Ross on Self and Others

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Ross suggests a trilemma:

(i) Innocent pleasure is good as an end.
(ii) I have a prima facie duty to produce what is good as an end.
(iii) I have no prima facie duty to produce innocent pleasure for myself.

In *The Right and the Good*, he denies (iii). In *Foundations of Ethics*, he denies (i). Neither of these solutions is satisfactory. One ought instead to deny (ii). I close by considering a similar trilemma concerning justice.

Ross writes that the claim that I have a prima facie duty to get pleasure for myself can be denied

only on one or other of three grounds: . . . that pleasure is not *prima facie* good . . . that there is no *prima facie* duty to produce as much that is good as we can, or . . . that though there is a *prima facie* duty to produce other things that are good, there is no *prima facie* duty to produce pleasure which will be enjoyed by ourselves. (RG 25)[1]

This suggests a trilemma:

(i) Innocent pleasure is good as an end.
(ii) I have a prima facie duty to produce what is good as an end.
(iii) I have no prima facie duty to produce innocent pleasure for myself.[2]

I shall say something (taking my cue from Ross) to motivate each claim. I shall then consider two solutions Ross proposes. In *The Right and the Good*, he denies (iii). In *Foundations of Ethics*, he denies (i). I argue that neither of these solutions is satisfactory, and that one ought instead to deny (ii), as, in effect, Ewing does. I close by considering a similar trilemma concerning justice.

[1] Parenthetical references are to W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford, 2002 [1930]) (RG); *Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford, 1939) (FE); 'The Nature of Morally Good Action', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 29 (1928–29), pp. 251–74 (MGA).

[2] In what follows, I omit the restriction to innocent pleasures and take as understood that the good in question is good as an end, since nothing here turns on these restrictions. Ross's expression 'prima facie good' in effect restricts the pleasures to innocent ones, but is itself problematic. For the problems, see Philip Stratton-Lake, 'Pleasure and Reflection in Ross's Intuitionism', *Ethical Intuitionism*, ed. Philip Stratton-Lake (Oxford, 2002), pp. 125–7.

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I

In favour of thinking that pleasure is good, Ross notes that given two worlds, equal in other respects but unequal in pleasure, we think the world with more pleasure is better. He also notes that our approval of kindness and disapproval of cruelty implies that we think pleasure is good and pain bad. And if virtue ought to be rewarded with pleasure, this again implies that pleasure is good (RG 135).

Ross thinks (ii) – I have a prima facie duty to promote what is good – is self-evident. If, as some think, 'x is good' should be analysed as 'x ought to be promoted', (ii) is trivially true. The same holds for those, like Moore in *Principia*, who analyse 'I have a duty to do x' as 'doing x maximizes goodness'. And even if one rejects these analyses, as Ross does, (ii) remains extremely plausible. It is, for example, the starting place of the arguments for consequentialism given by Bentham, Sidgwick and Kagan: all give some form of the argument whose premises are 'there is a prima facie duty to promote the good' and 'there are no other prima facie duties'. This argument would not be so popular were (ii) doubtful.

One might deny that I have a prima facie duty to promote what is good by thinking that there are no duties to oneself. This is not Ross's view, so this solution would not tempt him. He thinks there is a duty of self-improvement, where this involves acquiring virtue and knowledge for oneself (RG 21, 153, MGA 266–7). For virtue and knowledge, whether I or another is the recipient is irrelevant (RG 26, 151, 168, FE 283, 302–3, 322).

In *The Right and the Good*, in favour of (iii) – that there is no duty for me to promote my pleasure – Ross notes that it is 'by no means so clear' that we have a duty to promote our own pleasure, and that it is 'a very stubborn fact, that in our ordinary consciousness we are not aware of a duty to get pleasure for ourselves' (RG 24, 25–6). The 'acquisition of pleasure for oneself rarely, if ever, presents itself as a duty, and usually only as something permissible when it does not interfere with duty' (RG 151). Despite this, in *The Right and the Good*, Ross claims that I have a duty to promote my pleasure (RG 24–6). But in *Foundations of Ethics*, that I have no duty to promote my pleasure is described as 'one of the clearest facts about our moral consciousness'; '[t]hat we are conscious of no duty to maximize pleasure for ourselves seems to be so clear as not to need argument' (FE 272, 273; also 72, 129–30, 284). It is a 'hard fact (one of the most certain facts in morals) that we have a duty to produce pleasure for others, and have not a duty to produce it for ourselves' (FE 75). The 'act of seeking pleasure for oneself is not merely not obligatory, but has not even the specific kind of rightness or fitness which is moral fitness. It seems morally entirely colourless' (FE

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277; also FE 308). When considering whether there has been a prima facie duty overridden, Ross writes that we 'feel, not indeed shame or repentance, but certainly compunction, for behaving as we do' (RG 28). I would not feel compunction for choosing a good meal over an excellent one.[3]

II

In *The Right and the Good*, Ross denies (iii) – that is, he claims that I have a duty to promote my pleasure. He suggests that I think I have no duty to produce pleasure in myself because I do not think of what brings me pleasure as a duty, nor is this a duty that, like most duties, requires some reflection (RG 25–6). By the time of *Foundations*, Ross found this psychological explanation unsatisfactory. But this later rejection seems too hasty, for three reasons.

