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## Utilitarian Principles in Wordsworth's Literary Theory: Paley, Godwin and the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*"

Ichiro KOGUCHI

### 概要：

William Wordsworthが1802年に著した文学論“Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*”は、「快」と「苦」のダイナミックな関係によって文学産出のプロセスを描き出すものであり、この意味で功利主義の伝統に倅さず理論と言える。実際、ワーズワスの文学論は18世紀の「神学的」功利主義と思想的に通底し、これまでも Joseph Priestleyらの思想との関連が指摘されている。本論文は、ワーズワスの功利主義的傾向の歴史的文脈をより具体的に検証することによって、『『抒情歌謡集』序文』が展開した文学理論の思想的位置を明確化することを目的とする。特に着目するのは18世紀後半の功利主義思想家 William Paley と William Godwin である。ペイリー哲学の影響力は18世紀後期のケンブリッジ大学において支配的であり、この時期に同大学の St Johns College で学生時代を過ごしたワーズワスにとっては無視できない思想であった。ゴドウィン は *Political Justice* の刊行によって1790年代前半のもっとも重要な思想家となり、一時期はワーズワスに思想的よりどころを提供していた。本論文は、相反する思想傾向をもつとされるペイリーとゴドウィンとを、神学的功利主義という共通の文脈に位置づけたうえで、彼らの思想とワーズワスとの関連を論ずる。この一連の議論によって、ワーズワスの文学理論の隠れた水脈が明らかにされるとともに、時代を超克する彼の革新性の一端がより具体的に定義されることになる。

**Keywords:** utilitarianism, literary theory, Wordsworth

### I

Towards the end of 1798, William Wordsworth wrote a few pages of analytic prose on moral philosophy. This piece, later to be called “Essay on Morals” by modern literary criticism, indicates the poet’s critical attitude towards some of the moral theorists of his time. The essay specifically attacks William Paley and William Godwin, claiming that these thinkers place “an undue value . . . upon that faculty which we call reason” and that their theories consequently fail to “melt into our affections” and to “have any influence worth notice in forming . . . habits” (103). “Habits,” in the poet’s view of the human

mind, are no less significant than “affections,” as they are assigned the function of originating “all our actions” (103). To Wordsworth’s readers, this criticism of Paley and Godwin sounds rather familiar; he explicitly rejected the rational thinking of moral philosophy in two well-known poems written half a year before the “Essay on Morals”: “Expostulations and Reply” and “The Tables Turned.” These poems were intended to remonstrate with Wordsworth’s friend “who was somewhat unreasonably attached to modern books on moral philosophy” (Wordsworth, “Advertisement” 66). Wordsworth’s reproof of Paley and Godwin, however, does not mean that he was not concerned with these philosophers’ thoughts. Rather, the fact that he wrote about them suggests that their theories were so significant to him that he could not help writing a refutation of their claims.

Indeed, Wordsworth’s involvement with Godwin’s philosophy in the mid 1790s has been studied and documented by a number of commentators (Grob, Roe 192-98, Jonathan Wordsworth, Owen and Smyser 103-04). Wordsworth, in fact, had mixed feelings about this radical philosopher, and the poet’s attitude towards him oscillated over the years. Still, it is a critical consensus that Godwin’s theory was a key factor in the development of Wordsworth’s thought in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Through his political treatise, *Political Justice*, the philosopher gave the poet a much-needed ideological mainstay during the time when his confidence in revolutionary France and radical politics was faltering (Jonathan Wordsworth). Paley’s pervasive influence at Cambridge University during Wordsworth’s time has been demonstrated by Ben Ross Schneider. Yet the significance of this philosopher for Wordsworth the poet has been discussed less frequently. It is thus not easy to see why the poet took up Paley’s “rather wooden and unimaginative account of morals and politics” (Owen and Smyser 105). Furthermore, in many respects Paley cannot be placed in the same philosophical camp as Godwin. He was not a radical thinker, and some of his philosophical views contradicted outright those of Godwin.

However, a school of thought current in the late eighteenth century bridged the two men’s philosophical positions. Paley and Godwin, and to a lesser extent Wordsworth, subscribed to the philosophy of utilitarianism. Utilitarian views compose the fundamental theoretical frameworks of Paley and Godwin, and these views are among the important elements of the poetics advanced in the “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,” the first major statement of poetic theory by Wordsworth. When the significance of utilitarian thinking is taken into account, we can have a clearer view of why, among many other philosophers, the poet singled out two particular thinkers in his critical consideration of moral issues.

