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SIDGWICK AND ETHICAL INTUITIONISM

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ABSTRACT

SIDGWICK AND ETHICAL INTUITIONISM

By

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Sidgwick is an ethical intuitionist. His search for intuitionist grounds results from the following convictions: that all knowledge is either self-evident or derived from self-evident premises; that moral statements are non-empirical; that fundamental moral statements must be non-tautologous; and that any knowledge of self-evident non-tautologous statements is intuitive.

By "self-evident" he means that such propositions may be known to be true as soon as they are understood; but if necessary their truth can also be argued for. His Intuitive Method of Verification, for instance, includes several ways of "assuring ourselves of the self-evidence of what appears self-evident." And, in practice, for each of the fundamental principles which he calls "apparently self-evident" he advances some kind of support.

Sidgwick's appeals to self-evidence are often linked with appeals to general assent. In such claims that consensus exists, he is sometimes unclear on whose agreement counts, to what extent, and on what topics. These problems are latent

within the Common Sense philosophy of Thomas Reid; they become explicit with Sidgwick because he refuses to sacrifice plausibility for consistency. Some of these problems lessen when the propositions which are supported by such appeals are sorted into epistemological categories, according to their degree of generality and fundamentality.

The remaining problems can be stated more precisely. These involve the relationship between what I call second level propositions (Sidgwick's "apparently self-evident axioms," such as Benevolence) and third level propositions (more specific moral rules, such as truth-telling). For Sidgwick the third level propositions are knowledge claims, but not claims to intuitive knowledge. The second level propositions, however, are possible cases of intuitive knowledge.

Richard Rorty distinguishes two kinds of intuition. In the weak sense, intuitive knowledge refers to propositions capable of being known immediately, but which may also be supported by argument and explication. In the strong sense, intuitive knowledge is noninferential knowledge for which there is no decision procedure.

Sidgwick sought ethical foundations which were intuitive in the weak sense, but his search was unsuccessful. First, he held that any adequate set of ethical axioms would specify an end. But he was unable to explicate the difference

between a rationally chosen end and one which is not. Therefore, his claim that the only ultimate good is the pleasure of sentient beings is a claim to intuitive knowledge only in the strong sense. Secondly, although he claims that certain axioms are apparently self-evident, he also held that these fundamental principles must not conflict. Yet two of his principles, Rational Benevolence and Rational Egoism, do seem to conflict. They do not conflict if the universe is such that benevolence is always rewarded; however, we do not know that this is the case. Since an intuitive statement must be capable of being known without supporting considerations, the claim of at least Rational Egoism or Rational Benevolence to be intuitive in either sense must fail.

Several contemporary writers argue that egoism is not rational. If they are right, Benevolence and Egoism are no longer equal candidates for intuitive knowledge, and their conflict poses no problem. These writers attempt explications of "rationally chosen end" which exclude Egoism. None of the attempts considered here, however, succeeds.

Sidgwick's attempt to find intuitive ethical foundations, although a century old, points to central questions yet unresolved. His intuitionism is not a claim to have found such foundations. It is instead an insistence that such foundations be rationally evaluable.

For my mother, Margaret Anita Andre

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CHAPTER I

SIDGWICK'S CONCEPT OF MORALITY

I. Introduction

"For the supreme rule of aiming at the general happiness, as I had come to see, must rest on a fundamental moral intuition, if I was to recognize it as binding at all."[1] In these words, from the Preface to Methods of Ethics, Henry Sidgwick expresses his unique contribution to philosophical ethics: his attempt to establish utilitarianism on intuitional grounds. Most or all intuitionists before him had been deontologists, fierce in their rejection of utilitarianism. Most or all utilitarians had been empiricists, equally fierce in their rejection of intuited knowledge. My intention in this chapter is to trace the connection between Sidgwick's ethics and his epistemology, to identify the elements in his ethical theory which lead him to intuitionism (and so, trivially, to his rejection of empiricism).

In the several places where Sidgwick concludes that an intuition is necessary as the basis of utilitarianism, he

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[1]Henry Sidgwick, The Methods of Ethics, 7th ed. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1907; reprint ed., New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1966), p. xix.

works from varying premises. Most typically he makes this claim after pointing out that psychological hedonism cannot establish ethical hedonism.[1] At one point he argues from the failure of Mill's argument:

> An aggregate of actual desires, each directed towards a different part of the general happiness, does not constitute an actual desire for the general happiness . . . so that there is a gap in the expressed argument, which can, I think, only be filled by some such proposition as . . . the intuition of Rational Benevolence.[2]

I will argue here that it is Sidgwick's conception of an adequate moral theory which leads him to intuitionism.

Sidgwick believed a number of things about knowledge in general and moral knowledge in particular. (Throughout this dissertation, the words "moral" and "ethical" will be used interchangeably.) Some of his most important beliefs are listed below:

1. All knowledge is either self-evident or derived from self-evident premises.
2. There is (apparent) moral knowledge.
3. Moral statements are non-empirical.
4. Adequate moral axioms are not tautologous.
5. Knowledge which is self-evident, non-tautologous, and non-empirical is intuitive.

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[1] Ibid., p. 98.

[2] Ibid., p. 388.

6. If there is moral knowledge, some moral statements must be known intuitively.

For convenient reference, these beliefs will be referred to as Thesis (1), Thesis (2), and so forth.

The major part of this chapter will support the claim that Sidgwick did in fact hold each of these six beliefs. The quotation which begins this chapter is evidence that Sidgwick held Thesis (6). Thesis (5) is the subject of the fourth chapter of this dissertation and in the present chapter I will simply assume that Thesis (5) represents Sidgwick's belief.

Thesis (1) he shares with many philosophers, empiricists as well as non-empiricists. It represents a foundationalist view of epistemology, and is certainly open to important objection. These objections will not be considered here. In Chapter IV, however, I will discuss the implications of Thesis (1) for Sidgwick's intuitionism, and the difference which its rejection would make.

For the remaining theses--(2), (3), and (4)--I will give textual support and consider some of the tensions and apparent inconsistencies in his position. In several cases these considerations suggest a modified formulation of the thesis under discussion. In each case the thesis results from Sidgwick's concept of an adequate moral theory.

Occasionally I will point out that particular theses account for some significant differences between Sidgwick

and the empiricist utilitarians as well as between Sidgwick and the "evolutionary" ethicists of his day. (Thesis (3), for instance--that moral statements are non-empirical--at least partially explains his rejection of psychological hedonism.)

Following this explication I will attempt to recast this list of theses as an argument, in which Theses (1) through (5)--more exactly, these theses as they have been expanded and reformulated--are premises, and an expanded version of Thesis (6) is the conclusion. The changes necessary to make the argument valid reveal some interesting points about Sidgwick's intuitionism.

Finally, I will point out that the conjunction of these theses is not held by the classical utilitarians Bentham and Mill, nor by David Hume. It is only in conjunction that these premises lead to intuitionism. It follows that one important reason for Sidgwick's epistemological divergence from other utilitarians--for his non-empiricism--is this difference concerning the nature of moral theory.

II. Thesis (2): There is (Apparent) Moral Knowledge

Sidgwick begins the Preface to the First Edition of Methods of Ethics with "the simple assumption . . . that there is something under any given circumstances which it is

right or reasonable to do, and . . . this may be known."[1] This is a straightforward claim about the possibility of moral knowledge. Why then the "apparent" in the initial formulation of this thesis? Sidgwick is, by the end of Methods of Ethics, skeptical about the possibility of moral knowledge. His final position is not entirely clear, but he at least upholds two claims. First, we commonly speak and think as if moral statements are cognitive (i.e., capable of being true or false). Secondly, an adequate moral theory would found moral obligation on true moral statements.

Moral Statements as Cognitive

Numerous passages in Methods reveal his conviction that we regard morality as an object of thought. For instance:

> From a philosophical or epistemological point of view . . . we regard the world of duty and the world of fact alike as objects of thought and--real or supposed--knowledge . . .[2]

The language expressing this attitude is cognitive.

Sidgwick's comparison between the world of duty and the world of fact forces him to consider some obvious objections. In replying to these objections he often sounds as if he is doing more than describing the way we happen to

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[1] Ibid., p. v.

[2] Ibid.

think; he sounds as if he himself believes that all properly formulated moral statements are either true or false.

One objection points to the fundamental differences in our methods of determining truth in the two realms (of duty and of fact). In matters of fact, it might be claimed, truth depends essentially on correspondence between thought and fact; in questions of duty, this is not so. He replies that this difference is less clearcut than it at first appears to be: correspondence between thought and fact is difficult to determine.

> Though error may lie in want of correspondence between Thought and Fact, it can only be shown and ascertained by showing inconsistency between Thought and Thought, i.e., precisely as error is shown in the case of our thought about what ought to be.[1]

A different kind of objection claims that moral propositions are simply expressions of emotion or of approval. Sidgwick responds:

> It is absurd to say that a mere statement of my approbation of truth-speaking is properly given in the proposition 'Truth ought be spoken'; otherwise the fact of another man's disapprobation might equally be expressed by saying 'Truth ought not to be spoken'; and thus we should have two coexistent facts stated in two mutually contradictory propositions.[2]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 27.

This passage, incidentally, is a refutation of a subjectivist view of moral language, a view which became prominent in the mid-twentieth century. Sidgwick's claim that the two propositions "Truth ought to be spoken" and "Truth ought not to be spoken" cannot both be true (because they are contradictory) depends upon the assumption that these moral statements are cognitive.

He offers another argument against the subjectivist claim.

> The peculiar emotion of moral approbation is . . . inseparably bound up with the conviction . . . that the conduct approved is 'really' right--i.e., that it cannot, without error, be disapproved . . .[1]

He then contrasts this "peculiar emotion" with the emotion felt when someone decides that it is right to disregard a rule which one usually obeys (truth-telling, for example). This repugnance is not a moral sentiment, and is a "feeling quite different in kind and degree." The conclusion of this argument is that our feelings are based on a conviction that we have knowledge.

However, the conclusions reached in Methods of Ethics cast doubt on these common convictions about the possibility of moral knowledge. Sidgwick finds that two possibly conflicting fundamental ethical principles are equally rational, and that as a result our apparent knowledge of the pair of

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[1]Ibid., pp. 26-28.

principles is "illusory." The exact scope of the resulting skepticism is debatable, on two accounts--what Sidgwick does hold it to be; and what he should hold it to be. (This issue is discussed at greater length in Chapter V.) Possibly Sidgwick can retain his initial assumption about the possibility of moral knowledge in spite of his own skepticism, for there are cases when the two principles do not conflict. In those cases, perhaps, we know what is right: the action which both principles permit. The assumption of the Preface, however, that "there is something under any given circumstances which it is right or reasonable to do, and . . . this may be known," covers all possible circumstances; this assumption fails. In addition it is plausible to conclude that the skepticism at the end of Methods of Ethics is complete, that Sidgwick no longer holds, or logically can no longer hold, that we have any moral knowledge whatever.

It is better, therefore, to view that "simple assumption" as one which Sidgwick set out to examine. We may assume that moral statements are capable of being true or false, but if moral knowledge is impossible we must abandon that conviction.

Because of Sidgwick's final skepticism, Thesis (2) must be reformulated as a conditional claim:

2. If there is moral knowledge, then some moral statements are known to be true and some moral statements are known to be false.

Moral Knowledge and Moral Obligation

Thesis (2), like Theses (3) and (4), points to an important element in Sidgwick's concept of an adequate moral theory. Sidgwick insists that moral obligation, if it exists at all, must be founded in rationality. His skepticism is the more profound for this basic conviction. Although Sidgwick calls "ought" and "right" "too elementary to admit of any formal definition"[1] he nevertheless characterizes obligation in terms of rationality. This is true even in the case of hypothetical imperatives--of non-moral statements like, "If you want x, you ought to do y." Sidgwick points out that here the "ought" implies the unreasonableness of adopting an end and refusing to adopt the means indispensable to its attainment.[2] This is also true of moral action:

> It can hardly be denied that the recognition of an end as ultimately reasonable involves the recognition of an obligation to do such acts as must conduce to that end.[3]

There are some problems with what Sidgiick means by "ultimately reasonable end"; these are considered in Chapter V. For the time being it is sufficient to note that Sidgwick

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[1] Ibid., p. 32.

[2] Ibid., p. 37.

[3] Ibid., p. 36.

characterizes both the end sought by moral action and the means of reaching that end as subject to rational evaluation.

What has been established so far? From Theses (1) and (2), treated as premises, a conclusion can be drawn. Since other conclusions will be drawn later as further theses are discussed, this will be labeled (C_1).

1. All knowledge is either self-evident or derived from self-evident premises.
2. If there is moral knowledge, then some moral statements are known to be true and some moral statements are known to be false.

C_1. If any moral statements are known to be true, they must be either

   a) self-evidently true, or
   b) derivable from other self-evidently true statements.

The second alternative listed in this intermediate conclusion (derivability from other self-evidently true statements) leads to the discussion of Thesis (3).

III. Thesis (3): No Moral Statement is Empirical

The third thesis in the list is that ethical statements are non-empirical. To the extent that Sidgwick accepts this, he upholds the independence of morality; moral statements are not reducible to statements of physical science nor of

psychology, nor do moral statements follow from any collection of statements from these sciences. This independence of morality must be discussed under two headings: the nature of statements of obligation and the nature of statements about good.

In Sidgwick's own words, "the fundamental notion represented by the word "ought" or "right" . . . [is] essentially different from all notions representing facts of physical or psychical experience."[1] This passage is at first reading much like the famous passage in which Hume notes that statements containing "is" are used, fallaciously, to support statements containing "ought":

> This ought or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation . . . a reason should be given for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others which are entirely different from it.[2]

Sidgwick is more directly addressing the question of reducibility, Hume that of derivability. Perhaps one relationship could be denied while the other is upheld, but Sidgwick denies both. Sidgwick, in the passage quoted above, claims an essential difference between statements of obligation and descriptions of experience.

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[1]Ibid., p. 11.

[2]David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), p. 471.

However, there is another instance in which his position seems less clear. This occurs in a short article written for a symposium on the question, "Is the Distinction Between 'Is' and 'Ought' Ultimate and Irreducible?" His answer is this:

> I think it rash to affirm irreducibility but I am certainly not satisfied with any proposed reduction proceeding on the lines of scientific thought . . . i.e., from a psychological or sociological point of view . . . from this point of view, it seems impossible to explain or justify the fundamental assumption on which they all proceed, that some such judgments are true and others false. . . . One fact cannot be inconsistent with another fact; accordingly, regarded from a psychological or sociological point of view, A's judgment, e.g., that all gambling is wrong, does not conflict with B's judgment that some gambling is right. . . . The reduction, therefore, of duty to fact, on this line of thought if strictly pursued, eviscerates ethical thought of its essential import and interest.[1]

Now most of this passage concerns the relevance of an idea's origins to its truth, an issue which will be treated in a moment. But the passage includes the phrase "it is rash to affirm irreducibility" and seems to fall short of the position I have attributed to Sidgwick. His hesitation stems from his characteristic intellectual caution; he has not, after all, directly proven that standards of correctness cannot be stated in empirical terms. The hesitation also stems from his purpose in this discussion. That purpose was critical rather

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[1]Henry Sidgwick, "Is the Distinction Between 'Is' and 'Ought' Ultimate and Irreducible?", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, n.s., 1 (1892):89.

than constructive. Although the symposium itself addressed the question of reducibility in general, Sidgwick took the opportunity to continue his battle with the psychologism and evolutionary naturalism of his day. He was concerned, in other words, to show that a certain position was mistaken rather than to demonstrate a general proposition about the nature of moral language. He would of course hesitate to claim what he had not set out to prove. Not only does irreducibility follow from his position, however; eventually he granted this in so many words. Lecturing on the ethics of T. H. Green, Sidgwick said:

> I agree as to knowledge of what ought to be being irreducible to knowledge of what is, has been, and will be, and I agree in regarding it as fundamentally important to establish the right relation between the two.[1]

Just as he holds that ethical statements cannot be reduced to empirical statements, so he holds they cannot be derived from empirical statements. This claim is the subject matter of Chapter III, Book I of Methods of Ethics. Of the arguments which he gives to support this claim, two are particularly interesting. One is his frequent assertion that no fact about the origin of a belief (moral or non-moral) is

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[1]Henry Sidgwick, Lectures on the Ethics of T. H. Green, Mr. Herbert Spencer, and J. Martineau (New York: Macmillan Company, 1902; reprint. ed., New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1968), p. 2.

sufficient to tell us whether or not that belief is true. Another is his assertion that psychological hedonism does not establish the truth of any ethical theory. Each of these assertions is an instance of his general belief that moral statements cannot be derived from non-moral ones--in these cases, from psychological claims.

The Irrelevance of the Origins of our Beliefs

Sidgwick points out that to claim that people do believe that something is the case is not to claim that they ought to believe it is the case. Just as this is true about factual matters so it is true about matters of morality. There is a difference between describing beliefs and evaluating beliefs, in either the empirical or the ethical realms. The origins of our beliefs in either realm can neither establish nor disprove their correctness.

This position about beliefs in the moral realm faced two kinds of opposition. On the one hand, intuitionists claimed that moral knowledge is innate and therefore certain. On the other hand, skeptics claimed that showing the psychological origins of moral convictions proved that they were nothing but expressions of psychological drives.

He rejects both of these claims, holding instead that the origin of a belief is a criterion of neither its truth nor its falsity. The origin of a belief about geometry, for

instance, has no bearing on its truth; so those who explain ethical hedonism in terms of psychological hedonism are in no way justifying it. Some other means, in ethics as in geometry, must be found to prove it true or false.

One might object to this comparison, maintaining that while the fundamental axioms of geometry are uncontroversial, those of ethics are highly controversial. But this objection misses Sidgwick's main point, which is that these controversies can only be settled by appeal to a rational standard. Pointing out the psychological origins of our beliefs is not such an appeal. The question is not, Why do we have such beliefs? but, Why should we regard these beliefs as true? And--more to the point--why should we regard only some of these beliefs as true, and others as false? As Sidgwick points out, "all the competing and conflicting moral principles that men have anywhere assumed must be equally derivative; yet, since they conflict, they cannot all be true."[1] He points out that consideration of the genesis of the moral convictions leads neither to the establishment of any particular ethical theory nor to skepticism about the possibility of ethical theory. "Surely there is no reason to single out for distrust the enunciations of the moral faculty, merely

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[1]Henry Sidgwick, "The Theory of Evolution in its Application to Practice," Mind, o.s. 1 (January, 1876):54.

because it is the outcome of a long process of development."[1] He goes on to point out that the moral faculty has a shorter period of development than does our ability to perform the calculations of higher mathematics. If we have no doubts about the latter, he asks, why should we about the former?

So much for the skeptics. As for those who claimed that "originality" is some kind of argument for the truth of an ethical conviction, Sidgwick's rejection of the position of Thomas Reid is typical.

> The stress laid on [originality as a criterion of ethical truth] by Reid and other writers is chiefly due to a psychological assumption now almost exploded; viz., that the human mind exists at birth in a condition which, though imperfect . . . is at least free from positive faults: in which therefore, the exercise of its cognitive faculties, so far as it is capable of exercising them, must result in truth.[2]

If one rejects the claim that the human mind at birth is less liable to error than the adult's mind, then the appearance of some moral belief among young children gives no special support for its truth.[3]

One popular attempt, therefore, to derive moral statements from empirical ones has been shown to be inadequate.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Henry Sidgwick, "The Establishment of Ethical First Principles," Mind, 4 (January, 1879):109.

[3] Chapter III of this dissertation discusses in more detail the relationship between Sidgwick and Reid.

Another common attempt at the same kind of derivation occurs when people argue from psychological facts (or what they take to be psychological facts) to ethical claims. Frequently this kind of argument begins with the human desire for pleasure and argues for a hedonistic concept of good. This, too, Sidgwick claims, is an inadequate argument.

Psychological Hedonism

Sidgwick does not accept psychological hedonism, the belief that "pleasure or absence of pain to myself is always the actual ultimate end of my action."[1] In arguments reminiscent of Bishop Butler's, he rejects the claim as confused, tautologous, or false.[2] Of greater interest for this chapter, however, is the claim which emerges at various points in the above discussions, that psychological hedonism would not establish as true <u>any</u> ethical system--not even ethical hedonism. Thus one more attempt to derive moral statements from non-moral ones fails. Since the tenets of psychological hedonism are probably not empirical, this is not as such supporting evidence for Thesis (3). Sidgwick would probably agree to a much stronger thesis: that moral statements are neither reducible to nor derivable from non-normative statements. His

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[1]Sidgwick, <u>Methods</u>, p. 41.

[2]Ibid., pp. 39-56.

position (described above) on the moral import of psychological hedonism certainly is consistent with the stronger theses. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the statement of Thesis (3) in terms of "empirical statements" will be retained.

Sidgwick does more than reject the claim that psychological hedonism would establish the truth of ethical hedonism. He finds psychological hedonism actually incompatible with any ethical system which bases its precepts on the demands of reason. Not only would it be "inconceivable that Reason dictates [the pursuit of] . . . any other line of conduct";[1] more importantly, if we accept psychological hedonism

> the proposition that he 'ought' to pursue that line of conduct becomes no less clearly incapable of being affirmed with any significance. For a psychological law invariably realised in my conduct does not admit of being conceived as 'a precept' or 'dictate' of reason: this latter must be a rule from which I am conscious that it is possible to deviate.[2]

His argument, therefore, is more than the logical point that "ought" statements are not derivable from "is" statements. In a kind of conceptual analysis he argues that the very notion of moral obligation involves a belief in some kind of freedom.

But what kind of freedom? One cannot hold oneself morally obligated, he writes, unless one is "conscious that it is possible to deviate" from the rule in question.

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[1] Sidgwick, Methods, p. 41. (Emphasis added)

[2] Ibid.

It might at first be thought that this is yet another area where his concept of an adequate moral theory demands the rejection of empiricism, for freedom under certain definitions is difficult to account for in empirical terms. Freedom as "free will"--where that means a rejection of determinism--may pose such problems; but Sidgwick does not claim that this kind of freedom is a necessary component of ethical theory. In fact, after presenting arguments for and against determinism, he is unable to declare either side wrong. But he does think it "possible and useful to show that the ethical importance of deciding it one way or another is liable to be exaggerated."[1]

He supports this conclusion by examining the claim that "ought" implies "can." He finds two reasonable interpretations of the claim.

1. "I ought to choose to do x" implies "I can do x."
2. "I ought to choose to do x" implies "I can choose to do x."

Of these two he believes that the acceptance of moral obligation entails the acceptance of the first, but not of the second. He also believes that the first is a thesis compatible with determinism. There are things I can do, and things I cannot; some things are physically or psychologically impossible,

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 66.

while others are not. A determinist can agree with this distinction between what I can and cannot do. For a determinist "'ought' implies 'can'" means that the statement "he ought to do x" means (among other things) that it is neither physically nor psychologically impossible for him to do x.

Since one reasonable interpretation of "'ought' implies 'can'" is compatible with determinism, the suspected incompatibility between empiricism and Sidgwick's concept of an adequate moral theory does not arise. It remains true, however, that Sidgwick denies the derivability of obligation statements from psychological statements.

Thesis (3), then, insofar as it deals with statements of moral obligation, is clearly Sidgwick's position. There is more controversy about his position on statements about moral value--about statements concerning "good." Debate centers in particular on whether or not he holds good to be definable in non-moral terms. Because this issue is also relevant to Thesis (4) ("Adequate moral axioms are non-tantologous"), it will be postponed until that thesis is discussed.

Thesis (3), after the discussion of the past few pages, can be reformulated as follows:

3. Moral statements of obligation are neither reducible to nor derivable from empirical statements.

It has been suggested but not established that Sidgwick holds a stronger version of Thesis (3). Let that be (3'):

3'. Moral statements of obligation are neither reducible to nor derivable from any non-normative statements.

This stronger version leaves open the question of the derivability of moral statements from statements which are non-moral but normative. Statements about logical necessity are particularly interesting candidates here. This possibility is mentioned again in the last section of this chapter and in Chapter V.

IV. Thesis (4): Adequate Moral Axioms Are Non-Tautologous

Sidgwick maintained that fundamental moral principles cannot be tautologies. He gives some examples of attempts to base morality on tautologies, and dismisses them as "sham-axioms."[1] His reason for the dismissal is that they are not "important," give no "valuable information," tell us nothing "practical." "When examined, they are found to affirm no more than that it is right to do that which is . . . right to be done."[2] And in fact, the examples he gives are of principles which do exactly that. He has Plato telling us that Good is Virtue and Virtue is knowledge of what is Good, together with action in accordance with that knowledge. He finds an even more perfect circle in the Stoics: Life

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, pp. 374-78.

[2]Ibid., p. 375.

according to nature is life according to reason; and reason directs us to live according to nature.

It might well be asked at this point what Sidgwick means by "tautology." Does he mean, for instance, that moral axioms cannot be definitions? For all definitions are tautologies. This is a plausible interpretation, particularly since Sidgwick has carefully noted that "ought" cannot be defined. It seems clear, however, that what Sidgwick is dismissing in this section on tautologies is circular sets of definitions rather than definitions as such.[1] His reason for the dismissal supports this interpretation. The key word in his condemnations is "practical." If fundamental moral principles cannot give us practical guidance in life, they are useless. In fact, they cannot be fundamental moral principles at all.

But this interpretation of what he means by "tautology" might be attacked. Schneewind writes, for instance, in a synopsis of Sidgwick's position, that "to define 'good' as 'pleasure' is self-defeating if what you wish to hold as a first principle would then be a tautology, and a tautology cannot be an ethical first principle."[2] In other words,

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, pp. 385, 381.

[2]Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Sidgwick," by J. B. Schneewind.

Schneewind treats the rejection of tautology as a reason for Sidgwick's refusal to define "good."

It is at least open to debate, however, whether Sidgwick does refuse to define "good." In relevant passages he points out, first, that "good" has different connotations than "pleasure"; then, that it implies a reference to an absolute standard. "Good" has different connotations than "pleasure"; that is, to call a thing pleasant is not the same as calling it good. To call a thing good implies that it gives a specific pleasure, not just any pleasure. He takes examples of non-moral good: wine, for instance, is not called good simply because it is pleasant to look at. It must give the other specific pleasures associated with a good wine. In addition, it is not enough that just anyone call the wine good (although anyone may call it "pleasing to me"):

> The affirmation of goodness in any object involves the assumption of a universally valid standard, which, as we believe, the judgment of persons to whom we attribute good taste approximately represents.[1]

The last quotation leads to Sidgwick's main point in this discussion. It is similar to his point about statements of obligation. To call anything good, even in a non-moral sense, "involves the assumption of a universally valid standard"; and no description of a psychological state can be that. His main point, then, is not that "good" cannot be defined, but

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 108.

that--whether in a moral or non-moral sense--it cannot simply be defined as pleasure.

Does he or does he not define "good"? G. E. Moore has written in a famous passage,

> 'Good,' then, is indefinable; and yet, so far as I know, there is only one ethical writer, Prof. Henry Sidgwick, who has clearly recognised and states this fact.[1]

But less notable philosophers have thought that Sidgwick did define good. James Newell, for example, claims that Sidgwick "offers a definition of 'good' in terms of pleasurable consciousness. . . ."[2] Sidgwick's own words are these:

> It would seem then, that if we interpret the notion 'good' in relation to 'desire,' we must identify it not with the actually desired, but rather with the desirable:--meaning by 'desirable' not necessarily 'what ought to be desired' but what would be desired, with strength proportioned to the degree of desirability, if it were judged attainable by voluntary action, supporting the desirer to possess a perfect forecast, emotional as well as intellectual, of the state of attainment or fruition.[3]

Both definists and non-definists could find some support in this passage. Rather than try to settle the definist issue, however, let me summarize three important elements in the discussion so far. First, Sidgwick indisputably calls "ought" indefinable (because of its simplicity and unanalyzability).

