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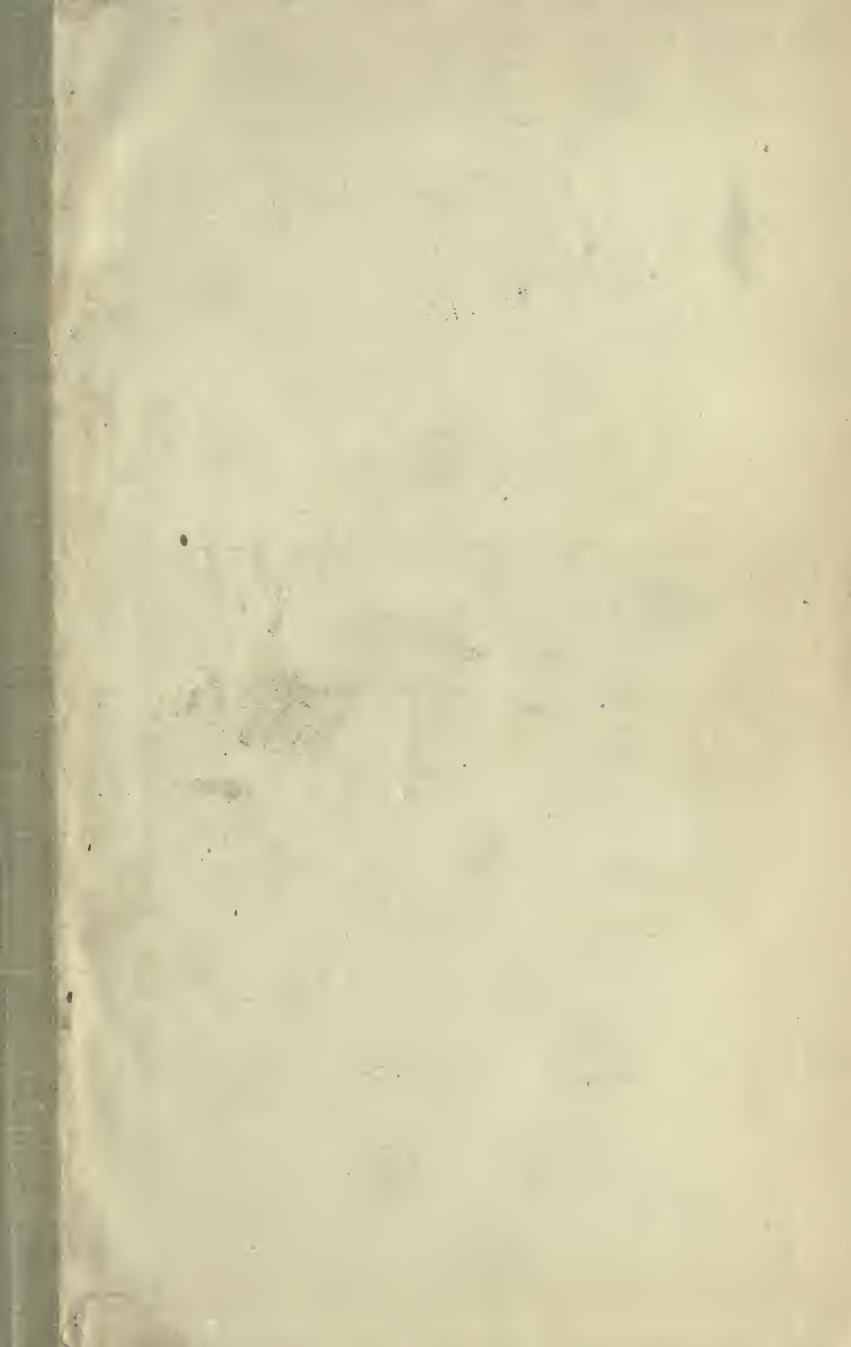
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THE  
ETHICAL PHILOSOPHY OF SIDGWICK

NINE ESSAYS, CRITICAL AND EXPOSITORY

BY

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## SOME HINTS TO THE STUDENT COMMENCING THE *METHODS OF ETHICS*.

THE following dissertation was written by the author when an "Advanced Student" in the University of Cambridge, and was accepted by the University in June, 1901, as an "original contribution to learning". It was, therefore, in no sense written for the elementary student of ethics. There is, however, some ground for believing that it may prove of assistance to such a student, and with this object, among others, in view, it has been published in book form.

The neophyte in ethics generally avoids the Methods, for the work has a not undeserved reputation for difficulty. Even those students who have the temerity to commence its serious perusal often become rapidly discouraged and fly to text-books of a more popular type. The reasons for this are not hard to find, and some of them will be referred to at greater length in the course of the dissertation. Briefly it may be pointed out that among the chief difficulties of the Methods are its length; its avoidance of clap-

trap rhetoric and of vivid and popular illustrations (poetic and other); the absence of any strenuous advocacy of some plausible constructive theory, such as the elementary student impatiently demands—in short, its unpartisan character (mistaken by the superficial reader for colourlessness); lastly the fact that some of the earliest chapters are by no means the easiest, so that the student finds himself overwhelmed with difficult problems from the very first. The result is that many readers never get beyond the first half-hundred pages.

Such a comparative neglect of a truly great work like the *Methods of Ethics* is little short of a philosophical disaster. The writer has had before now to look over the papers of elementary students of ethics. They contain much cheap and hackneyed criticism of Mill, and much half-digested idealistic dogma, but they show surprisingly little consciousness of the real difficulties of the subject. The present writer has no little sympathy with idealism, and with the many excellent manuals which have issued during the last decade from that school of thought—so far as he has any ethical views at all they are of an idealistic complexion. Nevertheless he avows his belief that there is no idealistic work in existence which will bear comparison with the non-idealistic *Methods* as a propædeutic to the subject of ethics. In ethics, as perhaps in theology,

a baptism of scepticism is an excellent and essential initiation into its mysteries and problems, and the individual who has escaped this initiation can never expect to do more than play with the subject. Hence in the interests of sound thinking all ethical students should be urged to grapple with the *Methods*, well assured that they will spend their time more profitably than by digesting a dozen inferior works.

How should the student set about his task? He should perhaps begin with the first chapter of the *Methods*, for this contains some very important introductory matter. Thus in the very first paragraph we find Sidgwick defending the independence of ethics against those who would reduce the "ought" to an "is," a naturalistic school of writers whose influence is great and perhaps increasing. In the same chapter we have a clear statement of the three important ethical methods which he proposes to examine, and a characteristic avowal that all three are *prima facie* rational.

The next two chapters may be omitted on a first reading; chapter iii. is, as a matter of fact, important, but somewhat difficult for the beginner. Its burden is that we cannot get rid of the "ought".

Chapter iv. is extremely valuable. In it Sidgwick refutes psychological hedonism; this refu-

tation was really necessary for the establishment of his own doctrine of ethical hedonism. If we “ought” to seek happiness for self or others (ethical hedonism) it is implied that we do not always do so. Chapter iv. should thus on no account be overlooked.

The remaining chapters in the first book may perhaps be omitted on a first reading.

The discussion of the common virtues in book iii. may now be read by the student. The vulgar theory of moral obligation is a crude kind of intuitionism; there are, it is supposed, a number of distinct virtues, justice, benevolence, veracity, etc., which men ought to practise. [Sidgwick's discussion of this “common sense” doctrine is admitted by all critics to be extremely able, to be, in fact, the most irrefutable part of his book.] The student may well spend much time over this discussion → (book iii., ch. iii.-x.). He will thus come to see the weakness of popular intuitionism, and the necessity for a sounder ethical theory. Chapter xi., book iii., is an admirable summary of this attack by Sidgwick upon “common sense”.

It should, of course, be remembered (see preface to second edition, p. x.) that his criticism is not directed against the practice of benevolence, courage, etc., but only against the view that vulgar intuitionism is adequate and satisfactory as a scientific



ethical theory. "Common sense" is a valuable guide, but it is not always infallible, nor yet is it always even clear and consistent.

The student may now turn to the chapters on egoism (book ii.). On the break-down of "common sense" men sometimes fly to egoism, for this commends itself as simple and consistent. Sidgwick examines this system on its merits; finds that it involves many practical difficulties, but refuses to deny it a place in ethics. The last chapter of this second book is valuable but difficult; in it Sidgwick shows that evolutionary science has not been able to remove the practical difficulties which surround egoism, and, indeed, hedonism generally. In other words he shows that the boasted attempts of "scientific" writers to come to the rescue of hedonism are not really successful.

Perhaps the student had better now turn to the last book (an exposition of utilitarianism) or he may, if he choose, grapple with the two central chapters of the *Methods*, chapters xiii. and xiv. of the third book. These two chapters represent Sidgwick's own views, and, together with the concluding chapter of the fourth book, should be studied with great care. The chapters on utilitarianism (book iv., ch. i.-v.) are full of good, but not specially striking, matter.

Having followed some such order as that indicated above, the student may now well begin again at the first chapter and go through the whole work systematically. If at any point he loses the drift of the argument, a reference to the table of contents at the beginning of the volume may afford some help. But superficial reading will never suffice to a grasp of the significance of Sidgwick's highly balanced arguments. The book must be studied again and again before its astonishing merits become fully apparent. Unless this is done, the student will inevitably be disappointed, and will crave for a different kind of diet. The lesson which Sidgwick has to teach us is the difficult lesson of openness of mind, of freedom from dogmatism: —the lesson referred to by a recent able writer on theological subjects when he says: "Some of the qualities of Grote's work, impartiality, candour, the determination neither to exaggerate nor to undervalue have marked more recent philosophic work at Cambridge".<sup>1</sup> The student must go to Sidgwick, not for a mass of facts, but to acquire a spirit, to learn a method, to distinguish sound reasoning from unsound, to know "processes" rather than "results".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Exploratio Evangelica*. Dr. Gardner. Preface.

<sup>2</sup> *Methods*, p. 14.



The prefaces to Sidgwick's book, especially perhaps the last, are instructive reading.

With respect to the following dissertation, the writer is tempted to follow the admirable example of Mr. Leslie Stephen (*Science of Ethics*, preface) and obviate objections and criticisms by the "explicit and perfectly sincere admission" that there is perhaps not a "single original thought in it from beginning to end".

Still, the task itself is in large measure an original one, for scarcely any one has yet attempted to assess Sidgwick's ethical system as a whole, though Mr. Bradley's spirited pamphlet is an approximation to such an assessment, and numerous isolated criticisms, favourable or unfavourable, have appeared in philosophical journals. In the opinion of such competent critics as have passed judgment upon the dissertation itself, its most valuable portions (the word "original" would be perhaps out of place) are those headed "The In corrigibility of Egoism," and "The Three Maxims of Philosophical Intuitionism Critically Considered". Most of the other chapters contain matter which is perfectly familiar to all experienced readers of ethics, though to the elementary student some of it may be fresh. The summaries of the criticisms to which the *Method of Ethics* has been exposed, especially Mr. Bradley's, will perhaps be useful

as indicating the nature of present-day ethical controversies.

It may be useful to give here a brief summary of the positive doctrines of the *Methods*. This may help to prevent the elementary student losing his way amid the multiplicity of details which he will have to encounter. The summary is reproduced with permission from an article entitled "Constructive Elements in the Ethical Philosophy of Sidgwick," contributed by the writer to the *Ethical World* of 15th December, 1900.

✓ A.—The existence of a moral faculty.

(1) No ethical system is able to dispense with an "ought". "Oughtness" or "rightness" is an "ultimate and unanalysable" notion, and may be regarded as equivalent to "reasonableness" in conduct. Each individual has some conception of what is "right" or "reasonable" for him to do, of what he "ought" to do; even though he may only recognise that he "ought" to seek his own happiness, or to act consistently.

(2) The fact that we judge an act to be "right" or "reasonable," or that we "ought" to do it, supplies a motive for doing it.

✓ B.—The *summum bonum*.

(3) The only thing ultimately good is happiness or pleasure ("desirable consciousness").

(4) This is capable of rough quantitative measurement and estimation.

(5) The *summum bonum* is, therefore, greatest happiness.

(6) There are, however, many other things commonly judged to be "good" in themselves, such as truth, virtue, beauty, and the objects of our common desires.

(7) But none of these ends can be justified to our reason "in a cool hour" except as sources of pleasure or happiness. Even virtue or excellence of character is ultimately valuable only as a source of happiness or pleasure.

C.—Egoistic hedonism.

(8) One's own personal "pleasure" or "happiness" is a reasonable end of action. We "ought" to seek our "happiness or pleasure on the whole" and, in so seeking, ought to regard "hereafter" as equally important with "now" (Maxim of Prudence).

(9) As a matter of fact, however, men do not always or even usually aim directly at pleasure or happiness; their impulses are directed primarily towards concrete objects, actions, and ends (see (6)). Frequently, indeed, such impulses are in the long run actually infelicitous in their results, and are almost always far more powerful than they would

be if directed merely towards the pleasure which results from the realisation of their objects.

(10) On the other hand, if men were to aim always, in a cool and calculating manner, at pleasure, their success would not be great  
> (Paradox of Hedonism).

(11) Hence, considering both (9) and (10), egoism dictates that we should to a large extent cultivate disinterested impulses towards virtue, benevolent action, etc., but not allow such impulses to become so absorbing as to lessen our chances of happiness.

(12) Thus egoism, though bristling with many practical difficulties, and being at best only rough and inexact, is yet a reasonable method of ethics.

D.—Universalistic hedonism (utilitarianism).

(13) Reason dictates that, if it is right or reasonable to seek our own happiness, it is equally right and reasonable to seek > that of others (Maxim of Benevolence). The Practical Reason is no respecter of persons. Utilitarianism ultimately rests upon this intuitive judgment of the Practical Reason.

E.—Relation of egoistic to universalistic hedonism.

(14) Though to aim at one's own "pleasure on the whole" does not often conflict with the aiming at the pleasure of others, yet there is the possibility of conflict.

(15) This conflict would, however, vanish if there were a Divine Providence, which had so adjusted the universe that by aiming at general happiness we should inevitably realise our own.

(16) But it is outside the scope of ethics to investigate this theological hypothesis. Without such an hypothesis, however, there can be no final reconciliation between duty to self and duty to others.

The important constructive propositions in the above are obviously (1), (2), (3), (8), (13), and (15); these are of a purely ethical character; the remainder are mainly psychological statements of actual facts of consciousness. Obviously, also, there are several distinct strands of thought running through the whole; the strand which appears under A and D is rationalistic, almost idealistic; that under B and C is hedonistic; while the remarkable conclusion arrived at under E is theological and extra-ethical.

In concluding these introductory remarks the writer wishes to thank Professor Sorley for



numerous suggestions and occasional criticisms. Some of these have been embodied in the text, but the majority appear in the form of footnotes. He has also to thank his friend, Mr. A. E. Marley, of the University of Cambridge, for assistance of various kinds.

## P R E F A C E.

THE *Methods of Ethics* has been justly acclaimed by the almost unanimous voice of contemporary moralists as a notable work. "Few books to a like degree constrain us to clear and exact thinking" (Gizycki).<sup>1</sup> "A great book" was the verdict of both Bain and Edgeworth, while the former virtually challenged critics to find in it a single fallacy,<sup>2</sup> and the latter did not "presume to estimate the almost inestimable benefits which it has conferred upon philosophy".<sup>3</sup> Even critics of an opposite school have denominated it a "philosophical classic".<sup>4</sup>

There has been only one emphatic demurrer to this chorus of praise. Mr. Bradley, while "far

<sup>1</sup> *International Journal of Ethics*, 1890, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> *Mind*, 1876, p. 177.

<sup>3</sup> *Old and New Methods of Ethics*.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. H. Rashdall in *Mind*, 1885, p. 200.

from wishing to deny to it (the *Methods of Ethics*) a certain value," has complained of its obscurity and of the fallaciousness of many of its reasonings.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, an attempt has been made to expound, estimate and criticise some of the most striking aspects of Sidgwick's ethical philosophy as put forward in this notable book.

To attempt a commentary, chapter by chapter, upon the *Methods of Ethics*, would be a thankless and useless task. Most of the third book requires no commentary whatever ; by common consent its chapters are so lucid, and the conclusions they embody are, for the most part, so indisputable, that even to point out their merits would be to gild refined gold. Chapters iii.-xi. of that book represent views which, thanks largely to Sidgwick himself, would be accepted by a great majority of reflective moralists, though few could have assessed the value of common-sense morality in a way so admirably fair and sagacious. Much also of the second and fourth books is fairly straightforward.

<sup>1</sup> *Mr. Sidgwick's Hedonism.*



Controversies, however, rise in connection with matters introduced (sometimes lightly) in the first book, such, for example, as free will, the "ultimateness" and "unanalysability" of the notion of "right," and the relation of pleasure to desire. Sidgwick's views on the ethical importance (or rather unimportance) of the evolution doctrine have also given rise to controversy. To these important matters some attention has been devoted, either directly or in stating the criticisms of others. But even these questions are eclipsed in interest by those which centre round the two concluding chapters of the third book, and the last chapter of the fourth. These are the "constructive" portions of Sidgwick's work. On one crucial point (the relation between egoism and utilitarianism) the interpretation brought forward in the following pages conflicts with the usual view of Sidgwick's work, but every attempt has been made by study of early editions and of Sidgwick's contributions to *Mind*, to ensure that the interpretation put forward is the true one. If the interpretation be erroneous, an excuse can be pleaded in the words

of Mr. Selby-Bigge (*Mind*, 1890, p. 93). "Of the *Methods of Ethics* it is especially hard to be critical : its very virtues have made it peculiarly difficult to grasp, or at least to judge ; there are so many candid admissions, so many able and eloquent statements of the other side, so little suppression of material facts, that many readers have professed respectful failure to entirely understand the author's views." Or, in the words of another writer's description of the *Methods of Ethics*, "It is often difficult to say towards which side the discussion is tending, while assertions are commonly guarded with 'it seems,' or 'upon the whole,' or similar modifying phrase. A condensed statement (of the argument of the *Methods*) is not easily attempted" (Calderwood, *Handbook of Moral Philosophy*, fourteenth edition, p. 343).

It should also be pointed out that the sections which follow are not continuous. They are separate discussions of certain leading features of Sidgwick's thought ; hence the connections between them are sometimes but slight, and there is, in addition, a

certain amount of repetition and overlapping. No one, in fact, can be more conscious of the defective arrangement of the chapters and sections than the author himself.

F. H. H.

GONVILLE AND CAIUS COLLEGE,  
CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND, 1901.

#### NOTE.

The following incident, narrated to the writer by Mr. Oscar Browning, is significant: "The first word of my book," said Sidgwick, who had just completed the *Methods*, and who was conversing with Mr. Browning, "is '*Ethics*,' the last word is 'failure'". The word "failure" disappeared from the second and succeeding editions of the *Methods*; but there is every reason to believe that Sidgwick felt to the last the enormous difficulty of ethical construction, more particularly the difficulty of reconciling or subordinating egoism to a more comprehensive system.



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## CHAPTER I.

### SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE *METHODS OF ETHICS* AND OF SIDGWICK'S PHILOSOPHY GENERALLY.

“The philosophic mind of the modern world is now at the ebb, with its constructive impulses comparatively feeble” (Sidgwick, *Mind*, 1900, p. 10).

IN one of the ablest of recent English works on ethics<sup>1</sup> it is said that “nothing is more striking at the present time than the convergence of the main opposing ethical theories”.

Egoism, we are told, is dead; the traditional English utilitarianism (transformed by the evolutionary idea) and the Kantian rigorism (transformed by later idealists) are now meeting on the common ground of the organic nature of society. If this be true—and a demonstration of its partial truth will form an element in the following discussions<sup>2</sup>—the words of Sidgwick which head this section must be regarded as peculiar and

<sup>1</sup> Professor Alexander, *Moral Order and Progress*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> See section, “Sidgwick and Green”.



## 2 SIDGWICK'S PHILOSOPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS.

paradoxical. In the face of the elaborate attempts at idealistic and evolutionary construction which have been made during the last few decades, how is it possible to affirm that the constructive impulses of the modern world are now "comparatively feeble"?

No doubt Sidgwick is referring mainly to metaphysical construction; his words are certainly not true, *prima facie*, in any emphatic sense of ethics. Since 1870 quite a dozen works have appeared on the idealistic side, several, such as those of Bradley and Green, of an epoch-making character, and definitely "constructive" in spirit. Darwin, Spencer, Clifford, Stephen, Alexander, have appeared as ethical evolutionists, again with "constructive" intentions; while eminent representatives of intuitionism and utilitarianism have also published important works. England, the chosen land of moral philosophy, shows no signs of having lost her interest in the subject, and the interest is not merely critical.

When we turn to metaphysics proper, Sidgwick's words are, to a large extent, true. Interest in ontology has waned; philosophers, distrustful of being able to penetrate to the absolute, busy themselves mainly with criticism and epistemology. In spirit, if not in methods, they approve of the modest aim which Locke, Kant, and many another



philosopher have set before themselves, the aim of investigating the nature and limits of knowledge rather than the nature of reality.

And yet "constructive impulses" are not by any means dead even in the sphere of metaphysics; the existence of such a work as *Appearance and Reality* sufficiently demonstrates this fact. How comes it, then, that Sidgwick, in the last year of his life, could speak so disparagingly of contemporary efforts at construction?

The reason probably was that he had a profound distrust of the success of such efforts. He had weighed them in the balances and had, he believed, found them wanting.<sup>1</sup> Philosophically his hand was against almost every man's. In 1882 he had inveighed against the "incoherence of empirical philosophy".<sup>2</sup> Others, his contemporaries of the idealistic school, were inveighing against it too; was Sidgwick then an idealist?

<sup>1</sup> "More thoroughly than any other man known to me," said the late Mr. F. W. H. Myers, "Sidgwick had exhausted one after another the traditional creeds, the accredited speculations; had followed out even to their effacement in the jungle the advertised pathways to truth. Long years of pondering had begotten in him a mood of mind alike rare and precious; a scepticism profound and far-reaching, which yet had never curdled into indifference nor frozen into despair" ("Memoir of Sidgwick," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*),

<sup>2</sup> *Mind*, 1882, p. 533.

In scarcely any possible sense of that much-used and much-abused word can he be said to have been so. His latest words were an exposure of what he regarded as the weakness of Green's metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> There was another powerful school of thought to which he might have belonged, that of the evolutionists; but it is certain that, though admitting the importance of the evolutionary idea in many fields, he denied that it threw any great light upon the ultimate problems of knowledge and morality.

Evolutionary construction, idealistic construction and empiricist construction, all, he felt, were built upon sand, or upon unexplained pre-suppositions.

Was he, then, a "critical" philosopher in the Kantian sense? No doubt the critical element in his work is extraordinarily prominent. His eye saw instantly the weak points in plausible and pre-tentious arguments. Out of the hundred or more sections of the *Methods of Ethics*, a very large number (beginning with his favourite particles "but," "still," "nor") are purely critical; dogma after dogma is brought on the scene only to be examined and rejected. A spirit of keen criticism pervades everything Sidgwick has written; and yet we cannot call him a "critical philosopher" in the

<sup>1</sup> *Mind*, 1901, p. 18.

narrower sense,—a philosopher who looks to Kant as the bringer of new and important speculative tidings. Some of his ablest criticism was directed against the “Critical Philosophy” itself, not merely, be it observed, against its details, but against its fundamental principle that the criticism of knowledge must precede full assurance of knowledge. He protested against the Kantian “suspension of all metaphysicians from their occupations until they had shown the possibility of metaphysical knowledge”. “Unless the critical philosopher can first explain how *his* knowledge is possible, he would seem to be only a dogmatist of a new kind.”<sup>1</sup> This last, indeed, is the conclusion at which he finally arrives. “I do not see that we are likely to gain by exchanging the natural and naïve dogmas of the older ‘transcendent’ ontology, for the more artificial and obscure, but no less unwarranted, dogmas of this newer ‘transcendental’ psychology.”<sup>2</sup>

To classify Sidgwick is therefore no easy matter. But one clue to his fundamental position is provided by the phrase he invented to describe a possible ethical theory, “philosophical intuitionism”. He was convinced, and urged his conviction with equal vigour against empiricism, evolutionism and Kantianism, that we have, in the long run, to fall

<sup>1</sup> “A Criticism of the Critical Philosophy,” *Mind*, 1883, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.



back upon certain reflective and unanalysable convictions or intuitions of truth. Evolution is powerless to subvert these. Evolutionists, like other men, take something for granted unproved, and have to rely finally upon such intuitions. Criticism, too, cannot subvert them except at the risk of subverting itself, for criticism like evolutionism must take something for granted.

Sidgwick published no large work on metaphysical questions; hence there is considerable difficulty, pending the publication of his metaphysical lectures, in speaking with confidence as to his ultimate positions. But if we are right in laying emphasis upon the intuitional aspect of his philosophy, then clearly he and Reid have a good deal in common, though the keen critical spirit of Sidgwick's work is far more prominent, and the constructive element less prominent, than in the work of his Scottish predecessor. It is notable that he based his utilitarianism upon an intuition, and he regarded this as his most important achievement.<sup>1</sup>

He may be said to have believed in a "common sense" of a philosophic kind, a kind very different,

<sup>1</sup> See the important and interesting preface to the sixth edition of the *Methods*. "I had myself become . . . an intuitionist to a certain extent . . . I was a utilitarian . . . but on an intuitional basis".



no doubt, from the vulgar "common sense" which, in its moral pronouncements, he criticised so severely. It is a "common sense" whose ultimate intuitions must be accepted without cavil, and must neither be resolved away into an infinite regress of cosmic conditions nor into an infinite regress of hypostatised "criticisms". He was not a "common-sense" philosopher in the vulgar acceptance of the phrase;<sup>1</sup> in a more refined acceptance, the phrase is not altogether inappropriate as applied to him, though "philosophical intuitionist" or even "Cartesian rationalist" (to whom "clearness and distinctness" are, with due limitations, the ultimate criteria of truth), are other designations which are spontaneously suggested by certain aspects of his work. A more precise "labelling" we need not attempt. Difficult as the "labelling" of Green proved itself,<sup>2</sup> the task would be far more difficult in the case of Sidgwick.

But it is necessary to turn to his more distinctly ethical work. It suffices to have pointed out with respect to his general philosophical attitude,

<sup>1</sup> "A criticism of the Critical Philosophy," *Mind*, 1883, p. 337. "I do not hold . . . that our common *a priori* assumptions respecting empirical objects require no philosophical justification."

<sup>2</sup> *Mind*, 1901, p. 18.

the critical spirit which pervades his teaching, the distrust of every pretentious and apparently homogeneous system of thought, the highly balanced treatment of every question ; these qualities help to throw light upon his statement that the "constructive impulses of the modern world are now comparatively feeble".

The critical spirit which he brought to bear upon the systems of others enters also into his own attempts at construction. The *Methods of Ethics* does not present us with a comprehensive and harmonious system of morality. Construction is begun, but at various points. "I have refrained from expressly attempting any such complete and final solution of the chief ethical difficulties and controversies as would convert this exposition of various methods into the development of a harmonious system. At the same time I hope to afford aid towards the construction of such a system."<sup>1</sup>

The words just quoted afford an explanation of the well-known fact that men have found a difficulty in reaching the core and vital essence of Sidgwick's work. His attitude is so judicial and critical, at times even so negative, that superficial readers fail to recognise the positive and constructive elements which lie enshrined

<sup>1</sup>*Methods*, p. 13.

amid the more negative and destructive. The impression conveyed is that the philosopher was more minded to pull down than to build up; that he was, indeed, reluctant to establish a positive system of his own. The impression is, in great measure, true. But still there are in the *Methods of Ethics* the elements of a possible system; positive statements which are Sidgwick's own, and not merely his as voicing some particular "method". These elements will presently be set forth. Here it suffices to call attention to the atmosphere of criticism which pervades his ethical no less than his other work, and which provides an explanation of the fact that many students who open the *Methods of Ethics* with a resolution to master its contents, relinquish their task in bewilderment or despair before a dozen chapters have been read. The thought, though clear, is so unimpassioned, so unpartisan, so elusive, so devoid of "gripping" power, that the mind wearies of the task. Popularity can, as a rule, best be won through partisanship; Sidgwick was too critical to be a partisan; hence his book is commonly regarded with respect rather than with enthusiasm.

He is sometimes called an "eclectic". There is a good deal of appropriateness in the designation, provided it be not interpreted as meaning a shallow and unintelligent collector of ideas from

various sources. It is certain that the positive conclusions at which Sidgwick arrived, however few in number, were the result of intense and long-continued thought. He was the very last man to select principles indiscriminately from here and from there in order somehow to build up a system which would please all parties. If, so far as he was a constructive philosopher, he was an eclectic, he was certainly not a shallow one. Still the *Methods of Ethics* has an eclectic appearance only less prominent than its critical aspect. "There are different views of the ultimate reasonableness of conduct, implicit in the thought of ordinary men,"<sup>1</sup> and Sidgwick treated each of the different views with such respect that his readers have frequently found a difficulty in knowing to which he himself most inclined. He even seems to have reconciled himself, in part, to the existence of *prima facie* contradictions, though he recognised that philosophy cannot ultimately rest contented with them. "System-making is pre-eminently the affair of philosophy, and it cannot willingly tolerate inconsistencies: at least if it has to tolerate them, as I sadly fear that it has, it can only tolerate them as a physician tolerates a chronic imperfection of health."<sup>2</sup> These words, again,

<sup>1</sup> *Methods*, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> "The Philosophy of Common Sense," *Mind*, 1895.



explain much of Sidgwick's work. Though recognising that "system - building" was the philosophic ideal, he had lost confidence in the power of the human mind, in its present stage of development, adequately to realise this ideal. He would not follow the example of many philosophers in hastily completing an apparently homogeneous and imposing but really crude and internally weak structure. "One of the most fruitful sources of error in philosophy has been overhasty synthesis and combination without sufficient previous analysis of the elements combined."<sup>1</sup> He preferred to build a little here, and a little there : to leave the whole incomplete provided it were sound and thorough so far as it went. He even chose to admit a *prima facie* contradiction rather than to get rid of it by the expedient of denying what seemed intuitively certain. Contradictions, he virtually tells us, may be only apparent ; it would be fatal to discredit the verdict of consciousness because it lands us in them. Would not Sidgwick and Hegel have found at this point *something* in common ?

To an extent, then, Sidgwick appears as an eclectic, but as a critical and discriminating one.

<sup>1</sup> "The Relation of Ethics to Sociology," *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. x., p. 18.

The *summum bonum* he borrows from hedonism ; important rationalistic elements he takes from Kant and Butler ; egoism and universalism each receives recognition ; intuitionism too is found to have an important function. The result is an apparent absence of homogeneity. He has refrained from trying "to convert the exposition of various methods into the development of a harmonious system," and indeed hedonism, though coming out of the fire of his criticism triumphant, does so only at the cost of many a scar.

One or two further characteristics of the *Methods of Ethics* deserve mention. Every age has its *Zeitgeist*, and the present owns allegiance to the *Zeitgeist* of evolution. Even idealism has joined hands with science, and worships at the shrine with neophytic fervour. Sidgwick, as said above, was not enamoured of the new cult. He admitted, as all thinking men must, the importance of the evolutionary idea for biological science, but he strenuously resisted its intrusion into ethical discussions except to a very limited and unimportant extent. The *Zeitgeist* had little or no influence upon him. He saw, as he thought, through its proud and pretentious claims. Hence the *Methods of Ethics* does not reflect the characteristic ideas of its time ; it belongs to an age of individualism rather than to an age of "social organism "

and "social tissue".<sup>1</sup> This is no disparagement. On the contrary, a work which boldly opposes current ideas may possess peculiar claims upon our attention. The *Zeitgeist* is not infallible.

Sidgwick resisted "idealism" too. His controversies with Green and Bradley were every whit as keen as those with Spencer and Stephen. Against what he regarded as the vague and inconsequent metaphysics of the former he protested as vigorously as against the biological bias of the latter.

Thus, standing outside the prevalent ethical tendencies of his time, distrusting them, engaged in a constant criticism of their errors and omissions, distrustful even of his own powers of constructing a self-consistent ethical system, Sidgwick was convinced that the most immediate task of philosophy was the unambitious one of keeping close to common notions, and making them clear, precise, and, as far as possible, harmonious. High-flying metaphysics he could not but distrust. Ambitious and imposing systems, idealistic or naturalistic, were for him but vulnerable and pretentious objects of criticism. Architectonic grandeur was no aim for a nineteenth century philosopher, heir, no

<sup>1</sup> On page 374 of the first edition he "simplified the question by supposing only a single sentient conscious being in the universe," a "simplification" to which his idealistic opponents strongly objected as being a return to a kind of atomism.

doubt, of all the ages, and also to all the ruined philosophies which have come down to him.

A German historian of philosophy has described the typical English philosopher in the following words. "He keeps as close as possible to phenomena, and the principles which he uses in the explanation of phenomena themselves lie in the realm of concrete experience. He keeps constantly in touch with the popular consciousness. His reverence for reality . . . and his distrust of far-reaching abstraction are strong."<sup>1</sup> English philosophy has been, until recently, empiricist, and the above words of Falckenberg aptly describe some of its characteristics. Sidgwick was not an empiricist<sup>2</sup> except in a very wide and vague sense, but the words above quoted are a not altogether inappropriate description of his attitude. True, he departs, when it is necessary to do so, from the "popular consciousness"; for the philosopher must, after all, "seek unity of principle and consistency of method at the risk of paradox".<sup>3</sup> But his departures are never in the direction

<sup>1</sup> Falckenberg, English translation, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> "I think it impossible to establish the general truths of the accepted sciences by processes of cogent inference on the basis of merely particular premises" ("Criteria of Truth and Error," *Mind*, 1900, p. 15. See also "Incoherence of the Empirical Philosophy," *Mind*, 1882).

<sup>3</sup> *Methods*, p. 6.



of Spencerian "unknowables" or transcendental "absolutes".

Another characteristic of the *Methods* is notable, the close-packedness of its thought. Most modern works on ethics are extremely diffuse. The student has to wade through many a page before alighting upon any striking or important statement. Green is diffuse and repeats himself time after time; Kant's diffuseness is notorious, and evolutionary moralists are, for the most part, still more guilty. The whole of Spencer's *Principles of Ethics* could be condensed, without important loss, into one-tenth of its present space. No such condensation is possible with Sidgwick's work. There is scarcely a superfluous word. If thoughts and suggestions can be regarded for the moment as entities capable of enumeration, the *Methods of Ethics* probably contains a greater number than any other ethical work of the size that has ever been written. It is a rich mine of thought from which moralists will borrow (with or without acknowledgment) for years to come.

Ethical works are not usually adorned with the flowers of rhetoric and eloquence. The *Methods of Ethics* is no exception. Though not devoid of a kind of chaste dignity, it is too thoughtful and argumentative to afford much pleasure of a purely artistic kind. And yet Sidgwick's style occasion-

ally rises into real eloquence as in the following passage (*Methods*, p. 499).

“It seems scarcely extravagant to say that, amid all the profuse waste of the means of happiness which men commit, there is no imprudence more flagrant than that of selfishness in the ordinary sense of the term, that excessive concentration on the individual's own happiness which renders it impossible for him to feel any strong interest in the pleasures and pains of others. The perpetual prominence of self that hence results tends to deprive all enjoyments of their keenness and zest, and produce rapid satiety and *ennui*: the selfish man misses the sense of elevation and enlargement given by wide interests; he misses the more secure and serene satisfaction that attends continually on activities directed towards ends more stable in prospect than an individual's happiness can be; he misses the peculiar, rich sweetness, depending upon a sort of complex reverberation of sympathy which is always found in services rendered to those whom we love and who are grateful. He is made to feel in a thousand various ways, according to the degree of refinement which his nature has attained, the discord between the rhythms of his own life and of that larger life of which his own is but an insignificant fraction.”



## CHAPTER II.

### SIDGWICK'S PREDECESSORS.

"I identify a modification of Kantism with the missing rational basis of the ethical utilitarianism of Bentham, as expounded by J. S. Mill" (Sidgwick : *Mind*, 1877, p. 411).

"The dualism of the practical reason . . . I learnt . . . from Butler's well-known *Sermons*" (preface to *Methods of Ethics*, second edition).

"The rationality of self-regard seemed to me as undeniable as the rationality of self-sacrifice" ("Autobiographical Note," *Mind*, 1901, p. 289).

THE statements quoted above and given by Sidgwick himself as expository of the sources of his ethical philosophy will be of direct guidance in tracing out the several distinct strands of thought which it contains. The last of the three is inserted for more than one reason. It represents a conviction which Sidgwick firmly embraced, and which despite the difficulties involved, he could never remove from his own mind. It represents, moreover, that aspect of his ethical system which has been least recognised by his critics, and which by many has been quite ignored. We shall return to it again.

The statements which head this section thus indicate in a brief form the four chief sources of the philosophy of the *Methods*. Those sources are Mill, Kant, Butler, and, most important of all, the convictions of Sidgwick himself.

(I) MILL.

Economists, logicians, moralists, theologians, and sociologists are united in the execution of one task—the criticism of Mill. No feeling of compunction animates the breasts even of those who owe him the most for providing them with much easy and excellent “copy,” and with many a text for a lengthy and triumphant discussion.

It is unfair that Mill should be known to numbers of students only through his inaccuracies and inconsistencies, especially when these latter, unlike those of many of his critics, are largely matters of expression only. Mill, who was too open-minded to ignore the varied sides of each subject, made admissions which were verbally inconsistent with each other, but which, by increased carefulness of expression on his part, could have been easily brought into harmonious unity.

That the much-criticised ethical work which Mill published in 1863 is full of loose and inexact expressions, no one is likely to deny. It is not, however, the purpose of this essay to point them

out ; that has been done sufficiently often ; the present task is to show, in brief words, the close relation in which Mill's work stands to the *Methods of Ethics*. The latter work is immeasurably the more exact, ambitious and comprehensive, but it will be found to be very largely based upon the former. Certainly no other book exerted so early and important a formative influence upon the evolution of Sidgwick's system as Mill's *Utilitarianism*.