First, one might expand on Ross's attempt to explain away the thought that I have no duty to produce pleasure in myself. Ross calls Butler 'the most sagacious . . . of the British Moralists' and the 'Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue' his 'ripest work' (FE 77–78). But there Butler argues that there is a duty to produce pleasure in ourselves. Butler admits that 'nature has not given us so sensible a disapprobation of imprudence . . . either in *ourselves* or *others*, as of falsehood, injustice, and cruelty'. But he explains this away:

> that constant habitual sense of private interest . . . renders such sensible disapprobation less necessary . . . to keep us from imprudently neglecting our own happiness . . . than it is necessary . . . to keep us from injuring others . . .; and also because imprudence . . . appearing to bring its own punishment more immediately and constantly than injurious behaviour, it less needs the additional punishment, which would be inflicted on it by others, had they the same sensible indignation against it, as against injustice, and fraud, and cruelty. Besides, unhappiness being in itself the natural object of compassion; the unhappiness which people bring upon themselves . . . excites in us some pity for them: and this . . . lessens our displeasure against them.[4]

Sidgwick also suggests that the thought that there is no duty to produce pleasure in oneself can be explained away. In a case such as

[3] In this context, Stratton-Lake suggests guilt as a test for the presence of a prima facie duty (Introduction to *The Right and the Good*, p. xli; 'Pleasure", p. 130). Ross adds, as a further test, that we feel 'that it is our duty to make up somehow' for the failure to discharge the overridden duty (RG 28). Presumably this test does not apply to duties to ourselves. Even for virtue and knowledge, I do not think I have a duty to myself to make up for missing out on them.

[4] Joseph Butler, *A Dissertation upon the Nature of Virtue*, in Butler, *Five Sermons* (Indianapolis, 1983), para. 6.

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Case I: I could produce a tiny pleasure in someone else at the cost of foregoing great pleasure (or experiencing great pain) in myself. No other prima facie duties count against producing this pleasure in another[5]

Sidgwick notes that we might approve of making the sacrifice because we approve of the disposition, not because we approve of the action.[6]

Second, many think there is no need to explain away the thought that there is no duty to produce pleasure in oneself, since we *do* think there is such a duty. Considering Case I, Sidgwick writes that 'it seems very doubtful whether we do altogether approve such conduct when the disproportion between the sacrifice and the benefit is obvious and striking'.[7] Broad, Carritt and Butler also think Ross is wrong. Broad writes that it

is true that we might hesitate to say that a person has a direct *prima facie* obligation to seek his own happiness. But we certainly condemn morally a person who acts highly imprudently . . . It seems plausible to hold that such condemnation is at least in part *direct*, and that it is not wholly based on one's awareness of the fact that such a person is likely to become a burden to others.[8]

Carritt notes that we say '"He *deserves* what has happened to him; he knew he was acting imprudently"; "He *deserves* neither pity nor help, he brought it on himself with his eyes open"; "I have a duty to myself" (in the way of prudence).' Carritt asks:

Do we . . . feel remorse for a past act of conscious imprudence or only regret, like that for ignorance or maladroitness? I incline, after hesitation, to say that

[5] This case is given against Ross's *Foundations* account by A. C. Ewing, 'A Suggested Non-Naturalistic Analysis of Good', *Mind* 48 (1939), pp. 1–22, at 20; Michael Stocker, 'Agent and Other: Against Ethical Universalism', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 54 (1976), pp. 206–20, at 208; Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (New York: 2003), p. 209; Thomas Hurka and Esther Shubert, 'Permissions To Do Less Than the Best: A Moving Band', forthcoming in *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, p. 11. E. F. Carritt (*Ethical and Political Thinking* (Oxford, 1947), p. 114)) and Ewing ('Utilitarianism', *Ethics* 58 (1948), pp. 100–11, at 107) give the case while not mentioning Ross. (Stocker claims that if I take the great pleasure for myself, I am 'not failing to fulfil any duty', and that if I produce the tiny pleasure in another, I am 'not fulfilling a duty, but rather doing more than duty'. Since Ross can plausibly claim that there is a prima facie duty to produce pleasure in others, this is contentious. But this Stocker claim can be separated from his more persuasive point that I am permitted to take the great pleasure for myself.)

[6] Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis, 1981 [1907]), p. 432. For the same point, see Ewing, 'Utilitarianism', p. 108.

[7] Sidgwick, *Methods*, p. 432.

[8] C. D. Broad, 'Self and Others', *Broad's Critical Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed. David Cheney (London, 1971), pp. 262–82, at 274–5. (Earlier, Broad agreed with Ross: 'I understand Ross to hold that no one has any obligation to give himself pleasures, and this is certainly in accordance with common sense' ('Critical Notice of *Foundations of Ethics*', *Mind* 49 (1940), pp. 223–39, at 237).) Carritt also notes, by implication, the difference in our reactions to large and small imprudences: 'We do sometimes praise a man for sacrificing his own enjoyments to the *slightly* lesser ones of other people' (Carritt, *Ethical*, p. 115, emphasis in original).

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we feel remorse; that we speak accurately when we say 'I have only myself to blame.'

I certainly do not think I ought to keep some casual promise, such as to play tennis, at the cost of the treat of my life; I am inclined to say I ought not; I should certainly call it 'unreasonable.'

And what overrides the duty to keep the promise must, Carritt claims, itself be a duty, to myself.[9] Butler writes that:

men often say of themselves with remorse, and of others with some indignation, that they deserved to suffer such calamities, because they brought them upon themselves . . . Particularly, when persons come to poverty and distress by a long course of extravagance, and after frequent admonitions, though without falsehood or injustice; we plainly, do not regard such people as alike objects of compassion with those, who are brought into the same condition by unavoidable accidents.[10]

We would not say that the imprudent 'deserved' the calamities unless we thought that, unlike the accident victims, they did something wrong. Nor would we feel remorse or indignation if we did not think there was a wrong.

Third, there is a reason for Ross to hold that there is a prima facie duty to produce pleasure in oneself, given other claims he makes. Consider Case I. If there is no prima facie duty to produce pleasure in myself, then I have a duty proper to make the sacrifice. If, as recent commentators hold, Ross thinks there are no (normative) 'ought' claims apart from claims about duty, he cannot say that there is *anything* to be said against producing the tiny pleasure in another.[11] For none of Ross's other prima facie duties concern my pleasure: beneficence is specified as concerning 'other beings' and self-improvement concerns giving oneself virtue or knowledge (RG 21). Similarly, consider

[9] Carritt, *Ethical*, p. 114. Carritt might be wrong about the need for a duty to myself, since there could be permissions that override the duty to keep the promise.