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[1]George Edward Moore, Principia Ethica (Cambridge: University Press, 1903), p. 17.

[2]James Newell, "The Philosophy of Henry Sidgwick" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1975), p. 1.

[3]Sidgwick, Methods, pp. 110-111.

Secondly, he insists that "good"--in moral and non-moral uses--means more than pleasure, because of its implicit appeal to a standard. Thirdly, he rejects tautologies as axioms in ethical systems.

And this brings us back to the original question: what does he mean by "tautology" besides a narrowly circular set of definitions? Whether or not he would call the interpretation of "good" in terms of "what would be desired by an omniscient being" a definition, it does not seem to be the case that he rules out all definitions, as such, as ethical axioms. He does not identify "tautology" with "definition" because he is not focusing on the truth-functional characteristics of a tautology, but on its non-informativeness.

It might also be asked what he means by "axiom." Chapter III will attempt to characterize those principles which serve as axioms in Sidgwick's moral theory. For the time being I will simply call them "the most basic of moral statements." Thesis (4) can be reformulated now, as follows:

4. If any moral statements are known to be true, the most basic among them must be non-tautologous.

And once again it is Sidgwick's concept of an adequate moral theory which leads him here. Frank Taylor argues that for Sidgwick

> Ethics aims at both knowledge about morals and knowledge for conduct. . . . This view of ethics is more able to do justice to moral experience than are positivistic, rationalistic, or theological

> conceptions . . . (Sidgwick's) system is a mixed system . . . not completely naturalistic or nonnaturalistic, definist or nondefinist . . .[1]

It is this insistence on practical guidance which leads to Thesis (4), and this fourth thesis is crucial to the argument which leads him to intuitionism.

V. Conclusion

The argument now reads as follows:

1. All knowledge is either self-evident or derived from self-evident premises.
2. If there is moral knowledge, then some moral statements are known to be true and some moral statements are known to be false.

   (C_1) If any moral statements are known to be true, they must be either self-evidently true or derived from other self-evident statements.
3. No moral statement is empirical; i.e., moral statements are neither reducible to nor derivable from empirical statements.
4. If any moral statements are known to be true, the most basic among them must be non-tautologous.

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[1]Frank Taylor, "The Right and the Good in the Ethics of Henry Sidgwick" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University Graduate School, 1969), p. 1.

These four theses, treated as premises, allow the following conclusion:

(C_2) Therefore, if there are any moral statements known to be true, the most basic among them are non-empirical and non-tautologous and either

a) self-evident, or

b) derived from other self-evident, non-empirical statements.

When Thesis (5) is added, a final conclusion may be reached.

5. Self-evident knowledge which is non-tautologous and non-empirical is intuitive.

(C_3) Therefore, if there is moral knowledge, either

a) the most basic moral statements are known intuitively, or

b) the most basic moral statements are derived from some other self-evident, non-empirical statements.

Of the alternatives offered in (C_3) Sidgwick pursued the first. Chapter V will argue that he could have pursued the second.

It remains to be noted that while each of these premises is necessary for the conclusion (C_3), neither Bentham, Mill, nor Hume holds the entire set. Sidgwick is alone among major utilitarians in his concept of morality.

David Hume, in the famous passage quoted earlier, makes the same distinction which is expressed in Thesis (3). However, he denies the possibility of moral knowledge in the sense expressed in Thesis (2) and thus would not have been led to a conclusion about the nature of such knowledge.

Mill's position is probably just the reverse of Hume's. In the equally famous passage from "Utilitarianism" he implies that moral statements can be derived from empirical ones (that ethical hedonism can be derived from psychological hedonism); and whatever one is to make of the phrase "proofs persuasive to the mind" he is trying to establish the truth of his ethical position. He is treating moral statements as cognitive.

Sidgwick's conception of moral statements as practical, non-empirical, and cognitive is unique among the classical utilitarians. It is that unique conception which leads to his other singularity, his intuitionism. The next chapter begins a close examination of that intuitionism.

CHAPTER II

SELF-EVIDENCE

I. Introduction

The last chapter traced the connection between Sidgwick's conception of an adequate moral theory and his conviction that such a theory must be founded on at least one fundamental intuition. This chapter begins an examination of the intuitionism which Sidgwick found it necessary to embrace. First it sketches the theory of verification of which "intuitive verification" is a part; then it examines the various tests which Sidgwick includes in his "method of intuitive verification." Next is an examination of the various ethical principles which Sidgwick maintains that we know intuitively. This examination shows that Sidgwick's position is open to charges of incoherence. The final section of this chapter defends Sidgwick against such charges. It is then evident that to clarify Sidgwick's use of "intuition" several other large questions must be asked; and so this chapter points to the following chapters.

II. Sidgwick's Theory of Verification: The Three Methods of Reducing Error

Terminology and Assumptions

First, a note on terminology. During Sidgwick's lifetime the word "epistemology" was just coming into common philosophical use. So by the time Philosophy, Its Scope and Relations is published in 1902, Sidgwick distinguishes "as epistemology or theory of knowledge," that aspect of philosophy which "considers the fundamental principles of all departments of systematic thought, but considers them with the special object of examining their validity and evidence."[1] He holds that epistemology deals only indirectly with principles of inference; its proper subject is the truth of non-inferential principles, but it is impossible to discuss those without dealing to some extent with principles of inference.[2]

Before "epistemology" became current, "metaphysics" was used to include what we today call epistemological questions. That usage is still apparent in Sidgwick's writings. Earlier in Philosophy, Its Scope and Relations, he writes that "the discussion of the validity of cognitions attained

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[1]Henry Sidgwick, Philosophy, Its Scope and Relations (New York: MacMillan Co., 1902; New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1968), p. 111.

[2]Ibid., pp. 116-17.

otherwise than by inference takes us into Metaphysics."[1] So epistemology has two parts: 1) logic, and 2) the truth of fundamental, underived principles. The second of these parts is itself part of another subject: metaphysics, which also includes the non-epistemological question of the nature of being. Epistemology and metaphysics, in Sidgwick's terms, intersect; neither is a subset of the other. In this dissertation I will use "epistemology" as Sidgwick does--the word has the same meaning today--and avoid the word "metaphysics" except in direct quotes.

Sidgwick holds that certain underlying assumptions are implicit in any epistemology:

> That some beliefs are true and others false, and that there is some way or ways of distinguishing the one sort from the other; and [that] the systematic knowledge of these ways is an indispensable element of the systemization of rational thought.[2]

This systematization he takes to be the primary goal of philosophy, whose purpose, he writes, is the "exhibition of system and coherence in a mass of beliefs."[3] These beliefs are then more easily purged of error; they are also more easily grasped and more useful; we are less likely to overlook any

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[1]Ibid., p. 82.

[2]Ibid., p. 112.

[3]Sidgwick, "Criteria of Truth and Error," in Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant, ed. James Ward (New York: MacMillan Co., 1905), p. 466.

hiatus.[1]

Sidgwick's methods of verification grow from these underlying assumptions. They help distinguish truth from falsity, and do this in part by "exhibiting system and coherence" in our beliefs.

The Three Methods of Verification

To Sidgwick, epistemology begins with the recognition of error.

> To the philosophical mind the ascertained erroneusness of some beliefs is apt to suggest the possible erroneousness of all. . . . What guarantees me against a similar discovery in respect of any other belief which I am now holding to be true? . . . [I]t is the removal of this philosophical uncertainty--in respect of beliefs that, in ordinary thought, are commonly assumed to be true--that I regard as the primary aim of Epistemology.[2]

But he assigns to himself a "humbler task" than that of finding absolute certainty: "anyone who has realized the slow, prolonged, tortuous process by which the human intellect has attained such truth as it has now got, will thankfully accept something less complete."[3] Sidgwick seeks instead ways of reducing the risk of error.[4] Reducing, not eliminating--

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[1]Ibid., p. 463. This idea of "system," or the standards of rationality which a method of ethics should meet, is more fully discussed in Chapter V.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 445.

[4]Ibid., p. 465.

the former can be reached, the latter probably cannot; and reduction of error is not only within our efforts but well worth them. Given the comments quoted earlier, then, the epistemologist's special task is to reduce the risk of error in fundamental, underived principles.

He calls his methods of reducing error "methods of verification." In "Criteria" he lists three; in Book III, Chapter XI of Methods he lists four. The first two listed in Methods are treated as one in "Criteria." My initial discussion follows the listing in "Criteria." Following a general description of each of the three listed there, I return to the first method and examine it in greater detail. This more detailed examination includes the divergent listing in Methods.

The "methods of verification" are these: (1) Intuitive, (2) Discursive, (3) Social. Satisfaction of one or all of these is no guarantee that we have found truth; satisfaction does, however, reduce the risk of error as much as is possible.

The first method, Intuitive Verification, is, essentially, the careful examination of a supposedly self-evident proposition. The key words here are "careful examination"; it is not its subject matter which distinguishes the first method from the other two, for each of them can also be applied to supposedly self-evident propositions. The point of the first method, then, is the kind of test which is suggested,

rather than the subject of that test. Sidgwick, I think, obscures this by the name he has chosen. "Intuitive" seems to indicate that this method alone deals with the apparently self evident.

What is this "careful examination"? What procedure is Sidgwick urging? This is a more complicated question than at first appears; I will return to it after sketching the other two methods of verification. For now Sidgwick's summary statement of this method of verification will suffice: "Assure yourself of the self-evidence of what appears self-evident, by careful examination."[1]

Sidgwick's second method of verification is the Discursive. Even when a proposition passes the test of Intuitive Verification, "we may be convinced of error through conflict of the judgment thus apparently guaranteed with some other judgment . . . equally strongly affirmed. . . ."[2] The object of the Discursive Verification is consistency. The method may be applied to fundamental or derived propositions--although Sidgwick speaks mainly of the fundamental.

> It consists in contemplating the belief that appears intuitively certain along with other beliefs which may possibly be found to conflict with it.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 461.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 462.

Of course, he adds, "we are always liable to obtain new beliefs which will conflict with old ones; therefore this verification is necessarily fallible." Among the three methods, Discursive Verification is of special and pre-eminent importance. One reason for its importance is that this method is the heart of any systematization, and, as noted above, systematization is for Sidgwick the primary goal of philosophy. Another reason for the pre-eminence of Discursive Verification may be that it alone, by the failure of a proposition to meet its demands, can tell us that one of our beliefs is false (although it cannot tell us which). This is the only place in the discussion where Sidgwick claims that a method leads to certainty, albeit of a limited and negative kind.

The third method of verification which Sidgwick uses he calls "Social or Oecumenical." Briefly, it consists of consensus among those who are competent to judge; such consensus makes it legitimate for us provisionally to accept the object of the consensus. In a world growing increasingly complex, this method of verification becomes more and more useful. The primary function of this method is to point out probable error; it also functions as a heuristic device.

When Sidgwick summarizes his methods, he again disclaims

> the pretension of establishing absolute truth or absolute exclusion of error. But if we find that an intuitive belief appears clear and certain to ourselves contemplating it, that it is in harmony

> with our other beliefs relating to the same subject, and does not conflict with the beliefs of other persons competent to judge, we have reduced the risk of error with regard to it as low as it is possible to reduce it.[1]

The crucial epistemological questions arise when a belief passes two of these tests but fails the third. For instance, when a belief is not self-evident but is commonly held and is internally consistent; or when inconsistencies are found in beliefs which are commonly thought to be self-evident;[2] or, finally, when consensus cannot be reached about competing, and internally consistent, intuitive judgments.[3]

The second method of verification, which demands that our beliefs be consistent, is less problematic than the first two. It can be more easily formulated and, in some form, is almost universally accepted. The first and third methods are less clear and much more controversial. The bulk of this chapter considers the meaning of "intuition" and related terms, as Sidgwick uses them. The following chapter will consider the meaning of "consensus" as it occurs in the third method and what it reveals about Sidgwick's intuitionism.

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[1]Ibid., p. 465.

[2]Sidgwick believes this is the case with Kant's antinomies.

[3]Sidgwick, "Criteria," p. 465.

III. Sidgwick's Intuitionism: Its Meaning

This section returns to Sidgwick's first method of verification and the question which was postponed when this method was first, briefly, considered: Just what does Sidgwick mean by the "careful examination" which will assure us of a statement's "self-evidence"? A related question concerns possible differences of meaning among the terms which Sidgwick uses, more or less interchangeably, for "self-evidence." Finally, this section examines the ethical propositions which Sidgwick calls self-evident. What does he mean when he so labels them?

Terminology

There are a number of terms which Sidgwick uses in somewhat the same sense. These include "self-evident"; "intuition"; "propositions which pass the test of intuitive verification"; and "first principle." The broadest of these is "self-evident"; in Sidgwick's terms these are "beliefs that in ordinary thought are certain [without qualification] . . . [and whose] certitude may be distinguished as primary or independent."[1]

Sidgwick spends very little time discussing the truth of empirical statements, either particular or universal.

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[1]Ibid., p. 437.

Usually he reserves "intuitions" for self-evident statements other than propositions of particular empirical fact; occasionally, however, the word (or some form of it, e.g., "intuitive") applies to all self-evident propositions. The first Method of Verification, for instance, is the "Intuitive" method, and it applies to particular empirical propositions as well as to general propositions.[1] Another term is "first principle." This is a statement which is used to support others, but which is not in turn supported by others. It would, if known to be true, have to be self-evident. He does not consider the possibility of a plurality of first principles, mutually dependent but, as a set, basic. Anything which counts as a first principle for Sidgwick will be underived.

Now, as noted above, Sidgwick does not consider the satisfaction of any of his Methods of Verification to be a sufficient condition of truth. There is some problem, therefore, with his use of the term "self-evident," which carries, more than the others, a connotation of indisputable truth. Usually, therefore, but not always, Sidgwick prefaces that phrase with "apparent" or "subjective."

What does he mean by such terms--self-evident, intuition--besides something which seems to be true and for which supporting premises cannot be given? One thing he clearly does not mean is that such propositions are "innate." Many

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[1]Ibid., pp. 442, 452-3.

rationalists identified "intuitive" with "innate," although it was not always clear what they meant. Sidgwick neither denies nor affirms the possibility of innate ideas; instead, he regards the question as irrelevant. His reason for this is his contention (presented in detail in Chapter I, Section II) that the origin of a belief cannot establish it as true or as false. Sidgwick therefore is not concerned with the origins of those beliefs which he calls "intuitive" and certainly does not identify them as "innate."

Testing Intuitions

In "Criteria," the first "method of verification," the "Intuitive Method," is to "assure yourself of the self-evidence of what appears self-evident, by careful examination."[1] In Methods Sidgwick lists four "conditions, the complete fulfillment of which would establish a significant proposition, apparently self-evident, in the highest degree of certainty attainable."[2] The first of these conditions is: "The terms of the proposition must be clear and precise." The second is: "The self-evidence of the proposition must be ascertained by careful reflection." The "careful reflection" and "careful examination" called for in both sources refers to many different examining procedures. When Sidgwick expands

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[1] Ibid., p. 461.

[2] Sidgwick, Methods, p. 338.

upon "careful examination" in "Criteria," he advises us to look closely at the clarity and distinctness of our ideas. For that reason I have chosen to treat the first two conditions listed in Methods as parts of the "Intuitive Method of Verification" listed in "Criteria."

In that article, the "careful examination" takes different forms, in part because of varying objects of the examination. In universal propositions, Sidgwick advises us to look closely at the clarity and distinctness of the ideas and at the intuitive certainty of their connections. When particular empirical judgments are at issue, he advises us to attempt to purge observation of inference. These suggestions are reminiscent of rationalist and empiricist criteria,[1] and in fact appear in the appendix of an article whose intention is the refutation of Cartesian rationalism and of the empiricism of John Stuart Mill. His refutation of empiricism is not directly relevant to this paper since, as shown in Chapter I, he holds that ethical statements are neither reducible to nor derivable from empirical statements. Nevertheless I will include a brief summary of that attempted refutation, for two reasons. First, it supplies some important general information about Sidgwick's epistemology, for he rejects empiricism on grounds which are independent of his

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[1]The word "criteria" is used here only in the sense in which Sidgwick himself used it: a criterion is a standard by comparison with which more probably true statements are distinguished from less probably true statements.

concept of morality. This information supplements the analysis presented in Chapter I. Secondly, Sidgwick's attempted refutation explains some of the procedures which he includes under the general title, "Intuitive Verification."

Sidgwick takes empiricism to be the belief that "the ultimately valid premises of all scientific reasonings are cognitions of particular facts"[1] and attacks this position on two grounds. First, the validity of general scientific principles cannot be established from particular cognitions alone. He does not argue this point, but takes it as having been shown by Mill and many others. His second ground for attack against empiricism is that cognitions of particular facts are "intimate blends" of observation and inference. Mill himself points out that

> in almost every act of our perceiving faculties, observation and inference are intimately blended; what we are said to observe is usually a compound result of which one-tenth may be observation and nine-tenths inference.[2]

The inferences involved include implicit comparisons and classifications of the present with the past; "and the implied classification may obviously be erroneous either through inaccuracy of memory or a mistake in the comparative judgment."

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[1] Sidgwick, "Criteria," p. 442.

[2] John Stuart Mill, Logic, Book IV, Chapter i, paragraphs 1, 2; as quoted by Sidgwick, "Criteria," p. 442.

Furthermore, even simple observations "cannot be distinctly thought at all without [this implicit classification]."[1]

To claim that experts can distinguish the immediate cognition from mediated, inferential knowledge is no solution--for even if it were true, they could not know someone else's immediate knowledge, only their own. And how do we deal with the fact that even among the experts there are disagreements? Consider

> . . . the numerous philosophical disputes that have arisen . . . [e.g.] about the impossibility of finding a self in the stream of psychical experience or . . . as to the consciousness of free will . . . surely in view of these and other controversies it would be extraordinarily rash to claim freedom from error for our cognitions of psychical fact, let them be never so rigorously purged of inference.[2]

Sidgwick summarizes his attack on the empiricist assumption that individual cognitions are true in this way: "The truth seems to be that the indubitable certainty of the judgment 'I am conscious' has been rather hastily extended by Empiricists to judgments affirming that my present consciousness is such and such." Empiricism fails because it requires a sharp distinction (between the inferred and the non-inferred) which it cannot provide.

One way, therefore, of performing the First Method of Verification is to attempt to purge our observations of

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[1]Sidgwick, "Criteria," p. 453.

[2]Ibid.

inference. As the above discussion makes clear, this attempt makes it more likely that our particular beliefs--beliefs grounded on particular observations--will be true. It does not assure us that they will be true.

Just as a rejection of empiricism underlies Sidgwick's approach to verifying particular empirical beliefs, so a rejection of Cartesian rationalism underlies his approach to universal beliefs.[1] Descartes had claimed that any proposition which is clear and distinct is true; but Sidgwick takes Descartes to task for not satisfying his own requirements--for failing to make "clear what he means by the 'clearness' of a notion."[2] "Distinct," he thinks, can be more helpfully explicated; an idea is distinct if it "is not liable to be confounded with that of any different object."[3] Nevertheless, this method, too, is only occasionally of any real use. (Sidgwick does find it applicable <u>retrospectively</u>: i.e., the discovery of error involves the discovery of <u>past</u> confusion. But "<u>before</u> the discovery of the error the thought <u>appeared</u> to be quite free from confusion . . ."[4])

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[1]The reader may wonder about Sidgwick's position on particular non-empirical beliefs. In the case of particular ethical beliefs ("Robbing this bank today is wrong") he simply holds that they cannot be self-evident. See his rejection of "Perceptional Intuitionism," <u>Methods</u>, pp. 98-100.

[2]Sidgwick, "Criteria," p. 449.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., p. 450.

Again, then, a kind of "careful examination" is suggested (in explanation of Intuitive Verification) which is a more modest version of suggestions made by a major philosopher or philosophical system. Sidgwick rejects empiricism; he also finds himself compelled to reject the claim of Rationalism

> to put forward a simple infallible criterion for the kind of knowledge which is to be taken as the ultimately valid basis of all . . . [other] knowledge. I regard both criteria as useful, as a means of guarding against error, but neither as infallible.[1]

A third kind of "careful examination" appears when Sidgwick considers a criterion formulated by Herbert Spencer, among others. If the negation of a proposition is inconceivable, then the proposition is self-evidently true. Sidgwick scrutinizes "inconceivable," and concludes that in statements of particular fact, it means "incredible." I cannot believe that I am not now thirsty; but I can certainly conceive of what it would be like. For universal propositions,

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[1]Sidgwick, "Criteria," p. 452. On the same page he notes

> "a curious interchange of rôles between Rationalism and Empiricism as regards the evidence claimed for their respective criteria. While the Rationalist's criterion is partly supported . . . on an appeal to experience, the validity of the Empirical criterion appears to be treated as self-evident."

Descartes, for instance, having found one indubitable proposition--cogito ergo sum--tried to isolate the characteristics of that idea which gave it its self-evidence. He finds that the idea is 'clear and distinct' and concludes from this experience of indubitability that he has found a criterion of self-evidence. And Mill's statement that "'whatever was a matter of direct perception . . . would have been real' seems to have been regarded as not requiring proof." (p. 452).

"inconceivable" may mean "unimaginable"; e.g., "I cannot imagine or conceive two straight lines enclosing a space." But "imagine" should not be limited to sensory experience; what Sidgwick means is broader: to be able to conceive of something being true is to know what it would be like for it to be true.

Just as in his treatment of the first two kinds of "careful examination," here too Sidgwick adds a caution: "my inability to conceive or believe [may] be due to a defect of my intellect."[1] And, he notes, the history of thought amply shows us the fallibility of this criterion, too.

The discussion in Methods supplies still more kinds of "careful examination." The supposedly self-evident proposition must be distinguished from "mere impressions or impulses," from opinions which seem unquestionable because they have been repeated so often, from claims whose major support is strong sentiment.[2] Making these distinctions will help us narrow the field to propositions whose only support is that of reason; at that point we can turn to the methods presented in "Criteria."

Remember that Sidgwick's second and third Methods of Verification can also be used to reduce error in apparently self-evident principles. What we have, then, in the two discussions mentioned thus far, is at least six different methods

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[1]Ibid., p. 449.

[2]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 339.

of verification. Four of these--purge observation of inference; formulate the proposition clearly and distinctly; ask whether its negation is conceivable; separate claims of reason from claims of sentiment, authority, and tradition--these four are lumped together to form the First or Intuitive Method because, unlike the Second and Third Methods, these are of use only in inspecting apparently self-evident beliefs.

There is yet another course, however, which reveals Sidgwick's position on the examination of such beliefs. This is an article entitled, "The Establishment of Ethical First Principles."

> [W]e are logically led to a conclusion which yet when reached we regard as a first principle. We start with a proposition which appears self-evident; we reflect on it and analyze it into a more general proposition with a limitation; . . . we see that [the limitation] is arbitrary and w/o foundation in reason; we deny its validity and we substitute for our original principle the wider statement of which that affirmed a part.[1]

Sidgwick's example involves the principle, "all pain of human or rational beings is to be avoided." He sees that the limitation to "human or rational beings" is one which reason cannot support, and is then led to the wider principle, "all pain is to be avoided."[2]

This removal of unreasonable limitations from apparently self-evident propositions might reasonably be called

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[1]Henry Sidgwick, "The Establishment of Ethical First Principles," Mind, 4 (January, 1870):107.

[2]Ibid., p. 106.

still another Method of Verification, one which belongs with those lumped together into the first, Intuitive Method.

The remainder of this chapter deals with the principles which Sidgwick calls self-evident, and the discussion with which he supports that claim. Looking at those principles will mean looking at Sidgwick's use of the first Method of Verification. By the end of the chapter we will have seen in detail what Sidgwick means by self-evident. His theoretical discussion of the concept has been presented in Sections II and III; his practical application of the concept is presented in the following pages, Section IV.

IV. The Intuitive Method of Verification Applied

Commentators differ markedly in the number of propositions which they believe Sidgwick held to be self-evident. The reason for this is that Sidgwick formulates the self-evident propositions in a number of different ways. Schneewind compiles all of these formulations and groups them in three categories: formulations of the axiom of Justice, formulations of the axiom of Prudence, and formulations of the axiom of Benevolence.[1] The justification for this grouping is Sidgwick's frequent references to those three axioms.[2]

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[1]J. B. Schneewind, Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 290-297.

[2]See for instance Chapter XIII, "Philosophical Intuitionism" of Book III in Methods; in particular, p. 382.

Sidgwick, however, sometimes speaks in addition of "Rational Egoism," and Schneewind's justification for calling this a formulation of Prudence is the close similarity in the content of the two. As the following discussion will show, I think Prudence has to be treated as two separate axioms. Furthermore, I do not treat rational egoism as just a formulation of Prudence, but as a separate principle. It is also not clear that everything Schneewind has treated as a formulation of the axiom of Justice deserves that label.

The first two of Sidgwick's formulations which Schneewind lists as formulations of "Justice" are:

1. "Whatever action any of us judges to be right for himself, he implicitly judges to be right for all similar persons in similar circumstances."[1]
2. "If I judge any action to be right for myself, I implicitly judge it to be right for any other person whose nature and circumstances do not differ from my own in some important respect."[2]

The differences between the two are not important. To the twentieth century reader these sound very much like principles of universalizability. Sidgwick bases them directly on the meaning of the word "ought."[3]

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 379.

[2]Ibid., p. 209.

[3]They are not, of course, definitions. "Ought" cannot be defined; "it can only be made clearer by determining

Does Sidgwick try to "verify" the self-evidence of this principle? Not explicitly; not beyond the claim that the principle is contained in the notion "ought."

Justice: A Self-Evident Ethical Principle

In Sidgwick's treatment of Justice, it is easier to see the Intuitive Method at work. It is his treatment of Justice, too, which first gives rise to a fairly important question: Is Justice considered a self-evident principle? Is it argued for? Is it both? If both, does Sidgwick have a clear sense of self-evidence.

The principle receives several formulations; and these formulations receive varying kinds of justification. The fullest discussion, in Book III, Chapter XIII ("Philosophical Intuitionism") follows the presentation of what I have called a universalizability principle.

> A corresponding proposition may be stated with equal truth in respect of what ought to be done to--not by--different individuals. These principles have been most widely recognized, not in their most abstract and universal form, but in their special application to the situation of two (or more) individuals similarly related to each other . . . in what is popularly known as the Golden Rule, 'Do to others as you would have them do to you.' This formula is obviously unprecise . . . for one might wish for another's co-operation in sin, and be willing to reciprocate it. Nor is it even true to say that we ought to do to others only what we think it right for them to do to us; . . . there may be differences in the circumstances--and even in the

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. . . its relation to other notions with which it is connected in ordinary thought." Sidgwick, Methods, p. 33.

> natures--of two individuals . . . [T]he self-evident principle strictly stated must take some such negative form as this; 'it cannot be right for A to treat B in a manner in which it would be wrong for B to treat A, merely on the ground that they are two different individuals and without there being any difference between the natures or circumstances of the two which can be stated as a reasonable ground for difference of treatment.[1]

Sidgwick does not make explicit the kind of proof he is using here; in terms of the account given above it might be claimed that he is using the "inconceivability" criterion--for he ends up stating the principle in negative form--in other words, that he shows the negation of the principle (as first stated) to be inconceivable. In the same vein, it might be claimed that when he considers "Golden Rule" formulations he is also using the inconceivability criterion, here finding the negation quite conceivable and thus rejecting the "popular" Golden Rule formulation.