The current paper explores the nature of the poetic theory propounded by Wordsworth in the “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.” Its particular focus is on the utilitarian aspects of the poet’s theory and their relation to the philosophical views of Paley and Godwin. I shall first briefly discuss Wordsworth’s poetics in the 1802 version of the “Preface” with reference to a school of utilitarianism. I shall then proceed to examine Paley and Godwin. As a broad consensus on Godwin’s influence on Wordsworth has already developed,

I shall explicate Paley's utilitarian theory at greater length. After this, Wordsworth's poetic theory will be investigated in the context of these two utilitarian thinkers. Finally, I shall make some remarks on the innovative side of Wordsworth by pointing out the revisions he made to the intellectual formulations of Paley, Godwin and other thinkers of his time.

## II

The year 1802 was an *annus mirabilis* for the literary critic William Wordsworth. He completed in this year the first full-length version of the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*." The shorter, original version of this prose piece had been written in late 1800 and was attached to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* published in January 1801. The 1802 "Preface" was substantially amplified with the addition of seven long paragraphs halfway through the text. The inclusion of this material gave an important argumentative core to the document. The 1800 "Preface" is a composite of a variety of arguments. It examines the operation of the association of ideas in poetic composition and conducts a detailed discussion of poetic language. It also proposes the famous definition of poetry, "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" ("Preface" 72, 85), which is regarded by modern literary criticism as representative of the expressive poetic theory of Romanticism (Abrams 47). Another feature in the 1800 version is the frequent use of the terms related to pleasure and pain. In fact, in the 1802 revision this feature is far more conspicuous. Wordsworth's theory of poetry continued to develop, and the poet formulated the famous theory of transforming imagination in the 1805 *Prelude* and in the "Preface to the Edition of 1815." However, when we consider the 1802 stage of his poetic theory, the concepts of pleasure and pain can probably be regarded as the predominant theme for the literary critic Wordsworth.

As I have argued elsewhere, the significant status assigned to pleasure and pain in the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" can be described in terms of utilitarian philosophy (Koguchi 92-98). In the eighteenth century, a philosophical attitude became popular that attributed human behaviour directly to the dichotomous dynamic of pleasurable and painful sensations. This school is known as utilitarianism, and many of the major empiricist thinkers, John Locke, David Hume, Edmund Burke and others, embrace utilitarian elements in developing their theories. As its argumentative core consists of pleasure-pain dynamics, Wordsworth's poetic theory clearly has a utilitarian character. More precisely, his position belongs to a particular school of this philosophy, "theological utilitarianism."

In the latter half of the 1802 "Preface," Wordsworth declares that a poet, while composing, is preserved "in a state of enjoyment" (86) by the guidance of "Nature" (86), and that this pleasurable condition is transferred to his reader. Earlier in the same "Preface," Wordsworth asserts that his reader's mind "must necessarily be enlightened, and his affections ameliorated" (72) through reading his poetry. Wordsworth, in short, believes in the inevitable improvement of the human mind, and this developmental

process, he argues, is accompanied by pleasure and enjoyment. It is this belief that parallels the teaching of theological utilitarianism.

The concept of theological utilitarianism has been put forward by Margaret Canovan. According to her study, British utilitarianism comprises two major currents: one is the secular position of Jeremy Bentham and his followers, and the other, represented by Joseph Priestley, is based on a more metaphysical or “theological” view of the world. Both schools concern themselves with the famous utilitarian principle of “the greatest happiness of the greatest number,” but there is a fundamental difference. Bentham focuses on the method of computing the sums of pleasure and pain so as to find the optimum path to the greatest happiness. His theory does not presuppose a benevolent universal order that is destined to lead mankind to higher stages. His interest is exclusively in finding the best way to achieve the largest sum of happiness from a given set of conditions. In contrast, theological utilitarianism holds that the universe is fundamentally a moral order presided over by a benign Providence, and that natural laws are designed to promote happiness in all creatures. In this view, the utilitarian criterion of the greatest happiness of the greatest number is not merely a means of finding the best course of action, but more importantly, it is a process to make the intrinsically benevolent world order manifest (Canovan 437-38).

