

Henry Sidgwick and his pupils, Bertrand RUSSELL and G.E. MOORE, being done at the same time, was to establish conceptual analysis as a dominant concern of twentieth-century philosophers.

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John G. Slater
(with an addition by W. Sweet)

SIDGWICK, Henry (1838–1900)

Henry Sidgwick was born on 31 May 1838 in Skipton, Yorkshire and died in Terling, Essex on 28 August 1900. He was educated at home and at schools in Bristol and Blackheath. In 1852 he enrolled at Rugby where he came under the influence of Edward White Benson, then assistant-master and later Sidgwick's brother-in-law and Archbishop of Canterbury. At Benson's urging he entered Trinity College, Cambridge in 1855. As an undergraduate, he became a member of the clandestine discussion society the 'Apostles', an experience which, he notes, 'had more effect on my intellectual life than any one thing that happened to me afterwards' (Sidgwick and Sidgwick, 1906, p. 34). He graduated in 1859 with a first in the Classical Tripos and as 33rd Wrangler in the Mathematics Tripos, in addition winning the first Chancellor's Medal. After graduation he was elected to a coveted Trinity Fellowship. Originally appointed as an assistant tutor in classics in 1859, he was made lecturer in moral sciences in 1867 (and again in 1869), then praelector of moral and political philosophy in 1875 and Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy in 1883 (a position which he held until shortly before his death).

Sidgwick's writings are wide-ranging, including history, poetry, literature, education, legislation and politics, though his most important contributions are in philosophy. In his lifetime he published five books, *The Methods of Ethics* (1874), *The Principles of Political Economy* (1883), *Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers* (1886), *The Elements of Politics* (1891) and *Practical Ethics* (1898), in addition to many articles and reviews. Five more books were published posthumously. He devoted much energy to the investigation of psychical phenomena, the Society for Psychical Research (which he co-founded in 1882) and the reform of higher education. With Eleanor Mildred Sidgwick (née Balfour), whom he married in 1876, he promoted psychical research and higher education for women, one

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result of which was the founding of Newnham College at Cambridge in the early 1870s. He received honorary degrees from the universities of Oxford, Budapest, Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews.

Sidgwick described the period of 1859–69 as his years of ‘storm and stress’. During this time he began to doubt the truth of Christianity. This led him to study Hebrew, Arabic, theology, biblical exegesis and history. These studies did not remedy his doubts. By the middle of the decade he devoted himself entirely to the study of philosophy, but in 1869 his misgivings about the tenets of the Church of England could be suppressed no longer, and he resigned both his lectureship and his fellowship on the grounds that he could no longer subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of faith, then a legal requirement of all college fellows. The resignation was financially difficult but intellectually fruitful: it was while struggling with his decision that he went through much of the thinking that ended up in *The Methods of Ethics* (1874; 7th edn, 1907).

This book, which went through five editions during his lifetime, is Sidgwick’s masterpiece. It is one of the very best treatises written on ethics. The difficulty at the core of ethics is that in reasoning about what to do, most of us appeal to a ‘loose combination or confusion of methods’ (1907, p. 102). This delivers plural and conflicting reasons for action, leaving us wondering what we ought, all things considered, to do. To remedy this situation, the moral philosopher ‘seeks unity of principle, and consistency of method’ (p. 6).

A method of ethics is defined as ‘any rational procedure by which we determine what individual human beings ‘ought’ – or what is ‘right’ for them – to do, or seek to realize by voluntary action’ (p. 1). Sidgwick sees three methods as worthy of consideration, rational egoism, dogmatic intuitionism and utilitarianism. Rational egoism is the view that an agent is rational insofar as he seeks to maximize his own happiness, hedonistically construed. Dogmatic intuitionism holds that ‘certain kinds

of actions are right and reasonable in themselves, apart from their consequences; – or rather with a merely partial consideration of consequences, from which other consequences admitted to be possibly good or bad are definitely excluded’ (p. 200). Utilitarianism maintains that an agent acts rightly insofar as she performs that action, out of the range of actions open to her, which maximizes aggregate happiness, hedonistically construed. He finds these implicit in the common consciousness of humankind, and his aim is to analyse these different methods.

The main argument of the book is that elements of dogmatic intuitionism can be reconciled with utilitarianism, which rests on a set of fundamental intuitions, that both rational egoism and utilitarianism represent equally plausible yet rival accounts of what we have most reason to do, and that therefore there is a ‘Dualism of Practical Reason’. The work also includes (in Book I) significant discussions of meta-ethics, the importance of the problem of free will to ethics, and the relation of pleasure and desire, among others. Sidgwick defends a non-naturalist meta-ethics. He rejects psychological hedonism, the idea that solving the problem of free will is of great significance to ethics, and empiricism, opting instead for epistemic (rational) intuitionism – the view that fundamental moral requirements are self-evident and therefore known or justified non-inferentially.

