Tarde critically engages with Fouillée and Guyau in his 1890 criminological work, *Philosophie pénale*.³⁸ Before studying what he refers to as 'positivist innovations' in the domain of penal law, Tarde thinks it is 'advantageous to put in their right place the eclectic ideas of those two very distinguished thinkers [...] Fouillée, and his disciple Guyau, prematurely taken from us in the full bloom of a train of thought, so poetic in its very severity, so religious in its irreligion'.³⁹

Tarde claims that, according to Fouillée, punishment and penal law cannot be understood without sociology:

Fouillée fully appreciated the fact that the question of penal law comes down to asking oneself what the nature of human association

³⁶ Tarde's work has recently met renewed interest. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. trans. by Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), especially 'Micropolitics and Segmentarity'. See also Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Maurizio Lazzarato, *Puissances de l'invention. La psychologie économique de Gabriel Tarde contre l'économie politique*. (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2002); Louise Salmon, 'Gabriel Tarde et la société parisienne à la fin du XIXe siècle: « rapides moments de vie sociale, » 1894-1897', *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines* 2005/2 (no 13), p. 127-140. In *Multitudes* 2001/4 (n° 7) one finds multiple articles dedicated to Tarde. For a critical reading, see Laurent Mucchielli, 'Tardomania? Réflexions sur les usages contemporains de Tarde', *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines*, vol. 3, (2000) pp. 161-184.

³⁷ On the convergence between Guyau and Tarde regarding the 'sociological point of view', see Testa, 'A arte do ponto de vista sociológico: estética e sociologia menor de Jean-Marie Guyau'.

³⁸ I am grateful to Stéphane Douailler and Inés Molina Navea for this reference.

³⁹ Gabriel Tarde, *Penal Philosophy*. trans. by P. Berne. (New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers, 2001), p. 29.

really is [...]. Is it the tie which binds and associates together anything more than a manifestation of organic solidarity? Or is it an agreement either implied or expressed, an accord of their wills which is not forced?⁴⁰

Tarde then discusses and criticises Fouillée's attempts at reconciling these two views. Guyau's name appears in an unreferenced quote from the 1883 article *Critique de l'idée de sanction* – a text which reappears as the book three of the 1885 and the 1890 edition of the *Esquisse* – regarding the problem of punishment:

It is true that there exists a natural or rational bond between the morality and immorality of the *will* and a recompense or punishment applied to the feelings [i.e. sensibility]? Does any kind of reason exist, outside social conditions, why the greatest criminals should receive, because of his crime, simply a pinprick, and the virtuous man a prize for his virtue?⁴¹

For Tarde, 'Guyau very precisely states the problem'.⁴² Later in the book, he relates Guyau's critique of punishment to a trend in 'spiritualism'. In this passage, Tarde reveals, perhaps without knowing, an implicit link existing between Guyau's later work on sanction and his early study, translation and commentary of the early Church fathers:⁴³

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32. It is interesting to note that the same link between penal law and different forms of social association and solidarity is developed by Durkheim in *Division of Labour in Society*, trans. by W.D. Hall, Ed. S. Lukes. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 59-60.

⁴¹ Guyau *apud* Tarde, *Penal Philosophy*, p. 40. See Guyau, *Contre l'idée de sanction*, pp. 13-14.

⁴² Tarde, *Penal Philosophy*, p. 40.

⁴³ Tarde connects Guyau's critique of the notion of sanction and punishment to the work of the early Church fathers (and not specifically to Guyau's work on them). Tarde's remark, however, allows us to link the two moments of Guyau's work differently from the way Gourinat proposed it (See Gourinat in Guyau, *La Morale d'Épicure et ses rapports avec les doctrines contemporaines*, 2002). For Gourinat, in contrast with Guyau's later concern with erecting an ethics without sanction and obligation, his work on the Church fathers would mark a concern with the ethics of duty, that is to say, moralities *with* obligation and sanction (*Ibid.*, p. 24).