It may not be impertinent to point out that if Sidgwick's style, admittedly lucid, easy, and well adapted to the task of philosophical exposition, was influenced by that of any predecessor, that predecessor was probably Mill. Many pages of *Utilitarianism* could be easily mistaken for pages of the *Methods of Ethics*. In the latter we miss, it is true, the hortatory element, but a comparison, for example, of the discussions on justice will show them to be not only similar in matter but marvelously alike in style. (Pages 82-87 in *Utilitarianism* are extraordinarily suggestive of Sidgwick.)

But style counts for little in philosophy ; similarities of tone and feeling are far more important. In our two writers we find the same openness of mind, the same breadth of view, the same intellectual and controversial honesty which will rather admit inconsistencies into a system than deny obvious facts. Sidgwick, it is true, had a

keener vision than Mill for such inconsistencies. While Mill was frequently unconscious of their seriousness, Sidgwick faced them bravely even at the imminent "risk of paradox". But in both writers there is an avoidance of the too common practice of unconsciously though violently distorting facts in order to fit them into favourite theories. Mill's admissions of the "sense of dignity," "quality of pleasures" and so forth, may be paralleled by Sidgwick's significant recognition of fundamental difficulties and paradoxes in his favourite system. Both writers were supremely honest; both were unwilling to sacrifice truth on the altar of dialectical victory.

But subject-matter is more important in philosophy than style, tone, or feeling. In Mill we find a long list of doctrines subsequently developed with increased skill and precision by the later writer.

We find, of course, the hedonistic *summum bonum*. We find, too, the important admission that man may knowingly follow the worse rather than the better reason (p. 14). We find that genuine self-sacrifice is a reality and not a delusion (pp. 22-23); that happiness should be the ultimate end yet not the proximate duty (p. 54); that the moral judgment is passed primarily on intentions though also in a secondary sense on persons and



their motives (pp. 26, 27); that utilitarianism has necessary limitations, and despite its theoretical impartiality, dictates that the immediate social environment has greater claims than distant individuals (p. 94). We find, too, as we should expect, a recognition of the inconsistencies, as well as the practical value, of common morality, and an appeal to utilitarianism to reconcile them (p. 38). We find, moreover, the admission, important in this evolutionary age, that questions of the origin of the moral judgment should not be intruded into a discussion of its validity (p. 62).

The crisis of each book is similar. Mill's "proof" of utilitarianism has often been exposed and ridiculed. "Each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons" (p. 53). No doubt there will be found here, if we choose to be severe, a "fallacy of composition"; an aggregate has no sensorium. But are we to assume that Mill was ignorant of this? We may admit the clumsiness and the logical and verbal inaccuracy of his so-called "proof," but are we, till the end of time, to parade as *monstra horrida* and as terrors to logical evil-doers, slip-shod statements which are, after all, capable of a rational interpretation? Surely his "proof" when charitably interpreted

and when deprived of its hedonistic flavouring, comes to much the same thing as Sidgwick's maxim of benevolence. The practical reason, we are virtually told, is no respecter of persons. The basis of his "proof" (a "proof" which Mill admits to be not a logical one and which should not be treated as if it claimed to be such) is probably found on page 24. "As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires the agent to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator." If so then the "general happiness" is, in a distributive sense, a good to the aggregate of all men.

In both, again, we have the admission, so significant in writers with a hedonistic leaning, that perfect contentment may not rouse our ethical approval; the "contented pig" is a *bête noir* for each of our writers (p. 14). In Mill we have the confusion between the two meanings of "desirable" (p. 53), and by Sidgwick, according to some of his critics,<sup>1</sup> the same confusion, with its consequent *petitio principii*, is repeated, at any rate in his first edition. In both we have (to mention a minor but interesting point) the legitimacy, under special conditions, of unveracity emphatically brought out (p. 34). In both we have an absence of shallow eighteenth century optimism, and yet no very

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bradley.



definite traces of the more recent pessimistic movement (pp. 14, 18).

Above all, their treatment of the problem of justice is extremely similar. Sidgwick's, of course, is immeasurably the fuller and more exact, but every element referred to by him in the classical fifth chapter of the third book will be found in a cruder and less exact form in the last chapter of Mill's *Utilitarianism*.

## (2) KANT.

Sidgwick tells us in the autobiographical fragment<sup>1</sup> which appeared in *Mind* of April, 1901, that he became impressed with the truth and importance of Kant's fundamental principle at a definite period in his philosophic growth. Mill's Utilitarianism had been found to be lacking in cogency and intuitive certainty; it gave no clear reason why a man should sacrifice his own pleasure for that of others. Kant's maxim, "Act from a principle that you can will to be a universal law," seemed to supply the intuitive basis for which Sidgwick was seeking. Owing, however, to a conviction of the incorrigibility of moral egoism, he subsequently came to feel that Kant's maxim was "inadequate" on the ground that "it did not settle finally the subordination of self-interest to duty". Still, it

<sup>1</sup> Now the preface to the sixth edition of the *Methods*.

remained as a supreme canon of one side of Sidgwick's system, the orthodox utilitarian side.

The categorical imperative of Kant thus reappears in Sidgwick in the form of the maxim of equity, one of the three maxims of philosophical intuitionism, and perhaps the most important.<sup>1</sup>

In other directions the influence of Kant upon Sidgwick was also of considerable importance, though it was in certain respects so similar to that of Butler that the two cannot always be distinguished.

Thus the emphasis laid by Sidgwick on "rationality" of conduct is distinctly suggestive of the Königsburg thinker; both philosophers invariably interpret "right" in the sense of "rational". Critics<sup>2</sup> have severely attacked Sidgwick's treatment of the question thus raised, but into the merits of the controversy we cannot now enter; his treatment is indeed but slight, and contrasts with the lengthy argument by which Kant sought to establish the claims of reason. We shall, however, see some grounds for believing that Sidgwick's view was based, at least in part, upon an abstract view of things not unsimilar to that of Kant. The point upon which we now insist is that both writers equated "right" with "rational," and that this was somewhat significant in the case of a hedonist like Sidgwick.

<sup>1</sup> *Methods*, book iii., ch. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> *E.g.*, Mr. Bradley.

But it is interesting to note that he comes back to hedonism by a strange and unfamiliar route. "It is right or reasonable (*i.e.*, I ought) to seek my own happiness." In this dictum, perhaps the most important and fundamental in Sidgwick's work, there is a curious fusion of the rationalistic with the hedonistic, a fusion which he learnt neither from Kant (who would have denied the proposition) nor from the hedonists (who would probably object to its form).

Again when we hear from Sidgwick that the notion of "oughtness" or "rightness" must be taken as "ultimate and unanalysable,"<sup>1</sup> we seem again to be breathing an anti-hedonistic atmosphere. Orthodox hedonists would scarcely admit that the notion is "ultimate," and the few who would admit it to be "unanalysable" would only do so on the ground that a meaningless notion is no notion at all, and therefore certainly unanalysable. Hedonists<sup>2</sup> object as a rule to the word "ought": it is for them an intruder from other and more

<sup>1</sup> *Methods*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Sorley considers the above words too strong; hedonists, he says, can give a perfectly valid meaning to the "ought"; the word stands for the claims which society has upon us. This, no doubt is true, but cannot be applied to the egoistic form of hedonism, only to the utilitarian. The above statement is true of Bentham, who held that the word "ought" "ought to be abolished".

unscientific systems of ethics. They contend that if there is any validity in the notion of "oughtness" it is capable of further analysis into "conduciveness to happiness". Sidgwick, therefore, in identifying "oughtness" or "rightness" with "reasonableness" and maintaining that the notion represented by these words is fundamental to ethics, is far removed, verbally at least, from the position of orthodox hedonism. Even if we only admit that we "ought" to seek our own individual happiness, or that we "ought" to act on some consistent plan, egoistic or other, still this "ought" has, according to Sidgwick, a rigorous stringency, an ultimate and unanalysable quality. The admission is thus interesting and important, though whether the alliance effected between this "ultimate" notion and hedonism is satisfactory, and whether "oughtness" can really be applied to egoistic pleasure-seeking, will have to be considered later on. Here it suffices to point out that this semi-jural view with its emphasis on "ought" is Kantian and stoical rather than hedonistic.

Sidgwick takes a still further step in his apotheosis of reason when he admits that reason can  
 → act as a motive to the will. This, as Professor Sorley points out,<sup>1</sup> is really the question of ques-

<sup>1</sup> *Ethics of Naturalism*, pp. 16-17.



tions in ethics, and any intelligible doctrine of the freedom of the will must have as its basis the originative power of reason. "When I speak of the cognition or judgment that 'X ought to be done' . . . as a 'dictate' or 'precept' of reason to the persons to whom it relates, I imply that in rational beings as such this cognition gives an impulse or motive to action"<sup>1</sup> (*Methods*, p. 34). Kant's view is similar to this, but far more sweeping and emphatic. According to him all moral action has to spring ultimately from reason, the immediate motive being reverence for the dictates of the latter. But alike in Kant and in Sidgwick the exact nature of the connection between reason on the one side and action on the other is not very clear, though the connection is obviously of the nature of refined feeling. Kant's view has been often criticised, and Mr. Bradley has undertaken the same duty in the case of Sidgwick.<sup>2</sup> But it must be confessed that the subject is an extremely difficult one. How exactly can mere reason pass into action? The answer probably is that there is no *mere* reason; that all action springs out of some interest, which, though dependent (to use Herbartian language) upon the nature of the

<sup>1</sup>The first edition lays greater stress upon this "desire to do what is right and reasonable as such" than later editions.

<sup>2</sup>*Mr. Sidgwick's Hedonism.*

presentations which exist in the agent's "circle of thought," is more than mere cognitive reason. The besetting danger of idealism is to exalt to the chief seat a reason which is divorced from the rest of consciousness; a danger no less serious than the hedonistic exaltation of mere feeling. This question (which Kant declared "insoluble"<sup>1</sup>) is too difficult and abstruse to deal with here.

Some light is thrown upon this problem of the place of reason in moral action by recognising the significance of Kant's terminology—a terminology subsequently adopted by Sidgwick. The *Methods of Ethics* in its first even more than in its later form, contains the words "objective," "universal," "intrinsic," as applied to moral truth. Reason is defined as the "faculty of apprehending universal truth" (p. 35, first edition). Acting rationally is acting "from an impulse in harmony with an intellectual apprehension of an objective rule, or intrinsically desirable end" (p. 43, first edition). We find similar language in Kant. "That reason may give laws it is necessary that it should only need to presuppose *itself*, because rules are objectively and universally valid only when they hold without any contingent subjective conditions, which distinguish one rational being from another" (Abbot., p. 107). Some of Sidgwick's critics

<sup>1</sup> Abbot, p. 165.



(notably Mr. Bradley) have attacked his doctrine of "objective" rightness on the ground that it implies a complete abstraction from ordinary moral facts; that it reduces each individual to an X, and then affirms that what holds between such phantom individuals is "universal" and "objective". The charge cannot be rebutted; the point of view is undoubtedly an abstract one as is most explicitly confessed in the above words of Kant. But whether this abstractness is or is not a serious blemish we need not here decide; the question will await us farther on. It suffices here to point out that, alike for Kant and for Sidgwick, the ultimate moral intuitions are based upon an abstract, almost a mathematical view of the moral universe.

One other Kantian doctrine, important though not exactly distinctive, reappears in Sidgwick. Each philosopher has somehow to extricate himself from an antinomy of the practical reason. The antinomies are not formally identical in the two cases, though the similarity between them is considerable. Kant's antinomy consists in the difficulty that while duty ought to be done for duty's sake and apart from all consideration of reward, yet ultimate good must include not only dutifulness or virtue but happiness. As he expresses it in the *Critique of the Practical Reason*,<sup>1</sup> virtue is the

<sup>1</sup> Abbot's translation, p. 206.

supreme good, but virtue and happiness combined constitute the perfect or complete good. Sidgwick's antinomy differs from this in its resolute affirmation of the rationality and duty of egoism (an affirmation we cannot find in Kant except as remotely and with difficulty deducible from his doctrine of the perfect good). In the *Methods of Ethics* the duty of egoism and the duty of universalism have somehow to be reconciled.

The solution of their antinomies is found by both writers in the postulates of God and Immortality. If, however, we are to judge from the closing paragraphs of the *Methods*, its author's confidence in his own postulates was less firm and unwavering than that of the Königsburg thinker. Those paragraphs open up long vistas of scepticism. It is said that Sidgwick's connection with the Psychological Research Society was due to his deep conviction that, apart from belief in a future life, the moral cosmos would be reduced to chaos. He became prominent among that small group of persons who, a decade or so ago, began the careful investigation of the obscure subjects of hypnotism, apparitions, and so forth, subjects which have appeared trivial or grotesque to many, but which to Sidgwick seemed fraught with great significance.

The above are the most obvious parallels between Sidgwick and Kant. A few others will be men-

tioned, but owing to the fact that even moralists of the most diverse schools have many doctrines in common, there is always, for the individual who seeks to trace out the influence of one writer on another, some danger of lapsing into pedantry, if not of doing serious injustice to the later of the two writers. Still a few other points may be mentioned in which agreement, if not influence, is manifest.

The perfectionistic ideal of morality is condemned by Kant and Sidgwick, and for identical reasons. "Ends must first be given relatively to which only can the notion of perfection be the determining principle of the will." The whole discussion<sup>1</sup> of ethical ends, inserted in the *Critique of the Practical Reason*, is deserving of comparison with Sidgwick's, and the treatment of such questions as talent and the theological view of ethics is similar to their treatment by our writer.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover we find Kant refusing to accept the "moral sense" basis for morality on the ground that the pleasures and pains of this "sense" already imply precedent virtue.<sup>3</sup> We find him rejecting the qualitative theory of pleasure, and holding (as Sidgwick also holds) that hedonism to be consistent

<sup>1</sup> Abbot's translation, pp. 129-30.

<sup>2</sup> *Methods*, pp. 79, 395.

<sup>3</sup> Abbot, p. 128 ; *Methods*, pp. 26-28.

must be quantitative.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, his emphasis upon freedom may possibly have influenced Sidgwick, though the latter philosopher has discovered some serious flaws in Kant's treatment of the question. Again when Kant's rigorism lapses momentarily, he makes dangerous advances in the hedonistic and utilitarian directions (he admits the "happiness of others" as an end which is also a duty<sup>2</sup>), and he speaks without utter condemnation of rational self-love<sup>3</sup> (*vernünftige Selbstliebe*), a phrase which reminds us of Sidgwick.

We may, however, certainly conclude that the Kantian element in Sidgwick's philosophy though important is not great in amount. The equity principle, as Sidgwick himself has pointed out, is undeniably Kantian, and the same may be said of the imposing rationalistic terminology of the *Methods*. But beyond this it would be unsafe to assert positive influence. In ethics there is much common ground.

### (3) BUTLER.

If we seriously try to assess influence (a task easily carried to an extreme) we shall conclude that neither from Mill nor from Kant did Sidg-

<sup>1</sup> Abbot, pp. 110-11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165: "Pure practical reason only *checks* selfishness . . . so far as to limit it to the condition of agreement with the moral law, and then it is called rational self-love".



wick learn to the full extent the moderation, the calm reasonableness, the many-sidedness which are such distinctive characteristics of the *Methods of Ethics*. Nor from them did he acquire the power of keen psychological analysis which is one of his greatest merits. Kant in his moral works was too violent a partisan of reason to see with perfect clearness the deficiencies of a purely rationalistic ethic; the sceptical wound inflicted by the first *Critique* was too serious for half measures; morality had somehow to be preserved, and rigorism presented itself as a desperate though apparently adequate remedy. Mill in his ethical work posed both as partisan and as philanthropist, and neither mood was favourable to calm analysis.

We must assess the influence of Butler at a higher rate. The Sermons of the clear-minded ecclesiastic who in 1747 had the refusal of the primacy of England, are unique in the English language. To turn from them to the ethical works (many of them very able) of his contemporaries, each with some favourite theory to maintain at all costs, is to breathe another atmosphere. So free are they from sectarian or philosophical bias, that the orthodox have long questioned their soundness, and philosophers themselves have been puzzled how to classify or label them. Every school of thought seems in

them to get its due. Theological assumptions are, no doubt, introduced, but they are not obtruded.

Within the wide framework provided by Butler's ethics the contributions of Mill and Kant could find a sort of resting-place.

What are the distinctive features in Butler which reappear in Sidgwick?

I. Both writers are in a sense hedonists.  
 "Nothing," says Butler, "can be of consequence to mankind or any creature but happiness" (Sermon 12). His interpretation of this somewhat ambiguous term is, however, to be noted. The pursuit of "gay amusement" and "high enjoyments" is a sure way to disappointment; our endeavour should rather be to escape misery, keep free from uneasiness, pain, and sorrow, or to get relief and mitigation of them; our aim, indeed, should be "peace and tranquillity of mind" (Sermon 6).

II. A far more characteristic feature of Butler's system is the inclusion within it of several distinguishable (if not distinct) ethical springs of action. This recognition of various springs of action was of course no new discovery; but the recognition of them as ethical and authoritative was somewhat novel and certainly important. In Butler we find, as *prima facie* ruling principles,



self-love, benevolence and conscience. But benevolence soon loses its *prima facie* supremacy; its pretensions, indeed, to rank as a ruling principle<sup>1</sup> were never very well grounded. By Sidgwick, too, benevolence as a separate virtue is found to be hopelessly vague, while as a ruling principle it comes to coincide with one of the chief maxims of philosophical intuitionism. After reduction, there remain for Butler, conscience (including benevolence<sup>2</sup>) and self-love; for Sidgwick rational utilitarianism and rational egoism, these two latter being complementary phases of philosophical intuitionism.

III. We thus have a dualism in each of our writers. But dualisms are notoriously unstable. It is of the highest interest to note that when an attempt is made to reduce, or to suggest a reduction of, this dualism to a monism, the more disinterested member is sacrificed. Egoism alone remains unchallenged. "There can no access

<sup>1</sup> As distinct from a particular affection. "Every particular affection, benevolence among the rest, is subservient to self-love" (Sermon 11).

<sup>2</sup> "When benevolence is said to be the sum of virtues it is not spoken of as a blind propension, but as a principle in reasonable creatures, and so to be directed by their reason; for reason and reflection comes into our notion of a moral agent" (Sermon 12). Here benevolence and conscience (a principle of "reflection") almost or quite coincide.

be had to the understanding but by convincing men that the course of life we would persuade them to is not contrary to their interest. . . . When we sit down in a cool hour we justify to ourselves . . . (no) pursuit, till we are convinced that it will be for our happiness, or at least not contrary to it. Our ideas of happiness and misery are of all our ideas the nearest and most important to us . . . and ought to prevail over (all others) . . . if there should ever be, as it is impossible there ever should be, any inconsistency between them" (Sermon 11).<sup>1</sup>

Butler, like Sidgwick, introduces the *Deus ex machina* to keep firm the connection between duty and self-interest, *i.e.*, to maintain a thoroughgoing egoism. "Consideration of the divine sanctions of religion is our only security of persevering in our duty, in cases of great temptation" (Sermon 12). "In the common course of life, there is seldom any inconsistency between our duty and what is called interest. . . . But whatever exceptions there are to this, which are much fewer than they are commonly thought, all shall be set right at the final distribution of things. It is a manifest absurdity to suppose evil prevailing

<sup>1</sup> "Self-love and benevolence, virtue and interest, are not to be opposed, but only to be distinguished from each other" (Preface).

finally over good" (Sermon 3). The two moralists lean for solution to a future life, though Butler's faith rises the higher. Of Sidgwick more anon.

It may be objected that on Butler's view conscience is supreme over self-love (*vide* Preface to *Sermons*) as bearing "marks of authority" over all other principles. But, as he afterwards explains, the authority of conscience, if the latter principle were obviously anti-egoistic, could not be maintained; its authority depends on the fact that its dictates are clear and precise, while those of egoism are always open to practical difficulties springing from our limited knowledge. "No man can be *certain* in any circumstances that vice is his interest in the present world, much less can he be certain against another." In other words, conscience, as a practical guide to action, is superior to egoistic calculation; but, unless ultimately coincident with a perfectly enlightened egoism, it would have no authority. The same view reappears in Sidgwick; the disinterested pursuit of truth, virtue, etc., and practical obedience to the rules of common sense morality irrespective of egoistic calculation are to be approved; but the approval is due to the belief that they are means to the maxim of gratification.<sup>1</sup> Destroy this

<sup>1</sup>The whole paragraph in Butler's preface beginning with the reference to Lord Shaftesbury's inquiry, is cardinal to his

belief and their practical value would disappear. Egoism must in the long run be victorious, though as a practical method it has many difficulties to face.

IV. The constant emphasis which Sidgwick lays upon reason as a practical faculty is paralleled by a similar emphasis in Butler. For both writers reason, in its practical aspect, has a double function : (a) it points out what is right ; (b) it gives a motive to the performance of what is right. "As the form of the body is a composition of various parts ; so likewise our inward structure is not simple or uniform, but a composition of various passions, appetites, affections, together with rationality ; including in this last both the discernment of what is right, and a disposition to regulate ourselves by it" (Sermon 12). "Every affection, as distinct from a principle of reason, may rise too high, and be beyond its just proportion" (Sermon 6). Throughout Butler we find the same identification of the *right* and the *reasonable*, which is so distinctive a terminological feature of Sidgwick's work ; *conscience* is nothing but the principle which dictates what is *right or reasonable*

system, and strongly suggests Sidgwick's treatment of the dualism of practical reason. The "two contrary obligations" of Butler correspond to the "division of practical reason against itself" to which Sidgwick refers in his closing chapter.



This, it is true, does not carry us far, and Butler's delineation of the faculty must be admitted to be extremely inadequate. The maxims it dictates are not by any means systematically set forth. Apart however from its detailed dictates, reason involves, as was seen, a "disposition to regulate ourselves by it," a general abhorrence of what is base and liking of what is fair and just "which takes its turn amongst the other motives of action" (Preface). "That your conscience approves of and attests to a course of action is itself alone an obligation" (Sermon 3). And yet Butler's strong common sense prevented him from laying undue stress upon an undoubted *vera causa*. "Reason alone is not in reality a sufficient motive in such a creature as man" (Sermon 5).

This function of the moral reason reappears in Sidgwick in the form of a desire to do "what is right and reasonable as such".

The task of delineating the characteristics of this faculty was no easier for Sidgwick than for his predecessor. That we have such a faculty Butler was convinced, and its importance is found to be emphasised far more in the (later) *Dissertation* than in the (earlier) *Sermons*, "whether called conscience, moral reason, moral sense, or divine reason; whether considered as a sentiment of the understanding, or as a perception of the heart or,



which seems the truth, as including both" (*Dissertation*). This wide and perhaps vague meaning of practical reason reappears in Sidgwick, and (rightly or not) was one of the chief grounds upon which Bradley criticised the *Methods of Ethics*.

The practical reason is evidently, in many cases, immediate in its operation; "in all common ordinary cases we see intuitively at first view what is our duty, what is the honest part. This is the ground of the observation that the first thought is often the best" (Sermon 7).

In another of its operations, however, the guidance of reason is more indirect, as when, for example, it dictates that the future be not discounted in favour of the present. "When men go against their reason, and contradict a more important interest at a distance for one nearer though of less consideration; if this be the whole of the case, all that can be said is, that strong passions, some kind of brute force within, prevails over the principle of rationality" (Sermon 7). This "principle of rationality" is obviously identical with one of Sidgwick's great constructive principles, that of prudence. But man may not only discount the future in favour of the present; he may also discount the welfare of others in favour of his own. Here again reason steps on the scene as a practical faculty, and raises a protest against the

self-partiality which is at the basis of most wrongdoing. "Vice in general consists in having an unreasonable and too great regard to ourselves in comparison of others" (Sermon 10). Hence the practical value of the golden rule, directing us to put ourselves on an equality with others. "Substitute another for yourself, when you take a survey of any part of your behaviour or consider what is proper and fit and reasonable for you to do upon any occasion". Another application of the same rule may be expressed: "Substitute yourself in the room of another: consider yourself as the person affected by such a behaviour, or towards whom such an action is done" (Sermon 10). "The principle of benevolence would be an advocate within our own breasts, to take care of the interests of our fellow-creatures in all the interfering and competitions which cannot but be, from the imperfection of our nature, and the state we are in. It would . . . hinder men from forming so strong a notion of private good, exclusive of the good of others, as we commonly do" (Sermon 12).

Thus in Butler we have maxims corresponding closely to those of equity and benevolence in the system of Sidgwick.

V. The presence of a categorical "practical reason" carries with it an important implication. *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*, represents no

delusion but a psychological fact. Hedonism, while not denying the existence of a state corresponding to this famous confession, tends to underestimate its significance. Sidgwick, closely acquainted with Butler and Kant, never lost sight of it.<sup>1</sup> "Nothing," Butler had said, "is more common than to see men give themselves up to a passion or an affection to their known prejudice and ruin, and in direct contradiction to manifest and real interest" (Sermon 11). There is a world of difference between this view and the corresponding hedonistic one that moral obliquity is only miscalculation.

VI. Perhaps more important than any of the above is Butler's refutation of psychological hedonism. "Particular affections rest in the external things themselves" (Sermon 11), while self-love, quite a distinct principle, seeks things only as a means of happiness or good. He protests against "the confusion of calling actions interested which are done in contradiction to the most manifest known interest, merely for the gratification of a present passion" (Preface to *Sermons*). The pursuit of external objects may be "no otherwise interested, than as every action of every creature must, from the nature of the thing, be ; for no one can act but from a desire, or choice, or preference

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, his essay on "Unreasonable Action" in *Practical Ethics*.

of his own ”<sup>1</sup> (*ibid.*). Instead of our desires being normally for pleasure they are frequently not even proportional in intensity to the pleasure that results from their gratification. “Our hopes and fears and pursuits are in degrees beyond all proportion to the known value of the things they respect” (Sermon 7).

This recognition that the majority of our impulses are, strictly speaking, neither disinterested nor interested, but are directed towards a variety of ends, some personal and private, others not, is a distinctive feature of Sidgwick’s admirable chapter on “Pleasure and Desire”. On one point the later writer diverges from the earlier. Butler, he says, has overstated the case, for desire does not always precede pleasure. Otherwise there is substantial agreement between them.

VII. How easy for Butler, had he been a violent partisan, to have overestimated the value of his doctrine of desire! Having shown, against Hobbes, that self-love is, in a vast number of cases, not the impelling motive to action, how easy to have altogether denied it a place in the moral life! This, indeed, was the step taken by

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sidgwick’s words: “Egoism, if we merely understand by it a method that aims at self-realisation, seems to be a form into which almost any ethical system can be thrown” (*Methods*, p. 95).



Kant. Butler's moderation prevented him from arriving at any such sweeping conclusion. He still admits, as we have seen, the existence of self-love proper and even assigns it a high place, *theoretically*, indeed, the highest place, in his hierarchy of principles. "Interest, one's own happiness, is a manifest obligation" (Preface). "Self-love in its due degree is as just and morally good as any affection whatever" (*ibid.*). Thus, occupying a middle position between Hobbes (who reduced every impulse to self-love) and Kant (who denied to self-love any moral value), Butler admits it to an honoured place, but denies it to be the only human impulse. Then arises the question of the mutual relations of self-love and the numerous extra-regarding impulses; and Butler here alights upon the important fact denominated by Sidgwick the "Paradox of Hedonism". "Immoderate self-love does very ill consult its own interest: and how much soever a paradox it may appear, it is certainly true, that even from self-love we should endeavour to get over all inordinate regard to, and consideration of ourselves" (Sermon 11). Self-love indeed, should be self-limiting for its own sake, and lead to a "due regard and suitable provision" for particular passions and affections (Sermon 12). In all this the two writers are absolutely agreed.



A few minor points.

VIII. Utilitarianism, despite its emphasis upon the equal claims of all men to happiness, is practically self-limiting. The claims of our immediate environment are more pressing, because more easily satisfied, than those of distant humanity. The strong common sense of both of our writers saw this. "That part of mankind, that part of our country, which comes under our immediate notice, acquaintance, and influence" has unusually imperative claims upon us.

IX. One of the most crucial matters dealt with by Sidgwick in his chapter on the "*Summum Bonum*" is the relation of the hedonistic summum bonum to the other possible ends of human effort. Is knowledge to be sought for its own sake, or is its pursuit to be strictly limited by its hedonic results? Are we to seek *it ruat caelum*? or, if less hedonic than "generally accredited fictions," are we to choose the latter? Sidgwick, as is well known, here adhered consistently to the hedonistic view, in spite of the enormous difficulties which such a view has to face at this point. Again we are reminded of Butler. "Knowledge is not our proper happiness. . . . It is the gaining, not the having of it, which is the entertainment of the mind. . . . If (men's) discoveries . . . tend to render life less unhappy, and pro-

mote its satisfactions then they are most usefully employed ; but bringing things to light, alone and of itself, is of no manner of use any otherwise than as an entertainment or diversion ” (Sermon 15).

X. Moralists who lay stress upon sympathy as a chief if not the only basis of morality, and rely upon its extension as a solution of the problem of reconciling self-interest with duty, often fail to remember that sympathy may in some cases diminish rather than increase happiness. Rightly, therefore, does Sidgwick in his concluding chapter reject it as a means of solving the final crux of ethics, and here again the calm dispassionateness of Butler may have been operative. “ Since in such a creature as man, compassion or sorrow for the distress of others, seems so far necessarily connected with joy in their prosperity, as that whoever rejoices in one must unavoidably compassionate the other ; there cannot be that delight or satisfaction, which appears to be so considerable, without the inconveniences, whatever they are, of compassion ” (Sermon 5). Connected with this is the very moderate optimism of the two writers which contrasts so powerfully with the ethical dreams of Spencer. “ This world was not intended to be a state of any great satisfaction or high enjoyment ” (Sermon 6).

There are however a few superficial and unimportant differences between the ethical systems of Butler and Sidgwick. Butler never ceased to believe that certain acts were to be condemned or approved apart from their consequences. "We are constituted so as to condemn falsehood, unprovoked violence, injustice, and to approve of benevolence to some preferably to others, abstracted from all consideration which conduct is like best to produce an overbalance of happiness or misery" (*Dissertation*, ii.—"Analogy"). Here the influence of the intellectualist school of moralists is evident: we are reminded of Clarke's doctrine of the "eternal and necessary differences and relations of things," and the "fitnesses" which exist between one being and another. Sidgwick, on the contrary, while admitting that many of our common moral judgments take no explicit account of consequences, would contend that *ultimately* there can be no grounds for judging of the rightness or wrongness of actions except their consequences, considered from a utilitarian point of view. Butler's most explicit rejection of this latter doctrine is to be found in his *Dissertation*. In this the intuitional or moral sense view is brought out with far greater explicitness than in the earlier *Sermons*. "Acting, conduct, behaviour, abstracted from all regard

to what is, in fact and event, the consequence of it, is itself the natural object of the moral discernment; as speculative truth is of speculative reason." "The faculty within us approves of prudent actions and disapproves of imprudent ones . . . *as such*, and considered distinctly from the happiness or misery which they occasion."

Contrast with this, Butler's earlier view. "That there is a public end and interest which each particular is obliged to promote, is the sum of morals" (Sermon 9). "The common virtues and the common vices of mankind may be traced up to benevolence or the want of it" (Sermon 12).<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting, too, to notice that while for Sidgwick the search for a satisfactory ethical theory was evidently one involving long and difficult reflection, for Butler "morality and religion must be somewhat plain and easy to be understood: it must appeal to what we call common sense as distinguished from superior capacity and improvement".

In the sermon "Upon the Love of God" Butler broaches in faint outline a view which finds no

<sup>1</sup> In a note to this sermon Butler makes a transition towards his later view. He contends that many of our dispositions are morally approved or disapproved independently of their utilitarian or anti-utilitarian tendencies. But he still appears to regard them as having ultimately a utilitarian justification.



place in the constructive philosophy of Sidgwick, and which, indeed, Sidgwick constantly opposed on the ground of its vagueness. We refer to, the perfectionistic view with its emphasis upon self-realisation and full development of function.

“There is a capacity in the nature of man which neither riches, nor honours, nor sensual gratifications, nor anything in this world can perfectly fill up or satisfy, there is a deeper and more essential want than any of these things can be the supply of; yet surely there is a possibility of somewhat which may fill up our capacities of happiness; somewhat in which our souls may find rest: somewhat which may be to us that satisfactory good we are inquiring after.” In this passage, so suggestive of Green's Prolegomena, Sidgwick would, no doubt, have found much with which to disagree. “Capacity” and “faculty” and “satisfaction” and “finding rest” are, he would tell us, ethically unmeaning, except on a frank admission of the hedonistic doctrine.

The preceding examination of Mill, Kant and Butler is liable to misinterpretation. From the fact that many of Sidgwick's doctrines are to be found in these three moralists it might be argued that he has no claim to be called an independent moralist. Such an argument is, however, almost



too trivial to notice. No modern moralist can be original in the strict sense ; he cannot promulgate absolutely new doctrines. But he can be original in tone, in spirit, in arrangement, in method. This Sidgwick was. At any rate it is certain that if we deny originality to the *Methods of Ethics* we shall have to deny it to almost, if not quite, all modern ethical works. Moreover, the critical element in the *Methods of Ethics*, an element of enormous value and importance, is markedly original.

Summarising, it may be said that, so far as positive influence can safely be traced, Mill created in Sidgwick a sympathy with utilitarian hedonism ; Kant provided him with the germ of the important *formal* part of his system (by this is meant his abstract intuitional maxims), and also with an imposing rationalistic and juristic terminology ("right," "reasonable," "objective," "universal," etc.) ; while Sidgwick's conviction of the incorrigibility of moral egoism received confirmation from Butler. In Butler too he found a dualism similar to that at which he had himself arrived, and from the bishop he also derived his conviction of the scientific inaccuracy of psychological hedonism. But the various elements, whether thought out *de novo*, as many were, or whether cautiously and scrupulously accepted from

previous writers, were all fused into one or the other side of the remarkable dualistic system which is presented to us in the *Methods of Ethics*, and they now appear before us stamped with a new and remarkable impress.

## CHAPTER III.

### ETHICS AND EVOLUTION.

“Ultimate ends are not, as such, phenomena, or laws or conditions of phenomena : to investigate them as if they were seems as futile as if one inquired whether they were square or round” (Sidgwick, *Mind*, 1886, p. 217).

DID not the phrase suggest disparagement, Sidgwick's ethical system might be said to be “pre-evolutionary”. Though he wrote at a time when the notion of development had ceased to be novel, and was already recognised as of great cosmical importance, few traces of the positive influence of that notion can be found in his work. His settled conviction was that the field of ethical thought must be kept free from the invasion of naturalistic ideas and methods. We find an emphatic expression of this conviction in the first edition of the *Methods*, and though his view became modified in succeeding years,<sup>1</sup> he was to the end consistent in minimising the ethical importance and sceptical in accepting the ethical conclusions of evolutionary philosophy.

<sup>1</sup> See preface to the second edition.

Several problems, more or less distinct, are suggested for consideration in this connection.

*I. Does the theory of development affect in any way (e.g., does it discredit) our existing moral intuitions?*

To this Sidgwick's answer is an emphatic negative.

In the first edition of the *Methods* (p. 185) he draws a specific distinction between the existence, the validity, and the origin of moral intuitions. It is quite illegitimate, he virtually tells us, to infer that a moral judgment is valid because it exists, or because it is "original" or "innate" in the individual: it may, on appeal to some higher intuition or judgment, be discredited. It is equally illegitimate to throw suspicion upon a moral judgment because it has been "evolved". The first is the besetting error of popular intuitionism, the second that of modern "scientific" writers.

"The illegitimacy of this inference<sup>1</sup> will, I think, be allowed as soon as it is clearly contemplated. It has been encouraged partly by an infelicitous transference of the language and conceptions of chemistry to psychology. In chemistry

<sup>1</sup>That an "evolved" judgment is necessarily of only doubtful value.

we regard the antecedents (elements) as still existing in and constituting the consequent (compound) because the latter corresponds to the former in some of its properties (weight, etc.), and because we can generally cause the compound to disappear and obtain the elements in its place. But there is nothing similar to this in the formation of new mental phenomena by what Mill calls "mental chemistry" and therefore this term seems inappropriate. The new mental fact is in no respect correspondent to its antecedents nor can it be resolved into them: nor does the fact that these antecedents have pre-existed render the consequent illusory and unreal. . . . Why should our earliest beliefs and perceptions be more trustworthy than our latest, supposing the two to differ? The truths of the higher mathematics are among our most secure intellectual possessions, yet the power of apprehending these is rarely developed until the mind has reached maturity. . . . It is hard to see why a different view should be taken in the case of moral intuitions."

That there is much truth in this argument, and that its vigorous affirmation is apt and timely in face of excessive evolutionary pretensions,<sup>1</sup> few

<sup>1</sup> As for example: "Morals are relative, not absolute; there is no fixed standard of right and wrong by which the actions of all men throughout all time are measured" (Clodd, *Story of*



ethical students are likely to deny. Man is bound to assume, or at least always *does* assume, that truth can be known, whatever be the process by which he comes to its apprehension. The errors and superstitions of the past give us, no doubt, grounds for caution and scepticism ; “ the liability to error is more equally distributed among human beings than the consciousness of such liability ”.<sup>1</sup> Still, however “ conscious of such liability ” we may become, we cannot fall back on thorough agnosticism. The latter view (as idealist writers have pointed out time upon time), is self-destructive. If every “ evolved ” mental state or belief is necessarily open to doubt and suspicion, then the doctrine of evolution, and even agnosticism itself, are both insecure. Truth must be examined on its merits, not on its lineage. So far Sidgwick’s protest against overweening evolutionism is valid.

But from the first, his view has been vigorously *the Creation*, p. 220). Doubtless the standard is, in one sense, not “ fixed,” and yet it must have some element of permanence, or all present-day judgments (Mr. Clodd’s included) are based on quicksands. The art of Raphael is an advance on that of Cimabue ; evolutionism is an advance on Ionic hylozoism ; such admissions as these imply a standard which is regarded as, in part, permanent. Mr. Alexander’s treatment of this subject is good (*Moral Order and Progress*).