Considering the differences in these two schools of utilitarianism, it can be argued that Wordsworth’s utilitarian interpretation of the process of composing poetry belongs to the “theological,” rather than the “secular” school. In describing the creative process of poets as “enjoyment” (“Preface” 86), Wordsworth does not intend to propose a method for attaining poetic pleasure; his focus is rather on the fact that poets are inevitably led to a pleasurable state through their creative activity, and that readers, and by implication society at large, are morally enhanced through reading poetry. As theological utilitarianism emphasises the benevolent order presided over by a deity, so Wordsworth recognises the guiding hand of beneficent nature: he says that “Nature” is “cautious in preserving” a poet “in a state of enjoyment” (86). Wordsworth’s wider concern that goes beyond his private self remains implicit in the “Preface,” but in his autobiographical poem *The Prelude*, he articulates the idea that nature and nature poetry have the potential of saving mankind from its current degenerated conditions:

. . . if in these times of fear,  
This melancholy waste of hopes o’erthrown  
.....  
. . . if in this time  
Of dereliction and dismay I yet  
Despair not of our nature, but retain  
A more than Roman confidence, a faith  
That fails not, in all sorrow my support,  
The blessing of my life, the gift is yours,

Ye mountains, thine o nature! Thou hast fed  
My lofty speculations. . . . (*Prelude* 1799. 2. 478-79, 486-93)

Given his acknowledgment of the benevolent order of nature, along with the prevalence of pleasure he envisages at private and social levels, Wordsworth's poetics can rightly be called a literary version of theological utilitarianism.

For an investigation of Wordsworth's utilitarian aspects, a key concept is an "overbalance of pleasure." The "Preface" uses this phrase twice (84, 86), and two other related phrases, "overbalance of enjoyment" and "counterbalanced by any pleasure," also appear once each (80). These apparently unpoetic expressions actually suggest a great deal about the poet's utilitarian views. First, "overbalance" is a mathematical term; it implies that something exceeds something else in quantity or degree. The word may even be regarded as belonging to the terminology of financial accounting. The "Preface" deals with the subtle operations of human psychology, but behind its argument is a utilitarian principle of numerical computation seemingly inimical to literary sensibility. The modifying noun phrase, "of pleasure," is an explicit statement of the utilitarian emphasis on the function of pleasure. And the word "pleasure" implies the other term of dichotomy, "pain." The whole phrase then completes the utilitarian logic of pleasure overpowering pain so as to lead the individual human psyche and society to better stages.

Several critics have commented on the significance of this phrase (Owen 28-30, Mason 75-76). They refer to David Hartley's associationist psychology as its most likely source. In his 1749 treatise on the association of ideas, *Observations on Man*, Hartley claims the predominance of pleasure in the development of the individual human mind:

. . . our sensible Pleasures are far more numerous than our sensible Pains; and tho' the Pains be, in general, greater than the Pleasures, yet the Sum total of these seems to be greater than that of those; whence the Remainder, after the Destruction of the Pains by the opposite and equal Pleasures, will be pure Pleasure. (1: 83)

Hartley actually uses a phrase closely resembling Wordsworth's phrase: "Over-balance of Happiness" (2: 15). Hartley's popularity was considerable during Wordsworth's youth. *Observations on Man* was republished a number of times in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries (Huguelet v-vii). And his psychological theory was a subject of college lectures at Cambridge (Schneider 109). Critics' conjecture of Hartley as the source of Wordsworth's "overbalance of pleasure" appears sound and well founded.

However, the term "overbalance of pleasure" is not exclusively "Hartleyan" as Owen and Smyser assert (182). The use of this phrase is not confined to Hartley and his followers. Word combinations that closely resemble it also appear in the works of Paley and Godwin. Though censured by Wordsworth in the "Essay on Morals," these two utilitarian thinkers were active and influential during Wordsworth's

time. They use phrases related to an “overbalance of pleasure,” furthermore, in their writings in conjunction with utilitarian explications of moral behaviour. Thus far modern commentators seem to have been interested only in the associationist side of an “overbalance of pleasure.” In the discussion below, I shall shift the focus of attention and highlight this phrase’s utilitarian connotations as found in Paley’s and Godwin’s texts.