The conception of a penal law free from all vengeance and all hatred is a very old one in the history of spiritualism. As early as the third century, Gregory of Nazianzus affirms that God does not take vengeance by punishing the wicked, He calls them to Him and wakes them from the sleep of death. To Gregory of Nyssa, also, the thought of an eternal hell is intolerable. He dreams of a final and immense amnesty.⁴⁴

Tarde then adds that ‘This same generous inspiration has been continued down to our day, as we have seen, to Fouillée and Guyau’.⁴⁵ Indeed, one of the first philosophical problems that interested the young Guyau was that of the existence of evil and the notions of punishment and salvation. In his formative years, while studying Plato and the Neoplatonists with Fouillée, ‘he tried to reconcile the existence of evil with the reign of universal love postulated by Platonic ‘optimism’’. Fouillée points out that, in order to solve this problem, Guyau elaborates an original interpretation of the Platonic doctrine of *procession*, conceiving the universe as an infinite series of worlds in which the good is fully actualised or is in the process of becoming [fully actualised]’.⁴⁶

Guyau’s Absence

After Guyau’s death in Southern France in March 1888, his mentor Alfred Fouillée took up the task of publishing his posthumous works. In 1890, together with Henri Bergson, he published Guyau’s last book, *La g n se de l’id e de temps*.⁴⁷ Later, in 1898, the second edition of his major work,

⁴⁴ Tarde, *Penal Philosophy*, pp. 506-507

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 507.

⁴⁶ Contini, *Jean-Marie Guyau*, pp. 77-78.

⁴⁷ In the ‘*tableau chronologique*’ concerning Guyau’s biography, Walther-Dulk claims that *La g n se de l’id e de temps* was published in 1900 (*De Guyau   Proust*, p. 20). In Riba’s chronology the date is 1890 (*La morale anomique*, p. 9). The correct date is 1890, as attested by the catalogue information of the BnF: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k68068r> [Accessed 24/02/2019]

the *Esquisse*, was translated and published in English.⁴⁸ Gertrude Kapteyn, the translator, concludes her preface by situating Guyau in the threshold of a new epoch, whose task is that of reform and emancipation:

No nobler task than the one set by Guyau could be given to the twentieth century; and to those who believe in its mission he should no longer be a stranger. In Guyau, who has not unjustly been called ‘the Spinoza of France’, they will find the inspiration needed for the carrying on of all social efforts and reforms. His high-souled sincerity and his ceaseless striving after truth and virtue mark him out as a standard-bearer in the struggle for the emancipation of humanity.⁴⁹

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Guyau’s name is still heard in philosophical and academic debates. In 1905 the *Société Française de Philosophie* hosts a session dedicated to his thought, particularly his notion of life.⁵⁰ Shortly after, in 1906, Gabriel Aslan defends his philosophy thesis at the Sorbonne, entitled *La morale de Jean-Marie Guyau*, with Durkheim as one of the examiners.⁵¹

Nevertheless, the name of Guyau, once described as the ‘greatest French eudaemonist philosophers of the nineteenth century’,⁵² gradually

⁴⁸ The first edition was published in 1885, during Guyau’s lifetime. In 1890 however, a second edition is published by Fouillée. This second edition has a different chapter structure. Fouillée argued that all the changes he made to the book were legitimate, since Guyau himself would have left a manuscript containing such changes Fouillée. For a comparison of the two, see Saltel’s edition of the *Esquisse* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2008, p. 29). This hypothesis cannot be confirmed given the loss of all of Guyau’s papers and manuscripts. Walther-Dulk discredits Fouillée’s claim. See Christian Lazaridès, “Guyau et les deux versions de son *Esquisse d’une morale sans obligation ni sanction*”. Forthcoming.

⁴⁹ Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction*. trans. by Gertrude Kapteyn. (London: Watts & Co., 1898), p. xii.