On closer examination, however, there are some problems with this interpretation of his procedure. Which sense of "inconceivable" would be appropriate? One sense discussed was "incredible": i.e., "I cannot believe that it is true." But there are vast differences between "I cannot believe that I am not thirsty" and "I cannot believe that what is right for me to do could be wrong for someone else, in the same circumstances, to do." Beliefs about one's immediate experience

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, pp. 379-80.

belong to an epistemological category which William Alston calls "self-warranted beliefs."[1] These are beliefs which are immediately justified; i.e., their justification consists simply in being held, and no other knowledge is necessary for their justification. According to Alston--and I agree--any proposition about one's immediate experience which one believes to be true is justified. Beliefs about morality are not in the same category; they are not justified simply by being held. This sense of "inconceivable," then, is not the one being used.

Another interpretation of "inconceivable" was "I do not know what it would be like for this to be true." Perhaps this interpretation is more helpful, although again Sidgwick's particular example is from a realm far removed from morality. "I do not know what it would be like for straight lines to enclose a space." "I do not know what it would be like for an action to be right for one person and wrong for another in the same circumstances." This, I think, is the most accurate interpretation of Sidgwick's procedure in "assuring himself of the self-evidence" in this particular discussion of Justice.

It is not, however, Sidgwick's only discussion of that principle. He immediately proceeds to draw parallels between Justice and another self-evident principle, Prudence.

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[1]William Alston, "Self-Warrant: A Neglected Form of Privileged Access," American Philosophical Quarterly 13 (October, 1976):257-272.

Justice and Prudence

The principle of Justice now receives this formulation: "individuals in similar conditions should be treated similarly." This principle "emerge[s] in the consideration of the similar parts of a Mathematical or Quantitative Whole."[1] The principle of Prudence is another which emerges from mathematical consideration: "a smaller present good is not to be preferred to a greater future good."[2] This mathematical analogy is my major concern, for it is a means of "assuring oneself of the self-evidence" of these two principles.

Before pursuing the analogy, however, another problem must be dealt with. Sidgwick gives several formulations of the principle of Prudence, and they are not equivalent formulations. Consider:

> The proposition 'that one ought to aim at one's own good' is sometimes given as the maxim of Rational Self-love or Prudence: but as so stated it does not clearly avoid tautology; since we may define 'good' as 'what one ought to aim at.' If, however, we say 'one's good on the whole,' the addition suggests a principle, . . . not tautological . . . that 'of impartial concern for all parts of our conscious life.'[3]

Granted, Sidgwick does not claim that this last formulation is equivalent to the first. In the passage cited, the first formulation "suggests" the second. In the Index of Methods,

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 381.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

under "Prudence," we read that "impartiality" is "educible from the rule of" Prudence. This entry refers us to the same page--381--as the lengthy passage quoted above.[1] (Note that here again there is the question of whether Sidgwick identifies the self-evident with the underived. What difference can there be between "educed" and "derived"?)

At any rate, Sidgwick is working with two distinct principles and for purposes of clarity these should be separately named. I will use "P_1" to refer to the principle, "One ought to seek one's own good." Sidgwick refers to this principle as Prudence/or Rational self-love. I will use "P_2" to refer to the principle, "One ought to have impartial concern for all parts of one's conscious life." Sidgwick often refers to this second principle as one of "impartiality." Sidgwick's exposition would be clearer if he explicitly separated, and officially named, these two facets of the principle of Prudence.

To return to the mathematical analogy and the parallel between Prudence (P_2) and Justice, Sidgwick writes that just as the notion of

> . . . the 'Good on the Whole' of a single individual . . . is constructed by comparison and integration of the different 'goods' that succeed one another in the series of our conscious states, so we have formed the notion of Universal Good by comparison and integration of the goods of all individual human--or sentient--existences. And here again, just as in the former case, by considering the relation of the integrant parts to the whole and to each other, I obtain the

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[1]Ibid., p. 525.

> self-evident principle that the good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view . . . of the Universe, than the good of any other . . . And it is evident to me that as a rational being I am bound to aim at good generally . . . not merely at a particular part of it.[1]

Sidgwick notes that this principle of Justice does not only apply to cases where "good" is interpreted hedonistically

> it is equally applicable to any other interpretation . . . in which good is conceived as a mathematical whole, of which the integrant parts are realised in different parts or moments of a lifetime.[2]

The question which arose concerning the principle of universalizability also arises here: given these mathematical analogies, is there any clear sense of "underived" built into his concepts of "self-evident" and of "intuition"? This notion of the relation of parts to whole is somewhat mysterious. Although this sounds like an attempt to establish a principle which is then labeled self-evident (note the phrase "I obtain the self-evident principle"), it does not accomplish that goal for the reader. To the extent that there is an argument here, it runs like this:

1. There are no grounds for preferring one part of a mathematical whole over other, equal parts.
2. The good of each individual human being is an equal part of a whole ("Universal Good").

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[1]Ibid., p. 382.

[2]Ibid., p. 381.

3. Therefore, the good of one human being is not preferable to that of any other.

The mathematical first premise offers a very clear example, even a model, of what "equal parts" means; but the argument stands without that premise. The argument is in fact almost tautologous: the good of each human being is equal to that of every other human being (premise 2); therefore the good of one human being is not preferable to that of any other (conclusion). If "equal" means "equal in value" and "preferable" means "of greater value"--and these are plausible interpretations--then the "argument" is circular. (I am discussing only validity here, not soundness.) The mathematical parallel is useful as explanation rather than as part of the proof. Sidgwick's comment that the principle of Justice emerges from the "consideration of the similar parts of a Mathematical or Quantitative Whole" remains obscure. It appears that what real progress has been made in the argument is from a claim about equal value to a demand for equal treatment--and the connection between the two cannot be established by mathematical analogies.

Two other, fairly minor, problems surface in these passages. One is Sidgwick's persistent use of the notion of "whole"; in the case of Justice, that whole is "Universal Good," in the case of Prudence, it is the good of one person's lifetime which is considered as a whole. Is it necessary to his ethics or to his epistemology that these things be viewed

as additive wholes, made up of the sum of their parts? Couldn't he more simply have said that goods may be compared with one another and ranked, and that neither temporal position nor "ownership"--i.e., belonging to this person rather than that--make one good higher than another?

And, as in the case of the mathematical analogies, there is the question of whether or not Sidgwick's conclusion (in this case, that future good is, ceteris paribus, equal to present good) really draws any support at all from Sidgwick's comments. The principle "aim at one's own good" suggests "aim impartially at one's own good, regardless of its position in time" only if it is already held that position in time is irrelevant to the ranking of goods.

The major point of this discussion, however, is not the success or failure of Sidgwick's arguments. It has been, instead, an examination of what Sidgwick means when he calls a proposition "self-evident." Can his claim that these propositions are self-evident be squared with his various attempts to establish their truth? That question is addressed directly in Section V, drawing upon the explication just completed.

Nevertheless, the question of the success or failure of his arguments is important. Chapter V looks at what Sidgwick has to say about Prudence (P_2) and about Universal Good from a perspective offered by some contemporary ethicists, and finds Sidgwick's position sound.

Rational Egoism and Rational Benevolence

Finally, let us look at the places where Sidgwick presents the self-evident principles of Rational Egoism and Rational Benevolence. At the beginning of Book IV, Chapter II, he spends some time on a comparison between Egoistic Hedonism and Universalistic Hedonism, claiming that if the second must be proved, so must the first; because there are times when each conflicts "with present inclination."[1] He drops the question, however, because Common Sense only demands a proof of the second. It is quite clear in this passage that Sidgwick does not see the offering of proof as inconsistent with self-evidence. Notice, for instance, the following comment:

> the fact that certain rules are commonly received as binding, though it does not establish their self-evidence, renders it generally unnecessary to prove their authority to the Common Sense that receives them . . .[2]

When he returns to the question in the final chapter of Methods it is again to remark that Common Sense supports Rational Egoism:

> It would be contrary to Common Sense to deny that the distinction between any one individual and any other is real and fundamental, and that consequently "I" am concerned with the quality of my existence as an individual in a sense, fundamentally important, in which I am not concerned with the quality of the existence of other individuals; and this being so, I do not see how it can be proved that this distinction is not to be

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[1] Ibid., p. 418.

[2] Ibid., p. 419. Emphasis added.

> taken as fundamental in determining the ultimate end of rational action for an individual.[1]

In another passage, Sidgwick puts it this way:

> If the Egoist strictly confines himself to stating his conviction that he ought to take his own happiness or pleasure as his ultimate end, there seems no opening for any line of reasoning [emphasis added] to lead him to Universalistic Hedonism as a first principle; it cannot be proved that the difference between his own happiness and another's happiness is not for him all-important.[2]

These are the longest treatments of the truth of the principle of Egoism in Methods of Ethics. The underlined passage in each shows Sidgwick's willingness to offer support--should it be necessary and available--for principles he calls self-evident. In addition, the last two actually offer such support for the principle of Rational Egoism.

What kind of support is it? The key notion in each of the two discussions, that each of us "is concerned" in a special way with his/her own existence, is somewhat ambiguous. Sidgwick surely means more than that each of us is specially equipped to know what is good for himself or herself, because he takes such considerations routinely into account in his presentation of utilitarianism, and he is presenting Egoism as a competitor with Utilitarianism. Does he mean, then, that as a matter of psychological fact each of us is more deeply concerned about his/her own welfare than anyone else's?

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[1] Ibid., p. 498. Emphasis added.

[2] Ibid., p. 420.

He has repeatedly rejected psychological hedonism--the doctrine that in all of our actions our primary motive is our own greatest pleasure--and most of his arguments are also applicable against psychological egoism in general. It would nevertheless be consistent for him to hold that what has the deepest emotional effect on us is our own welfare, distinguishing effect on emotions from effect on our actions; and such a belief is of course quite plausible. The point of interest, however, is that Sidgwick draws a connection between that fundamental concern and the ultimate end of rational action. It would seem to be a fair paraphrase of his consideration of Egoism, then, to say: Each of us cares more deeply about his/her own happiness than about that of others; it is therefore reasonable that each of us should seek our own happiness above that of others. As I've paraphrased it, this treatment involves an inference; furthermore, that inference depends upon a certain concept of "reasonable end."

To see more clearly what he means here it is useful to compare Rational Egoism with Rational Benevolence, the principle with which Sidgwick contrasts it.

In the competing principles of Rational Egoism and Rational Benevolence, what is at stake is the proper end of rational action. Sidgwick holds that both our own self-interest and the common good are such rational ends. As we have seen, the grounds for this claim in the case of the egoism principle seem to be certain psychological facts. In

the case of the Benevolence principle, the grounds are considerably different. Sidgwick approaches this principle in two quite similar ways. The first approach follows immediately upon the discussion of the principles of Prudence and Justice. Benevolence is arrived at in an analogous manner.

> Here again, just as in the former case, by considering the relation of the integrant parts to the whole and to each other, I obtain the self-evident principle that the good of any one individual is of no more importance from the point of view of the universe than the good of any other . . . and that I am bound to aim at good generally . . . not merely at a particular part of it. From these two rational intuitions we may deduce as a necessary inference, the maxim of Benevolence . . . that each one is morally bound to regard the good of any other individual as much as his own.[1]

This reasoning is similar to what Sidgwick adduces in support of the principles of Justice and Prudence. The concept of "rational end" and the very interesting phrase, "from the point of view of the universe," remain unclear; these are dealt with in Chapter V. The interesting point here is that Sidgwick quite explicitly labels the reasoning process an inference. And yet there is no doubt that he claims the principle to be self-evident and intuited; the claim is somewhat modest on this page ("at least a self-evident element, immediately cognisable by abstract intuition") but later, he

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[1]Ibid., p. 382. Emphasis added.

refers to Rational Benevolence "as one of the few Intuitions which stand the test of rigorous criticism."[1]

The second approach to Rational Benevolence also involves a reasoning process of sorts. This discussion is aimed at the Rational Egoist. Sidgwick distinguishes two strategies on the part of Egoists. The first claims that one's own good is of supreme importance to oneself; the second claims

> that his happiness or pleasure is Good, not only <u>for him</u> but from the point of view of the universe . . .[2]

An egoist who uses this second strategy can be shown that "<u>his</u> happiness cannot be a more important part of Good, taken universally, than the equal happiness of any other person." This is much less clearly an inference than Sidgwick's first approach was. Perhaps he is using here the procedure which he describes in "The Establishment of Ethical First Principles." This was the scrutiny of a supposedly self-evident principle for any unreasonable limitations in its formulation, the removal of those limitations, and the subsequent formulation of a wider principle. In the case of egoism, the limitation which is seen to be arbitrary is the limitation to my own individual good. The wider principle is that happiness generally (not just my own happiness) is to be sought.

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[1] Ibid., p. 421.

[2] Ibid., p. 420.

Again the evaluation of this argument will be postponed (until Chapter V). The point now, as throughout this chapter, is a methodological one. If we refer again to Criteria of Truth and Error where Sidgwick characterizes as "self-evident" those beliefs that in ordinary thought are certain [without qualification] . . . [and whose] certitude may be distinguished as primary or independent . . ."[1] we may well be puzzled. None of the ethical principles which he describes as self-evident fits that description. The description would remain valid only if some interpretation could be given to "ordinary thought" and "primary or independent certitude" which was consonant with the treatment which he gave those ethical principles. Such an interpretation will be considered at the end of this chapter, but it will be necessary to consider two other points first.

V. Some Problems in Sidgwick's Concept of Self-Evidence

Several questions have emerged in the preceding pages. The most important of these are: 1) does Sidgwick clearly distinguish between the self-evident and the inferred; and 2) just what epistemic value does he grant to such appeals? In answering the second question, I would like to deal also with Robert Schultz's charge that Sidgwick confuses epistemological with psychological certainty.

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[1]Sidgwick, "Criteria," p. 437.

It is most convenient to begin with the question of whether or not Sidgwick clearly distinguishes between the self-evident and the inferred. As noted above, there are a number of places where he seems to fail to do so; with one exception, however, I will argue, the procedures which look like attempts at demonstration are actually just attempts at explication. Sidgwick himself mentions the distinction which Aristotle draws between the logically prior and the epistemologically prior; Sidgwick's position might be called a recognition of the difference between the logically self-evident and the psychologically self-evident. He might remind us that no statement at all is self-evident as it stands. It is self-evident only in relation to a reader. Certain conditions must be met before a statement's "self-evidence" becomes obvious to a given reader. The reader must, for instance, know the language in which the statement is written. And then, the statement must be presented; if someone has never thought of a certain statement, the question of self-evidence never comes up. Much of what Sidgwick does in the passages cited above simply brings to the attention of the reader certain propositions which he or she may never before have considered. It is unquestionably true, however, that at times Sidgwick seems to be doing more than that; when, for instance, he uses reasoning of this sort: if X is self-evident, then so is y. Note that he is saying more than "If X is true, then so is y." It is this kind of procedure which Robert Schultz attacks in

his article, "Sidgwick on Proof in Ethics."[1] Schultz points out that the nature of the self-evidence is not made explicit, and that Sidgwick does not defend his claim that the wider principle is less arbitrary, more founded in reason, than the narrower principle. Since some kind of "demonstration" (not necessarily logical demonstration) is presented, and since Sidgwick attends to the psychological conditions for assenting to self-evident propositions, Schultz claims that Sidgwick confuses normative and psychological accounts of proof. He refers to two crucially important passages: first, the section of Methods which Sidgwick explicitly labels "The Proof of Utilitarianism"; secondly, the article referred to earlier, "The Establishment of Ethical First Principles." The first passage relates more directly to the comparative epistemic status of "intuitions" and "Common Sense"; I will deal with it later. The Mind article, however, is directly relevant to the question of Sidgwick's treatment of self-evidence. First principles, he writes,

> cannot stand in need of what is strictly to be called proof . . . Yet . . . where there is a conflict . . . as rational beings conversing with other rationals it seems absurd that we should not be able to explain to each other why we accept one first principle rather than another. And how can these principles be valid if they do not prove the first principle which they (to use Mill's phrase) "determine the mind" to accept?[2]

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[1]Robert Schultz, "Sidgwick on Proof in Ethics," Philosophical Archives, September, 1975, pp. 336-351.

[2]Sidgwick, "Establishment," p. 106.

It is, of course, that reference to Mill's phrase which lends credence to Schultz's claim that Sidgwick is confusing "empirical" with "normative" concepts of proof. Now, underlying Schultz's criticism is the assumption that Mill's phrase--and Sidgwick's reference to it--concerns a purely "empirical" concept of proof. As Schultz puts it, such "proof" would be

> simply a general description of the thought patterns usually found to be present in people's consideration of moral issues . . . [comparable to] a description, say, of the thought patterns typically present where people have arrived at the view that members of other races are mentally inferior to members of their own races. In neither case would there need to be any implications about the truth, authoritativeness, etc. of the principle arrived at.[1]

In the first place, this interpretation of Mill's phrase is questionable. My purpose here is not an exegesis of Mill's position; instead I would like to point out one plausible interpretation which would defend Sidgwick against Schultz's accusation. It seems to me that what both Mill and Sidgwick are pointing out is this: nowhere in ethics can we find truths which are logically certain.[2] Sidgwick (and probably Mill, too) is seeking a kind of certainty which is <u>not</u> logical--and yet which is still certainty. Whether or not they succeed in this search is worthy of a great deal of debate; but it is

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[1]Schultz, "Proof," p. 346.

[2]They might have added that neither are such statements found in empirical science; but whether or not the "certainty" found in the two fields is comparable is a vast and difficult question.

unfair to decide that the only alternative to this logical certainty in ethics is empirical description of what people do in fact believe. It is that decision--or assumption--which underlies Schultz's criticism. It could in fact be argued that the phrase "empirical proof" is self-contradictory; any usual use of the word "proof" involves reference to a norm--in Schultz's words, to the truth, and authoritativeness of what has been proven.

In the second place, Schultz's description of the examination of Common Sense Morality drastically oversimplifies the role that examination plays in Sidgwick's work. Nowhere is Sidgwick simply taking a survey and listing the results. It is obvious from even a summary of the three methods of verification that commonly held opinions are subject to Intuitive and Discursive verification. The role which Common Sense Morality plays in Sidgwick's theory is discussed further in Chapters III and IV.

But this discussion of Schultz pleaves untouched the earlier difficulty; does Sidgwick clearly distinguish between the self-evident and the derived?

In general, I think, any claim that he does not, depends on the assumption that what is self-evident must be self-evident to any reader on the first reading; that there can be no kind of helpful considerations which could result in a reader's realization that a proposition is self-evident; that any attempt to explain a principle, especially by relating

it to other principles, must necessarily be an attempt to prove or demonstrate that principle. If my reflections above are correct, then such attempts are possible, often necessary.

Can such attempts at explication be distinguished from demonstration? In the latter case the statement under consideration cannot be known to be true unless premises from which it is derivable are known to be true. In what I have called explication, the statement may not be discovered unless the "premises" are known; but its truth can be seen, recognized, or understood, independently without or before that of the first. There is no epistemological dependence. Self-evidence remains a term whose extension is not completely delineated; it remains a term which is relative to particular minds, and thus to some extent a psychological predicate.

Let us look at some instances where it might be argued that Sidgwick was deriving statements and then calling them self-evident. To begin with, what is the relationship between the objectivity of ethical judgments and the principle of universalizability? It is true that Sidgwick points out a connection between these, and that when he arrives at the principle, his comments contain the word "therefore." But it is also true that his claim about universalizability is that it is implicit in all ethical judgments; what he has done is to make it explicit. In addition, the connection which he draws between objectivity and the principle of universalizability is not a logical connection. It might almost

be called a factual connection; at least, it is a description of what we can and do take into account as rational moral agents.[1] Therefore Sidgwick was neither attempting nor in fact giving any logical demonstration of the principle of universalizability. As for the principles of Justice and Prudence, it has already been maintained above that Sidgwick's mathematical analogies are not in fact logical demonstrations. The question remains, however, as to whether Sidgwick intended them to be logical demonstrations. A close look at his text indicates that he did not. The suspicious phrase is this: "I obtain the self-evident principle." The "obtain" here is not meant to indicate the final step in a chain of logical proofs. Instead, it again indicates that a certain amount of reflection enters into any recognition that a principle is self-evident. The mathematical analogies again serve as illustrations of this reflective process; they are not offered as demonstrations.

What kind of "proof" does Sidgwick offer for Rational Egoism? None; although the argument as I reconstruct it contains an inference, it is clear in the passages quoted above that he considers not Rational Egoism, but its denial, as needing proof. The only comment which might count as the proffering of evidence is his invocation of Common Sense.

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[1] To Schultz, this and similar passages betray a confusion between normative and empirical concepts of proof.

The relationship between Intuition and Common Sense in Sidgwick's thought is complex and will be examined in the next chapter.

Sidgwick's treatment of Rational Benevolence is far more problematic. He says quite unequivocally that Rational Benevolence is a necessary inference from the principles of Prudence and Justice, but he also maintains that it contains "at least a self-evident element, immediately cognizable by abstract intuition."

Is it possible to maintain that a principle is an inference and still maintain that it is self-evident? On at least two interpretations of inference, yes, this is possible. First, it is always possible that "inference" is being used (perhaps improperly) to represent the kind of explication described above. Secondly (and more probably, in this case) it may be that the principle in question is a necessary inference from other principles, but that it could be known to be true without them. Take, for instance, the following mathematical example:

(a) 3 + 1 = 4
(b) 1 + 1 = 2
(c) 4 + 2 = 6
(d) (3 + 1) + (1 + 1) = 6

(d) is a necessary inference from (a), (b), and (c); on the other hand it is also self-evident. Rational Benevolence may be a necessary inference from other intuitions, but it is also, Sidgwick claims, evident in itself. These other

intuitions serve as analogies and explications in the same sense as the mathematical analogy. For anyone to whom Rational Benevolence is not self-evident, Sidgwick can call their attention to the simpler principles without, however, relinquishing the claim that Rational Benevolence is self-evident.

VI. Conclusion

This chapter begins an exploration of what Sidgwick means by "intuition." It examines this notion as it occurs in his Methods of Verification, and concludes that the fundamental notion involved in Sidgwick's "intuition" is "self-evident." Since this self-evidence is something of which we may "assure" ourselves, the questions arise: What kind of assurance is available? and, Is this "assurance" different from "demonstration"? These questions are considered in the light of those ethical principles which Sidgwick actually calls "self-evident," and in the light of Schultz's recent criticism of Sidgwick. The chapter concludes by arguing that Sidgwick's notion of self-evidence is coherent: that is, his verifications and explications of ethical propositions are, in principle and in fact, compatible with his claim that these propositions are self-evident. The chapter also argues that his concept of self-evidence is more than a reference to the psychological persuasiveness of the principles involved.

However, it has become clear throughout the chapter that Sidgwick's distinction between what is intuited and what is sanctioned by Common Sense needs attention. It has also become clear that his explications of the several fundamental, "self-evident," "intuited" notions depends upon an understanding of moral reasoning which Sidgwick does not fully explicate. The next chapters address these two problems.

CHAPTER III

COMMON SENSE

I. Introduction

The previous chapter examined Sidgwick's intuitionism, the intuitionism to which he is forced by his concept of an adequate moral theory. The analysis showed that, for Sidgwick, intuition is the recognition that certain non-tautologous propositions are self-evidently true. Sidgwick discusses three Methods of Verification, whose function is to test the truth of such propositions. The Third Method of Verification is what Sidgwick calls "The Oecumenical Test." The purpose of the present chapter is to examine his use of the Third Method and consider whether his concept of "self-evident" is separable from his concept of "generally agreed upon."

A close look at Sidgwick's notion of general agreement reveals some apparent problems. It is not always clear whose consent is to count; nor what degree of certainty is supposed to result from general consensus. Sometimes "Common Sense" seems to refer to an already existing body of beliefs, and other times it seems to be a method of establishing such beliefs. Propositions of quite different kinds are subjected

to the Method of Verification, with different results. The second section of this chapter discusses these apparent problems in some detail.

Since the term "Common Sense Philosophy" originates with Thomas Reid, the third section of this chapter examines some of his writings, in an effort either to find the source of Sidgwick's apparent inconsistency, or to find a remedy for it. The examination shows that the problems identified above are implicit in Reid's work, and become explicit in Sidgwick's because the later writer attempts far greater precision.

The fourth and fifth sections of the chapter classify propositions according to their epistemological level (i.e., according to their relative degree of generality and fundamentality). The classification helps solve some of the problems presented in the second section, and allows the unsolved ones to be formulated more clearly. These unsolved problems become the subject matter of Chapter IV.

II. Problems Within Sidgwick's Use of "Common Sense"

An attempt to pull together the different things which Sidgwick writes concerning "The Philosophy of Common Sense," the "Oecumenical Test," and "The Morality of Common Sense" reveals a number of apparent inconsistencies and incompletely worked-out relationships. Some of these problems, commentators have traditionally explained away (following Sidgwick's

lead). Others have been taken to reveal systematic problems within Sidgwick's epistemology. There are at least four such problems. One concerns the epistemic status of Common Sense; a second, the question of whose consent is to count; a third, the relationship between general assent as a Method of Verification and Common Sense Morality; and the fourth concerns the relationship between Sidgwick's use of these terms and his understanding of their historical basis in Scottish Common Sense Philosophy.

Epistemic Status

In the article referred to earlier, Robert Schultz argues that there is a "fundamental unresolved tension" in Sidgwick's treatment of the rules of Common Sense Morality. He points out that a major part of Sidgwick's proof of utilitarianism is his claim that utilitarianism "(1) sustains, (2) harmonizes, and (3) completes the morality of common sense."[1] Sidgwick must, then, grant some epistemic authority to the morality of common sense; he has to allow some claim to truth in these propositions, since they are essential premises in his argument. This, Schultz claims, results in an insoluble problem.

> The obvious difficulty with this has to do with the dependence of this whole set of arguments upon the prior acceptance of common sense morality as authoritative . . . [T]he question remains . . . how a

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[1]Schultz, "Proof," p. 350.

> principle that is, in any sense, "argued for" or "proved from" premises that are the rules of common sense morality, can be other than a lowest common denominator of those rules, or can, by itself, be used to correct and extend these rules.[1]

To some extent Schultz's objection deals with the coherence of Sidgwick's concept of proof (and, in fact, the title of his article is "Sidgwick on Proof in Ethics"). This objection will be dealt with in Chapter V. However, his claim that Sidgwick is inconsistent concerning the epistemic status of common sense is directly relevant to this chapter, and can be borne out by reference to Sidgwick himself. In "The Criteria of Truth and Error" Sidgwick gives, as his third method of verification, Oecumenical Verification. Also called Social Verification, it consists of consensus among those who are competent to judge. "Competence" is left quite vague. He here clearly grants epistemic value to consensus; and, to forestall the objection that perhaps we should distinguish Social Verification from Common Sense, let me note that Sidgwick explicitly identifies the two: "In provisionally taking Common Sense as the point of departure for philosophical construction, it was this criterion (Social Verification) that we implicitly applied."[2]

The word "provisionally" is important here; the third Method of Verification allows only "provisional" certainty,

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Sidgwick, "Criteria," p. 464.

and this is perhaps Sidgwick's recognition of the tension to which Schultz points. On the other hand, it must be remembered that Sidgwick is insistent that his Methods merely reduce the risk of error; he does not claim that any one of them guarantees certainty, and he does not distinguish the provisional assurance of the Third Method from that of the others. He intended, in speaking of the topic shortly before his death, to work out such distinctions, for he writes,

> At a later period I shall try to coordinate and compare the different kinds and degrees of imperfect certitude or provisional acceptance in cases where this triple verification (i.e., satisfaction of the three Methods) cannot be obtained.[1]

In particular he intended to discuss the situations when two of the three were satisfied, and one was not; ranking the certainty attained in each combination of two would be implication, have ranked all three in relation to one another. This intention, however, was never fulfilled.

So Sidgwick clearly grants epistemic value to general assent, to Common Sense, although he is careful to call this value provisional. When Sidgwick examines Common Sense Morality in Methods of Ethics, he finds that its provisions do not pass the other tests of self-evidence. He considers the results of his examination almost wholly negative;[2] and yet,

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[1]Ibid., p. 465.