The main line of argument in the *Methods* begins with an assessment of dogmatic intuitionism, where Sidgwick implicitly attacks the ethical framework found in William Whewell’s *Elements of Morality*. This view combines epistemic intuitionism with the position that the rules that specify the kinds of actions that are right are taken from common sense morality, and include requirements of justice, truth-telling, benevolence, among others. After an exhaustive survey of this view in Book III of the *Methods* he concludes that there are no intuitions or self-evident principles to be found in common sense morality (p. 360). The problem is that the rules

of common sense morality are unclear, or clear but disputed, or in conflict with each other, and therefore do not satisfy the four conditions of self-evidence. These conditions require that for a proposition to be self-evident it must be 'clear and precise', 'ascertained by careful reflection', consistent with other propositions considered self-evident, and that disagreement regarding its truth be absent or explained away (pp. 338–41). At best, the rules and principles of common sense morality provide adequate guidance to typical people in typical circumstances.

Out of his rejection of dogmatic intuitionism emerges Sidgwick's positive view that the only acceptable form of intuitionism is philosophical intuitionism, the view that there are 'one or more principles ... absolutely and undeniably true and evident' (p. 102). On one (disputed) reckoning there are five philosophical intuitions, the most important of which seem to support utilitarianism, namely, that 'as a rational being I am bound to aim at good generally ... not merely at a particular part of it' (p. 382) and that 'Happiness (when explained to mean a sum of pleasures) ... [is] the sole ultimate end' (p. 402). These principles are abstract, making it difficult to infer from them what we ought to do in particular cases. Nevertheless, the apprehension of these fundamental truths functions as the 'permanent basis of the common conviction that the fundamental precepts of morality are essentially reasonable' (p. 383). Whatever the case may be, Sidgwick holds that 'Utilitarianism is ... the final form into which Intuitionism tends to pass, when the demand for really self-evident first principles is rigorously pressed' (p. 388; see also pp. 406–7).

This is not the only argument that Sidgwick provides for utilitarianism. In Book IV he sets out to supply a Millian proof of utilitarianism, i.e. considerations determining the mind to accept it. The argument that he uses to bring the dogmatic intuitionist over to utilitarianism 'allows the validity, to a certain extent, of the maxims already accepted, and on the other hand shows them to be not absolutely valid, but

needing to be controlled and completed by some more comprehensive principle' (p. 420). He then shows that the dogmatic intuitionist should, in the light of what she believes, accept utilitarianism because it

sustains the general validity of the current moral judgements [of common sense], and thus supplements the defects which reflection finds in the intuitive recognition of their stringency; and at the same time affords a principle of synthesis, and a method for binding the unconnected and occasionally conflicting principles of common moral reasoning into a complete and harmonious system (p. 422).

The precise nature of this argument remains obscure as does its relationship to Sidgwick's intuitionist grounding of utilitarianism. To some, the proof involves granting initial epistemic credibility to common sense morality and showing that utilitarianism's ability to capture and explain it provides us with further reason to accept utilitarianism. It seems unlikely that he grants the rules of common sense this status, however, since he seems to hold that the rules of common sense morality require 'rational justification' (p. 383) and that 'the only moral intuitions which sound philosophy can accept as ultimately valid are those which at the same time provide the only possible philosophical basis of the Utilitarian creed' ('Professor Calderwood on Intuitionism in Morals', *Mind*, os vol. 1 [1879], p. 564). If we reject the claim that common sense morality has initial credibility, then it seems plausible to see the proof as an *ad hominem* argument against common sense morality, which helps to explain away disagreement about Sidgwick's philosophical intuitions.

Although Sidgwick thought he was able to move the exponent of common sense morality over to utilitarianism, he felt he had no such luck with the rational egoist. The difficulty is that it cannot be established for the rational egoist that 'the difference between his own happiness and another's happiness is not *for him* all-important'

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(p. 420). As a result, we are forced to admit that because both utilitarianism and rational egoism are equally plausible but offer conflicting requirements of rationality, there is a dualism at the heart of reason. The aim of the *Methods* is to find a decision procedure that does not generate 'conflicting conclusions' of the kind that are commonly arrived at by the common man in ethical deliberation. It fails to do this, however, and so it fails at its central task. At this point, Sidgwick was content to turn himself over to psychical research in the hope that it would demonstrate the existence of a moral governor who would make it in one's interest to act in accordance with morality.

