THE COSMOS
OF DUTY

Henry Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics*

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Contents

Note on References

This book is primarily concerned with the seventh edition of Henry Sidgwick's *The Methods of Ethics* (1907; all editions are London: Macmillan), and references to this are made by page number alone unless the context makes clear otherwise (some references are by book and chapter; by book, chapter, and section; and occasionally also by paragraph). It is regrettable that referencing by line numbers is in practice impossible, as is the case with many central works of modern philosophy. There is a great need for a complete scholarly edition of Sidgwick's works which would allow such referencing.

Editions of the *Methods* are referred to as M1, M2, and so on. The Preface to any edition is referred to as P along with the relevant number. So P1 refers to the preface to the first edition. Reference is then given by the page numbers as printed in the Hackett (1981, Indianapolis) reprint of the seventh edition (which adds two further preliminary pages to the original edition through including a Foreword by John Rawls). So P6 xix refers to the Preface to the sixth edition on page xix of the Hackett seventh edition. The Appendix is referred to as App.

Other abbreviations of works by Sidgwick are as follows. Page references in the text are to reprints as stated.

AES: 'The Aims of an Ethical Society', delivered to the London Ethical Society on 23 April 1893; repr. in Sidgwick 1998: 15–30.

APE: 'Appendix to the Preceding Essay', in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant and Other Philosophical Lectures and Essays*, ed. J. Ward, 1905. London: Macmillan, 461–7; repr. in Sidgwick 2000 as 'Further on the Criteria of Truth and Error': 166–70.

CCP: 'A Criticism of the Critical Philosophy II', *Mind* O.S. 8 (1883): 313–37.

DIO: 'Is the Distinction between "Is" and "Ought" Ultimate and Irreducible?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 2 (1891–2): 88–92; repr. as 'The Distinction between "Is" and "Ought" ' in Sidgwick 2000: 59–62.

EEFP: 'The Establishment of Ethical First Principles', *Mind* O.S. 4 (1879): 106–11; repr. in Sidgwick 2000: 29–34.

EP: *The Elements of Politics*, 2nd edn, 1897. London: Macmillan.

ERRL: *Essays, Reviews, Reports, and Letters to the Editor*, in *The Complete Works and Select Correspondence of Henry Sidgwick*, online edn, ed. B. Schultz, 2nd edn, 1999. Charlottesville: InteLex Corp.

FTDA: 'The Feeling-tone of Desire and Aversion', *Mind* N.S. 1 (1892): 94–101; repr. in Sidgwick 2000: 99–106.

GSM: *Lectures on the Ethics of T. H. Green, H. Spencer, and J. Martineau*, ed. E. Constance Jones, 1902. London: Macmillan.

GU: 'Review of J. Grote, *An Examination of the Utilitarian Philosophy*', *Cambridge University Reporter*, 8 Feb. 1871; repr. in Sidgwick 2000: 173–5.

LPK: *Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant and Other Philosophical Lectures*, ed. J. Ward, 1905. London: Macmillan.

MB: 'Mr Barratt on "The Suppression of Egoism" ', *Mind* O.S. 2 (1877): 411–12; repr. in Sidgwick 2000: 27–8.

NET: 'The Nature of the Evidence for Theism', read to the Synthetic Society, 25 Feb. 1898; in Sidgwick and Sidgwick 1906: 600–8.

OHE: *Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers*, 5th edn, repr. 1910. London: Macmillan.

PC: 'Professor Calderwood on Intuitionism in Morals', *Mind* O.S. 1 (1876): 563–6; repr. in Sidgwick 2000: 23–6.

PM: 'Public Morality', read on 26 Jan. 1897, at a meeting of a Cambridge essay club called 'The Eranus'; repr. in Sidgwick 1998: 31–46.

PSR: *Philosophy, its Scope and Relations: An Introductory Course of Lectures*, 1902. London: Macmillan.