### III

Paley was a late-eighteenth-century philosopher of a strongly utilitarian persuasion. His philosophy was especially influential at Cambridge. At the university, he obtained the eminent status of Senior Wrangler, and taught moral philosophy for ten years. *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, a collection of his Cambridge lectures published in 1785, was highly regarded. It was adopted as a textbook at the university and became a source of examination questions (McCalman 634, Schneider 37).

As Schneider has shown, the intellectual atmosphere of Cambridge during Wordsworth’s time was pervaded by utilitarian moral philosophy. This school of thought regarded the mechanism of pleasure and pain as the principal guide of moral action. Several earlier philosophers and poets were key contributors to Cambridge utilitarianism. Cicero advocated utility as the goal of human action. His *De Officiis* was an examination subject at St Johns College in 1773, 1778, 1783 and 1784. Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was one of the standard readings at Cambridge and a frequent source of examination subjects. This work also promoted the university’s utilitarian bias as it explained the moral sense as a pleasure-pain mechanism. The harmonious universe described in James Thomson’s *Seasons* and Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* helped to interpret Newtonian astronomy, another favourite doctrine at Cambridge, in terms of its utility for mankind. Among these thinkers, Paley’s significance was exceptional. His theory was a cornerstone of the utilitarian system of thought that dominated the university for several decades from the mid eighteenth century onwards (Schneider 10-11, 86-87, 107, 272).

In the *Principles*, Paley advanced a version of theological utilitarianism. Like other utilitarian thinkers, he laid principal emphasis on the quantitative dynamic of pleasure and pain in human action. Along with his frequent reference to the amount of pleasure or pain, such mathematical terms as “computation” and “calculation” are noticeable features of his argument. He does not use exactly the same wording as Wordsworth’s “overbalance of pleasure.” Yet he often makes a comparison between the advantage and disadvantage of a particular human behaviour or policy enactment, and in such arguments he uses terms that remind us of the utilitarian notions advocated by the poet: “overbalance” (Paley 89, 442, 566, 596, 656), “balance” (95), “exceed” (17, 18), “outweigh” (426, 640), “compensate” (22, 430) and “a proponderation [sic] of happiness” (589). We can conjecture Wordsworth’s philosophical closeness to

Paley, as these utilitarian usages suggest a verbal and conceptual affinity between the two thinkers. It is indisputable that Paley and Wordsworth lived in similar types of intellectual atmospheres.

Paley, in fact, clearly articulates his utilitarian views. He defines happiness as "any condition . . . in which the amount or aggregate of pleasure exceeds that of pain," and he asserts that "the degree of happiness depends upon the quantity of this excess" (18). As an explicit utilitarian, he is interested in the amounts and degrees of human sensations. Every sensation is treated in quantifiable terms; quality must be eliminated, or its significance minimised. Concentrating on the quantifiable aspects of sensations, Paley asserts that "pleasures differ in nothing, but in continuance and intensity" (19). This statement anticipates Bentham's more extreme formulation of modern utilitarianism in the form of the "felicific calculus." Bentham's theory measures every human action by six standards of quantity and degree: "intensity," "duration," "certainty or uncertainty," "propinquity or remoteness," "fecundity" and "purity" (Bentham 16). Sensations are thus reduced to numerical values. Though Paley's position is less radical than Bentham's, he still bases human action on its measurable aspects. He states that "from a just computation" of pleasures, "every question concerning human happiness must receive its decision" (Paley 19).

Paley, nonetheless, is not exactly Benthamite in that he is faithful to the teaching of theological utilitarianism. Unlike the secular Bentham, Paley does not merely seek for the optimum use of a given set of conditions. He is convinced that each human action or thought is backed by a benevolent deity who is continuously leading mankind towards ever higher, happier stages. He claims that "God Almighty wills and wishes the happiness of his creatures" (56-57), and that the system of the world, in accordance with this divine will, serves the happiness of mankind: "God hath called forth his consummate wisdom, to contrive and provide for our happiness, and the world appears to have been constituted with this design at first" (59). For the evidence of this divine benevolence, Paley refers to the absolute "pleasures of very young children" (59) and to natural "contrivances" that appear to be designed exclusively to promote happiness. Such contrivances of nature include the anatomy of the human body. For example, "Teeth are contrived to eat" (58), and thus are beneficial for human beings. It is true that from time to time decayed teeth cause pain, but pain is not the reason teeth are given to the human being in the first place: "their aching now and then is incidental to the contrivance" and "not the object of it" (58). He makes the same claim of other parts of the human body, as he says that no organ is "put there to incommode, to annoy, or torment" (59). Paley concludes that "Nothing of this sort [that is designed for torture or death] is to be found in the works of nature" (59). Indeed, God has provided mankind with "the capacity of our sense to receive pleasure, and the supply of external objects fitted to excite it" (58); that is, external and internal provisions to achieve happiness.