[10] Butler, *Dissertation*, para. 6. Richard Price, in *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* (London, 1787), writes that it 'is too absurd to be maintained by any one, that no relation which an action may have to our own happiness or misery, can (supposing other beings unconcerned) have any influence in determining whether it is or is not to be done . . . If it is my duty to promote the good of another . . . the same . . . must be my duty with regard to myself . . . It would be contrary to all reason . . . to assert that . . . the advantage an action will produce to another makes it right to be done, but that an equal advantage to myself leaves me at liberty to do or omit it . . . [A]n undue neglect of our own good . . . however hurtful to none but the agent himself, is vicious and criminal: The guilty person deserves the severest reproaches' (pp. 248–9, 251). Price cites Butler for the explanation of why we do not blame imprudence as much as other vices (pp. 252–3).

[11] Thomas Hurka, 'Common Themes from Sidgwick to Ewing', *Underivative Duty*, ed. Thomas Hurka (Oxford, 2011), pp. 6–25, at 8–9; Stratton-Lake, 'Eliminativism about Derivative Prima Facie Duties', *Underivative*, pp. 146–65, at 148 n. 8. I discuss the issue below.

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Case II: I could produce a pleasure in myself, or avoid a pain. Doing so has no effect on the performance of my other duties.[12]

If there are no 'ought' claims apart from claims about duty, Ross must say that it is not true that I ought (in any sense) produce this pleasure. Adding a prima facie duty to produce pleasure in myself (or a prima facie duty not to cause pain in myself) avoids these results.

One might object that the prima facie duty of self-improvement is always relevant here. Prudence is a virtue, so self-improvement would recommend producing the pleasures in myself. But when, in *Foundations*, Ross denies a prima facie duty to produce pleasure in oneself, he also denies that prudence is a virtue (FE 302). (This is what one expects given that virtue is 'action, or disposition to act, from any one of certain motives, of which . . . the most notable are the desire to do one's duty [thinking of it as one's duty], the desire to bring into being something that is good [thinking of it as good, but not thinking of bringing it about as a duty], and the desire to give pleasure or save pain to others' (RG 134; also 160).) And given Ross's concern to give not only the right verdicts but also the right reasons for them – it is one of his standard objections to egoism and utilitarianism that, even if they give the right verdicts, they offer the wrong reasons – it would seem mistaken to bring in other duties. Our judgements in Cases I and II seem to turn just on the size of the good involved, rather than on any thought about other duties or about who gets the good. In defending the duty to give pleasure to oneself, Ross writes that 'it is only if we *think* of our own pleasure not as simply our own pleasure, but as an objective good, something that an impartial spectator would approve, that we can think of the getting it as a duty' (RG 26). This seems to be how we think of our pleasure in the cases at hand. We think even an impartial spectator would recommend that we not make the sacrifice.

Judgements about imprudence vary. They vary in particular, I think, according to the disproportion between the loss and the gain, in Case I, and more generally according to whether one is sacrificing by experiencing a pain (or a loss from one's present position) or by forgoing a pleasure (or a gain from one's present position). But even when the disproportion is extreme and the sacrifice is a loss, some, like Prichard and the later Ross, do not feel moral disapproval, and would not accept attempts to explain this away.[13] This makes it controversial to solve the

[12] Ewing notes a similar case at 'Utilitarianism', p. 108; *The Definition of Good* (New York, 1947), pp. 151, 161–2; *Second Thoughts in Moral Philosophy* (New York, 1959), p. 112.

[13] H. A. Prichard, *Moral Writings* (Oxford, 2002) pp. 10 n. 4, 135, 171, 204. Derek Parfit also thinks the common view is that imprudence is not morally wrong, though he thinks that this view should be corrected once one comes to think, on the basis of adopting his

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trilemma by insisting that there is a duty to produce pleasure in oneself. A different solution is preferable, especially if it can, like holding that there is a duty to promote one's pleasure, explain why one ought (prima facie) to take the pleasure in Cases I and II.

III

Between *The Right and the Good* and *Foundations*, Ross must have grown discontented with thinking that there is a duty to promote one's pleasure.[14] The 'hard fact' that there is not proved persuasive. He came to explain why there is no duty to promote one's pleasure by arguing that pleasure is good in the sense that it is a 'worthy object of satisfaction' to someone (FE 275–6, 279, 283, 322). Since my pleasure is not a worthy object of satisfaction to me, it is not good from my point of view (FE 276, 282, 284, 288, 322): whereas we think it right to take pleasure in the pleasure of others, and would criticize someone who did not, we do not think it right that we take pleasure in our own pleasure, and we would not criticize someone who did not. (By 'satisfaction', Ross means pleasure.)

Two clarifications are needed.

First, at one point, Ross seems to claim that the work is being done by the requirement that the satisfaction be sympathetic:

> the satisfaction of which the pleasures of other people may be objects, and of which they are worthy to be objects, is quite different in its nature from the satisfaction which a man may feel in his own pleasant experiences. It is a sympathetic satisfaction, and sympathy by its nature must be of one man with another, and cannot be felt by a man for himself. (FE 276)

This is misleading. The reason for requiring that the satisfaction be sympathetic seems to be only that we do not think my pleasure is a worthy object of satisfaction to me. It is the judgement of worthiness, not the nature of the satisfaction, that drives the argument. The core idea is that, looking at others, 'a good man . . . feels satisfaction at their pleasure or dissatisfaction at their pain, and feels . . . that his interest in the pleasure of others is something that he can with moral safety follow – a feeling which he never has about his interest in his own pleasures' (FE 288). Brentano 'seems to be wrong in saying that a man's own pleasures are, from the point of view of any man, good

account of personal identity, that imprudence need not be irrational (Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 318–20).