[2]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 343.

Schultz and others argue, Common Sense Morality contributes the premises for Sidgwick's major argument in Methods.

Whose Consent Counts?

The nature of this "provisional" certainty, then, is the first difficulty in Sidgwick's use of Common Sense. The second is a problem which Sidgwick tries to explain away in terms of the "negative results" referred to above.

> It has been fairly urged that I leave the determinations of Common Sense very loose and indefinite: and if I were endeavouring to bring out a more positive result from this examination, I ought certainly to have discussed further how we are to ascertain the 'experts' on whose 'consensus' we are to rely in this or any other subject. But my scientific conclusions are to so great an extent negative, that I thought it hardly necessary to enter upon this discussion.[1]

Sidgwick's commentators have generally accepted this explanation. Schneewind simply paraphrases Sidgwick on the subject.[2] (Schneewind's book is intended to be as full and consistent an interpretation of Sidgwick as possible; it is not intended to be a critical study.) Koch points out a further "negative result" which makes the specification of whose consent is to count still less necessary: "the moral reasoning of every man who attempts to be rational is divided against itself

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[1] Ibid., p. 343 n.

[2] Schneewind, Sidgwick, p. 267.

because it allows the reasonableness of both Egoism and Benevolence."[1]

Nevertheless, if general assent is to have any epistemic value at all--and for Sidgwick, no matter how unclear that value, it exists--there must be some specification of whose agreement is to count.

Let us look first, then, at Sidgwick's use of the term "Common Sense" in Methods of Ethics. Hardly a page of that book lacks reference to "Common Sense" or to consensus. The list of phrases which expand on those terms, explain them, or replace them, is long. The list is also revealing, for it shows what a variety of ideas is included in that simple phrase. Such phrases as, "in the view of most men," "ordinary rules of morality," "natural to most men," "common use," occur frequently.

Once he writes that it is "the Common Sense of civilized Europe, upon which we are now reflecting"[2] although it is only a page later that he reverts to the phrase "Common Sense of mankind."[3] Such explicit ethnocentrism is rare: it is certainly no more frequent than Sidgwick's occasional explicit disavowals of ethnocentrism. In his treatment of Benevolence,

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[1]Donald Koch, "Henry Sidgwick's Moral Skepticism," Manuscript, p. 23 n.

[2]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 296.

[3]Ibid., p. 297.

for instance, he refers to the customs of other ages and other cultures and urges his readers to distinguish "real intuitions of rightness from the blind sense of obligation arising out of mere custom."[1]

This passage is not found in the last edition of Methods of Ethics; it is replaced by some general considerations about obligations to conform to custom. There is no reason to think, however, that Sidgwick abandons the distinction which he makes in this passage. The most likely interpretation of his references toward "Civilized Europe" is that, while he recognizes that for all practical purposes this is the only kind of consensus which he can know, he also recognizes the dangers of arguing from such limited data. Ethnocentrism is a practical danger for Sidgwick rather than a commitment within his theory.

There is another tension, however, which is more difficult to resolve. It shows up, to some extent, in his explicit definition of the "Morality of Common Sense": "a body of moral truth, warranted to be such by the consensus of mankind, or at least of that portion of mankind which combines adequate intellectual enlightenment with a serious concern for morality."[2] Apparently the consent of mankind in general is not necessary; that of reflective mankind is sufficient. But

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 218.

[2]Ibid., p. 215.

outside of Methods of Ethics some vacillation appears. In several places Sidgwick refers to the consensus of experts[1] and at least once explicitly discounts the opinions of those who have not thought seriously about the matter in question.[2] Is there some way to reconcile "consensus of experts" with "Common Sense of mankind"? Perhaps there is, if we are willing to limit the latter phrase to those who think seriously about the subject--in this case, about ethics. If, then, we call any person who has reflected on ethical questions an "expert" on the subject, we will have resolved the tension. The underlying assumption--and I do not know that Sidgwick makes the assumption explicit at any time--is that ethical knowledge is different from, say, scientific or theological knowledge; different in that it can be reached without special study by an average, but careful, thinker. The contrast with theology shows up in a curious, brief article by Sidgwick entitled "Dialogue on Time and Common Sense." The two characters are debating on whether God, if he exists, does so outside of time. One speaker invokes the authority of the ordinary person.

> 'The good people who go to church believe in an everlasting deity, enduring through Time, not out of Time.' 'Yes,' [Sidgwick] replied, 'but I understand that the

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[1]Sidgwick, "Criteria," p. 464.

[2]Sidgwick, "Dialogue on Time and Common Sense," in Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant, ed. James Ward (New York: MacMillan, 1905), p. 402.

> better opinion--as lawyers say--among students of theology is that the efflux and succession of Time takes place only for finite beings . . . I respect this preponderant opinion'[1]

The "better opinion," then, is not that of the ordinary person. And yet, opinions of such ordinary persons are of some importance, even in theology. In an interesting analogy, Sidgwick writes that the "normal mind"--the ordinary person's thoughts--

> move about these questions in a spiral way . . . the philosopher may save himself unnecessary motion, by keeping nearer the axis of the spiral . . . he must try to get the whole of our normal thought free from confusion and contradiction . . .[2]

This same approach is recommended for the study of ethics. At the least, then, in many fields, "normal thought" points the way; it is of heuristic value. And, although it doesn't surface in this dialogue, there does seem to be an underlying assumption that in ethics, unlike most other fields, the ordinary person who becomes reflective, becomes an expert; i.e., the consensus of the opinions of these people counts.

In his discussion of the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid, from whom Sidgwick borrowed the phrase "Common Sense," he gives still another specification of whose consent is to count. Sidgwick mentions the dispute between Hume and Reid and reminds us that Hume has one set of beliefs in the

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[1]Sidgwick, "Dialogue on Time and Common Sense," p. 401.

[2]Ibid., pp. 402-403.

"philosopher's closet" and a different--in fact inconsistent--set in the ordinary world of

> 'dinner, backgammon, and social talk.' Reid takes his stand with those who are 'so weak as to imagine that they ought to have the same belief in solitude and in company!' His essential demand, therefore, on the philosopher, is not primarily that he should make his beliefs consistent with those of the vulgar, but that he should make them consistent with his own . . . it is the duty of a philosopher--his duty as a philosopher--to aim steadily and persistently at bringing the common human element of his intellectual life into clear consistency with the special philosophic element.[1]

There emerges here a new phrase in explication of "Common Sense": "the common human element of [one's] intellectual life." Sidgwick focuses here not on how many people--common people or experts--hold the opinion, but on the fact that the philosopher himself holds it, and should not pretend that he does not.

Two other possible problems need to be mentioned here. One arises from Sidgwick's comment, in the same article on Reid, that the ordinary person may not be capable of formulating these principles, but is often capable of judging their truth; "just as few of us could have found out the axioms required in the study of geometry, but we could easily see the truth of Euclid's."[2] And here Sidgwick distinguishes between two kinds of proposition: those which are the underlying

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[1]Sidgwick, "The Philosophy of Common Sense," in Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant, pp. 415-16.

[2]Ibid., p. 417.

assumptions of arguments, and those which are its conclusions. The assumptions, he writes, are "implicitly assented to by men in general." It is, of course, still harder to determine what counts as assent if that assent need only be implicit. (Such a qualification also occurs frequently in Methods of Ethics.)

The other additional problem in this area of "whose consent is to count" concerns what kind of explicit dissent is to count. As Koch remarks,

> If, for example, the average wage earner is casually asked if he ought to get a higher wage, he will undoubtedly reply in the affirmative . . . If . . . some basis is utilized to limit dissent to 'serious dissent' or 'dissent that really counts,' 'then how is the adequacy of this basis itself to be judged?'[1]

The Relationship Between the Third Method of Verification and Common Sense Morality

A number of problems, then, arise from attempts to clarify "common" sense or "general" assent. Still another kind of problem is revealed by the apparent interchangeability of the two phrases just quoted. It will be remembered that in "Criteria of Truth and Error" Sidgwick links the Third Method of Verification (the Oecumenical Method) with Common Sense by calling an appeal to the latter, an implicit application of the former. It is nevertheless true that in the section of Methods devoted to the examination of Common Sense Morality,

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[1]Koch, "Sidgwick," pp. 26-27.

general assent is one of the methods used to test the Morality of Common Sense for self-evidence.[1] There is a kind of dialectic here, for as long as the maxims of Common Sense

> are left in the state of somewhat vague generalities . . . it may be fairly claimed that the assent is approximately universal . . . But as soon as we attempt to give them the definitiveness which science requires we find that we cannot do this without abandoning the universality of acceptance.[2]

It might be claimed that only the "vague generalities" count as the Morality of Common Sense, and that therefore there is no difference between that and the Oecumenical Test. For various reasons, however, I believe that difference is real and significant. For one thing, Sidgwick does not confine the term "Common Sense Morality" to that body of vague generalities; for another, general assent is used as a test of the self-evidence of the Morality of Common Sense and it is difficult for something to be a test of itself. The most significant difference, however, is implied in the previous point: the Oecumenical Test, or the test of general assent, is a procedure, while the Morality of Common Sense is a set of propositions. It is the relationship between the two--a relationship which Sidgwick comes close to calling identity, but which clearly cannot be that--which needs further attention.

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[1] Sidgwick, Methods, pp. 341-342.

[2] Ibid., p. 342.

The examination of this relationship will help to clarify Sidgwick's concept of Common Sense.

Methods vs. "The Philosophy of Common Sense"

There is one more important problem in Sidgwick's use of the term, a problem which emerges from a comparison of Sidgwick's use of the term in Methods of Ethics, with his discussion of the concept in an article entitled, "The Philosophy of Common Sense." In this article Sidgwick gives an initial definition of Common Sense as

> the body of unreasoned principles of judgment which we and other men are in the habit of applying in ordinary thought and discourse . . .[1]

He goes on to list, as typical of those "unreasoned principles," four beliefs: that objects of sense perception exist independently of our perception; that there is a permanent subject of our changing conscious states; that right and wrong can be known and are distinct from considerations of self-interest; that every change has a cause. As I will argue later, each of these propositions is, essentially an assumption, a premise rather than a conclusion. This characterization fits in well with Sidgwick's claim, elsewhere, that such principles are not explicitly formulated by most people, but receive assent when they are formulated.

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[1]Sidgwick, "The Philosophy of Common Sense," in Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant, p. 415.

What is the epistemological nature of the propositions which Sidgwick, in Methods of Ethics, claims are supported by Common Sense? To what extent are they like the assumptions for which he allows Reid to claim such support?

In the Preface to the First Edition Sidgwick makes

> the simple assumption (which seems to be made implicitly in all ethical reasoning) that there is something under any given circumstances which it is right or reasonable to do, and that this may be known.[1]

This is a more careful statement of one of the four "unreasoned" assumptions whose authority Sidgwick recognizes in "The Philosophy of Common Sense." But in Methods he does not characterize this as a belief of Common Sense, and in fact he makes no attempt to prove the proposition; it is, as he says, a simple assumption. Where Sidgwick does use Common Sense as evidence of truth or plausibility, he uses it to support propositions of a different kind.

His major examination of Common Sense occurs in Book III of Methods of Ethics, "Philosophical Intuitionism." Most chapters of that book examine specific virtues, "Justice," for instance, or "The Intellectual Virtues." Each of these chapters attempts to explicate the Common Sense notion of the virtue in question; and most of them end with the claim that the Common Sense notion cannot be defined precisely. Ordinarily (as mentioned above), the more precisely the virtue is

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. v.

defined, the less universal its acceptance will be; the less precise its definition, the more universal its acceptance.

That is, there is a group of actions which it is universally agreed are just; another group whose injustice is universally agreed to; and a third group about which there is disagreement. The more complete the attempt to classify the actions in this third group, the less likely we are to find universal agreement with the classification. Common Sense, then, is used in Methods of Ethics to verify propositions like the following: "These actions are contrary to the virtue of Justice."

How do these propositions compare with those which Sidgwick permits Reid to support through appeals to Common Sense? They are not of the same kind as the four which Sidgwick explicitly allows. Each of those four is an assumption which makes possible a whole field of inquiry. The assumption that every change has a cause underlies all scientific inquiry, for scientific inquiry asks what particular cause brings about particular changes. The assumption that there is a permanent identical subject of changing conscious states underlies, makes possible, most statements of psychology, for most psychology asks what is true of that underlying subject. The assumption that what we perceive exists independently of our perception underlies all efforts to distinguish illusion from reality. Finally, as noted above, the assumption that there is a knowable difference between what is right and what is

wrong underlies more particular inquiries about whether particular actions or classes of action are in fact right.

But the statement that specific kinds of action are just is not as general, not as fundamental, as these four assumptions. (There is this similarity in epistemological status: such a statement does make possible still other inquiries, e.g., whether a particular action belongs to the kind of action which is just.) But it is not as general as those four assumptions because it describes one kind of right action among many. It is not as fundamental as those four assumptions because it is made possible by one of them--the fourth--that there is a knowable difference between right and wrong.

Now Sidgwick gives us no examples of what he would call the illicit use of common sense; he simply writes that Reid misuses "vulgar common sense" when he allows the "ridiculousness" of conclusions to count as good reason for disbelieving them. An interesting question, then, is how Sidgwick distinguishes the proper use of appeals to consensus from the improper use. On questions concerning assumptions as fundamental as the four listed above, Sidgwick treats the appeals to consensus as entirely proper. When the propositions are of other sorts--i.e., assumptions, but less general ones; or conclusions of arguments--then Sidgwick is much more wary of use of appeals to consensus. There is no attempt, either in "The Philosophy of Common Sense" or elsewhere, to separate

these other propositions into classes such that one class would be properly supported by common sense, and the other not.

There are, then, a number of apparent inconsistencies in Sidgwick's use of terms like "Common Sense." Since that term originates with Reid, and since the most important of the problems arises in Sidgwick's discussion of Reid, it is appropriate here to look more closely at what the Scottish Common Sense philosopher meant by the term.

III. Reid and Common Sense

In examining Reid's concept of "Common Sense" the question of interest is whether the apparent inconsistencies in Sidgwick's concept arise because of confusions in Reid. If Reid is clear where Sidgwick is not, then the confusions might be solved by reinterpreting Sidgwick along Reidian lines. In that case, it could also be asked why Sidgwick diverged from Reid, and answers could throw further light on Sidgwick's position. If, on the other hand, these confusions have their origin in Reid, then we will understand part of the reason for Sidgwick's problems, and will know that we must look elsewhere for a solution. This comparison will refer to Essay VI of Reid's most important work, Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man.[1]

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[1]Thomas Reid, Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1969).

This discussion will begin by pointing out the important similarities between Reid and Sidgwick, and then will consider whether the specific problems which have been pointed out in Sidgwick also occur in Reid.

Fundamental Agreement Between Sidgwick and Reid

To begin with, it is clear that Sidgwick and Reid are in substantial general agreement in their use of the term, "Common Sense." Like Sidgwick, Reid is interested in setting up criteria for the identification of the intuitive foundations of knowledge. For Reid, as for Sidgwick, the question of whether such foundations are innate is not important.[1] For Reid, too, it is important that these intuitive foundations be non-tautologous.[2] Again, like Sidgwick, Reid believes that it is possible to reason concerning these self-evident principles. Reid is in fact more explicit concerning this point, and he describes four particular weapons which philosophers use to defend their first principles. The first of

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[1]Reid writes repeatedly in the Essay that we have these convictions "by the constitution of our own nature" (p. 540) so that someone lacking belief in our power of reasoning "would be a greater monster than a man born without hands or feet " (p. 630). He also insists, in arguments similar to Hume's, that these convictions cannot arise from experience (pp. 654, 666). In spite of this, he maintains that these principles are not innate, and concludes, "I maintain only that when the understanding is ripe, and when we distinctly apprehend such truths, we immediately assent to them" (p. 683). Reid, Intellectual Powers.

[2]Ibid., p. 479.

these is ridicule, i.e., claiming that the denial of these principles, while not a contradiction, is an absurdity. Ridicule, or the unsubstantiated claim "That's absurd!" is hardly a weapon of reason, and Sidgwick takes Reid to task for his occasional misuse of this "tool." The second is the use of particular examples, for these will win assent from the common man more readily than general principles.[1] The third weapon is called argument "ad absurdum."

> We trace the consequences of that supposition . . . and if we find any of its necessary consequences to be manifestly absurd, we conclude the supposition from which it follows to be false.[2]

This is not just a reiteration of the "argument" from ridicule; its force comes from Reid's pointing out that

> there is hardly any proposition . . . that stands alone and unconnected. It draws many others along with it in a chain that cannot be broken.[3]

This leads to Reid's most convincing argument, which he calls an argument "ad hominem." "If it can be shown that a first principle which a man rejects, stands upon the same footing with others which he admits . . . he must be guilty of an inconsistency."[4]

This discussion reveals two more fundamental points of similarity between the two men. It is clear that Reid,

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[1]Ibid., p. 662.

[2]Ibid., p. 608.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

like Sidgwick, is often appealing to some kind of implicit consent;[1] that is, the common person is not capable of formulating some of these principles, but would agree to their truth upon hearing the principle formulated by someone else. The most fundamental point of agreement is this: that such universal consent, whether or however verified, is evidence for the truth of the proposition. This is the heart of Common Sense Philosophy.

Problem Areas in Reid and Sidgwick

The first of the four problems identified in Sidgwick concerns the epistemic status of Common Sense (above pp. 74-77). It is "provisionally" authoritative, but "provisionally" is left unclear. The problem in this form does not occur in Reid, who takes the findings of Common Sense to be conclusive; indeed, it is the bedrock of inquiry. Why does Sidgwick part company with Reid here? It might be argued that Sidgwick's position, although more problematic than Reid's, is nevertheless an advance over it. The later writer advances a number of methods of examining apparently self-evident truths, a reaction in part to his recognition that what is called Common Sense may be simply prejudice in disguise. Sidgwick in fact takes Reid to task (as noted earlier) for not recognizing this danger. A major reason for Sidgwick's reluctance to claim

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[1]Schneewind, Sidgwick, p. 65.

complete certainty for Common Sense is that his close examination of Common Sense morality reveals its inadequacy. Reid makes no such examination. Let us say, then, that although Reid is consistent in what he claims about the epistemic status of Common Sense, the inconsistency in Sidgwick's work arises from problems in Reid's position which the Scottish philosopher did not himself recognize.

The second problem identified earlier in Sidgwick is that of specifying whose consent counts. Again, this problem does not occur as explicitly in Reid; he maintains that a large number of propositions receive consent from all those "with whom we can converse and transact business."[1] This formulation is repeated frequently; Reid sees no problem in identifying such people, and remarks that "all civilized people distinguish those who have this gift of Common Sense from those who have it not."[2] Thus there is no tension between "experts" and the ordinary person, between the reflective and the non-reflective. It might, of course, be claimed that the borderline between "those who have this gift" and others is not a precise one; but this is a different problem (for Sidgwick seems to vacillate on the criteria to be used rather than on the precise applicability of the criteria).

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[1] Ibid., p. 557.

[2] Ibid., p. 559.

That Reid's claims to such universal consent are sometimes unjustified is unquestionable. It might be that ethnocentrism is a much more serious danger for Reid than for Sidgwick. For one thing he frequently claims that certain principles are found in "all languages"--but refers to no language at all (not even English) to substantiate this claim. Reid makes an unusual distinction between contingent and necessary first truths. The details of this distinction will not concern us here,[1] except to note that necessary truths are in some sense stronger than contingent truths. This is of interest because this classification contains, along with logical and mathematical truths, "grammatical" truths, truths of taste, and those containing morals.[2] These latter categories (and particularly "truths of taste") indicate that Reid was unaware of the dangers of ethnocentrism. Sidgwick, on the contrary, was aware of the danger and tried, with varying success, to avoid it. But neither man maintains a theory which is, as such, ethnocentric.

Again, then, a problem (in this case, that of whose consent is to count) occurs in Sidgwick which does not occur

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[1]The distinction is drawn along somewhat Leibnizian lines. At one place, for instance, Reid writes that "contingent truths . . . may be true at one time, and not at another," while necessary truths are always true. Both categories of statement, however, are certainly true.

[2]The contingent truths refer to the reliability of human faculties such as memory, sense, and intellect, as well as our beliefs that the future will be like the past, that we have free will, and that other minds exist.

in Reid; and again, the difference results because Sidgwick's position is more cautious. If Reid is completely consistent, it is at the price of credibility; if Sidgwick is less than completely consistent, it is because of a more plausible position.

The third problem identified in the initial discussion of Sidgwick was the relationship between the Method of Verification called the Oecumenical Test, and Common Sense Morality. At some places these two are identified; in other places the first is used as a test of the second. This is yet another instance of a problem resulting from a more sophisticated position; for it is Reid's position that whatever is part of Common Sense is true, unquestionably true, and not subject to further test.

The final problem which the earlier discussion pointed out in Sidgwick does not follow the pattern of the first three. It does occur in Reid's writings, to at least the same extent that it appears in Sidgwick's. This fourth problem concerns the varying epistemological levels of the propositions which are said to be verified by Common Sense. When Sidgwick is discussing Reid, he considers propositions which are fundamental to whole fields of inquiry, propositions such as "every event has a cause." When Sidgwick examines Common Sense Morality, however, he examines propositions such as "this action violates justice," which are not nearly as fundamental. Reid groups "Truth of taste" with "Mathematical Truths," and

the second are not nearly as general as the first. He allows wide jurisdiction to Common Sense:

> It is possible, that, by setting out from false premises, or by an error in reasoning, a man may be led to a conclusion that contradicts the decisions of Common Sense. In this case, the conclusion is within the jurisdiction of common sense, though the reasoning on which it was grounded be not . . .[1]

These comments, of course, are pointed most directly at philosophers like Hume, who argue from quite involved premises to conclusions which violate common sense at the most fundamental level; such philosophers tell us, for instance, that inductive arguments yield no knowledge at all. Nevertheless Reid's comment indicates no limitation on what kind of proposition is subject to the judgment of Common Sense, and reveals that the distinctions unrecognized by Sidgwick are also unrecognized by Reid.

This examination of the historical background of Sidgwick's use of the term "Common Sense" shows that the problems within Sidgwick's work are all latent within Reid's work; Sidgwick does not diverge from Reid, but makes his terms more precise. It is this attempt at precision that gives rise to difficulties within Sidgwick's work. The next section of this chapter will present a framework for understanding what Sidgwick meant by Common Sense, a framework whose purpose is to resolve these difficulties and show that Sidgwick's position

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[1]Reid, Intellectual Powers, p. 568.

can, after all, be made consistent. It also intends to illuminate the relationship between Sidgwick's use of Common Sense and his intuitionism.

IV. A Clarifying Framework

I will argue here that it is helpful to think of Sidgwick's concept of Common Sense primarily as a procedure, and that the unclarities discussed above arise from his failure to recognize that at times he is using Common Sense to mean a procedure (the Oecumenical Test) and at times to mean a body of principles ("the body of unreasoned principles of judgment which we and other men are in the habit of applying in ordinary thought and discourse.")[1] The following formulation identifies both components of the concept: The appeal to Common Sense is a procedure which, on different epistemological levels--different levels of generality--yields different results and therefore has different epistemic value. Before distinguishing these levels, I will give a general description of this procedure. At every level this procedure is what Sidgwick calls the Oecumenical Test: the appeal to general assent, which Sidgwick considers to be a fundamental Method of Verification. Like the other methods it is only a negative test of certainty; where such consensus is lacking, so is certainty. Like the other tests, it is a heuristic device, for when a proposition

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[1]Sidgwick, "Dialogue," p. 415.

fails the test, we know that we must keep on looking--for a new formulation, perhaps a more limited one, which will pass the test. The subject matter of this test, on every level, is a set of principles which people assume to be true, to which people appeal in ordinary conversation, although these principles have often not been explicitly formulated by the speakers.

These principles can be distinguished from one another by their relative epistemological priority; by such a criterion, they fall into three different categories.

The First Level: CS_1

The first category, identified above in Sidgwick's discussion of Reid, contains those propositions which are the most fundamental. They are the presuppositions of whole fields of inquiry. To use Quine's metaphor, they are more central to our web of belief than any other non-tautologous statement(s). The only ethical judgment among those we have considered which belongs in this category is that there is a knowable difference between right and wrong. A correlative judgment--that there is a knowable difference between good and bad--also belongs here. These statements come closest to passing the test of general assent, and it is easy to specify whose consent is to count: everyone's, including the philosopher herself. There is no danger of ethnocentrism here, and no distinction between the expert and the non-expert.

There may be a distinction between the reflective and the non-reflective, but only to this extent: that for a few people the assent is explicit, for most implicit. Only when a proposition is formulated and understood can explicit consent be given, and in most people's lives such fundamental propo itions are never presented.

The epistemic status of these propositions is stronger than that of any other category. While Sidgwick would still insist on calling the certainty "provisional," there is no competition here. Their certainty is not subject to test by propositions of any other category. They are of course subject to the other two Methods of Verification; this raises the interesting question of whether these methods can be phrased as self-evident principles. If, in the form of principles, they would pass the test of general assent, further questions would arise about ranking within this most fundamental category. The second method, rephrased as a principle, is almost analytically true: True principles must be mutually consistent. The first method, in any of its guises, is not analytically true. Consider, for instance, "Those propositions whose negations are inconceivable are true." This is not a tautologous claim, nor does it seem self-evidently true. The same is true of the Third Method itself, rephrased as a principle: "Those propositions which receive universal assent are true." It seems clear that neither of these is self-evidently true, and that neither would pass the test of

universal assent. Sidgwick's wisdom in calling them Methods rather than Principles is apparent.

I will call the body of principles which have the epistemological status described above CS_1. Those on the second level, to be described next, will be called CS_2.

The Second Level: CS_2

This level corresponds to what Schultz calls "abstract transcedent axioms."[1] The belief that such axioms are true is what Sidgwick calls "Philosophical Intuitionism."[2] This level includes the principles of Justice and Prudence, of Rational Egoism and Rational Benevolence. Although I do not know that Sidgwick ever refers to these in terms of Common Sense, there is a two-fold warrant for labeling them CS_2. First, as noted in the previous chapter, Sidgwick's justification of these principles is occasionally difficult to distinguish from an appeal to general assent (and such an appeal, as noted before, Sidgwick explicitly links with appeals to Common Sense). Secondly, the principles fit epistemologically between the more self-evident axioms and those specific beliefs which, in Methods, Sidgwick explicitly labels Common Sense.

By "epistemological fit" I mean that the principles of CS_2 are less general and fundamental than those of CS_1,

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[1] Schultz, "Sidgwick," p. 337.

[2] Sidgwick, Methods, pp. 373 ff.

but more general and fundamental than those of CS_3. As I argue above, each of the propositions of CS_1 makes possible a whole field of inquiry. This is not true of those of CS_2. Each of them, however, is definitive of a major class of moral duties. That "individuals in similar situations should be treated similarly," for instance, cannot be true unless "there is a knowable difference between right and wrong" is true. This logical dependence is not reversible; the second proposition need not be true for the first to be true. The first proposition, in other words, applies to a broader range of actions than the second; it is also presupposed by the second.