The doctrines that Sidgwick defended were the subject of much controversy during his lifetime. Some of the most formidable critics were the British idealists F.H. BRADLEY and T.H. GREEN. Both Bradley and Green rejected hedonism in favour of the view that the good consists in self-realization or self-development, a position of which Sidgwick made short shrift in *Methods of Ethics* (pp. 89–92). The disputes were not only axiological in nature, there were also sharp disagreements over the foundations of morality, the practical relevance of moral philosophy, the relevance of metaphysical doctrines to ethical doctrines, and the relationship between the demands of morality and self-interest, among others.

Sidgwick's most explosive confrontation was with Bradley. In 1876 he reviewed Bradley's *Ethical Studies* in the first volume of *Mind*. He argues that Bradley's work is at times 'suggestive' but that 'just at the *nodes* of his argument, he lapses provokingly into mere debating-club rhetoric [and that] ... really penetrating criticism, especially in ethics, requires a patient effort of intellectual sympathy which Mr. Bradley has never learned to make, and a tranquility of temper which he seems incapable of maintaining' (1876, p. 545). He directed his attention, not to Bradley's arguments against hedonism, since he did not think these especially interesting or novel, but to his arguments in favour of self-realization as the ultimate good, and his

basic moral outlook. He argues that the basic notion of self-realization is unfit for the role Bradley wants it to play because of lack of specificity and clarity. He is especially puzzled by the suggestion that one's own good consists in the fulfilment of the requirements of common sense morality. In the next volume of *Mind* Bradley shot back with a response to the review, claiming that Sidgwick failed to interpret him properly and that he ought to have spent more time in the review defending his own ideas. Sidgwick replied very briefly, but withdrew no major claims. The exchange is on the whole quite unfortunate. It is characterized by a total lack of sympathy.

This lack persisted in Bradley's more substantive response to Sidgwick, his privately published pamphlet of 1877, *Mr. Sidgwick's Hedonism*. Bradley takes issue with a number of claims in *The Methods of Ethics*. He argues that the work fails to furnish us with clear accounts of reason and practical reason. He attacks both hedonism and Sidgwick's defence of it. In the latter attack, he agrees that only states of consciousness are valuable but wonders whether pleasure is the only such state that is intrinsically valuable. He devotes considerable attention to an assault on the idea that there is a science of ethics. He objects to what he calls 'casuistry', or ethical reasoning that consists in deriving what we ought to do in particular circumstances from general moral principles. The problem is that Sidgwick's casuistry lapses into a kind of subjectivism. For a moral code to guide one in practice it must 'attempt to get every complication within its clauses' (*Collected Essays and Reviews*, vol. I, p. 106). In this case, the morality of an action will depend, at least in part, on the differences between the specific circumstances, nature and character of moral agents; for example, one may permissibly perform an action if one has reason to believe it will be kept secret, that it would be wrong for one to perform in public. But the inclusion of such factors in determining the morality of an action undermines the objectivity of morality, since the 'attempt to get every qualification

inside the code leaves in the end *nothing* outside, so that the objective criterion becomes merely subjective, and will justify *any* action whatever' (p. 107). It is far from clear how the premises of this argument support its conclusion, but it connects with Bradley's claim that it is not the business of morality to tell us what we ought to do in particular situations because moral philosophy has 'nothing whatever to do with practice' (p. 114). Sidgwick did not respond to this or to Bradley's other arguments directly, and he all but completely ignored the pamphlet in revising subsequent editions of the *Methods*.

Sidgwick's disagreements with T.H. Green, his former Rugby schoolmate and sometime friend, ranged over a broader range of topics and were more interesting and more fruitful than his exchanges with Bradley. In the posthumously published 'The Philosophy of T.H. Green' (1901) and elsewhere, he takes issue with Green's metaphysics. In his *Prolegomena to Ethics*, Green writes that nature is an 'all-inclusive system of relations' (sect. 27), and because relations can only result from some sort of intelligent, active agency, the existence of this system implies that there is a unifying, self-objectifying, self-conscious agent that is the source of the whole of nature. This agent performs both this unifying role, and a role in making sense of the possibility of radical error in the individual, finite minds that unify the objects of their own experience and that are part of this one unifying, self-objectifying self-conscious agent. Sidgwick's main objection to this view concerns Green's claim that this God-like self-conscious agent is not part of the system of relations; rather, it is non-natural, that is, outside time, space and natural causal relations. He argues that Green is unable to sustain this claim in part because his own view requires that the self-conscious unifier have causal powers: it is after all putatively the *source* of nature, and it 'renders all relations possible' (sect. 27). Without such powers the unifying consciousness is explanatorily impotent.