RES: 'The Relation of Ethics to Sociology', *International Journal of Ethics* 10 (1899): 1–21; repr. in Sidgwick

1904: 249–69.

SFEC: 'Some Fundamental Ethical Controversies', *Mind* O.S. 14 (1889): 473–87; repr. in Sidgwick 2000: 35–46.

VOB: 'The Verification of Beliefs', *Contemporary Review* 17 (1871): 582–90; repr. in Sidgwick 2000: 121–8.

References to 'CD' are to *The Cosmos of Duty*.

List of Key Passages

The following is a list of the central passages in Sidgwick's text most relevant to each chapter of this book. References are given by book, chapter, and (sometimes) section. The list is of course non-exhaustive and readers are encouraged to use the excellent Contents and Index in the *Methods*, as well as the search facility in online texts such as that available via the University of Toronto at: <https://archive.org/details/methodsofethics00sidguoft>

Ch. 1: P6; 1.1–3; 1.6.
Ch. 2: 1.5; App.
Ch. 3: 1.4; 1.7.1–2; 1.9; 2.1–4; 2.6; 3.14.
Ch. 4: 1.8; 3.1.1; 3.1.3; 3.1.4–5; 3.11.1–2; 3.13.
Ch. 5: 3.1.2–3; 3.2; 3.12.
Ch. 6: 3.3–10; 3.11.3–9.
Ch. 7: P6; 1.7.1; 2.5; 3.1.2; 3.11.7; 3.13.3–5; 3.14.4; 4.1–5;
Concluding Chapter.

Summary by Chapter

1 The Nature of Ethics

This chapter covers some of the major background issues in Sidgwick's *Methods*. I begin with Sidgwick's own historical account of his development, including his search for a Kantian intuition to underpin utilitarian ethics, and the influence on him of Butler that led to the dualism of practical reason. I suggest that from the very start of the *Methods*, Sidgwick appears to be demanding a perhaps unreasonably high level of precision from ethical theory, as well as claiming a degree of impartiality in his approach which he finds it hard to live up to. I then examine Sidgwick's metaethics, explaining his cognitivism and his metaethically modest non-naturalist realism. Having set out Sidgwick's arguments against several naturalist positions, based on the ideas of God's will, conformity to nature, and self-realization, each of which Sidgwick believes fails to recognize the distinction between 'is' and 'ought', I turn to Sidgwick's views on 'ought' and his response to various non-rationalist positions influenced by Hume, centring on an appeal to the objective phenomenology of moral judgement and the claim that normativity is irreducible to any non-normative notion. Hume's metaethics depends on his account of motivation, and I explain how Sidgwick is best seen as a weak internalist about motivation, who allows for failure to be motivated by grasp of a normative reason in cases such as weakness of will or moral wrongdoing. I also claim that Sidgwick was insufficiently parsimonious in his use of ethical concepts, and could have avoided several metaethical debates entirely by not himself using the notion of 'ought' except in discussing the views of others. Sidgwick's own methodology depends on a distinction between methods and ultimate principles. I seek to elucidate that distinction, and argue that he would have

been wiser to focus on principles rather than methods. I spell out why he chose his three methods, and claim that, though there are some difficulties with his arguments, he was nevertheless right to see ethics as a debate between consequentialism, deontology, and egoism. The chapter ends with a section on Sidgwick's views of politics, where I argue that there is a stronger case than Sidgwick allows for seeing political theory as a branch of ethics.

