DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL: PALEY'S PROBLEM
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
'THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH'

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William Paley (1743-1805), Archdeacon of Carlisle and sometime Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, is usually remembered these days for his classic formulation of one of the design arguments for the existence of God: namely, the argument from watch to watchmaker and then, on analogy, from world to world-maker.[1]   However, in his own day and for much of the nineteenth century he was considered a noted Christian apologist - of the evidence writing kind - and not just a natural theologian.[2]   He was also considered to be an important Christian ethicist.[3]

It is with the last mentioned area of Paley's many-sided labours that the present article is concerned. As an ethicist Paley exercised immense influence over several generations of young English minds (especially at Cambridge, but also in British institutions for the training of missionaries).[4] His first major published work, for example, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* of 1785 was a required text for the ordinary B.A. at Cambridge from 1786 to 1857, when the works of J. S. Mill replaced it.[5]   The Paley

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[1] See J. Hick, *Arguments for the Existence of God* (London and Basingstoke, 1971), especially chapter one. For Paley's argument itself see J. Paxton (ed.), *The Works of William Paley* IV (London, 1845).

[2] See A. Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (London, 1971), chapter four, and M. K. Clarke *Paley: Evidence for the Man* (London, 1974), especially chapters eight and ten. L. Russ Bush includes some of Paley's work in his *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics A.D. 100-1800* (Grand Rapids, 1983), chapter twelve.

[3] Indeed, Paley's ethical material has been reprinted within the last decade. See R. Wellek (ed.), *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (Garland Press, 1977).

[4] For Paley's impact on missionary training see F. S. Piggin, *The Social Background, Motivation and Training of British Protestant Missionaries to India 1789-1858* (unpublished PhD, University of London, 1974).

[5] See A. M. C. Waterman, 'The Ideological Alliance of Political Economy and Christian Theology, 1789-1833', *JEH* 34 (1983), 232 n. 2. Also see T. R. Birks, *Modern Utilitarianism* (London, 1874) 76.

scholar, D. L. Le Mahieu is right, therefore, to remark that 'The Principles . . . exercised a powerful intellectual hegemony over a substantial portion of England's educated elite.'[6] But the concern of this article is not merely antiquarian. The theological utilitarianism that Paley expounded raises certain fundamental questions about the relationship between religion and ethics which are of continuing philosophical and theological importance.

1.   Problematic Elucidation

But given this climate of interest, it is a question of more than passing interest as to the best way to approach a figure of the past like Paley, who was both a philosophical and religious thinker.   Philosopher and historian of philosophy John Passmore has suggested five possibilities: polemical, cultural, doxographical, retrospective, and problematic elucidation.[7]

The polemical approach examines a past thinker in terms of some currently held philosophical 'orthodoxy', and usually finds him or her wanting.   Thus Hegel, for argument's sake, might be judged as not existentially aware enough, or not as linguistically sensitive as he should have been.

The cultural one suggests that the philosophy of any given age exhibits certain peculiar characteristics that reveal a distinctive *Zeitgeist* at work: some set of absolute presuppositions that separates the Age of Faith, for example, from the Age of Reason. The aim of this approach is to uncover such presuppositions.   An example that comes to mind is Ptolemaic as opposed to Copernican astronomy in respect of the two so-called ages mentioned above.

A doxographical approach simply describes earlier points of view (what Socrates taught about X or Y), whilst a retrospective one sees in a given thinker an anticipator of a presently held position (how Socrates was the precursor of Linguistic Analysis).

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[6]D. L. Le Mahieu, *The Mind of William Paley* (Lincoln and London, 1976) 155-6.

[7]A fine discussion and application of Passmore's analysis is found in E. Osborn, 'Elucidation of Problems as a Method of Interpretation 1', *Colloquium* 8 (1976) 31-2.

Passmore's last suggested approach is that of problematic elucidation. On this approach a given thinker is seen through the eyes of the problem he or she sought to solve, the question with which he or she wrestled.

With regard to Paley, as a case in point, the polemical approach might view him as representative of some false trail in philosophy: for example, the appeal to final causes; the cultural one as the paradigm of that eighteenth century blend of philosophical and theological thought that characterised so much of the immediate post-Newton English scene; the doxographical would merely describe his opinion and the retrospective might, for example, place him on a trajectory that begins with John Gay's seminal essay on theological utilitarianism and which culminates in J. S. Mill's largely secular one.