These principles (Justice, Benevolence, and so on) receive universal assent when they are made explicit. They are made explicit, however, only by philosophical reflection; and so the question of whose consent is to count is answered: "by those who have given morality sufficiently careful thought that they understand the principle." "Understanding the principle" may be taken to mean understanding the kinds of considerations which Sidgwick presents in explanation of the axioms; and understanding, to some extent at least, the alternatives to these formulations and the reasons for Sidgwick's acceptance of them. There is the classical temptation, of course, of claiming that anyone who disagrees just hasn't understood; I am not imputing that position to Sidgwick. There is a particular problem at this level, however, of specifying what is to count as sufficient reflection. Certainly it

demands more than simply understanding what the sentence means; it demands some critical reflection upon the implications of accepting or denying the sentence. This description is, of course, not at all precise: and an additional difficulty arises from the likelihood that more reflection is required at this level than at either of the other two. On the one hand, their generality makes the propositions of CS_2 more abstract than those of CS_3; they cover a wide variety of actions which differ from one another in many more ways than they resemble one another. It is likely that the propositions of CS_2 demand more reflection than the latter. On the other hand, they are more involved and less immediately evident than those of CS_1 and thus, again, demand more reflection. In this respect--the amount of reflection required for a proposition to be understood--the epistemological progression from level one through level three does not hold. On the other hand, the differing amount of reflection required is a clue to the difference in epistemic status between the first and the second level. It seems clear that Sidgwick considers the second level somewhat less certain than the first; it is propositions of the second level that receive his careful scrutiny and support, while those of the first he feels comfortable in simply assuming. Since he does not claim more widespread assent for one level than for the other, the fact that less reflection is required probably explains the greater certainty attributed to propositions of the first level.

The Third Level: CS_3

Given this tentative characterization of CS_1 and CS_2, it is time to turn to CS_3. The propositions of this level are those which are labeled "Common Sense Morality" in Methods of Ethics. The belief that such propositions are true is what Sidgwick calls "Dogmatic Intuitionism."[1] (What he calls "Perceptional Intuitionism" would be a fourth epistemological level, and is not considered here.)[2] Propositions of the third level are less general and less fundamental than those of the other two levels. For example, the following proposition is a piece of Common Sense Morality and hence belongs to CS_3.

A. Taking what belongs to another is wrong.

If A is treated as cognitive, as a proposition which is capable of being true or false, then anyone who claims that A is true presupposes the truth of the following, from CS_1:

B. There is a knowable difference between right and wrong.

Proposition A cannot be true unless proposition B is true. This order is not reversible; the truth of B does not presuppose the truth of A. A is also less general than B, since it applies to a proper subset of the situations to which

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[1] Ibid., p. 101.

[2] Ibid., pp. 100, 102.

B applied. If it is granted that these propositions are typical of their levels, it follows that propositions of the third level are less general and less fundamental than those of the first level.

It is somewhat harder to establish this epistemological order between CS_3 and CS_2; and it is the relative epistemic status of these two levels which is pointed out as a problem in the second section of this chapter. To begin with, however, it is reasonably evident that propositions of the third level are less general than those of the second. One reason to believe this is true is that there are far more third level propositions than second. Although Sidgwick phrases each of the "abstract transcendent axioms" (second level propositions) in several different ways,[1] it is fair to assume that Sidgwick intended to give at least three but at most five. I have identified four: Prudence, Rational Egoism, Justice, and Rational Benevolence. On the other hand, Book III of Methods, which examines Common Sense Morality (third level propositions), identifies a large number of separate duties: Benevolence, Justice, Obedience to Law, Truth-Telling, Liberality, other Social Virtues, and Self-Regarding Virtues such as Prudence, Temperance, and Purity. There is more involved, however, than simply this difference in numbers.

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[1]Schneewind identifies a total of seventeen. Sidgwick, pp. 295-297.

Each of the second level propositions is a constraint on all moral action, although sometimes the requirement is met vacuously (i.e., the requirement is met simply because it is not violated). But the third level propositions each refer only to a subset of moral actions. Notice that Prudence, Justice, and Benevolence occur in both lists.

As a second level proposition, both Prudence and Justice refer to the rational end of all action. On the third level, Prudence refers to the habit of careful calculation in matters concerning our own welfare; on the third level, Benevolence refers to specific acts of kindness.[1] The second level axioms, then, are more inclusive than the third level propositions.

In considering whether CS_2 is epistemologically more fundamental than CS_3, it turns out that the clearest answer is, again, that at least Sidgwick must think them to be. It is here that Schultz charges Sidgwick with a "fundamental unresolved tension." Briefly, Schultz argues that since Sidgwick "proves" Utilitarianism by arguing that it harmonizes and completes Common Sense Morality, he cannot consistently claim that Utilitarianism is of superior validity to Common Sense. In Schultz' words, how can a principle that is "'proved from' premises . . . be used to correct and extend those (premises)."[1]

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, pp. 329, 238.

[2]Schultz, "Proof," p. 350.

This part of Sidgwick's work is called by Schneewind the "Dependence Argument." Since he gives Sidgwick what is probably the most favorable possible interpretation, I will use that interpretation here. The essential disagreement can be put in this way: Schultz claims there is a circular relationship in Sidgwick's position, between CS_2 and CS_3;[1] that each is, to some extent, used as a premise in the proof of the other. Schneewind claims there is a one-way relationship; that whatever validity CS_3 has is dependent upon the validity of CS_2, and that CS_2 is established on independent grounds. Briefly, Schneewind finds in Sidgwick a concept of rationality which demands that any ethical system have both the form and the content of the abstract transcendent axioms which make up the second level. Chapter IV of this dissertation argues that Schneewind's interpretation of Sidgwick is the correct one; for my purpose here it is sufficient to note that under one plausible interpretation Sidgwick finds CS_2 epistemologically more fundamental than CS_3; that is, he holds that the propositions of the third level cannot be true unless those of the second level are true, and he does not hold that this relationship is reversible. Since it was established earlier that the propositions of CS_3 are less general than those of CS_2, and less general and less fundamental than those of CS_1, the

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[1]For the sake of brevity, "CS_2" will mean "the set of propositions of the second level." "CS_3" will mean "the set of propositions of the third level."

claim of relative epistemological priority among the three levels is tentatively established.

Correspondingly less certainty is established by consensus at this third level. It is here that the fruits of his search for consensus are so meager that he can say that questions of whose consent is to count are irrelevant.

> My . . . conclusions are to so great an extent negative that I thought it hardly necessary to enter upon this discussion.[1]

(That is not to say, however, that these propositions have no epistemic value at all. Schultz is quite right in saying that Sidgwick attaches some such value. Chapter IV argues that, while the second level propositions are, possibly, known intuitively, those of the third level are not. It does not follow that third level propositions are not knowledge claims; rather, their claims to be knowledge have to be validated through reference to second level propositions.)

At the third level more than at the others, such assent as exists is as likely to be explicit as to be implicit. People frequently speak of an action or a class of actions as being wrong; and they just as frequently use such principles as implicit norms in evaluating actions. But, as noted earlier, agreement at this level depends upon the imprecision of the formulation. As the formulation becomes more precise, agreement lessens.

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 343 n.

It was at this level, too, that the introductory segments of this chapter found a problem: what is the relationship between Common Sense Morality and the third method of verification? At this point it can be seen that an appeal to Common Sense Morality is, as Sidgwick said, an implicit use of the third method; but, (and this he didn't recognize) it is a use of that method at a particular epistemological level. At that level comparatively little consensus can be reached. The examination of such propositions by the third method shows, in detail, to what extent such agreement does exist.

Conclusions

This framework--this classification of moral propositions into three levels--clarifies the issues in two ways. First, it clears up several of the difficulties discussed earlier in this chapter. Consider for instance the apparent inconsistency between the kind of proposition to which "The Philosophy of Common Sense" refers, and those which make up the Morality of Common Sense. Viewing appeals to Common Sense as a procedure which has varying levels of subject matter eliminates this charge of inconsistency. Similarly, the relationship between the third method of verification and the body of Common Sense Morality is made clear by this interpretation.

Secondly, where this framework does not eliminate a problem, it at least identifies more precisely just what the

problem is. Take, for example, the question of whose consent is to count. It turns out that while on every level universal consent is desirable, nevertheless on each level the question takes a slightly different form. On the third level, since universal assent is unattainable for any precise statement, the question becomes moot. On the first level, however, something close to universal assent actually exists, at least implicitly, among those who weigh moral decisions. On the second level the question retains its sharp edge, for it becomes the question of what is to count as sufficient reflection. The remaining problem identified early in this chapter concerns the epistemic status of propositions which receive general assent. Part of that problem is the tension which Schultz identifies between what I have called CS_2 and CS_3. That issue is not resolved here, but it is sharpened. The issue now is this: can the truth of CS_2 propositions be established without assuming the truth of CS_3 propositions? Is there an irreversible epistemological order among the three levels?

The issue of epistemic status raises another, equally fundamental, question. Sidgwick, at every point, calls the certainty attained by this procedure "provisional." In a sense, he, like Reid before him, ignores the question of justification; but by using the word "provisional" he implicitly admits the difficulties. Why does universal assent

substantiate the truth of a proposition? This central question is left unconsidered.

Perhaps it is better answered obliquely. Like the other remaining questions--How much reflection is sufficient?, and, Is there a non-circular justification for the propositions of CS_2?--it depends upon Sidgwick's concept of rationality. This is the topic to be addressed in the next chapter.

V. Intuition and Common Sense

The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on Sidgwick's concept of intuition through an examination of the closely allied topics, general assent and Common Sense. In the light of the framework offered and discussed in the Section IV, that question can now be asked more precisely. From the point of view of content, are the propositions of any of these three levels those which Sidgwick would call intuitively certain, or self-evident? And, from the point of view of procedure, in what way does general assent add certainty to propositions whose self-evidence has been determined in other ways?

Let us look again at the propositions of each level. The acceptance of third level judgments, about individual actions or classes of actions, is in fact called "intuitionism" by Sidgwick. This label, however, is misleading. What Sidgwick means by "Intuitionism" is the belief that

> we have intuitive 'knowledge' of the rightness of actions . . . ascertained by simply 'looking at' the actions themselves, without considering their ulterior consequences.[1]

This is, of course, a belief which Sidgwick rejects. His examination of CS_3 occurs in Book III of Methods; the title of that book is "Intuitionism," and it concludes that such a view of morality does not satisfy the requirements of rationality. When Sidgwick talks about the intuitional foundation of ethics, therefore, he is not referring to propositions of the third level.

Since Sidgwick calls the axioms of the second level self-evident, and "self-evident" is part of what is meant by "intuitively evident," it is clear that these axioms are part of what Sidgwick means by intuition. What about propositions of the first level? He pays little attention to these, and never labels them "intuition." Is there a difference between the first and second levels which would justify that distinction? Propositions of the first level are, after all, epistemologically prior to--more fundamental and more general than--those of the second; it would seem that if those of the second are known through intuition, so must be those of the first.

There is no answer to this in Sidgwick's writing. The bulk of it, of course, concerns only propositions of the second and third levels. Sidgwick notes his assumption (that there

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[1]Ibid., p. 96.

is a knowable difference between right and wrong) and does not return to it. We are left now, as we were at the end of Section IV, with an important unsolved question: Should Sidgwick's concept of intuition be interpreted so as to include this fundamental first level ethical proposition? The attempt in the next two chapters to deal with Sidgwick's concept of rationality will be, in part, an attempt to deal with the questions that have arisen here.

VI. Conclusion

This chapter began with the general question, Does Sidgwick have a concept of self-evidence which is distinguishable from his concept of general assent? Since the whole notion of general assent is linked to the terminology of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, it was necessary to look closely at what Sidgwick means by such terms. Problems were found within his position--problems of whose consent is to count, of unclear epistemic status, of confusion between content and method, of varying levels of generality in the propositions cited; these problems were not solved by a close examination of the historic source of Common Sense Philosophy, the writings of Thomas Reid. In fact, that examination showed that those problems are latent within Reid's work, and become evident in Sidgwick's work in parge part because of his attempt at greater precision. Finally, the chapter suggests classifying the possible objects of general assent by epistemological

level--that is, by degrees of generality and fundamentality. Such a classification solves some of the problems mentioned earlier, and gives greater focus to others. Although these remaining questions concern propositions from all three levels, each is particularly related to questions about the justification for the axioms of CS_2. For example: Should propositions of the first level be grouped with those of the second level, as intuitively known? Is there a justification of CS_2 which does not depend upon the truth of CS_3? How much reflection is required for one's assent or dissent to count, in general consensus tests of CS_2? The answer to these three questions depends upon a close examination of the arguments with which Sidgwick supports CS_2.

The even more fundamental remaining questions involve the relationship between universal assent and epistemic status. Does universal assent substantiate the truth of a proposition? If so, how? It is this fundamental question which Sidgwick (like Reid before him) ignores. The chapter began by asking what Sidgwick's use of "Common Sense" could tell us about his intuitionism. The answer must be that such appeals are, in themselves, not shown by Sidgwick to be of value. They are at most of negative heuristic value. Are such appeals different from appeals to self-evidence? Prima facie, of course, the answer is yes. But the preceding analysis shows that such appeals are actually productive, for Sidgwick, only at the first and second levels. The first level receives little

attention. So, again, the "abstract transcendent axioms" of the second level are crucial. It is here that claims to self-evidence and to consensus converge. The following chapter will look at the arguments for these axioms more closely, with the intention of delineating the concept of moral rationality which underlies Sidgwick's appeals to self-evidence and to consensus. This model of rationality may illuminate his intuitionism in a way which such categories as self-evidence and consensus cannot.

CHAPTER IV

SIDGWICK AND INTUITIONISM

I. Introduction

Chapter II examined Sidgwick's notion of self-evidence, since he argues that if there is moral knowledge there must be some self-evident foundation for it. Chapter III discussed the role of common sense in determining whether certain propositions are self-evident. That chapter ends by distinguishing various levels of moral claims and suggesting that problems about self-evidence differ at each of the levels. The present chapter, Chapter IV, looks at treatments of both third and second level propositions and asks whether, for Sidgwick, either of these are possible instances of intuitive knowledge. The chapter distinguishes a number of senses of "intuition" and asks whether Sidgwick is an intuitionist in any of these senses. Along the way it considers various conflicting interpretations of Sidgwick's methodology. It concludes that, for Sidgwick, propositions of the third level are not known intuitively; propositions of the second level are possibly known intuitively.

II. Various Meanings of "Intuition" in Moral Theory

Sidgwick calls himself, and is always referred to as, an intuitionist. The word "intuitionist," however, is open to a surprising number of interpretations, and therefore can be misleading. In most cases the confusion arises from the close connection in ethical theory between deontology and intuitionism. This is an historical connection in that many deontologists have been intuitionists. It is, for reasons I will point to later, also a conceptual connection.

Sidgwick makes a number of distinctions among kinds of intuitionism in moral theory, which are useful in avoiding such a confusion. He distinguishes three kinds of "intuitionism," according to the generality of the rules to which actions must conform. Perceptional Intuitionism maintains that the agent can "see," in each act, its rightness or wrongness. To the extent that "rule" is appropriate here, the word must mean a statement about the morality of this particular action at this time. (Sidgwick rejects Perceptual Intuitionism without much argument.) The second kind of intuitionism is Dogmatic Intuitionism, which holds as ultimate "general rules prescribing different kinds of acts."[1] This corresponds roughly with Common Sense Morality. Sidgwick rejects Dogmatic Intuitionism because the relationship

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[1]Ibid., p. 103.

among the fundamental rules cannot be rationally explained. This demand for a rational relationship among rules will be dealt with in Section III of this chapter. The third kind is Philosophical Intuitionism, which regards as ultimately valid "more universal and fundamental principles."[1] Sidgwick considers himself a philosophical intuitionist. In so labeling himself, he is calling the abstract transcendent axioms of the second level more authoritative than the Common Sense Morality which comprises the third level.

However, Sidgwick himself notices the intertwining of two distinct elements in his definition of intuitionism, and so distinguishes between a "narrow" and a "wide" sense of the word. In the narrower sense, intuitionism is the belief that consequences alone do not determine the morality of actions. In the wide sense, "intuitionism" refers to the belief that there are "self-evident principles relating to 'what ought to be.'"[2] Sidgwick's wider sense, then, is an epistemological one, and concerns the source of our moral knowledge. It is a belief about what justifies claims to moral knowledge. Each of the three kinds of intuitionism distinguished above--Perceptional, Dogmatic, and Philosophical--is intuitionism in this wider sense. It is this "wider" or epistemological sense to which most of this chapter is addressed.

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[1]Ibid., p. 103 n.

[2]Ibid., p. 102 n.

In his "narrow" sense, intuitionism is a belief about what justifies action. (In his initial definition he speaks of the intuitionist as simply not considering the consequences of actions; but he qualifies this almost immediately: "no morality ever existed which did not consider ulterior consequences to some extent."[1] Thus the more careful statement that consequences alone do not determine the rightness of actions.) This narrower sense refers to the content of the intuitions, and may be called the deontological sense. Dogmatic and Perceptional intuitionists belong in this deontological category, as well as in the "wider," epistemological category. Philosophical intuitionism belongs only in the epistemological category.

Sidgwick, who accepted a principle of utility, does not consider himself an intuitionist in the narrower, deontological sense. Yet D. D. Raphael claims that Sidgwick is an intuitionist in this sense. For the next few pages I will review the various combinations of epistemology and deontology which occur in modern uses of the term "intuitionism." I will also note, and reject, Raphael's arguments that Sidgwick may rightly be called a deontologist (i.e., an intuitionist in the narrow sense).

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[1]Ibid., p. 96.

Some Modern Uses of "Intuitionism" in Ethics

"Intuitionism," in current ethical writing, receives a surprising variety of definitions. In many cases the writer takes one element among the many which Sidgwick has identified and makes that element the defining characteristic.

In Dogmatic Intuitionism, for instance, and in some versions of Philosophical Intuitionism, there is a plurality of ultimate rules. John Rawls' use of "intuitionism" centers on that element:

> I shall think of intuitionism in a more general way than is customary: Namely, as the doctrine that there is an irreducible family of first principles . . .[1]

In this sense of the word, uncommon though it is, Sidgwick is an intuitionist. He maintains at least three fundamental principles of morality: Prudence, Justice, and Benevolence. Since these are second level principles, not third, Sidgwick is an intuitionist.[2]

D. D. Raphael takes not one element from Sidgwick's discussion, but two, confuses them, and as a result calls Sidgwick a deontologist. He says at one point, ". . . Sidgwick thinks that each of the methods of ethics depends on 'intuition,'

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[1]John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1971), p. 34.

[2]I have not argued here for the irreducibility of these fundamental principles; this is usually assumed, but James Newell explicitly argues for it. Newell, "Henry Sidgwick," p. 1.

i.e., on at least one underivative principle of obligation . . ."[1] This is correct; here "intuition" is being used in the wider, epistemological sense.

But he goes on to notice that the "names used by Sidgwick for the three methods are slightly confusing" since the names of the other two methods (Egoism and Utilitarianism) "suggest that the principle of classification concerns the character of right action" rather than the source of the knowledge about right action. Raphael therefore chooses to see intuitionism "as referring to a belief about the character of right action, and that only." At this point he has switched to the narrower sense of intuition, as the belief that consequences are not the sole determiner of moral rightness. He proceeds immediately to confuse the two senses and to impute to Sidgwick the view that "any properly ethical theory is in part 'intuitional' (i.e., deontological)."[2] He supports this startling conclusion with the claim that

> even teleological theories must rely on at least one principle of obligation that does not itself depend on the value of consequences . . . the rightness of pursuing happiness itself is not a matter of utility.[3]

This view he takes to be Sidgwick's. What Raphael has done, however, is confuse two issues. One concerns the justification

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[1]David D. Raphael, "Sidgwick on Intuitionism," Monist 58 (July, 1974):409.

[2]Ibid., p. 407.

[3]Ibid.

of actions: to hold that consequences alone do not make an action right is to hold a deontological position. The other concerns the justification of belief. To hold that fundamental principles about the rightness of actions carry their own justification--are self-evident--is to be an ethical intuitionist. The first issue is normative; the second is epistemological. The first concerns intuitionism in Sidgwick's narrow sense; the second concerns intuitionism in Sidgwick's wider sense.

Raphael's claim is that a teleological belief about the rightness of actions cannot itself be justified on teleological grounds; thus it must be a deontological belief. But teleological beliefs are not justified on deontological grounds, either. Only actions (and intentions, policies, etc.) can be justified on either teleological or deontological grounds; beliefs must be justified on epistemological grounds.

Kurt Baier also argues for a connection between deontology and epistemological intuitionism. The connection he draws, however, does not depend upon a confusion; furthermore, it helps to explain the strong historical coincidence between the two. Baier argues that any deontologist must be an intuitionist. Since deontologists rely upon something besides the consequences of an act, in judging whether or not that act is right, they will (usually or always) "claim that rightness is a simple property which we can 'see' or 'intuit' in an act

. . ."[1] Thus the Dogmatic Intuitionist, who has a plurality of third level principles, none of them justified in terms of a second level teleological principle, is an intuitionist both in the wide, epistemological sense and in the narrow, deontological sense. Most theorists called ethical intuitionists are in fact both.

But here, too, one must be careful. Frankena appears to take a single element from Sidgwick's discussion of intuitionism and make that the defining characteristic when he writes that intuitionism holds that "obligation is indefinable and non-natural."[2] This alone would not make one an intuitionist in the wide sense, for this is a claim about the meaning of principles of obligation. The epistemological intuitionist makes a stronger claim: the truth of such principles must be self-evident.

The remainder of this chapter deals with intuitionism in the epistemological sense. It deals separately with the propositions of the second and third level, asking for those of each level whether it is appropriate to call Sidgwick an intuitionist in this sense.

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[1]Kurt Baier, "The Moral Point of View," in Readings in Ethical Theory, ed. Wilfred Sellars and John Hospers (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, p. 1970), p. 471.

[2]William Frankena, "Obligation and Motivation in Recent Moral Philosophy," in Hospers and Sellars, Readings in Ethical Theory, p. 709.

III. Intuition and Propositions of the Third Level

Propositions of the third level concern particular actions and particular kinds of actions. What Sidgwick calls Common Sense Morality is made up of propositions of this kind. This section asks whether Sidgwick claims that we know these propositions in some special, direct way that should be called intuition. The discussion begins with a description of a technique used by John Rawls, called "reflective equilibrium." It has been argued that use of this technique commits the user to either subjectivism or to intuitionism (for judgments of both second and third level). Sidgwick claims that a relationship of "dependent validity" holds between third level and second level propositions. This relationship differs from reflective equilibrium (as that phrase is commonly understood), and does not commit Sidgwick to intuitionism for third level propositions.

"Reflective Equilibrium" and Epistemological Intuitionism

"Reflective equilibrium" is a term introduced by John Rawls in A Theory of Justice.[1] It describes a technique used in a great deal of contemporary ethical work as well as in Rawls' own. It has been claimed that Sidgwick uses that technique. After describing that technique I will consider whether

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[1]John Rawls, A Theory of Justice, p. 20.

its use commits the user to epistemological intuitionism. I will then consider whether Sidgwick in fact uses that technique.

Rawls begins with moral convictions about particular actions and particular kinds of actions (Rawls frequently uses the term "intuitions" for such judgments; but I will refer to them as judgments of the third level). When these convictions result from "impartial judgment not likely to be distorted by an excessive attention to our own interests," such convictions "are provisional fixed points"[1] which our general principles (second level) should fit. When, however, we are not certain about a third level moral decision, then our second level general principles should be used to settle our uncertainty. These second level principles derive their authority from their capacity "to accommodate our firmest convictions and to provide guidance where guidance is needed."[2] There is a kind of balance, then, between two levels, each deriving its authority from its relation to the other, and each subject to revision when the other changes. This dynamic balance is what Rawls calls "reflective equilibrium."

This technique has been criticized. Because of it, Rawls has been called an intuitionist by those for whom that term is pejorative, who consider intuitionism a retreat to a non-rational and ultimately subjective position. A

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

particularly vitriolic attack is made by R. M. Hare. As he interprets it, the technique gives ultimate authority to the third level judgments of Rawls and his readers. His criticism is worth quoting at some length.

> To speak like this . . . is to make the truth of the theory depend on agreement with people's opinions . . . it is depressing to find a self-styled objectivist falling as deeply into [subjectivism] as Rawls does--depressing, because it makes one feel that this essentially simple distinction will never be understood: the distinction between the view that thinking can make it so (which is in general false) and the view that if we are to say something sincerely, we must be able to accept it (which is a tautology).[1]

On Hare's view, then, calling third level judgments authoritative is either an empty claim or a false one; and to persist in this is to remove any grounds for claiming objectivity in ethics.

A more moderate form of this criticism is given by David Lyons, who considers the technique (Lyons calls it a "coherence" theory) inevitable but necessarily imperfect. His criticism contains two major points. First, he echoes Hare's concern about subjectivism. In Lyon's words,

> the justificatory force of coherence arguments is unclear. Pure coherence arguments seem to move us in a circle, between our current attitudes and the principles they supposedly manifest . . . we can still wonder whether [our basic convictions] express

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[1] R. M. Hare, "Rawls' Theory of Justice," in Reading Rawls, ed. Norman Daniels (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), p. 83.

> any more than arbitrary commitments or sentiments that we happen now to share.[1]

Lyons considers a defense of the objectivity of these third level convictions. It might be argued, he wrotes, that

> coherence arguments really do justify moral principles because they provide the strongest arguments that are possible for them--and this constitutes justification, properly understood.[2]

Such a position, however, assumes

> a fallacious principle that something is justified when all possible arguments for it have been given.[3]

It also leads to an absurdity, for it "implies the possibility of justifying unjustifiable assertions."

Secondly, he points out an internal problem in any coherence theory of morality. Even on its own terms, the justification it provides is at best provisional.

> [N]o coherence argument can be conclusive. For none of our moral judgments . . . can be considered incorrigible. And it is, moreover, unlikely that any set of considered judgments will mesh neatly with an initially proposed, intuitively attractive and illuminating set of principles that might seem to ground them and to extend them in an acceptable way. To achieve a satisfactory fit between judgments and principles, some judgments must be discounted, initial principles must be modified, or both.[4]

In addition, our judgments concern only those situations which we have had occasion to consider--we can never eliminate the

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[1]David Lyons, "Nature and Soundness of the Contract and Coherence Arguments," in Daniels, ed., Reading Rawls, p. 146.

[2]Ibid., p. 147.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., p. 146.

possibility of new situations arising. Therefore "Rawls does not and cannot claim that his principles match our considered judgments perfectly."[1]

It is likely, then, that users of reflective equilibrium must choose between subjectivism and intuitionism. Either the whole balanced set of judgments has no objective foundation, or all of the judgments (third level and second level) have some kind of intuitive authority. (As mentioned above, in Section II, and in the treatment of Hare, there are many who see those alternatives as amounting to the same thing--i.e., it is hard to establish the objectivity of supposed intuitions.) And if they do classify third level judgments as intuitive knowledge, they run into the problems mentioned by Lyons in making these judgments cohere with one another and with the second level principles.

Since the question at issue here is whether or not Sidgwick is an intuitionist with respect to third level judgments, it becomes important to consider whether or not Sidgwick does in fact use the technique described above as reflective equilibrium.

Sidgwick and Reflective Equilibrium

The resemblance between Rawls and Sidgwick in this respect is strong. However, if Sidgwick is using any form of

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[1]Ibid.

reflective equilibrium, it is not one which commits him to epistemological intuitionism for propositions of the third level.

To substantiate that claim, the next few pages will present a detailed discussion of the relationship which Sidgwick claims exists between second and third level propositions. That relationship is complex and easily misunderstood. An example of that misunderstanding appears in Robert Schultz's argument that Sidgwick's concept of proof in ethics is essentially incoherent. Schultz's conclusion--that Sidgwick oscillates between normative and descriptive concepts of proof--has already been discussed, and refutation attempted (pp. 64-66 above). However, I will review the reasons which lead him to that conclusion, for those reasons involve a misinterpretation of the crucial relationship between Sidgwick's second and third level propositions. Schultz claims that Sidgwick uses the less certain third level propositions to prove the more certain second level propositions.