[14] Even in *The Right and the Good*, Ross does not include the duty to produce pleasure in oneself in his summary of prima facie duties (RG 21–2). And he finds no virtue in desiring one's own pleasure, although there is virtue in desiring all other goods (RG 168). (I owe the latter point to Tom Hurka.) Perhaps he was already moving to the *Foundations* view.

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in the same sense in which the pleasures of others are. For while we can see the rightness, the moral suitability, of his taking satisfaction in the latter, we can see no moral suitability in his taking satisfaction in the former' (FE 282). The 'reason [that there is] a duty for a man to produce pleasures for other people, and not a duty to produce pleasures for himself, [is] the fact that the former and not the latter are proper objects of satisfaction to him' (FE 276).[15]

Second, Ross thinks 'ought' always implies 'can' (FE 45–6). He also thinks that sometimes an emotion may not be in my power to feel (e.g. FE 49). If so, he cannot say that (in these cases) I ought to feel pleasure at the pleasure of others.[16]

However, Ross is careful to put his point in terms of 'moral suitability' or 'rightness' rather than 'ought'. Speaking of a 'worthy object of satisfaction' is 'only another way of saying that satisfaction taken by one man in the innocent pleasure of another is morally suitable, or right' (FE 279). And although he sometimes treats 'right' and 'ought' as differing only in respects other than a tie to 'can' (e.g. RG 3–4, 6, FE 43–5), his considered view is that 'right' does not imply 'can'. We

> can still call grief the right or fitting emotion . . . even if we do not suppose the person we are thinking about has it in his power to feel grief . . . Its fittingness depends solely on the nature of the circumstances and not at all on his capacity or incapacity. (FE 55)

I turn to objections.

Broad and Philip Stratton-Lake object to Ross's solution that my pleasure remains good, since my pleasure is a worthy object of satisfaction for others. If there is a duty to produce what is good, I still have a duty to produce pleasure in myself. But Ross could reply that (ii) should become 'I have a prima facie duty to produce what is either good regardless of one's point of view or good from my point of view.'[17] If so, I have no duty to produce pleasure in myself.

[15] In giving 'sympathetic' no role, I think I disagree with Stratton-Lake. He presents Ross as requiring that the sympathy be sympathetic to avoid the result that I have a duty to produce pleasure in myself ('Pleasure', p. 131). On my view, what avoids this duty is the thought that my pleasure is not a worthy object of satisfaction to me.

[16] I owe this worry to Jamie Hebert.

[17] Broad, 'Critical Notice', p. 237; Stratton-Lake, 'Pleasure', p. 132. Stratton-Lake thinks that, to avoid his objection, Ross must deny that there is a prima facie duty to promote the good, by holding the Scanlonian view that promotion is only one response to the good, a response one sometimes should not have (pp. 133–4). (Scanlon argues, for example, that valuing friendship does not involve producing more of it, at least in a case in which I could acquire more friends for myself by ditching my current friend.) Stratton-Lake thinks we should 'reject . . . any modified version of this duty [to promote the good]' (p. 134). But (a) it is not clear why the modification to (ii) I suggest does not work. (b) Since the duty is prima facie, the issue is whether, in the friendship or pleasure examples, there is *a* reason to acquire more friends or pleasure; there might be such a reason, even if it is

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Although this objection can be answered, Ross's denial that my pleasure is a good to me is strange. Here are three objections to this conclusion.

First, consider Cases I and II. Ross now thinks that there is, from my point of view, no good in the pleasure I would forgo and no bad in the pain I would suffer. This seems even worse than thinking that goods and bads are present while duties toward them are not.

Second, Ross's view is contrary to one of his earlier (convincing) arguments for the goodness of pleasure. Ross imagines two worlds, equal in other respects but unequal in pleasure. He notes that we think the world with more pleasure is better (RG 135). But if all the extra pleasure is located in me, Ross now says that that world is, from my point of view, no better.[18]

Third, Ross's view does not secure what one might have thought he wanted. Michael Slote writes that '[a]gent-sacrificing anti-consequentialist permissions have not always . . . been ignored . . . Ross, for example, discusses these permissions at some length, accepting their validity.' Slote cites the *Foundations* view.[19] But that view does not, except in very unusual cases, justify the permission Slote has in mind. In Case I, I am permitted to make the large sacrifice to myself for the small gain to another, but this is because I am required to do so. The common-sense thought is that I am permitted to make the large sacrifice, but also permitted not to make it. On the *Foundations* view, Ross can say this only in Case II, in which my producing pleasure in myself has no effect on the performance of any of my prima facie duties. Given that my prima facie duties include producing knowledge in myself and producing pleasure in others – things that in most cases are open for me – Case II is rare.

These are worries about Ross's conclusion. I also think Ross's main argument for his view comes up short, in at least five ways.

outweighed by other, non-producing reasons. (c) Whether Scanlon does show that valuing friendship is not a matter of producing more of it is controversial (see, for example, Philip Pettit, 'A Consequentialist Perspective on Contractualism', *Theoria* 66 (2000), pp. 228–36, at 235; Robert Shaver, '*Principia* Then and Now', *Utilitas* 15 (2003), pp. 261–78, at 271–2; Thomas Hurka, 'Value and Friendship: A More Subtle View', *Utilitas* 18 (2006), pp. 603–17). (d) As Scanlon notes, pleasure does seem properly valued by producing it. If my own pleasure is an exception, the explanation will rest on something special about my relation to my pleasure, as Ross thinks. Rejecting the view that promotion is the only correct response to the good will not suffice.

