A 'Fundamental Misunderstanding'?

T. H. IRWIN
Cornell University

I

One of the many illuminating aspects of Bart Schultz's book is the recurrent theme of Sidgwick's Socratic inspiration. Some of Sidgwick's contemporaries at Cambridge were among those who gave new life to the study of Socrates and Plato in England. The Cambridge Apostles were self-consciously devoted both to Socratic ideals of friendship and to the Socratic aim of impartial free inquiry on fundamental questions.

Schultz finds this Socratic inspiration in *The Methods of Ethics*. He remarks:

> Consequently, if one turns to *The Methods of Ethics* hoping to find the big answers to the big questions, one will probably come away disappointed. Better to expect from Sidgwick only that judiciousness that his 'true' self could wrest from his highly Socratic, sceptical intellect. To be sure, this scepticism is not merely critical or destructive, much less Cartesian, but more of a pervasive sense of fallibilism, admitting both the limitations of human knowledge and the demands of practical action. (139)

We might reasonably believe that this Socratic inspiration lies behind Sidgwick's conception of his task, expressed in the title and the organization of *Methods*. Schultz endorses this belief about *Methods*: 'If one turns to the *Methods* in this spirit, one can hardly come away disappointed, though it is perhaps by now evident that for his part, Sidgwick threw himself into the work with higher expectations' (139). These higher expectations result, according to Schultz, from Sidgwick's ambition of carrying out his 'mission from Mill'. I take Schultz to mean that Sidgwick had sought to combine a defence of utilitarianism in ethics with a broader defence of a Comtean outlook. I would like to reflect a little further on the Socratic influence that Schultz sees in Sidgwick and in the eventual character of *Methods*.[1]

[1] In this discussion I will not try to engage with the secondary literature. But I have especially benefited from M. G. Singer, 'The Many Methods of Sidgwick's Ethics', *Monist* 58 (1974), 420–48; J. M. A. Skorupski, 'Three Methods and a Dualism', *Proc. Brit. Acad.* 109 (2001), 61–81.

© 2007 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0953820806002366
Utilitas Vol. 19, No. 1, March 2007
Printed in the United Kingdom

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press

II

The organization of *Methods* suggests a Socratic examination of different approaches to ethics rather than a dogmatic presentation of a single ethical theory. Sidgwick does not emphasize his defence of utilitarianism. He insists that his primary aim is not to endorse any previous system or to put forward a new one that will avoid the errors of previous theorists, but to examine different methods.[2] We recognize different methods not by simply compiling a list of methods that have been used, or by thinking about those that might be used, but by noticing those that we necessarily recognize as possible methods for systematic practical reasoning.[3] The different methods can be found 'in the common practical reasoning of men generally' (6). They result from the different practical principles 'which the common sense of mankind is prima facie prepared to accept as ultimate' (6).

Sidgwick claims not to advocate one method over the others, since, in his view, they all have a place in practical reasoning. His task is to see how common sense falls into conflicts through its use of more than one method, and to see how far these conflicts can be avoided by a clear account of the different relations between the methods. In his view, an impartial survey of methods is necessary to avoid the theoretical confusions and practical uncertainties that may result from ambiguity and obscurity. The result of a survey of methods should be the drawing of 'as distinct a line as possible between the known and the unknown' (13). Sidgwick believes that frank recognition of the limitations of ethical knowledge would be a healthy development in moral philosophy.[4] The task of drawing this 'distinct line' is different from the task of constructing an ethical system, which he claims not

[2] 'The present book contains neither the exposition of a system nor a natural or critical history of systems. I have attempted to define and unfold not one Method of Ethics, but several: at the same time these are not here studied historically, as methods that have actually been used or proposed for the regulation of practice; but rather as alternatives between which – so far as they cannot be reconciled – the human mind seems to me necessarily forced to choose, when it attempts to frame a complete synthesis of practical maxims and to act in a perfectly consistent manner' (12). Parenthetical references without further identification refer to the 7th edn. of 1907 (almost identical to the 6th edn. of 1901). References of the form '[1] (etc.)' refer to the 1st (1874) or later edns.