<sup>1</sup> *Mind*, 1900, p. 10.

attacked. Sir Frederick Pollock<sup>1</sup> took up the cudgels on behalf of evolutionism, contending that the knowledge of how a faculty originated does give us some grounds for trusting or distrusting it. If we are satisfied that the course of development is "in the right direction"<sup>2</sup> we have *prima facie* evidence in favour of the beliefs and judgments which have been developed.

One of the ablest of early critics of the *Methods* was Mr. Alfred Barratt, author of *Physical Ethics*. In the second volume of *Mind* under the title, "The 'Suppression' of Egoism," he contributed what, with one exception, was the keenest criticism to which Sidgwick's work has ever been exposed. To some extent, as will afterwards be shown, he misunderstood the book he was criticising; still our concern, at present, is not with the difficult question of egoism, but with the possibility of a naturalistic interpretation of ethics such as was advocated by Mr. Barratt and strongly opposed by Sidgwick. "A belief," says Barratt, "cannot be more valid than its data, and therefore if we discover the origin of our present beliefs, we shall have, at any rate, a maximum measure of their validity. . . . The scientific system of ethics . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Mind*, 1876, p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> But what is the "right" direction? Does not this assume the point at issue?

shows you *why* you ought to aim at pleasure by proving that you do so aim, and that 'ought to' is compounded out of 'is'. . . . Science proves *hedonism*, but proves it in the egoistic form."<sup>1</sup>

Against all such sweeping naturalistic interpretations of ethics Sidgwick's words hold good. "Ethical conclusions can only be logically reached by starting with ethical premisses."<sup>2</sup> The "beliefs" to which Mr. Barratt refers can only be "unreasoned" or "unexamined" beliefs, the prejudices of race, class or creed, our childish inheritances and superstitions. Against these, the evolutionary and historical school of writers may legitimately

<sup>1</sup> "The 'Suppression' of Egoism," *Mind*, 1877, p. 167. M. Guyau also opposes Sidgwick on this important question. "Selon nous, la question qui paraît ici secondaire à M. Henri Sidgwick est au contraire la principale. Si l'école de l'association ou celle de l'évolution me montre dans mes sentiments moraux de simples transformations de l'instinct, si elle dissèque ma prétendue conscience morale et la résout en des éléments purement physique, si elle réduit en même temps l'autorité des lois morales à la force de l'habitude, de l'hérédité, de l'instinct, comment soutenir que cette autorité subsiste néanmoins pleine et entière, et que l'opinion qui ramène l'origine des sentiments moraux à une transformation de l'égoïsme est compatible avec la doctrine intuitive comme avec la doctrine utilitaire, comme avec la doctrine égoïste?" (*La Morale Anglaise Contemporaine*, deuxième édition, pp. 145-46).

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Barratt on "The 'Suppression' of Egoism," *Mind*, 1877, pp. 411-12.

direct their artillery. But they and we are alike bound to assume something as valid. The epistemological certainty of certain principles is the basis of all investigation, and it is puerile to quarrel with our fundamental intuitions on the ground that they may be erroneous. Once we have directed the clear light of the discursive or intuitive reason upon any field of possible knowledge, the verdict is, for the time, final, and no account of the "evolution" of the reasoning faculty is in place. Any other standpoint than this involves us in the sloughs of pyrrhonism, from which neither moral intuitions, nor evolutionary theories, nor even "physical ethics" can ever emerge to stand upon secure foundations. If the philosopher has to examine every factor which has entered in a formative manner into his present beliefs, every early influence, every sociological stimulus, he may as well at once abandon the hopeless task of philosophising. Still more true is this if he has to take account of the numberless ages of the world's evolution.

In crossing swords with these and other advocates of naturalistic ethics, and in espousing the cause of man's present-day ultimate convictions, Sidgwick reveals himself as the protagonist of intuitionism. We cannot, he would say, get behind our ultimate intuitions; these must be assumed without proof. It is interesting to note (this has



been already pointed out) how he directs this vigorous intuitionary fusillade not only against evolutionary philosophers but also against a very different foe, the critical philosophy.<sup>1</sup> "How," he would say, "can knowledge criticise itself? Must it not assume its own validity?" It is interesting also to see how closely he here approaches to one of the cardinal doctrines of his antagonist Green. The words placed at the head of this section remind us powerfully of the Oxford professor's bold challenge, "Can the knowledge of nature be itself a part or product of nature?" Differing among themselves on certain matters of detail, Green and Sidgwick presented a united front against those who attempted to subvert the fundamental facts of knowledge and morality on the ground that these facts were the products of evolution.

It must, however, be conceded to Sidgwick's opponents that the historical method is of considerable use as at least a propædeutic to ethics. To trace the growth of false beliefs and prejudices, to trace the course of evolution, to trace the influence upon morality of the sociological factor, all this cannot fail to clarify our ethical vision. The historical method is not useless, though its use for

<sup>1</sup> "A Criticism of the Critical Philosophy," *Mind*, 1883, pp. 69, 313.



directly ethical purposes may have been grossly exaggerated. Some further reference to this question will be made in the following section.

*II. The psychological nature of desire. Are all desires desires for pleasure? Does evolution throw light upon this question?*

The question whether all desires are directed towards pleasure has been so frequently debated by English psychologists and moralists that only a very brief treatment of this undeniably important problem will here be attempted. We are sometimes told that ethics and her sister studies are unprogressive; that the same elementary problems are being discussed to-day as were discussed by ancient Greek and by early English moralists. But there can, at any rate, be no doubt as to the substantial advance which has been made in the treatment of the present limited problem, and this increased clearness and correctness is due, in large measure, to Sidgwick himself. Even the terminology which has been generally accepted for use in this branch of philosophy is due to him.

“The two elements of Mill’s view which I am accustomed to distinguish as psychological hedonism [that each man does seek his own happiness] and ethical hedonism [that each man ought

to seek the general happiness] both attracted me, and I did not at first perceive their incoherence” (Preface to sixth edition of the *Methods: Mind*, April, 1901, p. 287). Fortunately, however, the perception of their incoherence at last occurred, and, as a result, we find presented to us in the *Methods of Ethics*, the somewhat novel spectacle of an emphatic denial of psychological hedonism accompanying an approval of ethical hedonism. There are many moralists who refuse to accept the latter element of Sidgwick’s teaching, while accepting with gratitude the former. There are few, indeed, who will deny that our philosopher has placed psychological hedonism in the limbo of exploded heresies, from which its future release is highly improbable.

Man does *not* normally aim at pleasure. Sidgwick, it is generally supposed, learnt this important fact from his master, Butler,<sup>1</sup> though there is every reason to believe that such a keen introspectionist may have discovered it unaided. It is obvious that he has treated the question in a far more precise and scientific manner than was possible to his predecessor of a century before. “Butler,” he says, “has certainly overstated his case, . . . for many pleasures . . . occur to me without any

<sup>1</sup>The preface to the sixth edition of the *Methods* puts this point now beyond doubt.

preceptible relation to previous desires. . . . But . . . it appears to me that throughout the whole scale of my impulses, sensual, emotional and intellectual alike, I can distinguish desires of which the object is something other than my own pleasure" (*Methods*, p. 46). A man normally desires things, not pleasure; the latter is a phenomenon which arises subsequently, but which would never arise at all were there not initial desires for objects other than it. Having once been experienced, the pleasure may, no doubt, stimulate to future activity; it may give rise to a "secondary desire" (p. 47), which, however, is quite distinct in nature from the primary desires for objects.

Now all this is important. If hedonism is the true system of ethics, we should expect it to be, to a considerable extent at least, in conformity with psychological facts. We should, of course, also expect it to *go beyond* these and prescribe an *ought*; still of any two ethical theories, the one which stands in fullest agreement with the normal facts of life, must, other things being equal, be regarded as the more satisfactory. By this test hedonism stands condemned. Man's normal life is not regulated on an approximately hedonistic plan.

This fact becomes obvious when Sidgwick's acute analysis of desire is examined in detail. An objector on the hedonistic side might claim that

though a desire is *per se* a desire for an *object* and not a desire for pleasure, yet the intensity of satisfaction which arises when the desire is realised is proportional to the intensity of the desire itself. Thus the intensity of the desire would be at least symbolic of the intensity of the attainable pleasure. But no. Pleasurableness is not a simple function of the intensity of desire. "I do not judge pleasures to be greater and less exactly in proportion as they exercise more or less influence in stimulating the will to actions tending to sustain or produce them" (*Methods*, p. 126). "Mr. Bain's identification of 'pleasure and pain' with motive power does not appear to me to accord with experience" (p. 127).

In short, human nature is not built upon a hedonistic schema. Desire, on Sidgwick's view, is not desire for pleasure, neither is it aversion from pain ; further, it is in itself neither necessarily painful nor pleasurable ;<sup>1</sup> still less is its intensity proportional to the intensity of the pleasure of satisfaction, or of the pain of deprivation. Psychological hedonism, in short, is a fiction.

Mr. Alfred Barratt was not satisfied with Sidgwick's argument, and maintained that, despite certain disturbing causes (such disturbing causes

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Marshall has criticised Sidgwick here : *Mind*, 1892 *passim*.



are not unknown to physical science) human action is really hedonistic. "I reasonably assume that motives follow laws analogous to those of other forces." "I know pleasure to be a motive, and I know no other."<sup>1</sup> No doubt the idea of a distant pleasure is far weaker than that of an immediate one, and no doubt also the effects of habit may interfere to prevent the law of strict proportionality from *apparently* holding good. But, he says, similar interferences have to be recognised in other matters, and yet scientific laws are, after all, valid. Habit, for example, may be compared to the friction which prevents the easy working of a lever; the feeble effect of distant pleasures may be illustrative of a law similar to that of inverse squares; yet in spite of such facts as these, the fundamental law may be that of proportionality between pleasure and desire. The attraction of two electrical charges obeys the law of proportionality, a law not suppressed by the other law, that of distances, nor by the existence of friction.

Sidgwick's answer to this would probably be that a law of strict proportionality, subject to such enormously important exceptions as those admitted by Mr. Barratt, has no claim to be called a "law" at all. If habit and futurity introduce deviations; if, moreover, as Barratt goes

<sup>1</sup> *Mind*, 1877, p. 167.



on to admit, means may be substituted for ends, and thus a third deviation from the "law" be introduced, why not also admit "fixed ideas" and "sympathy" and action from purely ideal motives? The law of strict proportionality can scarcely be called a law unless it is universal, or at any rate has only a few unimportant and easily explicable exceptions. But inasmuch as the above admissions are numerous and important, our "law" is obviously more honoured in the breach than the observance, if indeed it has any existence whatever. And in any case Mr. Barratt's argument is virtually an appeal to subconsciousness.

"Hedonism," says Mr. Barratt, "asserts that original impulses were all directed towards pleasure, and that any impulses otherwise directed are derived from these by 'association of ideas'." He explains, however, that by this he does not mean that the primitive attitude was subjective; there was no separation of object and subject; the first object of desire is a "pleased state" not a "pleasant object" or a "pleased subject".

But Sidgwick the iconoclast, the ruthless expositor of plausibilities, could "find no evidence that even tends to prove this (associational doctrine); . . . so far as there is any difference it seems to be in the opposite direction, as the actions of children being more instinctive and less reflective

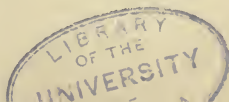
are more prompted by extra-regarding impulse, and less by conscious aim at pleasure." "No doubt," here perhaps Sidgwick is answering the last words quoted above, "the two kinds of impulse, as we trace back the development of consciousness, gradually become indistinguishable: but this obviously does not justify us in identifying with either of the two the more indefinite impulse out of which both have been developed. But even supposing it were found," here follows his familiar and favourite appeal to the facts of present-day existence, "that our earliest appetites were all merely appetites for pleasure it would have little bearing on the present question. What I am concerned to maintain is that men do not now normally desire pleasure alone" (*Methods*, pp. 53-54).

A similar answer would, no doubt, be returned to critics like Mr. Stephen, who, while admitting (*Frazer's Magazine*, March, 1875) that man's conscious motive in acting may not be pleasure, appears to maintain that, when subconsciousness is also taken into account, motive may always be hedonistic. Mr. Stephen, in fact, falls back on subconsciousness alike for the purpose of establishing determinism<sup>1</sup> and for the purpose of establishing psychological hedonism. Different critics will, no

<sup>1</sup> See following chapter.

doubt, differ in opinion as to the amount of value possessed by this argument. To Sidgwick, whose constant stress was laid upon the clear verdict of self-consciousness, its value appeared extremely small.

If indeed it could be proved that *originally* all action was hedonistic, and that at the present time all *animal* action is hedonistic, would not this proof have considerable ethical importance? Probably so. It would throw light upon the ultimate nature of reality, and the nature of reality is an important question for ethics as for other studies. If reality is hedonistic there would be a *prima facie* irrationality in man being non-hedonistic and thus refusing to be a "self-conscious agent in the evolution of the universe". In short, the existence, at low levels, of psychological hedonism would so far tend in favour of ethical hedonism as to throw an *onus probandi* upon its opponents; this, no doubt, is the reason for the otherwise inexplicable appeal of various hedonistic writers to primitive instincts and to subconsciousness. Sidgwick's refutation of psychological hedonism is therefore significant. Neither at high nor at low levels is man necessarily hedonistic; nature, too, on this question is silent or ambiguous, and thus the way is cleared for a careful and deliberate acceptance of any genuinely ethical doctrine which



the intuitive reason may sanction, even, perchance, of ethical hedonism itself.

*III. What are the causes of pleasure and pain?*

*Psychological, ethical question*

The question of the relation and supposed proportionality between desire on the one hand and pleasure and pain on the other having been settled, a wider question is immediately suggested. What are the causes of pleasure and pain? Here again evolutionists have, with much flourish of trumpets, descended into the controversial arena, only to receive defeat from the simple but effective critical weapons of Sidgwick.

Since the time of Aristotle many attempts have been made to demonstrate some definite relation between pleasure and pain and the conditions of the physical organism. Aristotle's theory is substantially the same as that which many modern evolutionists still favour.

"Aristotle conceived the feeling of pleasure as linked with every natural and normal activity of life, and this conception is still the most general and most probable."<sup>1</sup> The vista of speculation thus opened up is, however, closed by Sidgwick, so far, at any rate, as ethics is concerned. "There is at present, so far as I can judge, no satisfactorily

<sup>1</sup> Höffding, *Psychology*, English translation, p. 272.



established general theory of the causes of pleasure and pain; and such theories as have gained a certain degree of acceptance, as partially true or probable, are certainly not adapted for the practical application that we here require.”<sup>1</sup> These words summarise his whole position. The hedonistic and >algonistic doctrines of evolutionary philosophers are doubtful in theory and useless in practice.

Take, for example, Spencer's doctrine that pains are the psychical concomitants of excessive or deficient actions of organs, while pleasures are the concomitants of medium activities. It is true, as Sidgwick points out (*Methods*, p. 183), that many intense actions or sensations are painful, but “in none of these cases does it seem clear that pain supervenes through a mere intensification *in degree* of the action of the organ in question; and not rather through some change in the kind of action—some inchoate disintegration or disorganisation”. In still worse plight is Wundt's view,<sup>2</sup> that all sensations are pleasant at certain intensities, and only pass into unpleasantness as the intensity increases; on the contrary, says our critic, some sensations are never pleasant whatever their in-

<sup>1</sup> *Methods*, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> A view to which Professor James also inclines (*Text-book of Psychology*, p. 17). Most cautious recent psychologists support Sidgwick's view, e.g., Dr. Stout (*Manual*, pp. 217-18, first edition).



tensity, hence their unpleasantness is due, not to their quantitative nature, but to some qualitative peculiarity in the corresponding nervous action. The pains arising from disease, from the destruction of some organ, from improper (as distinguished from insufficient) food, and from emotional causes, seem to be explicable only by qualitative not quantitative considerations. Connected with this view is Sidgwick's treatment of desire. Desire, he considers, is not necessarily painful; it may be keen, and yet on the whole pleasant.<sup>1</sup> Only when actual destruction of tissue commences does desire give rise to a really painful state.

But whether we regard the causes of pain as qualitative or quantitative, in either case our theories are ethically useless, "since we have no general means of ascertaining independently of our experience of pain itself, what nervous actions are excessive or disorganised" (*Methods*, p. 185). How ludicrous, then, appear at the present stage of knowledge the proud attempts to deduce "from the laws of life and the conditions of existence, what kinds of actions necessarily tend to produce unhappiness"; we have, after all, to fall back upon the plain, rough-and-ready, old-fashioned method

<sup>1</sup> A view opposed by Mr. Marshall (see controversy in *Mind*, 1892).

of empirical hedonism ! Even admitting that pleasure, like virtue, resides somewhere in the mean, "it must be admitted that this proposition gives no practical directions for attaining it".

There is no need to follow out into its details Sidgwick's keen and discriminating criticism of the various modifications of Aristotle's view put forward by modern evolutionary writers. His negative treatment of this question probably cannot be improved upon in the present state of our knowledge. No doubt evolutionists are on the track of important discoveries, and their patient attempts to ascertain the precise conditions of pleasure and pain will some day yield valuable fruit. But Sidgwick's discussion has shown clearly enough that the subject is enormously profound and complex. A formula may hold good for the simpler pleasures of the senses, and yet fail utterly when applied to appetitive pleasures, or be absolutely grotesque when applied to æsthetic pleasures or to the pleasures of "conscience" or affection. The scientific formulæ dealing with this subject have hitherto proved themselves adequate only to the explanation of limited groups of facts ; when applied to the entire group they are found to be utterly and even ludicrously inadequate, to be nothing but examples of those "overhasty attempts at construction" which Sidgwick loved to expose.

*IV. Can hedonism be buttressed up by the substitution of "preservation," "quantity of life," "health," or any such criterion, for "pleasure" as the immediate object of pursuit?*

The last section has touched in brief upon the various scientific attempts to trace out some causal relation between pleasure and pain on the one side, and physiological conditions on the other. We have seen that in the present state of physiology, a science crowded with unsolved and enormously complex problems, we have no knowledge of any causal relation which is even approximately universal. Is it not possible, however, after retracing our steps to a more definitely psychical standpoint, to borrow from science *some* guidance? Does not the doctrine of evolution suggest that "preservation" or "survival," perhaps even "health" or "equilibrium" may be good working aims of a rational creature, conscious of his origin? He may still remain a hedonist by conviction; but can he not get rid of the difficulties in applying hedonism to practice, by aiming not directly at pleasure but at one of these other ends?

<sup>1</sup> Consider in this relation the highly interesting recent revival of vitalism—a revival which shows that physiologists are becoming more and more convinced of the almost overwhelming difficulties of their subject.

By a process of natural selection, all beings which in seeking pleasure, seek it in ways injurious to self or others, tend to perish; while those which seek pleasure in healthy and beneficial actions, tend to live, flourish and leave offspring. Hence there has arisen a kind of correspondence between pleasure and preservation. A pleasant act is generally a beneficial act; pain is usually symbolic of injury. Why then, dropping pleasure as our immediate object of pursuit, should we not aim directly at preservation and still remain hedonists? Such is Spencer's argument (quoted pp. 190-91, *Methods of Ethics*).

Sidgwick is as merciless to this as to the other ethico-scientific constructions. A disadvantage, he points out, is not necessarily got rid of by natural selection; it may be counterbalanced by other concomitant advantages. Hence the pleasurableness of an experience is not an absolute indication that this experience is preservative or beneficial. Common *a posteriori* observation, moreover, bears out this *a priori* view. Men constantly find pleasure in forms of unhealthy conduct, or in forms of conduct which have no material tendency to preserve life. Natural selection, in fact, though a highly important *vera causa*, must not be elevated into a sole cause, and its importance is regularly diminish-



ing with the progress of society (*Methods*, pp. 191-92).

Similarly with Mr. Stephen's view that the "health" or "efficiency" of the social organism should be taken as the practically ultimate aim (*Methods*, pp. 469-71). This view is unsatisfactory for at least two reasons. Preservation may be possible without any important degree of happiness being attained; while many important pleasures are not preservative in tendency, e.g., those of an æsthetic kind. Similarly, there are many pains which are not, to any important degree, destructive of the individual or of society. In short preservation and happiness are not proportional.

But Mr. Stephen's view is unsatisfactory for a second reason. "Social health" is claimed to "satisfy the conditions of a scientific criterion" as being far more precise and applicable to social problems than the criterion of happiness. But in point of fact it is not so, and cannot be so until sociology is in a more satisfactory state. Inasmuch as Mr. Stephen criticises adversely the present state of sociology, it is hard to see how he can bring forward such claims on behalf of "social health" as a working criterion.

Will "quantity of life" serve our purpose better? Not at all. It is not clear that intense or full life is on the average necessarily the happiest.



But even if this were so it does not follow that we shall gain maximum pleasure by aiming merely at intensity of consciousness ; for many intense states are neutral or even very painful (*Methods*, p. 192). Suppose, however, we include in "quantity of life" not only intensity but also multiplicity and variety. Suppose, in other words, we aim at self-development. But although there is a measure of truth in the view that a harmony or balance of functions is conducive to happiness, yet this harmony is a very elastic one. "The point where concentration ought to stop, and where dissipation begins, varies from man to man" (*Methods*, pp. 192-93).<sup>1</sup>

Or suppose again that we act on the maxim, "Give free play to impulse," on the ground that impulse has, through the operation of natural selection, become a good guide to the hedonic goal. This view again contains an element of truth, but it is incapable of becoming a satisfactory guide to action. For (*a*) the impulses fostered by natural selection tend to race preservation rather than to the pleasure of the individual ; (*b*) conscious comparison and inference are at least as likely to

<sup>1</sup> A similar argument is worked out in opposition to those who take development of the social organism (not merely development of the individual) as the practical end (*Methods*, p. 471).

be safe guides as impulse, and in many cases are found to be so.

Hence "we seem forced to conclude that there is no scientific short cut to the ascertainment of the right means to the individual's happiness; every attempt to find a 'high *priori* road' to this goal brings us back inevitably to the empirical method" (*Methods*, p. 195).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The preceding chapter is a mere *résumé* of Sidgwick's arguments and possesses no originality whatever. But it will serve a useful purpose if it calls attention to the extraordinary keenness of Sidgwick's critical weapons, which were never used more effectively than against the evolutionary moralists. Chapter vi. of the second book of the *Methods* is, indeed, a typical and admirable example of the negative side of Sidgwick's teaching.

## CHAPTER IV.

### SIDGWICK'S TREATMENT OF THE FREE-WILL PROBLEM.

“The question of free-will . . . can hardly be passed without some sort of struggle, even by those who—like myself—seek to evade the sphinx rather than to solve her riddle” (Sidgwick, *Mind*, 1888, p. 405).

SIDGWICK'S view of the place in ethics of the free-will question was a somewhat unusual one; he regarded it as of no fundamental importance to the constructive moralist. Ethical speculation concerning the rightness and wrongness of actions, was, according to him, unaffected by the discussion and decision of this thorny problem; its settlement need not, therefore, be demanded of the moral philosopher.

In conformity with this conviction of the ethical unimportance of the question, Sidgwick's treatment thereof is necessarily scanty. He illumines what may be called the fringe of the subject with some lucid discussion, but only two paragraphs of his work are devoted to a frontal attack upon the problem itself.

A comparison of the first with all later editions of the *Methods* brings out an interesting change of exposition. In the first, after reviewing the many deterministic arguments and fully admitting their cogency, he nevertheless ranged himself on the libertarian side.<sup>1</sup> "This almost overwhelming (deterministic) proof seems more than balanced by a single argument on the other side: the immediate affirmation of consciousness in the moment of deliberate volition. It is impossible for me to think, at such a moment, that my volition is completely determined by my formed character and the motives acting upon it" (first edition, p. 51). Influenced possibly by Mr. Stephen's criticism (*Frazer's Magazine*, March, 1875) he saw fit to withdraw this definite pronouncement in favour of libertarianism; for in the second and subsequent editions, though emphasis is still laid upon the libertarian verdict of self-consciousness, an attitude of strict impartiality on the question as a whole is maintained. The passage above quoted appears in the following modified form: "Against the formidable array of cumulative evidence offered for determinism there is to be set the immediate affirmation of consciousness

<sup>1</sup> On page 45 (first edition) he says, however, "The 'Freedom of the Will' presents itself to me as an unsolved problem . . . I am forced to suspend my judgment on the question",

in the moment of deliberate action. Certainly when I have a distinct consciousness of choosing between alternatives of conduct, one of which I conceive as right or reasonable, I find it impossible not to think that I can now choose to do what I so conceive" (p. 65).

This solitary though undeniably powerful and time-honoured argument from self-consciousness has been, as we should expect, seized upon by libertarians<sup>1</sup> (Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, vol. ii, p. 40, third edition; Maher, *Psychology*, p. 410, fourth edition) and vigorously attacked by determinists (Stephen, *Frazer's Magazine*, March, 1875). The argument probably cannot be admitted as flawless if regarded (which it should not be) as a final pronouncement. "My conviction of free choice may be illusory,"<sup>2</sup> Sidgwick admitted. The real question is whether self-consciousness is a reliable and omniscient witness; if it is not, it cannot pronounce a volition to be free in an absolute or cosmic sense. Until introspection

<sup>1</sup>One libertarian, however, Professor Calderwood, writing with the third edition of the *Methods* before him, regards Sidgwick as predominantly a determinist (*Handbook*, fourteenth edition, pp. 193-203). The "balancing" proclivities of Sidgwick's mind seem fated to make his interpreters differ among themselves.

<sup>2</sup>"I cannot believe it to be illusory," he had said in the first edition (p. 51).



can penetrate into the remotest abysses of motive and impulse, its witness is not infallible. We cannot fully know ourselves. "Mr. Sidgwick's appeal to the consciousness is therefore an appeal to a judge not in possession of the necessary facts" (L. Stephen, *Frazer's Magazine*, March, 1875).<sup>1</sup> This inherent defect in the adduced testimony was not brought out with sufficient clearness in the first edition, though even there the existence of latent factors in volition was not ignored (footnote, p. 46).

Sidgwick's subsequent expositions are, however, free from any reproach on this ground. "If I knew my own nature I *might* see it to be pre-determined that, being so constituted and in such circumstances I should act" in a *certain way* (p. 65). If Spinoza had been a favourite philosopher of Sidgwick this point might perhaps have received greater attention, for it was Spinoza who first explained satisfactorily the apparent cogency of the libertarian witness of self-consciousness. "Men think themselves free inasmuch as they are conscious of their volitions

<sup>1</sup> Similarly Fowler (*Principles of Morals*, pp. 330-31): "It may be replied that . . . I am not sufficiently acquainted with all the springs of action, and their relative force". Hence "the antinomy is not really resolved in either direction by Professor Sidgwick's argument".

and desires and never even dream, in their ignorance, of the causes which have disposed them so to wish and desire.”<sup>1</sup> Clifford, in like manner, has contended that the appeal to introspection involves an inconsistency; self-consciousness is supposed to be competent to assure me of the non-existence of something which, by hypothesis, is not in my consciousness, *i.e.*, the subconscious influences;<sup>2</sup> or, in the words of one of the ablest of recent expositors of determinism, “self-consciousness necessarily coincides with its effect—the completed activity. . . . The causes which set this activity in motion necessarily precede self-consciousness.”<sup>3</sup>

The appeal to self-consciousness is, therefore, to some extent a superficial appeal. And yet it has a

<sup>1</sup> *Ethics*, book i., appendix (Elwes' translation), p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> *Fortnightly Review*, Dec., 1875.

<sup>3</sup> Riehl, *Science and Metaphysics* (English translation), p. 212. Again, Edgeworth, in the course of an able and sympathetic examination of Sidgwick's *Ethics*, remarks: “If both motive and action are not cause and effect, but co-effects of the same physical causes, then we should (not) . . . expect action to have conscious motive as an invariable antecedent or concomitant. If the cause of action is not in consciousness, then action may obey the law of causation, though consciousness discerns no cause; the doctrine of necessity is not damaged, though even a Sidgwick may have swept the universe of consciousness with the microscope of introspection, and found not everywhere a cause” (*New and Old Methods of Ethics*, p. 25).

\* validity of its own. The superficial view is a perfectly true view so far as it goes. In the words of the writer we have just quoted, "the will must appear free to the actor, *i.e.*, from the standpoint of subjective experience. . . . In order to see the dependence of the will on its causes we must supplement subjective experience with objective."<sup>1</sup> This appearance of freedom—determinists would say "illusion" of freedom—is of great ethical importance, is, indeed, the characteristic feature of the moral life. The numerous arguments, ethical and psychological, which, since the time of Leibnitz, have been based upon the hypothesis of subconsciousness—it is upon subconsciousness that the determinist has to fall back—are always open to the objection raised by Locke,<sup>2</sup> and though this objection has, apparently, an ever-diminishing degree of force for the modern mind, it is, at any rate, useful in checking unnecessary excursions into what is, after all, in some measure a *terra incognita*. Again, an appeal to subconsciousness may be made in the libertarian interest; for if in its recesses an exemplification of the law of rigid causality may be concealed, pluralists may contend that an exemplification of absolute spontaneity or caprice may equally well be hidden. In short, the direct appeal to subconsciousness as such is

<sup>1</sup> Riehl, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> *Essay*, book ii., chap. i., p. 9 *et seq.*

an appeal from which no answer of either kind can be obtained. Reasons may be alleged in favour of certain processes occurring below the threshold, just as the scientist may allege reasons for the existence of *infra-red* or *ultra-violet* rays of "light" even if these latter were not capable of producing photographic or thermometric effects. But the distinctive features of the moral life are features of which we are acutely conscious, and to this extent the libertarian appeal to self-consciousness is far more conclusive than the deterministic appeal to something outside self-consciousness.

Sidgwick's one argument in favour of libertarianism has, therefore, a validity of its own. Freedom is a notion absolutely essential to the existence of the moral life. The ethical world is the world of (apparent) freedom. Viewed from the cosmic standpoint, this freedom may be illusory. Viewed from the ethical standpoint it is an indispensable postulate. "I ought, therefore I can." The conscious acceptance of the view that freedom is illusory would, as Sidgwick clearly pointed out, fundamentally revolutionise our moral notions. "I cannot conceive myself seeing this (that my freedom is illusory) without at the same time conceiving my whole conception of what I now call 'my' action fundamentally altered : I cannot conceive that if I contemplated the actions of my



organism in this light, I should refer them to my 'self' . . . in the sense in which I now refer them." <sup>1</sup>

Ethics, in short, deals with what lies above the threshold of consciousness. Whatever impulses may enter from below, they have no interest for ethics proper until the moment when they have so entered. Their past history, their connection with physiological and ancestral facts, are, strictly speaking, extra-ethical. One case no doubt is important, the case of the passing downwards of a set of actions from the conscious to the unconscious region—in other words, the formation of habit ; this is crucial as suggesting a possible clue to the origin of all instincts and impulses. But otherwise ethics has no direct concern with what lies outside of consciousness. For facts lying above the threshold, "freedom" is a necessary form which cannot be sublated. This, as we have seen, is admitted by thoughtful determinists, and Sidgwick's treatment of the problem is therefore justified.

It would be a departure from the plan of these essays (which is to expound and assess, and only occasionally to supplement certain of Sidgwick's doctrines) to go much further into the mazes of the free-will problem. In the last resort the

<sup>1</sup> *Methods*, p. 66.



question, perhaps, becomes one of monism v. pluralism. Of recent years there has been a distinct revival of pluralism<sup>1</sup> in philosophy, and with it, as we should expect, of libertarianism. But a Spinozistic monism is still all powerful in scientific circles, and highly influential in philosophical circles; and time only will show whether the revived Leibnitzian pluralism (some such view appears to be favoured by writers like Professors James and Ward) will win its way. It certainly appears probable that the increased stress which is daily being laid upon the active side of consciousness,<sup>2</sup> and upon the implications of the moral life, may result in a profound change of attitude on the part of philosophy.

The length of the controversy between determinists and libertarians should suggest at least one reflection to the combatants. Both views must in some form or other, be true; both views must in their cruder forms, be false. Libertarianism must be false if it means lawlessness; if it means that "you are 'accountable' because you are a wholly 'unaccountable' creature" (Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, p. 11). Nowhere in the universe must there be a chink or cranny where primæval chaos can retain a foothold. Philosophers who approach ethics

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., James's *Will to Believe and Other Essays*.

<sup>2</sup> See article "Pragmatism," *Mind*, October, 1900.

from the side of natural science are usually so impressed by this universality of the causal principle that they denounce "freedom" as an illusion. From their standpoint it must indeed necessarily appear as an illusion. From the inner standpoint "freedom" appears as an undeniable fact, and determinism itself as a delusion and impossibility. Nay, freedom may assert itself as a *new motive*; the interesting psychological fact of *volition for the sake of proving one's freedom*, contains, we should hope, enough of comfort to satisfy both parties, and indicates that there is, perhaps, no real opposition between the conflicting views. It certainly cannot be brushed aside so easily as Maimon<sup>1</sup> and other determinists would like.

It is, at any rate, an interesting fact that the most ethereal and idealistic of all English poets was a determinist. The mystical language of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is not always easy to interpret, but there can be little doubt that the third semichorus of Act ii., Scene ii. is an expression, in words of the highest poetic beauty, of the faith that consciousness of freedom is quite conformable with a wider cosmic determinism.

The most important of the criticisms which have been passed upon Sidgwick's treatment of the free-will problem, has now been dealt with at

<sup>1</sup> *The Illusion of Free Will.*

sufficient length. Only one further criticism need here be referred to, for Professor Fowler (*Mind*, 1890, p. 89; *Principles of Morals*, p. 331) can scarcely be called a critic so far as this question is concerned; he is in substantial agreement with Sidgwick as to the ethical unimportance of the controversy, and is not an extremist in its solution. But Mr. Selby Bigge (*Mind*, 1890, p. 93) maintains that the moralist cannot, after all, treat the question lightly. Upon Sidgwick's own confession our moral notions (represented by the terminology "ought," "self," etc.) would have to be thoroughly revolutionised if determinism were accepted. How, then, can the question be indifferent? Martineau (*Types of Ethical Theory*, pp. 42-43) is of the same opinion.

As to the "immediate affirmation of consciousness in the moment of deliberate action," Mr. Selby Bigge would be sorry to rest libertarianism upon so narrow a basis, and one of which determinists have given so good an account. He would prefer to base libertarianism upon the existence of the moral law; this, as Kant maintained, is the only and the sufficient *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom. Mr. Selby Bigge also complains that Sidgwick interprets libertarianism in the sense of non-determination by any laws: whereas in his own opinion we are determined by moral laws. He objects to

what he regards as Sidgwick's error in applying the libertarian conception to the *present* and the deterministic conception to the *future*; in the critic's view *time* has nothing to do with the case; we apply the libertarian conception when we are considering what *ought* to happen, the deterministic when we are considering what *will* happen.

Mr. Selby Bigge's remarks are from the Kantian standpoint. His leading practical conclusion is that because men think themselves free they are called upon to obey the moral law, a conclusion which, as we have seen, is not really foreign to Sidgwick's own results.

Finally, it may be pointed out that in Sidgwick's exposition of the consciousness of freedom there is a slight inconsistency. After properly objecting to the Kantian identification of rational with free action and pointing out that freedom is manifested as clearly in deliberate irrational action as in deliberate rational action, his appeal on behalf of freedom to the witness of self-consciousness is based on this very identification. "Certainly when I have a distinct consciousness of choosing between alternatives of conduct, one of which I conceive as right or reasonable, I find it impossible not to think that I can now choose to do what I so conceive," etc.<sup>1</sup> Here, presumably, a special

<sup>1</sup> *Methods*, p. 65.



kind of "freedom" is attached to rational action, and Sidgwick himself appears in the strange guise of the "disciple of Kant"<sup>1</sup> who said that a man "is a free agent in so far as he acts under the guidance of reason".

Still, this identification of free with rational action does not, it appears, invalidate in any way the argument of the author; the witness of self-consciousness is just as valid (or invalid) when it testifies to a deliberate choice of irrational conduct as when it testifies to a deliberate choice of the opposite. Why, then, is rational choice singled out by Kant, Sidgwick, and numberless other authors as specially "free"? Probably for the reason given by James (*Psychology*, vol. ii., p. 548): "We feel, in all hard cases of volition, as if the line taken . . . were the line of greater resistance". But Sidgwick would admit that a deliberate choice of the irrational and sensual is *per se* as "free" a choice as that of the rational and ideal, though less striking to the moral imagination. He was firmly convinced that the Socratic view, ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἔκων ἀμαρτάνει was erroneous; "wilful sin" is a fact<sup>2</sup> though a less common one than is sometimes sup-

<sup>1</sup> Condemned on p. 58, and in the appendix to the sixth edition of the *Methods*.

<sup>2</sup> "Unreasonable Action," *Mind*, 1893, p. 174 (reprinted in *Practical Ethics*).



posed, and if so, it is, as its name implies, an exemplification of "free will". But "wilful sin" is less dramatically interesting than resistance to "temptation"; in the latter case, as James points out, we speak of "*conquering and overcoming* our impulses and temptation, but the sluggard, the drunkard, the coward, never talk of their conduct in that way or say they resist their energy, overcome their sobriety, conquer their courage, and so forth". Thus the deliberate wrong-doer is regarded rather as relaxing than as tightening the fibres of his being; he is "letting himself go," and his choice of evil, though "free" and deliberate is not commonly regarded as so strikingly "free" as virtuous conduct in face of severe temptation. But metaphysically the "freedom" is the same in each case, and no one has done so much as Sidgwick to make clear this fact.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Mind*, 1888, p. 405, where Sidgwick points out the confusion between the two meanings of "Freedom". This article is now the appendix to the *Methods*.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE INCORRIGIBILITY OF EGOISM.

“A dubious guidance to a despicable<sup>1</sup> end appears to be all that the hedonistic calculus has to offer” (*Methods of Ethics*, p. 200).