2 Free Will

The main aim of this chapter is to elucidate Sidgwick's discussion of free will and determinism, and to bring out some of the utilitarian or consequentialist assumptions Sidgwick appears to have been working with. Having explained the structure of 1.5, I turn to Sidgwick's preliminary discussions of disinterested action and rational action, neither of which does he see as central to understanding the notion of freedom. I explain how Sidgwick offers a form of non-standard compatibilism, according to which what matters in deliberation is not how it was caused but whether the agent can be sure how she is going to act. I raise some problems for Sidgwick's criticism of Kant, and then consider Sidgwick's philosophy of action and in particular his conception of the will. I suggest that his restriction of ethics to the voluntary was unwise, and that his own account of voluntary action is best seen not as a development of the common-sense view but as his own view, based on a cognitivist theory of intention. I then examine Sidgwick's views on the scope of the will, before turning to his discussion of the debate between determinism and libertarianism. Not all of the arguments for determinism Sidgwick finds plausible are strong, but he is right to see force in the argument from natural causation. He is also right to recognize the power of the libertarian appeal to the phenomenology of freedom. But Sidgwick's view on the unimportance of the free will debate appears to rest on a consequentialist understanding of what really matters (that is, the outcomes of actions) and a consequentialist reinterpretation of moral responsibility, involving concepts at the heart of common-sense morality, such as desert. Ultimately, it seems that Sidgwick's conclusion is that the free will debate *may* make no practical difference, if one has the capacity to substitute consequentialist conceptions of these central concepts for traditional libertarian conceptions. And even here one might wonder whether Sidgwick is

right to claim that such substitutions will leave things as they are.

3 Hedonism and the Ultimate Good

This chapter begins by considering Sidgwick's position on rightness and goodness. I claim that, though there is a strong case for distinguishing reasons from values, the contrast Sidgwick draws between ancient 'attractive' and modern 'imperative' views is exaggerated. I then outline Sidgwick's view of what is good for a person in terms of what she has reason to desire, and show how this leaves him open to a 'wrong kind of reasons' objection. I turn next to various apparently different accounts of pleasure that seem to be implicit in Sidgwick's thought: the volitional view, the feeling-tone view, the apprehension view, and the desirable consciousness view. I claim that the last is best understood as equivalent to the feeling-tone view, and as Sidgwick's true view of pleasure. Having explained Sidgwick's arguments against psychological and synonymic hedonism, I consider his own welfare hedonism, focusing on Sidgwick's objections to non-hedonistic accounts, according to which well-being consists in goods such as virtue, physical states, or non-hedonic mental states. These objections are powerful, but not so powerful as to debunk the non-hedonist position: Sidgwick's own epistemology requires him to suspend judgement on the nature of the good. The next section discusses Sidgwick's appraisal of the difficulties of measuring pleasure and pain, and his objections to 'objective' and 'deductive' hedonism. I end with some discussion of what Sidgwick said, and might have said, in response to various practical and theoretical objections to hedonism.

4 Intuitionism

This chapter concerns Sidgwick's ethical epistemology. I begin by explaining Sidgwick's cognitivist view of intuitions as apparently self-evident beliefs. I express some doubt about Sidgwick's quick dismissal of 'perceptional' intuitionism before moving on to his objections to 'dogmatic' intuitionism and his arguments for 'philosophical' intuitionism. Here I claim that Sidgwick should have attached less weight to the morality of common sense than he did. I

then move on to the notion of self-evidence, and Sidgwick's conditions for 'highest certainty'. I claim that Sidgwick failed to follow through properly on the implications of his non-dissensus condition for his own ethics. After outlining Sidgwick's critique of what he calls 'sham-axioms', I discuss the principles of justice, prudence, and benevolence which Sidgwick himself found self-evident, suggesting again that dissensus poses difficulties, though not insurmountable ones, for Sidgwick.

5 Virtue

In this chapter I focus on Sidgwick's views on virtue in general, as opposed to those on particular virtues, which will be discussed in the following chapter. I begin with an examination of Sidgwick's views of the ethical significance of intention and motive, arguing that his giving too much credence to the notion that ethics is concerned with the voluntary again is in tension with his own utilitarian approach. I then consider Sidgwick's distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' rightness, and the best way to understand that distinction in relation to virtue. Having looked at Sidgwick's important discussion of the difference between virtues and talents, I find some problems in Sidgwick's position on supererogation. The third section of the chapter concerns the nature of virtue itself. I argue against the view that we should see being virtuous primarily as a property of a person rather than her acts, and then consider Sidgwick's position on moral motivation and the sense of duty. The chapter ends with a discussion of Sidgwick's views on the cultivation of virtue, and I raise the question whether he is right to doubt that virtue, as a trait of character, could be valuable in itself.