Individual human beings in this benevolent system endeavour to harmonise their own happiness to the



general happiness of mankind. Paley states that “the private happiness is our motive, and the will of God our rule,” and that “what promotes the general happiness is required by the will of God” (52). Thus, in order to find the right course of conduct, human beings need to “enquire into the tendency of the action to promote or diminish the general happiness” (56). Paley famously asserts that “Whatever is expedient is right” (61, 68), but he does not forget to add that “it must be expedient upon the whole, at the long run” (68).

Another feature of Paley’s *Principles* is worth noting in relation to Wordsworth’s “Essay on Morals.” One of the reasons Wordsworth disapproves of moral thinkers contemporary to him is that they disregard the role of habit in the development of the moral sense. He harshly criticises Paley and Godwin, because, in the poet’s view, these moral philosophers do not place a sufficient emphasis on the significance of habit. In reality, however, Paley advocates the role of habit in human action: “There are *habits* . . . of every modification of action, speech, and thought”; “there is not a quality, or function, either of the body or mind, which does not feel the influence of this great law of animated nature [the law of habit]” (41). The moral sense is such “a quality, or function” since it is effectively composed of habits. In Paley’s words, the moral sense cannot “be distinguished from . . . habits” (16). Wordsworth’s criticism is evidently misplaced. Habits for Paley are fundamental to human action. In the same *Principles*, he goes so far as to say that “Man is a bundle of habits” (41), suggesting that habits are primary elements that constitute a human being.

Wordsworth’s remarks on habit are more appropriate when they are applied to Godwin. Unlike Paley, Godwin in *Political Justice* does not make much of habit. Although he admits that habit helps a human being to perform virtuous conduct, Godwin is strongly opposed to reliance on habit, urging instead that all action should be preceded by a rational decision (Grob 118, Owen and Smyser 105). There are further contradictions between Godwin’s and Paley’s views. The former thinker believes in the significance of “private judgment” (1: 158), i.e. rational judgment by individuals, whereas for the latter, the general happiness of mankind always comes first. Paley is more or less opposed to radical political change, but Godwin, while rejecting violence as a means of political reform, looks forward to a chain reaction of revolutions starting from France: “France . . . will lead other nations to imitate and improve upon her plan [of civil revolution]” (1: 225).

However, like Paley, Godwin is a self-confessed utilitarian. Godwin declares that “utility, as it regards percipient beings, is the only basis of moral and political truth” (1: 201), and that “the only measure of equity is utility, and whatever is not attended with any beneficial purpose, is not just” (2: 690). Like Wordsworth and Paley, he, too, uses terminology of numerical comparison: “overbalance” (1: 93, 2: 604), “balance” (1: 121, 1: 274, 1: 302) and “preponderating” (2: 713). The notions of pleasure and pain are repeated frequently throughout the two volumes of *Political Justice*. Human beings in his view

live in a world filled with pleasures and pains. Senses are “inlets of pleasure and pain” (1: 182), and the first impressions that the human mind receives from the external world are nothing other than “those of pleasure and pain” (1: 15).

Furthermore, utility is clearly linked to ethics in Godwin's philosophy. Virtue is pleasure: “the virtuous man has a perpetual source of enjoyment” (1: 234); “the practice of virtue is the true road to individual happiness” (2: 363). At the same time, the philosopher does not disregard the happiness of the greatest number: “We ought to love . . . the good of the majority, the good of the general” (2: 826). In Godwin's thinking, the individual pursuit of happiness does not contradict the good of mankind. By exercising his rational faculty, the human being can progress ever nearer to perfection. Godwin sees progress and perfectibility as inherent in humanity. These elements ultimately guarantee the unity of the individual and the social: “Man perhaps is incapable under any circumstance of perpetrating an action of which he has clear and undoubted perception that it is contrary to the general good” (2: 832), and “he must be most virtuous, who chooses with the soundest judgment the greatest possible good of his species” (1: 232). It also deserves attention that in these necessitarian notions of human progress and perfectibility, Godwin, himself an atheist, comes close to theological utilitarianism. Probably inadvertently, Godwin shares with this school of utilitarian philosophy the definite prospect of mankind's achievement of ultimate happiness in the world.