The remaining approach, that of problematic elucidation, however, would much more readily avoid the ever threatening danger of anachronism and distortion by focussing on the problem Paley was trying to solve, how it appeared to him, and what solution he proposed. This is the approach of the present article.

2. Paley's Problem

Paley makes it plain in his *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* that it is the will of God that determines what is right or wrong, good or bad.[8]   In modern philosophical parlance, he holds to a divine command theory of morality in which 'what God wills is good', rather than 'God wills only what is good'.

The definition of virtue which he took from his mentor Bishop Edmund Law is consistent with this view. Virtue is 'the doing good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness.'[9]   This definition exhibits several of the leading ideas in Paley's own version of

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[8]See J. Paxton (ed.), *The Works of William Paley* II (London, 1845) 55-6 especially.
[9]*Ibid.*, 28.

theological utilitarianism: namely, the key notes 'the will of God', 'doing good', and 'everlasting happiness'.

In fact, theism is vital to Paley's ethic in at least three ways. First, God's will determines the good as we have already noted. Secondly, he held that moral obligation is grounded on the command of a superior who is in a position to cause our profit or loss (what he termed the 'violent motive'). In the case of God himself, on the last day as mankind's judge, he may bring about our everlasting weal or woe.[10] Thirdly, because God is judge, theism provides sanctions to induce moral behaviour from creatures capable of it.

These emphases on happiness, on the future state, on the will of God as determiner of good and evil, and on theistic sanctions constitute the common ground between Paley's own ethical system and that of other eighteenth century theological utilitarians such as John Gay (1688-1745) and Abraham Tucker (1705-1774).[11]

Paley's problem was how to discover God's will. For God's will - in Paley's 'system of ethics' - defines the good, and failure to comply with that will means the prospect of an unpleasant judgement in the life to come.

On Paley's view the object of both natural and revealed theology is to discover the will of God.[12] And in general terms he believed that he knew that will. Natural theology - centred on the design argument for God's existence - showed to his satisfaction, that it was God's intention to promote the happiness of his creatures. Nature, according to Paley, is filled with contrivances or designs. These contrivances or designs prove a contriver or designer. And on inspection, these contrivances are benevolent in character. So, too, therefore, is the contriver.[13] As for revealed theology, the Scriptures declare God's general will for life (e.g. loving one's neighbour as oneself), and illustrate it by fictitious examples (e.g. the parable of the Good Samaritan), by actual instances (e.g. the

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[10]*Ibid.*, 40-2.

[11]See the discussion of theological utilitarianism by A. W. Hastings, in J. Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* XII (Edinburgh, 1921) 560-1.

[12]J. Paxton (ed.), *Works*, II 42.

[13]*Ibid.*, 44-7.

widow's mite) and by Christ's own answers to moral questions put to him by others (e.g. the rich young ruler who asked 'What do I lack?').[14]

However, Paley wanted to provide more than mere general answers. He wanted to provide a text on ethics which addressed the subject not in any abstract way, but in one which really applied to the lives of his contemporaries in English society in the areas of private duty (e.g. prayer to God), domestic duty (e.g. parenting) and public duty (e.g. submission to civil government).[15]

But how could the application be made? How could God's will be discovered in those specific situations that constituted eighteenth-century English life? This was Paley's problem: the movement from the general to the specific; from his co-ordinate authority of reason and Scripture to actual contexts.

3. Paley's Interest

For Paley the above mentioned problem was no mere academic one. The problem of discovering God's will for specific situations was a matter of existential anxiety. For Paley believed that the two great questions were:

i. Will there be after this life any distribution of rewards and punishments at all?
ii. If there be, what actions will be rewarded, and what will be punished?[16]

Indeed, answering these two questions provided the impetus for the construction of what Paley himself termed his 'system'. As he put it:

The first question comprises the credibility of the Christian religion, together with the presumptive proofs of a future retribution from the light of nature. The second question comprises the province of morality. Both questions are too much for one work.[17]

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[14]*Ibid.*, 4-6.
[15]*Ibid.*, especially the Preface ix-xiv.
[16]*Ibid.*, 41.
[17]*Ibid.*, 41-2.