[18] Ross stipulates that the pleasure is 'widespread' (RG 135), so he might reply that there is no inconsistency. But I think Ross's thought experiment works even when the extra pleasure is not stipulated to be widespread.

[19] Michael Slote, 'Morality and Self–Other Asymmetry', *Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984), pp. 179–92, at 182.

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First, the main argument consists of asking whether I think my satisfaction in contemplating my own pleasure is worthy, right, proper, or suitable. At one point (quoted above), Ross says that my satisfaction in my own pleasure is not something I can 'with moral safety follow'. But in Cases I and II – particularly II – I *do* think I can with moral safety follow my satisfaction at doing so.

Second, it is plausible to think that I can be criticized for not taking pleasure in my pleasure, just as I can be criticized for not taking pleasure in the pleasure of others. I might be criticized for not valuing myself, or for not appreciating my good fortune.[20]

Third, Ross sometimes writes of a worthy object 'of interest' rather than 'of satisfaction'. At one point, he suggests that 'satisfaction' is just one response within 'interest': the objects are to be 'worthy objects of interest – of satisfaction when they are present, of desire when they are absent, of regret when they are lost' (FE 322). The main argument is plausible because there seems a difference between the suitability of feeling pleasure at one's own pleasure and feeling pleasure at the pleasure of another. But the other responses seem suitable in both cases. My pleasure (or freedom from pain) seems a suitable object of desire when absent, and of regret when lost. There is no objectionable smugness here, as there (sometimes) may be in my feeling pleasure at my pleasure. If so, my own past and future pleasures are worthy objects of interest.

Fourth, if I view my pleasure as 'an objective good, something that an impartial spectator would approve', then again I think I can with moral safety follow my satisfaction (RG 26). There is even 'moral suitability' in it. Similarly, as Ross notes elsewhere,

> supposing that he has been persuaded by (bad) arguments that his own pleasure is, for each agent . . . the one thing he ought to bring into being; supposing . . . that he is an egoist not by inclination but by conviction, then it seems that his action in seeking his own pleasure has some moral value . . . [H]e is seeking to produce something not because he thinks he will enjoy it, but because he thinks it will be objectively good. Or, again, supposing he is a convinced utilitarian . . . and . . . he seeks to produce his own pleasure not because it will be his, but because he thinks it will be greater than any pleasure he can produce for anyone else by acting otherwise; then, again, he is seeking his own pleasure not simply as his own pleasure, but as an objective good, and here, again, it seems that his action has moral value. (MGA 268–9)

Fifth, Ross distinguishes between being good in the sense of being a worthy object of satisfaction and being good in the sense of being a

[20] Carritt notes that 'we do find some goodness in the capacity, even among the discontents of age, to prize rather than regret memories of a happy youth' (*Ethical*, p. 122). For one account of when I can be criticized, see Hurka, *Virtue*, pp. 210–11.

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'worthy object of admiration'. He thinks virtue and knowledge are good in this latter sense (as well as being worthy objects of satisfaction). But one might think that my virtue (for example) is not a worthy object of admiration by me. We might not criticize one who admires the virtues of others but not his or her own virtue. We might find that attractive.[21] (Ross takes admiration to be 'an emotion accompanied by the thought that that which is admired is good' (FE 278). Perhaps failing to think that my virtue is good is a failing, but lacking the accompanying emotion does not seem a failing, and may be a plus.)

For these reasons, the *Foundations* solution is unacceptable.

IV

In *The Right and the Good*, in passing, Ross suggests a different solution: 'though there is a prima facie duty to produce other things that are good, there is no prima facie duty to produce pleasure which will be enjoyed by ourselves' (RG 25). The 'other' indicates that Ross takes my pleasure to be good; his thought is that there is an exception to the prima facie duty to produce what is intrinsically good.

Ross rejects this solution by arguing that it

> seems plausible only if we hold that an act that . . . brings pleasure to ourselves must for that reason not be a duty; and this would lead to paradoxical consequences, such as that if a man enjoys giving pleasure to others . . . it cannot be his duty to do so. (RG 25)

This argument fails: I might say that an act that brings pleasure to me is not, qua act that brings pleasure to me, a duty, without saying that any act I take pleasure in is not my duty. The solution can state not that an act which brings me pleasure is not a duty, but rather that I have no duty to bring myself pleasure. Acts which bring me pleasure (such as giving pleasure to others) might still be duties on other grounds (such as benevolence).

Holding that there are some goods which there is no prima facie duty to produce is plausible. Ross thinks of prima facie duties as moral duties. The case against the duty to produce pleasure in oneself is that the 'moral consciousness' finds no 'moral fitness' in this 'morally entirely colourless' duty. (Similarly, when arguing in *Foundations* that my pleasures are not a good from my point of view, Ross notes that they are 'morally neither worthy objects of satisfaction nor worthy objects of dissatisfaction' (FE 322; also 324, 326, 327). There is no 'moral suitability' in taking satisfaction in them or 'moral safety' in taking an interest in them (FE 282, 288).) So the case for an exception

[21] For one discussion, see Hurka, *Virtue*, pp. 207–8.