MAXIM OF RATIONAL BENEVOLENCE. “Each one is morally bound to regard the good of any other individual as much as his own, except in so far as he judges it to be less, when impartially viewed, or less certainly knowable or attainable by him” (*Methods*, p. 382).

“There are strong grounds for holding that a system of morality, satisfactory to the moral consciousness of mankind in general, cannot be constructed on the basis of simple egoism” (*Methods*, p. 119).

“I do not find in my moral consciousness any intuition that the performance of duty will be adequately rewarded and its violation punished. . . . It is . . . a matter of life and death to the practical reason that this premiss should be somehow obtained” (*Methods*, iv., last chapter, sec. 5, first edition).

“A man may . . . hold that his own happiness is an end which it is irrational for him to sacrifice to any other. . . . This view . . . is that which I myself hold” (*Methods*, p. 496).

“I find it impossible<sup>2</sup> not to admit the ‘authority’ of self-love, or the ‘rationality’ of seeking one’s own individual happiness” (*Methods*, p. 199).

THAT Sidgwick was a utilitarian seems to be taken for granted.

<sup>1</sup> “Ignoble” (sixth edition). <sup>2</sup> “Difficult” (sixth edition).

No doubt there *is* a utilitarian element in the *Methods of Ethics*. No doubt the author, on the strength of this element, sometimes explicitly calls himself a utilitarian.<sup>1</sup> But, according to the present writer's interpretation of Sidgwick's work, its utilitarianism is but a thin veneer over an underlying and invincible egoism.<sup>2</sup> The author whose life was an exemplification of absolute and almost hypersensitive altruism, presents to careful readers of his book a most emphatic defence of self-love.

But from the date of the first publication of the *Methods* this point has seemed, to many critics, doubtful or obscure. Many indeed have completely failed to recognise the importance attached by Sidgwick to egoism. As recently as the present year (1901) a discussion among students of philosophy in Sidgwick's own university revealed the fact that the cleavage of opinion is as distinct as ever, despite the increased explicitness of successive editions of the *Methods*. One section of readers claims that egoism has been refuted and suppressed, another that it is an integral—nay fundamental—

<sup>1</sup> *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. x., p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Sorley considers these words too strong, as probably they are. He admits that the case for Sidgwick's egoism is made out in the present chapter, but considers that sufficient justice has not been done to the exquisite balance of the two sides of the system presented to us in the *Methods*.

element in Sidgwick's system. When, indeed, the conflicting statements which head this section are studied and contrasted, a *prima facie* justification for the divergence of opinion becomes obvious.

The former of the two views—that egoism has been refuted and suppressed—though, the writer is convinced, a mistaken view, is of sufficient interest and importance to deserve definite consideration and refutation, in addition to the negative refutation which an exposition of the true view will involve.

Those who regard Sidgwick as a thoroughgoing utilitarian contend that (to use his own words), egoism gives but a "despicable end," and that in his exposition of the maxims of philosophic intuitionism (book iii., ch. xiii.) the rationality of regarding the welfare of others equally with one's own is explicitly enounced. Hence self-sacrifice is morally demanded in case of definite conflict between the greater good of others and the lesser good of self. The fourth book, they contend, is but a detailed amplification of the maxim of rational benevolence, and is conceived in a thoroughly anti-egoistic spirit.

But what of the "Dualism of the Practical Reason" if this simple and easy utilitarian interpretation of the *Methods* be adopted? The dualism, it would be replied, is no real dualism

at all. Man knows his duty. Utilitarianism and intuitionism have been shown to harmonise into a system, while egoism has been shown to be irrational, immoral and impossible. The admission of a dualism is but a concession to the hardness of heart of the immoral egoist. For him, as for all men, there is but one criterion of duty ; but if he will not be convinced, if he will not admit the claims of morality, how can we appeal to him except through his selfish instincts? The dualism is therefore only a practical one, not one of speculative ethics ; moral duty, interpreted in a utilitarian manner, stands opposed to immoral self-love. Sufficient interest may still attach to egoism to lead us to examine the relations between it and the other and only sound method of ethics, but the examination is unessential ; it is a work, though an interesting one, of supererogation. Ethics has to investigate the nature of duty, not to provide sanctions for its performance by the immoral. There is no *theoretical* need to try to "square"<sup>1</sup> egoism (an immoral system) with the true view, though there is much *practical* need of such a reconciliation. This, they say, is the reason for the introduction of a theological postulate at the end of the *Methods of Ethics*.

When asked how the reconciliation of the two

<sup>1</sup>The writer's word, not Sidgwick's.



contradictory systems can be, on their interpretation, "a matter of life and death to the practical reason," advocates of this view repeat that for practical purposes a reconciliation between the mundane ethics of duty and ideal ethics may certainly be necessary in order to give us an absolutely complete view of the moral universe. In an ideal system the virtuous individual, by obtaining an adequate reward, must be seen to have been in the long run (though all unknowing) the soundest egoist. But, after all, the construction of Utopias in which duty and happiness never collide is not the main work of the moral philosopher. Having ascertained the true criterion of moral action—universal happiness—his chief labour is done.

In short, egoism, according to this view, is an immoral doctrine, and has no scientific place in Sidgwick's system.

The present writer cannot possibly agree with this interpretation, despite the fact that so acute a critic and so close a friend of Sidgwick's as Mr. Leslie Stephen appears to hold it.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "A sufficient criterion of morality could be found in the 'greatest happiness' principle; but the difficulty was to discover a sufficient 'sanction'" (Mr. Leslie Stephen on "Henry Sidgwick," *Mind*, Jan., 1901). It should be pointed out, however, that the original title of the last chapter of the *Methods* was

Egoism in the *Methods of Ethics* is neither a defeated foe of utilitarianism, with whom parley is a matter merely of condescension and not of right, nor is it a savage rebel somehow to be tamed by an appeal to his brutal instincts. It is a civilised power whose authority and existence must be maintained and recognised, nay, whose authority must be, in the long run, supreme over all rivals.

The mistaken interpretation of Sidgwick's attitude is, as said before, no new one. One of the ablest criticisms<sup>1</sup> to which the first edition of the *Methods* was subjected proceeded on the assumption that an attempt had been made therein to "suppress" egoism, and Mr. Bradley and other critics made the same assumption. Again, the fact that Sidgwick is dubbed "utilitarian" by almost general consent and without any searching of heart, bears witness to the fact that the triumphant egoism of the *Methods* has been undetected. Nay, Sidgwick, as pointed out above, even calls himself by this name. And yet a thorough-going utilitarian interpretation would destroy the real significance of

"The Sanctions of Utilitarianism". Mr. Stephen's view is not seriously incorrect when the first edition is considered. Of this more anon.

<sup>1</sup> "The 'Suppression' of Egoism," by the late Mr. Alfred Barratt, *Mind*, 1877, p. 167.

his work. Many of its merits would, of course, still remain ; its psychological power, its analytical and critical acumen, its transparent sincerity. But its most striking and original feature would be gone. That feature is the "Dualism of the Practical Reason," and the basis of this is the existence of an incorrigible though moral egoism.

The true interpretation is that nowhere in the *Methods of Ethics* is egoism overthrown, though as a practical system its difficulties are unsparingly pointed out. To the very end the author regards it as a system equally rational, from a mundane point of view, with universalism, and, from a cosmic point of view, more rational.<sup>1</sup> Universalism must be proved to be egoism in disguise, or ethics cannot be completely rationalised ; this proof is therefore a matter of "life and death," not merely for common practical morality (many might admit this), but for the practical *reason* itself. A man who deliberately sacrificed his happiness for others, knowing or believing that the sacrifice was and always would be real and uncompensated, would be not

<sup>1</sup> "The result of Sidgwick's recognition of three methods of ethics . . . is . . . apart from his theological assumption . . . intuitional hedonism . . . not intuitional utilitarianism. With the theological postulate, it is, in the last analysis, rational egoism" (Professor Seth, "The Ethical System of Henry Sidgwick," *Mind*, April, 1901).

merely foolish, or fanatical, but, from one point  
 → of view, immoral.

The striking statement which heads the present section may first be considered. "A dubious guidance to a despicable end appears to be all that the hedonistic calculus has to offer." This declaration, coming at the end of an examination of egoistic hedonism and standing at the point of transition to intuitionism, has been regarded by many readers as indicating Sidgwick's final attitude towards the first system. And yet on a careful examination of the opening words of the third book, it will be found that the declaration is probably not that of the author, but of the author as voicing common judgments. How possibly could Sidgwick admit the "authority" of self-love, the "rationality" of seeking one's own individual happiness, and in the same paragraph denounce happiness as a "despicable end"? Nay, in the very declaration itself the word "appears" is notable.

It should be pointed out as explanatory, to some degree, of the misinterpretation of the work, that the egoistic element in the *Methods of Ethics* became more pronounced in later editions than it was in the first. With diminishing stress upon the "impulse to do what is reasonable as such" came increasing stress upon the "authority of self-



love". Indeed a number of passages in the first edition could easily lend themselves to the interpretation of Mr. Stephen and the other critics who regard Sidgwick's concluding chapter merely as an attempted appeal to immoral egoism to be utilitarian on egoistic principles. "It may be granted that we seem to have proved in chapter ii. (book iv.) that it is reasonable to take the greatest happiness of the greatest number as the ultimate end of action. But in order that this proof may have any practical effect, a man must have a certain impulse to do what is reasonable as such: and many persons will say, and probably with truth, that if such a wish exists in them at all it is feeble in comparison with other impulses: and that they require some much stronger inducement to do what is right than this highly abstract and refined desire" (*Methods*, last chapter, § 1, first edition). Passages of this kind bear out Mr. Stephen's interpretation, that while Sidgwick regarded utilitarianism as alone moral, and egoism as thoroughly immoral, he considered that there was a *practical* necessity for inducing the immoral egoist to be a utilitarian, and that such an inducement was only possible in the form of sanctions, *i.e.*, appeals to his egoism. But no such passage can be found in later editions. Egoism equally with utilitarianism appears there as "right and



reasonable," nay, as so much more reasonable than its rival that unless the latter can somehow be "squared" with the former, "it would seem necessary to abandon the idea of rationalising morality completely" (*Methods*, p. 507). "The relation of rational egoism to rational benevolence is . . . the profoundest problem of ethics. My final view (on this) is given in the last chapter of this treatise" (*Methods*, p. 387, note). If these words mean anything they mean that two systems of morality are in conflict; not a moral system with an immoral. It is not a question, as Mr. Stephen thinks, of how the egoist can be induced by sanctions to act in a utilitarian fashion, but whether he *ought* ever to sacrifice himself for others; whether it would not be, for him, wicked and immoral, so to do.

Sidgwick can scarcely be said to have seriously changed his view as to the relations of the two systems, for the admission of the "rightness" of egoism is found in the first edition, and even in the same chapter from which we have just now quoted. He declares as he draws his discussion to a close that "we cannot but admit, with Butler, that it is ultimately reasonable to seek one's own happiness" (*Methods* iv., last paragraph, first edition). But later editions bear witness to an increasing explicitness of conviction that egoism is to be reckoned

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with, *not* as an immoral stumbling-block in the way of the performance of the right and reasonable, but as itself right and reasonable.

The following are Sidgwick's remarks upon the possibility of a "proof" of utilitarianism addressed to the egoist.<sup>1</sup>

"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 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.* In this case all that the utilitarian can do is to effect as far as possible a reconciliation between the two principles, by expounding to the egoist the sanctions (as they are usually called) of rules deduced from the universalistic principle, *i.e.*, by pointing out the pleasures and pains that may be expected to accrue to the egoist himself from the observance and violation respectively of such

<sup>1</sup>The italicised words are extremely important, but are, be it noted, found only in the first edition.

Again, "I can conceive no possible way of meeting this (egoistic) objection except . . . by exhibiting the necessary universality of the ultimate end as recognised by reason : by showing that the fact that I am I cannot make my happiness intrinsically more desirable . . . than the happiness of any other person" (Book iii., ch. xiii., § 5, first edition).

rules. It is obvious that such an exposition has no tendency to make him accept the greatest happiness of the greatest number as his ultimate end; but only as a means to the end of his own happiness. It is therefore totally different from a proof (as above explained) of universalistic hedonism. When, however, the egoist puts forward implicitly or explicitly the proposition that his happiness or pleasure is good (or objectively desirable), 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 (the mere fact that he is he can have nothing to do with its objective desirability or goodness)" (*Methods*, p. 420).

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The issues lie before us now with perfect clearness. If we can induce the egoist to admit that the mere fact that "he is he" is an indifferent fact and that there is something "objectively desirable" apart from his own personality, then utilitarianism is "proved". But if the egoist is obstinate and refuses to admit "objective or intrinsic desirability," if he clings—and his name implies that he will—to his own egoistic feelings and interests, then there is no possible transition *for him* to utilitarianism. Be it observed that he is not immoral in so refusing,

for the rationality (i.e., the morality) of self-love has been repeatedly admitted.

Now it is obvious that such a refusal is the only possible course open to an egoist. For him to admit "objective desirability" in the sense of desirability apart from his own personality would be to admit that he is not and never has been an egoist at all. To ask him to admit the fact that "he is he" to be an indifferent fact, would be to demand exactly the last thing he would be willing to admit. He is by hypothesis an egoist: his individuality is, for him, of supreme importance, and he finds encouragement for his egoism in the declarations of respectable moralists like Butler and Sidgwick who both admit that it is right and reasonable to seek one's own happiness. If, then, the only transition to utilitarianism is by getting the egoist to renounce his egoism (i.e., his egoistic morality) there can be no transition at all. Sidgwick in his first edition seemed almost<sup>1</sup> to hold that this transition was possible. But further reflection, stimulated perhaps by the criticisms of Barratt and Bradley, appears to have convinced him of its difficulty if not impossibility.

The most notable of all his declarations on this

<sup>1</sup> "Almost." The long paragraph quoted above is extremely balanced and non-committal. But if there is any leaning it is, apparently, to the utilitarian side.



question was made in reply to a critic who, unlike so many of Sidgwick's readers, had detected the underlying egoism of his system. Professor Gizycki was a thorough-going utilitarian, and as such he objected to the admission of the rationality of egoism, and to the consequent disastrous dualism of the practical reason. "Professor Sidgwick has not proved that the method of egoism, beside being a possible method, and one often in actual use, is also an ethical method" (*International Journal of Ethics*, 1890, p. 120).

Sidgwick in response<sup>1</sup> "supplies the missing argument" (*Mind*, 1889, pp. 483-85): "The distinction between any one individual and any other is real, and fundamental, and 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. If this be admitted, the proposition that this distinction is to be taken as fundamental in determining the ultimate end of rational action for an individual cannot be disproved; and to me this proposition seems self-evident although it *prima facie* contradicts the equally self-evident proposition that my good is no more to be regarded than the good of another."

<sup>1</sup>To Gizycki's more elaborate criticism, *Vierteljahrsschrift für Wissenschaftliche Philosophie*, 1880, p. 114.



This same explicit pronouncement is repeated in the later editions of the *Methods*, though the form is in a very slight degree weakened (*Methods*, pp. 495-96). Its effect is decisive. Egoism, admittedly moral, cannot be got rid of.

If there is nothing seriously inappropriate in combining statements found in the first edition with statements found in the last, the demonstration that Sidgwick was not, except in a superficial sense, a utilitarian, is complete.

(a) "I can conceive no possible way of meeting this (egoistic) objection except by . . . showing that the fact that 'I am I' cannot make my happiness intrinsically more desirable . . . than the happiness of any other person" (iii., ch. xiii., § 5, first edition). For the egoist "the mere fact that 'he is he' can have nothing to do with . . . objective desirability or goodness."

(b) "'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" (*Mind*, 1889, pp. 483-85, and *Methods*, p. 496).

The "proof" of utilitarianism is therefore useless. The *only* way out of egoism is [by (a)] to admit that the "I" is negligible. But [by (b)] the "I" cannot be neglected, and thus the "only possible way" is barred. "Pray admit," says the

eth: one voice, "that your personality is of no importance for morality; pray admit that the fact that 'you are you' can be ignored." "No," says the other voice, "the fact that 'I am I' is of fundamental importance, come what may to consistency."

ψ Egoism can be ethically suppressed in two ways, though they are perhaps only superficially distinct. It can be shown to be based on a delusive conviction of the ethical importance of personality, or it can be condemned as immoral. In a following chapter the latter attempt will be made. The present business is to point out that Sidgwick accepted neither mode of suppressing egoism. Egoism is not immoral ("I ought to seek my own happiness," self-love is "rational"), personality is not a delusion negligible by ethics ("I am concerned with the quality of my existence in a fundamentally important sense").

Objectors may perhaps urge that egoism in Sidgwick's system has been taken up and absorbed into the maxim of benevolence. The rights of self, they would say, are adequately safeguarded when the self is recognised as one among other selves of equal value, and it is this which the maxim of benevolence emphatically declares. Such is not the present writer's interpretation of the *Methods*. No doubt the self does get, as we shall

later see, a very large measure of protection from the maxim of benevolence. But it is deposed to a position of mere equality with other selves, and on interpretation of the maxim would permit us to say that "I am concerned with the quality of my existence . . . in a sense . . . in which I am not concerned with the quality of the existence of other individuals. . . ."

The only conclusion we can draw is that egoism in Sidgwick's philosophy comes out finally incorrigible, unscathed and triumphant. Entrenched in its proud position of moral authority it can bid defiance to the solitary maxim of benevolence; nay, as we shall hereafter show, there lie already within the camp of its supposed rival the seeds of egoistic treason.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor Sorley has raised the following question. Is Sidgwick's egoism only a form of the Kantian doctrine that, while self-sacrifice is rational for the individual, yet, unless on taking a cosmic view we can see this self-sacrifice to be, after all, compensated, the moral universe must be admitted to possess a flaw; or is Sidgwick's an *absolute* egoism which declares that always and everywhere self-sacrifice is immoral? The two views are somewhat difficult to distinguish, though it is clear that Kant held to the former and yet regarded himself as by no means an egoist. Certain expressions in the last chapter of the *Methods of Ethics* will bear the Kantian interpretation, but there is some ground for holding that Sidgwick, when speaking with his egoistic voice, sometimes went to the extreme length of the

second view. "A man . . . may hold that his own happiness is an end which it is irrational for him to sacrifice to any other. . . . This view . . . is that which I myself hold" (*Methods*, p. 496). M. Guyau also interprets Sidgwick in the latter sense. "Selon ce philosophe, la sanction, au lieu d'être comme pour Kant une *conséquence* du 'devoir,' en est plutôt une *condition sine qua non*. Je ne puis sacrifier mon intérêt personnel dans la vie présente si je ne conçois pas ce sacrifice comme devant être amplement compensé plus tard" (*La Moral Anglaise Contemporaine*, 2<sup>e</sup> édition, p. 148).

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE THREE MAXIMS OF PHILOSOPHICAL INTUITIONISM CRITICALLY CONSIDERED.

THE last chapter has been expository rather than critical. It is time to probe deeper into the questions at stake.

An objector may retort, after reading what precedes, "Egoism or no egoism, Sidgwick calls himself a utilitarian, and brings forward a maxim of 'rational benevolence'. It is wasted labour to describe him as an egoist." But no one wishes to depict him as a pure egoist, for there is undoubtedly in his philosophy a utilitarian element. The aim has been but to show that this utilitarian element has a powerful ethical adversary to overcome. Egoism is extraordinarily well entrenched in the *Methods*.

With the exception of the occasional affirmations of the rationality of egoism and the delineation of the *summum bonum* in hedonistic terms, the most important constructive part of the *Methods* is the thirteenth chapter of the third book. There we find presented to us three important maxims which



Sidgwick regarded as intuitively certain, and these it is necessary to examine with care.

1 *Maxim of Rational Egoism, Prudence, or Self-love.*—This prescribes "impartial concern for all parts of one's conscious life". "Hereafter (as such) is to be regarded neither less nor more than now."

2 *Maxim of Rational Benevolence.*—"One is morally bound to regard the good of any other individual as much as one's own, except in so far as we judge it to be less when impartially viewed, or less certainly knowable or attainable."

3 *Maxim of Justice or Equity.*—"If a kind of conduct that is right (or wrong) for me is not right (or wrong) for some one else, it must be on the ground of some difference between the two cases other than the fact that he and I are different persons."

#### (a) THE MAXIM OF BENEVOLENCE.

This maxim, intuitional in nature and utilitarian in result, has peculiar interest when considered in the light of the preceding chapter. It is supposed by many of Sidgwick's readers to get rid of egoism and for this reason it had better be examined before the other two.

27 In itself it is a model of clearness, and possesses all the precision of a mathematical axiom. It may

be regarded as based on the doctrine of the uniformity of space. An ego here, an ego there, an ego yonder—why favour one more than another? Why seek the good of the nearest ego at the expense of the farthest? Why seek *my own* good rather than his? Mere difference of spatial position ought not to count with a rational being. The mere fact that “I am I” cannot be considered as important.

The maxim in its abstractness is certainly possessed of validity. The objection could, no doubt, be raised that the good of an embryo statesman may really be more important than the good of a confirmed Hooligan; that to do good to (*e.g.*, to educate) a budding genius is really more important than to do a similar good to a nincompoop. The objection is not without practical interest, but it does not overthrow Sidgwick’s maxim itself. The latter, as he repeatedly pointed out, is purely abstract. When human beings are considered *qua* human beings, and all individual differences are ignored, the maxim certainly holds good. One concrete sugar-plum may not be equal to another in value, but all sugar-plums in the abstract are equal, and in the same way all human beings in the abstract are equal. “One is morally bound to regard the good of any other individual as much as one’s own, except in so far as we judge it to

be less, when impartially viewed, or less certainly knowable or attainable.”

Yet despite the absence of ambiguity in the statement of the maxim, it has probably been widely misunderstood, and its name is certainly somewhat unfortunate. “Benevolence” means, for most men, conduct beneficial to others than the agent; benevolence to *oneself* would usually be called by another name. And yet the maxim commands the latter as well as the former kind of conduct. Occasionally it may dictate self-sacrifice; more frequently it will ally itself with egoism. This becomes obvious when it is remembered that the maxim does not sublate or ignore the agent’s self, but merely reduces it to a position of equality with other selves. After a careful consideration of the respective goods to self and others which alternative courses of conduct will bring about, the man has to choose whichever good is the greater. Such a rational choice may sometimes be in favour of the agent, sometimes in favour of others; it may be “selfish” or “self-sacrificing”; but so long as the greater good is sincerely chosen, the conduct of the agent is moral. When the “goods” are apparently equal, the agent’s choice is, presumably, a matter of ethical indifference.

It is clear, then, that the maxim of benevolence

is not one of altruism. It represents no bias whatever towards the side of self-sacrifice. To sacrifice oneself for others without a conviction that by such a sacrifice they will receive a greater good than is lost by the self-sacrificer, would be absolutely immoral, as a violation of the principle of strict equality among the egos. The maxim will thus condemn a vast number of acts of fantastic or impulsive self-sacrifice. It may become a powerful ally of egoism, and certainly contains far more comfort for the egoist than for the altruist.

For, be it observed, one has only to consider the good of others as much as one's own. The thousand acts of heroic self-forgetfulness and self-abnegation with which school books and military records abound, are, in face of the maxim of benevolence, instances of atrocious though well-meant immorality. They cannot be approved even on the ground of useful example, for how can fantastic acts of self-sacrifice, in themselves immoral, exert any influence except in the direction of immorality? Nowhere in Sidgwick's system are we told that the good of others should be considered *more* than our own; the self is therefore left in a tolerably secure position; egoism applauds, and even benevolence is ever ready to smile a moderate approval.

There is another very considerable source of



comfort for the egoist. The knowledge of the agent has to play a considerable and decisive part in all choice. The merely problematic good of another must not weigh against the more certain good of self; to let it do so is to be immoral; if the good of another be "less certainly knowable" than the good of the agent, the maxim of benevolence bids him choose his own good. Take, for example, the case of a man who sacrifices his own comforts and prospects in order to save a relative from temptations and possible ruin; such a choice is immoral unless there is a fair certainty that the relative will thus reap more good than the agent loses. The self-sacrificer is, we may assume, fairly certain of his own future prospects; unless he is at least equally certain that by his sacrifice he can acquire for his weaker relative the same or a greater amount of prosperity, he must not sacrifice himself; if he does he is immoral, and is, moreover, setting an immoral example. Similarly the man who leads a "forlorn hope" is immoral unless fairly certain that the sacrifice of his life will result in a greater good to others than the remainder of his life will be to himself.<sup>1</sup> The medical man who performs

<sup>1</sup> Professor Sorley considers that the use of the word "immoral" in this connection is too strong. No doubt it is stronger than can be sanctioned by the tone and spirit of the *Methods of Ethics*, but not, in the opinion of the writer, stronger than can

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upon a patient, as a last resource, an operation which in previous cases has occasionally proved successful but which is nevertheless full of danger to himself, is immoral unless he recognises that the chance of saving his patient is greater than the chance of losing his own life. The "patriot" who faces the possibility of life-long imprisonment in order to bring about some social or political change, is immoral unless he believes the chances are in favour of success. In each case, be it observed, morality is violated at two points; egoistic morality is obviously violated, and benevolent morality is violated too. The self-sacrificers can therefore justify their conduct by an appeal to no valid principle whatever. They defy the moral principle of egoism (it is right to seek my own happiness); they defy the principle of rational benevolence (all egos are to be considered as of equal value). What punishment is severe enough for the depravity of such self-sacrificers?

It has now been shown, perhaps at wearisome length, that the maxim of benevolence is no very formidable obstacle to egoism. Occasionally, no doubt, the two will conflict, and then we have a "dualism". But more often benevolence will be

be sanctioned by the logical implications of that work. The whole object of the present section is to find out the *logical results* of the maxim of benevolence.

→ on the side of egoism, and it always *must* be so except in the comparatively few cases where self-sacrifice will, with apparent inevitableness, lead to a good greater than, or at least equal to, the loss suffered by the agent. All fantastic acts of self-sacrifice dictated by a mere chance of producing greater good to others than is possible to oneself, nay, all acts of self-sacrifice which are not carefully thought out beforehand, are violations of this important principle.<sup>1</sup>

“Rational benevolence” recognises two and only two criminals. The first is the selfish man, who sacrifices the greater good of others to obtain his own lesser good. The second is the self-sacrificer who negates his own greater or more certain good for the sake of the lesser or less certain good of another. The two criminals offend the maxim in an equal degree; each violates the principle that all egos are to be regarded as absolutely equal in the eyes of reason.

At this point the lesson of the previous chapter must be repeated. Absolute egoism all this time still remains moral. The “Two Voices” of

<sup>1</sup> See *Methods*, p. 333 (first paragraph). Also pp. 348-49. “It would be held . . . that we are not bound . . . to run any risk, unless the chance of additional benefit to be gained for another outweighs the cost and chance of loss to ourselves if we fail.”



Tennyson's poem have their analogue in the two voices of Sidgwick's ethics. The one voice proclaims, "I am I. My happiness is an end which it is irrational for me to sacrifice to any other. Egos are not of equal value; mine has peculiar claims. 'This distinction is to be taken as fundamental'" (*Methods*, p. 496). The other voice says "One ego is equal to another; I must be impartial".

There is an interesting analogy between the controversy thus initiated, and the psychological controversy as to the nature of space. Philosophy has long found difficulty in the latter problem, but her perplexities now seem likely to be diminished by a recognition of the distinction which Professor Ward has done so much to elucidate (article, "Psychology," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, p. 53, *Naturalism and Agnosticism*, vol. ii., p. 138, *et seq.*). Perceptual space is not homogeneous. Located as it is around a percipient, it has peculiar relations to him. An inch in his immediate neighbourhood is very different perceptually from an inch at a distance. "It is from this psychological, perspective space, with its absolute origin in the 'here' of the percipient, each successive shell as we recede from this centre differing in characteristics and ordinates and even dimensions, and differing largely by reason of the different move-

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ments to which it is correlated—from this concrete spatial scheme it is, I say, that the abstract space of Euclid has been elaborated.” Egoism corresponds, we might venture to say, to a theory of perceptual space, rational benevolence to a theory of conceptual space. For *this* doctrine, space and its contained egos are everywhere uniform in value ; for *that* doctrine one ego is a centre around which all others are spatially arranged, and from which each takes its peculiar value. Which, for ethics, is the truer view is a profoundly difficult question.<sup>1</sup>

Here it suffices to observe that each view is based upon a perfectly valid mode of thought, the one upon a concrete “perceptual” mode, the other upon an abstract “conceptual” mode.

To sum up. Egoism, *ab initio* admitted to be moral or rational (for personality is an absolutely fundamental notion) remains, on Sidgwick’s principles virtually unrefuted. Rational benevolence is also moral, though based upon a more

<sup>1</sup> Here again the problem suggested by the clash of principles in Sidgwick’s work appears in the same form, and contemporaneously, to Professor Seth and to the present writer (see *Mind*, April, 1901, p. 187). Is the abstract, quantitative method the true one for ethics? If so, Sidgwick’s three maxims have great value. Or are its problems of a concrete, qualitative kind? Is personality an essential factor? Is orientation around a “self” to be ignored or not?



abstract view of the universe. The two principles may occasionally conflict ; in that case the agent necessarily violates one moral principle in obeying the other. But more frequently rational benevolence will ally itself with egoism ; the claims of the agent's ego have, indeed, never been denied by the maxim itself, though they have been placed on an equality with those of other egos. Moreover, owing to the far greater uncertainty which attaches to seeking the good of others than attaches to seeking one's own good, the latter object of search must generally, even on the principle of rational benevolence, be chosen. Thus egoism remains almost invincible ; its only possible opponent has been found to be, in large measure, a friend in disguise.

A critic may reasonably ask : " Is it possible that the logical result of Sidgwick's ethics is a condemnation of the majority of ' noble ' acts of uncalculating self-sacrifice ? Would he not approve of such acts on the ground that, however fantastic when considered on their own merits, they tend in a felicific direction ; that they set a good example of utilitarian conduct even though, in particular cases they may be condemned as foolish, ascetic, or hyper-altruistic ? " No doubt a certain amount of allowance must be made for this consideration (see *Methods*, pp. 428-29) but only because of the



uncertainty of the results of conduct. A "foolish" act of self-sacrifice *may* turn out socially useful, hence we must not condemn such acts too readily. But if there were *no* doubt as to the "foolishness" of an act of self-sacrifice, if it were <sup>100.0%</sup> *certain* that the self-sacrificer would lose more than society would gain, he must undoubtedly be condemned as immoral by virtue of the maxim of benevolence. The argument from example is not to the point. Examples of foolish self-abnegation can only encourage further foolish self-abnegation, and this is immoral.

It remains therefore to be seen whether, impregnable from without, egoism is not vulnerable from within. "I ought to seek my own happiness" has, so far, been allowed to pass unchallenged. Sidgwick never questioned its validity, and the proposition has, no doubt, much on the surface to recommend it. But the consequences of its admission have proved disastrous. In the despairing words which close the *Methods of Ethics* we are face to face with a "fundamental contradiction" which threatens to prevent us from "rationalising morality completely". "In . . . cases of a recognised conflict between self-interest<sup>1</sup> and duty, practical reason being divided against itself, would cease to be a motive on either side."

<sup>1</sup> A *moral* principle, be it noted.

It is time, then, to call in question the hitherto unchallenged claims of moral egoism.

(b) THE MAXIM OF PRUDENCE OR RATIONAL EGOISM.

The present writer has become convinced that Sidgwick's maxim of prudence contains two elements of an absolutely diverse character, and that unless these are distinguished nothing but confusion can result.

In various parts of the *Methods of Ethics* we find such affirmations as the following:—

“I find it impossible not to admit the ‘authority’ of self-love, or the ‘rationality’ of seeking one’s own individual happiness” (p. 199).

“The rationality of egoism I find it impossible not to admit” (p. 200 note).

“We cannot but admit, with Butler, that it is ultimately reasonable to seek one’s own happiness” (last paragraph, first edition).

In the chapter on “Philosophical Intuitionism” we also find given as intuitively certain a maxim denominated one of “prudence” or “rational egoism” and prescribing “impartial concern for all parts of one’s conscious life”. “Hereafter (as such) is to be regarded neither less nor more than now.”

An examination of the above statements will reveal the presence of two elements.

First, a genuinely egoistic principle. "I ought to seek *my* happiness or good."

Secondly, another principle not necessarily egoistic at all. "Impartial concern for all parts or moments of conscious life ought to be given."

In the *Methods of Ethics* some confusion is present owing to these two elements not being definitely distinguished. An attempt will be made in what follows to show:—

→ (1) That the genuinely egoistic maxim is only doubtfully valid, for the word "good" or "happiness" covers a serious ambiguity.

(2) That the second maxim is valid for the same reason that the maxim of benevolence is valid (time and space are both conceptually uniform); but this maxim has no special reference to egoism, and is equally applicable to benevolent morality.

### I.

In what precedes it has been seen that there is in Sidgwick's system a utilitarian element based upon the principle of impartiality or equality. There is also a more fundamental element based upon an exactly opposite principle, that of partiality or egoism; *my* good is of first importance in virtue of the fact of personality. Between absolute

contradictories there can be no peace. I ought to be partial ; I ought to be impartial.

Here then is a dualism ; the "profoundest problem of ethics" faces us. But dualisms are notoriously unstable, and though in many parts of the *Methods of Ethics* a prima facie equilibrium of the two contradictories is preserved, the discriminating reader will discover that the balance really inclines to the egoistic side.<sup>1</sup> The closing chapter of the *Methods* is an attempt to ascertain how utilitarianism is to be ultimately justified at the sovereign bar of egoism ; the ultimate justification of self-sacrifice, interpreted hedonistically, seems never to have been contemplated. If this be true, then egoism is absolutely fundamental to Sidgwick's ethics ; standing on its firm foundations a man can declare, "It is unreasonable to be impartial, it is unreasonable to sacrifice myself". Unless, when the final account is made up, the balance incline to the egoistic side, "cosmos is reduced to chaos,"

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that Sidgwick's master, Bishop Butler, is open to a similar difficulty of interpretation. Thus Fowler, after quoting the famous egoistic passage in the eleventh sermon, says (*Principles of Morals*, p. 63, note) : "This passage, which places self-love on even a higher level than conscience, appears to me to be plainly inconsistent with Butler's predominant conception of benevolence and self-love as co-ordinate principles of our nature, both alike being regarded as under the supreme governance of conscience or reflection".



for uncompensated self-sacrifice at the call of utilitarian duty is an offence to the moral consciousness of egoism, however pleasing to the moral consciousness of the less fundamentally moral principle of utilitarianism.

Shall we then accept egoism frankly and unreservedly and refuse to be distracted by the rival principle? If we do, we shall at least obtain consistency of method. Or shall we deny that egoism is a moral system? We shall then have to oppose ourselves to the proposition of Butler that "interest, one's own happiness, is a manifest obligation," a proposition accepted unreservedly by Sidgwick from his cautious and moderate-minded predecessor. Each horn of the dilemma has its difficulty, but the present writer proposes to seize the latter of the two.

We have to examine the proposition, "I ought to seek my own happiness," and to see whether it is in any sense valid. The conclusion at which the present writer arrives is that if by "happiness" is here meant pleasure considered *per se* and as a purely subjective element—considered in fact quite apart from all circumstances and results—this proposition is a most violent and gross case of abuse of language. The "ought" is absolutely out of place. What is meant is, "I should like to have pleasure, pleasure is pleasing," statements which

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are valid (and tautologous) but which have nothing to do with morality except to stand as examples of what morality is *not*. We have no right whatever to substitute "ought" for "like" and thus make a sham moral maxim. "I ought to increase my happiness" (*sc.* my pleasure) is a mere perversion of speech unless—which is probable—more is meant than meets the ear.

And yet there must be some validity in a maxim which to Butler, Sidgwick and many other writers has seemed self-evident.

Instead of considering the somewhat abstract maxim, "I ought to seek my happiness," let us for clearness' sake, examine a specialised form of the same, even at the risk of indulging in apparent trivialities.

If a voluptuary were heard to declare that he "ought to go to the theatre," the statement—coming from such a source—would probably strike his hearers as ridiculous. In the mouth of a mere "pleasure-seeker" (if there is such), the word "ought," when applied to his pursuits, has absolutely no appropriateness whatever. To use it in place of the word "like" is merely to play fast and loose with words and with moral distinctions.

But suppose a worthy citizen be heard to declare "I ought to go to the theatre to-night," the

statement, though somewhat condensed and obscure, may carry a certain intelligibility; it will not mean merely "I like". If the worthy citizen means merely "like" he has no right to say "ought". But he probably means what he says. He *ought* to go.

He may mean :—

(1) "My life has become monotonous. My functions as man and citizen are suffering from too close application to business; my health is giving way; it is a duty to my own self-development that I should have a change of thought; the stimulus of the theatre will be not only pleasant (in itself a non-moral consideration) but will favourably react upon my life-work."

This is most probably what the worthy citizen means. Or he may mean :—

(2) "I have neglected my family; they have their claims upon me; I ought not to be so self-absorbed and mopish; I *ought* to be happier for their sake. I will take them to a place of amusement." Pleasure, though it may be in one case immoral and in another unmoral, may in this case be symbolic of and concomitant with the highest morality.

Or he may mean :—

(3) "There is an elevating play being acted to-night. It is my duty to encourage excellent

performances, and to discourage by my absence the lower forms of drama. I ought to go to-night."