[3] J. B. Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 194–204, discusses Sidgwick on methods sympathetically and carefully, and examines some of the difficulties about intuitionism and perfectionism (see below).

[4] 'In ethical treatises, however, there has been a continual tendency to ignore and keep out of sight the difficulties of the subject . . . Thus we get on the one hand vague and hazy reconciliation, on the other loose and random exaggeration of discrepancies; and neither process is effective to dispel the original vagueness and ambiguity which lurks in the fundamental notions of our common practical reasonings. To eliminate or reduce this indefiniteness and confusion is the sole immediate end that I have proposed to myself in the present work' (13).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to undertake.[5] Though he leaves himself some room to reach dogmatic conclusions, he treats them as secondary to his impartial examination.[6]

Sidgwick agrees with Socrates in believing that we ought not to be afraid of the exposure of our ignorance and uncertainty. He denies that ignorance and uncertainty will cripple us in practice. He believes that, on the contrary, we confuse ourselves in practice if we have not properly separated the known from the unknown. His statement of his 'immediate end' in *Methods* fits his statement of his 'scepticism of a humble, empirical, and more or less hopeful kind'.

III

These Socratic professions of impartiality and even of neutrality did not convince all the early readers of *Methods*. In the Preface to the second edition Sidgwick comments on the 'fundamental misunderstanding' by readers who have taken him to advocate utilitarianism against the other two methods. He mentions Bradley (without naming him) as a critic who 'has gone to the length of a pamphlet under the impression (apparently) that the "main argument" of my treatise is a demonstration of universalistic hedonism' (x).

In this second edition, therefore, Sidgwick claims to have taken steps to remove occasions for the misunderstanding, and to make it clear that he impartially criticizes all the three methods.[7] He defends his impartiality by claiming to have reconciled intuitionism and utilitarianism. The examination of intuitionism in Book III ends with a claim about reconciliation.[8] In later editions (beginning with the second) he changes the title of the last chapter, so that it refers to the

[5] 'In order better to execute this task, 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' (13).

[6] 'In the course of this endeavour I am led to discuss the considerations which should, in my opinion, be decisive in determining the adoption of ethical first principles: but it is not my aim to establish such principles . . . I have . . . never ventured to decide dogmatically any controversial points, except when the controversy seemed to arise from want of precision or clearness in the definition of principles, or want of consistency in reasoning' (14).

[7] 'I have certainly criticized [the morality of common sense] unsparingly: but I conceive myself to have exposed with equal unreserve the defects and difficulties of the hedonistic method . . . . And as regards the two hedonistic principles, I do not hold the reasonableness of aiming at happiness generally with any stronger conviction than I do that of aiming at one's own' (x).

[8] 'I am finally led to the conclusion (which at the close of the last chapter seemed to be premature) that the Intuitional method rigorously applied yields as its final result the doctrine of pure Universalistic Hedonism' (406f.). [1] reaches the same conclusion at 375, and reaffirms it at the end of the chapter: 'I am forced to leave the ethical method which takes perfection, as distinct from happiness, to be the whole or chief part of ultimate good, in a rudimentary condition . . . . we may perhaps conclude that common sense will admit,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press

relations between the methods, and he repeats that he has reconciled two of them.[9]

Careful and well-informed students of Sidgwick have agreed with his Socratic account of his procedure in *Methods*. F. H. Hayward defends Sidgwick by emphasizing the place of egoism in Sidgwick's overall position. Since Sidgwick neither reconciles utilitarianism with egoism nor rejects egoism, he cannot reasonably (according to Hayward) be understood as an advocate of utilitarianism.[10] Jerome Schneewind argues, on the strength of the passages I have quoted, that *Methods* is primarily an impartial examination of methods.[11] I understand Schultz to agree with Hayward and Schneewind about the essentially impartial and Socratic character of *Methods*. Though he notices some reservations that have been expressed about Sidgwick's treatment of his three methods,[12] he does not seem to believe that they cast doubt on the impartial character of *Methods*.