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to the prima facie duty to produce the good is plausible, as it would not be if one thought of prima facie duties as simply claims about what one ought prima facie to do. There are goods that there is no moral duty to produce.[22]

The problem, at least for Ross, is that Ross seems to admit no duties other than moral ones. If so, there are goods such that it is not the case that they ought, in any sense, be produced. This is odd. In Case I, surely there is a sense in which I ought not make the sacrifice. (And more weakly, surely I am permitted not to make the sacrifice.) In Case II, surely there is a sense in which I ought to produce the pleasure or avoid the pain in myself. Indeed, something akin to Case II, with the judgement that I ought to produce the pleasure or avoid the pain in myself, is given by Derek Parfit and Roger Crisp as our most certain normative knowledge.[23]

The point is even stronger if prima facie duties are thought of as stating reasons, or considerations counting in favour of a course of action. In Cases I and II, the pleasure or pain I might experience gives me a reason for, or counts in favour of, an action.[24]

There is a further problem with admitting only moral duties, when it is done as Ross does. Thomas Hurka praises the Sidgwick-to-Ewing school for admitting only one 'ought'. This, Hurka argues, has the merit of making all normative debates turn on substantive considerations rather than conceptual classifications. For example, the conflict between egoism and utilitarianism is between two theories employing the same 'ought'. There is no role for classifying the 'oughts' as 'prudential' and 'moral', with the possible bad consequences that the classification itself is relevant to weighing the 'oughts' or that there is no conflict.[25] But Hurka's praise should be more restricted. Sidgwick admits only one 'ought' and so sees a substantive conflict between egoism and utilitarianism. He is willing to admit egoism as a 'method of ethics', though nothing turns on that description – whether

[22] When Stocker rejects a duty to produce pleasure or avoid pain in oneself, he too notes that doing so is not 'obligatory' and that there is no 'moral obligation' to do so (207, 208, 210). But he notes that failing to produce pleasure or avoid pain in oneself can still be criticized as, for example, 'unreasonable', or 'bad to do and good not to do' ('Agent', p. 211).

[23] Roger Crisp, *Reasons and the Good* (Oxford, 2006), p. 73; Parfit, *Reasons*, p. 452.

[24] Stratton-Lake, who (very plausibly) favours this interpretation of prima facie duties, associates them with specifically moral reasons. He notes that 'not all reasons are such as to ground duties. For instance, the fact that my act will benefit me may make it the case that I ought to do this act, but cannot, I think, plausibly be said to make it the case that I have a duty to do this act' ('Eliminativism', p. 149). But he also notes that Ross thinks only moral 'oughts' are normative (see below), and so implies that Ross could not say (in a normative sense) that the fact that my act will benefit me makes it the case that I ought to do that act ('Eliminativism', p. 148 n. 8).

[25] Hurka, 'Common Themes', pp. 9–11.

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it is a method of ethics or not, it is a rival to utilitarianism regarding the question that matters, viz. what ought I to do?[26] Sidgwick's 'ought' has no particular content. Ross also admits only one 'ought', which he too thinks of as 'moral'. But *his* thinking of it as moral does have content, and dictates answers to substantive questions by means of conceptual classification in just the way Hurka finds objectionable.[27] Egoism is quickly dismissed as giving the wrong reasons:

> Egoistic hedonism is put out of court by the fact which stares us in the face, that it is consideration for the rights or interests of others, far more often (to state the matter very mildly) than consideration for our own interests or rights, that makes us think it our duty to behave in a certain way. (FE 65)

This is correct if 'duty' means 'moral duty' and 'moral' implies that one must not be entirely self-regarding. But if 'duty' means only the 'ought' with no particular content, Ross is much less clearly right. To say that what we ought to do in this sense depends on our rights and interests is not so implausible (particularly given the historical popularity of egoism and the instrumental theory). Similarly, affixing 'moral' to 'fitness', 'duty', 'suitability' and 'satisfaction' makes it plausible to say that there is no duty to promote pleasure in oneself, since some, at least, do not morally blame imprudence. But to say that it is not the case that one ought, in the contentless sense, to choose a great pleasure for oneself over a tiny pleasure for another, or accept a pleasure or refuse a pain for oneself when no other duties are affected, is false. It is also false that no ought-claim in this sense can be made about ordering the excellent dinner rather than the good one.

Ross does not offer an explicit defence of admitting only moral duties. The closest he comes is his discussion of the 'ought' in a hypothetical imperative. Ross notes that:

> no one really thinks that the fact that a person desires a certain end makes it obligatory on him to will the means to it; if we think the end is a bad one (or that his desiring it is bad), we think that in spite of his desiring the end he ought *not* to adopt the means.

Hypothetical imperatives make no 'ought' claim: if one issues a hypothetical imperative, 'all that he is entitled to say is that a man who desires certain ends can hope to get them only if he adopts certain means'. Ross concludes that 'we are left with but one proper sense' of 'ought', 'viz. [that] imposed on [the agent] by the moral law' (FE 47–8).

This is hasty. One might agree with Ross about hypothetical imperatives, but disagree with his conclusion that there is a tie between

[26] Sidgwick, *Methods*, pp. 25, 119.

[27] For the same charge against Prichard, see Robert Shaver, 'H. A. Prichard', *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. Hugh LaFollette (New York, 2013).

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'ought' and the moral law. One might think (with Sidgwick) that there is a categorical imperative to pursue one's pleasure. Or (as Hurka notes) one might, like Sidgwick and Broad (and contemporary 'wide-scope' advocates), think of hypothetical imperatives as categorical imperatives telling me to {take the means or give up the end}. That might avoid Ross's objection, without giving any moral content.[28] Either view allows one to keep what Hurka wants – the disagreement over the duty to promote one's pleasure is a substantive one, in no way settled by classification, and no different from the disagreement between utilitarians and Ross.

Denying that there is a moral duty while admitting a non-moral duty to produce pleasure in oneself is plausible. And there is independent reason to admit non-moral duties (or use 'moral' in a sense that does not rule out any ought-claims), to avoid ruling out positions by classifying them as non-moral. But since Ross seems not to admit them, and does not use 'moral' in a contentless sense, denying (ii) is unpalatable for him, though not for the reason he gives.