6 The Virtues

This chapter consists primarily in discussions of Sidgwick's treatments of individual virtues. I argue that Sidgwick distorts practical wisdom into a form of self-control, partly because of his antipathy to the notion of judgement, but also because of his restriction of ethics to the sphere of the voluntary. I suggest that Sidgwick's account of benevolence rests too much on his own

hedonistic account of the good, and then examine his fourfold distinction of the duty into involuntary duties, voluntary duties, duties of gratitude, and duties of pity. I claim that once again Sidgwick's own utilitarian views appeared to be affecting his own interpretation of common-sense morality. I then turn to Sidgwick's discussion of justice, and in particular its relation to law, contract, and custom. I show how Sidgwick's emphasis on the importance of not disappointing expectations is worth greater attention than it has received in the literature, and how his criticisms of natural rights theories and desert theories anticipated various later arguments. Sidgwick himself offers a separate discussion of laws and promises, and I begin by looking at his account of political obligation and his apt criticisms of consent theories. I try to bring out how much insight Sidgwick shows in his account of the limits on the duty to keep a promise. After explaining Sidgwick's view on the role of justice within a utilitarian theory, I discuss various other virtues: veracity, non-malevolence, liberality, the self-regarding virtues, courage, and humility. I then focus on Sidgwick's overall analysis of the failure of common-sense morality, bringing out how Sidgwick often confronts common-sense moral principles with a 'clarity-non-dissensus dilemma'. I conclude that, though there is a huge amount to learn from Sidgwick's examination of common sense, his criticisms are flawed by a failure to recognize the role that a capacity for individual judgement can play within an ethical theory.

7 Egoism, Utilitarianism, and the Dualism of Practical Reason

In this chapter I examine Sidgwick's views on egoism, utilitarianism, and the conflict between the two that he called 'the dualism of practical reason'. I show that, though Sidgwick finds egoism somewhat objectionable, he sees an intuitive grounding for it in the metaphysical distinction between one individual and another. I suggest that the view can be made consistent with a Humean view of personal identity, and offer some defence of Sidgwick's general view on the plausibility of egoism. I also find persuasive Sidgwick's view that there is a potential conflict between happiness and duty, as ordinarily understood. Continuing on to utilitarianism, I argue that Sidgwick's 'objective' version of the view is as plausible as more recent 'subjective' or probability-based versions. I then

examine Sidgwick's views on the moral status of non-humans and future generations, and raise some questions about what appears to be the advocacy by Sidgwick of a restricted form of egalitarianism. Having outlined Sidgwick's intuitionist argument for utilitarianism, I then turn to his 'proof' of the view in book 4, which attempts to persuade common-sense moralists that utilitarianism can be seen as 'controlling and completing' common-sense moral principles. This proof, I claim, might succeed in certain cases, though it is open to a defender of common-sense morality to claim that her principle of benevolence can do at least much of the work done by the utilitarian principle in Sidgwick's account. Sidgwick recognizes that he should take a view on what kind of value 'moral value' is, and I applaud his account. I then consider Sidgwick's careful and balanced discussion of the relation between utilitarianism and common-sense morality, including his famous admission that utilitarianism may recommend its own partial suppression. The final section discusses Sidgwick's dualism of the practical reason. Through understanding Sidgwick's versions of egoism and utilitarianism as making consistent yet universal demands, I show why Sidgwick appeals to the possibilities that sympathy may play an important role in happiness or that the world is morally governed by God as resolving the dualism of practical reason. Neither of these strategies works, but I suggest that had Sidgwick seen his principles of prudence and benevolence as pro tanto principles guiding judgement about particular cases, the dualism could have been avoided.