These, then, are intelligible interpretations, and there may be others. A man will never be found to be merely an egoistic hedonist when he uses the word "ought," even though he may be making statements superficially hedonistic in appearance such as "I ought to take a holiday," "I ought to marry," "I ought to get more enjoyment out of life," "I ought to seek my happiness". He will never use the word "ought" if he is regarding "pleasure for pleasure's sake"; he will use the word "like". "Ought" always implies some purpose connected with the higher living of self and others; in short some ideal of social and personal excellence.<sup>1</sup>

"I ought to seek my happiness" is therefore

<sup>1</sup> Professor Seth supports this view. "The point of view of duty is always, it seems to me, the point of view of society, never that of the mere individual. 'Duties to oneself' are . . . duties to society" ("The Ethical System of Henry Sidgwick," *Mind*, April, 1901). Similarly Professor Alexander, *Moral Order and Progress*, book ii., chap. ii. "Self-regarding Acts are Social," and Wundt, *Ethics*, vol. iii., p. 78 (English translation), "The individual end can be moral only when it is the immediate but not the ultimate object; in other words, the agent's own personality as such is never the true object of morality".

valid but not in a sense which justifies egoistic hedonism. If it means "I ought to consult my own pleasure merely for the sake of pleasure" it is probably the most violent of all perversions of language. Its exact negative is generally regarded as true. But if we adhere to the ordinary sense of the word "happiness" (the feeling which accompanies the normal activity of a "healthy mind in a healthy body"<sup>1</sup>) there is no great inappropriateness in saying that we "ought" to aim at it. The happiness of each is involved in the happiness of others, the happiness of others in the happiness of each. As Sidgwick truly says, "any material loss of happiness by any one individual is likely to affect some others without their consent, to some not inconsiderable extent" (*Methods*, p. 476). What a pity Sidgwick did not follow out further this justification of the egoistic doctrine!

Happiness then, is a duty; we ought to seek it; but only the happiness which accompanies or corresponds to the activity of a "healthy mind in a healthy body," in short, a state which many moralists would prefer to call "perfection" or "self-realisation".

Pleasure *per se*, pleasure in abstraction from circumstances, is the most absolutely "subjective

<sup>1</sup> *Methods of Ethics*, p. 92.

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of all things. Now, inasmuch as "ought" and "right" imply an "objective" standard, it is difficult to see how any "oughtness" can attach to pleasure so considered; it is difficult to see how one can rationally make the affirmation, "I ought to seek my own pleasure". But call pleasure "happiness" and the ambiguity and comprehensiveness of the latter word come to the rescue. "I ought to seek my happiness" is fairly plausible.

The point is so fundamental that it deserves, even at the risk of repetition, a little further consideration.

Any other interpretation than the above involves us in difficulties. "I ought to seek my own pleasure," it is said. Now if "like" is substituted for "ought" we have a proposition of which no critic can deny the force. Is the substitution legitimate? Either "ought" = "like" or it does not. If it does, why use the somewhat mysterious "ought" for the matter-of-fact and unambiguous "like"? If it does not, what new element does the "ought" introduce over and above the "like"? On the first alternative the "ought" is no longer "ultimate and unanalysable," and, moreover, it has absolutely nothing of the "objectivity" which is claimed for moral truth; there is certainly nothing



“objective” about “like”. The first alternative is therefore difficult to maintain in view of Sidgwick’s general attitude. But the second alternative (that “ought” means something more than or different from “like”) drives us on to some non-egoistic or non-hedonistic view of ethics. The “ought” must represent the claims of some wider self than the self of momentary feeling, of some wider system, personal or social, than the to-and-fro movement of sensible impulses.

It seems to the present writer that the greatest defect of the *Methods of Ethics* is the absence of any examination of this fundamental principle of egoism. It is extraordinary that, in face of the enormous difficulties which the presence of this principle introduced into his system, Sidgwick never made an attempt to probe it to its roots. “The rationality of egoism I find it impossible not to admit;” it is with bald statements of this character that the reader has for the most part to be content. Only once did Sidgwick venture on a justification of the egoistic position, and this justification, as was seen in the preceding chapter, he based on the fact that the personality of the agent is something, for the agent himself, absolutely unique. This is a valid argument, no doubt, but it is certainly one requiring to be followed out into

greater detail than Sidgwick ever attempted. "I find it impossible not to admit the 'rationality' of seeking one's own individual happiness." Again we have a bald statement concluding with a word which Sidgwick had himself clearly shown to bear at least three interpretations! (*Methods*, pp. 92-93).

A whole book we find devoted to an examination of egoism as a *method*; but only a few words, and those originally inserted in a journal, to an examination of its fundamental postulate, though the latter was accepted by himself!

Some reason for the unsatisfactory nature of Sidgwick's treatment of the egoistic postulate will perhaps be found in the following section, in which an attempt will be made to show that Sidgwick confused egoistic with prudential conduct, and came to transfer the undoubted rationality and obligatoriness of the latter to the former.

To sum up. On the present writer's interpretation, egoism is immoral when logical, and moral when illogical. If it means "I ought to seek my own personal pleasure for its own sake" it is immoral. If it goes beyond the merely personal feelings of the subject, if, in other words, it affirms "I ought to seek my happiness, my welfare, my true good" (all these notions stand for something more than merely subjective feeling), then egoism is, in a very real sense, moral, but it can then

scarcely be called genuine egoism. "All our impulses, high and low, sensual and moral alike, are so far similarly related to self, that . . . we tend to identify ourselves with each as it arises. Thus . . . egoism . . . is a notion equally applicable to all varieties of external behaviour, and a common form into which any moral system may be thrown."<sup>1</sup>

7. Can a suppression of the latter and wider kind of egoism (we might call it egoistic eudæmonism<sup>2</sup>) be ever morally demanded in the interests of others? Is a man ever called upon to sacrifice his true welfare, his self-development, at the call of a wider duty? This is a difficult question which the present writer will make no attempt to solve. Is a man called upon to sacrifice his personal feelings of pleasure? Often, surely.

## II.

But egoism is not yet done with; indeed what Sidgwick regarded as the essential element in the "rational" form of the doctrine has not been touched upon at all. The proposition "I ought to seek my own happiness" is not by any means

<sup>1</sup> *Methods*, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> The revival of the useful Aristotelian word "Eudæmonism" by Professor James Seth and others is a step in the right direction, though hedonists will, no doubt, regard it as a step backwards into vagueness.

identical with the maxim of rational egoism, prudence or self-love as set forth in the chapter entitled "Philosophical Intuitionism". The maxim of rational egoism appears as a refinement upon the other, and its essential principle is, according to Sidgwick, "impartial concern for all parts of one's conscious life"; in other words, it dictates that "hereafter as such, is to be regarded neither less nor more than now".

An obvious criticism is now suggested. Why is this latter principle regarded as egoistic? The parent who ignores his child's future welfare and indulges in an unwise and exaggerated regard for its present, is surely in need of a warning that "*hereafter* as such, is not to be regarded less than now," and yet the parent cannot appropriately be accused of egoism. "Impartial concern for all parts of conscious life is as necessary for benevolent as for egoistic conduct. In what way does it hold less good for conduct towards others than for that towards oneself? . . . Ought not all men to consider the future generations, and not say, '*Après nous le déluge*'?"<sup>1</sup> In short not only is there no antagonism between the "maxim of prudence"—miscalled an "egoistic" maxim—and that of benevolence, but the non-egoistic essence of the former is necessary for the completeness of the latter.

<sup>1</sup> Gizycki, *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. i, p. 120.



The real basis of egoism is not in the least, "I ought to have impartial concern for all parts of my conscious life," for it is equally obvious that, whether my concern is for my own or for others' welfare, my concern should be impartial as respects "hereafter" and "now". Prudence and egoism are not identical, and though the distinction is faintly recognised in the *Methods* (p. 381), where a transition from the egoistic to the rationally egoistic principle is effected ("the proposition that one ought to aim . . ."), the recognition is inadequate: nowhere does Sidgwick point out that impartial concern for all time is not necessarily

egoistic. The genuine maxim of egoism is "I ought (it is reasonable for me) to seek my own happiness," and this, whether self-evident or not is a very different and far more important maxim than the other. Many moralists would accept the self-evidence of the maxim of prudence and, indeed, would extend its essential principle ("impartial concern for all parts of conscious life") to the maxim of benevolence also, while they would strenuously deny the genuinely egoistic principle to be moral, at any rate in the hedonistic sense.

Can it be that Sidgwick never clearly distinguished between "egoism" proper, and "impartial concern for all parts of conscious life"? Apparently so. He appears to consider that "rational



egoism" and "rational benevolence" can come into conflict (*Methods*, p. 386, note 4). Such a conflict is certainly possible if by rational egoism is meant the doctrine that "I ought to seek in a special sense my own pleasure". But if mere "impartial concern for all parts of conscious life" (omitting the "my") is egoism, and impartial concern for all egos is benevolence, there is no possible conflict between the two principles. The one prescribes impartiality in time; the other impartiality in space. A has to consider as strictly equal, (1) each moment of A's own future and present life; (2) each moment of B's future and present life. So much is implied if not expressed, in the maxim of "prudence". But (3) A has to consider as strictly equal A's life and B's. This follows from the maxim of benevolence which puts the good of all egos on an equality. Here, surely, there is no ethical difficulty whatever. Mathematics have saved us. A's conscious life = B's conscious life (maxim of benevolence). Each moment of A's conscious life is equal. Each moment of B's is equal (maxim of "prudence"). Hence a moment of A's life = a moment of B's. If our action is ever momentarily checked by the apparent equality of two goods, whichever we finally choose is a matter of indifference, for no important ethical question whatever is involved.

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There is no conflict of principles any more than when we choose by haphazard one of two tarts each equally good.

It is clear, then, that to denominate the maxim that "impartial concern should be given to all moments of conscious life" a maxim of "prudence" is not altogether appropriate unless "prudence" is interpreted universalistically; and to call it a maxim of "self-love" or "egoism" is still more inappropriate. Only when the "my" is introduced does genuine egoism appear on the scene. If it be admitted that "I ought to seek my own pleasure," there is certainly now the possibility of a genuine conflict of moral principles, for this latter one may conflict with the maxim of benevolence with its declaration of the equality of all egos. Sidgwick's enunciation of the maxim of prudence or self-love apparently combines an egoistic element with a non-egoistic mathematical element; it demands "impartial concern for all parts of one's conscious life;" here the "one's" makes an otherwise non-egoistic maxim into an egoistic one.

To summarise. "I ought to seek my own happiness" is in appearance and intention a truly egoistic maxim; whether it is self-evident or not was discussed in the preceding section. "Impartial concern ought to be given to all moments of conscious life" is not egoistic at all, and can scarcely

even be called prudential. It is as applicable to consideration for the welfare of others as to consideration for one's own welfare. Sidgwick's maxim of "prudence" or "self-love" is a blend of these two. The mathematical rigorism of the "impartiality" principle, is combined with a more doubtful egoistic principle. The basis of the one element lies in a mathematical view of the uniformity of time; the basis of the other element lies in a conviction of the importance of personality (*Mind*, 1889, p. 473 *et seq.* and *Methods*, pp. 495-96). Each element is thus based on solid foundations, but the fact that the foundations are double and not single, though deducible from the *Methods*, was never properly recognised by the author.

(c) THE MAXIM OF JUSTICE OR EQUITY.

"If a kind of conduct that is right (or wrong) for me is not right (or wrong) for some one else, it must be on the ground of some difference between the two cases other than the fact that he and I are different persons."

In the first edition of the *Methods of Ethics* Sidgwick laid great stress upon the "objectivity" of right and wrong. What exactly did this term mean? His critics have answered that it means merely "abstractness". "We strip the end of

all reference to any one person and it thus becomes a pursuit of no one in particular, and that means, somehow, what is imperative on all alike!" (Bradley, *Mr. Sidgwick's Hedonism*).

This interpretation cannot be regarded as unfair. Sidgwick specifically admitted that his three "absolute practical principles, the truth of which is manifest . . . are of too abstract a nature, and too universal in their scope, to enable us to ascertain by immediate application of them what we ought to do in any particular case" (p. 379). We have seen that this abstractness undoubtedly belongs to the maxim of benevolence; we shall find that it equally belongs to the maxim of justice enunciated above.

"One man," says the apostle, "esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike" (Romans xiv. 5). What guidance will the maxim of justice or equity afford in the case of such a conflict of opinion? Mr. A is convinced that he ought to "keep the Sabbath"; being convinced of this, he is also of opinion that Mr. B ought to keep it, for mere numerical difference of personality does not alter obligation. But Mr. B is no respecter of Sabbaths, for he "esteemeth every day alike". Thus while Mr. B says, "I ought not to keep the Sabbath," Mr. A says, "You ought to keep it".



Here, then, is a formidable difficulty. What are the "differences between the two cases" which the maxim of equity allows as valid grounds for differences of conduct? External circumstances may, no doubt, "alter cases" as a well-known proverb asserts, and as our maxim implies; yet the latter gives us no guidance as to what exactly those allowable external circumstances are. But when we come to *internal* circumstances, namely differences of character and opinion, the exact application of the maxim is far more obscure.

Are we to admit such differences as valid grounds for differences of conduct? If so, it is right for A to keep the Sabbath, and right for B not to keep it. Or are we to ignore such internal differences? In that case it is right for B to keep the Sabbath, though he is personally convinced that he ought not to do so.

Take another case. I am convinced, we will suppose, that it is "right" for me to increase my usefulness by taking orders in the Church, despite the fact that in doing so I shall have to affirm a belief in certain doctrines which I do not really believe. Whatever is right for me cannot be wrong for another, *qua* another. True, the "other" may be unsuited for clerical duties; and this fact may make similar conduct on his part "wrong". But suppose the two cases are exactly



similar except that, while I am convinced that increased usefulness overbalances unverity, he is convinced that veracity is an absolute duty. Then if our maxim admits that such circumstances alter the case, what is right for me is wrong for him ; if it does not admit this, then what he feels to be wrong to do is the very thing which in my opinion he ought to do.

It is clear, then, that the maxim of equity is not of any serious practical value. If we like to abstract from each man his peculiarities of character, opinion and circumstance—if we like to reduce each individual to an abstract X—then the maxim holds good. What is right for X is right for Y, for Y and X are only numerically distinct. But is this abstract way of dealing with moral problems of any use whatever ?

It is interesting to note that Kant's famous enunciation of the equity principle is, as we should expect from its close resemblance to the one we have been discussing, open to exactly the same criticism. "Act on a maxim that you can will to be law universal." Brutus is meditating the assassination of Cæsar. His projected act, to be moral, must be capable of being universalised. Now assassination in the abstract cannot well be universalised, and it was this stringent view that Kant was specially anxious to maintain. But his

doctrine can be interpreted in another and much less stringent sense. "The difference between the two might be illustrated, for instance, in the case of stealing. According to the former interpretation, stealing must in all cases be condemned, because its principle cannot be universalised. According to the latter interpretation it would be necessary, in each particular instance in which there is a temptation to steal, to consider whether it is possible to will that every human being should steal, when placed under precisely similar conditions."<sup>1</sup> Similarly Brutus might very well will that assassination under the circumstances of the case (the tyrant's position and character, the state of the nation, etc.) might be universalised; he might regard it as a duty binding on all men. But this interpretation of the maxim would obviously be a lax and dangerous one, and the same may be said of Sidgwick's equity principle which will be found to correspond closely to this laxer interpretation of the categorical imperative.

To systematise. The Kantian principle is susceptible *prima facie* of two interpretations.

(a) Acts like assassination, "Sabbath-breaking," lying, are always and under all circumstances wrong (or right). This absolute and abstract interpretation represents Kant's view most accurately.

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie, *Manual of Ethics*, third edition, p. 193.

(*b*) Acts like assassination, etc., may be right under certain definite external circumstances (e.g., great tyranny) and wrong under certain others. This is the laxer interpretation of Kant's maxim, and apparently comes close to Sidgwick's principle of equity. The latter admits "differences between cases".

But when "internal circumstances" are considered in addition to "external," a further difficulty arises. We have then the two following alternatives.

(*c*<sub>1</sub>) An act like assassination may be right under certain external circumstances (e.g., great tyranny) provided all men hold the same opinions as myself. This case virtually coincides with (*b*); internal and external circumstances are supposed identical throughout the whole series of cases.

(*c*<sub>2</sub>) Inasmuch as some people are convinced that assassination under certain external circumstances may be advantageously universalised, while others deny this, the latter fact has to be considered by the former class of individuals as constituting a new circumstance. They cannot will assassination under the given external circumstances to be always a universal law, for to do so would be to will that others should violate their own interpretation of the categorical imperative.

Neither can the latter class condemn assassination, for to do so would be to will that the former class should refrain from doing what they regard as right. Thus there is a complete deadlock unless each party will make allowance for the personal opinions of the other. But to do this is to change our "objective" criterion to a "subjective" one (cf. Bradley, *Mr. Sidgwick's Hedonism*).

It is clear, then, that from such a purely abstract maxim as that of equity not much real guidance can be obtained. To point this out is not to pass adverse criticism upon Sidgwick, for he himself was conscious of the abstractness of the maxim, and has admitted that it "merely throws a definite *onus probandi* on the man who applies to another a treatment of which he would complain if applied to himself" (p. 380). In short, whatever value the maxim possesses is negative, as checking partiality; and the same, of course, may be said of Kant's famous proposition.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE THREE MAXIMS.

Professor Seth (*Mind*, April, 1901) has made some suggestive remarks as to the relations of the three maxims of philosophical intuitionism. "All three are principles of the distribution of the good or happiness, and the common mark of all is that



impartiality which is of the essence of justice," the latter lying (to use Sidgwick's words) "in distributing good or evil impartially according to right rules". Professor Seth therefore considers that Sidgwick's statement "suggests, if it does not imply, that both prudence and benevolence are transcended in the principle of justice, of which they are only the special applications," though benevolence is a larger application of the principle than prudence. "If prudence be made an absolute principle, or co-ordinated with benevolence, it is found to contradict not merely the latter principle, but justice also."

With a reservation respecting the last remark, this treatment of the question can be accepted. It should be remembered that though Sidgwick and his interpreter Professor Seth both regard the maxim of "prudence" as liable to conflict with that of "benevolence," such a conflict is really impossible if the essence of prudence is "impartial concern for all parts (in time) of conscious life". How can impartiality towards life in time conflict with impartiality towards life in space?

Professor Seth recognises—which few others have done—that egoism in Sidgwick's system is powerfully entrenched, and that only by a denial of the morality of this egoism can his system be rendered coherent (see *Mind*, p. 182). These



positions the present writer has tried to establish in the preceding pages.

The following appears, on a final survey, to be the relationship of the three maxims.

(1) They are, for the most part, based upon a highly abstract view of the moral universe; a view expressible in some such form as, "In regarding conscious life we should be impartial". This principle Sidgwick appears to consider as the essence of justice.

(2) One application of this principle may be named, somewhat inaptly, "prudence"; "impartial concern should be had for all parts, whether now or hereafter, of conscious life" . . . (not, of course, *mine* only, but that of all men). It is *just* to be impartial as regards *time*.

(3) A second application of justice may be, again somewhat inaptly, named "benevolence"; "impartial concern should be given for all parts, whether here or there, of conscious life". All egos are, in the abstract, equal in value. It is *just* to be impartial as regards *space*.

Now there is no possible conflict between either of these three principles. Their abstractness saves them.

Only in one place, and there with momentous results, does Sidgwick fall back on a more concrete view. That is in his treatment of egoism.

He drops at one point, as we have seen, his abstract way of regarding mankind, and declares that "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". But this statement contradicts point-blank the principle of equality among egos. The concrete view, the view which takes account of personality, is hopelessly in conflict with the abstract view. But, it may be asked, why should we not add yet another principle to the list? Why not add, "We are concerned with the quality of our *present* existence in a sense, fundamentally important, in which we are not concerned with the quality of future existence"; in other words, why not express in philosophic language the exhortation "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, and seize the passing hour"? This concrete principle would stand opposed to the "prudential" maxim in the same manner as the declaration above quoted stands opposed to the maxim of benevolence. The "square of opposition" would then be complete.

The question is, which attitude, the concrete or the abstract, is the true one?

The neo-Hegelians answer, "The concrete," and for this reason, despite inevitable defects in their

expositions, their treatment of moral problems is perhaps more satisfactory than that of any other group of moralists. The abstract mathematical method of ethics,—the attempt to enunciate maxims which are based upon the uniformity of space and time,—the X, Y, Z, method which puts all personalities on a level and ignores perspective,—can probably never afford a true interpretation of moral facts. In ethics as in metaphysics the mathematical method has had its day.

The concepts of “organism,” “development” and so forth—biological concepts—are far more likely to prove fruitful than the mathematical concepts of unit, space and time. In Sidgwick’s ethics the two kinds of concepts are struggling for the mastery, but the mathematical are uppermost. Among his idealistic opponents the opposite view prevails.

The discussion of Sidgwick’s three famous maxims must now be concluded. There is every reason to believe that he looked upon them as the most valuable positive part of his system, the formal or rational basis for ethical construction. Combined with the material element provided in the fourteenth chapter these maxims were regarded as providing us with rational egoistic hedonism, and rational universalistic hedonism, while the mutual relations of these two systems were left for a final chapter.

The result of the preceding investigation is to show that the three maxims have undoubtedly a solid basis of truth, but that their mutual relations, and the validity of one of the three (egoism), are not exactly such as Sidgwick himself supposed.

#### ADDENDUM.

The present chapter may be concluded with a quotation not without interest in this connection. A writer is expounding Sidgwick's standpoint.

“Besonders leicht seien wir geneigt, uns für ein kleineres, aber gegenwärtiges Angenehmes zu Ungunsten eines grösseren künftigen zu entscheiden. Vor solchen Übereilungen habe uns praktische Weisheit zu schützen. Diese halte uns die beiden Regeln stets klar vor, die die Vernunft gebe. ‘Du sollst nicht eine gegenwärtige kleinere Lust vor einer grösseren künftigen bevorzugen.’ Das sei das eine unserer sittlichen Vernunftgebote, die ganz richtige Regel des Eudämonismus. Daneben gebe es noch ein zweites, das ebenso durch sich selbst einleuchte. ‘Du sollst nicht deine eigne geringere Lust der grösseren eines Mitmenschen vor ziehen.’ Sidgwick vertritt damit den Standpunkt eines utilitaristischen Intuitionismus.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Psychologie des Willens zur Grundlegung der Ethik*, H. Schwartz (Engelmann, Leipzig, 1900).

It is obvious from the above that Sidgwick's work has more than a merely insular interest. When German moralists condescend to quote and discuss English results, those results are probably worthy of some respect.



## CHAPTER VII.

### SIDGWICK AND THE IDEALISTS.

SIDGWICK'S opposition to ethical evolutionists was paralleled by his opposition to another school of thinkers, the Idealistic, Transcendental, Hegelian or Neo-Kantian School<sup>1</sup> which, during the later decades of the nineteenth century attained an importance second only to the evolutionary. The consideration of his relations to these writers may serve to throw some light upon his own views and upon the tendencies in the ethical thought of his time. Considered from the standpoint of moral philosophy, the two most important writers of the school were Green and Bradley, and with these Sidgwick came controversially into collision. Green's Prolegomena is probably the only powerful rival to Sidgwick's Methods for the premier position in modern English ethical literature, while Mr. Bradley's Ethical Studies which appeared in 1876 and his important pamphlet entitled Mr. Sidgwick's Hedonism, which appeared in 1877 (both marked by a brilliance and vivacity which

<sup>1</sup> All these adjectives are more or less unsatisfactory.

Green's work never attained), are also notable as historically prior to the *Prolegomena* and *a fortiori* to the host of minor writings which have recently come from the same school.

The views of Green and Bradley are virtually identical, but in the following exposition of the relations between Sidgwick's system and that of the idealists, Green will be taken as the conciliatory, and Bradley as the bellicose representative of the latter. This may serve to give a personal interest to discussions which are otherwise not always easy to follow. In the first of the following sections an attempt will be made to show the amount of agreement, in the second, the amount of divergence between Sidgwick on the one side and Green and Bradley respectively on the other, while the third section will deal with a few questions not considered in the preceding two.

and how!

### (I) SIDGWICK AND GREEN.

The names of Sidgwick and Green appear likely to go down to posterity as representative names in the sphere of English ethical thought during the latter half of the nineteenth century. This representative character is due to several causes. The two men were almost contemporaries by birth, though Green died in 1882 and Sidgwick eighteen years later. Green was an Oxford man, while

Sidgwick hailed from Cambridge; Oxford, the home of "movements" and "revivals," Cambridge, the home of science and criticism, found in these writers no unworthy types of their spirit and life.<sup>1</sup> Above all, the philosophical oppositions of a thoughtful age seem to have been reflected and focussed in the persons of Sidgwick and Green.

The former, we are told, represented the older and more distinctively "English" school of utilitarianism, the latter the transcendentalist irruption whose beginning is usually dated from the publication in 1865 of the *Secret of Hegel*. The contrast between them thus seems at first sight violent and pronounced.

The following examination will, however, show that, contrary to common opinion, these writers are, throughout a considerable region of ethical thought, in agreement. Led astray by the associations of the words "idealist," "hedonist," and so forth, men of our age have exemplified anew the power of some of those "idols" against which Bacon warned the men of his. The terminology has suggested far-reaching differences of standpoint, and thus underlying agreements have been unnoticed. Moreover, the mutual criticisms in which

<sup>1</sup>Green's grist, as an Oxford don once said, has gone to the Ritualistic mill; Sidgwick's grist was of a more intangible kind, and if to any definite mill, has gone, perhaps, to the sceptical.

the two philosophers engaged have been still more instrumental in conveying an impression of wide divergence. It is no wonder, therefore, that a reader who does not take the trouble to compare attentively the philosophical pronouncements of our two writers, is unable even to suspect the existence of any substantial agreement between them. But it will be found that they present a long series of coincidences of thought and expression, and the inference may therefore be drawn that the state of ethics is, after all, not so chaotic and parlous as is commonly supposed. It is probably true that the science can never make substantial progress so long as only differences of standpoint are emphasised. Now if it be the case that two writers, equally eminent for practical devotion to humanity, clearness of mental vision, and freedom from theological or anti-theological bias, have, after approaching ethics from opposite sides, arrived at similar conclusions on many matters, it is surely right to assume that some progress has been made, and we may infer, in addition, that the progress of the future is likely to be along the line of such agreement. At least there cannot fail to be some service in marshalling side by side the views of two such important moralists as Sidgwick and Green.

(1) Each denies the existence of "psychological

hedonism" as a primary or common fact of life. Men do not necessarily, or even usually, act from mere desire for pleasure *per se*. To call attention to this is not to flog a dead horse, for psychological hedonism still survives in certain philosophical circles.

"It appears to me that throughout the whole scale of my impulses, sensual, emotional, and intellectual alike, I can distinguish desires of which the object is something other than pleasure" (*Methods*, p. 46).

"There are desires, whatever their history, which are not desires for pleasure" (*Prolegomena*, p. 117).

"There are many objects of desire which are not imagined pleasures" (*ibid.*, p. 233).

(2) And yet, though the desire for pleasure is not a primary impulse, it may exist as a secondary or derivative impulse, supplementing the primary desires for objects. On this matter our two writers are followers of Butler, who declared that "self-love and the several particular passions and appetites are in themselves totally different" and yet "the two principles are frequently mixed together, and run up into each other" (Sermon I, note).

"Hunger is frequently and naturally accompanied with anticipation of the pleasure of eating, but careful introspection seems to show that the two are

"It is true that any interest or desire for an object may come to be reinforced by desire for the pleasure which, reflecting upon past analogous ex-



by no means inseparable. And even when they occur together the pleasure seems properly the object not of the primary appetite but of a secondary desire which can be distinguished from the former" (*Methods*, p. 47).

(3) With respect to the relation between the primary desires for objects and the secondary or derivative desire for pleasure, the two philosophers unite in warning us against the undue predominance of the latter. If men would be happy they must not aim too consciously and deliberately at the hedonistic goal. Sidgwick names this fact the "fundamental paradox of hedonism" (p. 49).

"Of our active enjoyments generally . . . it may certainly be said that we cannot attain them, at least in their highest degree, so long as we keep our main conscious aim concentrated upon them" (*Methods*, p. 49).

"The impulse towards pleasure, if too predominant, defeats its own aim" (*Methods*, p. 49).

perience, the subject of the interest may expect as incidental to its satisfaction. In this way 'cool self-love' . . . may combine with 'particular desires or propensions'" (*Prolegomena*, p. 168).

"Just as far as 'cool self-love' in the sense of a calculating pursuit of pleasure becomes dominant and supersedes particular interests, the chances of pleasure are really lost" (*Prolegomena*, p. 168).

"A transfer of (his) interest from (the) objects to (the) pleasure would be its destruction" (*Prolegomena*, p. 251).

(4) "But," an objector may urge, "we have not yet advanced beyond the mere truisms of

ethics." Still, psychological facts, whether truistic or not, are important. However, to advance into more disputed territory :—

"Can pleasure *per se* be an object of thought?"

In answering this question the two authors appear to have crossed swords. Sidgwick answered "Yes,"

→ Green answered "No". But it is important to be sure of what the question means, as the definition of the *summum bonum* will perhaps be found to hang on the answer.

Can we, in thought, abstract pleasure from its conditions, or is it, on the contrary, so deeply imbedded and involved in each concrete pleasurable state, that it cannot be regarded apart from its concomitants? When, for example, we anticipate the pleasurable state which we call "social intercourse," and contrast it with the pleasurable state which we call "athletic exercise," is it really possible for us to abstract in thought from the concrete states the feeling element, the "pleasure *per se*" as we may call it, and compare the two amounts? Or is each of the concrete states so definitely an organic whole that such abstraction is impossible?

As said above, Sidgwick and Green appear at first sight to have taken opposite sides on this question. But on careful examination of their statements an astonishing amount of agreement

between them will be discovered ; each makes such concessions to the other view that in the result all serious divergence is absent.

Green affirms that "pleasure as feeling, in distinction from its conditions which are not feelings, cannot be conceived". To this Sidgwick replies with some force that though an angle cannot be "conceived" apart from sides, yet we can without difficulty compare the magnitudes of different angles and yet make no explicit reference to the sides. In the same way we can, by a process of abstraction, compare the pleasurable-ness of two states without considering the other factors. But he concedes that this process of abstraction and comparison is not possible "to the extent which hedonists sometimes seem to assume as normal".

Continuing his reply to Green, he proceeds as follows :—

"It seems sufficient to answer that in several parts of this very treatise (the *Prolegomena to Ethics*) arguments respecting pleasure are carried on which are only intelligible if this distinction between pleasure and the facts conditioning it is thoroughly grasped and steadily contemplated by the understanding : and we may add that the distinction is carried by Green to a degree of subtlety far beyond that which ordinary hedonism requires, as (*e.g.*), when 'pleasure' is distinguished

from the 'satisfaction' involved in the consciousness of attainment. Nor are these arguments merely critical and negative in respect of the possibility of measuring pleasure: we find for instance that Green has no doubt that certain measures 'needed in order to supply conditions favourable to good character, tend also to make life *more pleasant on the whole*'; and again that 'it is easy to show that an overbalance of pain would on the whole result to those capable of being affected by it' from the neglect of certain duties. In these cases it would seem that pleasure and pain, in distinction from the facts conditioning them, being conceived capable—in whatever degree—of quantitative measurement, cannot but be 'objects of the understanding' (*Methods*, p. 130, fifth edition, note; in the sixth edition see pp. 132-33).

Here, doubtless, Sidgwick is verbally victorious. In the *Prolegomena to Ethics* we find many expressions with a distinctly hedonistic sound. Not only does Green reiterate that man's conduct is directed to "self-satisfaction"—a phrase which a hedonist can easily interpret as meaning "pleasure";—not only does he speak of "a pleasure-seeking tendency" by which we are "really affected" (p. 254), and of "self-sophistications born of the pleasure-seeking impulse" (p. 350), but he even admits, now and then, that pleasures are capable of quantitative



comparison. The truth of the whole matter seems to be (and here the two writers are in full agreement) that though normally, as Green time after time points out, the pleasurable-ness of a conscious state is so embedded in the state that it cannot be completely abstracted in thought, yet this pleasurable-ness can in a rough sort of manner be estimated, and compared with the pleasurable-ness of another concrete state. Still, the comparison is difficult, artificial and incapable of scientific exactness.

“When,” says Sidgwick, “I reflect on my pleasures and pains and endeavour to compare them in respect of intensity, it is only to a very limited extent that I can obtain clear and definite results from such comparisons” (*Methods*, pp. 142-43).

Thus the mutual concessions of our two authors have resulted in almost perfect agreement.

This discussion has an important bearing on the question of the nature of the *summum bonum*.

(5) Connected with the question just discussed is another “Can pleasures be summed?” Rather it might be said this question is the last one under another form, for if pleasure be no object of thought and cannot be quantitatively estimated, any process of summation is obviously impossible. If, on the other hand, it is admitted that though



mathematical exactness is here not to be expected, the pleasure-values of different conscious states differ in intensity and duration, it is hard to deny that a conceptual process of summation of a rough sort is possible.

Though Green denies at one moment the possibility of such a summation, he admits, at another, everything that the hedonist can reasonably ask.

He tells us, that though a series of pleasant feelings cannot be enjoyed or imagined *en bloc* yet they can be "added together in thought, though not," he continues, "in enjoyment or in imagination of enjoyment" (p. 236). "Undoubtedly a man may think of himself as enjoying many pleasures in succession, may desire their successive enjoyment, and, reflecting on his desire, esteem the enjoyment a good" (p. 243).

Again he says: "Desire for a sum or series of pleasures is only possible so far as upon sundry desires each excited by imagination of a particular pleasure, there supervenes in a man a desire not excited by any such imagination, a desire for self-satisfaction . . . a desire to satisfy himself in their successive enjoyment" (p. 236).

In admitting all this and yet denying that pleasures can be summed Green appears as over-subtle. His contention, obscurely expressed, ap-

pears to be that a passing succession or sum of feelings is devoid of unity or wholeness. "To say that ultimate good is a greatest possible sum of pleasures . . . is to say that it is an end which for ever recedes; which is not only unattainable but from the nature of the case can never be more nearly approached" (p. 401). But the hedonist is not disturbed in the least by such a contention, especially when Green himself puts forward a *summum bonum* open *prima facie* to the same objections; perfection surely cannot be attained at a leap. The real truth underlying Green's clumsily expressed doctrine that "pleasures cannot be summed" is that in pleasure taken by itself there is no principle of development: that the pleasure of to-day is not improved or aided by the pleasure of yesterday; the two could be reversed in time without detriment. This is not true of two similar acts done conscientiously at different times. The one operates upon the nature of the other. "We prepare ourselves for sudden deeds" says George Eliot, "by the reiterated choice of good or evil, that gradually determines character." The same idea is expressed by Herbart in his doctrine of the "Memory of the Will". In other words, to reverse in time the places of two virtuous acts would involve all the difference between progress and retrogression, while to reverse the places

of two "doses" (so to speak) of pleasure would be a matter of indifference. The concept of progress is alien to pure hedonism. Hedonism is *atomic* rather than *organic*.

The conclusion, then, is that though Green maintains officially that "pleasures cannot be summed," he makes such concessions to the opposite side as to deprive his contention of much of its logical value. Pleasures can in a rough and inexact manner be "added together in thought"; this he admits, and this admission is enough for the hedonist. Sidgwick is therefore right in dismissing Green's criticism as not pertinent. "I cannot see," he says, "that the possibility of realising the hedonistic end is at all affected by the necessity of realising it in successive parts." The whole question probably lies deeper. Can "mere feeling" constitute the *summum bonum*? Green's answer to this question was, perhaps, his most important achievement, and having answered it in the negative, it was not worth time and trouble to discuss with his opponents whether mere pleasure can be treated quantitatively. Once a hedonist has so far lost touch with reality as to worship the phantom of "pleasure *per se*," he will not scruple to talk of "summation" and "*maxima*" especially when the redoubtable opponent of hedonism gives away, in unguarded moments, his own entire case.

(6) We pass on to the much-debated question of the so-called "quality" of pleasures. Is the judgment of common sense valid that certain pleasures are "low" or "coarse," and others "high" or "refined". Now "a pleasure" is really a complex state involving conative and cognitive as well as feeling elements. When, therefore, we speak of an "elevated pleasure," does the elevation pertain to the affective or to the other factors? Is it the *pleasurableness* that is higher in quality? Both our writers answer the question in the negative, and in almost the same language.

"When one kind of pleasure is judged to be qualitatively superior to another although less pleasant, it is not really the feeling itself that is preferred, but something in the objective conditions under which it arises" (*Methods*, p. 129. Italics ours).

"No one can doubt that pleasures admit of distinctions in quality according to the conditions under which they arise" (*Prolegomena*, p. 169. Italics ours).

*implies summum bonum not exclusively composed of pleasure - ?*

Coming from Sidgwick this admission is remarkable, as exemplifying anew the difficulty of considering pleasure *per se*. Here, as he admits, is an important practical judgment directed not towards the mere pleasurableness of a state, but towards its non-hedonistic conditions. Yet when he comes to discuss the nature of the *summum bonum* he has to turn his back upon this admission. "Mere pleasure" is elevated to the highest ethical



throne ; its various objective conditions are ignored, and, as a consequence, all distinctions of quality vanish. "Pushpin is as good as poetry."<sup>1</sup>

Many critics would regard this as an inconsistency in his thought. Whatever *summum bonum* be adopted it ought not, they would say, to do serious violence to common notions. If "quality of pleasures" is an essential element in the moral judgments of common sense, it cannot be safely disregarded in framing a conception of the highest good. And yet to admit quality is really to be faithless to the pleasure theory. Sidgwick, rightly or wrongly, preferred to run the risk of opposition to common sense rather than to sacrifice hedonism.<sup>2</sup> Thus, despite the unrivalled excellence of his psychological analysis of moral notions, his *summum bonum* stands aloof from the results thus attained ;

<sup>1</sup>The hedonistic justification of "quality" of pleasures is, of course, that the "refined" pleasures are more lasting, less liable to painful concomitants or after-effects, etc. But it is a question whether this is not a strained interpretation of the judgment of common sense. Common sense feels that there is something more in the fact than this explanation allows.

<sup>2</sup>Contrast the two following statements :—

"The philosopher seeks unity of principle and consistency of method at the risk of paradox" (Sidgwick, *Methods*, p. 6).

"Never, except on a misunderstanding, has the moral consciousness in any case acquiesced in hedonism" (Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, p. 81).



while in Green's treatise, despite the laxity of its terminology, the wearisomeness of its iterations, and the artificiality of many of its distinctions, we have really a closer approximation of theory to fact.