(I say 'seems' because Ross writes that:

> I do not wish to introduce moralistic considerations into other spheres than that of morals. Scientific questions must be dealt with on scientific grounds, and aesthetic questions on aesthetic grounds. That a belief would conduce to the promotion of morality does not tend to show that it is true; and that the contemplation of a work of art would conduce to immorality does not show that it is not beautiful. But science and aesthetic enjoyment fall within human life as a whole, and I do maintain that in human life there is a greater good than either. (RG 153)

Ross's view might be that there are scientific and aesthetic goods, but only moral duties; the moral duty to promote the good includes these goods (as Ross explicitly includes knowledge), and these goods can be compared with moral goods (see also FE 324). Or his view might be that there are scientific and aesthetic duties, such as 'form beliefs on the basis of the evidence for them', which can conflict with moral duties.[29] This does seem less likely, given Ross's earlier claims about one sense of 'ought', tied to the moral law. But in context, Ross is rejecting senses of

[28] Hurka, 'Common Themes', p. 9. I say 'might' because if 'ought' implies 'can', and I cannot give up the end, it seems that even the wide-scope reading has the consequence that I ought to adopt the bad means. (I owe this worry to Damian Melamedoff.) For one recent discussion, with references to the literature, see Jonathan Way, 'Defending the Wide-Scope Approach to Instrumental Reason', *Philosophical Studies* 147 (2010), pp. 213–33.

[29] Hurka suggests that Ross might treat epistemic 'oughts' as hypothetical imperatives, and so as not making 'ought' claims ('Common Themes', p. 9 n. 11). Ross seems to suggest instead treating epistemically desirable states of affairs as good, adding that there is a moral duty to produce them.

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'ought' that do not imply 'can' or require that one take the appropriate means to one's end (FE 46–7). That rejection would allow categorical non-moral duties.)

Unsurprisingly, some have held that while there is (perhaps) no moral duty to produce pleasure in oneself, one ought to do so. Ewing distinguishes between an 'ought' of moral obligation and an 'ought' of 'fittingness' or (as in Carritt) 'reasonableness'. After noting Ross's *Foundations* position, he writes that:

> in the sense in which I have used 'ought' here, is it not obvious that we ought to pursue our own pleasure? Other things being equal, it is plainly much more reasonable, fitting, appropriate that I should try to do what will increase my pleasure rather than what will diminish it. And we do in fact find that the word 'ought' is constantly being used in cases where the only reason in mind for doing something is that it would give the person who did it pleasure or spare him pain.[30]

> Whether I should be morally to blame or not for declining to choose to have [a pleasant experience] when I could do so without corresponding harm, at any rate it would be fitting, rational, desirable for me to choose the experience.[31]

> Ross denies that the pursuit of one's own pleasure is a *prima facie* duty, but I should not follow him here. I think that one ought, other things equal, to do what makes for one's own pleasure, and that the contrary supposition is due to a confusion of the two senses of 'ought.'[32]

Some of the details of Ewing's view may be wrong. Since he uses 'fitting' to define 'good', it is important that 'fitting' not imply 'can' in the way in which he thinks the moral 'ought' does.[33] Judgements of goodness are not restricted by what we can do (including what attitudes we can have). But the 'oughts' in 'I ought to produce pleasure in myself' and 'I ought to produce pleasure in others' do not differ in whether they imply 'can' (both presumably do, at least if 'ought' ever implies 'can'). The problem comes because Ewing takes 'fitting' to differ from 'morally obligatory' in various ways – in terms of whether 'can' is implied, and in terms of whether other features of moral obligation, such as blame

[30] Ewing, *Definition,* p. 160; also *Definition*, pp. 133, 162–3, 194; 'Suggested', pp. 3, 8; *Second Thoughts*, pp. 92, 111–14.

[31] Ewing, *Definition*, p. 151; also 'Utilitarianism', p. 108 and *The Morality of Punishment* (Montclair, NJ, 1970 [1929]), p. 3n. Since the last was published well before *Foundations*, derives from a thesis Ross examined and contains a foreword by Ross, it is surprising that Ross did not pay attention to Ewing's view.

[32] Ewing, 'Suggested', p. 20. For the same point as Ewing makes, see Parfit, *On What Matters* (Oxford, 2011), vol. 1, p. 372. Ewing sometimes suggests that the 'ought' of moral obligation can be analysed in part by the 'ought' of fittingness, but later rejects this possibility (see 'Suggested', p. 14; *Definition,* pp. 168–9; *Definition*, pp. 170–1, 184; *Second Thoughts,* pp. 90, 95–6; *Value and Reality* (New York, 1973), pp. 189–90).

[33] Ewing, 'Suggested', pp. 13–14; *Definition*, pp. 133, 150–1, 165, 171; *Second Thoughts*, p. 92.

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and authority, are present.[34] It is 'fitting' in the sense not attached to blame and authority that gives him a good reply to Ross.[35]

Of the solutions to the trilemma, denying (ii), that there is always a moral duty to promote the good, is best, provided one adds that there is a reason to promote one's pleasure. This gets the right answer in Cases I and II, while avoiding the controversial issue of whether there is a moral duty to promote one's pleasure.

Holding that there is a reason to produce pleasure in oneself is also a first step to justifying the permission Slote notes. If there is nothing to be said for producing pleasure in myself in Case I, and something to be said against it (since the alternative produces pleasure in another), it is hard to see how a permission to produce the pleasure in myself can be justified. But if there is a reason to produce pleasure in myself and a reason to produce pleasure in others, it may be possible to explain the permission on the basis of competing reasons, since one could say that permissions arise when there are competing reasons with no reason clearly winning.[36]

There is also a more general conclusion to be drawn. Although he does not stress this, Ewing sometimes states ideal utilitarianism in terms of fittingness rather than moral obligation.[37] In this, he prefigures the recent popularity of stating consequentialism, and in some cases all moral theories, in terms of what one has reason to do.

[34] For authority, see *Definition*, pp. 170–1; *Value*, pp. 189–91. Ewing also seems to hold, at least in *Definition*, that one violates a moral obligation only when one acts in a way contrary to what one takes to be most fitting (pp. 120–1, 130–33, 135, 168, 189–90). One could give the reply to Ross noted in the text without believing this.