This proved to be a programmatic statement out of which was to flow Paley's *Horae Paulinae* of 1790 and *Evidences of Christiantity* of 1794 dealing with the credibility of the Christian religion on the one hand, and his *Natural Theology* of 1802, dealing with presumptive proofs of a future retribution from the light of nature on the other. Thus Paley sought to answer the first great question.

But how was the second great question to be answered? Answering this question constituted the task of Paley's system of ethics, and thus was the burden of his *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*.

4. Paley's solution

Paley's solution introduces another leading idea in his ethical thought: namely, the principle of utility or expedience.[18] This is the principle that Paley believed allowed the movement from the general considerations of natural theology and the general rules of revealed theology to the practicalities of actual obedience to the will of God.

In his *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, Paley offers an analogy of the position the moral agent is in. He compares the moral agent to an ambassador.[19] Like an ambassador, the moral agent (on analogy, the Christian) has two ways of coming at a decision in the service of his sovereign. One way is to refer to any written instructions (on analogy, the Scriptures). The other is to judge what is the master's probable will in particular instances not covered by written instructions. In this latter situation, the ambassador must rely on what he knows of the sovereign's disposition and intentions (on analogy, what the believer gleans by the light of nature).

As suggested above, the principle of expediency or utility (which estimates actions on the basis of their tendency to promote or diminish happiness) is the stratagem Paley employs in making the move from God's declared will in the Bible to discerning that will for cases outside the Bible's

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[18]*Ibid.*, 47-9.
[19]*Ibid.*, 42-3.

range.[20]   Given the knowledge of God's character provided by natural theology (that he is benevolent as his contrivances show).   Paley is confident that like an ambassador he can 'assume with great probability how his master would have him act on most occasions that arise'.[21]

For examples of Paley's method of moral deliberation at work, let us consider - albeit briefly - his treatment of the issues of Christian Sabbath observance and submission to civil government.

As regards the Sabbath issue, Paley devotes several chapters of his *Principles* to it. He begins by appealing to reason in an attempt to show that 'a day of rest' benefits all mankind, especially the labouring classes. Further, such a day of rest allows opportunity for 'men of all ranks and professions' to participate in the external offices of the Christian religion, as well as indulge in religious meditation and inquiry if they wish. Lastly, a day of rest 'affords respite to the toil of brutes'. The needs of the wider creation have their place.[22] The appeal to the utility of such a day of rest features in his discussion, although he acknowledges that reasoning alone cannot show why Sunday is to be preferred to any other day as the day of rest, nor why the ratio of rest to work should be one in seven, rather than one in six, or even eight.[23]

Next, Paley considers sabbatical institutions in terms of Christian morality. But before they can be so considered two preliminary questions must be asked.[24] First, whether the command to institute the Jewish Sabbath applies to Christians? Secondly, whether Christ gave any new command on the subject, or whether by the authority or example of the apostles any other day took the place of the Jewish Sabbath?

Paley's answer to the first question is negative. The command to institute the Sabbath was addressed to Israel and cannot be extended to Christians. It could be if it were a

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[20]Paley's concept of happiness is much richer than the mere surplus of pleasure over pain. See his discussion in *ibid.*, 14-27.

[21]*Ibid.*, 43.

[22]J. Paxton, *Works*, II 287-8.

[23]*Ibid.*

[24]*Ibid.*, 288.

creation ordinance, for then it would be binding on all as creatures. But from his reading of the biblical evidence Paley concluded that the Sabbath was a peculiar Jewish institution, even though of divine origin.[25]

As for the Genesis 2:3 text, that connects the hallowing of the seventh day with God's own rest, and to which some appealed as providing creation-based authority for on-going Sabbath observance, Paley argues - albeit somewhat obscurely - that the connection is an historical, rather than a theological one. This text, in his estimate, does not speak of the appointment of Sabbath observance, but simply gives the reason why it was the *seventh* day God hallowed: namely, it was on that day God rested because he had completed his work.[26] Likewise in the version of the Decalogue found in the Book of Exodus, the institution of the Sabbath is connected with the creation story simply to answer the question why it was one day in seven to be observed, rather than some other ratio.[27] How Paley came by this privileged information he does not say.