In his twenties, Wordsworth learned much from Godwin. Jonathan Wordsworth enumerates the specific tenets the poet derived from the philosopher: an absolute trust in self-knowledge, self-rule and the freedom of the individual mind. As Wordsworth's poetic theory has a markedly utilitarian character, we might add to this list of borrowed concepts the pleasure-pain dynamic of utilitarianism that harmonises individual happiness and the good of the whole.

#### IV

I have examined two utilitarian theorists who provided some of the immediate intellectual context of the young Wordsworth. Paley's philosophy was effectively the official moral theory of Wordsworth's Cambridge. Godwin was one of the most well-read thinkers of the mid 1790s, and his influence on the poet, both textual and personal, has been substantially documented.

It has been pointed out that Wordsworth's concepts of pleasure and joy are indebted to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's pantheist philosophy (Gill 208). In the poem “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,” Coleridge indicates that an intuition of pervasive deity, or “One Life,” is an experience of “deep joy” (38). He elsewhere alludes to pleasures derived from God-imbued natural scenery and their “Moral Effect” (*Collected Letters* 1: 154). Wordsworth echoes Coleridge's thinking in an autobiographical passage: “in all things / I saw one life, and felt that it was joy” (*Prelude* 1799. 2. 459-60). Wordsworth's intellectual

debt to Coleridge is beyond doubt. That said, an “overbalance of pleasure” and other related terminology in the “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” seem to be sufficient evidence to endorse the utilitarian lineage of Wordsworth’s poetic theory. I shall hereafter reconsider the “Preface” in view of Paleyan and Godwinian utilitarianism.

I have argued that Wordsworth’s theory of pleasure can be seen as a version of theological utilitarianism. As I showed in the second section of the current paper, Wordsworth suggests that the process of composing poetry is accompanied by a growing amount of pleasure and that the same plenitude of pleasure is transferred to the readers of the poetry. He also claims that this pleasure-generating process is under the guiding hand of benevolent nature. These views have a strong affinity with theological utilitarianism, which claims the presence of a benign Providence leading humanity to happiness. Wordsworth, in addition, recognises the importance of habit in human psychology. Hence, Wordsworth’s position is largely in agreement with Paley’s theory of morals. I shall now look more closely at the passages in which the poet discusses the process of creating poetry and the pleasure that accompanies this process.

The discussion of composing poetry appears in the sixth paragraph of the “Preface.” Here the operation of habit figures particularly large. In an explication of the psychology of artistic creativity, Wordsworth defines thoughts as “the representatives of all our past feelings” (72). And by contemplating “the relation of these general representatives to each other,” he argues, “our feelings will be connected with important subjects” (72). This contemplation enables the formation of habits, which serve the amelioration of both the poet’s and his reader’s minds:

. . . by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves . . . must necessarily in some degree be enlightened, and his affections ameliorated. (72)

The “being to whom we address ourselves” is no doubt the reader of Wordsworth’s poetry. The quoted passage signifies that the poet’s continual act of introspective contemplation crystallises in the form of habits, and that once these habits are formed, the remainder is an automatic process leading to the enlightenment of the reader. This poetic enlightenment also has social implications, for the poet’s power now transcends the bounds of his own internal world and the immediate circle of his friends, and proceeds to influence society at large through the edification of his readers.

The quoted lines may not seem particularly utilitarian, as they do not directly refer to utility in terms of pleasure or happiness. But when placed in the overall context of the “Preface,” it becomes apparent that this passage can be read in light of the dynamic of pleasure and pain. As I indicated early on, elsewhere in the “Preface” Wordsworth declares that while composing poetry, a poet is preserved “in a state of

enjoyment" (86) by the guidance of "Nature" (86), and that this pleasurable condition is then transferred to his readers:

. . . if Nature be thus cautious in preserving in a state of enjoyment a being thus employed [a poet], the Poet ought to profit by the lesson thus held forth to him, and ought especially to take care, that whatever passions he communicates to his Reader, those passions . . . should always be accompanied with an overbalance of pleasure. (86)

The dominance of pleasure is inevitable, as it is under the command of "Nature." And because this passage and the earlier paragraph on habits enhancing human consciousness share the notion of human amelioration and the inevitability of its occurrence, the central claims of both can be regarded as fundamentally congenial. Hence, that earlier paragraph's description of the internal dynamics of poetic creativity can be regarded as partaking of the utilitarian notion of pleasure. Wordsworth's views in these two paragraphs have an affinity with the Paleyan emphasis on habit and with the principle of necessity claimed by Godwin. Further, all these views are ultimately subsumable under the metaphysical visions proposed by theological utilitarianism.