⁵⁰ Contini, *Jean-Marie Guyau*, 66. See *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie*, 6:43, 1906. “De l’idée de vie chez Guyau”. Séance du 28 décembre 1905. Thèse: Georges Dwelshauwers, Discussion : R. Berthelot, Dauriac. Edité par A. Colin. See also Riba, *La morale anomique*, p. 52.

⁵¹ Riba, *La morale anomique*, p. 84.

⁵² Walther-Dulk, *De Guyau à Proust*, p. 7.

fell into oblivion. This intellectual disappearance is followed by the death of Fouillée, in 1912, who until then actively championed Guyau's work, animating debates and stimulating a wave of receptive and critical literature. Five years later, in 1917, it is Guyau's only son, Augustin, who dies fighting in the war. Augustin was a young philosopher and engineer,⁵³ who wrote on Fouillée's work,⁵⁴ like Fouillée had written on the work of his father. After Augustin's death, all Guyau's papers and manuscripts were lost.⁵⁵

Why and how has Guyau's name been gradually effaced from the history of philosophy? One way to account for this disappearance would be an analysis of the French intellectual field and its institutional conditions at the time: a historical and sociological study of Guyau's emergence and disappearance is yet to be developed. Gesturing towards the beginning of this work, I would like to sketch a rough comparison between Guyau and two of his contemporaries for whom his work played an important role: Bergson and Durkheim.

Both Durkheim and Bergson read and engaged with Guyau's work, and both later came to occupy important institutional places in the intellectual field between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Bergson succeeded Gabriel Tarde in the chair of

⁵³ Michel Onfray, *La construction du surhomme. Contre-histoire de la philosophie*, 7. (Paris: Grasset, 2011).

⁵⁴ See Augustin Guyau's *La philosophie et la sociologie d'Alfred Fouillée*. (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1913).

⁵⁵ In her account, Ilse Walther-Dulk tells us that she received a letter from the *conservateur* of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, Foncin: 'Unfortunately, I believe that all the family papers concerning Guyau were lost. Indeed, Madame Fouillée, his mother, was my father's childhood friend. She bequeathed to my sister and I her *villa* in Menton, but she naturally instituted her daughter-in-law as her universal inheritor. She was the one to keep all the family *souvenirs*. Unfortunately, worn out by the sorrow caused by the death of all her beloved ones, and particularly the death of her only son [Augustin], she gradually lost her mind. When we had to take her to a nursing home, we found the apartment where she lived by herself, and in which none of her friends were allowed, almost empty. What had she done with the family papers? Did she destroy them? Did she send them to someone else? I do not know'. (*De Guyau à Proust*, p. 96).

‘Modern Philosophy’ at the *Collège de France*.⁵⁶ Durkheim worked tirelessly to establish sociology as a scientific and autonomous academic discipline (founding the *Année Sociologique*, around which he organised a school of thought and research). Guyau, on the other hand, was never an institutionally based philosopher nor a university professor. He was part of a transnational intellectual network and was active in philosophical discussion, especially through his interventions at the *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*. At only 19 years old, he won a prize of the *Académie de Sciences Morales et Politiques* for his thesis on Epicureanism and utilitarianism, which secured him a teaching position at the *Lycée Condorcet* (where Bergson would later study). However, his fragile health prevented him from pursuing the teaching career – as well as from establishing any other institutional or academic status. At an early age, and after his success in the competition of the *Académie*, Guyau leaves Paris for Nice and, later, Menton. He produced most of his work outside the academic system. My proposition is that future studies on the history of Guyau’s disappearance would have to consider his position of marginality with regards to the academic institution.