Paley also answers the second question in the negative. Christ gave no new command on the subject, nor did the apostles either by word or example. What the New Testament does make plain is that on the first day of the week (or the Lord's Day), Christians are to gather for public worship. But cessation from labour is neither commanded by Christ nor by his apostles. Indeed, Paley argues, the institution of a weekly Sabbath presupposes that Christianity is the religion of the state. This was hardly the position the apostles were in. Furthermore, there is insufficient evidence even to show that Christians gathered on the first day of the week in commemoration of the resurrection, although Paley thought it

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[25]*Ibid.*, 294.

[26]*Ibid.*, 300-1.

[27]*Ibid.*, 291. Richard Bauckham suggests that Paley viewed Genesis 2:3 as proleptic of Exodus 16. However, Paley's argument appears headed in a different direction and without the theological insight that Bauckham indicates. See R. J. Bauckham's essay 'Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition' in D. A. Carson (ed.), *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids, 1982), 331.

not improbable.[28] Paley draws his discussion to a close with this conclusion:

The *assembling* upon the first day of the week for the purposes of public worship and religious instruction, is a law of Christianity of Divine appointment; the *resting* on that day from our employment longer than we are detained from them by attendance upon these assemblies, is to Christians an ordinance of human institution; binding nevertheless upon the conscience of every individual of a country in which a weekly sabbath is established, for the sake of the beneficial purposes which the public and regular observance of it promotes . . .

Paley then adds tentatively:

and recommended perhaps in some degree to the Divine approbation, by the resemblance it bears to what God was pleased to make a solemn part of the law which he delivered to the people of Israel, and by its subserviency to many of the same uses[29] (original emphases).

So, then, for Paley a clear distinction is to be made between the first day of the week as opportunity for Christian gatherings (which has New Testament warrant), and for rest (which can be justified on the grounds of its benefits, or utility to that end). For Paley there was no Christian Sabbath as such.[30]

On the matter of practicalities, Paley argues that three uses may be proposed for the religious observance of Sunday:

i.   To facilitate attendance upon public worship.

ii.   To meliorate the condition of the labouring classes of mankind, by regular and seasonable returns of rest.

iii.   By a general suspension of business and amusement, to invite and enable persons of every description to apply their time and thoughts to subjects appertaining to their salvation.[31]

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[28]*Ibid.*, 296-7.

[29]*Ibid.*, 301-2.

[30]Paley is inconsistent here. On the one hand he appears to imply that for a Christian Sabbath there needs to be some divine command to warrant it, but then argues there is no command; whilst on the other hand he entitles one of his chapters 'By What Acts and Omissions the Duty of the Christian Sabbath is Violated'. Compare, *ibid.*, 286 and 302.

[31]*Ibid.*, 304.

The first use has the warrant of primitive Christian practice, as does the second (for example, Irenaeus). The third has utility on its side: namely, 'that it is unsafe to trifle with scruples and habits that have a beneficial tendency, although founded merely in custom.' Paley's great fear is that any disrespect for Sunday observance (for example, as shown by gambling or gaming on that day) may actually spring from 'a secret contempt of the Christian faith' and help 'diminish a reverence for religion in others'.[32]   Paley was ever the apologist.

Paley's appeal to the utility principle is even more clearly seen in his treatment of the question of submission to civil government. The Archdeacon, having rejected any social contract theory of civil obedience, states his general position that 'the only ground of the subject's obligation is THE WILL OF GOD, AS COLLECTED FROM EXPEDIENCY' (original emphases).[33] In this light, he concludes that if the established government cannot be resisted or changed without public inconvenience (therefore, with unhappiness), then it is God's will that the government be obeyed (the interests of the whole society require it). His premises are that it is God's will that human happiness be promoted, that civil society conduces to that end, and that civil societies can not survive unless the interests of the whole bind the parts.[34]   Although this argument would appear to lead to the maintenance of the status quo (for how can a government be resisted or changed without some measure, however small, of public inconvenience?) he quickly adds a qualification. Once the principle of expediency is admitted, then the justice of a particular case of resistance becomes a matter of computing 'the quantity of danger and grievance on the one side, and of the probability and expense of adressing it on the other.'[35]

Significantly, the appeal to Scripture plays no substantive role in Paley's argument. For he was convinced that 'as to the *extent* of our civil rights and obligations,

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[32]*Ibid.*, 302-4 for the substance of this paragraph.
[33]*Ibid.*, 333.
[34]*Ibid.*, 334.
[35]*Ibid.*

Christianity hath left us where she found us' (original emphases). Hence, the Christian must rely upon whatever may be 'deduced from the law and religion of nature'. He does consider two important New Testament passages, Romans 12:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-16, but only to show that they do not challenge his position, when 'fairly interpreted'.[36]

The total argument (for obedience or resistance) exhibits a number of 'utilitarian' commonplaces: happiness as a goal, the utility or expedience principle, a concern for the quantification and calculation of profit and loss. Significantly, however, in the course of the argument Paley makes it patently clear that it is the will of God which 'universally determines our duty'. For Paley, the principle of utility or expedience is not part of the definition of the good, but rather an epistemic criterion for discerning the will of God.