The dominant concern of Wordsworth, an autobiographical poet, was with the internal realm of consciousness. But he was also involved with socio-political issues, especially in his youth. Seen from this perspective, the episodes of "the spots of time" embedded in *The Prelude* assume a fresh significance. In the first "spot," the child Wordsworth, having accidentally lost sight of his servant in their riding excursion to a stony moor, comes to a site where a murder was committed in earlier times. There he experiences the mysterious transformation of the surrounding scenery into "visionary dreariness" (1805. 11. 311). The second "spot" is a recollection of an incident in which Wordsworth as a school boy is waiting for horses to take him home for the holidays. His desire to return home is later to be connected with a feeling of guilt, because his father, by coincidence, died shortly after Wordsworth arrived home. Although both "spots of time" are experiences of fear and guilt, they lead to an eventual "overbalance of pleasure." Long after the original incidents, he had a vision in which the same scenes were clothed in "The spirit of pleasure, and youth's golden gleam" (1805. 11. 323).

Importantly, it is possible to argue that the redeeming power of the "spots" has a broader meaning beyond the poet's private consciousness. The "spots of time" are about the moments when internality becomes especially dominant; Wordsworth describes them as experiences in which "The mind is lord and master—outward sense / The obedient servant of her will" (1805. 11. 222-23). Thus these "spots" principally pertain to the internal realm of consciousness. Yet these moments also have socio-political implications. The "spots" passages are placed after the poet's psychological crisis that was brought about by his disillusionment with the French Revolution. They are there to heal his trauma by giving him a renewed strength and creativity. Thus revitalised, in the final thirteenth book of the same poem,

Wordsworth aspires to be one of the “United helpers forward of a day / Of firmer trust” (1805. 13. 338-39). The social significance of this statement is evident, as these “joint labourers” (1805. 13. 339) are expected to work their way through the difficult times when “This age fall back to old idolatry” (1805. 13. 432) and “men return to servitude as fast / As the tide ebbs, to ignominy and shame / By nations sink together” (1805. 13. 433-35). For Wordsworth, private redemption is social redemption. The “spirit of pleasure” that he has received deep into his consciousness ultimately contributes to the betterment of society.

We have seen the same pattern of private pleasure leading to the general good in utilitarian thinkers. Godwin harmonises the private and the social by regarding an “uncontrolled exercise of private judgment” (1: 158) as the means of attaining the general good of society. As I have pointed out, he is confident of the progress and perfectibility of mankind: “perfectibility is one of the most unequivocal characteristics of the human species, so that the political, as well as the intellectual state of man, may be presumed to be in a course of progressive improvement” (1: 11). Human errors are “momentary, and our judgments have hourly approached nearer to the truth” (1: 30). Under this principle, “all private consideration must yield to the general good” (1: 165).

Paley is less certain about the harmony of private happiness and the social good; he seems to admit the necessity of making a conscious effort to subordinate the private to the collective: “VIRTUE is the doing good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God” (36). Yet like Godwin he, too, is optimistic about the ultimate happiness of mankind. He admits that “private happiness is our motive” (52), but because “God Almighty wills and wishes the happiness of his creatures” (56-57), the conflict between egoism and the general good can be minimised by the conciliator God.

The unity of private and social, found in Wordsworth, Godwin and to a lesser degree in Paley, can be regarded as “the principle of the natural identity of interests” in the established terminology of utilitarianism (Plamenatz 49). Although Wordsworth probably would not have liked to be categorised as a utilitarian, he was certainly indebted to this school of philosophy in conceiving his theory of poetry in the “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.” His open rejection of the theories of Paley and Godwin in his “Essay on Morals” entails a tacit acceptance of significant aspects of their philosophical views.