1
The Nature of Ethics

1 Sidgwick's Project

Henry Sidgwick was thirty-six when *The Methods of Ethics* was first published in 1874. For well over a decade he had been planning a book that might reconcile 'moral sense', or intuition, with utilitarianism, and he revised the book in various editions for the rest of his life (Sidgwick and Sidgwick 1906: 75). Sidgwick died before completing the sixth edition, which was seen through the press by E. E. Constance Jones. In the preface Jones included some illuminating notes for a lecture by Sidgwick on the development of his ethical views. Although Sidgwick is often, with some justification, described as the third of the great 'classical utilitarians', we can see from his own account of his intellectual journey that, though it began with utilitarianism strictly understood, it soon departed from there and was never to return.

Sidgwick tells us that he was initially committed to Millian utilitarianism, which he found liberating, in contrast to the 'arbitrary pressure' of the dubious, confused, or dogmatic moral rules he had been taught. That commitment sat alongside antipathy to the views of the influential Cambridge philosopher William Whewell, whose *Elements of Morality* (1845) led Sidgwick to the view that 'intuitional' ethics was, in comparison with mathematics, 'hopelessly loose'.[1] Sidgwick understood Mill to hold that each person seeks her own happiness (psychological hedonism) and that each person ought to promote the happiness of all (ethical hedonism). He found both views attractive, not yet seeing the potential inconsistency between them. As he came to recognize the possibility of conflict between 'interest' and 'duty', Sidgwick began to think seriously

about egoism as a normative view, and concluded that it is the opposition between 'interest' (that is, self-interest) and duty or the general good that is central to ethics, rather than that between 'intuitions' and hedonism. This, he says, explains the structure of the *Methods*, in which, after an introductory book, egoism (interest) is discussed in book 2, intuitionism (duty) in book 3, and utilitarianism (the general good) in book 4. Further, Sidgwick decided that, despite his earlier aversion to intuitionist ethics, the only way to ground a utilitarian justification for sacrificing one's own happiness for the sake of others was through a fundamental ethical intuition: 'I must somehow *see* that it was right for me to sacrifice my happiness for the good of the whole of which I am a part' (P6 xviii).

Where was he to find such an intuition? Sidgwick returned to Kant, and, though impressed by Kant's view that what is right for any person must be right for all persons in similar circumstances, felt that this notion of universalizability was insufficiently substantive to ground a principle of duty in opposition to egoism. This led Sidgwick to Butler, who he believed also accepted a 'dualism of the practical reason'. It was under the influence of Butler that Sidgwick rejected psychological hedonism and accepted the existence of disinterested, other-regarding motivation. Further, since Butler's powerful critique of utilitarianism also worried Sidgwick, and Sidgwick realized that he himself was already an 'intuitionist' by accepting both the Kantian thesis about rightness and the need for an intuitionist foundation for utilitarianism, he decided to reconsider intuitionist ethics itself. Unsurprisingly, Sidgwick decided to study not Whewell but Aristotle, seeing his *Nicomachean Ethics* as an impartial attempt to make consistent the common-sense morality of his day. Sidgwick set out to do the same for nineteenth-century British morality, and 3.1–9 was the first component of the *Methods* to be completed. The upshot was that, though he failed to find any further intuitions he could accept, he came to see common-sense morality as a system itself based on the promotion of general happiness, to be revised in the light of general happiness only in exceptional cases. Further, despite having failed to find any way to resolve the conflict between egoism and utilitarianism, Sidgwick decided to publish his book, finding it a 'great comfort to have got it out' (Sidgwick and Sidgwick 1906: 295).