Schultz refers to Sidgwick's claim that third level judgments have "general validity" which is only a "dependent and subordinate validity."[1] To Schultz, this notion of "subordinate validity" is incoherent. The relevant passage in Methods occurs when Sidgwick is arguing for the superior validity of Utilitarianism. Common Sense Morality has

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, pp. 421-422.

> only a dependent and subordinate validity . . . Utilitarianism sustains the general validity of the current moral judgments . . . 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.[1]

To summarize his objection, Schultz says

> [T]he question remains . . . how a principle that is, in any sense, 'argued for' or 'proved from' premises that are the rules of common sense morality, can . . . be used to correct and extend those rules.[2]

In answering Schultz's charges--and in substantiating the claim that Sidgwick is not an epistemological intuitionist for propositions of the third level--I will be indebted to Schneewind's interpretation of the central argument in Methods of Ethics.[3] Schneewind points out the importance of the historical context in understanding Methods of Ethics.

> [C]ommon sense morality had come by the middle of the 1860's to occupy a central place in . . . ethical controversies . . . the problem with which Sidgwick is mainly concerned [is]: to what extent can common sense morality be systematized on a self-evident basis?[4]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Schultz, "Proof," p. 350.

[3]As Schneewind points out, the general outline of Sidgwick's argument in Methods of Ethics is obscure. C. D. Broad treats the book as a collection of valuable reflections, and points out no overriding argument at all. Many readers have taken it to be a defense of utilitarianism, and yet Sidgwick himself denies this.

[4]Schneewind, Sidgwick, p. 193.

He identifies two major components in Sidgwick's answer to this question; Schneewind calls them the systematization and dependence arguments. Each requires detailed explication. I will begin with the dependence argument.

"The dependence argument is Sidgwick's attempt to show . . . that reason requires first principles of a kind which common sense does not supply."[1] Sidgwick distinguishes between the ultimately arbitrary facts of physical nature and the (ideally) rational facts of moral value. In the first realm we will, in the second realm we will not, admit variations for which we can discover no rational explanation. But all that Common Sense Morality gives us is a list of actions, some of which are right and others wrong, with no explanation for the difference between them.

The contrast with science is less helpful than either Sidgwick or Schneewind thought; Sidgwick's underlying point is an ideal of rational explanation. Schneewind refers us to Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant, but there Sidgwick discusses such an ideal for science too:

> For the purposes of science, the judgment that some members of a class have an attribute . . . immediately suggests the question, By what other characteristics is this portion of the class distinguished? We then seek at once to turn the 'some' into the 'all' of a sub class, by ascertaining their common characteristics.[2]

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[1]Ibid., p. 280.

[2]Sidgwick, Kant, p. 84.

Sidgwick describes the relationship between Common Sense Morality and Utilitarianism as twofold: "at once negative and positive."[1] This phrase occurs in Book IV, Chapter II, "The Proof of Utilitarianism." Sidgwick takes this opportunity to relate the conclusions of Book III (his examination of Common Sense Morality) to his project in Book IV (the proof of utilitarianism). It is here that Schneewind's reconstruction is important and revealing. What Sidgwick calls the "negative" stage, Schneewind calls the "dependence" argument; what Sidgwick leaves implicit, Schneewind makes explicit.[2] The "dependence" argument is so named (by Schneewind) because its conclusion is that Common Sense Morality has only a "dependent and subordinate validity."[3] As he sees it, the dependence argument begins after Sidgwick has established that the principles of Common Sense Morality are not self-evident; that is, the principles do not survive scrutiny by the three methods of verification described in Chapter II of this dissertation. The first method of verification offered means of evaluating claims to self-evidence; the second demanded mutual consistency among a set of principles; the third demanded general agreement. When Common Sense Morality is examined carefully, it offers generally agreed upon and

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 421.

[2]Schneewind, Sidgwick, pp. 264-265.

[3]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 422.

mutually consistent principles only at the cost of self-evidence.[1]

This is Sidgwick's conclusion in Methods after 150 pages examining Common Sense Morality. At this point Schneewind points to a discussion outside of Methods which describes more fully what might count as self-evidence in ethical principles.

In Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant,[2] Sidgwick discusses what "independent" validity would mean. Such principles would, for one thing, be "absolutely valid": each "conclusively determines the actual moral status"[3] of acts which fall under it. In addition, the principles are ultimate: "there is no valid principle of greater generality . . ."[4] The dependence argument is Sidgwick's attempt to show that the results of the examination of common sense morality are incompatible with these two related claims . . ."[5] Whenever common sense morality satisfies one of these conditions it fails the other. If the rule is "ultimate"--not dependent on a rule of greater generality--it is too vague to apply to actual cases. If it is sufficiently precise to apply to actual cases, then

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, pp. 342-343.

[2]Sidgwick, Kant, p. 2.

[3]Schneewind, Sidgwick, p. 279.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., p. 280.

the statement of it includes exceptions and limits, and such statements and limits, if rational--i.e., not merely arbitrary --must be determined by some other principle.

> If morality is rational, in short, the rules taken by dogmatic intuitionism as first principles can only determine putative rightness. But first principles, it is agreed, must determine actual rightness, since otherwise the rationality of morality is incomplete. The dependence argument shows, then, that from the main result of the examination of common-sense morality, it follows that the principles the intuitionist holds have only a 'dependent and subordinate validity.'[1]

The positive side of the argument--the systematization argument--is the claim that utilitarianism supplies the rationality which is missing in common sense morality. The systematization argument includes an account of what it means for some principle to be "superior in validity" to others: it will be "at least as wide-ranging in its scope" as the derivative principles; it "determines the limits and exceptions of other principles, while none determines such restrictions to it." In morality, therefore, such a principle will determine the actual rightness of actions. It is then Sidgwick's major burden to show that Utilitarianism does have this relationship to the morality of common sense. That effort is discussed in Chapter V.

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[1]Schneewind, p. 282. His reference is to Methods, p. 422.

Sidgwick on Third Level Propositions and Epistemological Intuitionism

Whether or not this systematization and dependency relationship is to be called reflective equilibrium is not important; nor is the issue whether or not Rawls himself uses Sidgwick's technique. What is important is whether Sidgwick's position commits him to the dilemma which seems to arise from some kinds of reflective equilibrium: that is, either subjectivism or an intuitionism which includes intuitionism for third level propositions.

Peter Singer argues that it does not. His thinking is interesting because, although I think his conclusion is correct, the argument he presents to support it is inadequate. As Singer sees it, Sidgwick uses the data of Common Sense Morality

> not as a means of establishing the validity of utilitarianism, but as a means of winning over . . . one who happens to hold a particular moral position, opposed to utilitarianism--namely, the philosophy of common sense morality.[1]

Singer calls this an ad hominem argument. There is no doubt that this is in part what Sidgwick is doing, for he says so frequently. The question is whether this is the only use he makes of third level moral judgments, for if it is, then Sidgwick is clearly not granting that these judgments constitute intuitive knowledge. In Singer's attempt to establish that

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[1]Peter Singer, "Sidgwick and Reflective Equilibrium," Monist 58 (July, 1974):499.

Sidgwick uses Common Sense Morality only in this ad hominem way, Singer makes several additional points. He mentions Sidgwick's insistence that the Oecumenical Test gives us only provisional certainty. This alone will not establish Singer's point, because Sidgwick attaches the same qualification to all his Methods of Verification. Whatever certainty can be reached through Intuitive Verification--regarding the second level axioms--will also be provisional. This qualification attached to third level judgments, therefore, does not prove that Sidgwick considers them less authoritative than second level judgments.

To support his claim Singer also points out that the subject matter of Sidgwick's inquiry is the method of Common Sense Morality rather than its conclusions; in Reflective Equilibrium it is the conclusions which serve as "fixed points" and must be systematized. However, the method of Common Sense Morality is appeal to a set of rules about action. Rules in this sense could be the subject of Reflective Equilibrium, just as conclusions about particular acts can be.

Singer's final argument is more effective, it relies on Sidgwick's acceptance of egoism as ultimately rational. Egoism is incompatible with Common Sense Morality, but this incompatibility in no way counts against Sidgwick's conviction of its rationality. Since Rational Egoism is a second level proposition, this argument offers real support for the claim

that Sidgwick is not an epistemological intuitionist for propositions of the third level.

The most convincing support for that conclusion, however, lies in a close look at the systematization and dependency arguments themselves. The crucial question is the correct meaning to be applied to the phrase "dependent validity." Sidgwick uses the phrase, as Singer claims, as part of an ad hominem argument; but only as that? As I have interpreted Schneewind's interpretation, the "dependent" in the phrase "dependent validity" means at most "derivative." Third level judgments are indeed knowledge claims, but they are not claims to intuitive knowledge. If anything is to count as intuitive knowledge it is the second level axioms; the third level judgments count as knowledge only because of their relationship to the second level axioms.

Perhaps it is Sidgwick's characteristic caution which leads to an opposing interpretation, for he insists upon the provisional nature of our certainty even at the second level, and when these axioms lead to conclusions which contradict Common Sense Morality we are told to be wary. In such a case, something must be mistaken. But no matter how firm our third level conviction, Sidgwick does not assume that the second level axiom must be reformed to fit it.

If, then, Sidgwick is not using Reflective Equilibrium in spite of the strong resemblances between his technique and Rawls', then the arguments which lead Hare to call Rawls an

intuitionist cannot be used against Sidgwick. And if third level convictions are helpful guards against error rather than authoritative--if their validity is only derivative from that of the second level axioms--then there remains no reason for calling Sidgwick an intuitionist in respect to third level propositions. He does not claim a special, direct knowledge with certainty of those moral truths.

IV. Intuition and Propositions of the Second Level

A more significant question is whether Sidgwick's treatment of the second level propositions is appropriately called epistemological intuitionism. It is, after all, of the self-evident axioms that Sidgwick was speaking when he called himself a philosophical intuitionist; and the term is meant to contrast with the Perceptional and Dogmatic intuitionism which he finds wanting.

In order to discuss this issue it will be necessary to return to a consideration of just what epistemological intuitionism is. The second section of this chapter has discussed the frequent linking of intuitionism and deontology, pointed out the reasons for this, and attempted to distinguish intuitionism as a view about the content of morality from intuitionism as a view about the source of moral knowledge. The latter is the most common use of the term; it can be distinguished from other (usually mixed) uses by calling it epistemological

intuitionism. For the rest of this chapter I will continue to use the term intuitionism in a strictly epistemological sense.

Epistemological Intuitionism: Further Examination

At this point the previously unexplicated concept of "epistemological intuitionism" needs to be clarified. Intuitionism seems most attractive on a foundationalist approach to knowledge. Chapter I, examining the elements in Sidgwick's concept of morality which lead him to intuitionism, lists as a crucial thesis, "All knowledge is either self-evident or derived from self-evident premises." This dissertation neither examines nor evaluates that premise. Nevertheless its importance, and the fact that it can be questioned, must be noted.

In such a foundationalist framework, intuitionism seems necessary to avoid infinite regress. We must arrive at a non-inferential base and, if we are to avoid skepticism, that non-inferential base must count as knowledge. But what--if anything--can justify such basic beliefs? What can serve to distinguish truth from falsity?

It is helpful to use Richard Rorty's two senses of intuition: a weak sense and a strong sense.[1] In what might

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[1] Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s. v. "Intuition," by Richard Rorty.

be called the weak sense, intuitive knowledge is synonymous with non-inferential knowledge.

Weak sense: S knows the p intuitively only if

a) p is true

b) S is justified in believing that p and

c) S's knowledge is non-inferential.

This kind of intuition can be known without supporting arguments; on the other hand, should doubts arise about the truth of the proposition, such support can be helpful in settling the doubts. A paradigmatic instance of intuition in this weak sense is our knowledge that we have two legs. We do not know this inferentially, we know it directly. Yet, should doubts arise about the truth of the proposition, we can look, count, ask other people, and so on. Information from these other sources can legitimately allow us to conclude that the proposition in question is true. Thus intuition in the weak sense refers to propositions which are capable of being known directly and capable of being known indirectly.

In the stronger sense, intuitive knowledge is a particular form of non-inferential knowledge.

Strong sense: S knows that p intuitively only if

a) p is true

b) S is justified in believing that p and

c) there are no accepted procedures for resolving doubts about the truth of p.

Propositions which are known intuitively in the strong sense form a subset of those known intuitively in the weak sense. There are two paradigmatic instances of intuition in the strong sense: "first person statements about those psychological states to which one has 'privileged access' and underived a priori truths."[1]

To a non-foundationalist, knowledge in neither of these two senses should be called intuitive knowledge. Tom Regan, for instance, argues that any claim to moral intuition must fail. He, too, distinguishes two kinds of supposedly intuitive knowledge; although his terminology differs, his dilemma can be phrased in terms of what is called above the strong and weak senses of intuition. Either there is no way of confirming our possession of intuitive moral knowledge (this is the strong sense identified above); or there is such a method (this is the weak sense). But any such method of confirmation "would open up the possibility that p could be known nonintuitively . . ." and thus destroy any necessity for claiming the knowledge is gained intuitively. Since this necessity is the only factor making intuitionism attractive, the existence of a decision procedure for so-called intuitions

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[1]Ibid.

would eliminate the most important support for claiming that we have intuitive knowledge in this sense.[1]

But, to Regan, an equally serious difficulty befalls any claim to intuitive knowledge in the strong sense. He paraphrases a typical defense of ethical intuitionism as follows:

> [T]here are ends which every rational man must agree are worthwhile . . . (it is part of the meaning of "a rational man" that he do so); . . . we know which ends these are.[2]

This is Regan's paraphrase of an intuitionist's position. Regan concludes that this position is equivalent to saying, "I know that I know, and I can say nothing about it." To him, this is an unjustified claim to knowledge, and therefore should not be called a claim to knowledge at all. He chooses instead to grant the claims made above about rational ends, and yet deny that these constitute knowledge.

Having noted this non-foundationalist attack on the coherence of "intuitive knowledge" I will simply repeat that Sidgwick is a foundationalist. If we could establish that there are "ends which every rational man must agree are worthwhile" Sidgwick would call this knowledge. The acceptance of intuition in the strong sense, therefore, is attractive for all of the reasons which make foundationalism attractive (and

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[1]Tom Regan, "McCloskey on Rational Ends: The Dilemma of Intuitionism," Journal of Value Inquiry 9 (Spring, 1975): 48-58.

[2]Ibid., p. 54.

the reasons which make foundationalism attractive are outside the scope of this dissertation).

Schneewind summarizes the history of ethics in the centuries preceding Sidgwick. It is a history of two competing foundationalist approaches to morality. One, which he calls a Reidian notion, emphasizes the authoritativeness of the moral faculty rather than its rationality, and explicitly compares the moral sense with the other senses.[1] The other, which he calls a Kantian notion, identifies the moral faculty with reason. Schneewind finds an unrecognized tension between these two concepts in the intuitional ethics of William Whewell, who

> does occasionally slip into treating intuition as a power . . . of simply seeing some truth . . . But more commonly Whewell attempts to avoid any untestable appeal to a cognizing faculty and to rest morality on propositions which are 'seen' because they plainly display their own inherent rationality.[2]

In terms of this chapter, the Reidian notion is one example of intuition in the "strong" sense of the word (where S knows p intuitively only if p is true, S's belief is justified, and no decision procedure exists). What Schneewind calls the Kantian sense includes at least the "weak" sense of intuition (in which S knows p intuitively only if p is true, S's belief is justified, and S's knowledge is non-inferential).

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[1]Schneewind, Sidgwick, pp. 67-68, 72, 106-107.

[2]Ibid., p. 113.

Now Schneewind also maintains that, although "Sidgwick makes few explicit comments on Whewell, much of the Methods is an implicit critique of his work."[1] And Schneewind places Sidgwick in the Kantian tradition.

Clearly Sidgwick is seeking a foundation for ethics which falls within that tradition. He calls the second level axioms self-evident (or, apparently self-evident), and he speaks of these as having greater validity than the third level judgments. He is seeking principles which, in Schneewind's words, "exhibit their inherent rationality." As Sidgwick put it, these principles have "superior validity." If the only kind of intuition which "exhibits its inherent rationality" is intuition in the weak sense, then Sidgwick is seeking a foundation for ethics which is intuitive in the weak sense only. But if there is room for both a strong and a weak sense of intuition within the Kantian tradition, further questions arise. Is it possible for a principle which "exhibits its own rationality" to be a principle for which there is no decision procedure? This seems unlikely, since the very meaning of rationality includes an appeal to shared criteria by which to separate the rational from the irrational. Suppose, however, that one appeals to a standard "which all rational people accept" but one is unable to explicate why all rational people accept that standard. And, should someone

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[1]Ibid., p. 112.

speak rationally and yet reject the appeal, one is unable to give reasons which would change the rejector's mind. Such an appeal is to intuition in the strong sense; but the appeal belongs within the Kantian tradition.

Granting Schneewind's claim, then, that Sidgwick belongs within the Kantian tradition, we are nevertheless left with a significant question. Does he treat second level propositions as possible instances of intuition in the strong sense, or only in the weak sense? (Those known in the strong sense form a subset of those known in the weak sense.)

The possible parallel between underived a priori truths (paradigmatic instances of intuition in the strong sense) and second level axioms is one major concern. Sidgwick's claims about good are similar in epistemic status to these second level axioms, and are also claims to intuitive knowledge. The statements about good will be examined first, followed by an examination of statements about ought (the second level axioms). In both cases, it will be seen that Sidgwick seeks foundations which are intuitive in the weak sense. In the case of "good" statements, he must settle for claims to intuitive knowledge in the strong sense. In the case of "ought" statements, his success in attaining foundations which are intuitive in the strong sense depends upon the success of the considerations with which he supports these foundations.

Hedonism and Intuitionism

Sidgwick writes that the only ultimate good is the pleasure of sentient beings. He bases this claim on an explication of "good" as "what one would desire if one's desires were in harmony with reason . . ."[1] Various other explanations of "good" are rejected because they lack any normative component (in today's vocabulary; in Sidgwick's own, they lack appeal to a "universally valid standard." See the discussion in Chapter I of this dissertation). That normative component is reason, and thus his own explication includes the phrase, "with reason."

Sidgwick then is making two centrally significant claims about good. First, he says that to call something good is to claim that it is what would be desired if one's desires were rational; secondly, that what in fact is ultimately good--what in fact is the ultimate object of rational desire--is the pleasure of sentient beings. I will argue that for Sidgwick each of those claims is a claim to intuitive knowledge in the strong sense.

Sidgwick's discussion actually has two steps; in one he discusses the meaning of "my good on the whole," and in the next the meaning of "ultimate good on the whole." These distinctions are crucial in the discussion in Chapter V

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 112.

concerning the Dualism of Practical Reason, but the present discussion is confined to the elements common to both concepts of good.

He argues that "good" cannot be reduced to "what is desired" or even to what would be desired if its consequences were "accurately foreseen and adequately realized in imagination." He rejects these definitions because the notion of good (strictly speaking, he is dealing here with "my good on the whole") is "authoritative: and therefore carries with it implicitly a rational dictate to aim at this end." And so his final position is that "good" ("ultimate good on the whole") means "what as a rational being I should desire and seek to realize, assuming myself to have an equal concern for all existence." Part of what it means to be rational is supplied by the final phrase about concern for all existence. What is good is the object of rational desire.[1]

He argues for this position by discussing the various ways in which we use the word "good." He considers various possible definitions and rejects them, because they do not adequately convey the meaning of the word. If this discussion of definition is an appeal to intuition at all, it is to intuition in the weak sense. There is a decision procedure, although not a precise one; that procedure is reference to our common understanding of what a particular word means.

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[1]Ibid.

Let us turn, then, to his second claim about "good." Only the pleasure of sentient beings is in fact good; only the pleasure of sentient beings can be the object of rational desire.

Sidgwick's argument begins with a consideration of various things which might be called good: virtues and excellence in particular.

> However immediately the excellent quality of such gifts and skills may be recognized and admired, reflection shows that they are only valuable on account of the good or desirable conscious life in which they are or will be actualized . . .[1]

The issue, then, is what is to count as desirable consciousness. Again he considers alternatives; pleasure is clearly desirable, but is it the only ultimately desirable quality of consciousness? Knowledge of the truth and the contemplation of beauty, for instance, seem also to be ultimately desirable. Sidgwick thinks they are not, and asks the reader to follow a familiar procedure.

> I appeal firstly to his intuitive judgment after due consideration of the question . . . and secondly to a comprehensive comparison of the ordinary judgments of mankind . . . when (to use Butler's phrase) we 'sit down in a cool hour,' we can only justify to ourselves the importance that we attach to any of these [alternative objects of desire] by considering its conduciveness . . . to the happiness of sentient beings.[2]

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[1]Ibid., p. 395.

[2]Ibid., p. 401.

Sidgwick appeals to "reflection" and to "intuitive judgment." This appeal is a claim to intuitive knowledge in the strong sense. If someone were to sit down "in a cool hour" and decide that something besides pleasurable consciousness is desirable for its own sake, Sidgwick could say nothing but "think again."[1]

People do, upon reflection, differ about what is of ultimate value. These differences are both more common and of more practical effect than differences about the paradigmatic cases of intuition in the strong sense. Because of these significant disagreements, intuition in the strong sense is a more problematic basis for ethics than for empirical knowledge.

Sidgwick's discussion of ultimate good invokes the "ordinary judgments of mankind." Using the distinctions provided by this chapter, we can now understand more fully Sidgwick's frequent use of appeals to consensus in support of "apparent self-evidence." The relationship between consensus and self-evidence was an unanswered question at the end of Chapter III. Consensus counts in support of the self-evidence of a claim for Sidgwick, because he is constantly seeking ethical foundations which are intuitive in the weak sense

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[1]That is, if the competing candidate for ultimate good were a fairly reasonable one. The next chapter of this dissertation summarizes Sidgwick's rejection of such candidates as fame. He believes he could persuade someone that fame is only of instrumental value.

only. Since the weak sense of intuition is simply non-inferential knowledge for which convincing proof is available should it be needed, the common opinions of mankind would be likely to agree upon such claims. But in the case, for instance, of what is to count as ultimate good he actually must make do with an appeal to intuition in the strong sense. Consensus helps to support the truth of such claims because it indicates the possible existence of some shared but unexplicated understanding that accepting this claim is reasonable. If these shared but unexplicated reasons could only be made explicit, we could move from the strong sense of intuition to the weak.

Finally, a kind of red herring must be considered. One of the paradigmatic instances of intuitive knowledge in the strong sense is privileged first person reports. G. E. Moore, who writes that goodness is an intuited non-natural property, is probably claiming a parallel between the privileged first person reports and this recognition of a non-natural property. Moore also acknowledges a debt to Sidgwick, and so it is tempting to think that Sidgwick too claims such a parallel.

Moore praises Sidgwick's avoidance (unique, Moore thought, among ethical writers) of the naturalistic fallacy.[1]

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[1]G. E. Moore, Principia Ethica (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), p. 17.

Moore also distinguishes two kinds of intuitionism: that whose subject matter is "The Good" (Moore: "What kind of things ought to exist for their own sakes?") and those concerning rightness or obligation (Moore: "What kind of actions ought we to perform?"). He is an intuitionist only about the first class of proposition, and even there he is careful to limit the meaning of that term.

> [W]hen I call such propositions 'Intuitions,' I mean merely that any proposition whatever is true, because we cognise it in a particular way . . . [I]n every way in which it is possible to cognise a true proposition, it is also possible to cognize a false one.[1]

Earlier in this passage Moore seems to imply that Sidgwick, too, properly understood, is an intuitionist in this sense, and only in this sense. Sidgwick does resemble Moore in caution; that is, Sidgwick always speaks of apparent self-evidence and never claims complete certainty. Sidgwick also resembles Moore in claiming that ethical statements cannot be reduced to "natural" ones.

But if we ask the further question--does Sidgwick's argument parallel such claims as that each of us knows immediately and incorrigibly whether s/he is in pain--then the answer must be no. Surely the question of what each of us finds desirable can only be answered through a privileged first person report. But Sidgwick insistently points out that there is a normative element in the concept of Good, and this

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[1]Ibid., p. x.

cannot be reduced to physical or psychological statements. The "non-natural" component in Sidgwick's explanation of "goodness" is not a property but an appeal to rationality.

Finally, Moore is incorrect if he means that Sidgwick is not an intuitionist about "what kind of actions we ought to perform." The claim that Sidgwick is an intuitionist in the strong sense about the second level axioms constitutes the final sections of the present chapter.

The Fundamental Axioms and Intuition

Is Sidgwick's treatment of the second level axioms one that implies intuitionism in the strong sense? One way to approach that question is to compare these axioms with one of the paradigmatic instances: our knowledge of underived a priori claims which underlie scientific knowledge. These a priori claims include, for instance, the principles of causality and of the uniformity of nature. The context in which they are made is a foundationalist account of empirical knowledge, just as Sidgwick is working within a foundationalist account of ethical knowledge.

Some parallels between the ethical axioms and the scientific axioms are obvious. Although, as Chapter III argues, the scientific axioms are more fundamental than the ethical axioms, nevertheless in both cases we have propositions which underlie more specific claims and cannot themselves be inferred from more fundamental claims.

Because of the problems of justification which are built into the (strong) concept of intuitive knowledge, various attempts have been made to find some other account of such propositions, an account which would preserve their epistemic status but eliminate the justification problem. Some have attempted, for instance, to recast the a priori scientific claims as rules of inference.[1] Without entering into the details of the debate, let me simply assume here that Hempel is right in concluding that it is "simpler and more helpful" to construe such laws as statements. Remember, too, that for Sidgwick epistemology deals only indirectly with principles of inference. Its proper subject is the truth of non-inferential principles. (See Chapter II of this dissertation.)

Another alternative is simply to deny that these fundamental principles constitute knowledge. A non-foundationalist who makes such a denial (Regan, for instance) can still maintain that other propositions nevertheless count as knowledge. When a foundationalist denies that the a priori principles constitute knowledge the results are more extreme. The history of empiricism shows the extent of the skepticism which can result.

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[1]Carl Hempel, Aspects of Scientific Explanation (New York: The Free Press, 1965), pp. 354-59.

A more useful approach to the topic occurs in Bertrand Russell's Human Knowledge, Its Scope and Limits. His position begins with the observation that "'knowledge' . . . is not a precise conception."[1] To refuse to call induction knowledge is to reject a large portion of what the ordinary person calls knowledge, and restricts the range of that word very narrowly. At the very least it goes counter to ordinary usage; in addition it lessens the possibility of evaluating and discriminating among various candidates for a priori knowledge. Russell maintains that the restriction of the word knowledge to areas where we have complete certainty will confine us to a complete solipsism of the present moment.[2] There are, then, only two logically consistent positions:

> either we must accept skeptical solipsism in its most rigorous form, or we must admit that we know, independently of experience, some principles or principles by means of which it is possible to infer events from other events . . .[3]

Let us assume that this is an acceptable justification for accepting a priori claims as intuitive knowledge in the strong sense, in regard to empirical scientific knowledge.

The resemblance of Sidgwick's ethical intuitionism to Russell's treatment of a priori empirical claims is clear. As the first chapter shows, it is Sidgwick's insistence on

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[1]Bertrand Russell, Human Knowledge, Its Scope and Limits (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948), p. 96.

[2]Ibid., p. 178.

[3]Ibid., p. 179.

the cognitive status of moral claims which leads him to intuitionism; and this parallels Russell's refusal to deny the cognitive status of science. While Sidgwick never reflects on the imprecision in the common notion of "knowledge," he would surely agree on this point.

Russell, however, is no intuitionist--or at least, he refuses to call himself that. The "principle or principles" which "we must admit that we know independently of experience" he calls "necessary assumptions." His defense of them as playing a necessary role in his epistemology parallels Sidgwick's defense of the necessity for second level axioms. This parallel suggests that an overtly intuitionistic treatment of such axioms is not absolutely demanded.