This feature of Paley's ethical theory has not always been understood.[37] And indeed, if a number of his assertions are read out of context they appear to point in a very different direction. For example, statements such as 'whatever is expedient is right', and again, 'It is the utility of any moral rule alone, which constitutes the obligation of it.'[38] But such statements when read in the context of his overall argument make it plain that Paley is concerned not with definitions, but with epistemology: not with what is the good, but rather with 'how is it to be recognized'.[39]

In the sum, then, our two examples - that of Sabbath observance and submission to civil government - show Paley solving his problem of how to discover the will of God. In the case of Sabbath observance, since the Scriptures provide much material, the argument from utility has a low profile in the overall discussion. However, the reverse is the case with

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[36]*Ibid.*, 340 for the substance of this paragraph.

[37]A fact recognized in the last century. See Lord Neaves, *A Lecture on the Character and Writings of William Paley*, D.D. (London, 1873)   21.

[38]J. Paxton, *Works*, II 47.

[39]Again, a fact recognized as early as 1823. See R. Lynam's introduction to *The Works of William Paley*, D.D. (London, 1823) xvii-xviii.

regard to submission to civil government. On this topic it is the appeal to reason and the principle of utility that dominate.[40]

5. Paley's Significance

For our purposes Paley's system of ethics highlights three enduring problems of philosophical and theological interest.

First: given Paley's divine command theory of morality - namely, that 'the good is what God wills' rather than, 'God wills what is good', moral predicates such as 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong' are replaceable by 'what God wills' or 'what God approves of' on the one hand, and 'what God forbids' or 'what God disapproves of' on the other. This then raises the logical problem of tautology.[41] For to say that 'God wills what is good' is to say 'God wills what he wills'. We are none the wiser as to why any such willing is to be considered good in the first place. Divine command theories, like Paley's, give every appearance of arbitrariness.[42]

Secondly: given Paley's adoption of the principle of utility or expediency, a procedural problem arises. How are the best consequences for happiness of any action or class of actions to be calculated - remembering that Paley himself uses the language of calculation? This appears to be a problem endemic in any utilitarian theory (whether theological or secular) that attempts to introduce some notion of quantification into moral decision making.

Thirdly: given Paley's recognition that the putatively sacred text of the Bible deals with general rules for life rather than immediately applicable prescriptions, a hermeneutical problem emerges. Just how is the interpretative transition to be made from the ancient text (Paley's Bible) to contemporary situations? Or, to use the terminology of Hans Georg Gadamer,

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[40]Compare *ibid.*, 286-302 on the Sabbath with 325-48 on submission to civil government.

[41]On this difficulty in general see John Kleinig, 'Moral Schizophrenia and Christian Ethics', *Reformed Theological Review*, 40 (1981) 12.

[42]Because of Paley's understanding of the divine will as definer of right and wrong, J. S. Mill could regard him rightly as only an 'equivocal utilitarian'. See A. Ryan, *Utilitarianism*, 19. Importantly, in Paley's theological utilitarianism, the adjective really counts.

how is the fusion of the two horizons - that of the text and that of the reader - to be effected?[43]

To Paley's credit, he recognized all three difficulties. For example, with regard to divine command theory, he saw both the problem of tautology and the attendant problem of moral predicates thereby rendered vacuous when applied to God. In his own words:

But if the Divine Will determine the distinction of right and wrong, what else is it but an identical proposition, to say of God, what he acts *right*? or how is it possible to conceive even that he should act *wrong*? yet these assertions are intelligible and significant (original emphases).[44]

His own answer was to suggest that since we know (given natural theology) that God wills the happiness of his creatures, then the divine conduct itself could be assessed in that light.[45] But this is hardly an impressive move. The question remains begged as to what makes the divine will itself praiseworthy.[46] That the divine Being behaves consistently is no real answer.