(7) Hedonism seems fated by some evil providence to provide the world with bad psychology ; how otherwise are we to explain the fact that hedonistic writers have so often assumed the intensity of a desire to be proportional to the pleasure of its satisfaction? It is surely one of the commonest experiences of life that powerful desires may, when gratified, yield quite disproportionate pleasure, while on the other hand we have many "pleasant surprises" following upon no desire whatever. Only by a confusion can psychological hedonists justify their claim that men normally seek the greatest pleasure. Their case can, to some extent, be rendered more plausible by taking into consideration the pain of baffled desire, but even then there is ample evidence that this pain is not proportional to the desire ; as Sidgwick says : "Desire and aversion may be intense without being distinctly either pleasurable or painful. . . . In any case. . . . they are certainly not painful in proportion to their intensity" (p. 185, note, fifth edition). The truth seems to be that our whole

hierarchy of impulses is constructed on a plan which, for a hedonist, would appear clumsy in the extreme. Like a famous King of Portugal, hedonists must feel that if present at creation they could have given Providence a few good hints. This want of correspondence between impulse and resultant pleasure is admitted by both our writers, though the admission is far more significant in the case of Sidgwick than in that of Green.

“It seems to me that exciting pleasures are liable to exercise, even when actually felt, a volitional stimulus out of proportion to their intensity as pleasures” (*Methods*, p. 127).

— “Sympathy . . . may cause impulses to altruistic action of which the force is quite out of proportion to the sympathetic pleasure (or relief from pain) which such action seems likely to secure to the agent” (*Methods*, p. 497, note).

“Our common experience is that the objects with which we seek to satisfy ourselves do not turn out capable of satisfying us” (*Prolegomena*, p. 165).

(8) Psychological hedonism is thus rejected by both of our writers, though each would admit that pleasure of a sort arises from the realisation of desire. But psychological hedonism is a pertinacious foe. Driven from one of its strongholds in the ambiguities of the word “pleasure,” it often takes refuge in a still more inaccessible region, that

→ of the moral feelings. Even the martyr at the stake, we are told, and the Crucified on the cross were, after all, hedonists, for to choose any other course than those which they pursued would have subjected them to the tortures of a discontented conscience. In other words genuine self-renunciation has no existence in the system of the psychological hedonist.

The question here raised is not only one of subtlety but one of fundamental importance. We must not cast aside, without extremely cogent reasons, the convictions of common sense and the asseverations of the world's highest moral consciousness. Is psychological hedonism really right in holding that the voluptuary and the martyr are distinguishable only by incidentals and not by essentials?

It is clear that Sidgwick found this problem an unusually difficult one, for he gives us no very emphatic pronouncement upon it. It may, indeed, be admitted that human motives, notably the motives of those persons whom he describes as possessed of "especially refined moral susceptibilities," are so complex and subtle, that exact analysis, even in one's own case, is extremely difficult. The interplay of the forces of egoism and altruism (to use a misleading mechanical metaphor) baffles the keenest self-inquisitor.



But it may here be objected *in limine* that Sidgwick, being a utilitarian, must necessarily have maintained the ethical duty of occasional self-sacrifice. If the moral man is called upon to work for the "greatest happiness of the greatest number," he must, at times, sacrifice his own. This, however, is not the point here under discussion. We are now dealing only with the psychological nature of supposed self-sacrifice, not with the ethical demand for self-sacrifice. The question is not "Ought a man ever to sacrifice himself?" but "When a man thinks he is sacrificing himself is his sacrifice ultimately real? Does he not get a subtle compensation in the form of the pleasure of a good conscience?"

The tendency of Sidgwick's thought was in the direction of admitting self-sacrifice to be a reality and not a delusion, and the same may be said of Green.

"Most men are so constituted as to feel far more keenly pleasures (and pains) arising from some other source than their conscience" (*Methods*, p. 175).

"The character and activity of the altruistic enthusiast, under ordinary conditions of temperament and circumstance, is not preponderatingly pleasure-giving to the agent himself" (*Prolegomena*, p. 299).

If so, then apparent cases of self-sacrifice are, for most men, real and not illusory.

“A man who embraces the principle of rational egoism cuts himself off from the special pleasure that attends (this) absolute sacrifice and suppression of self. But however exquisite this may be, the pitch of emotional exaltation and refinement necessary to attain it is comparatively so rare that it is scarcely included in men’s common estimate of happiness” (*Methods*, p. 138).

“We perhaps admire as virtuous a man who gives up his own happiness for another’s sake, even when the happiness that he confers is clearly less than that which he resigns” (*Methods*, pp. 431-32).

“It does not follow . . . that he (the man animated by the desire for goodness) would not have had more enjoyment on the whole if the dominant desire had been different, and if he had been free to take his fill of the innocent pleasures from which it has withheld him. According to all appearances and any fair interpretation of them, he certainly would have had more” (*Prolegomena*, p. 298).

Sidgwick, then, seems to allow of the possible existence of absolute self-renunciation, though as a comparatively rare phenomenon. Some readers may perhaps read an undertone of scepticism in his references to this subject, but on the whole they appear to represent the *bonâ fide* convictions of a cautious mind. If this interpretation be correct it provides a new indication of how far he had departed from the traditions of “psychological hedonism”. “Apparent self-sacrifice” would be admitted by most moralists to exist; many would



go farther and declare that what appears as self-sacrifice is, at times, morally demanded. Sidgwick makes it clear that this self-sacrifice may be real and not only apparent: that even the rewards of conscience may not suffice to balance the loss of happiness incurred by the self-sacrificer.

Thus the last card of psychological hedonism has been played. The "internal sanction" equally with the "external" (as found in terrestrial society) is an inadequate sanction for duty.

What of Green? Strange to say the "idealist" is, at this point, as difficult to interpret as the "hedonist". Green's constant stress upon "self-realisation" has suggested to many of his critics that he was really an upholder of a subtle form of egoistic hedonism, and the charge cannot be altogether dismissed as unfounded. However, in one fairly explicit part of the *Prolegomena* (quoted above) we are told that the higher life may involve loss of pleasure on the whole. Doubtless the "internal sanction" is a somewhat disturbing and incalculable factor, ever diminishing the intensity of self-sacrifice, and always suggesting to hedonists the possibility that any apparent self-renunciation is, in a subtle way, merely a form of self-seeking. Both of our writers speak with caution, but their final conclusions appear to be much the same; the "internal sanction" being.

as a rule, comparatively weak, self-sacrifice may be real and not merely apparent.

(9) Connected with this question of self-sacrifice is a wider and more far-reaching one. Time was when ethical discussions were pervaded by a more or less flashy optimism such as we find in the works of Shaftesbury, in Butler's first sermon on Human Nature, in the *Essay on Man*, and in its prototype the *Théodicée*. Virtue was an infallible passport to maximum pleasure. Everything *must* be right. We live in the best of all possible worlds.

No thinking man can, at the present day, accept this sanguine view without some reserve and hesitation. The existence of a definite school of philosophical pessimists, and the discovery of the principle of natural selection with all that is involved in that principle, have, between them, made us less dogmatic, less positive, less cheerfully confident, and more willing to think out ethical problems without making assumptions as to ultimate destinies. It is a remarkable fact that both of our writers sound at this point a note of philosophical caution and scepticism. Sidgwick, indeed, admits in his last chapter (perhaps the most remarkable in his book) that ethics contains, *prima facie*, a fundamental contradiction. Egoism and

utilitarianism, duty to self and duty to others, may, at times, conflict; and in such cases of conflict (pure) ethics stands powerless. The dutiful man cannot be sure that his dutifulness will always bring its reward, or his self-sacrifice a compensation.

One hypothesis only, says the philosopher, will remove this possible conflict of principles, the hypothesis of a Divine and Rewarding Providence; yet that hypothesis lies beyond the sphere of pure ethics and is not capable of very clear demonstration. He brushes aside the ultimate theological problem, not of course as unimportant, but as virtually insoluble. How serious a matter this is for pure hedonism need scarcely be pointed out. To any philosopher who interprets the *summum bonum* in terms of pleasure, the pessimistic doubt is disintegrating and fatal.

The whole system of our beliefs as to the intrinsic reasonableness of conduct must fall, without a hypothesis unverifiable by experience reconciling the individual with the universal reason, without the belief in some form or other, that the moral order which we see imperfectly realised in this actual world is yet actually perfect. If we reject this belief . . . the cosmos of duty is really

“ We may speculate, indeed, on the possibility of a state of things in which the most entire devotion to the service of mankind shall be compatible with the widest experience of pleasure on the part of the devoted person. . . . All speculation of this kind, however, provokes much counter speculation. . . . It may very well be that the desire for human perfection

pure-abstract?

reduced to a chaos : and the . . . may never be destined to prolonged effort of the human carry men, even in its fullest intellect to frame a perfect ideal satisfaction, into a state of pure of rational conduct is seen to enjoyment, or into one in which they will be exempt have been foredoomed to in- from large demands for the rejection of possible pleasure” evitable failure” (last words of the first edition of the *Methods*). (*Prolegomena*, pp. 297-98).

“ I am not myself an optimist,” repeated Sidgwick towards the close of his life.<sup>1</sup> Green might have echoed the words, if by “ optimist ” were meant one who believes, as Spencer does, that the human race is moving towards a goal of pleasure unalloyed with pain. Pain must be assumed to have its meaning, and cannot be brushed aside as a transitory shadow upon the moral universe. No philosophy can claim to have fully explained or justified its existence, but philosophies certainly differ in the degrees of success with which they appropriate this eternal fact. For hedonism it is a terribly severe stumbling-block ; for perfectionism it is far less severe ; in a dim sort of way the perfectionist can see that pain has sometimes, if not always, a character-building function, and that either the sufferer or the sufferer’s friends may be morally strengthened by its presence. Most or all of the moral virtues would lose their place and meaning if a condition of unalloyed or even predominant

<sup>1</sup> *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. x., p. 19.



bliss prevailed ; self-denial and benevolence, for example, would be evaporated away. Perfectionism, we may truly say, fits in far better with actual moral phenomena than hedonism can ever do. This may not be an insuperable obstacle to the latter doctrine ; the philosopher may (to use Sidgwick's important and oft-quoted words) "seek unity of principle at the risk of paradox". Still, the more serious the conflict between a moral theory and common moral facts, the more pressing should be the demand for rigorous proof of the former.

To sum up. The problem of pain (and pessimism) is, at first glance, the same for each of our two writers. But on reflection we see that its seriousness is far greater for the hedonist than for the perfectionist. To Sidgwick it suggested a message of philosophic despair. The good man, dutiful, self-sacrificing, daily losing pleasure, has no secure place in the hedonistic universe ; hence arises an imperious demand for a future life to compensate for the ills of this. To Green, who steadfastly refused to accept mere pleasure as an ultimate good, the problem raised by pessimism was of less fundamental importance. To him the perfection of man, the development of human capabilities, was the *summum bonum*, a happy state, doubtless, yet not necessarily a state of intense, or constant, or unalloyed pleasure. Pain was not, on



his view, necessarily an evil, nor pleasure necessarily a good, nor the preponderance of pleasure over pain the *summum bonum*. Hence, whatever vagueness may, rightly or wrongly, be brought as a charge against "idealism," the latter system certainly avoids somewhat better than hedonism the difficulty of facing the doubt whether, perchance, the universe is not out of conformity with hedonistic principles. Whatever difficulties may confront the advocates of a perfectionistic standard, they are small compared with those which face hedonists when ultimate problems appear on the scene.

(10) Another matter. "Surely," it may be said, "the doctrine of a 'self-conditioning and self-distinguishing consciousness' upon which Green loves to dwell and which, indeed, he takes as the basis of his system, is a doctrine foreign to Sidgwick's thought. Here surely there is opposition, or at least contrast."

Not at all! Superficially there certainly is a contrast. "Self-consciousness" is a rare word in the *Methods of Ethics*, while it appears on almost every page of the *Prolegomena*. But Sidgwick was, after all, too keen an introspectionist to fall headlong into Hume's error by denying the fundamental fact upon which Green laid such emphasis. Here and there, indeed, he affirms the moral importance

of "self-consciousness" in words which might be interchanged with those of Green.

Thus, after admitting in his chapter on the will, that our conviction of freedom *may* be illusory, he proceeds as follows:—

"I cannot conceive myself seeing this, without at the same time conceiving my whole conception of what I now call my action fundamentally altered. I cannot conceive that if I contemplated the actions of my organism in this light I should refer them to my 'self,' *i.e.*, to the mind so contemplating" (*Methods*, p. 66).

Compare the following:—

"In the case of such volitions as are pre-eminently the objects of moral condemnation and approbation, the psychical fact 'volition' seems to include—besides intention or representation of the results of action—also the consciousness of self as choosing, resolving, determining these results" (*Methods*, p. 61).

"A want only becomes a motive so far as upon the want there supervenes the presentation of the want by a self-conscious subject to himself" (*Prolegomena*, pp. 93-94).

Nay, even in the smaller details of expression we find an agreement. The "identification" of self with a desired object (a phrase we are wont to regard as Green's own) is found in the *Methods*.

“All our impulses high and low, sensual and moral alike, are so far similarly related to self, that . . . we tend to identify ourselves with each as it arises” (*Methods*, pp. 90-91).

“The ego identifies itself with some desire, and sets itself to bring into real existence the ideal object, of which the consciousness is involved in the desire” (*Prolegomena*, p. 106).

And the *Methods of Ethics* is not the only place in which we find Sidgwick, incidentally, no doubt, yet emphatically, laying stress upon self-consciousness.

“I admit the proposition that self-consciousness ‘must be able to accompany all my *Vorstellungen*’ as one of which reflection shows the contradictory to be inconceivable. I cannot conceive a feeling, thought or volition, as mine without conceiving it as referred to a permanent, identical self” (“A Criticism of the Critical Philosophy,” *Mind*, 1883, p. 326).

(11) The moment self-consciousness is admitted as an important and fundamental fact a whole series of questions is suggested. Thus, we are led at once to ask whether the “scientific” or “naturalistic” interpretation of mental and moral facts is adequate. Can the universe be explained from below? Can psychical life be built up out of mental atoms united by association? Can the course of past events give us a moral standard; can the *is* give us an *ought*; can moral effort be

explained (or explained away) by the course of naturalistic evolution? Or, as an alternative, must we explain many, if not all facts, from above, from the standpoint of self-consciousness and knowledge?

Both of our writers accepted the second alternative. Neither denied importance of the doctrine of evolution, but both refused to allow the intellectual and moral life of man to be swamped by the advance of purely naturalistic ideas. This fact is perhaps most obvious in the case of Green; the whole of the first book of the *Prolegomena* is a laboured protest against the attempt to explain naturalistically the fact of *knowledge*. "Can the knowledge of nature be itself a part or product of nature?" he asks, and his answer is an emphatic negative. The later books of the *Prolegomena* are a still more elaborate defence of the facts of the *moral* life against similar attacks, and the result of the inquiries they contain is that morality involves a "non-natural" principle of self-consciousness, a principle which is not capable of being explained by the facts of inorganic or merely sentient nature. Quotations from the *Prolegomena* are here unnecessary. The most superficial reading of that work is sufficient to confirm the above statements relative to its tenor.

Scarcely less vigorous is Sidgwick's defence of



psychical life. One of the most characteristic features of his philosophy is its protest against evolutionary attempts to explain moral facts and judgments as mere results of non-moral laws. The moral, he held, cannot be produced out of the non-moral. "The theory of evolution . . . has little or no bearing on ethics" (*Mind*, 1876, p. 52, *et seq.*).

"Ultimate ends are not, as such, phenomena, or laws or conditions of phenomena. . . . How can an inquiry into the history of our beliefs affect our view of their truth or falsehood? . . . The historian<sup>1</sup> who pronounces on the 'relative truth' of any current beliefs, implicitly claims to know the really valid practical principles partially hidden from the holders of such beliefs: and my point is that the study of the historical sequence of beliefs cannot by itself give him this knowledge"<sup>2</sup> (*Mind*, 1886, p. 217). "I cannot see how the mere ascertainment that certain apparently self-evident judgments have been caused in known and determinate ways, can be in itself a valid ground for distrusting this class of apparent cognitions. . . . No general demonstration of the derivedness or developedness of our moral faculty can supply an

<sup>1</sup> Or, of course, the evolutionist.

<sup>2</sup> As Green would say, "Can the knowledge of nature be itself a part or product of nature?"



adequate reason for distrusting it" (*Methods*, pp. 212-13).

Green and Sidgwick are thus at one in defending the claims of self-consciousness against the assaults of overenthusiastic adherents of the historical and evolutionary schools. Truth is truth, and right is right; the *dicta* of self-consciousness cannot be sublated except by falling back upon some other *dicta* from the same source. We must stop somewhere; something must be taken for granted; self-consciousness and its intuitions constitute the final court of appeal to which even history and evolution have to be brought.

Of the two philosophers Green laid the greater stress upon history and evolution, but neither was willing to abnegate the claims of the self to the paramount position in thought and morality.

(12) There is some temptation to carry out the comparison between the two writers still further. It might be shown that on the free-will question there is perhaps, in the long run, a good deal of agreement between them. Green's emphasis on "free will" has lulled no careful readers into forgetfulness of the real determinism of the *Prolegomena*. Green's protest was not against determinism, but against mechanical determinism, the view which explains human action by the categories

of force, resultant, etc. ; *self-consciousness* is so unique a fact that such categories as these become meaningless when applied to its operations. But if "free" means "chaotic" or "unaccountable" then, according to Green, the self is not free. "The action is as necessarily related to the character and circumstances as any event to the sum of its conditions" <sup>1</sup> (*Prolegomena*, p. 112).

Spiritual determinism is probably all that morality and common sense require ; for Bradley has turned the tables upon libertarians and shown <sup>2</sup> that common sense is, to some extent, on the deterministic side, and not so entirely devoted to libertarianism as is sometimes supposed. Sidgwick's discussion of the question, though different in form from Green's, is perhaps much the same in result.<sup>3</sup> Determinism, he tells us, has a strong case, but self-consciousness, including the consciousness of freedom, are facts which on his view cannot be got rid of. Combining <sup>4</sup> the two results we should

<sup>1</sup> Similarly Bradley (*Ethical Studies*, p. 20), "Though I consider the phrase 'result' inaccurate and here misleading, I do not deny that the character of a man does follow, as a result, from his natural endowment together with his environment".

<sup>2</sup> *Ethical Studies*, Essay I.

<sup>3</sup> See, however, what follows below.

<sup>4</sup> Sidgwick kept the two standpoints apart, and never effected the combination above mentioned. Still the result of such a combination would probably be as above indicated.

arrive at a spiritual determinism not unlike that of Green, a determinism shorn of many of its terrors, but apparently not yet satisfactory to libertarians.<sup>1</sup> Whether ultimately satisfactory or not, this theory certainly marks an advance beyond the crude standpoints of two opposed views, both (alas!) still influential; the view of the popular theologian with his chaotic principle of libertarianism according to which "you are 'accountable' because you are a wholly 'unaccountable' creature";<sup>2</sup> and the view of the materialist with his principle of blind fatalism.<sup>3</sup>

(13) One might go farther and call attention to the very considerable amount of agreement shown by our two writers on such matters as the object of moral judgment (motives or intentions?);<sup>4</sup> the existence of wilful wrong-doing (the denial of which runs through many systems from

<sup>1</sup> Seth's *Ethical Principles*, p. 391.

<sup>2</sup> Bradley's *Ethical Studies*, p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Sorley is unable to accept the above statement as to the relations of Sidgwick and Green on the free-will question. While, on his view, Green maintains a spiritualistic determinism, Sidgwick, when speaking with his libertarian voice, maintains a form of absolute indeterminism. This, no doubt, is true; but all that the present writer is concerned to show is that if Sidgwick had chosen to synthesise his two views he must have arrived at a position not unlike Green's. This, of course, he never did.

<sup>4</sup> Compare *Prolegomena*, pp. 318-22, and *Methods*, p. 204, *et passim*.

that of Socrates onwards);<sup>1</sup> and the function of reason as more than ancillary (compare Sidgwick's statement that reason gives an impulse or motive to action with Green's statement that reason has the initiative in the bettering of life).<sup>2</sup>

Compare in like manner the two following statements in both of which the influence of Kant is noticeable :—

“Whatever action any of us judges to be right for himself he implicitly judges to be right for all similar persons in similar circumstances” (*Methods*, p. 379).

“The ‘better reason’ which presents itself to him as a law for himself will present itself to him as equally a law for them ; and as a law for them on the same ground and in the same sense as it is a law for him” (*Prolegomena*, p. 213).

## (2) SIDGWICK AND BRADLEY.

It is interesting to note that within a year of the time when Bain<sup>3</sup> was expressing an enthusiastic approval of the *Methods of Ethics*, praising its “logical rigour,” and challenging critics to detect a fallacy in its pages, Mr. Bradley had accused Sidgwick of *petitio principii* and *ignoratio elenchi*, had declared the *Methods* to be an “ob-

<sup>1</sup> Compare *Prolegomena*, p. 185, and *Methods*, p. 59, and *Practical Ethics* (“Unreasonable Action”).

<sup>2</sup> *Methods*, p. 36 ; *Prolegomena*, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> *Mind*, 1876, p. 177.



scure" work, "not easy to understand," and had apologised for the length of his own criticism<sup>1</sup> on the ground that it was "hard to discuss a man's opinions when you do not know what they are".

Rumour may often be a lying jade, but there is no reason why we should in this case refuse credence to her testimony that no criticism ever passed upon the *Methods* roused so deep a feeling in its author as Bradley's pamphlet.<sup>2</sup>

The controversy began with a brief criticism of the *Methods* inserted at the end of the third chapter of *Ethical Studies*. Sidgwick responded with a criticism of the latter work,<sup>3</sup> Bradley replied,<sup>4</sup> and Sidgwick again followed.<sup>5</sup> But skirmishes gave place to more serious work when Bradley wrote the pamphlet entitled *Mr. Sidgwick's Hedonism*, an elaborate and violent attack upon Sidgwick's leading principles; its undoubted ability is however marred by an almost complete refusal to recognise the undoubted merits of the *Methods of Ethics*. No reply was ever made to

<sup>1</sup> *Mr. Sidgwick's Hedonism* (pub. H. S. King).

<sup>2</sup> Sidgwick himself was not remiss, during the earlier stages of the controversy, in responding to Mr. Bradley's slap-dash methods. *Ethical Studies* abounds in "debating-club rhetoric" and in "uncritical dogmatism".

<sup>3</sup> *Mind*, 1876, p. 545.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1877, p. 122.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1877, p. 125.



this pamphlet, and though there are signs that it influenced later editions of his work, Sidgwick's only reference to it (preface to the second edition, p. xi.) ignores its title and its author.

So important is this criticism for a right understanding of the controversies between the utilitarian and idealistic schools, that the writer has preferred to summarise it here and now instead of relegating it to the last chapter.

(1) The word "reason" is used in the *Methods of Ethics* ambiguously. It appears to have a narrower meaning (faculty of apprehending *universal truth*) and a wider (faculty of cognising *objective truth*); in the latter use it is analogous to perception of particular objects. But how far is the latter process "potentially universal"? Does reason really apprehend the individual or only the general?

(2) "The moral reason is a spring of action." What does this mean? How does an intellectual apprehension pass over into action? Is there need of some adventitious desire to make reason practical? If so, is reason a "spring of action" at all? The difficulties which surround the Kantian dualism of reason and feeling are here apparent.

(3) Mill's confusion between the "desirable" as equivalent to "desired," and the "desirable" as equivalent to "that which we ought to desire"

appears again, though it is more veiled, in Sidgwick's pages; he thus repeats Mill's "*audacious petitio principii*". Sidgwick's argument runs somewhat as follows:—

(a) Pleasure is "feeling that is desirable considered merely as feeling" (here "desirable" strictly means only "desired"). But (b) the good is "desirable" (what "ought to be desired"); (c) hence pleasure is the good. Sidgwick has in (a) illegitimately and implicitly introduced the idea of "oughtness" which, as applied to pleasure, is the very thing he had to prove. He never clearly distinguishes between the two meanings of "desirable,"<sup>1</sup> hence this word "can pass either for pleasant or good and so is a ready means of identifying these terms".

(4) There is another confusion; "pleasure" is sometimes identified with "most pleasant consciousness" or "desirable conscious life," at other times with a mere feeling or quality of a feeling; hence an *ignoratio elenchi*. Sidgwick ought to prove that mere pleasure or agreeable feeling is the ultimate good; he actually proves this of "desirable conscious life". Many non-hedonists would be willing to accept "desirable conscious life," for this must include thought and action

<sup>1</sup> Sidgwick replied that he was quite aware of the distinction at the time he wrote the first edition (see p. 388).

as well as feeling. The phrase "desirable conscious life" as used by Sidgwick involves both a *petitio principii* (in the word "desirable") and an *ignoratio elenchi* (in the phrase "conscious life"). The moral is "that a good definition saves argument".

(5) The hedonistic end,<sup>1</sup> "the sum of pleasures valued in proportion to their pleasantness," assumes that the "calculus" is possible; in reality, as Sidgwick himself shows in certain parts of his treatise, it is impossible.

(6) The phrase "greatest sum" is utterly ambiguous. The good must be a whole, not an aggregate. (a) If by the "greatest sum" we mean an infinite quantity, this is a self-contradictory idea, and stands for something unrealisable; how can we approximate to an endless sum? (b) If by the "greatest sum" we mean a finite series, then this is attainable, but only at death; and when we further apply the motion to all humanity greater difficulties arise. (c) If by the "greatest sum" we mean a co-existing aggregate, our end will be that at any time the sentient world may be having the greatest possible quantity of happiness. But what does "greatest possible"

<sup>1</sup>In an appendix Bradley emphasises the point that the question is not whether we can aim at the hedonistic end but whether we can get it.

mean? Apparently it means "greatest possible under all the conditions," one of the conditions being that our energy is directed towards increase of happiness. If then we suppose that at a given period of the world's history energy has been so far as was possible directed towards gaining pleasure, then the *summum bonum* is now realised however small the surplus of pleasure. Every failure to get perfect happiness is so much vice in oneself or others. If all had done and did their duty we should all be perfectly happy even though there might be only a small surplus of pleasure over pain. (d) It will not do to take mere *increase* of pleasure as the end. (e) Again if we admit "freewill" (as Sidgwick appears to do) further difficulties face us; an element of chance enters; we can never tell what is the "greatest possible". In short, "if our author has ever asked himself the meaning of 'the sum' he has at present not imparted his answer to the public".

→ (7) Again, how can the greatest sum be a "real end of reason"? Does reason give merely the abstraction of pleasure in general, or in addition the notions of "amount" and "others"? What exactly does reason give? Apparently the "objectivity" of the end means its abstractedness; we strip from it all reference to any one person and



it thus becomes a pursuit of no one in particular and that means, somehow, what is imperative on all alike!

(8) All may admit that ultimate good must enter somehow into relation to consciousness.

But is pleasantness really the end? Sidgwick answers this in the affirmative; objective relations (truth, etc.) are not intrinsically desirable.

But, says our critic, this does not prove that pleasantness only is the end. Because A is not desirable without B we have no right to say that B by itself is desirable. *Pleasure may be a factor in the summum bonum and yet not be the only thing good.* "The thesis to be proved is that mere pleasure is the end. Mr. Sidgwick writes 'conscious life' for pleasure and adds 'desirable' (which means end) to the definition. The crowning phrase 'desirable conscious life' combines *petitio principii* and *ignoratio elenchi*." ✓

(9) Sidgwick's supposition of a single sentient conscious being in the universe<sup>1</sup> who decides that nothing can be ultimately "good" except his own happiness is not to the point. (a) The supposition is an impossible one. (b) The end for all need not be a multiple of the end for an isolated unit. (c) "good" which is "objective" would be impossible with only one individual. (d) So far as our im-

<sup>1</sup> A supposition omitted from later editions of the *Methods*.



agination can picture the unit in isolation, pleasure is not obviously the absolutely good for such a unit. "It does not appear to me that the pleasantness, in its abstraction, is even *an end*."

Given maintenance or heightening of function on one side with the same or less pleasure; given on the other side lowering of function with the same or more pleasure, which *ought* you to take? If what we call progress entailed increase of pain *ought* we to progress? Bradley says "Yes"; Hedonism fails if "Yes" is the answer. *But in reality the separation is illegitimate; our end is virtue + pleasure. To say, Function is the end, is by no means to say, Pleasure is not good. Life without pleasure is inconceivable.*

(10) Hence Sidgwick's argument that there is a latent hedonism in common morality is not to the point: it merely establishes the thesis, "virtue in general is pleasant".

(11) Sidgwick's attempt to suppress egoism (in Bradley's opinion the only consistent hedonism) by argument is futile. The two maxims of equity and benevolence are mere tautology, for, by definition, the "reasonable" is what holds in abstraction from the individual. What is good for X is good for X, what is right for X is right for X. We have only reiterated the postulates which the egoist denies, there is nothing "objectively desirable"

for him ; he has no "ought" except as regards means. Sidgwick's attempt to suppress egoism suppresses personality ("you" and "me") and on the same ground reduces pleasure and pain to illusions.<sup>1</sup>

(12) Sidgwick's view of ethics is a jural view and will be found, when carried out, to come to something like jesuitry. Ethics has to apply general rules to every particular case, and when complete there will be no possible collision among the rules. But while law, says Bradley, treats each case as an abstraction, morality has to take account of all the circumstances (previous life of the man etc.). Either, then, the moralist has to give up his code at a certain point, or to attempt to get every possible complication within its clauses.

Sidgwick accepts the latter alternative. In any given circumstances there must be some one thing that ought to be done. (May there not conceivably be *two* courses equally conducive to the greatest surplus? <sup>2</sup>) But circumstances alter cases, and differences of "nature and character" have

<sup>1</sup> "Mr. Sidgwick hopes the egoist will be good enough to admit that something is objectively desirable as an end. If the egoist does so, he is 'suppressed' certainly, and deserves to be. But will he do so?" (*Ethical Studies*, p. 116).

<sup>2</sup> "Yes," admitted Sidgwick in a note added to the third edition.

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to be considered. "Exceptions" are allowable because they are not really exceptions, but additions to the code. There is also another class of exceptions which utilitarianism will admit; an act which, if universally adopted, might be inexpedient, may yet be right for the individual if not likely to be widely imitated. "The opinion that secrecy may render an action right which would not otherwise be so, should itself be kept comparatively secret; and similarly it seems expedient that the doctrine that esoteric morality is expedient should itself be kept esoteric." All this, apparently, must be inserted in the code! Does it not come to this that any act is moral to me if I have a sincere belief that it will increase happiness? Thus we have arrived at mere individualism: the objective criterion has become subjective, what we "think" objective (i.e., conducive to happiness). What about the right course which is the "same for all"?

(13) Sidgwick's suggested reconciliation of egoism and utilitarianism by means of the rewards and punishments of a possible future life is unsatisfactory. We have no means of judging from what we do in human communities for the sake of the good, to that which is good and right to be done in the universe. "We do not and cannot know the conditions there. If any one

wishes to maintain that *because* advantage and disadvantage do not coincide with virtue and vice, *therefore* the government of the world is not moral, he must be prepared to show that if he were in power, he could produce less evil and more good than there is by going on a law of rewards and punishments." The device of rewards and punishments does not remove evil from the universe. Moral evil would still remain *plus* its punishment, so long as stupidity and impulse remain. What is an "adequate" reward? What are the rules of payment?

Again, Is punishment merely to be threatened? We are too stupid. Is it to be inflicted? What good will that do? Again, Do I deserve a reward for doing my duty, etc., etc.?

The demand for rewards and punishments rests on a true moral judgment, but it is not an absolute demand. "We take the analogy of human society and then we emphasise one moral law which holds there, forgetting wholly the highest law."

"If the highest moral law is not a law providing for the distribution of advantage and disadvantage, then the conceptions of justice and desert are inapplicable there and must be overruled." The highest law is, "Do the most good" and this may override all lower laws. To adjust proportionably reward and punishment to virtue



and vice would do more harm than good ; it would produce less virtue and more vice.

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(1), (7) The first of the above criticisms may have been justified by certain obscurities in the first edition of the *Methods*, but it has comparatively little force if directed against the work in its later form. With Sidgwick the "universality" or "objectivity" of moral truth is based (if the previous exposition has been correct) upon an abstract view of the moral universe, virtually upon the uniformity of space and time. The same remark applies to the seventh criticism. The practical reason, according to Sidgwick, not only provides us with the three maxims of philosophical intuitionism (maxims which have no special reference to "pleasure," and which are applicable however we define ultimate good), but when these maxims come to be applied to the hedonistic end, they compel us to treat it in a strictly quantitative or mathematical manner. Hence we get the notion of a "greatest sum" by combining the view that all time is equally important (maxim of prudence) with the view that the various personalities scattered through space are equally important (maxim of benevolence).

(2) The second criticism is undoubtedly of weight, though it tells against some other systems



as well as against the one now being considered. How do cognitions pass into action? More especially, how do abstract cognitions or intuitions, such as those of prudence or benevolence, pass into action? Is reason really "practical" at all, or is it not, rather (as hedonists generally assert), the "slave of the passions," and devoid of any originative power in the world of conduct? Sidgwick tells us that a moral cognition "gives an impulse or motive to action" (*Methods*, p. 30); in other words he assumes, but without entering into the psychology of the process involved, that reason is "practical" as well as "speculative".

Green's long argument in book ii., chapter ii. of the *Prolegomena* is in protest against a "faculty" doctrine which first separates "intellect" from "will" and then puzzles itself over the problem how the one can influence the other. The whole question belongs to psychology, and is likely to remain perplexing until that science is in a more satisfactory state than it is at present. Herbart's solution would, no doubt, be thorough and comprehensive enough, if only it were true—a reduction of the active and appetitive side of mental life to the presentative—a reduction of desire, aversion and action to a mere movement of presentations backward or forward in consciousness. But despite the enormous value of this theory for pedagogical

purposes, it is probably false as an ultimate solution of the problems of mental life. Still, we know that ideas do influence conduct ; cognitions, even abstract cognitions, do pass into action ; there is a practical as well as a speculative reason. But the exact relation between the cognitive and the emotional or active sides of our nature ; the psychology of "cognitions of right" ; even the psychology of pathological "fixed ideas" (which often pass into vigorous action), these are questions still somewhat obscure. The faculty doctrine adds a new difficulty for every one it removes ; a sensational atomism such as that of Locke or Herbart is unable to explain satisfactorily the active side of life ; while the view of writers like Green, who lay stress upon mental life as an organic and self-conscious unity, cannot be altogether acquitted of the charge of vagueness. Bradley's challenge, "Is reason a 'spring of action' at all?" is, no doubt, pertinent, but at present Sidgwick's treatment of this question, however slight and superficial, may perhaps, *faute de mieux*, be accepted as fairly satisfactory.

(3) Bradley's third criticism is an extremely serious one. Sidgwick is accused of *petitio principii*. He had to prove that pleasure was the good (what we ought to aim at), but he only succeeded in this

by making use of the ambiguous word "desirable," one of whose meanings involves the very notion of "ought," while the other does not. Hence a fallacy of *petitio principii*, or perhaps rather of "four terms".

If the preceding discussion on the maxim of prudence or egoism has been correct, the root of the difficulty lies in the inadequacy of Sidgwick's treatment of that maxim. He constantly tells us that it is right for each person to seek his own happiness; in other words, happiness is something "desirable" in the sense of "what ought to be desired or sought". But it is at least equally true to say that happiness is "desirable" in the sense of "desired"; in other words we should "like" to have happiness. Are, or are not, these meanings confused in Sidgwick's treatment of the question? The present writer thinks that they are; and if so Mr. Bradley's criticism is justified. The point has been, however, already argued at sufficient length in the preceding discussion on the maxim of egoism. The difficulty is to get the notion of "ought" attached to the notion of "pleasure," and the ambiguous words "happiness" and "desirable" are, doubtless, excellent means of bringing about the attachment.

(4) The phrase "desirable consciousness" must

surely have struck many readers of the *Methods of Ethics* as a somewhat peculiar and unfamiliar one, one which *might* harbour (whether it actually does or not) a number of ambiguities. Bradley asserts that such is actually the case, and roundly accuses Sidgwick of a fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi* in his use of the phrase. Sidgwick had to prove that pleasure was the only ultimate good; he actually proves that "desirable consciousness," a concrete, complex state of pleasurable existence, is the only ultimate good.

Bradley's objection is chiefly of interest as calling attention to a possible flaw in Sidgwick's attack upon the perfectionistic standard. Hedonists would admit that "mere pleasure"—pleasure apart from conscious life—is not only not the *summum bonum* but is not even conceivable. They virtually contend for "pleasurable conscious life," and they are certainly wise in doing so. But they forget to allow their opponents a similar grace. Sidgwick, for example, shows with apparent cogency<sup>1</sup> that "mere virtue"—virtue devoid of pleasure to self or others—still more emphatically, virtue accompanied by extreme pain—cannot be regarded as, in and for itself, good. In other words, he makes abstraction from virtuous consciousness of one of its essential characteristics—

<sup>1</sup> *Methods*, p. 392 f.



the feeling of high satisfaction commonly called the pleasure of the "moral sense"—and then he triumphantly affirms, "the remainder is, in itself, worthless". Surely Mr. Rashdall is right in pointing out that moralists of the idealistic school mean by virtue "virtuous consciousness," a total concrete state of well-being. They have, at any rate, as much right to take shelter within its ample recesses, as Sidgwick within those of the phrase "desirable consciousness". The point will come up again.

(5), (6) Mr. Bradley has spent much time, both in his *Ethical Studies* and in the pamphlet here referred to, in criticising the hedonistic conception of a "sum" or "greatest sum" of pleasures. His arguments are ingenious and forcible, and should be read by all students of ethics,<sup>1</sup> but they do not seem to the present writer absolutely conclusive. A "sum" of fleeting feelings is, no doubt, an obscure conception; a "greatest possible sum" is worse still. But though the mathematical terminology can be objected to, the hedonistic conception is, after all, fairly intelligible, at any rate as intelligible

<sup>1</sup> For those to whom Mr. Bradley's ethical works (unfortunately out of print) are unavailable, Professor Mackenzie's *Introduction to Social Philosophy*, p. 204 f., gives a clear summary of the present argument.



as the rival conception of perfection or self-realisation which involves an admitted circle.<sup>1</sup> Hence the present writer has no intention of following Mr. Bradley's subtle arguments on the "sum of pleasures" doctrine. The brief summary above given must suffice, and a few remarks have also been proffered on this subject in the preceding section on Green.