## V

I have interpreted Wordsworth’s poetic theory with reference to the utilitarian philosophy of Paley and Godwin. I have shown that the “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” is indebted to the philosophical tradition to which these thinkers subscribe. However, if the “Preface” were merely a literary version of theological utilitarianism, its significance would have been limited. In conclusion, I shall point out the innovative side of the poet in terms of his utilitarian views.

Critics have discussed literary pleasure since Classical Antiquity. Horace states that “poets aim at giving either profit or delight, or at combining the giving of pleasure with some useful precepts of life” (90). Philip Sydney remarks that the end of poetry is “to teach and delight” (101). In the eighteenth century, the psychology of pleasure became a clearer focus of attention. Joseph Addison composed a series of essays on aesthetic pleasure, “The Pleasures of the Imagination,” in 1712, and a large number of poems also appeared on the theme of pleasure, among them Mark Akenside’s *Pleasures of Imagination* and Thomas Warton’s “Pleasures of Melancholy.” This literary background is another context to Wordsworth’s treatment of pleasure.

At first glance, Wordsworth’s theory of pleasure is merely a restatement of these earlier views as well as of utilitarian theory contemporary to him. If examined in detail, however, his views turn out to be subtly different from those of other thinkers; pleasure for Wordsworth is neither an expedient tool for the achievement of something other than pleasure itself nor a purely aesthetic phenomenon existing for its own sake.

Implied in the arguments of Horace and Sydney is the view that pleasure is the means of achieving the moral goal of poetry: to teach the reader. Sydney writes that the ultimate end of poetic pleasure is “to move men to take that goodness in hand” which, were it not for pleasure in poetry, “they would fly as from a stranger” (103). Utilitarians, too, more or less accept this instrumental view of pleasure in that they believe that private pleasure has the function of leading to the general good of mankind.

The notion of aesthetic pleasure became widely recognised in the eighteenth century. According to this concept, pleasure derived from works of art is a product of purely disinterested judgment. What is extrinsic to this experience, e.g., the question of whether it serves other ends, should not be considered. When Gotthold Ephraim Lessing says that the “aim of art . . . is pleasure” (*Laokoon* qtd. Owen and Smyser 178), he is suggesting the purely aesthetic nature of artistic pleasure. In Britain, Richard Hurd makes the same claim by defining the “art of poetry” as “THE ART OF PLEASING” (4). Hurd strongly repudiates the instrumental view of poetic pleasure: “in poetry . . . PLEASURE is the end, to which use itself . . . must submit” (2).

Wordsworth’s view of pleasure is not identical with either of these two positions. Pleasure for him is not instrumental in determining human behaviour. Poetry surely engenders sensations of enjoyment both for the composing poet and his readers; yet pleasure does not immediately lead either of them to specific conduct. Wordsworth’s pleasure is not purely aesthetic, either. He sees it as more than a delightful sensation that exists for its own sake. Following the tradition of theological utilitarianism, Wordsworth suggests that pleasure is an index of the benevolent order of the world. And despite the pleasurable nature of his poetry, he does not instruct his readers to read poetry for the sake of pleasure.

Indeed, the poet’s conception is grander: a “grand elementary principle of pleasure by which he [a

human being] knows, and feels, and lives, and moves" ("Preface" 79). In this formulation, the status assigned to pleasure approximates to a transcendent principle. Pleasure accompanies the human being in every aspect of his action or thought provided that he is engaging in the right kind of conduct. While pleasure thus quietly supports human morality, it cannot be an object of conscious pursuit. Of such pleasure Wordsworth writes in "The Old Cumberland Beggar":

. . . the soul  
By that sweet taste of pleasure unpursu'd  
Doth find itself insensibly dispos'd  
To virtue and true goodness. (94-97)

Pleasure in these lines is not purely aesthetic because it is linked to "virtue and true goodness." Neither can it be said to serve immediate purposes, as it is "pleasure unpursu'd," that is, pleasure unavailable for those who seek it for some extrinsic objectives.

A poet attempting to create a new kind of poetry, Wordsworth was engaged in different fields of thought. Having once experienced a serious psychological crisis in the face of the deteriorating course of events after the French Revolution, he was deeply concerned with human morality and socio-political issues. Hence, when he composed his first systematic poetic theory, it involved not only poetry and literary criticism, but also psychology, moral philosophy and even politics. Probably because of the complexity of its origin, the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" can present a new way to look at literary pleasure, while being characterised by its indebtedness to earlier intellectual traditions.

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