Despite these judgements of people who know Sidgwick's work much better than I do, I incline to the 'fundamental misunderstanding' that Sidgwick ascribes to Bradley and others. It does not seem to me that his examination of different methods is impartial. It seems to me that he could never have examined the different methods as he does if he were not antecedently convinced of the truth of utilitarianism. His examination is partial and prejudiced (in a non-pejorative sense), since it relies on a previous judgement that the supreme principles are universalistic hedonism (utilitarianism) and hedonistic egoism.

IV

The different methods result from the different practical principles 'which the common sense of mankind is prima facie prepared to accept

as its most certain intuition, most precisely stated, the first principle of utilitarianism' ([1], 378).

[9] [2] adds 456–7 (also in later editions) at the beginning of the chapter.

[10] F. H. Hayward, *The Ethical Philosophy of Sidgwick* (London, 1901), ch. 1.

[11] 'These clear, emphatic, and reiterated statements about what is aimed at in the *Methods* indicate that it is a mistake to view the book as primarily a defence of utilitarianism. It is true, of course, that a way of supporting utilitarianism is worked out in detail in the *Methods*, and that there are places in it where Sidgwick seems to be saying quite plainly that utilitarianism is the best available ethical theory . . . . Yet it does not follow that the *Methods* itself should be taken simply as an argument for that position' (Schneewind, *SEVMP* 192). Schneewind also remarks, however, that in several places, including III.xiii, IV.ii, and the last chapter, Sidgwick 'seems to abandon his stance of neutrality and to argue in his own voice for utilitarianism' (263).

[12] 'Whether he also moves rather too quickly on certain ethical theoretical issues – for example, in reducing the number of methods to three (confusingly linking perfectionism to dogmatic intuitionism) and in collapsing egoism and utilitarianism into variants of hedonism – is a matter that has worried even those sympathetic to his commitment to independent ethical theory (and, of course, Sidgwick himself)' (156). See also 163–5 on perfectionism and intuitionism.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as ultimate' (6). In Sidgwick's view, only happiness and excellence (or perfection) are recognized as ultimate. Since the happiness that we take as an end may be one's own happiness or the general happiness, we have good reason to recognize egoistic hedonism and utilitarianism as the two methods aiming at happiness. Only one method aims at perfection; Sidgwick calls this the intuitional method.

Sidgwick's reasons for connecting the intuitional method with perfection are obscure, since in many respects the intuitional method seems to be opposed to the pursuit of perfection. He connects the intuitional method with the rejection of the ancient view of ethics as the study of the ultimate good.[13] The ancient view is teleological, whereas intuitionism is deontological; it takes moral principles to be unconditionally binding without reference to any further end that they promote. Sidgwick does not believe that a deontological conception of morality commits us to a strongly moralized Stoic conception of the ultimate good. But he connects his three different methods with three different rational ends, and connects intuitionism with the pursuit of perfection.[14]

Sidgwick treats the perfectionist method as a special form of the intuitional method because the two methods can be expected to coincide in practice ('prima facie' and 'to a great extent'). Still, the two methods seem to differ on a cardinal point, since the perfectionist method is teleological, whereas the intuitionist method is deontological. Perfectionists are committed to a tight connection between the content of morality and the character of the ultimate end, but intuitionists are committed to no such connection.[15]

[13] 'the conception of ethics as essentially an investigation of the 'Ultimate Good' of Man and the means of attaining it is not universally applicable, without straining, to the view of Morality which we may conveniently distinguish as the Intuitional view; according to which conduct is held to be right when conformed to certain precepts or principles of Duty intuitively known to be unconditionally binding' (3).

[14] His explanation of his procedure in [1] is this: 'Again, the method which seeks the individual's perfection as ultimate is closely akin to that which aims at conformity to certain absolute rules; virtue being the most prominent element in our notion of human perfection. It will therefore be convenient to treat these together as two varieties of what we may call Intuitionism' ([1], 9). In [2] and later editions he has this (or something similar): 'And since Virtue is commonly conceived as the most valuable element of human Excellence – and an element essentially preferable to any other element that can come into competition with it as an alternative for rational choice – any method which takes Perfection or Excellence of human nature as ultimate End will prima facie coincide to a great extent with that based on what I called the Intuitional view: and I have accordingly decided to treat it as a special form of this latter' (11).