Sidgwick's axioms resemble Russell's a priori claims, then, in that they underlie a whole field of supposed knowledge. On a foundationalist account, they must be knowledge if any of the less general claims within the field are to be knowledge. The "dependent validity" of third level propositions demands a "superior validity" in second level. Do the axioms resemble the a priori claims in lacking a decision procedure?

Chapter II points out that Sidgwick's concept of self-evidence allows him to call in supporting considerations; the chapter argues that this concept is a coherent one. Therefore the present question about kinds of intuition depends upon the success of the considerations offered in support of those

axioms. Chapter II raised some questions about those considerations. The most interesting problems occurred in his treatment of Prudence (as impartiality over time) and of Rational Benevolence. These considerations involved mathematical analogies. Chapter V looks at these supporting analogies again. What is clear is this: Sidgwick was seeking intuitive foundations in the weak sense, foundations which were simply non-inferential. If in fact he accepts as axioms principles which are non-inferential and for which there is no decision procedure, it is because he could not find adequate means of showing the axioms to be self-evident.

Sidgwick is an epistemological intuitionist, then, in regard to second level propositions, at least in a weak sense. He is an intuitionist in a strong sense in his claim that the only ultimate good is the pleasure of sentient beings; he is an intuitionist in the strong sense about the second level axioms of obligation if he accepts axioms whose self-evidence he cannot fully establish.

V. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to sort out various stages of the term "intuitionism," noting in the process that some of the variety of meanings attached to it result from the frequent historical connection between deontology as an ethical position and intuitionism as an epistemological position. When the two are separated and intuitionism is used in a

purely epistemological sense, it can then be asked whether Sidgwick holds that propositions of the second or third levels are intuited.

Sidgwick's treatment of third level propositions strongly resembles the Rawlsian technique of "reflective equilibrium." After summarizing various problems in that technique, both as used by Rawls and as apparently used by Sidgwick, this chapter argues that upon closer examination Sidgwick is not using reflective equilibrium and does not treat third level propositions as intuitively known.

The more difficult and more significant question is whether Sidgwick treats second level axioms as intuitively known. Returning to the epistemological notion of intuitionism, the paper distinguishes a weak and a strong interpretation, and then is able to recast the question. Does Sidgwick claim that we are justified in believing the second level propositions and at the same time that there are no accepted procedures for resolving doubts about their truth? In the case of Sidgwick's claims about ultimate good, the answer is yes. In the case of the second level axioms of obligation, the answer is less clear.

These axioms are claims to intuitive knowledge; but whether in the strong or the weak sense depends upon the success of the "arguments" supporting them. Sidgwick sought intuitive knowledge in the weak sense, and may in fact be calling upon axioms which can be intuited only in the strong

sense. In any case, he treats the axioms as others treat the a priori claims underlying scientific knowledge. Sidgwick's ethical position is unaltered if the "intuited axioms" are recast in the mold of Russell's "necessary assumptions." This suggests the conclusion that Sidgwick's epistemological intuitionism is demanded by his ethical cognitivism but not embraced for its own sake. The following chapter continues the examination of Sidgwick's attempt to found ethical knowledge on propositions which are known intuitively only in the weak sense.

CHAPTER V

PROBLEMS WITH SIDGWICK'S INTUITIONISM

I. Introduction

Chapter IV concluded that Sidgwick sought ethical principles (second level propositions) which were intuitively known in the weak sense. This kind of intuition can be known without supporting arguments; on the other hand, should doubts arise about the truth of the proposition, such support can be helpful in settling the doubts.

The conclusion that Sidgwick sought ethical knowledge in this sense is consistent with the conclusion of Chapter II, that Sidgwick's concept of self-evidence allowed for the use of supporting considerations. It is also consistent with the conclusion of Chapter I, that Sidgwick's concept of morality demands that the most basic moral statements be either known intuitively themselves, or be derivable from other statements which are known intuitively. A statement which is intuitive in the weak sense is one which is known directly itself, but it is not impossible that the statement also be capable of being known through inference from other statements.

Now the fact that Sidgwick offered supporting considerations does not prove that he sought ethical foundations which

are intuitive in the weak sense only. Considerations can also be offered for intuitions in the strong sense. Only I know whether or not I am in pain; but if someone points out to me that my face is contorted and I have been rubbing my jaw, their comments may make me aware of pain that I had not before noticed. In the case of intuition in the strong sense, however, such considerations are never decisive. I could not legitimately infer from their comments that I am in pain. Such considerations in the case of intuition in the weak sense can be decisive. I could legitimately infer from the comments of others that I have two legs. Sidgwick's success in finding axioms which are intuitive in the weak sense therefore depends on the decisiveness of the considerations with which he supports them.

It might be objected that any decisive considerations given to support intuition in the weak sense must ultimately be appeals to intuition in the strong sense. However, Sidgwick's foundationalism only requires that the fundamental premises of our knowledge be self-evident. However, Chapter II argues that self-evidence is a partially psychological term, such that a claim may be self-evident to some people at some times, and known to others through argument. This kind of foundationalism allows for epistemological variety in its premises. A stricter foundationalism which characterized its premises as logically fundamental and underivable

might indeed have to resort to intuition in the strong sense; Sidgwick's foundationalism does not.

In addition, when moral knowledge is treated from a foundationalist perspective, it need not follow that fundamental moral principles are themselves underived. As Chapter I points out, they may be either self-evident or derived from premises which are self-evident. So even if it were true that any foundationalism is ultimately driven to claim intuitive knowledge in the strong sense, it would not follow that fundamental moral claims must be of that nature. And, most importantly, treating these claims as intuitive knowledge in the strong sense allows no way to solve the significant disagreements among humans about such claims.

This chapter looks more closely at the kinds of considerations with which Sidgwick supports his second level propositions. It assumes the conclusion of Chapter IV, that Sidgwick sought ethical foundations which are intuitive in the weak sense. It examines the charges (some of them his own) that he was unable to find such foundations. Section II considers a variety of such charges; Section III concentrates on the problem which is by far the most significant, that of the possible conflict between Rational Egoism and Rational Benevolence. Section IV looks at some contemporary attempts to provide the considerations which would eliminate this possible conflict.

II. Problems in Finding Intuitive Foundations

Chapter IV pointed out Sidgwick's inability (unacknowledged) to specify when a desire is a rational desire. When he claims that the only ultimate good (the only rationally desired ultimate end) is the pleasure of sentient beings, he is making a claim which is intuitive in the strong sense. The inability to make this a claim to intuitive knowledge in the weak sense is the central problem in Sidgwick's ethics, for he claims that any rational method of ethics must specify an end. This, at least, is the view of Marcus Singer. If he is correct, then any adequate set of axioms of obligation, for Sidgwick, will have to specify an end.

Rationally Chosen Ends

At the very outset of his major work, Sidgwick defines a "Method of Ethics" as "any rational procedure by which we determine what individual human beings 'ought'--or what it is 'right' for them--to do."[1]

Marcus Singer, intrigued by this notion, follows its use throughout the Methods of Ethics, and concludes "that there is a fundamental incoherence in the key concept of the methods of ethics . . ."[2] He points out, first, Sidgwick's

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 1.

[2]Marcus Singer, "The Many Methods of Sidgwick's Ethics," Monist, 58 (July, 1974):441.

frequent insistence that a "method of ethics" must specify an ultimate end of moral action. This ultimate end serves as an ultimate reason for what is done, and allows for moral reasoning which shows the relation between a prescribed action and the accomplishment of this end. This in turn gives coherence to the method.

It is here that Singer finds a problem. He holds that this position is inconsistent with Sidgwick's professed neutrality among Methods of Ethics, for by these criteria "intuitionism" is not a method at all. It has neither system nor ultimate end, in spite of Sidgwick's occasional claims to the contrary: "I have used the term 'intuitional' to denote the view of ethics which regards as the practically ultimate end of moral actions their conformity to certain rules."[1] Singer claims that the phrase "practically ultimate end" is not clear; that it results from Sidgwick's preconception "that there must be an ultimate end . . . if there is to be a method of ethics."[2]

Even if Singer is correct in calling "practically ultimate end" an unclear phrase, this is not sufficient to establish that Sidgwick has abandoned his "professed neutrality." It would be sufficient only if Sidgwick's position of "rational end" is essential to his claim that Utilitarianism

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 96.

[2]Singer, "Many Methods," p. 438.

has greater rationality than Common Sense Morality. Sidgwick finds that Utilitarianism can supply principles of "ultimate validity"--non-conflicting principles which are of use in practical situations. He finds that Common Sense Morality cannot. This is an abandonment of neutrality only if the requirements for "ultimate validity" are debatable. In any case, it is not clear that Sidgwick's requirement that a rational method of ethics specify an end plays any part in his criticism of Common Sense Morality.

On the other hand, Singer has pointed to an important problem in Sidgwick's thinking. If the phrase "practically ultimate end" is not particularly clear, it may be because the concept of "rationally chosen end" is not clear.

Singer's objection rests on the unclarity of "practically ultimate end." An "end" in this context supplies a reason for action; and so problems about what is to count as an end are related to problems about why one end is rational and other ends are not.

Singer, in fact, attributes to Sidgwick the view that the end which a method specifies need not be rationally chosen. For this assumption he finds some support in the following passages:

> It is not necessary . . . to assume that the end itself is determined or prescribed by reason: we only require to assume . . . that it is adopted as ultimate and paramount.[1]

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 8.

> The applicability of a method for determining right conduct relatively to an ultimate end . . . does not necessarily depend on the acceptance of the end as prescribed by reason; it only requires that it should be in some way adopted as ultimate and paramount.[1]

In both cases Sidgwick goes on to say that he has simplified the task of his book by choosing to deal only with those ends which may be considered reasonable. What is the significance of those two remarks by Sidgwick? There are several possible interpretations. At first glance, it is tempting to see Sidgwick as oscillating--as he is accused of elsewhere--between a descriptive and a normative position. On the one hand, he acknowledges that people do act for non-rational ends, but is unwilling to acknowledge that they should so act. There are, however, other possible interpretations, shedding more light on Sidgwick's basic stance.

The example he himself gives of a non-rational ultimate end is Fame; and it is counted non-rational because upon reflection we see that it is desirable not for itself but for some other good, such as happiness. So, many choices which in practice function as ultimate, are upon reflection seen as instrumental values only; and Sidgwick considers the way we think rather than the ways we happen to act.

This puts some restriction on what is to count as a rationally ultimate end. However, earlier in the book Sidgwick drops from consideration certain methods of ethics which

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[1]Ibid., p. 77 n.

do prescribe ultimate ends. Methods based on the pursuit of Excellence, of Perfection, and of Virtue are all rejected. So, beyond the restriction to an ultimate end, we are left in some doubt about what would distinguish a rationally chosen end from others. It may be for this reason that Sidgwick is reluctant to claim that the end of any properly so called Method of Ethics is rationally chosen. This reluctance, however, coexists uneasily with Sidgwick's professed aim of seeking a rational foundation for morality.

I will assume here that a consistent and sympathetic interpretation of what Sidgwick means by "method" includes a rationally chosen ultimate end,[1] as well as a rational decision about which actions accomplish that end. These ultimate ends, expressed by principles,[2] must be mutually consistent, complete, and related to one another.

It has been claimed that there is a different kind of problem in Sidgwick's attempt to establish self-evident second level propositions. This problem concerns the relationship between the axioms of obligation and Common Sense Morality.

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[1]This interpretation is favored by many commentators. William Frankena, "Sidgwick and the Dualism of Practical Reason," and David Daiches Raphael, "Sidgwick on Intuitionism," Monist 58 (July 1974):452, 408.

[2]See Schneewind, Sidgwick, pp. 194-97, for a discussion of the relation between principle and method.

"Unconscious Utilitarianism"

When Sidgwick summarizes what he holds to be the relationship between Common Sense Morality and Utilitarianism, he writes that ". . . the morality of Common Sense may be truly represented as at least unconsciously utilitarian."[1] To call the Common Sense moralist an "unconscious utilitarian" is provocative, almost metaphorical; it is less than completely clear and has been interpreted in various ways. In the commemorative Monist volume, for instance, Gertrude Ezorsky argues that Sidgwick's description of what it would mean to be an "unconscious utilitarian" is inadequate. She says the term would be correctly explicated as follows:

> An agent is an unconscious utilitarian if, and only if:
>
> (a) the view that one ought to maximize utility is such that the agent doesn't think himself to hold that view,
>
> yet
>
> (b) he acts as someone (with the same relavant nonmoral beliefs) would act who believed in maximizing utility.

Sidgwick, she claims, uses the following inadequate replacement for (b):

> (bb) A [Common Sense Moralist] in following his moral rules tends to raise general utility somewhat.

But (bb) does not entail (b); for instance, someone who chooses to inflict a deserved punishment rather than an (apparently) more utile undeserved punishment conforms to (bb) but not to

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[1] Sidgwick, Methods, p. 424.

(b). Since (bb) does not entail (b), then if (b) is part of the only adequate characterization of "unconscious utility," Sidgwick fails to achieve such a characterization.[1]

Now Ezorsky's explication of "unconscious utilitarian" has a certain plausibility, and her claim that Sidgwick supports (bb) rather than (b) is correct. In his own words,

> Utilitarianism is not concerned to prove the absolute coincidence in results of Common Sense Morality and Utilitarianism . . . nor to prove that existing moral rules are more conducive to the general happiness than any others; but only to point out in each case some manifest felicific tendency which they possess.[2]

And if the other premise of her argument stands--that hers is the only adequate characterization of the phrase "unconscious utilitarian"--then her case is made. She can then go on--as she does--to argue that in this sense the Common Sense Moralist is not in fact an "unconscious utilitarian." This argument resembles many which have been given over the last century, whose point is that utilitarianism dictates actions which common sense morality rejects.

But after all, the phrase "unconscious utilitarian" is Sidgwick's; and since it occurs in the same paragraph with his disavowal of (b), there seems no good reason to claim that any adequate explication of the phrase must include (b).

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[1]Gertrude Ezorsky, "Unconscious Utilitarianism," Monist 58 (July 1974):468-69.

[2]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 425.

What is at issue here is the complex relationship which Sidgwick claims exists between Common Sense Morality and Utilitarianism. He claims that Utilitarianism has a rationality which is missing in Common Sense Morality. This rationality accounts for the systematization and dependency relationships that are explained in detail in Chapter IV. Briefly, Sidgwick points out that Common Sense Morality is consistent, and can claim general agreement, only when its propositions are too general to apply to actual situations. When its propositions are specific, they conflict with one another and the resolution of the conflict is not the subject of general agreement. These propositions are nevertheless knowledge claims, and even have a "dependent validity." If they are valid at all, that validity derives from their relationship to self-evident axioms which do meet the requirements of consistency and applicability. Sidgwick believes that "the apprehension, with more or less distinctness, of these [second level] abstract truths [is] the permanent basis of the common conviction that the fundamental precepts of morality are essentially reasonable."[1]

Are arguments such as Ezorsky's effective against Sidgwick's claim, seen now in its complexity, that the common sense moralist is an "unconscious utilitarian"? Certainly no single counter-example--such as Ezorsky's instance of common sense

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[1]Ibid., p. 383.

morality choosing deserved punishment over apparently more utile undeserved punishment--will do the job. Sidgwick is speaking of Common Sense Morality as a whole--as a complex moral code. He claims that the system as a whole possesses "manifest felicific tendency"--but he is not claiming that each individual principle of that code is one a utilitarian would choose to live by. Neither is he making the comparative claim that our extant moral code is more felicific than any conceivable alternative. In fact, it is the Utilitarian's duty to rectify the moral code of his age. He expresses this obligation in a nearly poetic passage near the end of Methods.

> [The Utilitarian] will contemplate [established morality] with reverence and wonder, as a marvellous product of nature, the result of long centuries of growth . . . he will handle it with respectful delicacy as a mechanism, constructed of the fluid element of opinions and dispositions, . . . which no politicians or philosophers could create . . . Still, as this actual moral order is admittedly imperfect, it will be the Utilitarian's duty to aid in improving it.[1]

And he is willing to accept, when required by his Utilitarianism, moral judgments which run counter to received morality. To cite one of the most problematic of such instances:

> Thus on Utilitarian principles, it may be right to do and privately recommend, under certain circumstances, what it would not be right to advocate openly . . . it may be conceivably right to do, . . . if perfect secrecy can be reasonably expected, what it would be wrong to recommend by private advice or example.[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 475-76.

[2] Ibid., p. 489.

Sidgwick acknowledges the "paradoxicality" of these results.

> There is no doubt that the moral consciousness of a plain man broadly repudiates the general notion of an esoteric morality . . . it would be commonly agreed that an action which would be bad if done openly is not rendered good by secrecy.[1]

He is fully granting, then, Ezorsky's claim that Common Sense Morality sometimes requires acts which Utilitarianism forbids. He grants this claim because it does not run counter to his own position on the complex relationship between Common Sense Morality and Utilitarianism.

But what would count against his conclusions? Theoretically, a number of things: if common sense morality could be shown to have the characteristics (roughly, exceptionless applicability) which Sidgwick claims to be rationally necessary, then there would be no need to look elsewhere for rational principles; the "dependency" would not exist. This is unlikely; the results of Sidgwick's analysis of Common Sense Morality, on the whole, are almost unarguable.

A second possibility would be the existence of an alternative principle, or set of principles, which provided greater systematization than Utilitarianism does; that is, one which determined actual rightness and was exceptionless.[2] If a competing principle or set of principles provided less paradoxical results--that is, was more consistent with Common

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[1]Ibid., p. 490.

[2]Given that such principle(s) satisfied the tests of self-evidence as well as Utilitarianism does.

Sense Morality--such principle(s) would be of "superior validity" to Utilitarianism and, again, Sidgwick's claimed relationship would not hold. It is, then, not merely the existence of a counter-example--a "paradoxical" conclusion of utilitarian reasoning--but the existence of counter-examples together with an alternative set of principles, which would serve as evidence against Sidgwick's claimed "unconscious utilitarianism."

There is still a third possibility, and one which, unlike the first two, needs somewhat detailed consideration here. If Sidgwick's version of Utilitarianism fails to meet his own requirements for systematization, then, the dependency and systematization relationship does not hold. One specific possibility is a conflict between or among Sidgwick's second level axioms; since he does not claim that any of the self-evident axioms takes precedence over the others, the existence of a conflict would destroy his claim to have provided exceptionless principles determining actual rightness.

Possible Conflicts Between Axioms

Could there be a conflict between his principles of Justice and Benevolence? Claims that there can be such conflicts have long been a major part of arguments advanced against utilitarianism. Two recent writers, A. R. Lacey and James Newell, present interesting versions of this problem, directed specifically toward Sidgwick's version of

utilitarianism. Each author presents an imaginary situation in an effort to show such a conflict; the two situations differ, but they involve the same fundamental issue.[1]

In Newell's scenario, there is some good (understood in Sidgwick's hedonistic sense) which occurs in indivisible units, and moreover is in short supply; there may be, for instance, three equally deserving candidates but only two units of the good to be given out. Newell argues that the principle of Justice demands that no one receive the good, since it is impossible for all who deserve it to receive it; while the principle of Benevolence requires that we maximize good, and therefore give the available goods to two people rather than to none.[2]

In this form the objection is fairly easy to meet; for it is reasonable to claim that the principle of Justice will be satisfied if these equally deserving candidates are given an equal chance at receiving the good; and this can be accomplished by some kind of random selection such as the drawing of lots.

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[1]Newell is indebted to Lacey.

[2]James Newell, "The Philosophy of Henry Sidgwick," pp. 233, 304-6. Newell misdescribes the problem, for he claims that "whether or not [the two principles] come into conflict in actual practice, if they will issue in conflicting duties when applied to a possible situation, they are logically incompatible principles." p. 304. This issue is discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Lacey's scenario is more challenging. He deals not with goods but with evils, namely pains; and he deals specifically with a penal system. Suppose that the common good is increased by the administration of some punishment, perhaps because of its deterrent effect. Suppose, however, that the increase in the common good would be outweighed by the evil of punishment if everyone who deserved punishment received it. The principle of Benevolence, then, demands that some, but not all, of the guilty be punished, while the principle of Justice demands that all (supposing they are equally guilty) be treated alike. Either all should be punished, or none should be punished.[1]

But here, too, random selection would allow both axioms to be satisfied. That this goes counter to our third level convictions about proper penal institutions is not directly relevant, for, as mentioned above, Sidgwick's position allows for some direct contradiction between third level convictions and second level axioms. In fact, his explicit acceptance of actions done in secret (where the same action done publicly would be wrong) allows for the possibility of a secret lottery in such a case. The fact that such a lottery is almost by definition impossible to keep secret--for the public would almost surely know that one was punished but not another--reminds us of how unlikely it is that Lacey's

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[1]A. R. Lacey, "Sidgwick's Ethical Maxims," Philosophy 34 (1959), pp. 217-28.

particular conflict between Justice and Benevolence would ever take place in real life. Choices about penal systems are choices between systems rather than between individual actions--in this case, between a system of uniform punishment, arbitrary punishment, or uniform non-punishment. Arbitrary punishment would cause less direct pain than uniform punishment, for fewer people would receive punishment; but it would cause more indirect pain, both in offering less effective deterrence and in lessening the predictability of public life. It is unlikely, then, that a strictly utilitarian calculus would call for public arbitrary punishment; but in any case, punishment can be administered in such a way--impartial random selection--as to satisfy both Benevolence and Justice.

But what of possible conflicts between Rational Benevolence and Rational Egoism? To what extent would the possibility of such conflict destroy Sidgwick's claim to have provided the systematization which is missing in Common Sense Morality?

III. Possible Conflicts and the Dualism of Practical Reason

Of all that Sidgwick wrote, it is the skeptical--almost despairing--conclusion of Methods of Ethics which has received the most attention. This despair arises from problems in reconciling Egoism and Utilitarianism.

Sidgwick has established, he thinks, that Intuitionism (common sense morality) is a form of "unconscious utilitarianism,"

and asks whether there is a similar convergence between Utilitarianism and the third "Method of Ethics," Egoism. The "self-evident axioms" of earlier discussions are re-phrased as principles--principles specifying ultimate ends--for the two methods. The principle of Prudence (P_1), "One ought to seek one's own good," becomes in the final chapter of Methods the principle of Rational Egoism: "My own greatest happiness is the rational ultimate end for me."[1] This principle specifies the ultimate end of the Egoistic Method. The principle which specifies the ultimate end of the Utilitarian Method is Rational Benevolence.

As stated in the final chapter of Methods, this is, "It is right and reasonable for me to do what I believe to be ultimately conducive to universal Good or Happiness."[2] Sidgwick tells us that to accept the maxim of Rational Egoism while rejecting that of Rational Benevolence is a reasonable position; for the truth of the one does not imply the truth of the other. Moreover, the coincidence of the dictates of the two maxims is "at least incapable of empirical proof." The existence of a Moral Order which rewards those who abide by Rational Benevolence and punishes those who do not, would establish such a coincidence; for it "would suffice to make it always everyone's interest to promote universal happiness

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 497.

[2]Ibid., p. 507.

to the best of his knowledge."[1] But the existence of such a Moral Order--w ether as a personal God, or in some non-personal form--cannot be proven.[2]

His resulting despair is stated most dramatically in the First Edition:

> The cosmos of Duty is thus really reduced to a Chaos: and the prolonged effort of the human intellect to frame a perfect ideal of rational conduct is seen to have been foredoomed to inevitable failure.[3]

The above is a rough outline of Sidgwick's "Dualism of Practical Reason." Sidgwick himself says very little about this Dualism; he discusses it only in the final chapter of Methods of Ethics (summarized above) and even there most of his attention is given to showing that in ordinary life (without the theological postulate) Egoism and Utilitarianism will sometimes reach conflicting conclusions about the reasonable thing to do. The nature of the conflict--its logical and epistemological character--is not directly examined. Commentators have interpreted the dualism differently. What follows is an attempt to sort through various interpretations,

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[1]Ibid., p. 506.

[2]Sidgwick, however, never doubted the possibility of such knowledge. He simply felt it had not yet been attained.

[3]Sidgwick, Methods of Ethics, first ed., p. 473, quoted in Schneewind, Sidgwick, p. 352. Sidgwick sometimes calls this a conflict between Duty and Self-Interest; the phrase is probably ill-chosen, since the issue involves a tension between two duties: duty to self and duty to others.

in order to evaluate Sidgwick's success in finding self-evident second level propositions,

Conflicting Interpretations

An historically important version of the dualism is that of C. D. Broad. In Five Types of Ethical Theory, he writes:

> It is surely quite plain that no such [theological] postulate would free ethics from the theoretical inconsistency . . . There are two principles which are logically inconsistent . . . No God, however powerful and however benevolent, can alter the fact that those two principles are logically incompatible and that therefore something which seemed self-evident to Sidgwick must in fact have been false . . . the only function of the postulate would be to make it a matter of practical indifference whether I acted in accordance with one or other of the two principles, one of which must be false . . .[1]

This conclusion is much stronger than the one Sidgwick reaches:

> [N]egation of the connexion [of Benevolence and Egoism] must force us to admit an ultimate and fundamental contradiction in our apparent intuitions . . . it would seem to follow that the apparently intuitive operation of the Practical Reason . . . is after all illusory.[2]

To Sidgwick the two principles are possibly incompatible rather than logically so; the possible incompatibility destroys his hope of "completely rationalizing" ethics, but only the actual incompatibility of the two principles would justify denying their self-evidence. Actual incompatibility would,

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[1]C. D. Broad, Five Types of Ethical Theory (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1935), p. 253.

[2]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 508.

after all, mean that at least one of the principles was false, and it would follow trivially that at least one of the principles was not self-evident.

This, at least, is my interpretation of the passage above; it is the only passage I know where Sidgwick addresses this particular issue. (This interpretation is shared by Schneewind.)[1]

Frankena takes an interesting position, midway between that of Sidgwick himself and that of Broad. While he agrees that the two principles are not logically incompatible, he holds that even the possibility of their incompatibility destroys their claim to self-evidence. These two questions--of the logical relationship between the principles and of the effect of that relationship on their self-evidence--deserve attention.

The Logical Relationship Between the Principles

Broad holds that the two principles are logically incompatible. He chooses not to use any of Sidgwick's formulations, and he paraphrases the two principles:

> Egoistic Hedonism says: 'You ought to sacrifice any amount of happiness in others if you will thereby increase your own total happiness . . . more than you could by any other course of action . . .' Universalistic Hedonism says: 'If a certain sacrifice of your own happiness will

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[1]Schneewind, Sidgwick, pp. 370-74.

> so much increase that of others that the total nett amount of happiness is increased, you ought to make this sacrifice.'[1]

He adds similar paraphrases concerning choices between actions which lead to unhappiness. In what sense are these principles "logically incompatible"? If two statements are logically incompatible, then no matter what the state of the world it is not possible for both to be true. It might be questioned whether these principles are statements (and hence capable of being true), but the slightest of rewordings will take care of that problem; for instance,

> Utilitarianism: If a certain sacrifice of your own happiness will so much increase that of others that the total net amount of happiness is increased, making this sacrifice is what you ought to do.
>
> Egoism: If a sacrifice of any amount of happiness in others will increase your own total happiness, this is what you ought to do.

"X is what you ought to do" means "Doing X is right, and not doing X is wrong." (Sidgwick himself goes back and forth between formulations of these kinds. See Schneewind's comprehensive listing, pp. 295-297.) Now it is easy to see that the two principles are incompatible--cannot both be true--only in some states of the world: those where doing the action commanded by one principle requires a violation of the

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[1]Broad, Five Types, pp. 240-41.

other. If there is a moral order in the universe--if Sidgwick's "theological postulate" is true--then the two principles are mutually consistent. If the theological postulate is false, then the two principles are inconsistent; however, even in this case the two principles are not logically inconsistent. The inconsistency does not hold in all possible worlds, but results from a matter of contingent fact.