Green thinks that this 'divine mind' provides the basis for his view that one's true good

consists in self-realization or self-development, where this seems to mean that the good consists in the realization or perfection of certain definite capabilities. We have these capabilities because the one divine mind 'with the constant characteristic of self-consciousness and self-objectification ... gradually reproduces itself in the human soul. In virtue of this principle in him man has definite capabilities, the realization of which ... forms his true good' (sect. 180). Green says that he is unsure regarding what the capabilities are (sect. 180), though he seems to think that they are the capabilities that make us rational agents (sect. 176), akin to those we see partially realized in 'recognized excellences of character and conduct' (sect. 358). Sidgwick is less than sanguine that Green's metaphysical claims support his ethical ideal. In 'The Philosophy of T.H. Green', he argues that it is difficult to see how Green's ethical ideal can be derived from his notion of a combining agency if it is conceived of 'as having no character except that self-given in unifying the manifold of nature: for this unification is surely equally effected in the lives of sinners and in the lives of saints' (pp. 26–7). He makes this complaint repeatedly in his writings on Green, and it constitutes a major methodological difference between the two. *Contra* Green, Sidgwick conceives of ethics as autonomous or freestanding, and therefore not based on anything more fundamental, for example, metaphysics or natural science.

In his posthumously published *The Ethics of T.H. Green, Mr. Herbert Spencer, and J. Martineau*, Sidgwick engages in a more sustained attack on Green's theory of ethics. He targets, among other things, Green's account of desire, volition, intellect and freedom, his view of one's true good as self-realization and the main objections to his brand of hedonism (as distinct from Green's objections to Mill's brand of hedonism and psychological hedonism). He complains about the vagueness, obscurity and indefiniteness of the notion of self-realization. Green appears to move back and forth between thinking of self-realization as consisting in one's

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capabilities broadly construed to include those realized in artistic, scientific and other cultural endeavours and thinking of self-realization as consisting in the realization of one's moral capabilities only (e.g. virtue). Sidgwick notes that Green appears to opt for the first account, but that if so, Green cannot (despite his claims to the contrary) help admitting a dualism of practical reason, a conflict between one's own perfection and that of others, since the objects that contribute to self-realization in this sense can be competed for in our world.

Sidgwick devotes considerable attention to Green's objections to hedonism, some of which he answers effectively. In Book IV of the *Prolegomena to Ethics*, Green notes some agreement with utilitarianism in so far as it is considered a criterion of morality that may include a non-hedonistic conception of the ultimate good (sect. 356). He rejects hedonistic utilitarianism for a number of reasons. He argues that hedonism cannot be the true good because pleasure is transitory, not abiding or permanent, that the greatest sum of pleasures is unattainable and unpractical as a criterion of morality, because 'the sum of pleasures plainly admits of indefinite increase, with the continued existence of sentient beings capable of pleasure' (sect. 359), and that there are liabilities associated with hedonistic calculations. In addition, he launches an intuitive attack on hedonism, arguing that things other than pleasure have value (sect. 357).

Sidgwick rejects the claim that a good needs to be abiding – indeed, for him not even Green's own view of the good can satisfy this demand – and in his view the notion of the greatest sum of pleasure is as clear as it needs to be for practice because in the cases in which we act happiness and unhappiness are 'capable of being made greater or less' (*Lectures on the Ethics of T.H. Green*, p. 112). He is less persuasive when it comes to addressing the issue of calculation. He merely remarks that hedonism is no worse and is in fact much better on this score than Green's own view. He addresses some of Green's arguments against him in particular by

clarifying his position, especially his rejection of the idea that states of consciousness other than pleasure are not intrinsically desirable. However, Sidgwick supplies no new arguments for hedonism. His view remains that hedonism is the correct axiology because 'nothing but pleasure appears to the reflective mind to be good in itself, without reference to an ulterior end; and in particular, reflection on the notion of the most esteemed qualities of character and conduct shows that they contain an implicit reference to some other and further good' (p. 107). It is surprising that this disagreement between Green and Sidgwick did not even dampen the latter's commitment to hedonism, especially in the light of the kinds of conditions he thinks philosophical intuitions must satisfy.