[15] 'It is true that here we may say with Aristotle that the end is the action itself, or a certain quality of it (conformity to a rule), and not something outside of and consequent on the action: but in common language, when we speak of acting for an end, we mean something different from the action itself, some consequence of it. Again, . . . many of the school called Intuitivist or Intuitional hold that our obligation to obey moral rules is not conditional on our knowledge of the end and of its connexion with the actions prescribed' ([1], 3). This is abbreviated in [2] and further in later editions. [2] deletes the reference to Aristotle.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Once he has declared his intention of treating the perfectionist method as a special case of the intuitionist method, Sidgwick no longer tries to characterize different methods by reference to different rational ends. Instead he distinguishes them as different 'modes of thought' (13) that 'find a response in our nature' (14). Our attraction to these different modes of thought is indicated by our tendency to agree that (1) it is reasonable to pursue one's own pleasure, that (2) we have a moral sense, that (3) we make intuitive moral judgements, and that (4) we regard general happiness as a paramount end.[16] The first and the fourth modes of thought introduce egoistic and universalistic hedonism, and so introduce teleological methods. The third mode introduces intuitionism without any teleological aspect. No room is left for the pursuit of perfection in its own right.[17]

The four different modes of thought do not seem to be mutually exclusive. The first three simply require us to acknowledge certain considerations. The fourth introduces general happiness as a paramount end, not as the one and only paramount end. The first mode introduces ultimate reasonableness, but without any explanation.

When he returns (in I.vi)[18] to the discussion of methods, Sidgwick describes them without any reference to different rational ultimate ends defining different methods.[19] First he separates a deontological from a teleological method. He then separates two teleological methods (one aiming at happiness, the other at perfection), so as to yield three methods, two teleological and one deontological.[20] The three methods rest on different claims about what it is ultimately reasonable to do.

[16] 'When I am asked "Do you not consider it ultimately reasonable to seek pleasure and avoid pain for yourself?" "Have you not a moral sense?" "Do you not intuitively pronounce some actions to be right and others wrong?" "Do you not acknowledge the general happiness to be a paramount end?" I answer "yes" to all these questions. My difficulty begins when I have to choose between the different principles, or inferences drawn from them' (14). In [1], 12 the first question is significantly different: 'When I am asked, "Are you not continually seeking pleasure and avoiding pain?"...' The question is changed in [6]. Perhaps Sidgwick decided that it was misleading to represent the plausibility of the first method through a psychological claim, and so he changed it to a claim about reasonableness.

[17] The second mode may also introduce intuitionism; Sidgwick does not suggest that a moral sense introduces its own distinct method; it seems to rely on conscience, as described at 99–101.

[18] In [1] this chapter is simply called 'The methods of ethics'. In [2] and later the title is changed to 'Ethical principles and methods'.

[19] 'The aim of Ethics is to systematize and free from error the apparent cognitions that most men have of the rightness and reasonableness of conduct, whether the conduct be conceived as right in itself, or as the means to some end commonly conceived as ultimately reasonable' (77).

[20] 'What then do we commonly regard as valid ultimate reasons for acting or abstaining? This, as was said, is the starting-point for the discussions of the present treatise: which is not primarily concerned with proving or disproving the validity of any such reasons, but rather with the critical exposition of the different "methods" – or rational procedures

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press

One important constraint on a distinct method appears in Sidgwick's argument to show that some apparent accounts of ultimate reasonableness do not provide methods. The three inadequate accounts that he mentions appeal to the will of God, self-realization, and life according to nature. He argues that the appeal to the will of God can be reduced to an appeal to happiness, or perfection, or self-realization, and so does not 'suggest any special criterion of rightness' (80). His discussion of naturalism argues that any clear conception of nature that does not already build in the ethical conclusions we want to reach will clearly lead us to false ethical conclusions. Naturalism is not a method; it is not 'capable of furnishing an independent ethical first principle' and one cannot extract from it 'a definite practical criterion of the rightness of actions' (83). Sidgwick implies that a rational ultimate end generates a distinct method only if it provides a first principle that is both (1) independent (not relying on any other principle for any of its content), and (2) practically definite (capable of yielding, by itself, clear practical guidance). He now claims that 'method' rather than 'ultimate reason' is the basis for distinguishing different ethical systems.[21] Though perfectionism is teleological and intuitionism is deontological, they both reason in the same way to find out what should be done, since they both refer to principles taken to be known without reference to any external end.