The Dualism and Self-Evidence

What about Frankena's claim that even the possible conflict of the two principles destroys their claim to intuitive self-evidence? Where Broad concludes that it is impossible (even granting the theological postulate) for both principles to be true, Frankena says that it is impossible (even granting the theological postulate) for both to be self-evident. Frankena's conclusion is weaker than Broad's, but stronger than Sidgwick's. (At least as I have interpreted Sidgwick, he says that only the falsity of the theological postulate would force us to deny the self-evidence of one of the principles. Since we do not know whether that postulate is true, we are left in suspense about the self-evidence of the two principles.)

Frankena says very little to support his position here; he says simply that

> it seems to me that two ethical principles cannot both be regarded as self-evident if it is in principle

> possible for them to come into conflict . . . coincidence [in practice] might obtain only because of a fortunate accident about the constitution of our world, and not be true of other possible worlds. [Emphasis added][1]

"But this is a hard question," he concludes; and it is. It involves the distinction between the contingent and the necessary. On one view--a completely deterministic one--there is no difference between "contingent" states of affairs and "necessary" ones. Everything is necessary, could not be other than it is; there is only one ontologically possible world. This view that the world is, ontologically, necessary nevertheless allows room for epistemological contingency. So-called "contingent" states of affairs seem so because of our ignorance of the full, necessary interrelatedness between what we are describing and the rest of the world.

Now most traditional theologians would call the existence of God, at least, necessary. Granting this assumption, however, does not commit them to the view that every state of affairs in the world (or in an after-world) is necessary. For some traditional theologians, God has made the only possible world; these are committed to ontological determinism. For other theologians, God has made one of many possible worlds; these are not committed to ontological determinism. Similarly, impersonal versions of the Moral Order postulate

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[1]William Frankena, "Sidgwick and the Dualism of Practical Reason," Monist, 58 (July 1974):457-58.

commit the holder neither to ontological determinism nor to ontological contingency.

Would, then, an assumption that the existence of the Moral Order is necessary deprive Frankena's objection of its force? If the dictates of Egoism and Benevolence coincide, this would not be contingent, but necessary. For that matter, would assumptions like these create problems for the previous contention that the two principles are not logically incompatible? (If they are incompatible when the world is fully understood, such an argument could run, then they are incompatible by the very nature of things.) In either case, if "contingent" retained a meaning, it would be epistemological rather than ontological.

But this is just the point, for it is the epistemological status of Egoism and Benevolence which is under discussion. With this reminder, problems about logical incompatibility are obviated. With the understanding we now have, and with any degree of understanding which we are likely to have, the principles of Egoism and Benevolence are at most epistemologically incompatible, and that contingently so.

To return to the more puzzling question: Does our uncertainty about the existence of the Moral Order destroy the supposed self-evidence of the two axioms? Self-evidence, as discussed in Chapter II, is not limited by Sidgwick to statements which are true by definition. It has to do, however, with epistemological independence, and is confined

roughly to those statements which can be known to be true as soon as they are fully understood. Remember that Sidgwick allows certain "demonstrations" of his self-evident axioms; these involve, for instance, mathematical analogies in the case of Prudence, and "inference from" universalizability, in the case of Justice. In the terms introduced in Chapter IV, what Sidgwick means by "self-evidence" is intuitive knowledge in the weak sense.

We cannot know that both Rational Egoism and Rational Benevolence are true unless we know that there is a Moral Order. The existence of such a Moral Order is not self-evident. A statement cannot be intuitive in the weak sense unless it is possible to know its truth without any supporting considerations. That is not possible for the pair of axioms under consideration. Therefore, it cannot be that both of them are self-evident, where "self-evident" is equivalent to "intuitive in the weak sense."

This conclusion is the same as Frankena's, although it is reached by a somewhat different route. It is, as noted before, a stronger conclusion than Sidgwick's own; it argues that the dualism destroys the intuitive foundations Sidgwick sought for his ethics. The conclusion is, however, milder than Broad's, for it does not preclude the possibility of a rational foundation for ethics, should some proof of the theological postulate be found. Such rationalization, however, would take a somewhat different form than that imagined

by Sidgwick; it would either lack intuitive starting points or have different ones than those he lists.

The most promising alternative rationalization is suggested by attempts to show that Benevolence has a claim to self-evidence which is superior to that of Egoism. The next section of this chapter deals with that issue.

IV. Attacks on the Self-Evidence of Egoism

If the principle of Egoism, that "my own greatest happiness is the rational ultimate end for me," cannot be intuitively known in the weak sense, then Sidgwick's Dualism of Practical Reason no longer exists. There would no longer be a conflict of two self-evident axioms.

Sidgwick's "proof" of utilitarianism would then be much more plausible. His proof involves the claim that the principle of Utilitarianism, Rational Benevolence, makes practical demands which do not conflict with the demands of other self-evident principles. He can then claim for Utilitarianism the "superior validity" which allows Common Sense Morality to have dependent validity.

The following sections of this chapter discuss several attempts by contemporary writers to establish that egoism is not a fully rational position, for such an attempt, if successful, would salvage the intuitive foundations of Sidgwick's ethical system.

Arguments from the Nature of Moral Language

A common position today is that the very word "morality" contains within it a rejection of egoism; to call an action moral and to call it egoistic is to contradict oneself. The premises leading to this conclusion differ. Frankena, for instance, argues quite directly: to be moral is to be non-egoistic. He sees hints of such a position in Sidgwick's tendency to use the term "ethical" when he is referring to the principle of Egoism, and to reserve the term "moral" for the non-egoistic principles.

Sidgwick, however, anticipated such an objection. He answers that the general consciousness of mankind nevertheless considers self-interest reasonable, and his fundamental search is for what is reasonable.

Kurt Baier, who also holds that the very meaning of "morality" excludes egoism, argues from more complex premises. Baier begins this way:

> Consistent egoism makes everyone's private interest the 'highest court of appeal.' But by 'the moral point of view' we mean a point of view which is a court of appeal for conflicts of interest. Hence it cannot (logically) be identical with the point of view of self-interest.[1]

I claim, however, that egoism can be that court of appeal. To the extent that the conflict exists within a single person, that is obvious, for the conflict is resolved

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[1]Kurt Baier, "The Moral Point of View," p. 470.

in favor of that person's own interest. If the conflict exists between several people, egoism can even then meet Baier's requirement of providing a solution which is mutually acceptable, publicly reasonable. It can be mutually acceptable that each person seek his or her own interest. This contention will be developed more fully later.

But Baier's argument continues. One's own interest is an aim, he says, but seeking it cannot be expressed as a principle; yet "morality involves doing things on principle."[1] What is it to act on principle? It is to act according to a rule which one holds to be "binding on everyone alike quite irrespective of what are the goals or purposes of the person in question." This definition comes close to begging the question, since it is in part simply a direct rejection of egoism. Egoists, after all, consider their own goals and purposes as their ultimate end, and could not make a moral decision which disregarded these goals and purposes. Nevertheless, this question of what is involved in acting on principle is a crucial one. Objections to the rationality of egoism ordinarily invoke the necessary objectivity, impersonality, and universalizability of moral principles. Notice, for instance, the following argument by Peter Singer:

> If [one] claims to be aiming at what is morally good, because of the universalizability inherent in this claim, we can argue that he cannot,

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[1]Ibid., p. 471.

> consistently, give greater consideration to his own interests, simply on the ground that they are his own interests, than he gives to the interests of others.[1]

The rest of this chapter explores the interconnections of universalizability, rationality, and objectivity, and relates them to egoism.

Reasonableness and Objectivity

To be reasonable means, of course, to be objectively reasonable; that is, reasonableness involves meeting more than private standards of rationality. Standards of rationality are by definition shared; an objective reason is one which can be shared. In moral discussions, an objective reason is a universalizable reason; that is, if it counts as a reason for my doing an action, it would also count as a reason for anyone's doing an action which is like it in morally relevant ways. The point of many objections to the rationality of egoism is that it cannot be expressed as a universalizable reason for action. Sidgwick responds (although not in exactly these terms) that egoism can be expressed as a universalizable principle as long as it is expressed in terms of subjective good rather than objective good.

> If the Egoist strictly confines himself to stating his conviction that he ought to take his own happiness or pleasure as his ultimate end, there seems no opening or line of reasoning to lead him to

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[1]Peter Singer, "Reflective Equilibrium," p. 512.

> Universalistic Hedonism . . . When, however, the Egoist puts forward, implicitly or explicitly, the proposition that his happiness or pleasure is Good, not only for him but from the point of view of the Universe . . . it then becomes relevant to point out to him that his happiness cannot be a more important part of Good, taken universally, than the equal happiness of any other person.[1]

The crucial distinction, in Sidgwick's mind, is between claiming that something is good for oneself and claiming something is good "from the point of view of the Universe." My paraphrase just above this quote renders "good for oneself" as "subjective good" and "good from the point of view of the Universe" as "objective good." This rendering is drawn from an article by J. L. Mackie.

Mackie pinpoints the crucial importance of this distinction in the defense of the rationality of egoism. (Sidgwick himself, here as in other discussions of the dualism, is very brief.) As Mackie sees it, "With his usual combination of acuteness and honesty, Sidgwick has here got right something that many other moral thinkers have got wrong." What is it that Sidgwick has got right? According to Mackie, it is the distinction between "ethical objectivity in general" (which Sidgwick treats as a given) and "the objectivity of good." If the former can be maintained while the latter is denied--and both Sidgwick and Mackie think it can--then the

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, pp. 420-21.

reasonableness of egoism as an ethical principle can be preserved.[1]

Mackie argues that statements about subjective good are properly symbolized as two-place predicates, those about objective good as one-place predicates. He concludes that the formal logical properties of the two concepts explain why each of the concepts is compatible with ethical objectivism; that is, why one may accept the necessary objectivity of ethical statements and nevertheless find egoism rational. If a statement like "A's happiness is good" is universalized (and ethical statements must be capable of being universalized), the resulting statement is "The happiness of all persons is good." "Good" here is a one-place predicate. Mackie provides no symbolization, but it might look like this:

(1) "A's happiness is good" = Ga

(2) "Everyone's happiness is good" = (x)Gx

Sentence (2) is a universalization of sentence (1). To speak of good as objective, he says, is to treat it as a one-place predicate. So, if the "good" in sentence (1) means "ultimate good, a reason for acting," then anyone who holds sentence (1) and also holds that ethical statements must be objective (universalizable) must hold that everyone's good is a reason for acting. This last tenet is incompatible with egoism.

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[1]J. L. Mackie, "Sidgwick's Pessimism," Philosophical Quarterly 26 (October 1976):319-20.

(3) "A's happiness is good for A" = Gaa

(4) "Each person's happiness is good for that person" = (x)Gxx

Sentence (4) is a universalization of sentence (3). It preserves the necessary objectivity, in the sense of universalizability, of the statement, but it is not incompatible with egoism.[1]

Hence Sidgwick's insistence on the distinction between "good from the point of view of the Universe" and "good for oneself." Mackie's formal analysis helps us to see that statements about the obligation to seek one's own good can be universalized; and that this universalized formulation expresses both an objective sense of obligation and a subjective sense of good, or of end. It helps us to see that egoism can be defended against charges of being unreasonable which identify reasonableness with the universalizability of ethical principles.

Mackie's analysis also helps us see the importance of Sidgwick's distinction between objective good and

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[1] My analysis here differs slightly from Mackie's, who casts statements about subjective good as "ought" statements, but does not do the same for statements about objective good. His conclusion, then, depends on the claim that ought statements must be symbolized with two-place predicates, while "good" statements may be symbolized with either one-place or two-place predicates. I cannot explain why he fails to consider "ought" statements which refer to objective good.

subjective.[1] If the only reasonable way to speak of "good" is in the sense of "objective good," then egoism is unreasonable, for egoism is incompatible with such claims. (See Sentences (1) and (2) above.) If egoism is unreasonable, then there no longer is a dualism in practical reason.

G. E. Moore claims that the notion of "subjective good" is unreasonable, and thus that the only reasonable way to speak of "good" is in the sense of "objective good." "The only reason," he writes, "I can have for aiming at 'my own good,' is that it is good absolutely that what I so call should belong to me." This is the crux of Moore's rejection of egoism, and it is part of his explicit attack on Sidgwick's dualism. Moore argues that I can possess only something which is good, "and not the fact that it is good." Things can be possessed, but facts cannot; and, Moore goes on to say, sentences like "The possession of this by me is my good" are meaningless.[2]

However, Moore fails to consider such closely related sentences as "The possession of this is good for me." This sentence removes the awkwardness of the one Moore chooses, and furthermore expresses the idea which he rejects.

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[1]From now on I will use Mackie's phrases rather than Sidgwick's. Their parallel to one another is more obvious and the terms are less cumbersome.

[2]Moore, Principia Ethica, p. 98.

One further historical comment. C. D. Broad holds the somewhat curious position that egoism is incompatible with a purely teleological view of ethics. His argument is as follows:

> The consistent Egoistic Hedonist holds that pleasure and nothing else is good, and that an equally pleasant state is equally good no matter where it occurs. He knows quite well that, in many cases, if he sacrificed some of his own pleasure, others would gain far more pleasure than he has lost. Yet he holds that any such action would be wrong. Such a view would be quite impossible if he held the teleological theory that 'right' and 'conducive to intrinsically good results' are mutually equivalent. It can be made consistent only on the extreme deontological view that such an action would be unfitting, and that its unfittingness suffices to make it wrong on the whole no matter how intrinsically good its consequences might be.[1]

The phrase "intrinsically good" is crucial here. Broad characterizes teleology as the belief that a right action is one which is conducive to intrinsically good results. He must mean by "intrinsically good" what Mackie has meant by "objectively good," for otherwise he would not find egoism and teleology incompatible. He has assumed without noticing it that the only reasonable way to speak of "good" results is of "objectively good" results.

Are there reasons other than Moore's for calling "subjective good" an incoherent notion? These other reasons are the ones to which this section of the chapter is devoted.

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[1]Broad, Five Types, p. 244.

Nagel and the Irrationality of "Rational Egoism"

Thomas Nagel, in The Possibility of Altruism, advances an argument against the rationality of subjective concepts of good.[1] This argument is important and interesting in its own right; in addition, it has particular relevance to the egoism which Sidgwick found rational. This relevance stems from a position both men share about the rationality of prudence (P_2, the principle of impartiality over time). Sidgwick thinks that rationality demands impartiality toward all the moments of one's existence. But he also thinks that rationality allows one to favor oneself over other people (i.e., to take one's own good as an ultimate end and not take the good of others as ultimate). Nagel agrees that rationality demands impartiality toward all the moments of one's existence; but he does not think that rationality allows one to favor oneself over other people. If Nagel begins with a position so much like Sidgwick's but concludes with a rejection of the rationality of egoism, it is interesting to consider whether Nagel's conclusion is more faithful to their common beginnings than is Sidgwick's.

The similarity in starting points is all the more striking in the following passage. In it Sidgwick seems to

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[1]Thomas Nagel, The Possibility of Altruism (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

agree with Nagel that the same reasons which show imprudence to be irrational show egoism to be irrational.

> I do not see why the Egoistic principle should pass unchallenged any more than the Universalistic. I do not see why the axiom of Prudence should not be questioned, when it conflicts with present inclination, on a ground similar to that on which the Egoists refuse to admit the axiom of Rational Benevolence. If the Utilitarian has to answer the question, "Why should I sacrifice my own happiness for the greater happiness of another?" it must surely be admissible to ask the Egoist, "Why should I sacrifice a present pleasure for a greater one in the future?"[1]

Sidgwick is not here speaking for himself; he is pointing to the dilemma which the "extreme empirical school" must face. Sidgwick is not an empiricist himself, and he has no trouble rejecting imprudence as irrational. In doing so he constructs an argument which Nagel's later argument resembles. Sidgwick's argument is quoted at length in Chapter II of this dissertation; briefly, he says that the notion of "'Good on the whole' of a single individual . . . is constructed by . . . integration of the different 'goods' that succeed one another" temporally. This is comparable to the notion of "Universal Good" formed by "integration of the goods of all individual human . . . lives." And yet, later, Sidgwick finds egoism--partiality toward one life--rational. He says that

> 'I' am concerned with the quality of my existence . . . in a sense, fundamentally important, in which

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[1]Sidgwick, Methods, p. 418.

> I am not concerned with the quality of the existence of other individuals.[1]

He is unable to say more about this "fundamentally important sense." If Nagel is right, this "fundamentally important sense" cannot be a rational one.

Nagel finds strict formal parallels in the rationality of prudence and that of altruism. In his own words, "the interpretation of that feature of reasons on which prudence depends provides a model for the parallel enterprise in the case of altruism."[2] Nagel, then, focuses on the nature of reasons, on what counts as a reason. This is a question which Sidgwick never explicitly raises, and his failure to do so leaves the central concept of "rationally chosen ultimate end" unclear.

Nagel's argument, as I construe it, has the following steps:

(1) Reasons, not desires, are necessary to explain and justify action.

(2) Objective reasons motivate everyone who is aware of them.

(3) Personal practical judgments have motivational content.

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[1]Ibid., p. 498.

[2]Nagel, Altruism, p. 27.

(4) Impersonal practical judgments must have the same motivational content as the corresponding personal practical judgment.

(5) Only reasons understood as objective allow impersonal practical judgments to retain the motivational content of corresponding personal practical judgments.

Each of these steps is densely argued for, and the following summary pays more attention to some of these arguments than to others.

Step (1): Reasons, not desires, are necessary to explain and justify action. One of the most original sections of The Possibility of Altruism argues that desires are not necessary to explain and motivate action. ("Desires" here refers to presently existing feeling states.) Suppose, for example, that I will visit Italy six weeks from now. At the moment I have no desire to learn Italian; but the fact that I will have such a desire in six weeks gives me a reason to study Italian now.[1] The book proceeds to examine the nature of reasons, as distinct from desires.

Step (2): Objective reasons motivate everyone who is aware of them. Nagel argues that both imprudence and egoism fail to recognize an essential feature of reasons, and that in each case to deny this feature is to deny a related

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[1]Ibid., pp. 58-59.

empirical assumption. He argues that imprudence fails to recognize that reasons are timeless, and that to deny their timelessness is to deny that we are temporally extended beings; egoism fails to recognize that reasons are objective, and this amounts to a denial that each of us is but one among (at least possibly) many such beings.

Nagel stipulates a meaning of "objective" which is somewhat different from the uses of that term by authors considered earlier in this chapter. "Objective" is, of course, opposed to "subjective." A subjective reason can motivate us only if we know our place in what it describes. An objective reason motivates us whether or not we know our place. Nagel expresses the difference formally:

> Every reason can be expressed by a predicate R, such that for all persons p and events A, if R is true of A, then p has prima facie reason to promote A . . . Formally, a subjective reason is one whose defining predicate R contains a free occurrence of the variable p (. . . free only within R; it will be bound by the universal quanitification over persons which governs the entire formula).[1]

He then gives the following examples of reasons someone--G. E. Moore, say--might give for removing himself from the path of an oncoming truck.

Objective reasons (intuitively formulated):

(a) the act will prolong G. E. Moore's life.

(c) the act will prolong someone's life.

The same objective reasons (formally stated)

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[1]Ibid., p. 90.

(a) (p,A) (If A will prolong Moore's life, then p has reason to promote A.)

(c) (p,A) [If (∃q) (A will prolong q's life), then p has reason to promote A.]

These objective reasons motivate whether or not one is G. E. Moore. Whoever I am, I have reason to do what I can to remove Moore from the path of the truck. This is not true of subjective reasons, which do not motivate unless I know that I am Moore.

Subjective reasons (intuitively formulated):

(b) the act will prolong his life.

The same subjective reason (formally stated)

(b) (p,A) (If A will prolong p's life, then p has reason to promote A.)[1]

However, this formulation seems to make all prudential reasons subjective. Prudential reasons are those which motivate one to take care of oneself. If these are subjective, then Nagel must abandon his crucial claim that any reason, qua reason, is objective.[2] Nagel deals with this in terms of "a curious value: the objective value of self-reliance in matters of basic survival and self-preservation." He gives the following intuitive and formal versions of such prudential reasons:

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[1]Ibid., p. 91.

[2]See, for instance, the criticism made by Benson, Philosophical Quarterly 22 (January 1972):82-83.

(d) the act is one which will prolong the life of its agent.

(d) (p,A) (If A is an act which will prolong the life of its agent, then p has reason to promote A.)[1]

In this characterization of "objective," Nagel believes he has a tool which will show that "value must be conceived as objective." This would be an argument for altruism, "since it will mean that the ends are common rational objects of pursuit for everyone."[2] But how does he support his position? So far I have simply described the difference between subjective and objective reasons. There remains the major task of establishing that all reasons (as distinguished from desires) are objective--all reasons motivate everyone who is aware of them to bring about the state of affairs for which they are reasons.

(3) Personal practical judgments have motivational content.

(4) Impersonal practical judgments must have the same motivational content as the corresponding personal practical judgments.

His argument for this conclusion depends upon another distinction, that between personal and impersonal practical

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[1]Ibid., p. 92.

[2]Ibid., p. 97.

judgments. Since we are not solipsists, since we see others as persons like ourselves, we must be able to "say of other persons anything which one can say of oneself, and in the same sense." Motivational content is part of any personal practical judgment; therefore, it must be a part of any impersonal practical judgment. To make a personal practical judgment ("I have reason to do A") is to commit oneself to a corresponding impersonal judgment ("Smith has reason to do A") plus some statement identifying myself as Smith. Since the first judgment is sufficient to justify and explain my doing A (this is what Nagel means by "motivational content") so the second is sufficient to justify and explain action bringing about Smith's doing A.[1]

His final premise is this:

(5) Only reasons understood as objective allow impersonal practical judgments to retain the motivational content of corresponding personal practical judgments.

If all five of these premises are true, Nagel can conclude that all true reasons, qua reasons, are objective. But egoistic reasons are not objective, for egoistic reasons motivate us only if they refer to us. Therefore, egoistic "reasons" are not fully reasons.

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[1]Ibid., p. 101.

Nagel's position is not without problems. Most attacks on it concern his claim that motivational content is part of practical judgments. "The crux of the matter is the legitimate content of the claim that one should be able to say 'I have a reason' and 'He has a reason,' using 'reason' in the same sense."[1] Both Watt and Darwall[2] have misgivings about that "legitimate content." The following objection is my own, but heavily indebted to both men. The problem seems to be this: The personal judgment has motivational content in that it explains and justifies my action; the impersonal judgment has motivational content in that it explains and justifies Smith's action. The word "reason" is therefore used in the same sense. If the two judgments in question were re-phrased:

1. There is a reason for me to do A,
2. There is a reason for Smith to do A,

it could plausibly be claimed that both have the same motivational content; whoever makes either judgment explains and justifies those actions of his which bring about Smith's doing A. But these re-phrasings beg the question, for their very wording assumes that reasons are objective.

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[1]A. J. Watt, review of The Possibility of Altruism, by Thomas Nagel, in Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 48 (December 1970):408.

[2]Stephen Darwall, "Nagel's Argument for Altruism," Philosophical Studies, 25 (1974):125-130.

It seems, then, that egoism has not yet been proven irrational. Nagel's attempt at such a proof is significant because it deals with the problem which, as Sidgwick points out, is central: the distinction between subjective and objective reasons for action. If only the latter are truly rational, then egoism has no rational basis, and the dualism does not exist. Without the dualism, Sidgwick's effort to find intuitive (in the weak sense) bases for ethics might have succeeded.

Not only does Nagel attempt to establish what Sidgwick would like to have established; the premises from which Nagel argues are of the kind which Sidgwick sought. These premises themselves claim to be intuitive in the weak sense. Not that Nagel uses that particular terminology; but he does claim that, when we fully understand the nature of reasons, that very understanding will lead us to reject egoistic "reasons" as irrational. Just as Sidgwick hoped that the considerations he advanced in support of the self-evident axioms were decisive, so Nagel hopes that the considerations he advances in favor of the objectivity of reasons are decisive. The hope that supporting considerations will be decisive is not available to one who depends upon foundations which are intuitive in the strong sense.

The final pages of Chapter I argue that Sidgwick's concept of moral knowledge demanded that the most basic moral statements be known intuitively themselves, or that they be

derivable from some other self-evident, non-empirical statements. Nagel attempts to supply such other premises. Nagel, I argue in Chapter V, fails. But anyone who rescues Nagel rescues Sidgwick.

In the meantime we must repeat Mackie's accolade: "With his usual combination of acuteness and honesty, Sidgwick has here got right something that many other moral thinkers have got wrong." Until someone can establish that only objective concepts of good, of reasons for acting, are rational, then Sidgwick is correct in claiming a dualism in practical reason.

V. Conclusion

This chapter examines Sidgwick's effort to establish second level propositions as intuitions in the weak sense. It argues that the concept of a rationally chosen end is integral to his concept of a method of ethics; and it recalls that he calls one set of apparently self-evident ethical principles superior in validity to another if the former is exceptionless and can determine actual rightness, to a greater extent than the latter. Most of the chapter deals with the failure of Sidgwick's own "self-evident" principles to be exceptionless. It is claimed that Benevolence and Justice do not conflict, but that the possibility of conflict between Egoism and Benevolence destroys their claims to self-evidence. The two principles are not logically incompatible, but it is

possible for both to be true only if a theological postulate is true. If they actually conflict, obviously at least one is false and therefore not self-evident; if they do not conflict (because the theological postulate is true), it still cannot be claimed that each is self-evident since the truth of at least one depends upon the truth of the theological postulate. An intuitive statement must be capable of being known without supporting considerations.

The chapter then discusses a number of current attempts to show that egoism is irrational. The success of such an attempt would salvage Sidgwick's claim to have found at least one self-evident principle (Benevolence). But Egoism survives the challenges raised against it, as Sidgwick had claimed it would. His own brief remarks about egoism anticipate the more technical current discussions of objective and subjective good and point out clearly that the essential question is the legitimacy of the concept of subjective good.

The fact that Sidgwick's comments often presage current discussion--and that these discussions shed light upon his own position--allows this final conclusion: Sidgwick's "intuitionism" is far more in the spirit of the twentieth century than of the eighteenth. He holds, not that he has found the self-evident bases of morality, but that claims to have found such bases are properly subject to rational evaluation.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Sidgwick characterizes an adequate ethical theory as one whose second level axioms are themselves self-evident and which explain and justify the claims of third level propositions to be knowledge. His search for such ethical foundations is thorough; his evaluation of his own results is honest and despairing.

Does the failure of such a careful and candid theoritician show that all similar searches will end in failure? If so, the efforts of many twentieth-century ethicists are doomed, for many are attempting (in far less detail, usually) what Sidgwick attempted before them.

The true value of studying Sidgwick does not lie in realizing the extent of his failure. Instead, it lies in recognizing and making use of his successes, and in treating his failure as the central problem which any foundationalist ethics must solve.

His successes include a number of useful distinctions among kinds of intuition, a modest and reasonable theory of self-evidence, and an attitude toward common sense morality which grants it heuristic value without calling it authoritative.

He was unable to find ethical foundations which satisfied his own requirements of rationality. But his attempt to do so isolated a singularly important issue: What counts as a reasonable end for action? Is an egoistic concept of good--"my good in preference to the good of others"--such an end?

Although his work, for a careful reader, draws attention to this question, Sidgwick says very little which is of help in answering it. He simply says that he does not know how "subjective good" could fairly be called unreasonable. Contemporary work on the nature of reasons is far more extensive than anything Sidgwick considered. If it should succeed in delineating a concept of "reason" which disqualified egoism as a rational principle, this work would complete a project which Sidgwick began.

Methods of Ethics does not show the futility of foundationalist ethical theory. Instead, it points out the major challenge which such theories must meet.

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