A different hypothesis regarding the forgetting of Guyau’s name is proposed by Walther-Dulk, in her book *De Guyau à Proust*. According to Walther-Dulk, the trajectory of Guyau’s work cannot be understood independently of the history of the reception of Nietzsche’s work in France. She claims that Guyau’s thought played a key role in setting the grounds for this reception. As she explains: ‘All philosophical trends close to that of Nietzsche were thereupon attributed to Nietzsche himself, even when they took inspiration from other models as, for example, Guyau. This is how Guyau’s philosophy was overshadowed by Nietzsche’s’.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Bergson studied at the Lycée Condorcet, after Guyau renounced his position and left Paris for Southern France. He took up the ‘*Chaire de Philosophie grecque et latine*’ from 1900 to 1904, and then the ‘*Chaire de philosophie moderne*’ from 1904 to 1921.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Guyau and Nietzsche

Following Walther-Dulk's hypothesis, the immediate and exceptional impact that Nietzsche had in France is, to a large extent, due to the fact that certain philosophers, especially Guyau, have previously created the conditions for the understanding of his work.⁵⁸ This superposition – and, ultimately, this absorption of Guyau's philosophy by the French reception of Nietzsche – is nonetheless the sign of a remarkable convergence.⁵⁹ This is clear if one looks at a series of themes in their works: the central role of the notion of life, its intensity and expansion; the critique of morality and the problematisation of religion, and the proposition of an ethics without obligation and sanction. Additionally, one can also find material evidence of Nietzsche's reading of two of Guyau's books: the *Esquisse*⁶⁰ and *L'irréligion de l'avenir*.⁶¹ The impact of these readings in Nietzsche's thought slowly begins to be studied.⁶²

Although Nietzsche read Guyau, and both philosophers lived in Southern France around the same time (until Guyau's death and Nietzsche's departure in 1888), Guyau did not know Nietzsche. Their philosophical encounter only takes place after Guyau's death, through Fouillée's pen. Fouillée was perhaps the first to systematically compare

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵⁹ I have recently developed this convergence in my paper 'Guyau et Nietzsche, lecteurs d'Épicure', presented at the *Journée d'Études Jean-Marie Guyau 2018 – Guyau et ses contemporains*, forthcoming.

⁶⁰ See Jean-Marie Guyau. *Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction*. Biography, Preface and Postface by Jordi Riba. (Paris: Payot, 2012). See especially Chapter IV (Présentation des remarques de Nietzsche à la lecture de l'*Esquisse*) and Chapter V (Annotations de Nietzsche).

⁶¹ See Walther-Dulk's 'Regard sur la réception de Guyau par Nietzsche à la lumière de ses annotations sur *L'irréligion de l'avenir*,' in *L'effet Guyau*, Ed. Jordi Riba (p. 7-16), followed by 'Les annotations de Nietzsche à *L'irréligion de l'avenir*,' (p. 17-71).

⁶² We have, however, some important studies, such as Fouillée's. Recently, Contini (1995), Walther-Dulk (2008; 2014). Keith Ansell-Pearson, 'Contra Kant: Experimental Ethics in Nietzsche and Guyau'. *Nietzsche and Kantian Ethics*, Eds. T. Bailey and J. Constancio. (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); 'Contra Kant and Beyond Nietzsche: Naturalizing Ethics in the Work of Jean-Marie Guyau'. *The Hegel Bulletin*, Cambridge University Press, 35:2, (2014).

their ideas, both in his 1902 book *Nietzsche et l'immoralisme* and in his article, published in English, 'The Ethics of Guyau and Nietzsche'.⁶³ Exploring their intellectual proximity, Fouillée shows how they both attempted to construct an 'ethics without obligation or sanction' grounded on the notion of life. Fouillée's main goal, however, is to differentiate their thought, showing how, even if Guyau was one of Nietzsche's predecessors, he avoided some of his main mistakes. Fouillée criticises what according to him is Nietzsche's reactionary aristocratism, as well as his conception of life as *will to power*, which he understands literally as a self-centred will to dominate and extend oppressively one's power and rule over others.⁶⁴

For Fouillée, both Nietzsche and Guyau are philosophers of the intensity of life and vital expansion, though they diverge in the way they conceived these terms. Guyau understood expansion as extension towards others: 'the generous and fruitful life, which lives for many others'.⁶⁵ In this sense, as Keith Ansell-Pearson remarks, 'Guyau is perhaps best seen as part of a tradition in French philosophy of an ethics of generosity that also includes important figures such as Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze [...] Guyau's essential point is to claim that the sentiment lying at the foundation of human morality is generosity'.⁶⁶