This way of distinguishing methods might suggest that the two teleological outlooks, Epicureanism and utilitarianism, ought to be treated as the same method. For they both claim that what is ultimately reasonable is determined by some end external to reasonable action itself, and on this point they differ from the intuitional method shared by intuitionism and perfectionism. Though Epicureanism takes the relevant external end to be one's own happiness, and utilitarianism

for determining right conduct in any particular case – which are logically connected with the different ultimate reasons widely accepted. In the first chapter we found that such reasons were supplied by the notions of Happiness and Excellence or Perfection (including Virtue or Moral Perfection as a prominent element), regarded as ultimate ends, and Duty as prescribed by unconditional rules' (78). At [1], 59, Sidgwick gives a longer summary of the three methods. He speaks of 'ultimate ends' (59) and 'ultimate grounds' (60), but not of what is 'ultimately reasonable'.

[21] 'Hence arises difficulty in the classification and comparison of ethical systems; since they often appear to have different affinities according as we consider Method or Ultimate Reason. In my treatment of the subject, difference of Method is taken as the paramount consideration; and it is on this account that I have treated the view in which Perfection is taken to be the Ultimate End as a variety of the Intuitionism which determines right conduct by reference to axioms of duty intuitively known; while I have made as marked a separation as possible between Epicureanism or Egoistic Hedonism, and the Universalistic or Benthamite Hedonism to which I propose to restrict the term Utilitarianism' (83f.). In [1], 64 Sidgwick does not announce a preference for classification by methods. He makes the change in [4].

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press

takes it to be universal happiness, both outlooks rely on the same pattern of practical reasoning, and so they seem to share one method.

Sidgwick, however, claims that 'the practical affinity between Utilitarianism and Intuitionism is really much greater than that between the two forms of Hedonism' (85). He claims this because of indirect utilitarianism. Indirect utilitarians accept 'as practically valid the judgments of right and wrong which the Common Sense of mankind seems intuitively to enunciate' (85), but nonetheless have claimed that moral principles are right in so far as they promote the general happiness.[22] Sidgwick concedes that the intuitionist method is different from the utilitarian.[23] But he takes the practical convergence between intuitionism and utilitarianism to warrant the treatment of egoism and utilitarianism as distinct methods.

One might explain Sidgwick's obscurity in two ways: (1) He wants to emphasize the practical difference between egoistic and universalistic hedonism, and so he treats them as two distinct methods, even though they do not really meet his criteria for distinct methods. (2) He relies on different criteria for distinguishing methods: (2a) Sometimes he is thinking of distinct forms of reasoning – in particular, teleological versus deontological reasoning. (2b) Sometimes he thinks we have the same method if we take the same sorts of considerations into account in reaching conclusions about what is right.

The first criterion, (2a), makes intuitionism and utilitarianism use different methods and makes egoistic and universalistic hedonism use the same method. The second criterion, (2b), makes egoistic and universalistic hedonism use different methods, since the egoist considers only his own pleasure. It also makes intuitionism and universalistic hedonism use similar methods, or closely related methods, since they take account of many of the same characteristics (e.g. whether a promise has been made, or whether an innocent person will suffer with no significant gain to anyone else) and reach many of the same conclusions.

Neither of these explanations (in (1) and (2)) of Sidgwick's obscurity leaves him with a satisfactory position. He wants to distinguish three methods, but he does not give a good reason for recognizing all and only these three. Either utilitarianism and egoistic hedonism share

[22] 'On this view [sc. indirect utilitarianism], the *method* of Utilitarianism is certainly rejected: the connexion between right action and happiness is not ascertained by a process of reasoning. But we can hardly say that the Utilitarian principle is altogether rejected: rather the limitations of the human reason are supposed to prevent it from apprehending adequately the real connexion between the true principle and the right rules of conduct' (85).