(8) Bradley's best argument is undoubtedly the one in which he shows that pleasure may have an honoured place in the perfectionistic *summum bonum*, while not occupying the throne itself.

✓ "Pleasure may be a factor in the *summum bonum* and yet not be the only thing good." The hardness of a diamond may be one of its most valuable qualities, so valuable that a *soft* diamond (did such exist) would be a mass of worthless carbon, and yet this quality of hardness may not be the only valuable one possessed by the gem. The hardness may be valuable only when accompanied by brilliance and purity. Pleasure, in like manner, may be admitted as good, but only when it is a quality in a total state recognised, on other grounds, as "good," "noble" or so forth. The pleasure accompanying the deeds of the philanthropist or of the honest mechanic may

<sup>1</sup> Green's *Prolegomena*, p. 205.

be "good"; the pleasure of the sensualist may be "bad"; while there may be pleasure of other kinds which, *prima facie* at any rate, appears morally neutral. In the same way the hardness of a diamond is good, while the hardness of a boiled egg or of a penny bun may be "bad". In short, pleasure may be good or bad according to circumstances. The idealistic school of writers vehemently contend that we must abandon hedonism and take for our *summum bonum* a wider, fuller, more concrete notion than "pleasure" before we can attain to a true view even of pleasure itself. Sidgwick's phrase "desirable consciousness," may be thought to point in this very direction.

Bradley's succeeding arguments, (9), (10), (11), (12), need little comment. The eleventh is based on the view that Sidgwick had tried to "suppress" egoism, a view which, if the preceding discussions are valid, is a mistaken one. The twelfth (an accusation of jesuitry against Sidgwick's utilitarianism) will meet us again and will be found to be well established.

(13) Bradley's last objection has been frequently urged and by no one more emphatically than by Guyau.<sup>1</sup> "La morale vient en somme se suspendre tout entière à une conception re-

<sup>1</sup> Gizycki raises the same objection. See Ch. 10 of this work.

ligeuse ; cette conception elle même, si on essaie de la formuler plus nettement que M. Sidgwick, ne pourra aboutir qu'à la notion d'un dieu utilitaire, voulant pour toutes ses créatures la plus grande somme de plaisirs, mais ne pouvant la distribuer dès cette vie, et uniquement occupé dans l'éternité à corriger les misères de ce monde (misères qu'il a dû lui-même contribuer à produire). Cette conception d'un dieu impuissant ou repentant est-elle plus soutenable que la doctrine religieuse vulgaire? . . . Un dieu utilitaire, ne voulant que le plaisir de ses créatures et leur prodiguant les souffrances, ne serait-il pas une absurdité vivante? . . . Sa seule conclusion logique serait une pure négation ; s'il<sup>1</sup> évite cette négation, c'est qu'il n'a pas eu le courage de faire porter sa critique de la morale sur le point essentiel, sur l'origine même du sentiment moral et de ces 'désirs élevés' qu'il invoque en terminant. Un souhait ou un désir n'est pas une raison ; il peut y avoir opposition entre un désir instinctif et une négation rationnelle, sans qu'il y ait au cœur même de la pensée humaine cette 'contradiction fondamentale' qui épouvante M. Sidgwick, et qui le fait se réfugier dans un acte de foi. La contradiction, si elle existe, ne se trouve que dans son propre système." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor Sidgwick.

<sup>2</sup> *La Morale Anglaise Contemporaine.*

The criticisms of Bradley and of Guyau seem absolutely conclusive against the form of the theological solution proffered by Sidgwick. Should the human mind ever succeed in penetrating to a standpoint from which the universe will appear as absolutely rational, that standpoint will, almost certainly, not be a hedonistic one. Pain is everywhere about us; the course of mundane progress gives no clear indications that it is ever likely to vanish from the earth; while, if we make the assumption of a future life, we must accept one of two alternatives. Either that life will be one in which feeling is altogether absent<sup>1</sup> or if feeling be not absent, pain, though not perhaps physical pain, is as likely to prevail as pleasure. Neither alternative can satisfy a hedonist.

As pointed out in the preceding section, the perfectionistic theory, though not without its own difficulties, gives a better interpretation of the pain enigma than hedonism can ever do. Perfectionism can find a place for a certain amount of suffering even here and now; it has, moreover, no serious objection to the continuance of that amount either in this or in any other possible world. Doubtless much of the pain we daily observe or experience seems absolutely purposeless and enigmatical; but

<sup>1</sup> A view strongly suggested by the James-Lange theory of emotion.



*all* does not. Perfectionism therefore can rise to a theistic view without serious difficulty ; but the hedonist who sees in *all* pain so much failure, must surely be gifted with a faith passing that of the saints and martyrs if he can soar to the conception of a hedonistic God who, in spite of the failures of his rule over human creatures in this life, will yet succeed in redressing the adverse balance in another. The adverse balance in this life, observe, has on the one theory been nothing but absolute loss ; it may not have been absolute loss, on the other view ; it may have conduced to what is of supreme importance, the growth of character.

Are Guyau's words too strong? Is not Sidgwick's hedonistic deity "*une absurdité vivante ?*"

### (3) SIDGWICK'S ATTACK ON IDEALISM.

After a perusal of the preceding elaborate attack upon Sidgwick's ethical doctrines, the reader may naturally ask whether our author remained passive, or whether he responded to the challenge thrown down by his idealistic critics.

To Bradley's furious pamphlet he never replied, and even the controversy which preceded its appearance (*Mind*, 1876-77) remains valuable not for the ethical conclusions which it elucidated but mainly as an armoury for polemical epithets.



With Green and over Green, however, Sidgwick carried on an intermittent discussion. We have seen that in many respects the two writers were not far apart. Still, they belonged to different schools and some conflict of opinion was inevitable. Thus we find that the years 1874-75 Sidgwick criticised, in the pages of the *Academy*, the important work then being published by Green and Grose, their standard edition of the writings of Hume. In 1877 there followed a brief controversy between the two men over the "sum of pleasures" doctrine; the substance of this now appears in the *Methods*. Green died in 1882, and his *Prolegomena*, containing a criticism of some of Sidgwick's views, were published in the following year. In 1884 Sidgwick contributed an extremely important article to *Mind*, under the title of "Green's Ethics". The last lecture that Sidgwick ever gave was on the philosophy of the great Oxford teacher, and this has recently been published in *Mind*.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Methods*, as above indicated, we find a number of somewhat important references to Green. The most weighty of these deal with the questions of the conceivability of pleasure apart from its conditions, and of the intelligibility of the phrase "sum of pleasures" (*Methods*, pp. 132-35). Refer-

<sup>1</sup> "The Philosophy of T. H. Green," *Mind*, 1901, p. 18.

ence has already been made in a preceding section to these controversies, and the conclusion arrived at was that the amount of real difference of standpoint is much smaller than commonly supposed. Elsewhere in the *Methods* Sidgwick criticises Green's definitions of happiness (p. 93) and of motive (p. 363), but in each of these cases the main interest is only terminological.

His two articles in *Mind* are, however, of great interest, and some of the most important points therein raised will here be considered. Inasmuch, however, as they involve metaphysical considerations, their treatment will be extremely slight.

Green's system is obviously based upon metaphysics, according to Sidgwick upon false metaphysics. Green, we are told, has argued that because finite minds are similar to the Divine Mind in having like it a unifying and combining character, therefore there is *identity* between them; each man's consciousness is a form of the eternal consciousness itself. In the words of Professor Seth, who here echoes the same objection, Green has "transformed the logical identity of type into a numerical identity of existence";<sup>1</sup> he has swallowed up human personality in the Divine and given us nothing but a pantheism. But the answer to this criticism is quite obvious. Green was *not* a pan-

<sup>1</sup> *Hegelianism and Personality*, p. 29.

theist ; he never taught that human personality must so lapse into an ocean of divinity as to lose its own characteristic features.

That each, who seems a separate whole,  
Should move his rounds, and fusing all  
The skirts of self again, should fall,  
Remerging in the general soul.

On the contrary he was most emphatic in his defence of human and divine personality.

Eternal form shall still divide  
The eternal soul from all beside.

His maintenance of this doctrine may not have been absolutely unswerving, but it undoubtedly represents the predominant side of his thought. The great problem of the metaphysics of the present day, as Professor Ward once remarked to the writer, is, How can the claims of the Many be preserved along with the claims of the One? Spinoza sacrificed the Many to the One, Leibnitz the One to the Many ; philosophers of the future have to avoid both dangers. Though Green's system of philosophy leaves the exact relations of the Many to the One undelineated, it is certain that he did not commit the first of the errors above mentioned. Personality, human and divine, was the keynote of his teaching.

More conclusive in appearance is Sidgwick's criticism of certain others of Green's doctrines,

Each man's consciousness is a "realisation" or "reproduction" of the divine consciousness. Sidgwick pertinently asks which of these apparently inconsistent alternatives we are really expected by Green to accept. The latter, no doubt, is most prominent in his thought. The author of the *Prolegomena* was convinced that there is one Divine Eternal Spirit who really *is* all that the human spirit can become; but why then did he use the word "realise" and thus reduce God and nature to potential existence? The word "reproduce" certainly stands for Green's predominant view; God is the ideal of the human spirit, but he is an ideal completely "realised" already, though not in human consciousness. Sidgwick's criticism of the joint use of the terms "realise" and "reproduce" has thus much force for those who are not convinced, on other grounds, of the tenability of Green's system, but for those who feel that the moral ideal must possess both static and dynamic qualities—must stand for reality as well as ideality—Green's terminology, with all its difficulties, will not present itself as altogether absurd.

Sidgwick makes a further criticism. Spirit is described as a non-natural principle which constitutes nature by a system of relations which result from its action as thinking, but is itself not determined by these relations. But Green conceives



spirit as one and many (God and finite beings); he conceives of these as having relations of likeness and yet of difference; he regards spirit as "self-distinguishing," "self-objectifying," and "combining". But he is here employing words denoting relations of quantity, identity, and so forth, relations which he also uses in describing phenomena. How then can spirit be "non-natural"?

Green's answer would doubtless be that the categories of unity, likeness, etc., which we use both in describing spirit and in describing natural phenomena are in either case the work of spirit. Spirit conceives phenomena under these categories, and, when it reflects upon its own nature, it has to employ the same categories. But these latter are nevertheless of spiritual origin whether applied to nature or reflexly to self. Green, in fact, would contend that he has rather spiritualised nature than naturalised spirit by the employment of the categories of unity, identity, and so forth.

According to him, however, spirit is "not in time," and yet, as Sidgwick points out, he frequently describes it as "already" in a certain state, and as abiding "for ever". Again it is "not a cause," and yet he speaks of it as a "source of the relations which constitute nature," and as "using the animal organism for its vehicle". He distinguishes Divine from natural causality, and



makes the former a mere unifying principle, whose only character is found in synthesising the manifold of nature. But if so, how can this merely unifying or synthesising principle become a moral ideal of perfection to human beings? How can it be a moral ideal at all? unification surely is as present in the lives of sinners as in those of saints. In short there is no bridge between Green's metaphysics and his ethics.

To some extent the edge of this last criticism can be turned by pointing out that, on Green's view, the Divine Spirit, though described in the first book of the *Prolegomena* in purely intellectualistic language, is so described merely for convenience of exposition. Later on in the work Green advances beyond the purely intellectualistic standpoint which he had only emphasised as a convenient starting-place in the idealistic demonstration. Still, when we begin to endow the Divine Spirit with other qualities than the intellectual—when we add qualities involving desire—our ideal begins to appear sadly human, and the difficulties revealed by Mansel in his famous *Bampton Lectures* crowd in apace. Green's metaphysics may be admitted to be imperfect—what system of metaphysics is not? But a system which is based upon the notion of a realm of self-conscious personalities, in close relations with one supreme self-conscious

personality, may at any rate be claimed to solve as many difficulties as it raises. It is at least as satisfactory as the metaphysical torso at the end of the *Methods*.

To answer all the criticisms directed against Green's system would evidently involve a lengthy excursion into the metaphysical region, a task beyond the limits of the present work. No doubt Green was right in basing ethics on metaphysics, for, however scrupulously we may attempt to avoid questions of the latter kind, we shall find ourselves ultimately driven to their consideration. Throughout the *Methods* there is a deliberate attempt at avoiding metaphysics, yet the author is finally compelled to appeal to theological and metaphysical considerations: But in the present volume no serious attempt will be made to discuss problems of this kind, though in a work which professedly deals with the controversies between Sidgwick and his contemporaries some passing reference had necessarily to be made to Sidgwick's articles on Green.

A *résumé* has now been given of the 1901 article in *Mind*. More directly *ethical* was the earlier one, though even in this we find that Sidgwick expressed his dissatisfaction with the metaphysical basis of Green's system, and criticised it on similar lines to the above. He asks, as also in his later

article, how we can possibly get an "ideal of holiness" out of a combining, self-distinguishing and self-objectifying agency, an agency of a purely intellectual character. Green doubtless would answer, as pointed out above, that for him the Divine Spirit is more than an "eternal intellect out of time," and that though in book i. of his *Prolegomena* he dealt exclusively with the intellectual aspect of the Divine Spirit he did not in that book exhaust its attributes.

Again Sidgwick complains that Green holds up at one time a moral ideal in which men can find "rest," or "abiding satisfaction"—a state quite different from that of our present life with its constant emergence of desire,—while from certain other aspects of his philosophy we should expect that the presence of the animal organism would be absolutely essential for his conception of the good and that this latter would consist in "some combination of natural desires modified by self-consciousness".

Green's answer to this (whether satisfactory or not must be left to the judgment of his readers) would be to insist that all such "desires" as are possessed by moral beings already involve self-consciousness, and are different *in toto* from the mere blind impulses which we attribute to animals. Green would object to any "combination" doctrine

as savouring of the presentationalism or atomism against which he waged war.

Sidgwick undoubtedly puts his finger on an apparently weak place in Green's argument when he criticises the "finding rest" doctrine of the latter philosopher. Does Green postulate a future life? Even if he does, this scarcely gives us an ethical end here and now, for the present life shows us no "rest". If, on the contrary, the "rest" is to be realised in a society of persons on this earth, where is the transition from the egoistic to the universalistic side of Green's doctrine? Is "a better state of humanity" identical with a "better state of myself"? Why should I sacrifice my good to that of others?

Green's answer, as expressed by one of his followers,<sup>1</sup> is, "Because they are not other. A society in which the individuals composing it can only get their own good each at the expense of some one else—a society, in other words, of atomic units—is not a human society at all." Green's view of society was clearly an organic one, Sidgwick's was atomic. It has been shown in preceding chapters that our author found enormous difficulty in getting rid of egoism, and curiously enough it is this very difficulty he here challenges Green to

<sup>1</sup>*The Philosophy of T. H. Green*, by W. H. Fairbrother, p. 183.



solve. From his own atomic view the task was impossible, and he claimed that it was equally impossible from the idealistic point of view, that of the "social organism". But surely this is not so. For an individual who regards as the moral ideal a concrete though only half revealed state of perfection—a state necessarily social—there is no serious theoretical difficulty in the moral demand for sacrifice of "self" (one's own personal feelings of gratification) in the interests of a wider social "self". But for a hedonist the sacrifice of personal gratification always remains a difficulty. Ought he to sacrifice himself? We may surely conclude that Green's system is more satisfactory at this point than the rival view, though the claim that the idealistic ideal is one involving "rest" seems much more difficult to maintain.

In Green there are, according to his critic, two conflicting moral ideals, one a pagan or neo-pagan ideal including artistic and scientific as well as strictly moral perfection; the other a stoically and puritanically narrow ideal of merely moral perfection.<sup>1</sup> The latter of these is, no doubt, realisable without competition; the former is not. A person who aims at the fullest development of all his

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that Herbartianism is being attacked at the present day on similar grounds. See Natorp: *Herbart, Pestalozzi und die heutigen Aufgaben der Erziehungslehre*,



faculties will probably have to do so at the expense of other persons.

This is by far the most serious ethical objection to Green's doctrine, and there can be little doubt as to the inadequacy of his treatment of it, an inadequacy due to the fact that the *Prolegomena* were never completed. The editor's footnote on page 312 of that work is the official answer to Sidgwick's criticism, and with that the admirer of Green has to be content.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE *SUMMUM BONUM*.

"The common judgment that a thing is 'good' does not on reflection appear to be equivalent to a judgment that it is directly or indirectly pleasant" (*Methods of Ethics*, table of contents, book i., ch. ix.).

"We can only justify to ourselves the importance that we attach to . . . objects by considering (their) conduciveness, in one way or another, to the happiness of sentient beings" (*Methods of Ethics*, p. 401).

THE student who for the first time sees the above two statements in close proximity may feel bewilderment at the contradiction they seem to involve. A frank admission that "good" does not mean "pleasant" is followed by an affirmation that objects are "good" only so far as conducive to happiness. But on examination, the logical contradiction, though not the ethical paradox, is seen to vanish. The first statement reflects the superficial judgments of common thought, the second the reflective and analytical judgment of the philosopher who, having swept his glance around the cosmos in search for a *summum bonum*, has at last

been successful, but only at the cost of a challenge to common sense.

It will be an easy, perhaps a trivial task to point out these and similar difficulties in the *Methods of Ethics* considered as a constructive work. Of such difficulties no one could be more conscious than Sidgwick himself; the words we have quoted represent but one case among many in which he brings out into deliberate and sharp prominence the difficulties inherent in the task of ethical construction. Unsympathetic readers might even be tempted to suggest that he revelled in the marshalling of insoluble problems and felt a positive delight in the clash of contradictions. Far otherwise was probably the truth.<sup>1</sup> But certain it is that despite his acceptance of ethical hedonism he made no attempt to minimise or conceal its paradoxes. He preferred to bring them out into extraordinary clearness. "The readiness to admit every difficulty"<sup>2</sup> was, as Caird pointed out, one of his leading characteristics.

The present task is not to deal with such difficulties as surround the hedonistic calculus or the transition from egoism to utilitarianism, but with

<sup>1</sup> See *Mind*, 1889, p. 483, where he speaks of his "prolonged effort to effect a complete systematisation of our common ethical thought" and his failure.

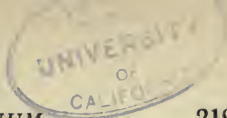
<sup>2</sup> *Academy*, 12th June, 1875.

those which surround the exact formulation of the *summum bonum*, which task is, after all, the central problem of ethics. What is it that is ultimately good, good *per se*, good as an end and not merely as a means? Is it pleasure, or happiness, or perfection, or virtue (whatever these words may mean)? Is it to include contemplation of beauty, and search for truth? Is it some simple state, or some complex whole? What, in short, is the *summum bonum*? The question has been touched upon in the two preceding chapters, but its importance is so great that it may well claim a chapter to itself.

Ignoring minor theories of ultimate good, we may confine our attention to the two which at present divide moralists into somewhat sharply opposed classes.

One class of minds will contend, with Sidgwick, that the pleasurable of existence is its only quality of ultimate value. That conduct commonly denominated "virtuous" is worthless unless productive of pleasure to self or others. That truth and beauty, like virtue, are, in the long run, valueless unless pleasant. That error which is pleasant is ultimately better than truth which is unpleasant. That, in short, the *summum bonum* is pleasure only.

The other class will contend, with Bradley, that to



lay this stress upon pleasure is to lay stress upon an abstraction. That pleasure, no doubt, is generally good, but that it is to be judged along with the whole concrete state in which it occurs. That higher functioning has to be chosen even if, as often happens, its pleasurable-ness is less than that of lower functioning. That, in short, not pleasure but the more concrete notion of self-realisation or perfection lies at the basis of the moral life and moral judgments.

“Questions of ultimate ends do not admit of proof.” Mill never spoke truer words than these. *do admit of determination to whether they or are not*  
The view adopted by each thinker with respect to the final justification of conduct, is to a large extent dependent upon non-rational considerations, upon such factors as early training and congenital characteristics, certainly not upon demonstrative proof. And yet these factors can scarcely be allowed for. Yet upon them depends to a large extent the thinker's ultimate metaphysical view, and upon this latter, in turn, hangs his ethical theory. *★*

Still, the impossibility of arriving at a final consensus does not deter moralists from attacking the central problem of their science, and, as Sidgwick has not hesitated to give a careful and somewhat lengthy defence of ethical hedonism, no discussion of his philosophy would be complete without a somewhat more detailed consideration of his arguments.



They are contained in the fourteenth chapter of the third book, the most important chapter in the *Methods of Ethics*.

In the thirteenth chapter Sidgwick had enunciated the three maxims of philosophical intuitionism. Those maxims have been already examined, and while not denying them a certain value and a very large measure of self-evidence we have seen that they are highly abstract,<sup>1</sup> and therefore of little positive though of considerable negative ethical value. We have seen that this abstractness is fully recognised by the author himself. He was therefore naturally driven on to an examination of the central ethical problem. What is, after all, the *good* which has to be distributed impartially and in conformity with the three maxims we have been enunciating?

Sidgwick's argument is a close and forcible one. Perhaps the device of parallel columns may be useful for the purpose of following it, step by step, and providing such criticisms as a supporter of Green or Bradley would be likely to adduce. Some of the points have been already touched upon in previous sections, especially in chapter vii.

<sup>1</sup>The only exception is in the maxim of egoism, one element of which is based on a concrete, perspective, personal view of things.

## SIDGWICK'S ARGUMENT.

(1) The good cannot be virtue in the vulgar sense, i.e., conformity to common rules of morality. For the validity of these rests in the long run upon the three maxims of philosophical intuitionism, and these latter prescribe seeking the "good," whose meaning is therefore still unexplained.

(2) Neither can we fall back upon a kind of "æsthetic intuitionism," and regard the good as manifested in such virtuous conduct as we approve by trained insight. Such virtuous conduct will still be found to involve the notion of doing good.

(3) Nor can we fall back on the plan of defining the good as virtue regarded not as a quality of conduct or action, but as a quality of character ("be this," not merely "do this"). Character with its faculties and dispositions always implies the production of some result, some feeling or act which is brought about by the "faculty," etc.

## REPLY.

(1) Certainly, the good transcends the common rules of morality, though these latter are expressions of it. The moral ideal, as shown by Green in the *Prolegomena*, is constantly leading to an advance beyond them towards new and fuller expressions of itself.

(2) Certainly. The "moral sense" is not adequate to the fulness of the ideal.

(3) No moralist would dream of regarding a mere faculty, one that never passes into action, as good. But is there any such thing? Is not a mere faculty or disposition a pure abstraction? Virtue is an *ἐνεργεία* not a *δύναμις*. Sidgwick's argument is sound but unnecessary.

(4) Nor can we fall back upon subjectivism and say that the good is conscientiousness or subjective rightness. For to ignore the objective side of conduct—its external effects—would be to do violence to common sense.

(5) It is also clear that the good cannot consist in the talents, gifts, or graces which are commonly included under the notion of excellence or perfection. For none of these are valuable except when actualised in conscious life.

(6) Shall we then say that

(4) Nevertheless conscientiousness is a most important feature of virtuous action.

“The one unconditional good is the good will ; this must be the end by reference to which we estimate the effects of an action” (*Prolegomena*, p. 316, *et seq.*, where this subject is thoroughly discussed). “There is no reason to doubt that the good or evil in the motive of an action is exactly measured by the good or evil in its consequences as rightly estimated—estimated, that is, in their bearing on the production of a good will or the perfecting of mankind” (pp. 320-21). The good will must not be merely formal, it must have reference to society ; still unless the motive of the act be good, the act is not virtuous.

(5) But what right have you to abstract these talents, etc., from their “actualisation in conscious life” ? Of course they have no value as mere potentialities—if there is any mere potentiality (see Leibnitz, *Nouveaux Essais*, preface).

(6) Certainly it must be

ultimate good = desirable conscious life, desirable consciousness ?

(a) It certainly must be consciousness. For mere physical or physiological processes cannot be regarded as in themselves either "good" or "bad," but only in reference to their conscious results or concomitants.

(b) Neither can mere self-preservation or the preservation of the race be ultimately good unless the consciousness of the "preserved" individuals be predominantly happy or desirable.

(c) Nor can "virtuous consciousness" be good if accompanied by torture or misery.

"conscious life" of a sort. But "desirable" is an ambiguous and dangerous word.

(a) Granted. "The rational soul in seeking an ultimate good necessarily seeks it as a state of its own being" (Green, *Prolegomena*, p. 414).

(b) Granted, unless happiness is interpreted in a strictly hedonistic and quantitative manner. The consciousness must be of the nature of "self-realisation" and therefore be in a sense, "happiness". But its goodness does not consist merely in its pleasantness.

(c) The supposition of "virtue" accompanied by torture or misery is a far-fetched and artificial one. Putting aside the question whether the virtuous man is ever called upon for an *absolute* self-sacrifice, it is certain that the *reductio ad absurdum* in the opposite column (c) does not prove that pleasure in the abstract is the ultimate good.

(7) Ultimate good then is

(7) "Apart from feeling,"

“desirable consciousness”. But consciousness includes cognition and volition as well as feeling. Are these desirable apart from feeling? No. They are “quite neutral in respect of desirability”.

For (taking the case of the cognition of truth), (a) though a man may prefer the cognition of truth to the belief in fictions in spite of the fact that the former state may be more painful than the latter, yet in this case he is not judging the conscious state as such. His judgment is directed to the “objective relations” between his mind and other things.

(b) Similarly a man may have a “predominant aversion” to slavery, even though the life of slavery might conceivably be pleasanter than one of freedom and penury; or he may prefer contemplation of beauty or pursuit of virtue even though, as states of consciousness, these are less pleasant than certain other states.

But “admitting that we have actual experience of such

again this illegitimate abstraction! What right has any one to separate cognition and volition from its accompanying feeling? May not the moral judgment be passed on the whole concrete state?

But surely the fact—just admitted by Sidgwick—that we have strong impulses towards the apprehension of truth, conformity to virtue, etc., even when we recognise that these may be painful, is a serious stumbling-block in the way of accepting mere pleasure as the *summum bonum*. Does it not seem probable that the *summum bonum* is wider and more comprehensive? Using Sidgwick’s own words when enunciating (in order to condemn) this view, “We may take ‘conscious life’ in a wide sense so as to include the objective relations of the conscious being implied in our notions of virtue, truth, beauty, freedom” (p. 400).



preferences as have just been described, of which the ultimate object is something that is not merely consciousness. . . .

“Yet (c) when we ‘sit down in a cool hour’ we can only justify to ourselves the importance that we attach to any of these objects by considering its conduciveness to the happiness of sentient beings” (p. 401).

(8) Another argument in favour of accepting pleasure as the *summum bonum* (in addition to the argument just given, and based upon the intuitive judgment) is to be drawn from a “comprehensive comparison of the ordinary judgments of mankind”. Common sense hesitates to approve of the pursuit of really fruitless knowledge; as for knowledge *apparently* fruitless, common sense recognises that there is always the chance of this not being the case, and at any rate its pursuit gives pleasure. There is even the possibility of “virtue” (fanaticism is supposed to be “virtuous” in a sense) conflicting with happi-

But to prove that virtue apart from pleasure is not “good,” does not prove that pleasure alone is good (see Bradley’s criticism in the preceding chapter).

(8) Inasmuch as the “predominant aversions” to error, slavery, etc., mentioned above, are, presumably, aversions of “common sense,” it is somewhat strange to contend now that common sense approves of knowledge only so far as it is fruitful (*i.e.*, pleasure-producing). To say that “it is paradoxical to maintain that any degree of freedom . . . would still be commonly regarded as desirable even if . . . it had no tendency to promote the general happiness” is again to make a completely artificial abstraction of happiness from freedom. Again, in these cases, as in the still more important case of virtue, common sense,

ness, and in such a case common sense hardly recommends the further cultivation of the former ; the same may be said of "freedom". The case of beauty is simpler, for this ideal is, roughly speaking, approved by common sense in proportion to the degree in which it is productive of pleasure. as Sidgwick admits, is doubtful and ambiguous ; and its verdict is certainly as much *against* as *for* the hedonistic position.

Such is Sidgwick's famous argument in favour of ethical hedonism, and such are, in brief form, the answers which those who are unconvinced by his reasonings adduce in favour of the opposite view. It is obvious to all that if ethical hedonism is to be based upon an argument so delicately poised as the one we have been considering, its position is the reverse of secure. Sidgwick has done for this doctrine what Plato did for his idealistic metaphysics, he has shown that the opposing arguments are almost—if not quite—as strong as the arguments in its favour.

The *Methods of Ethics* is a hedonistic work, and yet it is, perhaps, more dangerous to hedonism than any hostile work has ever been. No writer has shown a fuller consciousness than Sidgwick of the enormous difficulties which face the moralist when attempting to erect ethics upon hedonistic foundations. He brings out obstacles, paradoxes, and inconsistencies into the light of day ; he glosses

over no difficulty, he refuses to bridge gaps and fill lacunæ by doubtful means. And yet, though conscious as few even of the opponents of hedonism have ever been, of the seriousness of its demerits, he concludes that this system, *faute de mieux*, is the only possible one. We have seen the argument by which he arrives at this conclusion. We have now to consider the result, and the consequences to ethics of its acceptance.

Is the reasoning of chapter xiv., book iii., valid? Is it true that the only element of existence possessing ultimate worth is pleasurable feeling? Is it the case that virtuous conduct, unless pleasant or conducive to the pleasure of self or others, is worthless? Do we admit that error which is pleasant is better than truth which is unpleasant?

Before admitting conclusions so momentous, we must scrutinise carefully the reasoning by which they have been attained. It is obviously based upon methods of exclusion, abstraction, and *reductio ad absurdum*. Ultimate good, says Sidgwick, cannot consist merely in "virtue," for this always implies the doing of "good"; benevolence, for example, is the doing of "good" to certain individuals, or the promotion of their "well-being". But admitting this argument to be, in a sense, valid, thorough-going hedonism is not really established. For (1) the good or well-being which is promoted

by benevolence need not be mere pleasure, though it frequently is so; (2) the benevolence itself may be judged as good. There is no inconsistency in saying "it is good to be benevolent, *i.e.*, to do good," for the good in each case may be interpreted perfectionistically. The individual who benevolently helps on the self-development or perfection of others may be, *ipso facto*, forwarding his own. No doubt benevolent action is often predominantly hedonistic; philanthropists frequently (too frequently indeed) aim at the mere giving of pleasure to the objects of their sympathy rather than at their elevation or development; but it must be remembered that pleasure and development are, generally speaking, not incompatible. The reformers who advocate the education of the "lower classes" may point, and justly, to the refined pleasures which follow upon education, though it is only a shallow optimism which would claim that improved education was always accompanied by increased pleasure. Thus there is sufficient correspondence between the perfectionistic and the hedonistic ideals to explain the frequent confusion of the standpoints.<sup>1</sup> To ask, "Is higher function-

<sup>1</sup> Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, p. 119. "Pleasure is the psychical accompaniment of exercise of function and a distinction is required in order to think of function apart from some pleasure. Perhaps there is really no such thing."



ing apart from pleasure, good?" is to ask an unmeaning question, for all functioning involves some pleasure. But there is a more moderately expressed question which we *must* ask. When

the choice lies between higher functioning accompanied by less pleasure, and lower functioning accompanied by more pleasure, which *ought* we to choose? It is only in answering such a question as this that there is much *practical* divergence between the two theories. Perfectionists can nearly always, if they choose, draw support from a vague non-quantitative hedonism, though their consistency in doing so depends upon the view they adopt on the question whether pleasure is a low kind of good or whether it is, in itself, neither good nor bad. Upon the latter question they seem not altogether agreed. Bradley (*Ethical Studies*, pp. 118-27), while doubting whether pleasure *per se* or pain *per se* can be conceived, appears to hold that they may be admitted to be, in a relative sort of way, forms of good and evil respectively. The latter view is also Mr. Rashdall's (*Mind*, 1885, pp. 207-8); pleasure, or relief from pain, is good, but only in a subordinate sense; good in the highest sense is self-realisation.

Green's view, on the other hand, appears to be of a rather more stoical character.

Sidgwick's argument that virtue cannot be the



ultimate good because all virtue implies doing or producing good, is based upon an abstraction of the act from its consequences, and is therefore regarded by many critics as not conclusive. His opponents would contend that the "benevolent" act has to be considered as a concrete whole and that when so considered it is morally approved on the grounds: (1) that even though the benevolent man may merely aim at conferring pleasure, this latter may be admitted as "good" in a secondary sense; (2) that the benevolent man frequently aims at more than pleasure, as, for example when he contributes towards the improved education of the working classes; in such a case the good aimed at is to be interpreted perfectionistically rather than hedonistically; (3) that the benevolent act not only confers good but is in itself good.

Only by Sidgwick drawing a sharp line between the subjective and objective sides of an act—between its performance and its consequences—is his conclusion possible. His argument, in short, is based upon abstraction.

The same objection applies to his succeeding argument against the view that the good consists in character and its faculties, habits, or dispositions (*Methods*, p. 393). Probably no writer has really ever regarded character in the abstract (*i.e.*, apart from its activities), as being good

in any absolute sense. But character realised in action may be admitted to be good ; in any other sense it is probably unmeaning. The sleeping man is neither good nor bad. Aristotle long ago made it clear that virtue cannot be a mere *δύναμις*.

The final argument by which Sidgwick attempts to show that pleasure is the only ultimate good is again an argument based upon abstraction and exclusion. We have to exclude pleasure from virtue and then ask ourselves, "Is the latter now good?"<sup>1</sup> But, as Bradley has pointed out, to prove that A is valueless apart from B does not make B, when taken alone, valuable. The real value may lie in the complex and concrete whole which includes both A and B. Virtue apart from pleasure of a certain kind is inconceivable.

The argument could be equally well turned against hedonism itself. Is *pleasure taken in abstraction* good?<sup>2</sup> To answer is really impossible. We have no right to put asunder elements which are organically connected as parts of the same

<sup>1</sup> *Methods*, p. 397.

<sup>2</sup> To take a concrete case. If by any possibility mankind could be made really happier by being transformed into pigs, *ought* we to choose such a transformation? Mill says "No," and Sidgwick *apparently* (p. 111) says the same.

phenomenon. A certain degree of pleasure will always accompany virtuous activity; to abstract the one from the other is misleading. But if we *do* abstract, it is not by any means clear that the answer is in favour of hedonism.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CONCLUSION.

WE will conclude with a presentation, in brief form, of the general position in which the hedonism of the *Methods of Ethics* finds itself.

There may be some inappropriateness in adopting, during the course of an ethical discussion, one of the leading methods of inductive science, and treating hedonism as an hypothesis to be tested by its agreement with certain facts and postulates. "Questions of ultimate ends do not admit of proof;" still there are certain postulates which an ethical theory may be expected to satisfy to an extent.

These postulates (which remotely suggest Newton's famous laws of philosophising and their later developments) may be expressed as follows:—

(1) The meaning of the theory should be clear, precise, and unmistakable.

(2) The theory should be in approximate agreement with the ordinary moral judgments of men.

Of two theories, otherwise equally satisfactory,

the one which is the more conformable with common sense is to be preferred.

(3) It should be internally consistent and coherent.

(4) It should give guidance, and the man who acts upon it most thoroughly ought to be the man who most realises the goal he has in view.

(1) Now it is by apparently satisfying the first of these requirements that hedonism has won a large measure of favour. "Pleasure" is a word comparatively unambiguous in meaning, and though on examination it is found to be not by any means really unambiguous, and the notion of pleasure apart from its conditions is a difficult one to form and use, still hedonism will always bear an appearance of plausibility in virtue of the apparent clearness and precision of its *summum bonum*. How vague appears the notion of perfection or self-realisation when contrasted with that of pleasure!

(2) Hedonism is far less successful in satisfying the second requirement. True, Sidgwick lays some stress upon the implicit hedonism of common sense when he is discussing (in book iii.) the common virtues. He shows that the happiness of mankind is frequently the criterion by which the morality of acts is judged, and in a still more central portion



of the same book (chapter xiv.) he again appeals to the verdict of common sense as being condemnatory of the pursuit of truth and similar ends except so far as such pursuit is hedonistically justifiable. But his views on the concordance or discordance of common sense with hedonism are fortunately not dogmatic; and, indeed, common sense is so ambiguous that dogmatism as to its utterances would be out of place. Still, on the whole, Sidgwick is bound to admit a discordance.

Thus we find that the implicit hedonism to which he appeals more than once is, after all, not a pure hedonism at all. Happiness, as he clearly pointed out in an early part of his book, is commonly interpreted in a sense very different from the quantitative one of thorough-going hedonism; it is characterised as "the feeling which accompanies the normal activity of a healthy mind in a healthy body" (*Methods*, p. 92). Here we have obviously a standard which is partly if not wholly perfectionistic; for "healthy mind" and "healthy body" are phrases strangely suggestive of the self-realisation doctrine. Hence the argument based on the implicit hedonism of common sense is not conclusive, for the "hedonism" may be, and probably is, of a eudæmonistic or qualitative kind, and may differ from the perfectionism or idealism of some writers only in laying a little

more emphasis on the pleasure aspect. It is interesting to note that Green too has appealed to common sense (the common sense of the Greeks) in the interests of perfectionism, and his appeal seems quite as successful as the one from the hedonistic side. It is at least clear that the vulgar notion of "well-being" which lies at the basis of common judgments is not precisely a hedonistic notion, though, no doubt, it contains a hedonistic element.<sup>1</sup>

The appeal to common sense in the chapter on "Ultimate Good" is again somewhat inconclusive in result; as Sidgwick himself admits, it "obviously cannot be made completely cogent since . . . several cultivated persons do habitually judge that knowledge, art, etc.—not to speak of virtue—are ends independently of the pleasure derived from them". The fact that "common sense is most impressed with the value of knowledge when its 'fruitfulness' has been demonstrated" may be perfectly true, and yet have very little force against the moderate and non-ascetic perfectionism of the Green and Bradley school, for pleasure may be admitted as a subordinate good. The crucial case is that of knowledge connected indissolubly with pain, but such a case is so removed from the

<sup>1</sup> Bradley's *Ethical Studies* and his pamphlet on Sidgwick's hedonism bring out this point with great clearness.

ordinary sphere of possibility that it is useless for ethical purposes. Hedonism has no right to base itself upon such extreme cases. If such an attempt is made the result will certainly be fatal to itself, for the "contented pig" (the classical example of "pleasure" divorced from "perfection") will then have to be ethically approved, contrary alike to the judgment of Mill (*Utilitarianism*, p. 14) and apparently to that of Sidgwick also (*Methods*, p. 111).