Guyau understood life's expansion as *fecundity*. Indeed, in a remarkably Spinozist fashion, Guyau claims that if on the one hand life is 'nutrition and assimilation,' on the other, it is also 'production and fecundity,' which means that 'the more it takes in, the more it needs to give out'.⁶⁷ As Guyau explains:

The aspect of life that allowed us to unite, to a certain extent, egoism and altruism [...] is that which we called moral fecundity. The

⁶³ Alfred Fouillée, 'The Ethics of Guyau and Nietzsche'. *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol.13, n.1, October, (1902).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶⁶ Keith Ansell-Pearson, 'Jean-Marie Guyau (1854-88)'. *International Encyclopaedia of Ethics*. Ed. Hugh La Follette. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013).

⁶⁷ Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality*, p. 86.

individual life should diffuse itself for others, in others, and if necessary, should yield itself up [...]. Individual life is expansive for others because it is *fruitful*...⁶⁸

For Guyau then, an intense life needs to reach others, and it is only through contact, interaction and communication that it expands itself. He illustrates this insight through a metaphor: ‘Life, like fire, only maintains itself by communicating itself’.⁶⁹ In this sense, the more intense a life is, the more it needs to give out: it is only by propagating itself that it can avoid its own extinction. The analogy with fire also expresses that which Guyau called ‘expenditure’, which he understood as one of the conditions of life. ‘Thus, the expenditure for others which social life demands is not [...] a loss for the individual; it is a desirable enlargement, and even a necessity...’⁷⁰

As we can see, the issue of sociality and figure of the *other* are central in Guyau’s notion of life, which is understood as fundamentally social (or, as he claims, ‘sociological’). This is undoubtedly one of the signatures of Guyau’s philosophy and can already be found in his first major book. In the conclusion to his *Ethics of Epicurus*, Guyau speaks of a time to come, when we will no longer be able to *enjoy* in solitude, when our pleasure will find in the pleasure of others the condition of its own blossoming:

We are now on our way to an epoch when egoism will turn back and retreat further and further within ourselves, becoming less and less recognisable. In this ideal epoch, beings will [so to say,] no longer be able to enjoy [*jouir*] in solitude: their pleasure will be as if part of a *concert* [of pleasures] in which the pleasure of others will take part as a necessary element. Moreover, is it not [already] like this in the most cases?⁷¹

In his reading, Fouillée develops this theme, showing how Guyau

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

⁷¹ Guyau, *La morale d’Épicure*, p. 283. My translation.

makes space for alterity, solidarity and altruism. This is exactly the point on which Nietzsche diverges from him, violently criticising the way in which the young philosopher he called the ‘brave Guyau’ has, nevertheless, preserved solidarity and altruism as fundamental aspects of life and therefore as the foundation of ethics.

In fact, the first of Nietzsche’s notes to his volume of the *Esquisse* expresses it clearly:

This book contains a strange flaw: while seeking to demonstrate that moral instincts rest upon life itself, Guyau forgot that he himself has precisely proved the contrary; in other words, he proved that all of life’s essential instincts are immoral, including those which we call moral. The highest intensity of life manifests itself through behaviours that are necessary to its widest expansion: it is exactly the opposite to any altruist fact whatsoever. This expansion expresses itself as an insoluble *will to power*. Reproduction, moreover, is not the symptom of an essentially altruist character [of life]: it comes from the conflict within an organism [...] that does not have enough power to order all that it has conquered.⁷²

Walther-Dulk also stresses this disagreement in Nietzsche’s readings of Guyau. For example, if one looks at Nietzsche’s notes on his copy of *L’irréligion de l’avenir*, one notes that he writes ‘Esel!’ (‘ass’; ‘donkey’) every time Guyau mentions this essentially altruistic and social aspect of life.⁷³ According to Ansell-Pearson, Guyau’s ‘conception of life departs, then, from that of Nietzsche’s thinking of life: whereas for Nietzsche the essence of life is will to power, involving relations of domination and exploitation, for Guyau life is fecundity and *amour*, in which the most

⁷² Nietzsche, ‘Remarques de Nietzsche à la lecture de l’*Esquisse*,’ Guyau, *Esquisse d’une morale*, 245. I have translated this passage comparing it to the one presented by Philippe Saltel (*La puissance de la vie: Essai sur l’Esquisse d’une morale sans obligation ni sanction de Jean-Marie Guyau*. (Paris: Belles Lettres/Encre marine, 2008), p. 21).