[23] He also implies that the utilitarian method is similar to the egoistic method on the relevant point (see 'the connexion between . . . reasoning' in the quotation from 85 in the previous note).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a method or utilitarianism, intuitionism, and perfectionism share a method.

V

Sidgwick's claims about methods, therefore, are a source of darkness rather than light in the structure and argument of his book. *Methods* is an important and illuminating book despite, not because of, its explicit concern with methods, as Sidgwick conceives them.

Why, then, does he present his argument as an examination of these three methods? The three methods underlie the argument of the last chapter of the book; Sidgwick revised the chapter in later editions to make this clear.[24] Two claims about the methods are especially relevant to this last chapter: (1) his claim to have harmonized utilitarianism with intuitionism; (2) his claim to have found a dualism of practical reason involving egoism and utilitarianism.

He introduces the first claim after the examination of intuitionism in Book III.[25] But what does it mean? He has used 'intuitionism' to refer to (a) an epistemological position that relies on principles grasped by intuition; (b) a deontological attitude to moral principles; (c) perfectionism. He reconciles (a) with utilitarianism, since (he argues) our genuine intuitions favour utilitarianism.[26] But he rejects (b), and does not reconcile it with utilitarianism. He also rejects (c); for the version of perfectionism that values moral virtue as a non-instrumental good is the only version that might even appear to agree with intuitionism in the deontological sense, but this version of perfectionism conflicts with Sidgwick's hedonist account of non-instrumental good.

Sidgwick, therefore, does not seem to have reconciled intuitionism with utilitarianism. When he speaks of an apparent opposition between utilitarianism and intuitionism, he uses 'intuitionism' for

[24] In [1] the last chapter is called 'The sanctions of utilitarianism'. In later editions it is called 'Concluding Chapter: the mutual relations of the three methods'. [1] omits the long first paragraph on intuitionism and utilitarianism at [7], 496f.

[25] 'I am finally led to the conclusion . . . that the Intuitional method rigorously applied yields as its final result the doctrine of pure Universalistic Hedonism' (406f.). [1] reaches the same conclusion at 375, and reaffirms it at the end of the chapter: 'I am forced to leave the ethical method which takes perfection, as distinct from happiness, to be the whole or chief part of ultimate good, in a rudimentary condition . . . . we may perhaps conclude that common sense will admit, as its most certain intuition, most precisely stated, the first principle of utilitarianism' ([1], 378).

[26] 'We have found that the original antithesis between intuitionism and utilitarianism must be entirely discarded: since the first principle of utilitarianism has appeared as the most certain and comprehensive of intuitions, and most of the others naturally range themselves in subordination to it, and even seem to be most thoroughly understood when considered as partial applications of it unconsciously and imperfectly made' ([1] 472). In later editions this comparison of the methods is moved from the end to the beginning of the last chapter, and expanded (496).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the intuitionist method – a deontological doctrine that recognizes a plurality of basic principles grasped by intuition without reference to any further justifying ultimate end. Sidgwick's initial claim that he is a 'utilitarian on an intuitional basis' refers to his claim at the end of *Methods* to have reconciled or 'synthesized' the two methods called 'utilitarianism' and 'intuitionism'.[27] But if 'intuitionism' refers to the intuitionist method, he does not synthesize it with utilitarianism. For the intuitionist method treats common-sense principles as objects of intuition and therefore endorses them. This is the position that Sidgwick discusses in his examination of common-sense morality. But this position neither agrees with nor collapses into utilitarianism.[28]

This is only a sketch of Sidgwick's various uses of 'intuition', 'intuitional', and 'intuitionist'.[29] But it may be enough to show that readers would not be at all tempted to suppose that Sidgwick had synthesized utilitarianism and intuitionism unless they had already accepted his claim that intuitionism, in his equivocal description, constitutes a method of ethics. But why would one suppose that Sidgwick's equivocal description picks out a single method of ethics unless one wanted to make it seem plausible that utilitarianism could be synthesized with it? The description of the method and the claim about synthesis seem to be designed for each other; they have no independent support.