Let us, however, accept the challenge and take the extreme case into momentary consideration. Suppose that if the whole sphere of truth could be known it would confirm in every detail the gloomiest convictions of the pessimist. Suppose that at the heart of things there lie a blind mechanism or a void abyss, and that the ideals and aspirations of mankind can be seen by the clear-sighted philosopher to be but self-begotten delusions. Suppose that the rude awakening described in Matthew Arnold's most heart-searching poem is to be the fate of all who think; that the fond hopes of man are found to be, as Mycerinus thought he had found them, "mere phantoms" of a heart which is ever:—

Stringing vain words of powers we cannot see,  
 Blind divinations of a will supreme;  
 Lost labour! when the circumambient gloom  
 But hides, if gods, gods careless of our doom.

Suppose the very worst. Will the philosophic moral man whose vision has revealed to him not the Celestial City which the pilgrims thought they saw from the Delectable Mountains, but a vacuum or a soulless fatalism, think it his duty to keep the frightful truth from mankind? Will he say, "At whatever cost of deception men must be kept in enjoyment"? Perhaps he may. The case is admittedly an extreme one, and difficult of solution. But the verdict of the moral consciousness is not obviously on the side of hedonism. Many men would surely say, "Let mankind know the truth however dark it may be".

The case will, at any rate, serve to bring out the implications of hedonism. If we are to accept the latter theory, "truth for truth's sake" can no longer be a maxim for any moral man; it will have to be replaced by "truth so far as pleasant, beyond that, ignorance and deception". What is the crowning excellence of the *Methods of Ethics*? The love of truth which breathes from every page. But on the hedonistic theory that quality is no longer an excellence, except in very moderate degrees. Does the last chapter of the *Methods of Ethics* conduce to happiness? On the contrary, coming at the end of a book which is unique for its judicial and scientific calm and for the confidence which it inspires in its hard-won conclusions, this



chapter is far more chilling and disintegrating in its tendency than if it had appeared in the work of a blatant atheist. Truth at all costs—truth whether pleasant or unpleasant—was the motto of the writer of the *Methods*. And yet this motto is opposed to the hedonistic system which it is the main positive business of the book to erect, for in the chapter on the *summum bonum* we are virtually told that the moment truth becomes really and inevitably unpleasant it must be avoided and concealed.

The above argument is to some extent, no doubt, an *argumentum ad populum*. To make the *Methods of Ethics* pass sentence upon itself may be thought to be but a poor device. But the argument will serve the purpose of bringing out the implications of hedonism when the latter system is rendered, as Sidgwick's keen mind helped to render it, thorough-going. Hedonism, when consistent, must become in a most evil sense, Jesuitry. The State will deceive the people for their good, and the philosopher will hide his opinions not only from the multitude but from his fellow philosophers lest he may confirm them in their gloomy results. "To do evil that good may come," will be no longer an intelligible phrase, and will certainly raise no feeling of disapprobation.

"But surely," it may be objected, "hedonism does not, when consistently worked out, become



Jesuitry and deception? Was not Mill a hedonist? was not Sidgwick the very incarnation of truthfulness, the Cambridge champion of intellectual honesty, the Fellow of Trinity who resigned his Fellowship from conscientious conviction?" Yes, Mill and Sidgwick were, to a degree which few men have attained, intellectually honest. And yet the implications of the *Methods of Ethics* are such as have been indicated. If we are consistent with our hedonism we must cease at a certain point to be "honest" and "veracious" in the common sense of the latter words.

Thus we are told in the fourth book: "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 right to teach openly to one set of persons what it would be wrong to teach to others; it may be conceivably right to do, if it can be done with comparative secrecy, what it would be wrong to do in the face of the world; and even, if perfect secrecy can be reasonably expected, what it would be wrong to recommend by private advice or example. . . . The utilitarian conclusion, carefully stated, would seem to be this, that the opinion that secrecy may render an action right which would not otherwise be so, should itself be kept comparatively secret" (*Methods*, pp. 487-88).

Whether such admissions as these are easily conformable with the intuitive maxim of equity we need not here discuss. The present point is that hedonism, when carried out to its logical conclusions, is violently opposed to common sense. Sidgwick admits this when he denominates the above conclusions "paradoxical," and the same admission is made when he declares in an earlier portion of his work that "the common judgment that a thing is 'good' does not on reflection appear to be equivalent to a judgment that it is directly or indirectly pleasant" (Table of Contents, book i., ch. ix.).

Thus despite the fact that an appeal to the implicit hedonism of common sense is not only possible but is frequently made, the result of the appeal is, in large measure, to confirm eudæmonism if not perfectionism.

The same result follows from an examination of the qualitative view of pleasure, a view certainly held by common sense, but completely foreign to consistent hedonism. When we judge certain pleasures to be "high" and certain others to be "low" we are obviously not orthodox hedonists; our judgment is not being passed upon the pleasure-element itself but upon "something in the objective conditions under which it arises" (*Methods*, p. 129). In other words the judgment implies something

wider, more concrete, than mere feeling, though the latter element is, no doubt, to be included within the wider ideal. Unless, therefore, we are to reject entirely the deeply grounded judgment of common sense that "pleasures" differ in "quality" as well as in intensity, we cannot accept quantitative hedonism. If we refuse to reject this judgment, we are bound to accept a eudæmonistic or even, perhaps, a perfectionistic standard of ethics. No doubt hedonism can give an interpretation, though a strained one, of the quality doctrine; the "higher" pleasures are more permanent and undiluted than the "lower" ones. But common sense, in approving of the "higher" means more than this.

Hedonism, we are bound finally to conclude, is not in harmony with common sense. Still this conclusion cannot be regarded as absolutely fatal to an ethical theory, for no theory can be expected to be, at all points, in harmony with the vague, unreasoned, moral conclusions of the vulgar. It is bound to go occasionally beyond, sometimes even to contradict them.

(3) The third criterion of a moral theory is its internal coherence and consistency.

To point out at great length the internal difficulties of hedonism will be unnecessary in view of

the preceding discussions on the relations between egoism and utilitarianism. It has been seen that each of these systems presented itself to Sidgwick as rational, and that a conflict between the two was therefore inevitable. But a hedonism which contains a "fundamental contradiction"—to use the emphatic closing words of the *Methods of Ethics* (p. 506)—a hedonism which cannot be resolved into a monism but must ever content itself with being dualistic, surely stands condemned. The advocates of the pleasure-theory have always failed at this point. Many and various have been their attempts to bridge over the yawning chasm between the claims of the one and those of the many, and no one has done more than Sidgwick to show the failure of all such attempts.<sup>1</sup> Is it not probable that the pleasure-ideal is too narrow to allow of the sublation of this dualism? If the moral end is pleasure (a purely subjective phenomenon) must there not ever be an opposition, or at least a dangerous contrast, between the pleasure of this person and the pleasure of that? "No," it may be answered, "pleasure may be shared." But is this true of pleasure in the hedonistic sense—pleasure as subjective feeling? Obviously not. Concrete pleasures, those of recreation, art, etc., can, no doubt, be shared, but such "pleasures"

<sup>1</sup> See last chapter of the *Methods*.



are complex social functions, not merely subjective feelings.<sup>1</sup> It is obvious that if we adopt so narrow and personal a moral ideal as mere feeling<sup>2</sup> we must expect conflicts and contradictions.

The problem arises whether, if we enlarge our ideal to eudæmonistic or perfectionistic dimensions, we shall get rid of such difficulties as these. Sidgwick boldly avowed that we shall not. Seven years before the first edition of the *Methods* appeared, he criticised the "culture" doctrine of Matthew Arnold on exactly similar grounds to those upon which he criticised, eighteen years later, the very similar self-realisation doctrine of Green. He saw the beauty of the wider ideal; he saw that it *tended* towards a destruction of the embarrassing conflict between the *meum* and the *tuum*,<sup>3</sup> but nevertheless he detected in it the possibility of a conflict of a somewhat different kind. "The impulse towards perfection in a man of culture is not practically

<sup>1</sup> For the ambiguity which lurks in the word "pleasure" see Mackenzie's *Manual of Ethics*, p. 72 (third ed.). Sidgwick has pointed out another ambiguity (*Methods*, p. 44).

<sup>2</sup> Something, by the way, least distinctive of man, and common to him and the brutes (*Ethical Studies*, p. 113).

<sup>3</sup> "While the happiness of others cannot be a rational object of pursuit to the man whose true end is happiness, the good of others may be . . . to a being whose end is something other than happiness conceived of as a mere pleasure" (Rashdall, "Prof. Sidgwick's Utilitarianism," *Mind*, 1885, p. 222).



limited to himself, but tends to expand in infinitely increasing circles. . . . And if it were possible that all men under all circumstances should feel . . . that there is no conflict, no antagonism, between the full development of the individual and the progress of the world—I should be loth to hint at any jar or discord in this harmonious movement.

But . . . life shows us the conflict and discord : on one side are the claims of harmonious self-development, on the other the cries of struggling humanity.”<sup>1</sup> In his article on Green’s Ethics<sup>2</sup> he gave expression to the same fear. “How,” he would say, “is the conscientious man to decide in the event of a conflict between (for example) his artistic development and his duty to his family? Self-development bids him be an artist ; for that profession he is manifestly endowed by nature ; why then refuse in the name of narrow and petty family duty to answer to the trumpet-call of the perfectionistic philosophy? Is not self-realisation (in this case artistic self-realisation) the supreme standard of conduct? And yet if he listen to this voice will he not be condemned by the same perfectionistic philosophy for neglect of family duty? In short, is there not in this philosophy a dualism

<sup>1</sup>“The Prophet of Culture,” *Macmillan’s Magazine*, August, 1867.

<sup>2</sup>*Mind*, 1884, p. 169.

quite as serious as that which destroys the unity of the pleasure doctrine? ”<sup>1</sup>

The difficulty has not been overlooked by idealistic writers.<sup>2</sup> No moral philosophy, it must be admitted, is competent to solve every problem, or to adjust with unerring accuracy the respective claims of two competing goods. But there can be little question that the perplexity which is attendant on the hedonistic dualism is far greater than that which arises from the rival theory. It suffices here to have pointed out a difficulty recognised by Sidgwick in the perfectionistic scheme, a difficulty which may tend to soften our condemnation of hedonism though without removing it. Our present business is not to solve perfectionistic puzzles, but to point out the internal anarchy of the pleasure theory. The existence of such an anarchy is absolutely undoubted.

(4) Our fourth criterion is a practical one. Which theory gives the better guidance to its devotees?

The self-realisation or perfectionistic doctrine has, no doubt, to face some serious practical difficulties, such, for example, as those presented by unfavourable

<sup>1</sup> These words are not Sidgwick's own, but represent his argument.

<sup>2</sup> Green's *Prolegomena*, p. 415 and *passim*.

social conditions, and by the crowning problem of death. It is not clear how a youth who is condemned to live in a slum, or to labour daily at degrading, mechanical or humdrum work, or to die of consumption while yet in his teens, can "realise himself" or even *approximate* to "perfection". But it is equally clear that similar difficulties and others in addition surround the hedonistic rule of life. The hedonist, too, may die young; he, too, may live amid unfavourable social surroundings; he may find the production of happiness for self and others as difficult a task as the perfectionist finds his. No doubt some happiness is within the reach of all, but whether the hedonist can gain or dispense the *greatest possible* amount of that commodity is a difficult if not an unmeaning question. The ambiguities of the phrase "greatest possible" have been already noticed in the *résumé* of Bradley's criticism.

But on one point, at least, hedonism is glaringly at fault. It has its own peculiar "paradox," a paradox so important as to amount, in the opinion of some moralists, almost to a refutation. That a deliberate, conscious, consistent pursuit of pleasure should be the worst possible plan of operations for the hedonist, is certainly a strange and damaging fact. That the best way to attain pleasure is to forget all about it, and to busy oneself in a

disinterested pursuit of virtue, etc., for their own sakes<sup>1</sup>—this is scarcely what we should *expect* if the hedonistic scheme were rooted and grounded in truth. Again we may admit that an argument of this kind, taken alone, is quite inadequate to refute such a theory as the one we are discussing. The moralist seeks “unity of principle and consistency of method at the risk of paradox”;<sup>2</sup> that hedonism has its “fundamental paradox” is therefore no insuperable objection to its truth, though it increases the need for rigorous proof on other grounds. Still, for hedonism to have to fall back at times upon perfectionism is not complimentary to the former system. “The fullest development of happy life for each individual seems to require that he should have other external objects of interest besides the happiness of conscious beings.<sup>3</sup> And thus we may conclude that the pursuit of the ideal objects before mentioned, virtue, truth, freedom, beauty, etc., *for their own sakes*, is indirectly and secondarily, though not primarily and absolutely, rational.”<sup>4</sup> In other words we must try to think and act as perfectionists, in order to realise the hedonistic end! Is not this a most impressive

<sup>1</sup> Whether our method is egoistic (*Methods*, p. 137), or utilitarian (*Methods*, p. 406).

<sup>2</sup> *Methods*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Or, of course, of himself.

<sup>4</sup> *Methods*, pp. 405-6.

argument in favour of perfectionism? Does it not confirm to the uttermost the arguments of Green that it is a far better practical guide than hedonism? <sup>1</sup>

The difficulties which follow upon the attempt to obtain guidance from the latter doctrine have been repeatedly pointed out by the idealistic school. But the fullest consciousness of these difficulties is obtained not from a study of the ponderous verboriousities of the *Prolegomena*, or the scintillating epigrams of *Ethical Studies*, but by inwardly digesting the fourth book of Sidgwick's *Methods*. No other writer has ever worked out with such patient and unflinching skill the mode of application of utilitarianism to the solution of present-day problems. At first sight an inconsistency of treatment is to be detected. Sidgwick, as we have seen, saw the necessity, on utilitarian grounds, of maintaining the disinterested (*i.e.*, *prima facie* non-utilitarian) love of virtue, beauty, etc. ; in other words perfectionism was to be, in large measure, the practical guide to the utilitarian end. We might have expected, therefore, that the fourth book would be on perfectionistic lines. Instead of this we are brought back to the ordinary method of comparing pleasure-results. "If he wishes to guide himself reasonably on utilitarian principles, the

<sup>1</sup> *Prolegomena*, book iv.



individual must . . . use the empirical method we have examined in book ii." (*Methods*, p. 476). But the inconsistency is only apparent. The pursuit of virtue, beauty, truth, etc., is to be disinterested only to a certain limited extent.

✓ "When the pursuit of any of these ends involves an apparent sacrifice of happiness in other ways, the practical question whether under these circumstances such pursuit ought to be maintained or abandoned seems always decided by an application, however rough, of the method of pure empirical hedonism" (*Methods*, p. 477). This cumbrous machinery of wheels within wheels, of non-hedonistic impulses moving within and limited by a wider, semi-latent, but ever-ready-to-appear-on-the-scene hedonistic principle—is scarcely such as to commend itself to an impartial spectator. Thorough-going hedonism in theory and practice we can understand ; theoretical hedonism combined with perfectionistic practice, that too, we can understand ; but must there not be a flaw in this hybrid system which bids us seek virtue disinterestedly but with interested intentions, seek it disinterestedly up to a point, and then no more? Is not ethics in a parlous state if she is reduced in practice to "make-believe"?

The meaning of a preceding statement that "the *Methods of Ethics* is more dangerous to

hedonism than any hostile work has ever been" is perhaps now clear. Sidgwick has followed out the system into its remotest ramifications and has shown, not, perhaps, its impossibility, but its unwieldiness and incompetence to afford practical guidance except of the roughest kind.

It is, of course, when applied to perplexing and intricate moral problems that the practical value of an ethical system can be tested. Take for example the problem of vivisection. Before the hedonist can decide as to the morality or immorality of this practice, he must be able to know with approximate exactness a multitude of details. He must have decided the question as to the nature of animal pain, whether it is really so intense as that of human beings, or whether, owing to the lower degree of consciousness possessed by brutes, it is comparatively negligible. He must be able to estimate the probability of physiological experiments seriously diminishing the sum-total of disease and suffering. He must take into consideration the mental anguish of sensitive persons who hear the records of vivisections and are distressed by them. He must consider the existence, in greater or less degree, of such feelings in the vivisectioners themselves. He must estimate the danger of vivisection reacting upon the general moral tone of the nation or of a portion of it, and thus possibly

diminishing in an indirect way the amount of hedonic feeling. He must consider, too, the pleasure of research, the pain of alienated sympathy, in fact the whole problem of the relation between the search for truth and the increase of happiness.

All these estimates are necessary before hedonism can decide the simple question whether vivisection is moral. Is it not clear that a perfectionistic theory is more likely to give direct and intelligible guidance than a theory which only takes account of the most fluctuating and incalculable of human (or rather organic) phenomena—feelings of pleasure and pain?

Listen to the practical difficulties which face the utilitarian when he is meditating a social reform. "In the first place, as his own happiness and that of others connected with him form a part of the universal end at which he aims, he must consider the importance to himself and them of the penalties of social disapprobation which he will incur; taking into account, besides the immediate pain of this disapprobation, its indirect effect in diminishing his power of serving society and promoting the general happiness in other ways" (*Methods*, p. 497). Where, we wonder, would have been human progress if the reformers of the past had thought of all this? Are not Green's words obviously and entirely true? "Our inquirer will find it difficult

to assure himself that, by any interference with usage or resistance to his own inclination, he can make the balance of human pleasures as against human pains greater than it is" (*Prolegomena*, pp. 373-74). He will become "less confident in any methods of increasing the enjoyments of mankind, and in consequence more ready to let things take their course" (*ibid.*, p. 379). Utilitarianism, when carried out consistently, will result in social and moral stagnation.

Listen again. "It is possible that the new rule, though it would be more felicitic than the old one, if it could get itself equally established, may be not so likely to be adopted, or if adopted, not so likely to be obeyed, by the mass of the community. . . . It is easier to pull down than to build up; easier to weaken or destroy the restraining force that a moral rule, habitually and generally obeyed, has over men's minds, than to substitute for it a new restraining habit. . . . And again, such destructive effect must be considered not only in respect of the particular rule violated, but of all other rules. . . . Nor must we neglect the reaction which any breach with customary morality will have on the agent's own mind."<sup>1</sup> For similar reasons it is necessary, we are told, to consider the danger of losing the sympathy of our fellows in making our

<sup>1</sup> *Methods*, pp. 479-80.

innovations ; not only, if we lose this sympathy, do we lose much happiness, but we also lose the support, afforded by their sympathy, to our moral convictions. "Through this twofold operation of sympathy it becomes practically much easier for most men to conform to a moral rule established in the society to which they belong than to one made by themselves" (*Methods*, p. 481).

These quotations are given to illustrate at the same time the rigorous and thorough-going character of Sidgwick's delineation of the hedonistic method, and the enormous difficulties involved in the practical application of that method to moral problems. It is abundantly clear that utilitarian hedonism will rarely be on the side of progress, for all attempts at reform involve disturbance of convictions, alienation of sympathy and (worst of all) inevitable uncertainty as to the effects of the reform, if carried out, upon human happiness. The utilitarian will therefore rarely endeavour to create new tastes and new wants ; he can never be certain that they will really add to the total of hedonic feeling. There are thus good reasons for the alliance which some writers have proclaimed, between utilitarianism and the "adaptation to environment" doctrine. The parasite is "adapted," and presumably enjoys himself. Utilitarianism, if → carried out to its logical consequences, would breed



parasites. Rarely, if ever, would it be on the side of reform or of the "elevation" of man. Hedonic feeling is too firmly united to the *status quo* for utilitarianism to advocate any serious changes.

Here we must conclude. The case for hedonism presented in the *Methods of Ethics*, though not a hopeless one, is certainly the reverse of promising. A theory based upon the view that ultimate good consists in feeling—a phenomenon least distinctive of man, a phenomenon dependent upon ever-varying conditions, and under the sway of habit, opinion, error and other extraneous factors—a theory of this kind encounters so many difficulties that even the skill of a Sidgwick cannot make it look attractive.

## CHAPTER X.

### SIDGWICK'S CRITICS.

A NUMBER of criticisms of Sidgwick's work have been referred to in the preceding pages, and the appended bibliography contains a list, as complete as the writer has been able to make it, of all such criticisms as have appeared in periodicals. Here follow, in a very condensed form, a few of the most important. Criticisms, favourable or otherwise, which have appeared in standard ethical works have been for the most part omitted, as easily accessible to all students of ethics.

LESLIE STEPHEN : *Frazer's*, March, 1875 (evolutionist). Sidgwick's defence of libertarianism is not satisfactory as it ignores sub-consciousness. For the same reason his disproof of psychological hedonism is unsatisfactory ; our pleasure-motives may be below the threshold of consciousness.—Reason cannot directly prompt to action. What does Sidgwick mean by "reasonable" conduct? Reason must have materials to work upon.—The maxim of equity is unsatisfactory. To admit that differences of "nature and character" alter the

morality of an action is to obliterate the distinction between right and wrong. The word "objective" is ambiguous. In the maxim of benevolence what does "intrinsically desirable" mean? If a thing is desirable it must be so to some definite person or persons.

EDWARD CAIRD: *Academy*, 12th June, 1875 (idealist). Sidgwick does not distinguish clearly enough the desires of a self-conscious and rational being from the appetites of animals.—Sidgwick seems sometimes almost to regard reason as constituting a motive and determining an end, but on the whole he seems to conceive reason as merely taking up and stamping with approval some of the matter presented by the passions.—Pleasure in abstraction from its conditions cannot be the subject of a judgment at all.—The maxim of equity is superfluous and even tautological. "What is right for me is right for all"; this implies that we know the "right" already apart from its universality. With Sidgwick objectivity = universality.—Maxim of benevolence. The mere universalising of desire, leaving it what it was in the natural man, would not produce a higher ideal than Carlyle's universal Paradise of Pigswash.

ALEXANDER BAIN: *Mind*, 1876, p. 177 (utilitarian). [An almost entirely favourable review.]

The hedonistic calculus is not so difficult as

Sidgwick represents it ; men can allow for bias, perturbations, etc.—There should be more reference to the “social organism,” rather than to the “greatest number” of individuals ; society as an organism can exert a greater claim upon our self-sacrifice than a number of units can exert. Still, we cannot get altruism out of egoism (*vide* Sidgwick’s last chapter) ; it has its own justification.

In his *Emotions and the Will* Bain passes some criticism upon Sidgwick’s treatment of the free-will question. But on the whole the two writers are in close agreement.

ALFRED BARRATT : *Mind*, 1877, p. 167 (evolutionist).

[An able criticism from the side of egoism and evolution, but based on the erroneous view that Sidgwick had tried or professed to “suppress” egoism.]

The historical antecedents of the moral faculty are of importance. “I doubt the validity of your moral faculty and in order to determine that I must compare it with my other faculties. A belief cannot be more valid than its data, and therefore if we discover the origin of our present beliefs we shall have at any rate a maximum measure of their validity.” How can mere interrogation of a faculty give “objective” good ; unless some reason for or explanation of this

“good” can be given we are driven back on to subjectivism. “The scientific system of ethics . . . shows you why you ought to aim at pleasure, by proving that you do so aim and that ‘ought to’ is compounded out of ‘is’. . . . Science *proves* hedonism but proves it in the egoistic form.—Where is the vicious circle in ‘follow Nature’? It means, ‘Be a self-conscious agent in the evolution of the universe’.”—[Barratt’s argument in favour of the proportionality of desire and pleasure has been dealt with elsewhere.]—If Mr. Sidgwick feels an “aversion” to egoism, and regards it as “ignoble” and “despicable,” he should remember that there is at least nothing noble in an unreasoning aversion. [A criticism beside the mark if Sidgwick is, in large measure, an egoist.]—The rule of equity is only valid if interpreted in the sense that mere difference of individuality in moral agents, as in atoms, does not affect the result, which is precisely similar under all similar conditions. But if the internal natures of the individuals are not included under the conditions, the axiom is not valid. It cannot then be right to tell a lie to a lunatic.—Sidgwick’s maxim of benevolence is on a par with his equity maxim. His error is traceable to the words “intrinsically desirable”. Desire must be felt by somebody. Sidgwick seems to have convinced



himself that good is something "objective" and "universal" and then to have argued that this must mean something independent of all individuals altogether. . . . The laws of nutrition are clearly objective and universal, but surely Mr. Sidgwick would not agree that because my dinner is not "intrinsically" more worthy of digestion than another's, therefore it is reasonable for me to digest all men's dinners. [Sidgwick's terminology was made less ambiguous in his later editions.]

Why should the egoist submit to Mr. Sidgwick's request (in the chapter on the "Proof of Utilitarianism") to speak of something as "objectively" desirable? Even if the "proof" were admitted it would be a deduction from egoism, and the latter must still remain valid. At most the voice of reason would be divided. [This is exactly what Sidgwick avers.] Barratt agrees that hedonism of some kind is the verdict of reason, and that egoism is the form of hedonism which reason originally dictates. But universal egoism is not utilitarianism, and no logical jugglery will make one out of the other. "Desirable," "intrinsic," "objective," are dangerous and ambiguous words.

SIDGWICK replied (*Mind*, 1877, p. 411): "I do not consider the principle of rational egoism to have been confuted, but only contradicted". As

to the physical method of establishing ethics, "ethical conclusions can only be logically reached by starting with ethical premisses".

BARRATT replied (*Mind*, 1877, p. 452): "I do not see how Mr. Sidgwick reconciles the 'dualism of the practical reason' with the 'postulate of the practical reason,'" that "two conflicting rules of action cannot both be reasonable".

HENRY CALDERWOOD: *Mind*, 1876, p. 197. [An attempt to state the intuitional position in a clearer manner than Sidgwick had done.] Moral intuitions are not the same as moral judgments; the latter may be erroneous; the former are not. Hence the weakness of Sidgwick's attack. Men's applications of their intuitions to concrete cases may be erroneous, but the moral intuitions themselves are valid. *How can you tell?*

In his *Handbook* (pp. 193-203, fourteenth edition) Professor Calderwood criticises Sidgwick's "determinism" on the ground that it is inconsistent with his admission of the importance of "deliberation" and "consciousness of self as choosing"; such admissions as these require for their explanation a "metaphysical doctrine of freedom". [Professor Calderwood has perhaps not fully appreciated Sidgwick's highly balanced treatment of this question; Sidgwick admits the consciousness of freedom and of "self" as choosing.]

✓ F. H. BRADLEY'S important criticism has been dealt with in another place.

F. Y. EDGEWORTH : *New and Old Methods of Ethics* (pub., James Parker and Co., 1877).

[This pamphlet is a criticism—in large measure favourable—of the *Methods of Ethics*, and is also, to some extent, a reply to Mr. Barratt's *Physical Ethics* and to his attack upon Sidgwick.]

The case of non-hedonistic desire may possibly be explained by ancestral habit ; “the dim remembrance of ancestral pleasures . . . produces that propension of which Butler speaks, disproportionate to (distinct) expectation and (personal) experience of pleasure.—Sidgwick's attack upon the view that the earlier (? egoistic) kind of conduct is somehow better than later kinds is not quite so conclusive as he thinks. It is vain to recommend a course of conduct not tending to the agent's pleasure if it can be shown that never in the past has such action so tended. Here then is a real negative criterion, and one which is fatal to asceticism.—Barratt's objections to the maxim of equity would be equally fatal to the proposition “mathematical judgments are the same for all persons, the data being the same”.—Sidgwick is not guilty of jugglery “in trying to make utilitarianism out of egoism, for his logic is not addressed to the pure egoist”.—It is a little unfortunate, but perhaps

inevitable that the terms "right," "reasonable," etc., should be employed in connection with egoism. —The argument in favour of free-will, based upon the verdict of self-consciousness, is not conclusive ; we cannot expect action to be always preceded by conscious motive.—Sidgwick's estimate of the value of authority as a criterion of the greatest pleasure is perhaps too low.—It is conceivable that the egoist's greatest pleasure might, in certain cases, consist in the contemplated pleasures of others. [Mr. Edgeworth concludes with a careful and lengthy mathematical working out of the results of quantitative hedonism. His conclusions may be summarised : "With regard to the theory of distribution, there is no indication that, at any rate between classes so nearly in the same order of evolution as the modern Aryan races, a law of distribution other than equality is to be wished. The more highly evolved class is to be privileged when there is a great interval. . . . With regard to the theory of population there should be a limit to the number. . . . If number and quality should ultimately come into competition, as seems to be not impossible, then the indefinite improvement of quality is no longer to be wished. . . . Not the most cultivated coterie, not the most numerous proletariat, but a happy middle class shall inherit the earth." ]

G. VON GIZYCKI: *Vierteljahrsschrift für Wissenschaftliche Philosophie*, 1880, p. 114.

Like many other critics of Sidgwick, Gizycki objects to his denial of the importance of a knowledge of origins. "Dass die frage nach Natur und Ursprung des Gewissens oder der 'moral faculty' eine. . . . Bedeutung nicht habe, kann ich ihm durchans nicht zugeben." If Sidgwick had only analysed conscience or the moral faculty as exactly as he had done in the case of desire, he would not so easily have identified "moral" with "reasonable".—Gizycki notices that, despite the many difficulties inherent in egoism, Sidgwick does not reject that system. "Unser Autor ist aber weit davon entfernt, dieser Schwierigkeiten wegen—die er sicherlich nicht als zu gering darstellt—die Methode des hedonistischen Calculus zu verwerfen."—As for the three maxims, Sidgwick's work is highly valuable. "Es ist kein geringes Verdienst des Verfassers, diese logische Elemente des moralischen Bewusstseins klar und präcis festgestellt zu haben."

Gizycki's greatest criticism of Sidgwick is directed against the "rationality" of egoism and against the resulting "dualism" and chaos. "Wie kommt der Verfasser zu diesem trostlosen Schlussresultate? Nur dadurch, dass er jene selbst-evidente Intuition, 'dass blosse Priorität und posteriorität in der Zeit



kein vernünftiger Grund ist, das Bewusstsein des einen Moments mehr zu berücksichtigen, als das eines andern,'—als einen Zureichenden rationalen Beweisgrund des Egoismus als solchen ansieht; wozu er nicht das mindeste Recht hat." The intuition is not egoistic at all and cannot conflict with the principle of benevolence. "Nur dies folgen kann, das die Methode des Egoismus unbedingt zu verwerfen ist."—No doubt we have "ein mächtiges Bedürfniss des Gemüths" that good and evil deeds may be ultimately rewarded or punished appropriately. But no ethical "dualism of the practical reason" can be founded upon such a "Bedürfniss".

Sidgwick replied (*Mind*, 1889, pp. 483-85) in the very important article entitled, "Some Fundamental Ethical Controversies," during the course of which he reaffirmed, with great emphasis, the "rationality" of egoism.

In the *International Journal of Ethics*, October, 1890, p. 120, Gizycki repeated his criticism of Sidgwick's "egoism".

REV. H. RASHDALL: "Professor Sidgwick's Utilitarianism," *Mind*, 1885, p. 200. [A thoroughgoing criticism from the idealistic side, though Mr. Rashdall is not sufficiently conscious of the egoistic undercurrents in Sidgwick's philosophy.]

The fundamental question raised by Professor

to Gizycki

Sidgwick's position is the logical compatibility of a rationalistic theory of duty with a hedonistic conception of the true good. The central difficulty of his position is the assignment of a different end to the individual and to the race. It is pronounced reasonable for A to sacrifice his happiness for B, but he must regard B as living only for his own happiness.—To say that pleasure must be the ultimate end because a life spent on a desert island could (apparently) have no other object, is to seek to arrive at the true end of man by abstracting him from the conditions which make him man. If we admit that altruism is rational we must modify our conception of ultimate good ; it must be not mere happiness but social or moral happiness, including the willingness to do what is "right and reasonable as such". In fact there are *prima facie* two ultimate goods, happiness and conformity to reason.—Sidgwick's theological postulate at the end of the *Methods* can get but little support from hedonism. Can a universe be rational in which the end is only pleasure, and yet in which reason daily prompts to the sacrifice of pleasure? "Man is so far a rational being that he is capable of preferring the rational to the pleasant. Surely, then, the reasonableness of such a preference cannot be dependent on its ultimately turning out that he has, after all, preferred the very thing which his

love of the reasonable led him to reject. Mr. Rashdall, therefore, regards ultimate good as inclusive of rationality of conduct (virtue) not as mere pleasure. Sidgwick's argument against the character-theory of ethics is not satisfactory, but no one holds such a theory. "A 'virtue' or 'faculty' is, of course (as Professor Sidgwick urges), a mere abstraction, but only in the sense in which pleasure is an abstraction also." By "virtue" we mean "virtuous consciousness," just as by "pleasure" Professor Sidgwick means "pleasurable consciousness".

M. GUYAU: *La Morale Anglaise Contemporaine*, 2<sup>e</sup> édition.

M. Guyau like Professor Gizycki supports Barratt's contention that the question of the origin of the moral faculty is of fundamental importance. He also criticises severely the introduction in the last chapter of the *Methods* of a *deus ex machina*. The conception of a utilitarian Deity correcting in a future life his failures in this, is in a worse plight than the ordinary religious doctrine which represents the pains of the present life as "une sorte de monnaie avec laquelle on achète la moralité suprême seul bien véritable". We must not draw arguments from hopes and desires; "un souhait ou un désir n'est pas une raison".





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The following abbreviations are used :—

*M.* = *Mind*.

*J.* = *International Journal of Ethics*.

*A.* = *Academy*.

*F.* = *Fortnightly Review*.

*Mac.* = *Macmillan's Magazine*.

*C.* = *Contemporary Review*.

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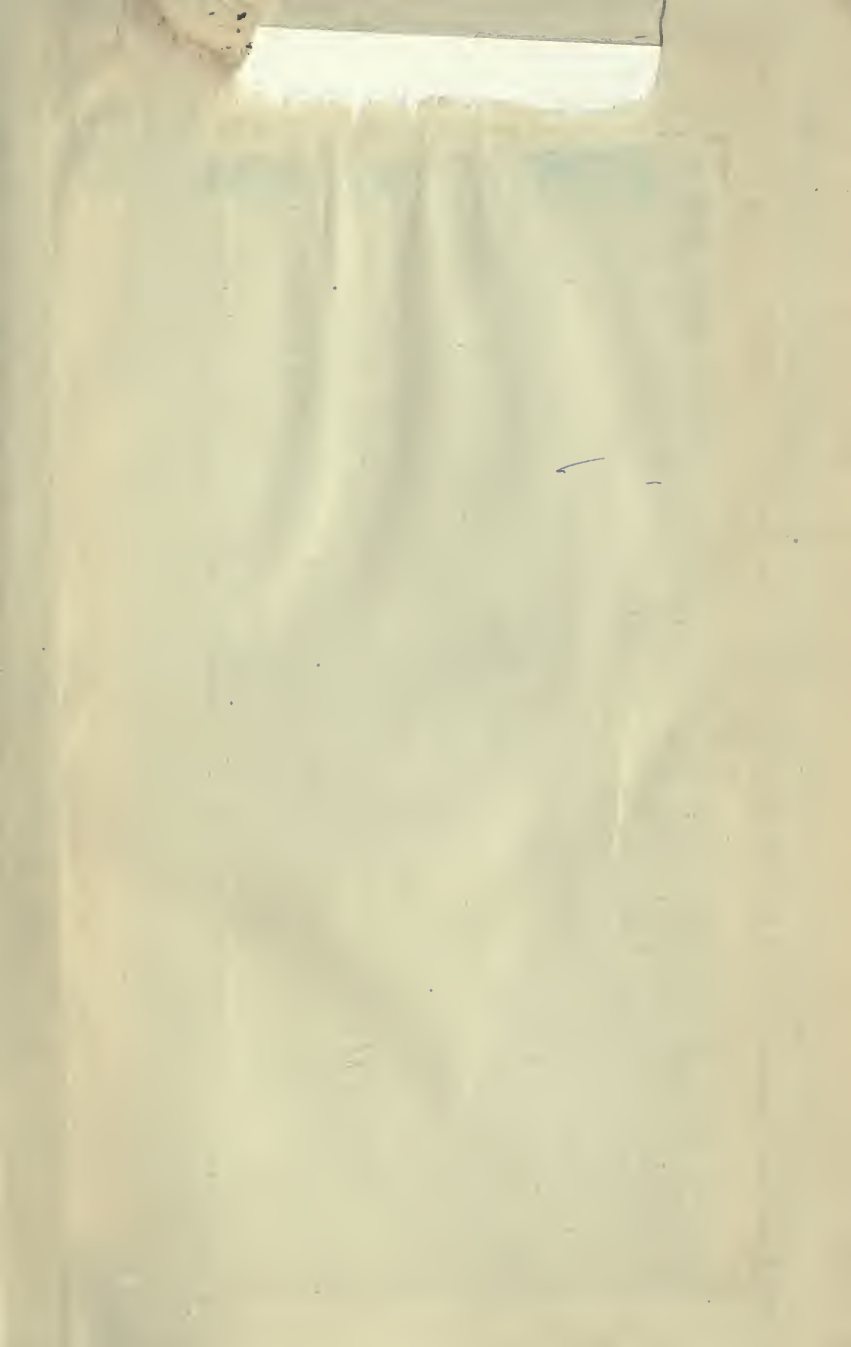
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