Sidgwick's aim, then, was to ascertain which—if either—of egoism and utilitarianism was correct, by reflection on the possibility of securely grounding either on a secure intuitionist basis. But he wished also to inquire into whether elements of

traditional intuitional or non-utilitarian ethics could be so grounded. Sidgwick does not say how he would have dealt with such non-utilitarian principles had they appeared justified, though we might presume that, just as in the case of egoism and utilitarianism, he would have sought to make them consistent with one another.[2] Philosophical ethics, Sidgwick tells us, aims like science to be 'systematic and precise' (1; see Irwin 2009: 3: 479–84).[3] He later says that the assumption that moral rules should be precise 'naturally belongs to the ordinary or jural view of Ethics as concerned with a moral code' (228), and provides an argument for this view based on an apt analogy with law. If a law were vague, we would think it to that extent unreasonable: anyone subject to a legal obligation ought to be in a position to know what it is. Similarly, a moral philosophy which left it unclear on some occasion exactly what a person's obligations were would, to that extent, have failed.[4]

A good deal of law is indeed highly precise. The UK Representation of the People Act 1969, for example, leaves no doubt about when a person becomes eligible to vote in a parliamentary election: on their eighteenth birthday. But some law is less precise. Consider, for example, the definition of obscenity in the Obscene Publications Act 1959, still in force in the UK:

> For the purposes of this Act an article shall be deemed to be obscene if its effect or (where the article comprises two or more distinct items) the effect of any one of its items is, if taken as a whole, such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it.

If I have written some potentially obscene article, and am considering its publication in the UK, the law will not tell me whether or not it is safe for me to publish it. I have to rely on my judgement about the likely effects of its publication, and whether they might be described as depravation or corruption. Now it might be said that Sidgwick is right that, to this extent, the law is a failure, and legislators should seek further precision. But even if they did—perhaps by spelling out further what is meant by depravation and giving examples of what is and what is not to count as obscene—there will be an ineliminable role for judgement on the part of citizens. A law is not a failure if it is *reasonably* clear, and relies only to a *reasonable* degree on individual judgement. Exactly what counts as reasonable or not in ethics is a highly important question,

and I shall return to it later in this book (see CD 6.9).[5]

Given the prevalence of apparent conflict between the considerations picked out as relevant by utilitarian and non-utilitarian principles, consistency between them, if it were even possible, would have required any single ultimate principle to become hugely complicated and detailed. And at that point Sidgwick would almost certainly have rejected it as intuitively insecure (see e.g. 342–3), and as presenting him with yet another failure. To avoid such complication would have required him to accept the possibility of decision-making based on the weighing of a plurality of ultimate principles against one another in individual cases analogous to the kind of legal judgement mentioned in the previous paragraph. As we shall see (CD 7.3), had he allowed the possibility of such judgement, he could have avoided not only the danger of conflict between utilitarian and non-utilitarian principles, but the actual conflict between egoism and utilitarianism he so signally failed to resolve at the close of the *Methods*.

Also important to Sidgwick's own conception of his project is his avowed impartiality (see Irwin 2009: 439–40; 518). At P1 viii, Sidgwick claims that the protreptic goals of moral philosophers have distorted the development of ethics as an objective enterprise, and announces his intention to focus on the 'methods' of ethics themselves and not their practical results:

> I have wished to put aside temporarily the urgent need which we all feel of finding and adopting the true method of determining what we ought to do; and to consider simply what conclusions will be rationally reached if we start with certain ethical premises, and with what degree of certainty and precision.

Later, at 13, Sidgwick claims that his only 'immediate end'[6] has been to clarify the three methods themselves and that he has therefore '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' (see also 338). This is mysterious.[7] Sidgwick famously considered the *Methods* a failure, but not because it left the three methods unclear. The failure consisted in the dualism of the practical reason—the conflict between egoism and utilitarianism that made impossible the development of a 'harmonious system'.[8]