VI

To prove that something similar is true about Sidgwick's description of egoism as a method of ethics, we would need to discuss the dualism of practical reason in some detail. I will ask only this: have we any reason to regard egoistic hedonism as a method of ethics if we are not already influenced by the confrontation between egoistic hedonism and utilitarianism in the last chapter?

[27] 'the opposition between utilitarianism and intuitionism was due to a misunderstanding . . . I could find no real opposition between intuitionism and utilitarianism. The utilitarianism of Mill and Bentham seemed to me to want a basis; that basis could only be supplied by a fundamental intuition; on the other hand the best examination I could make of the morality of common sense showed me no clear and self-evident principles except such as were perfectly consistent with utilitarianism' (xx–xxi).

[28] In the first edition he claims only that utilitarianism and common sense generally coincide. In later editions he goes into more detail (496f.). Some of the same points are more briefly stated at [1], 473, at the end of the last chapter.

[29] Issues are further complicated by Sidgwick's division between perceptual, dogmatic, and philosophical intuitionism (I.viii). The form of intuitionism that is reconciled with utilitarianism is the philosophical form. Further questions arise about whether his division is legitimate.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Intuitionism and utilitarianism seem to give rival answers to the same question, about the basic principles of morality. But it is not so obvious that the two moral methods and the prudential method answer the same question. Sidgwick claims that all three methods are methods of 'determining right conduct' (496), or that they correspond to 'different practical principles which the common sense of mankind is prima facie prepared to accept as ultimate' (6), or 'valid ultimate reasons for acting or abstaining' (78).[30] What does he have in mind in speaking of ultimacy?

Reasons (or ends, or principles) might be ultimate in two ways: (1) They are non-derivative, so that they tell us what is rational in its own right. (2) They are the reasons of last resort, and hence the supreme reasons. This difference between types of ultimacy affects Sidgwick's claims about his different methods. If they involve different non-derivative principles, we may well find a number of ultimate and non-competing principles defining different non-competing methods. In particular, we may conclude that the principle of prudence and the principle of morality are both ultimate principles because each tells us what is non-derivatively reasonable and what we ought to do. But we may still treat them as answers to different questions: one tells us what we ought to do in our own interest and one tells us what we ought to do from an impartial point of view.

According to Sidgwick, egoistic hedonism implies 'the adoption of his own greatest happiness as the ultimate end of each individual's actions' (119).[31] He points out that many people agree 'that it is reasonable for a man to act in the manner most conducive to his own happiness' (119).[32] But he does not notice the difference between his principle and the general agreement. His principle makes one's own happiness the ultimate end, and hence the supreme end of one's actions, whereas people generally agree only that it is a reasonable end.

In the conclusion of the book Sidgwick treats the two finalists among his three methods – egoistic and universalistic hedonism – as claiming supremacy. But he has not argued that the generally-agreed egoist principle claims supremacy. Hence he has not argued that egoism constitutes a 'method of ethics' in the sense that is relevant to the final argument of the book and especially to the dualism of practical reason.

Schultz mentions doubts that others have expressed about whether Sidgwick has adequate grounds for asserting a dualism of practical

[30] This claim about ultimate reasons and ultimate reasonableness is absent from the corresponding places in [1]. Probably Sidgwick adds it to later editions in order to show how the different methods are irreducibly different.

[31] This does not appear in [1], 107.