Sidgwick continued to champion hedonistic utilitarianism despite the critical reaction to it and the dualism that he articulated at the conclusion of the *Methods*. He put the doctrine to work in his writings on both political economy and politics. *The Principles of Political Economy* is a brilliant effort at constructing principles of distributive justice based on the principle of utility, while *The Elements of Politics* aims to determine the right constitution and function of government on roughly utilitarian grounds (together with a few assumptions about the nature of human beings in general). In the posthumously published *Philosophy, Its Scope and Relations*, he outlines the ambitions of philosophy and his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant* provide us with his insights into his attitude towards Kant's ethics and epistemology.

Sidgwick spent much of his life advocating for moral and social improvement, evidenced by his commitment to various ethical societies and social causes, including university and educational reform. His reflections on practical ethics are collected in the last book published during his lifetime, *Practical Ethics*. His view is that resolving practical moral issues seems possible only if we 'give up altogether the idea of getting to the bottom of things, arriving at agreement on the first principles of duty or the Summum

Bonum' (p. 5). He maintains that appeal to controversial fundamentals is a problematic way to approach practical ethics. He holds that in cases of disagreement about fundamentals peaceful coexistence is possible only if we adopt the 'spirit of justice' and seek compromise, not enforcement of our own disputed principles. The mark of a person embodying the 'spirit of justice' is a willingness to take an impartial stance to co-operate and forge lasting practical policies, 'to compromise ... even when the adjustment [policy] thus attained can only be rough, and far removed from what either party regards as ideally equitable' (p. 61). The spirit of justice requires 'sympathy, and the readiness to imagine oneself in another's place and look at things from his point of view; and ... the intelligent apprehension of common interests ... in this way we may hope to produce a disposition to compromise' (p. 61). This may in the end serve as a fitting response to Bradley's rather poorly justified claim that moral philosophy and ethics are irrelevant to what we ought to do in practice. Whatever the case may be, Sidgwick's deep theoretical ethical disagreements with the idealists did not close off co-operation with them in the pursuit of social and practical moral reform that some of them (including Bernard BOSANQUET and Green) sought.

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SINCLAIR, May (or Mary Amelia St Clair: 1863–1946)

Mary Amelia St Clair (she did not use the name 'May' until her thirties) was born in Higher Bebington on the Wirral Peninsula on 24 August 1863 and died in Buckinghamshire on 14 November 1946. She was the youngest daughter of a shipowner. When in 1872 her father's business failed, the family relocated to Ilford in Essex. She was educated mostly at home, but in 1881 she was sent for a year to Cheltenham Ladies College, where many years before her mother had been a pupil. There the Headmistress, Dorothea Beale, encouraged her, as one of the older pupils, in the reading of philosophy, and especially the idealism of Plato, Kant, Fichte, GREEN and CAIRD, in which she found a position to satisfy her philosophical and religious doubts. Her interest in philosophy continued, and during the subsequent fifteen years she published several philosophical articles in the Cheltenham Ladies College magazine. She went on to write two books in defence of

idealism. She never married but supported herself by writing – mainly fiction, but also poetry, reviews and translations. She was a supporter of women's suffrage. Her novels were popular (even more so in America than Britain) but have been largely forgotten since her death.

The first of her two philosophical books, *A Defence of Idealism* (1917), which she later described as a 'light-hearted essay' but is nonetheless both well-written and argued, could hardly have appeared at a time less receptive to its doctrines. As its author noted, 'There is a certain embarrassment in coming forward with an Apology for Idealistic Monism at the present moment. You can not be sure whether you are putting in an appearance too late or much too early' (*Defence of Idealism*, p. vii). The book is an attempt on behalf of idealism to deal with the contemporary challenges of vitalism and pragmatism, and is marked throughout by a strong interest in psychoanalysis. Though it generated little response, the book was well received, and Sinclair afterwards became a member of the Aristotelian Society. Her second book, *The New Idealism*, which appeared five years later in 1922, is a stronger work which attempts to formulate an idealism that could withstand the 'new realism' of RUSSELL, Whitehead and ALEXANDER, a position for which she had immense respect and which had, she thought, successfully brought out many weaknesses of the older idealism. In particular it taught the need to take space and time seriously and not to dismiss them as mere antinomies. Central to the reconstruction she proposes is a distinction she draws between primary and secondary consciousness; between, on the one hand, the objects, events, relations and conditions which are immediately present in consciousness, and, on the other, further observation, reflection, judgement, inference or belief upon them. The realist is right, she argues, to attempt to draw a line between knower and known, but this must fall not between consciousness and its objects but within consciousness itself, between its primary and secondary forms. Her work was well thought of (Bertrand Russell and J.H.