2 The Autonomy of Ethics

2.1 Cognitivism and Non-naturalist Quietism

Sidgwick's disparaging contrast between intuitionist ethics and mathematics strongly suggests that he saw the latter as the model at which philosophical ethics should aim. Indeed, he is happy to see philosophical ethics as scientific in so far as it aims at being systematic and exact (1–2). But calling it a science, he suggests, may be misleading, since the objects of ethics are quite different from those of the 'positive sciences'; ethics is better described as a *study*.[9] Sidgwick notes that psychologists and sociologists who seek to explain human action individually or collectively often begin to speak of the actions or institutions they study as 'good', 'bad', 'right', or 'wrong', and, in doing so, they move out of their 'positive' discipline into ethics or politics. The attempt to *explain* human action, sentiments, and judgements is 'essentially different' from the attempt to decide which of these is *right* or *valid*.[10] Ethics is not a form of 'naturalism', in so far as it sees *what ought to be* as an object of knowledge (PSR 24; 76; see P1 vii), while it is usually held that a science must be an inquiry into some 'department of actual existence'.

Sidgwick is, then, both a cognitivist—in the sense that he accepts that there can be ethical knowledge, at least in principle—as well as a non-naturalist, in so far as he denies straightforward naturalism (see Phillips 2011: 12).[11] Is he also committed to normative, ethical, or moral realism, if we understand such positions to involve a substantive metaphysical commitment to moral or ethical facts?[12] Sidgwick never speaks of such facts.[13] And his reference to the subject matter of positive science as some aspect of 'actual existence' suggests that he was not inclined to think in those terms.[14] For him, it was enough that we can have knowledge of moral truth (34), and that philosophical ethics be seen as the discipline through which we might acquire such knowledge.[15]

For this reason (see Schneewind 1977: 222; Shaver 2000: 262–6; Phillips 2011: 27–32), Sidgwick appears to be in a position to sidestep the charge of metaphysical extravagance often made against ethical non-naturalism (see esp. Mackie 1977: 38–42). Of course, in some weak sense he must be committed to ethical facts,

if the postulation of such facts amounts to nothing more than the claim that ethics has an object, irreducible to non-ethical facts, which we can cognize (see Phillips 2011: 27–32). But Sidgwick's moral metaphysics is derivative from his epistemology. He does not begin with the claim that there is some 'special realm' of moral facts, like the Platonic forms, and then provide an epistemology in the light of that.[16]

2.2 Is and Ought

At 78–83, Sidgwick notes that his list of three ultimate reasons suggested for further attention—happiness, excellence, and duty—may appear to leave out some important further options for ultimate reasons: that something is God's will; that it promotes 'self-realization'; or that it is in conformity to nature. Sidgwick is ready to accept the immediate attraction of such views, since they might appear to provide a foundation for what ought to be in what actually exists. He then claims that, for this very reason, they are the concern not of ethics as he has defined it (as an autonomous discipline) but of philosophy more generally, which is concerned with the relations of all objects of knowledge.

This restriction of the scope of ethics is somewhat unsatisfactory. Sidgwick might be proposing his conception of an autonomous ethics for pragmatic reasons—as a research programme which, though it leaves out some significant options, will be for that reason more manageable. But this will leave his conclusions as merely temporary hypotheses, which, even if they appear highly plausible, will require testing against the ethical conclusions from ethics more broadly construed as part of philosophy. This seems especially regrettable given the pessimistic conclusion of the *Methods*: a proponent of one of the three alternatives might well be hopeful of greater philosophical success.

But Sidgwick's restriction is best seen not as purely heuristic, since he continues:

> The introduction of these notions into Ethics is liable to bring with it a fundamental confusion between 'what is' and 'what ought to be', destructive of all clearness in ethical reasoning: and if this confusion is avoided, the strictly ethical import of such notions, when made explicit, appears always to lead us to one or other of the methods previously distinguished.