[32] Not in [1], 109.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reason (220–53), but I am not completely sure how he answers them. If we deny Sidgwick's dualism, we may still admit that serious questions arise about the relation between morality and self-interest. To recognize such questions, we need only agree that self-interest matters, and that we need to decide how much it matters in comparison with morality. The recognition of these questions falls short of any admission of Sidgwick's dualism. We might, therefore, doubt Schultz's defence of the dualism:

> [I]t is quite possible that he [sc. Sidgwick] outstripped his predecessors in compellingly and explicitly bringing out the force of the dualism as a potential moral dilemma for a post-Christian age. For there was something quite ingenious, or insidious, about his frequent invocations of Butler, as though the tacit question was: what becomes of Butler's system, or of any Christian ethical view, once the theological postulate is removed? (222)

I take this defence of Sidgwick to claim that Christian moralists treat egoistic hedonism as a supreme principle. Admittedly, some Christian moralists – William Paley, for instance – affirm it, but I do not believe Butler affirms it, or that most Christian moralists implicitly or explicitly accept it.[33] Even if one could show that most of them accept rational egoism as a supreme principle, that would not help Sidgwick, since his principle is not just egoism, but egoistic hedonism.

For these reasons I doubt whether an impartial examination of methods would support Sidgwick's treatment of egoistic hedonism as a supreme principle. Just as his formulation of intuitionism depends on his aim of reconciling intuitionism with utilitarianism, his formulation of egoism depends on his aim of generating a conflict with utilitarianism. In neither case does he show that he captures the 'different practical principles which the common sense of mankind is prima facie prepared to accept as ultimate' (6).

VII

I can now state my conclusion baldly, and perhaps too simply, in order to compare it with Schultz's view: Sidgwick's discussion of methods shows that he is not an impartial Socratic investigator, but relies from the outset on his dogmatic convictions about the truth of utilitarianism and the conflict between egoistic hedonism and utilitarianism. If he had not relied on these dogmatic convictions, he would not have recognized the three methods that he recognizes. These convictions are 'dogmatic', not in the sense of being unexamined or not open to argument, but in

[33] I disagree with Sidgwick's claim about Butler because I believe Butler takes conscience to be superior to self-love. Hence I disagree with Frankena's reason for denying that Butler recognizes a dualism (quoted by Schultz, pp. 221f.).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press

so far as they are positive claims accepted in advance of the inquiry and controlling the shape and direction of the inquiry.

I agree with Sidgwick, therefore, in speaking of a 'fundamental misunderstanding'. But it seems to me that the misunderstanding is his own. He has misunderstood what he is doing in *Methods*, and in particular he has failed to notice the dogmatic presuppositions of his allegedly impartial inquiry. In this respect it seems to me that Schultz's mention of Sidgwick's scepticism of 'a humble, empirical, and more or less hopeful kind' (139) underestimates the dogmatic elements in *Methods*.

I have contrasted these elements with impartial Socratic inquiry, but I do not claim that this contrast would stand up to closer examination. One might indeed argue that Socrates' inquiries also depend on dogmatic presuppositions. I do not mean to rule out that possibility in disputing a 'Socratic' picture of Sidgwick's inquiry. But I have tried to show that Sidgwick's and Schultz's picture of Socratic inquiry does not fit Sidgwick's discussion of methods.

I have stated my conclusion as a point of disagreement with Schultz's view, but I am not sure how far I am disagreeing with him. His long, complex, and leisurely discussion of *Methods* may well include points that would take account of the dogmatic elements that I have emphasized. But I believe Schultz is more inclined than I am to accept Sidgwick's description of his work as an impartial examination. His comments on the argument do not lead him to question Sidgwick's claim of impartiality. If this is indeed Schultz's view, I hope my effort to state a different view will encourage further discussion of this aspect of Sidgwick's argument.

Unlike Schultz, I have no skill as a biographer, and so I will not speculate about what Sidgwick's fundamental misunderstanding of his work might tell us about his character. It is not unusual for philosophers (among others) to overlook the prejudices that guide them in their selection of allegedly 'impartial' or 'neutral' starting points. Sidgwick vividly illustrates how difficult it may be to recognize such prejudices; he makes a great effort to avoid them, and believes that critics are mistaken in their claim that such prejudices influence his argument. The criticisms do not lead him to change his mind on this point; they lead him to stronger affirmations of his impartiality. These affirmations reveal the extent of his self-misunderstanding.

Terry.irwin@philosophy.ox.ac.uk

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820806002366 Published online by Cambridge University Press