[35] Ewing also suggests (especially in later works) that there is a moral obligation to produce pleasure in oneself (*Definition*, pp. 161–2, 194; *Second Thoughts*, pp. 112–14). His overall position, then, seems to be that there is a moral obligation to produce pleasure in oneself – and that even those who deny this obligation must admit that it is fitting to produce pleasure in oneself. He sometimes describes his position as capturing a prima facie duty to produce pleasure in oneself (e.g. 'Suggested', p. 20). Similarly, he argues that his analysis of 'good' in terms of fittingness collapses the distinction between Ross and consequentialists (e.g. 'Suggested', p. 10). But this is true only if prima facie duties are not restricted to (what Ewing calls) moral obligations. Thanks to Tom Hurka for pressing me on Ewing's overall position.

[36] Parfit, *On What Matters*, vol. 1, pp. 137–41. An alternative, favoured by Hurka and Shubert, is to think the permission is brute. They note that it cannot be explained on the basis of conflict between a reason to produce pleasure in oneself and a reason to produce pleasure impartially (p. 10). In Case I, those reasons both favour my not making the large sacrifice. But Ross, on the suggestion I offer, says there is a reason to produce pleasure in others, not impartially (as Hurka and Shubert note in a different context, p. 18). (Hurka and Shubert (and others) do raise further worries about justifying permissions on the basis of reasons. These would need to be addressed.)

[37] See *Definition*, pp. 189, 193–4. Since Ewing downplays fittingness in favour of moral obligation in *Second Thoughts*, this may not be his final view. He also sometimes states ideal utilitarianism in terms of prima facie duties ('Suggested', p. 10; *Definition*, pp. 188–9; *Ethics* (New York, 1953), p. 77), perhaps because he does not identify prima facie duties with moral obligation (e.g. 'Suggested', p. 20; *Definition*, pp. 119–20, 189).

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Questions of obligation are not fundamental.[38] Consideration of one's own pleasure provides a further motivation for this position. Some object that utilitarianism (implausibly) states that, alone on a desert island, I have a duty to maximize my pleasure. Ewing can (plausibly) say that, although I perhaps have no moral duty to maximize my pleasure, I ought to do so, in the sense that it would be fitting or reasonable for me to do so.

V

There is a parallel trilemma concerning justice, by which Ross means the distribution of happiness in accordance with merit.

(iv) Justice is good as an end.
(v) There is a prima facie duty to produce what is good as an end.
(vi) I have no prima facie duty to produce justice for myself.

In *Foundations*, Ross thinks that justice, like pleasure, is a worthy object of satisfaction, but not a worthy object of admiration, since 'our admiration would be only for him who had effected it' (FE 323; also 73–4, 286, 288–9).[39] Ross solves the trilemma as he does the pleasure problem in *Foundations*: a just distribution for me is not a good from my point of view, so I have no duty to produce a just distribution for myself. He thinks holding that I have no prima facie duty to produce justice for myself, like holding that I have no prima facie duty to produce pleasure in myself, accords with common sense. The

> right proportioning of pleasure between himself and others is not a morally worthy object of interest to him, but only the right proportioning of pleasure between others. There is clearly nothing morally right in desiring happiness proportioned to one's own merits – though of course there is nothing morally wrong either. (FE 323)

(vi) is much more controversial than (iii), in two ways.

First, if I desire that my happiness be *reduced* because it is more than I deserve, that state of affairs seems a morally worthy object of satisfaction. One might object that our approval is for a resulting more

[38] Francis Howard-Snyder, 'The Heart of Consequentialism', *Philosophical Studies* 76 (1994), pp. 107–29; Alastair Norcross, 'The Scalar Approach to Utilitarianism', *Blackwell Guide to Mill's Utilitarianism*, ed. Henry West (Oxford, 2006), pp. 217–32; Crisp, *Reasons*, ch. 1.

[39] This suggests that only activities are worthy objects of admiration. But since Ross thinks knowledge is a worthy object of admiration, he cannot restrict worthy admiration to activities. Perhaps his tendency in *Foundations* to value the 'activity of the mind which leads to knowledge' more than the knowledge itself shows that, in the end, Ross would say that knowledge is not a worthy object of admiration (e.g. FE 270; also 266, 267, 269, 282–3, 284).

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just distribution to other people. By renouncing what I do not deserve, others get what they deserve. (This might happen because, by getting some of what I had, they get what they non-comparatively deserve, or because, simply by my renouncing, they get what they comparatively deserve.) But one might approve without this thought. And even when there is no resulting more just distribution, we approve. Say I am Wilt Chamberlain. I forgo the huge salary my talents would garner in the market, on the ground that I do not deserve the salary. This frees up the money for other talented players, but since they deserve the huge salaries no more than I did, the resulting distribution is no more just. (We would approve of Wilt more if he took the salary and gave the portion he takes himself not to deserve to the poor. But it does not follow that we do not approve of the less-good Wilt described.)

Second, many morally disapprove of those who do not stand up for the happiness they deserve. To be 'spineless' or a 'doormat', to let oneself be taken advantage of, is morally bad, even when others are not affected. And many feel guilt for not standing up for what they think they deserve.

I think, then, that the justice trilemma can be resolved by denying (vi) – or at least that is less controversial than resolving the pleasure trilemma by denying (iii). But if this is unsatisfactory, Ewing's solution might be employed here as well: perhaps (v) is false if one thinks of all prima facie duties as moral, but it remains fitting and reasonable to secure a just distribution for oneself.[40]

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[40] Thanks to Tom Hurka, Joyce Jenkins, Jeff Verman, Sandy Vettese, Andrew Webb, and an audience at Manitoba.

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