Sidgwick proceeds to examine the 'divine will' view first, since here,

he says, the connection between 'what is' and 'what ought to be' is clear. He raises the question of how we might ascertain God's will, and suggests it must be through revelation, reason, or some combination of both. Revelation, he suggests, does not fall within the domain of ethics as he understands it. Given that the epistemology of revelation might turn out to be analogous in important ways to Sidgwick's own philosophical intuitionism, this is not a strong response to the revelational position. He might rather have allowed for the view, and then impaled it on one or other horn of the *Euthyphro* dilemma. If the idea is that God's willing in itself gives us a reason to act, this appears arbitrary, and also fails to explain why—on most theistic accounts—God is said to will actions for which there often seem to be excellent reasons independent of his willing (see 31). But if God is seen merely as the best guide to what is independently right, then the view becomes more strictly ethical, and Sidgwick can run his argument that such positions can be categorized within the scope of the ethical theories he does discuss. It is a form of this latter argument that he uses against the rationalist theist, claiming that her ethical position will be either one of his original three, or a version of the 'self-realization' or 'nature' views.

Sidgwick then moves to a discussion of the conformity-to-nature view (CTN). He claims first of all that human nature must be seen as designed, if the view is to be at all plausible. If nature were just a matter of aimless change, it becomes quite unclear how it could ground ends or moral rules (later, at 83, Sidgwick applies this claim to evolutionary theory). So let us consider the design view. First, to avoid the ethical conclusion that 'anything goes', we need to distinguish the notion of natural impulses from those that humans actually experience. But we cannot do this by claiming that the supremacy of reason is natural, since the starting assumption of the view is that reason requires conformity to nature. CTN-theorists have usually understood the natural to be either what is common or usual, or what is original or earlier as distinct from what develops later. But Sidgwick sees no ground for thinking that nature is opposed to the unusual or prefers what is earlier in time. Some widely admired impulses—such as enthusiastic philanthropy—are uncommon and emerged later than several other impulses often thought less valuable. Indeed, many 'later' developments, such as certain societal institutions, seem beneficial, and it would anyway be arbitrary to see them as beyond the 'purposes' of nature. Nor can any substantive ethical conclusions be drawn from premises about the physical make-up of humanity. Reflection upon the actual

social relations within any human society will take us to the question of what such relations *ought* to be, and our original triad.

Although many variants of CTN do fall to one or more of Sidgwick's objections, one appears to remain standing. Sidgwick's restriction of CTN to versions which postulate design in nature is unmotivated. Where human nature came from is irrelevant; what matters, according to CTN, is what it is. Many have accepted as plausible the Aristotelian view that the good of any being will depend on its nature, and that such a good is promoted through increasing the perfection of that nature. The question is what that nature is; and what emerges from reflection on the perfectionist tradition is that many thinkers have seen the acquisition of knowledge, social relationships, and so on as both characteristically human and aspects of the human good, independently of their relation to consciousness, pleasure, or moral excellence.[17] Here we see an alternative to Sidgwickian hedonistic happiness and moralized perfection emerging as a candidate for ultimate end, an end which might be grounded in a form of perfectionism that avoids any 'is'/'ought' objection through its reliance on a self-standing normative premise linking the good with human nature (see CD 1.5).

What about self-realization? Sidgwick (80 n) postpones discussion of this until 89–91 in the following chapter, which concerns different interpretations of egoism. Sidgwick begins by noting the Hobbesian and Spinozan versions of egoism as a principle of self-realization. He suggests that the intellectualism implicit in Spinoza's conception would seem quite implausible to someone who saw the human good as consisting in action, the creation of artistic beauty, or obedience to reason or conscience. Egoism cannot be based on an appeal to those impulses which our self finds prominent, since any such impulses could meet this criterion. But it might be said that we should exercise our faculties and so on in 'due proportion'. There are two ways in which this proportion might be understood. It might be taken to refer to whichever combination of tendencies we were born with; so we might be urged to 'be ourselves'. But this can be plausible only as an instrumental recommendation. If adhering to our original nature made us very unhappy, no one would recommend doing so. Alternatively, the due proportion in question can be seen as merely another term for perfection.

Sidgwick's conclusion is that the notion of 'self-realization' is too vague to be of service in philosophical ethics. This comes as