⁷³ Walther-Dulk, ‘Regard sur la réception de Guyau par Nietzsche’.

intensive life is also the most extensive'.⁷⁴

To sum up, according to Fouillée, if Nietzsche is the philosopher of power, in whose work power is presented as both that which moves us towards the achievement of a goal and the end to be pursued, Guyau is the philosopher of the 'organisation of power', this organisation being directed towards ends that remain to be determined. It is neither power *per se*, nor a mere increase in its quantity, that Guyau argues for, but rather both the increase in power's intensity and variety, deployed in multiple ways to achieve ends that are different from power (or the increase of power) alone. As Fouillée explains: 'Quantity in the rough meant to him [Guyau] only 'power' to which 'order' should be added, that is an *organisation of power* in view of some end to be attained. The end always remains to be determined'.⁷⁵ If it is true that life and power are naturally related, this does not necessarily mean that power should constitute the moral end in itself. It is in this sense that Fouillée asks whether ethics would consist in merely following nature or life (*sequere naturam* or *sequerem vitam*).⁷⁶ His answer is negative, for in this case, he explains, there would be no need for ethics, no need for establishing ends. Here, precisely, he finds another divergence between Nietzsche and Guyau:

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

⁷⁴ Ansell-Pearson, "Jean-Marie Guyau (1854-88)".

⁷⁵ Fouillée, 'The Ethics of Guyau and Nietzsche', p. 23.

⁷⁶ A more careful reading of Nietzsche could have shown Fouillée that this also not the case for Nietzsche. Indeed, this is one of Nietzsche's main criticisms to the Stoics: 'According to nature' you want to live? O you noble Stoics, what deceptive words these are!'. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. trans. by W. Kaufmann. (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 15, §9.

. In this and other regards, Fouillée's appreciation of Nietzsche is one-sided and consistent with this task of demonstrating the superiority of Guyau's ethics.

dying.⁷⁷

In addition to Fouillée's pioneering essay on Guyau and Nietzsche, a new wave of scholarship sheds light on different aspects and themes concerning the Guyau-Nietzsche relation, departing from Fouillée's overly critical appreciation of Nietzsche's thought.⁷⁸

The significant impact of the 'brave Guyau' upon Nietzsche's philosophy is still to be fully explored. I have suggested the possibility of reading Guyau *with* Nietzsche. Although Fouillée's polemical in its tone, he identifies that which seems to be a significant problem in Nietzsche's philosophy: the problematic place of the *other* in ethical life. By contrast, Guyau's work offers us a naturalist and vitalist ethics where the *other* does not appear merely in the perspective of opposition or antagonism. In Guyau we find an ethics based on a philosophy of life which makes room for otherness and solidarity; a philosophy according to which the expansion of one's own life also means cultivating the life of the other.

Stressing Guyau's neglected importance for ethics, politics, aesthetics, sociology and criminology, I have shown how authors such as Kropotkin, Tolstoy, Durkheim and Tarde have engaged with Guyau as a sort of unavoidable reference in their own fields. Guyau's work still poses a question for all those who think philosophical practice and reflection is first and foremost concerned with the ethical task of human emancipation through cooperation and solidarity. For them, recalling Kapteyn's words, Guyau 'should no longer be a stranger'.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23

⁷⁸ See, among others, Ansell-Pearson, 'Free Spirits and Free Thinkers' and Contini, 'Nietzsche lettore di Guyau'.