As for the matter of calculation, Paley's answer here was to adopt as his procedure what these days is termed rule rather than act utilitarianism.[47] Thus Paley looked to general rules that promoted rather than diminished happiness, and referred classes of actions to these.[48] But this gives a generality to his discussion which militates against his intention to provide a system of ethics applicable to contemporary life. He acknowledges as much when, in the

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[43]See the discussion of Gadamer's views by A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Exeter, 1980) *passim*.

[44]J. Paxton (ed.), *Works*, II 55.

[45]*Ibid.*, 55-6.

[46]A possible move here for the divine command theorist is to modify his claim and to suggest that consideration of the divine nature needs to play a role in moral discussion, and not just a consideration of the divine will abstracted from that nature. A. F. Holmes, for example, makes this move in *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions* (Downers Grove, 1984) 76-7. Also see J. Idziak (ed.), *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (New York, 1979), especially her introduction.

[47]For a discussion of the differences between act and rule utilitarianism see J. P. Thiroux, *Philosophy: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1985) 205-6.

[48]J. Paxton (ed.), *Works*, II 47-55.

course of a discussion of the problem of calculations in his *Evidences of Christianity* he observes that in the formation of such general rules 'there is ample room for the exercise of wisdom, judgement and prudence'.[49] The question raised then is just what is the point of speaking of calculations and quantification if such an immeasurable factor as wisdom, for example, is involved?

As regards the hermeneutical problem, Paley rejected any naive biblicism. As he put it, 'whoever expects to find the Scriptures a specific direction for every moral doubt that arises, looks for more than he will meet with.'[50] However, given his solution to the second problem above (that of calculation), if the text of Scripture offers only general moral considerations, then what kind of confidence can Paley have when attempting to discover with precision the divine intentions outside of the biblical revelation? This difficulty is best seen in the way that on the one hand Paley can assert that revelation brings certainty in morality, while on the other hand he can argue on analogy (like the case of the ambassador) that the moral agent operating beyond the written instructions has only probabilities to go on.[51]

The hermeneutical difficulty faces any moral agent who sees a putatively sacred text to shape his or her moral life when historical and cultural change make compliance, *au pied de lettre*, an impossibility. Paley was no exception.

On a more positive note, it is worth observing that Paley conducted his moral deliberations with eternity in mind. He took Christian eschatology with the utmost seriousness. In this, his ethical system preserves an authentic New Testament accent.[52] Indeed, as Leslie Stephen rightly remarked, for Paley heaven and hell were 'the weights which work the great machine of the universe, in so far as it has any moral significance.'[53]

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[49]*Ibid.,* I 220.

[50]*Ibid.,* II 4-6.

[51]*Ibid.,* compare 5-6 with 42-4.

[52]See W. Barclay, *Ethics in a Permissive Society* (London, 1971) 52-53.

[53]L. Stephen, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* II (London, 1902).

Conclusions

Paley's theological utilitariansim is a museum piece as far as the history of ideas is concerned. He was the end point of a particular trajectory in eighteenth-century moral philosophy. And the particular anxieties that informed his ethical system - namely, how to survive the Last Judgement - are an embarrassment to many modern theologians, for whom the divine love with its mercy, rather than the divine righteousness with its wrath, is the key attribute of God.[54]

Yet Paley's system of ethics as found in his *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* is of no mere antiquarian interest. For Paley wanted to know the good in order to conform his life to it, and for him - given his divine command theory - that meant knowing the will of God and obeying it.

However, as we have seen, the system of ethics that both his anxiety about the Last Judgement and his desire to know God's will gave rise to, itself exhibits problems of enduring importance and interest. These are the problems of tautological definition in divine command theories, the calculation of utility in utilitarian theories, and the hermeneutical problem confronting those who seek to live by ancient texts. That Paley'   s own solutions would convince few today does not alter the fact that he saw the problems. And the recognition of genuine problems for thought and life - it can be argued - is a beginning to philosophical wisdom, even as the fear of the Lord, who is also judge is the beginning of biblical wisdom.[55]

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[54]On modern embarrassment over the doctrine of the Last Judgement see G. Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* (Clarendon, 1974).

[55]See N. Capaldi and L.E. Navia (eds.), *Journeys Through Philosophy: A Classical Introduction* (New York, 1977) 11-18.